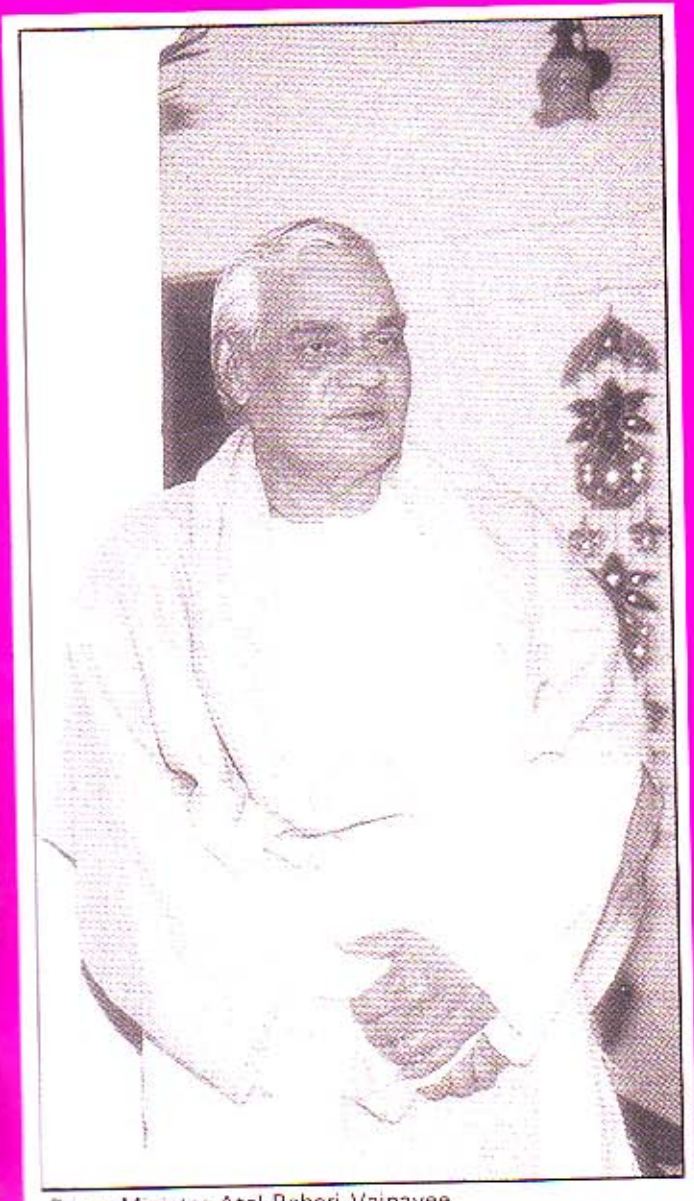


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BJP AT THE HELM IN NEW DELHI



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee

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TIME Interview Furore

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right to say it."

Voltaire

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NEWS REVIEW

BJP at the Helm in Delhi

After days of disarray and disputes, haggling and horse-trading among Baratiya Janata Party's disparate coalition partners following an indecisive verdict by the people of India at the recently held country-wide elections, 71-year-old Atal Behari Vajpayee has fulfilled his long lasting ambition of becoming Prime Minister with the prospect that he and the government he heads in New Delhi would certainly survive longer than just 13 days he managed on the last occasion in 1996. That is not because he has a commanding majority in the Indian parliament, but because the defeated United Front, the Congress, the Left and other opposition parties have found it impossible to get their act together.

Ranged against powerful secularist forces, and in its bid for power compelled to strike alliances with many regional parties of disparate and unlike political orientations, in the run-up to the elections the BJP had to live down its reputation as the "hindu nationalist party" as dubbed by the western media, including the BBC.

A "New India" free of hunger, fear and corruption and make the nation and "India by Indians" is the promise contained in the "National Agenda" of the BJP-led coalition on assuming power.

The noticeable difference between the BJP election manifesto and the National Agenda is the decision not to include the Hindutva demands such as the uniform civil code, abrogation of Article 370 of the constitution and the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya. While the BJP remains committed to these positions, the Agenda promises to appoint a commission "to review the Constitution of India in the light of the experience of 50 years and make suitable recommendations" and to "truly and genuinely uphold and practise the concept of secularism consistent with the Indian tradition of *Sarva panth*

samadara (equal respect for all faiths) and on the basis of equality for all." There is a commitment to establish a civilised, humane and just civil order which does not discriminate on grounds of caste, religion, class, colour, race or sex.

Nor does the National Agenda reflect the various well publicised demands advanced by some of BJP's coalition partners. For instance, there is no mention of Tamil being made an official language as demanded by the AIADMK leader, Jayalalitha Jeyaram.

Working for a consensus and against "negativism and untouchability", the BJP-led government would while continuing with the "reform process" provide a "strong swadeshi thrust" to the national economy not neglecting to "analyse the effects of globalisation, calibrate the process of it by devising a time-table to suit our national conditions and requirements."

The Agenda stated that the government will undertake a strategic defence review and "will reevaluate the nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons."

Vajpayee's 43-member strong two-tier council of Ministers is itself a manifestation of the tight-rope walking that he had to undertake in the context of support he had to rely on from his disparate coalition. It is therefore no surprise that half of the Cabinet posts have gone to the BJP's coalition partners with Tamil Nadu emerging as the largest beneficiary from where there are seven Ministers, four of them of Cabinet rank. Despite her failure to obtain a ministerial birth for her latest ally, Dr Subramanian Swamy, AIADMK leader, Jayalalitha, managed to secure four places for her MPs including two Cabinet posts including the Ministry of Law and Justice for M Thambi Durai. Valappadi Ramamurthy of the Tamil Nadu Rajiv Congress, which was in electoral

alliance with the AIADMK, was also included in the Cabinet as Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Prime Minister Vajpayee, having been a former Foreign Minister under the Moraji Desai government in the 1970s, has retained the Foreign Ministry portfolio for himself. Despite the "strong swadeshi thrust" mentioned in the National Agenda, the much coveted finance portfolio has gone to Mr Yashwant Sinha, a known reformist of economic liberalisation. After his induction into the cabinet, Yashwant Sinha went public allaying the apprehensions of multi-national corporations by assuring them that they had nothing to fear under the new BJP administration and promised to streamline procedures to facilitate larger foreign investments.

The militant and shadowy extremist hindu nationalist outfit, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS) has ensured that most of the other powerful Cabinet posts are occupied by those who were once, or still are, its members. The BJP president L K Advani as the powerful Minister of Home Affairs, former BJP president Murli Manohar Joshi as Minister of Human Resources Development, Science and Technology and Madan Lal Khurana as Parliamentary Affairs Minister are cases in point.

The one time trade union fire-brand, George Fernandes emerged as the surprise choice as Defence Minister. It is said that until very late, he was resisting the temptation to join the cabinet saying, "Bringing down a government is bigger fun."

Swamy Making Trouble

Having failed in his effort to get a place in the cabinet, Dr Subramanian Swamy has already begun his familiar trouble-shooting, and this time he has lost no time in targeting George Fernandes labelling him as an "active supporter of the LTTE" which is banned in India.

On 19 March Dr Swamy went public accusing Mr Fernandes of having close links with the LTTE and having promised the leadership of the LTTE that he would get the government to lift the ban on it. "The Vajpayee government must come out with its stand on the LTTE since it has Mr Fernandes in the Cabinet," he told the press in Chennai.

When asked about his views on the LTTE after he took office, Mr Fernandes told reporters, "What is happening in

Sri Lanka is a civil war and India should not have got involved. We should now make all efforts to bring back peace in Sri Lanka as is possible. We should also put all moral pressure to prevent human rights violations in this civil war," adding that it was his personal opinion.

It is no secret that Mr Fernandes has a well known advocate for Indian support for the "Tamil Eelam cause", and only three months ago he defied a ban by the Gujral government to hold the first-ever International Convention for Solidarity with Eelam Tamils in Delhi attended by several foreign speakers calling for support for Sri Lankan Tamils. In his speech, Mr Fernandes said, "No matter what the obstacles are, we will hold similar state-level conferences. We are ready to face any consequences... We shall be meeting again and

again because it is going to be a long fight. We hope those fighting for the rights of the Eelam people in Sri Lanka will win their battle. ... We shall overcome... We shall be meeting again and again.

"The Indian Government does not have a word to say about the fate of the Tamils who are at the receiving end of state-sponsored terror in Sri Lanka. There are powerful interests in this country who would not care about what happens to the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Tamils are seen as second-class citizens... The Tamils took to weapons in response... The basic purpose of this convention is to make the people of India (particularly form the north) aware of Tamil Eelam and making them part of their struggle."

UNP's 'Preposterous Proposal'

The provision for dissolution of a provincial council with 50% of the Members of Parliament voting for it, contained in the alternative constitutional reform proposals recently released by the United National Party(UNP), was described as a "preposterous proposal" by Minister of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration and Deputy Minister of Finance, Prof. G.L.Peiris.

"Nobody can govern the country without having a minimum of 50% of the seats in Parliament. A government cannot get the budget or any other legislation approved in Parliament without having 50% of the seats in Parliament. The UNP's proposal says that you can overturn a Provincial Council at any time you wish to do so. So, what is the stability in a system such as this? Who will have confidence in such an arrangement? What is the seriousness, sincerity and the degree of commitment underlying such effort?," the Minister asked.

Prof. Peiris addressing a meeting at the National Savings Bank at its auditorium in Colombo said, "The UNP's non-co-operation is a national tragedy and that is why the problem is dragging on. There is politics aim at power but there must be some national feeling when there is so much suffering and anguish resulting from the national crisis. There are heart-rendering stories in

the newspapers. One story said that there was a 19-year-old girl student who told her mother that she need not regret educating her because she could look after her when she got a job. That child lost her life in the Maradana bomb blast. These are human problems and not political problems. In a situation like this how can one make a nonsensical proposal such as this?"

The government is engaged in fighting a war. Thirty percent of the national income is spent on the war. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has constantly said that human problems cannot be solved by violence in the battlefield alone. You need political solutions to address human problems. The only way to solve a national problem is through the consensus across the political spectrum, the minister said.

This has happened in other countries such as the United Kingdom. Whatever the differences that exist between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, these parties have been able to come together to combat the IRA threat, he said.

"When the British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind was in Sri Lanka about one and a half years ago, he told me that whatever the problems that exist between the two parties, they had been able to come to a common stand in this regard. When I said that taking a common stand like that could be an

extremely difficult exercise, the British Foreign secretary replied: 'The soldier on the field of battle who knows that he can be blown to bits in a matter of hours, must be assured his laying down his life would not be in vain.' So, if there is a change in the government one year later, there will not be a change in the objectives. Whether it is a Labour Government or Conservative Government, they stand firm by the objectives for which these soldiers are laying down their lives.

"What is happening here? If the Opposition says that they have problems with the Government and therefore, they will not cooperate, it could be described an immature attitude in politics. Politics is not like having a garden party where you are polite to each other all the time. Politics is such that politicians do not pay compliments to each other at election time here or anywhere else in the world.

"So, simply because there are differences of opinion in the arena of politics, it is not correct for a mature Opposition to say: 'We don't care. Let bombs explode. Let people die. Let the Dalada Maligawa be attacked.' The Maradana bomb took 32 lives including those of six children. There are problems between the United National Party and the People's Alliance. Does this justify the UNP not lifting a finger to solve a national problem?

"The PA government does not need any personal favours from the UNP. This is a national problem which has to be solved. Consider the case that has been put forward by the UNP to abdicate responsibility. We have been struggling hard for the last two and a half years to find a solution to this perennial problem through the Parliament Select Committee on Constitutional Reforms. The idea is the Constitution is the supreme law and above any other laws passed in Parliament and it has a greater degree of stability. An ordinary law can be passed by a simple majority or changed at any time. The amending of the Constitution needs a two thirds majority and a referendum," the Minister said.

The Constitution has been the instrument which has been used in a majority of countries such as Canada, Germany, Mauritius, Fiji and India for solving of various internal issues related to ethnicity, he explained.

Meanwhile, political parties representing the Tamils and Muslims feel

that the decision of the United National Party (UNP) to reject the Government's proposals and to publish its own counter-proposals as a calculated move to sabotage the government's efforts on constitutional reform, including devolution of powers.

There is manifest dissatisfaction among Tamil and Muslim political parties about the alternative proposals submitted for revising the Constitution by the UNP.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader and the Ports, Shipping Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Minister A.H.M. Ahraff commenting on the UNP's first set of alternative proposals told the press that the SLMC's position was not for any alternative proposals.

The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader and Livestock Development and Estate Infrastructure Minister S. Thondaman said that during the past fifty years major political parties have not given serious consideration towards settling the ethnic question. They only played 'Musical Chairs' and the United National Party was trying to play the same game again with its alternative proposals." We have already a large number of legislators and various regional councils. Therefore, UNP's suggestion of creating a second chamber would further make our national politics a mockery. Our country is small and already we are spending billions to run the various councils. UNP's proposed second chamber would be another expensive body and instead of solving the

ethnic problem the alternative proposals would further delay the opportunities of finding an early settlement to the ethnic question, Mr S Thondaman added.

The General Secretary of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and former Jaffna District Parliamentarian Suresh K. Premachandran said that his party felt that the alternative proposals of the UNP would not solve the ethnic problem. "The North-East expects a fully fledged regional devolution and not the half baked ideas of the UNP on power sharing. "The UNP proposal has not at all answered the ethnic question and it is a clear indication that the UNP has only taken the issues at the centre and not worried about the North-East region, Mr. Premachandran added.

Commenting on the UNP's proposal for the depoliticisation of the police force, appointment of politically independent Police Commission, Public Service Commission and an Election Commission, a civil rights activist in Colombo said, "True in principle these are good suggestions. But it is a bit rich coming from the leadership of the UNP which, during its long tenure, politicised every conceivable state institution into instruments of the ruling party, used the police force to harass, intimidate and even murder its political opponents, indulged in electoral malpractices on an unprecedented scale and corrupted and subverted the entire political process."

UNP Boycotts Parliament

Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) began a month-long boycott of Parliament in protest against what it described as "an erosion of democratic values in the country".

"What we are doing by not attending parliament is to bring home to the country and abroad the message that there is a dangerous situation in the country. The democratic environment is in danger and we are taking measures to protect it," Ranil Wickremasinghe, the leader of the UNP told a news conference in Colombo shortly after his party began the protest on 3 March.

Wickremasinghe alleged that supporters of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) coalition were attacking his party

members and preventing them from holding public meetings. Vehicles carrying UNP supporters were stoned and tyres set on fire 27 February when the opposition held a meeting to protest against a government decision to grant a contract for phosphate mining to a US-based foreign consortium.

UNP MPs held up placards in front of the parliament building before the session began. When it started, Wickremasinghe and MPs belonging to his party walked out of the legislature. "We cannot be a party to protect democracy inside the house, while democracy is being pulverised outside the house," Wickremasinghe said.

Parliament was adjourned after 35 minutes, and when it reassembled the

government got approval for 21 bills and motions taking advantage of the absence of the opposition Members of Parliament. "It is in contravention of parliamentary tradition to pass important legislation having wide implications in the absence of the opposition," a UNP Member of Parliament protested to the press.

The party could extend its boycott of parliament beyond one month if the government did not ensure free political activity, and stopped what he described as the harassment and intimidation of the government's political opponents, UNP's General Secretary Gamini Athukorale told the press.

The UNP leadership has also appointed a three-man committee to launch a 'diplomatic offensive' against the government with former deputy foreign minister Tyrone Fernando, Mahinda Samarasinghe MP and the Mayor of Colombo Karu Jayasuriya to meet the heads of diplomatic missions in Colombo to make representation against the government's alleged suppression of the opposition political activities and alleged bribery and corruption.

The Committee had already approached the UK, India, Pakistan, US, Japan, German and Australian ambassadors and high commissioners and made known the UNP grievances against the PA government. It is expected to meet the heads of all other diplomatic missions soon. The progress being made at these meetings is being monitored closely by the UNP and the leader of the Opposition Ranil Wickremesinghe, while former UNP Foreign Affairs Minister Shahul Hameed had also briefed the committee on the mechanics and modus operandi of the committee.

It is amazing and hypocritical for a party that presided over a regime for 17 years (until August 1994) under which democratic rights were trampled, human rights were violated on a massive scale, political opponents were murdered in their hundreds and freedom of expression was strangled to begin a boycott of parliament in protest against alleged erosion of democracy, said a ruling party spokesman.

Government spokesmen also alleged that the UNP's decision of the UNP leadership to boycott parliament at this juncture was not motivated by the commitment of that party to democratic values, but because of its inability to take a stand, because of deep divi-

sions within the party, on the proposal before parliament to take action against one of the former Ministers of the UNP who, along with others, had been found guilty of corruption by a Special Presidential Commission. They also alleged that the UNP offensive against alleged government bribery and corruption was a red herring to get over the difficulty of expressing its views on the proposed debate in parliament to deprive the civic rights of one of its front benchers, who had been found guilty by a Presidential Commission.

The motion to deprive civic rights of the former Minister and two others which was on the Order Paper of Parliament for debate on 17 March would be taken up as scheduled, despite UNP boycott of Parliament, a government spokesman said.

The three persons whose names were mentioned in the motion for the debate were the former UNP Minister and present Gampaha District MP, Wijeyapala Mendis, former Secretary to the Ministry of Finance R Paskaralingam, and a senior official Ackiel Mohamed. The latter two are reported to have worked very closely with the former President Premadasa during the previous regime.

The motion to be adopted by parliament stated that the Presidential Commission of Inquiry had recommended that Wijeyapala Mendis was found guilty of misuse of power by reason of acts committed or omitted by the former minister and that his civic rights should be removed. According to Article 81 of the Constitution of the country, if the civic disability motion is passed by parliament with a two-third majority in favour, a member could be expelled from Parliament.

The UNP leadership naturally denied that its boycott of parliament was in any connected to the predicament of the former UNP minister. However, there were some within the UNP who had questioned the propriety of the UNP leadership for having so far failed to make known its stand on the charges levelled against its former senior ministers on wheeler-dealing and under-the-table land transactions involving state land.

Government sources said that the UNP parliamentarians were divided on this issue and that some of the new MPs were in favour of the motion to impose civic disabilities on Mendis and others, while some senior members of the party were not in favour of the move.

The Furore Over TIME Interview

The interview given by President Chandra Kumaratunga to the prestigious US weekly magazine, TIME (9 February 1998), has drawn widespread critical comments from the government's opponents and the columnists of the privately-owned print media in Sri Lanka.

The criticism related to the report that during the talks between the government and the LTTE during late 1994 and early 1995, the President had offered the LTTE leader Prabhakaran that he could have control of the administration of the northern province for a period of ten years provided he accepted an autonomy package and stopped fighting.

The relevant quote in the TIME said, "The President told TIME she promised Prabhakaran an autonomy package, and also said if he stopped fighting he could run the northern province using his guerrillas as a police force

without having to face elections for up to ten years. She says the Tiger chief didn't respond."

Critics of the President went on over-drive saying that she was prepared to betray the country to Prabhakaran by offering a virtual separate state on a plate. They argue that had the LTTE leader accepted the President's offer, Prabhakaran could have had the chance to run an almost independent northern province without having to elections for ten years backed up his guerrilla force; it would have been a de facto partition of the country; the people of the north, with the sanction of the Sri Lanka government, would have been deprived of their fundamental democratic rights - to elect a government of their choice by universal franchise.

The band-wagon of critics included the UNP, MEP and JVP. Even the Mahanayake of the Malwatte Chapter joined the fray calling upon the Presi-

dent to explain the offer to the LTTE leader.

Ranil Wickremasinghe, the leader of the UNP, even threatened to reconsider his party's participation in the Parliamentary Select Committee process - as if the party had done anything other than do everything possible to prolong and frustrate the process. "How could the President who has been elected for a period of six years offer Prabhakaran the right to govern the northern province for ten years without elections? What is the use of a Select Committee if we are not consulted or briefed on these offers?", Mr Wickremasinghe fumed with self-righteous indignation.

The President for her part on 26 February admitted to journalists that the offer to the Prabhakaran as reported in the TIME interview was in fact made. She said that the offer was an informal sounding out during the time of the peace negotiations with the LTTE.

"It was made at a time when there were no military operations between the LTTE and government forces for 8 months. We had reached a cessation of hostilities and were discussing. I had proposed to the LTTE that they begin to discuss with us the draft of the political proposals which are before the country at the moment. The draft was ready by December 1994. Prof Peiris and I had looked at it, in fact from before the election time in August 1994. It is in that context that if they were willing to discuss the political proposals, end the war, lay down arms. Then in those circumstances, obviously for an organisation which had declared war on the Sri Lankan state, which wanted a separate state - in fact the LTTE was in de facto charge of the entire northern province during many years of UNP government rule - it was only reasonable that we make an offer," the President said.

The offer was for the LTTE to administer the northern province for a period of five to ten years provided of course if it stopped fighting, converted itself into a democratic party, laid down arms, and accepted that all other democratic Tamil parties could also operate. They would have also had to agree to go for election after this period. These were all suggested and there was nothing strange about the suggestion because such arrangements had worked in other countries where a similar situation as that prevailed in Sri Lanka had existed, the President said.

"Anti-Terrorism Front"

The activities of the recently formed 'National Front Against Terrorism' at the initiative of a well-known Buddhist priest has raised fears of incitement to violence against those whom the Front characterises as those who advocate an end to the ongoing ethnic war and dialogue with the LTTE. The primary target of the Front appears to be Tamil politicians in Colombo, peace advocates and human rights NGOs.

The NFAT which was inaugurated at a meeting held on 16 March at the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress headquarters followed by a demonstration. Spearheading the Front is none other than Ven Maduluweve Sobitha Thero who also happens to be key figure in the formation of the Sinhala Commission and its activities.

Addressing a gathering of about 500 persons, one of the convenors, Champika Ranawaka, made the obviously exaggerated claim that 7000 people had been killed in 21 bomb blasts in Colombo. He attacked Tamil politicians for extending their support to the LTTE and added that the "NGO mafia" was working hand in glove with the LTTE to perpetrate crimes against the Sinhalese people.

Of particular target the Front's speakers were Cabinet Minister and

What the President found strange was the UNP's criticism of her when in 1986, President Jayawardene at the Bangalore SAARC Conference had discussions with Rajiv Gandhi and agreed to handover the entire North and East to Mr Prabhakaran with the Chief Minister's post without election, if he was willing to end the war. Mr Premadasa gave arms and money to the LTTE without any conditions which they are using to kill our people even now. "I have never been so foolish, or reckless or irresponsible. We only offered this to an organisation which was not waging war against this government, which was in the process of discussing peace in order to establish and stabilise a peaceful situation if it was possible. But the LTTE refused. They went back to military conflict and since they started the war against the government, we waged a war honestly and truly unlike the UNP," the President added.

President of the Ceylon Workers Congress(CWC), Mr S Thondaman, TULF politicians including its leader M Siva-sithamparam and Tamil Congress leader, Kumar Ponnambalam. The Front's protesters demanded the dismissal of Mr Thondaman from the Cabinet claiming that his statements were very often supportive of the LTTE.

Speaking at the meeting, Sobitha Thero said, "Tamil politicians living in Colombo under the protection of our police forces, and not in Jaffna, and posing as moderates are the real supporters of LTTE terrorism. S Thondaman, a senior Minister of the Government is one of them. At a recent meeting to mark the CWC anniversary, Thondaman demanded that the LTTE be given control of the north-east province for 15 years. This is an improvement on Thondaman's earlier demand that the LTTE should be given control of the north-east for 10 years. Tamil politicians like Kumar Ponnambalam and M Siva-sithamparam of the TULF, even if they do not carry arms, are supporters of LTTE terror."

Another Buddhist priest, Ittapana Dhammalankara Thero said that though the Government had banned the LTTE, no legal steps had been taken to implement this decision, such as the punishment of those who supported the LTTE, for example by confiscation of their property. With every bomb explosion, the Tamil politicians step up their demands and urge the Government to negotiate with the LTTE and make more and more concessions to them. The Tamil politicians who live in Colombo do not condemn these barbaric acts, complain incessantly about the 'harassment' of Tamils who are searched, the Thero said.

Gamini Perera said that there were a few Sinhalese media personnel, intellectuals and members of the NGOs who extended supported to the 'terrorists'. Identifying Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council as one such individual, he said that Jehan Perera had wrote an article in the "Island" newspaper giving reasons as to why the LTTE attacked the Dalada Maligawa. If you can find reasons, then you can justify it, said the speaker.

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Bus bomb kills 39, Over 300 Injured

39 people, including school children, were killed and at least 300 people suffered injury when a bus laden with shrapnel-packed bombs raced through Colombo's crowded business district on 5 March and exploded in front of the Maradana railway station. Police were chasing a bus involved in a hit-and-run collision when the vehicle suddenly exploded.

Several vehicles and shops were wrecked in the blast in Maradana, an area crowded with shops and the iron railing dividing the road was twisted by the impact of the blast. "A policeman was trying to open the door of the bus when there was a flash. I was thrown away," said Mohammed Mansoor, whose shop was severely damaged in the blast along with several others. Witnesses said at least two vans carrying schoolchildren were caught up in the explosion, and schoolbags stained with blood could be seen scattered around the scene. Hundreds of injured were rushed to Colombo's main hospital, and weeping parents rushed to the area to try to account for their children.

The driver of the bus, believed to be a suicide bomber, was among the dead. Investigations revealed that the

explosives and thousands of ball bearings which acted as shrapnel, had been tacked on either side of the bus with the aim of targeting as many people as possible, the police said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion, but there is widespread belief that the LTTE was responsible.

If the LTTE was in the Maradana bomb explosion, it would mark the third major suicide attack by the LTTE this year. On 25 January, days before independence celebrations were held, the country's most important Buddhist shrine in central city of Kandy was severely damaged in a suicide truck bomb attack in which several were killed. The following week in February, a suicide-bomber blew herself up at the gates of air force headquarters in Colombo, killing eight other people and wounding five. Last October a truck bomb exploded in the car park of a five-star hotel Galdari in Colombo's business district, killing 18 people and injuring more than a 100.

Many foreign governments have condemned the bomb attack in Colombo. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan issued a statement condemning

the bomb blast soon after the incident. The statement said: "The Secretary General is outraged by the news of a bomb blast today in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, which has killed and injured a large number of civilians, including children.

"Once again, the Secretary-General condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the use of violence against civilians. Terrorism cannot be condoned in any circumstances. He calls for and end to the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, which has brought considerable suffering to many innocent non-combatants, and for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the problem. He extends his condolences to the families of the victims."

In a message to representatives of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) abroad, Amnesty International on 6 March expressed concern about the bomb explosion. In its statement Amnesty International said that it had learned that an otherwise empty bus believed to be driven by a member of the LTTE exploded around midday while being chased by police. Among those killed are drivers and passengers of vehicles in the traffic surrounding the bus, shop keepers, stall owners on the pavement nearby, and pedestrians and commuters on their way to an adjacent railway station.

While the intended target of the bomb was not known, Amnesty International said it was concerned that the killings, as others attributed to the LTTE over the last few years, appears to be in contravention of basic standards of international humanitarian law. It also sought assurances from the leadership of the LTTE that deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians by forces under LTTE control will not be authorized or tolerated.

A western diplomat in Colombo was quoted in an agency report as saying that, judging from the number of suicide bomb attacks in Colombo, there is no doubt the Tigers were quickening the tempo. "The LTTE seem to have some definitive plan in mind. It seems they want to take out a big fish. But this one definitely went off at the wrong place and at the wrong time," he said. "It's an all-out war. They are obviously hell-bent on getting someone big. If they do that the opinion against the Tamils in the south is likely to be hardened," said political analyst Pai-

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Dr Piyasena Dissanayake, Secretary of the National Joint Committee (NJC) of Sinhala and Buddhist Organisations, said that it was shameful that a senior Minister who supported terrorists was being tolerated in the Cabinet. Thondaman must be removed from the Cabinet. The Government had abdicated its responsibility to maintain law and order and keep the peace. The people had now to action to protect themselves, he said.

In an intemperate pamphlet distributed at the meeting, the NMAT called upon the Government to take effective action against those who advocate talks with the LTTE. The action proposed includes ordering the police to arrest and keep in custody politicians, media personnel, political commentators and "so-called intellectuals", who either advocate negotiations with the LTTE, or call

for constitutional reforms that would lead to the division of the country.

The NMAT also issued a warning that if the government failed to take such action, "we declare that we have the sacred right to take any action against them for our sake and the sake of our children."

A leading human rights activist told the "The Weekend Express" in Colombo that "although the strident and aggressive posture by this new movement is nothing new, the challenge issued to the intelligentsia as well as the media has to be taken note of."

"This is not an attack on Tamil politicians, but against the progressive, secular sections within the Sinhala community and civil society who favour a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict," said an academic who wanted to remain anonymous. ●

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US Rejects LTTE Demand for Release of Classified Documents

The US State Department has rejected the demand for the release of classified records that led to the designation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) by the US authorities as a terrorist organisation.

In a submission filed with a Court of Appeals here, which was obtained by India Abroad, the US Department of State said, "Neither the LTTE nor its counsel is entitled to access to the classified portions of the administrative record."

The State Department's objection was in response to an earlier procedural application filed by LTTE's lawyers alleging that the State Department had secretly compiled information that led to the LTTE's designation as a terrorist organisation, and was now refusing to disclose fully.

The LTTE's motion followed a petition it filed with the appeal court in November last year asking it to rescind the US governments' decision, saying the LTTE did not pose any threat to the security of the US and did not qualify as a terrorist organisation under US laws.

A news release from the Law Offices of Ramsey Clark, the senior Attorney appearing on behalf of the LTTE in its challenge against the US State Department's designation as a "Terrorist Organisation" said, "LTTE's challenge to its designation by Secretary Albright last fall as a terrorist organisation moved a step forward today. In a motion filed with the Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia, LTTE is claiming the right to full access to the record, the opportunity to show the legitimacy of its action under international law and to correct inaccuracies and distortions in the record which the State Department secretly compiled and is now refusing to disclose fully. The motion develops with documentary evidence LTTE's struggle for independence and emergence as the de facto government of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka.

"The motion stresses that relief being requested is the minimum necessary to satisfy the principles of fairness and due process of the law that would otherwise be lacking.

"LTTE's papers quote the United States Declaration of Independence: "but when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is the right, it is their duty to throw off such Government and to provide new guards for their future security," stated that the formation of the Tamil armed resistance movement was in response to the terror, violence and repression of the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan government. And the Secretary of State's failure to take the genocide and other wrongful conduct in violation of international law by the Sri Lankan government and security forces dominated by the Sinhalese people toward the Tamil people makes her designation of the LTTE as a "terrorist" organization arbitrary, capricious and an abuse of discretion.

"In the court papers the LTTE states that the State Department's readiness upon challenge to abandon its initial adamant classification of the entire record reveals that the initial position was arbitrary and capricious and thereby justifies lack of confidence in the fairness and legality of its classification judgement.

"It was pointed out that according to the editorial of VIDUTHALAI PULIKAL, the official LTTE Journal, which was contained in the Administrative Record, LTTE indicated that the United States' government's partial position in the war between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE contradicts its foreign policy on Human Rights and Peace and further states that the Tamil people hope that the United States will make all possible effort to create a peaceful environment in Sri Lanka through a neutral and diplomatic approach to the Tamil-Sinhala ethnic

crisis."

The State Department in its objection to the LTTE's application said, "First, such access is contrary to the statutory scheme, which provides solely for 'ex-parte and in-camera review' by this court of the classified information used in making the designation."

Moreover, it said, "the Supreme Court has made clear, based on the President's authority as head of the Executive Branch and as Commander-in-Chief, that the Executive Branch has control over access to classified information under our constitutional scheme and has a 'compelling interest' in withholding national security information from unauthorised persons in the course of executive business."

"Simply put, "the Administration said in its submission" neither the LTTE nor its counsel has been authorised by the Executive Branch to view classified information, and therefore they are not entitled to access to the classified portions of the administrative record in this case."

The State Department in its submission also flatly rejected the LTTE's alternative request, that if it is denied access, "that its counsel be permitted to review the classified material and to make notes for the purpose of pursuing this case."

Citing precedents, the Administration said that "this court and other courts have denied access to private counsel in other in-camera proceedings involving classified information."

It said that the reason for this is twofold. "First national security is too important to be entrusted to the good faith and circumspection of a litigator's lawyer, and second, such a procedure strains the attorney-client relationship between the opposing party and its lawyer".

"Those concerns are fully applicable here," the State Department emphasised in its submission.

Consequently, it said, "the petitioner's attorneys are no more authorised to view the classified information at issue here than is petitioner".

In its submission, the State Department noted the LTTE's argument that its constitutional due process rights will be violated if the United States' designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation is upheld based on the classified information contained in the administrative record that the LTTE has

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Editors Guild Protests Against Stifling Climate for Free Media

The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka said in a statement on 1 March that it was concerned with an escalation in incidents against journalists with the growing use of "strong-arm tactics" against journalists and the "rapidly deteriorating climate for a free media."

The strongly-worded statement came as the police Criminal Investigations Department (CID) released Chinese journalist Jin Hui on 28 February after detaining him overnight on a deportation order. Jin, 26, the Colombo correspondent of Beijing's official Xinhua News Agency, was freed within a few hours and the deportation order withdrawn following intense diplomatic moves.

It was the first deportation order against a journalist by the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga which came to power in 1994 promising greater press freedom. Previous governments expelled several foreign correspondents and were severely criticised by international rights organisations for curtailing media freedom. Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera had earlier given assurances that no journalists would be arrested or searched without the presence of an information department or foreign ministry official.

Last month a group of armed men stormed the house of a senior local journalist, Iqbal Athas, and threatened him

and his family. Athas, a defence correspondent with the Sunday Times newspaper, writes a weekly column where he has often criticised the failures and mismanagement in the military which is engaged in war with the Tamil Tigers.

"It is distressing to note that despite assurances by the Media Minister of a full investigation into that raid, it took the criminal investigation department 13 days to record a statement from Mr Athas," the Guild's statement said.

The statement also noted the interrogation by police of an associate editor and two reporters of a Sinhalese-language weekly over a report investigating the activities of LTTE in the central plantation districts, where hundreds of thousands of Tamils work on the estates. The police wanted the two reporters to divulge their sources and also interrogated the driver of the vehicle that took them to the hill country.

In another incident, also last month, police assaulted a provincial reporter of a newspaper who had exposed the booming trade in illicit liquor in his area. In this connection the Guild's statement said the reporter, Pradeep Dharmaratne, was picked up by police from his home in the middle of the night. He was tortured and police then tried to frame him by forcibly placing his finger-prints on liquor barrels. The reporter was later taken to court and

released on a bail of 15,000 rupees.

"The guild is of the opinion that the aforesaid incidents indicate a drift towards a police state, and that this government, unfortunately, is gaining currency as one that is becoming increasingly insensitive to media freedom," the statement said.

The government took action to transfer an entire police station's staff after unidentified attackers burned down the home of a journalist who was tortured in police custody. Twenty-seven policemen were transferred from the town of Aranayake, 45 miles east of the capital, Colombo, to other areas.

Police "must be answerable for what happened to this journalist's house," Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera said.

Pradeep Dharmaratne, a correspondent for the state-run Dinamina newspaper, said his thatched-roof house was burned down at midnight. The government has promised him a new home.

The government had sent a special team of detectives to Aranayake after international media watchdog groups condemned Dharmaratne being tortured at the police station on 16 February. He was hospitalised with damaged kidneys, but has since recovered. Several days after he returned home, masked men armed with swords tried to break into his home, but failed.

Dharmaratne says he believes the policemen are linked to liquor gangs he has written about.

"There is a conspiracy amongst certain members of the police to discredit the President and the government by various forms of intimidation and harassment of the public," Mangala Samaraweera, media minister and cabinet spokesman told a news conference on 5 March.

"I wouldn't say we cannot trust the whole police force, but there is a minority section that is hell-bent on creating chaos," he said.

The Minister's comments came after a furore over treatment of a Pradeep Dharmaratne whose house was torched in the central Kegalle district in the early hours on 26 February.

"We are concerned about the behaviour of certain officers in the police force. They are hoping that they can have a different set of people in office before their past is exposed by various investigations by the human rights commission," Samaraweera said.

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not seen.

The document said, "that is one of the issues to be decided by this court after full briefing in this appeal."

It said the LTTE "can raise these issues when it files its brief challenging the validity of the Secretary's (of State Madeleine Albright) designation."

"These issues should be addressed by the parties in briefing on the merits, rather than at this preliminary state of the proceeding, "the State Department's submission to the court added.

The submission argued: "if this Court ultimately determines that, as a matter of due process, the secretary's designation cannot be upheld because it is based, in part, on classified infor-

mation, the remedy will be to remand the matter to the secretary for her further consideration, not to order disclosure of the classified information."

The submission also argued that there was absolutely no basis 'for the LTTE's request that this Court exclude from consideration on review any classified information not provided to the petitioner. Again, the statutory directive from Congress is directly to the contrary."

Meanwhile, the submission also dismissed the LTTE "attempts to paint itself as a de-facto government conducting a justified war of liberation against the Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan government. ●

KRISHANTHY MURDER TRIAL

Defendants Confess to Rape and Murder

"Lance Corporal Somaratne Rajapaksa, the first accused in the Krishanthi Kumaraswamy rape and murder trial had confessed to the military police that the accused committed rape on Krishanthi and strangled all four deceased to death by means of a rope", said Lance Corporal Upali Manamperi when he produced the statements made by the defendants as "confessions" as prosecutions' at the Trial-at-Bar hearing held in Colombo.

The Bench comprised High Court Judge of Colombo Nimal Dissanayake (President), High Court Judge of Negombo Gamini Abeyratne and High Court Judge of Balapitiya, Andrew Somawansa.

In this case the accused include eight army personnel and a reserve police constable. They are Corporal Dewage Somaratna, Rajapakse Jayasinghe, Mudiyanse Jayasinghe, Gunasekera Pradeep Priyadarshana (RPC), Ambawattage Suranji, Priyantha Perera, Waduntantrige Arnan Wijayananda Alwis, Dehigaspitiye Gedara Muthu Banda, Dissanayake Mudyanselage Jayatilake, Diypatugama Vidanalage Indrajith Kumara and Abeysekera Pathiranalage Nishantha.

The Attorney General has indicted the accused under Sections 140, 146, 296 and 357 of the Penal Code with being members of an unlawful assembly, abducting 15-year-old school girl, Krishanthi Kumaraswamy with a view to committing illegal intercourse and with committing her murder and that of three others, her mother, brother and a neighbour who went in search of Krishanthi. The crime is alleged to have been committed on or around 7 September 1996.

Examined by Additional Solicitor General Mr D P Kumarasinghe PC, witness Lance Corporal Upali Manamperi said that he had recorded the statement made by the defendants accused in the case. The witness had also visited Jaffna to investigate the incident following orders given to him by Major Podiralaharmy. Accordingly witness had recorded the statement of the first accused, Lance Corporal Somaratne Rajapaksa on 22 October 1996.

In his statement Rajapaksa had stated that he joined the SL Army in

1990. He was a married man, 27 years of age. According to the confession one Lt Thudugala had given the accused a list of names of four women and had told him to arrest them. Thereafter the accused had arrested Krishanthi Kumaraswamy dressed in a school uniform at the Chemmani checkpoint in Jaffna town. Krishanthi was taken into custody by the first accused along with 4th accused Jayatilake and the 5th accused Alwis. After tying her hands together in spite of her screaming she was pushed inside a bunker.

Although they had intended to keep Krishanthi there until the evening, a middle-aged woman accompanied by two men had visited his checkpoint in search of the girl. When the accused had denied that the girl was there, the three people had gone away in search of her. Nevertheless they had returned to the checkpoint that same evening demanding that the girl be freed from their custody.

The woman had demanded them to hand over the girl and said that if she did not hand her over, they would not leave the checkpoint. She had also indicated that she had a witness who saw Krishanthi being stopped at the checkpoint. When the woman and others refused to leave, the accused had taken

them too into their custody.

The accused Rajapaksa had informed the incident to Lt Thudugala and another officer, Wijesiriwardana. They had then ordered the accused to eliminate them.

By nightfall the first accused, Rajapaksa and the 4th accused Perera tied up the two men and took them to the Chemmani saltern not very far from the checkpoint. They were accompanied by the seventh accused, Lance Corporal Indrajith and eight accused Jayatilake. Later four of them had the two men killed by strangulating them with a rope put around their necks.

After the men were killed their garments were taken off and buried separately. The bodies were buried in another pit. Accused Jayasinghe and Alwis too had assisted to complete the burials.

Later in the same manner the old woman, Rasamma, the mother of Krishanthi, too was strangled to death. The accused, Rajapaksa had taken possession of the dead woman's gold chain which she had been wearing around her neck, while the sixth accused had assisted in the burial work.

Finally the first accused, Rajapaksa, had escorted Krishanthi towards the saltern where he had forcibly raped Krishanthi - the girl almost fainted.

The 2nd accused, Jayasinghe, 3rd accused Pradeep, 4th accused Perera, 7th accused Indrajith, 8th accused Jayatilake and Nazar also raped the girl in turn. Trial is proceeding. ●

41 Policemen in Custody Over Killing of Civilians

Forty-one policemen and para-military home guards suspected of being involved in the killing of eight Tamil youths have been ordered by a Magistrate to be remanded in custody.

The presiding Magistrate of the court in the north-eastern town of Trincomalee held an identification parade spread over a week and on 18 February ordered 19 policemen, 21 home guards and a civilian to be kept in custody until the case is recalled on 24 February.

Earlier the police had arrested 12 security service personnel, including a police inspector and four constables in connection with the killing of 8 Tamil youths on 1 February in the village of

Thambalagamam in the Trincomalee district.

In a statement issued on 3 February, Amnesty International said, "Today's report that eight Tamil civilians, including three teenagers, were deliberately shot at close range by police and home guards at Tampalakamam on 1 February is deplorable" and called upon the Sri Lankan authorities to take all necessary action to ensure those responsible are brought to justice. It is important that the alleged perpetrators are taken into custody as quickly as possible so they are not able to intimidate witnesses.?

"Among those killed were six peo-

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ple attending a house warming party in a house near the police post at Pokkuruni, a hamlet of Tampalakamam, Trincomalee district. Around 6.30am, around 20 police and home guards who appeared drunk reportedly took the victims, including two brothers as young as 13 and 17, inside the police post and shot them in the compound. They later went from house to house and beat up villagers. Soon after, two other villagers were killed near the church at Pudukudiruppu, another hamlet of Tampalakamam.

"Initially, the Kantalai police were apparently pressuring families to sign statements claiming that those killed were members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or that they were killed by the LTTE, an armed opposition group fighting for an independent state in the north and east of the country.

"After an intervention by high-ranking officials, however, the

bodies were taken to Trincomalee hospital where post-mortem examinations revealed that all victims died as a result of shooting at close range.

"The officer-in-charge of Kantalai police station reportedly confirmed at a magisterial inquiry on 3 February that police and home guards were responsible for the killings. However, to Amnesty International's knowledge, none of those alleged to be responsible have been arrested. According to some reports, they have been transferred to Kantalai police station where they continue to be on active duty.

"The inquest is scheduled to continue on 6 February. The magistrate has reportedly indicated that an identification parade will be held. Several witnesses claim they can identify some of those responsible.

"Amnesty International is urging the authorities to ensure that adequate compensation be granted to the relatives of the victims."

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kiasothty Saravanamuttu adding that the LTTE were hoping for a backlash against minority Tamils, which might strengthen their cause in their core constituency. "But the backlash could also be against the government, in that its devolution proposals might get derailed," he said.

Breakthrough

Police would appear to have made an early breakthrough in their investigations with the arrest of the bus conductor Kanthan, Suvendra Devi wife of the owner of the Nissan mini bus W. Kulendran (35) alias Pulendran alias Rajakulendran, and Arjun Balendran (19).

The three suspects were detained in the Batticaloa area and taken to Colombo for further investigations. An agency report datelined 7 March said that the police successfully repulsed an attempt by LTTE gunners who attacked the Eravur police station by firing automatic weapons in a bid to free their two comrades and a Tamil woman, who owned the Nissan mini-bus which was used in the Maradana bomb explosion.

Balendran had been arrested on inquiries conducted after the suicide-bus driver gave an address in Jampettah in Colombo to the traffic police, when the bus met with an accident at Panchikawatte shortly before the explosion.

According to investigations, the registered owner of the bus had sold it to a person called Mohamed of Eravur who had in turn sold it to Pulendran. Pulendran is absconding.

Mohamed had told the police that he had sold this bus to Pulendran two months ago. Mohamed who is also in custody had further told investigators that Pulendran owed him Rs 400,000 in respect of the bus purchase.

Police suspect that the bus had been bought by money given by the LTTE. "Police records showed that it very rarely did the Batticaloa-Colombo run," they added. Pulendran's house was traced to Eravur in Chenkalady and the conductor's, to another house close by.

Balendran was arrested in Batticaloa. All these arrests were made on just within three days of the explosion. Police records further revealed that this bus which used to do the Colombo-Batticaloa run, had last left Batticaloa on March 3 evening with Pulendran in the driving seat.

Detectives further suspect that Pulendran had been in possession of three national identity cards, which gave his names as Kulendran, Pulendran and Raja Kulendran.

The last name on record at police-check-points in Batticaloa had been the name V.Kulendran. This was the name given by Kulendran when he passed those check-points in Batticaloa on

More Mass Graves

About 47 mass graves around the country will be dug up in the next few weeks in search of the remains of about 200 persons who are alleged to have disappeared between 1989 and 1990.

A special CID team has been appointed by DIG T. V. Sumanasekera following the findings of the presidential Commissions of Inquiry on involuntary removal of persons in this period.

The team headed by a senior superintendent of police will soon begin work under the order of magistrates of the respective areas where these mass graves are believed to be situated. The interim reports of the three disappearance commissions, which were appointed in 1995, were made public about a fortnight ago and President Chandrika Kumaratunga has already taken the commissions to task for delaying their conclusions.

March 3 evening.

Meanwhile police who had earlier traced the registration number of the vehicle (48-4864), was able to trace its chassis number (FGW 40-001412). They also recovered a cyanide capsule from the scene of the blast.

The Colombo Detective Bureau (CDB) investigating the Maradana bomb blast revealed that the RWPC now in custody had received Rs. 53,000 from the LTTE to pay an advance for the safe house at Glen Street, Slave Island. According to the investigators she had first received Rs. 48,000 and later Rs.5,000 to be paid to the owner of the house at Slave Island. Police strongly believe that this safe house where the RWPC had been living had been used by the LTTE woman suicide bomber who exploded the bomb near the security checkpoint at the gates of the Airforce Headquarters in Slave Island in early February. The suicide kit had been worn by the LTTE woman at this safe house, police said.

Police said that the RWPC's involvement in the LTTE activities was very deep. She had been questioned at length by detectives in order to ascertain LTTE movements in the City.

The investigating team have taken into custody several suspects including an Inspector of a traffic division in Colombo, Suvendra Devi, wife of the main suspect Pulendran. ●

LTTE Offers Fierce Resistance

D B S Jeyaraj

Contrary to bombastic pronouncements made by government and defence Ministry spokespersons from time to time that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been pushed to the verge of defeat, the Tigers have in recent times displayed tremendous military resilience that has amazed observers of the Sri Lankan conflict. Apart from resisting the advances of the Sri Lankan armed forces in the Northern mainland of the Wannu the LTTE has also been engaging in a wide series of operations in the Jaffna peninsula, the Eastern Province, the territorial waters of the North-Eastern coast as well as various parts of Southern Sri Lanka particularly Colombo.

The most striking aspect of this resilience is manifest in the Wannu region. There the LTTE has been effectively holding at bay three full fledged divisions of the army namely the 53rd, 55th and 56th. In addition to these troops numbering 37,000 contingents from the Police, Navy and Air Force totalling nearly 10,000 are also in the area as supplementary military support. In spite of this the "Operation JAYA Sikurui "or S..... Victory" launched on May 13th last year at the auspicious time of 5.20am is yet to arrive at its target destination Kilinochchi. Furthermore the Southern portion of Kilinochchi town was wrested from army control by the LTTE last month.

When operation "Jaya Sikurui" began the defence establishment expected the Sri Lankan army to progress like a knife through butter in the Wannu. Some even stated that the entire exercise would be completed within 90 days. Now more than 300 days have passed but the Operation is not over yet. Military analysts predict that the hardest round of fighting is yet to come.

Do or Die

When "Jaya Sikurui" began troops reached Omathai on the Jaffna-Kandy road without much difficulty. Likewise troops also captured Nedunkerny quite easily. Optimism reigned supreme in military quarters that the rest of the operation too would meet with similar success. But the Tigers had other ideas. The LTTE unleashed a massive resist-

ance cum counter offensive code named "operation Sei allathu Sethu Mudi" (Do or Die) in the "Quit India" movement conducted by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942. His disciple Rajaji coined the phrase "Seithu Mudi Allathu Sethu Mudi" to invigorate the masses in what was essentially a non-violent movement.

Utilising a similar slogan as code word for the Tiger multi-pronged counter offensive indicated the determination level of LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran in countering the military threat posed by the Sri Lankan state. Thereafter the Tigers adopted a rare blend of positional warfare as well as hit and run guerrilla tactics to attack, defend, contain and at worst delay the advancing troops. The length between Vavuniya and Kilinochchi along the Jaffna - Kandy road is estimated at 75km. At present the troops have reached the outskirts of Mankulam. This means that a distance of about 30 to 32km has to be covered yet.

When the army reached Omathai after brief skirmishes on its outskirts and consolidated it, hopes soared high in defence circles. It was felt that the forces would coast along places like Puliyankulam, Kanakarayankulam, Mankulam, Murikandy and link up at Kilinochchi just as easily as the Yarl Devi train of old did in the past. The first phase of "Jaya Sikurui" was expected to conclude at the key intersection of Puliyankulam for strategic reasons. A road from Puliyankulam goes North-Eastwards via Nainamadhu and Nedunkerny to Mullaitheevu. So troops from Nedunkerny wanted to link up at this place first and consolidate a triangular area. But the LTTE had other ideas.

Very stiff resistance offered by the Tigers prevented the troops from taking Puliyankulam in the first place. Sections of the Colombo media were so confident of army success that they jumped the gun several times and announced the capture of and link up at Puliyankulam several times. It just did not happen. Finding Puliyankulam inaccessible along the A-9 Highway or Jaffna - Kandy road the army got off the beaten into the interior and proceeded northwards both on the East and

West of the road. One column moved up to Pudhoo on the West and another to Periyamadhu on the West. Thus the army encircled Puliyankulam on three sides but still could not penetrate LTTE defences of that town.

The nearest the army got to Puliyankulam was the old railway goods shed and yard nearly a km from the town. Finding the LTTE defences of the Kandy - Jaffna Road near impregnable the security forces decided to continue with their circumventing strategy. Instead of targeting spots on or along the A-9 Highway directly they began clearing new routes in the jungle parallel to the main road. This was done both on the East and West. Troops from Nedunkerny and Periyamadhu linked up at Nainamadhu in between. Further progressing Northwards the security forces found themselves up against another impregnable tiger defence around Kanakarayankulam.

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The El Nimo Factor

At this point of time the army discovered the potential of a neglected stretch of roadway called the Old Kandy road or Old road. This linked both the Puliyankulam B Mullaitheevu road and the Mankulam B Mullaitheevu road. So troops after some fighting reached Krippattamurippu on the Mankulam B Mullaitheevu road. The army also established control in some places along the general area of this road like Karappukuthi, Katkidanku and Vignanakulam. This progress up to a point very close to Mankulam on the eastern flank rendered unnecessary the consolidation of Puliyankulam or capture of Kanakarayankulam.

Moreover two Gods in the Hindu pantheon had joined forces against

Anuruddha Ratwatte at this time. Vayubhagwan the Wind God and Varuna Bhagawan the God of Rain had jointly unleashed the Monsoon Winds and rain the Wann. Aided by the El Nino factor the unprecedented intensity of the Monsoon caused havoc. Tanks were overflowing and floods were rampant. The Kanakarayan Kulam filled up and soon the river Kanakarayan Aaru flowing outwards was in spate. The LTTE destroyed all fordable bridges along this river. So the troops were further constrained in movement. One attempt to sneak ahead in the adverse weather met with tragedy at Mnna Kulam where the LTTE wiped out nearly 200 men from the elite Commando forces.

After weather conditions improved troops have made and continue to make attempts to reach Mankulam. At present troops on the Mankulam-Mullaitheevu road have moved West by South West to Olumadhu also on the same road. On the South-East of Mankulam troops have established Forward Defence Lines at Katkidanku and the Vignanakulam-Karappukuthi area. On the eastern sector troops have consoli-

dated themselves at Pudhooor the site of the famous Nagathambiraan Kovil. They have also ventured into the interior jungle and set up some FDLs. The Police is in charge of areas from Vavuniya to Omanthai both East and West. The Air Force is in charge of the eastern flank from Omanthai upwards. The Navy is in charge of the Western flank from Omanthai upwards. While these additional personnel augment the army in holding on to captured territory the bulk of the army is left free to continue with their main mission engaging the LTTE and capturing 'real estate'.

Inflicting Heavy Damage

The army has been pursuing that goal through a series of offensives that have failed because of the stiff resistance displayed by the Tigers. The latest such offensive launched on March 14th was a three pronged thrust in the general direction of Mankulam. The main thrust was from Karippattamurippu-Olumadhu towards Mankulam. The second was from Mannakulam to the South-West of Mankulam. The third was from Moondrumurippu

along an interior track to Vannivilankulam on the Mankulam-Mallavi road. The Tigers foiled the attempt on all three fronts and aborted it. In the process they injured three Brigadiers and killed Major Priyantha Ranasinghe the artillery commander. The injured Brigadiers were the General Officer commanding 55th Division Brig. Sarath Fonseka and his deputy Brig. Tuan Johoran. The third injured Brigadier was Wickremasuriya the Principal Staff Officer of Overall Operations Commander Major-General Sri Lal Weerasooriya.

The LTTE has been mainly inflicting heavy damage on the advancing army through the use of long range artillery and mortars. According to Colombo media reports the Tiger artillery barrage has been very accurate and effective due to a simple technique. Anticipating troop movements through jungle the LTTE has tied ribbons and bands to the tops of tall trees. All these trees and their positions have been codified. Distances and angles of areas surrounding these trees have been calculated by LTTE gunners beforehand. So when troops advance near a codified



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tree an LTTE 'spotter' hidden in the area promptly notifies the artillery point through radio of the exact position. He may, for example, say the troops are 50 metres to the right of tree code number 'x'. The LTTE gunner adjusts his sights and lets fly. This, according to Colombo media reports, is the chief reason for the LTTE artillery scoring bull's eye after bull's eye despite firing from afar through thick underbrush.

The LTTE has also constructed very strong bunkers that are very well camouflaged. The Air Force, using unmanned aerial vehicles for observation, have not been able to detect these bunkers. So what happens is 'blind' bombing that does not affect the LTTE. The bunkers, constructed with the aid of a new concrete cement manufactured by the Tigers, are able to withstand the stray shell or bomb that hits it. In addition the LTTE has also heavily mined roads and possible access routes. Booby traps and the tiny but lethal cigarette pack sized 'johnny mines', a brainchild of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran, are also sprinkled in the area. A further innovation is sniping from lofts set up in trees.

Counter Attacks

Apart from this type of warfare aimed at holding on to fixed positions the LTTE has also been staging counter attacks too. Six major counter attacks have been conducted by the LTTE the most notable among them being the ones at Thandikulam, Omanthai and Karappukuthi. The significant aspect of these was that the LTTE doubled back penetrating enemy lines and attacked. In addition to these major attacks the Tigers have also infiltrated the so called areas captured by Jaya Sikurui troops time and again indulging in hit and run tactics. Sniping and land-mining by Tigers are widespread.

On the other hand, the Wannai war has also seen the LTTE assume a new incarnation as a conventional militia. It has resisted military advances in most places that it entrenched itself. The relative progress made by the army was mainly through its circumventing strategy that by-passed well fortified positions of the LTTE. At one stage during the Wannai war the LTTE was simultaneously fighting on four fronts holding the army at bay. There is also the case of the Mannakulam debacle on December 4th last year where the LTTE set up a decoy camp lured the army comman-

dos and then struck swiftly and successfully.

Conflicting figures have been publicised about casualty figures on both sides. An unofficial but quite reliable estimate places the figure of the army as 5500 casualties so far. This includes around 1300 dead and 4200 injured. About half of the injured are classified as walking wounded. The army says that the LTTE casualty toll is over 6,000. The reality is much less. The Tigers apparently have lost nearly 900 cadres and incurred wounded figures numbering around 800.

While the 'Jaya Sikurui' operation was in progress the LTTE also mounted a counter offensive against the sprawling Elephant Pass B Paranthan B Kilinochchi base complex in the North. Initially, Tigers from the east of Kilinochchi at Murasumottai attacked Paranthan. This was followed by Tigers from Iranaimadhu attacking Kilinochchi from the South. A third contingent attacked the Elephant Pass camp from three sides. The army defended Elephant Pass and Paranthan successfully. More than 160 Tigers were killed in Paranthan and about 35 in Elephant Pass. But in Kilinochchi the LTTE did well.

Battle for Kilinochchi

They succeeded in driving out the armed forces from Kilinochchi town initially and held on to the area up to the Karadipokku junction. On February 4th the LTTE senior leader Sornam hoisted the Tiger flag in the heart of Kilinochchi town. Many displaced residents of Kilinochchi were brought into town to witness the ceremony. Thereafter the army launched two counter attacks to regain Kilinochchi but were repulsed. Later the LTTE withdrew to a certain extent but still held on to a chunk of territory originally in the hands of the army. This is a rectangle about four km in length and one and half km in breadth in the South and South East of Kilinochchi.

The army is back in most parts of North and North West Kilinochchi. The central part of Kilinochchi is virtually "no man's land" now. Recently the batch of journalists taken to Kilinochchi photographed the Kilinochchi signboard on the northern border but not the one at the southern border. Although journalists reported that Kilinochchi is in the hands of the army it is not the whole truth. The situation on ground

is that both the army as well as the LTTE are in control of parts of Kilinochchi with some "no man's land" in between.

The LTTE is said to have used 1800 cadres in the attack. It is surmised that if and when the army takes Mankulam the forces at Kilinochchi would begin a southwards thrust against the LTTE thereby opening up another front. Until then they may be content to stay put in their present position.

In Jaffna

The LTTE has also been expanding its activity in the Jaffna peninsula. While the general impression abroad is that the entire peninsula is fully controlled by the army the reality is not that simple. There is a substantial portion of territory in the Thenmaratchy, Pachchilaipalli and Vadamaratchy East divisions that are virtually no go areas for the Army. So too is the Aaladi area in the east of Punkudutheevu. The lower portion of the peninsula does not have many army camps particularly along the east coast.

Patrolling by the army on a long scale is impossible because of the LTTE presence. Attempts to conduct major expeditions along this coast have been thwarted by the LTTE which engaged in positional warfare here. Also recently the bodies of some soldiers killed in Mirusuvi were handed over to the Red Cross by the LTTE in the Peninsula itself. Despite the local authority elections concluding without a major mishap, the LTTE has subsequently escalated its activity in the Peninsula. But reports of several LTTE hideouts and safe houses in the Valigamam, Vadamaratchy and Thenmaratchy areas being 'discovered' by the Army does not augur well for the Tigers as this indicates that the forces are receiving accurate information of LTTE whereabouts from the people.

The LTTE also scored some successes on the maritime front. Although the Government has been saying that the sea power of the LTTE has been drastically reduced recent events suggest otherwise. The Sea Tigers registered a major victory last month when they attacked a flotilla of Navy vessels off the coast of Inbarutty in the Point Pedro area. Suicide squads of the Black Sea Tigers destroyed two ships "Pabbatha" and "Valampuri". They also damaged two Dvora gun boats and a Shanghai fast attack craft. The fact that the

(Continued on next page)

SRI LANKA'S INDEPENDENCE

The Birth Of A Tragedy

By Dr Jayadeva Uyangoda

Salman Rushdie's characters in the fictionalised account of India after Independence. The Midnight Children, were born at the moment of India's Independence at midnight on 5 August 1947. My own samsaric encounter with the political independence of my country has been slightly different. I was not born when the Union Jack was lowered and the Lion's Flag hoisted in Colombo, on 4 February 1948. I was born two years later, in 1950.

Yet, in a political and historical sense my own biography of the past 48 years has been closely intertwined with the 50-year biography of post-colonial Sri Lanka. I grew up in the early 1950's in the relative peace of an isolated Sinhalese village. As a six-year-old child, I learnt about the assassination of Prime Minister S R D Bandaranaike, and political assassinations were to constitute a major facet of my country's politics since I reached the age of 38. As an eight-year-old child, I learnt about the differences between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities; then, of course, even the everyday events of my entire adult life were to be governed by Sinhala-Tamil conflictual politics. I

came of age in the radical 1960's while being fed, looked after and educated by one of the best welfare states in the developing world. The welfare state, which also stood as an obstacle to significant economic growth, produced from among its own children a generation of bewildered idealists. Being one among them I ran away from home, became a modern anarchist, tried my

Since Sri Lanka's Independence 50 years ago, two competing visions of a modern state, grounded in separate and unmediated ethnic interests, have informed the nation's peculiar path of decolonisation.

hand at revolution and along with my generation paid a heavy price for that misadventure. Then in the twilight of my youth, in the 1980's. I witnessed how my country all of a sudden began to lose all its idealism and hope while aggression, hostility, ethnic self-righteousness, brutality and violence were welcomed with fervour by all those who mattered in shaping Sri Lanka's political future. At present I am watching, not with pleasure, how Sri Lanka is run-

(Continued from page 15)

"Valampuri" is missing still has led to speculation that the vessel is in LTTE hands. The LTTE attack apparently was launched from the Sea Tiger bases at Chundikulam and Nagar Koil.

In addition to the Sea Tigers under Soosai and Gangai Amaran, the LTTE has also developed a new marine strike outfit under Kutti. This is modelled on the US SEALs and is named Leopards Sea Unit. The LTTE also has a land-based commando force called Leopards. The Sea Leopards have engaged in two attacks so far. One was the attack on the naval base at Kilali and the other the suicide attack on Trincomalee harbour.

Bomb Attacks in Colombo

The LTTE has also continued to be active in the Eastern Province. More importantly there have been a number

of bomb explosions and attempted explosions in the Southern parts of Sri Lanka notably Colombo. The Government has blamed the LTTE although Tiger spokespersons have neither accepted nor denied responsibility. The explosions however have thrown the Government security apparatus into wide disarray but have politically damaged the International reputation of the LTTE. The bomb incidents have also hardened Sinhala feelings, strengthened the hard liners and weakened the peace lobby. It is doubtful whether the LTTE current focus, which is basically militaristic, would take heed of this phenomenon. For its part the LTTE will continue to demonstrate its military capacity and resilience for quite some time at least. This again will thwart all plans of the PA Government to usher in the devolution package after a conclusive military victory against the LTTE. ●

ning deeper and deeper into its decades-old crisis. In despair, I read the poetry of despair. As I recently read in a poem by Pakistan's Kishwar Naheed, "I and my country were born together. We lost our sight in childhood."

The story of Sri Lanka's 50 years of independence is also the story of how a new nation-state lost its sight as well as innocence in childhood and went awry in adulthood. Initially, only a few people sighted this birth of an unfolding tragedy. In 1956, when Sinhalese was made the official language, Colvin R De Silva, a Marxist parliamentarian at that time, summed it up pithily: "Two languages. one country; one language: two countries." Then, in the 1960's, Howard Wriggins, the American diplomat-turned-scholar, titled his study of Sri Lankan politics after independence. Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation.

Sri Lanka's Independence of 1948 was unique in the ex-colonial South Asia; it was not an achievement gained after a long and arduous nationalist struggle as in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Rather, Sri Lanka's independence was 'granted' by the British, once a decision was made to part with the 'Jewel in the Crown', British India. Sri Lanka's nationalist leaders were constitutionalist lobbyists at their best; practising a highly legalistic form of nationalist agitation. They were more inclined towards constitutional reform negotiations to obtain the status of a responsible government than extra-institutional mobilisation directed towards achieving swaraj. Then, of course, the post-War Labour Government had decided to de-colonise the Empire by leaving the South Asian sub-continent. By a stroke of fate, Sri Lanka became a direct beneficiary of the epoch-making independence struggle of the people across the Palk Straits. It then was not an accident that 4 February 1948 fell less than a year after 14 and 15 August 1947, the Independence days of India and Pakistan.

Sri Lanka's so-called non-violent path to Independence in 1948 has given rise to a myth, popularised mostly by secondary school text-book writers. Every school child is taught that the Sri Lankan people got their independence without shedding a single drop of blood. In a way, the British colonial rulers did not cause much shedding of blood, as they did in India or Africa, during their one-and-half century stay

in Sri Lanka. The annexation of the island's coastal areas from the Dutch in 1796 was more the result of a change in the military balance in Europe than a war of conquest. Similarly, the capture of the Kandyan kingdom in 1815 was made relatively easy because of the confluence of interests between the renegade Kandyan aristocracy and the British administrators in Colombo. Soon after the conquest of Kandy, there were two rebellions against British rule, one in 1818 and the other in 1848. In terms of their social origins, the two rebellions came from two different social strata; the first was largely resistance by the disillusioned Kandyan aristocracy while the participants in the second were the impoverished Kandyan peasantry. Both rebellions were suppressed in blood.

However, between 1815 and 1915 the colony remained relatively peaceful. It was also the period during which the colonial plantation economy took firm root, the administrative system enveloped the entire island and a local bourgeoisie and the middle classes emerged in the new social structure. During the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915 violence did occur, yet Sri Lanka did not experience a massacre that was equivalent in severity and magnitude to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. This led to another colonial and academic myth about Sri Lanka under the British - a 'model colony'.

The nationalist historiography, however, has its own reading of Sri Lanka's independence struggle, which is also taught to every school child. As this particular historical analysis posits, after the Sinhalese heroism in battle against the colonial rule was suppressed twice in the early and mid-19th century, a religio-cultural renaissance began in the second half of the same century centred on Buddhist revivalism. It defied and challenged both European culture and Christianity. Contemporary Sinhalese nationalist historians call this revivalism, a search for a truly national identity by a subjugated nation that was seeking its own cultural and spiritual emancipation.

Quite interestingly, when a political agitation for constitutional reforms earnestly began in the early 20th century, the mass potential of the Sinhalese cultural revivalist movement had already elapsed. Space for public activity had shifted from religion and culture to constitutional reforms and the

civic leadership from middle class vernacular intelligentsia to patrician notables. Members of a class of land-owning and professional gentry, these notables were the top-most layer of the native Sri Lankan society. The 'nationalist' leaders, both Sinhala and Tamil, formed the Ceylon National Congress in 1919 as a joint front to agitate for reforms, but the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic rivalry soon took over the Congress agenda and competitive ethnic politics began to characterise the entire nationalist reform movement in the decades to follow. Communalist political agendas aimed at securing more power for the Sinhalese and Tamil political leaders in the colonial legislature were so rigid that the Donoughmore Commission, which came to Ceylon in 1929 to report on constitutional reforms, described the Sri Lankan variety of communalism as "a canker on the body politic eating deeper and deeper into the vital energies of the people".

Why is it that Sri Lanka did not produce a mass nationalist struggle for complete independence from the British? in Sri Lanka, answers to this question are always formulated by contrasting Sri Lanka's nationalist politics with the Indian experience. In India, as this explanation goes the Indian National Congress mobilised the masses for complete independence and the nationalist movement of the elite linked itself with the struggle of the peasant and working class masses through the medium of Gandhian politics of defiance and resistance. Another contrast with India, often made by Sri Lankan Marxists, is that while India under colonial capitalism had produced a relatively mature 'national bourgeoisie' with a capacity to resist the colonial power, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie was weak, underdeveloped and as a class totally dependent on the colonial economy and culture. A remark often made by observers from the sub-continent who visit Colombo may perhaps add another perspective to this argument; the Sri Lankan elite, even today, constitutes the most 'British' of the South Asian elites.

With retrospective historical insights, one may argue today that the absence of a militant anti-colonial movement in the immediate pre-independence decades was not necessarily a negative feature. After the 1920's, the elite politics was conducted exclusively on communalist terms. The introduction of universal adult franchise in 1931

further added to the ethnoicisation of elite political practices, because in the absence of an advanced civil society, ethnic fears and prejudices, rather than party programmes, appeared to be more attractive to professional politicians. As the research work of such scholars as Jane Russel, Michael Roberts and Nira Wickremasinghe demonstrate, the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic bifurcation of political leaders pursued no other mode of mobilisation than making appeals to the most sectarian of racist impulses they themselves had constructed. In case Sinhala and Tamil patrician elites succeeded in mobilising the masses as well on such emotive platforms of ethnic enmity, the independence of 1948 would have easily been preceded by a bloodbath as was the case in India and Pakistan in 1947. For this failure at least, history may perhaps forgive the weak, dependent and thoroughly conservative colonial bourgeoisie of Sri Lanka and its political leaders.

Meanwhile, there was also a minor stream of swarajists associated with the Left and radical nationalism. The Left programme was for an anti-imperialist struggle, combined with social revolution. Most fascinating. However, were the radical Sinhala nationalists who were largely inspired by Indian nationalist struggle, particularly by its militant Bengali version. Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose were their role models. Led by a group of Left-oriented intellectual monks, these radical nationalists took the unusually courageous step of making a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) for Sri Lanka in 1946, perhaps the last radically progressive action associated with Sri Lanka's Buddhist nationalists.

The absence of ethnic violence at the moment of Independence constituted what one may call the Sri Lankan exceptionalism in South Asia. In Sri Lanka, there was no Mahatma Gandhi to be gunned down; a two-nation theory of state formation had not yet evolved. Nor was there a modern philosopher-statesman to make political poetry out of the midnight symbolism of destiny and freedom. Independence in February 1948 was mainly an official exercise of, to use historian Kingsley de Silva's phrase, 'transfer of power'. And power was transferred to a stratum of city-dwelling gentry who had been fairly well-schooled in the politics of sectarian competition, yet possessed only a poor vision for their own role in

effecting a meaningful political change in a plural society.

The first 10 years of independence were crucial to the shaping of the future path of Sri Lanka, because that was the period in which the independent country began to show symptoms of losing sight of the future. The ideology of counter-pluralism so ardently built up during the previous two decades by the Ceylon National Congress headed by D S Senanayake and the Sinhala Maha Sabha of SWRD. Bandaranaike guided the behaviour of the new state soon after power was transferred. The fear of Indians swamping the island, a theme that gave much rhetorical energy to Congress and Sabba politicians in the pre-independence years, was translated into legislative practice by the new, independent Parliament with the citizenship law of 1948. While this legislation was meant to exclude from citizenship nearly half a million Tamil plantation workers, a subsequent election law enacted in 1949 deprived them of franchise rights as well. This Sinhala majoritarian assertion in the wake of independence immediately gave rise to a Tamil minoritarian assertion around the demand for a federal state on the assumption that Tamil fears expressed earlier of eventual Sinhalese domination of state power had been proved. Thus, within two years of independence, Sri Lanka's quest for nation-building led itself to two tracks - a Sinhala track and a Tamil track - which were never to meet throughout the following 50 years.

It is these two competing visions of a modern Sri Lankan state, grounded on separate and unmediated ethnic interests, that have informed the island's peculiar path of de-colonisation. And indeed, if both the Sinhalese and Tamil societies failed to give rise to an anti-colonial mass struggle in the pre-independence period, within five to six years of independence they discovered the enemy within the territorial borders of the island so that the unspent political energies could now be marshalled for what may be termed post-colonial nationalism. As the Sri Lankan experience clearly demonstrated, post-colonial nationalism was also a peculiar process of decolonisation in which gaining access to, and the control of state power was seen as the prime mechanism for correcting injustices suffered by the majority Sinhalese-Buddhist community during the pre-independence colo-

nial period.

De-colonisation in ex-colonial societies has always been a nationalist endeavour. Anti-colonial nationalisms have been generally constructed with the notions of establishing political sovereignty for communities that had come to see themselves through the modern political category of the nation. But the combination of de-colonisation and post-colonial nationalisms in Sri Lanka have had another feature which began to crystallise itself in the early 1950's. We may call it the displacement of the enemy. The Sinhala Buddhist nationalists viewed the minority Tamils and Christians as beneficiaries of the British colonial rule and therefore their political project enunciated the position that de-colonisation would mean the political and cultural empowerment of the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority. In this framework, the post-independence empowerment of the Sinhala-Buddhist society was a post-colonial negotiation with the colonial past. Meanwhile, the de-colonisation project of Tamil nationalism had a different approach to the issue of post-independent empowerment. It was grounded on the belief that before the colonial advent, Tamils in the North-East had been a separate sovereign entity and that any post-independence political arrangement, to be meaningful to Tamils, would ensure accommodation of that sovereignty in the form of regional autonomy. And the Tamil nationalists began to use the formulation, 'Sinhalese imperialism', as early as the 1950's, pointing to their belief that the independence of 1948 benefited only the Sinhalese.

Once the enemy was discovered within, it was relatively easy for both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist projects to assume a somewhat mass character within just ten years of Sri Lanka's independence. With this qualitative transition, the leadership of the two nationalist mobilisations was passed onto new actors. The social composition of new forces of post-colonial Sinhala nationalism was totally different from the Anglicised Sinhala elite that negotiated the transfer of power from the British. The leadership of the new Sinhala nationalist forces emerged from among the vernacular intelligentsia of the urban as well as semi-rural intermediate classes, the latter being the social core of the new mobilisation. Tamil nationalism too underwent a significant transition. While a new party called the Federal

Party was formed in 1952, the notion of national self-determination was introduced to the Tamil nationalist discourse. The new Forces also shifted their focus away from business and professional Tamil elites in Colombo to middle class social groups in the Tamil districts of the North and East. Making Sinhala the official language in 1956 and the ethnic riots of 1958 - the two moments that decisively defined subsequent Sinhala-Tamil relations as well as the majoritarian nature of the post-colonial Sri Lankan state - were events, the historical meaning of which could be discerned only in the context of the social transition of post-colonial Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms.

When the question of state power became so crucial and central to Sinhala and Tamil nationalist goals in the post-Independence phase, political accommodation between the two became excruciatingly painful and difficult. The fate of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1958, the Senanayake Chelvanayakam Pact of 1966, the District Development Council's scheme of 1982 and the Provincial Councils system of 1987 demonstrates, in varying degrees, what one may call the reform-resistant character of the post-colonial Sri Lankan state. It is perhaps a political irony that only post-colonial Tamil nationalism, precisely because it was a nationalism of an ethnic minority, could present a state-reform perspective for a pluralistic polity. The Tamil federalist demand, if we detach it from its avowedly ethnic overtones, can be seen as the most important political intervention in order to make the post-colonial Sri Lankan state modern, more democratic and pluralistic. But the federalist demand touched the very essence of the question of the irate and it could only further strengthen the unitarist impulses of Sinhala nationalist politics. Given the fact that post-colonial Sri Lanka's ruling class has been an ethnic Sinhalese ruling class, the task of reforming the state remains incomplete. The whole experience of the 1972 and 1978 constitutions was one of institution-wrecking and not institution-building - in essence, counter-reformist. The puzzle of ethnicised democracy in Sri Lanka is that even purely legislative attempts towards pluralistic reform measures would require and generate generalised political violence as witnessed in 1987-88. Or, if violence

(continued on next page)

Devolution Proposals - UNP's Delaying and Negative Tactics

By Dr.S. Narapalasingam

The present Government was elected to office in August 1994 with a clear mandate of the people to settle early the ethnic conflict that had been inflicting heavy human and other losses, depriving many of decent living standards and some even of their homes and livelihoods and inflaming hatred and violence. Disappearances, arbitrary killings, torture, threats and intimidation were used as means to suppress dissent and sustain political power. Violations of human rights had never before been as immense and blatant in the history of Sri Lanka. Communal harmony, peace, rule of law and democracy received a severe beating.

Conscious of these concerns of the people, the new Government gave top priority to the task of settling the ethnic conflict and began negotiations earnestly with the Tamil militant group - the LTTE and when this attempt failed because of the intransigence of its leadership, it did not waver in its efforts to reach a consensual political solution. The Government was also aware that it was imperative to solve the ethnic conflict first in order to tackle the other pressing problems of the people.

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is not resorted to by a reform-minded regime, as is the case today in Sri Lanka, the reform process will have to go through a long journey, running the risk of ending up in futility.

Looking back at the past 50 years through the prism of Sri Lanka's crisis today, it is amazing to realise that political institution-building, in order to facilitate the management of ethnic relations, did not enter the thinking of the ruling elites for almost 40 years. Almost all legislative and constitutional attempts made during those four decades in the sphere of ethnic relations by all regimes resulted in destroying the space for pluralistic institution-building. The blame should be shared by both Sinhalese and Tamil political leaders whose short-term visions, however just they may have appeared at one time or

The legitimate procedure to examine and seek the views of all the parties on the Government's draft proposals for devolving powers to the regions via the Parliamentary Select Committee for Constitutional Reform was followed. The Committee, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration, Prof. G L Peiris held 77 meetings and the main opposition party, the UNP had the opportunity of submitting amendments or alternative proposals for constitutional reform at any of these meetings. In fact many amendments suggested by the UNP were accommodated by the Government. According to the chairman, the UNP had dragged the Select Committee process by asking for additional time when each of the contentious issues was taken up for discussion.

The contentious issues on which the UNP added riders to the draft constitution that was presented to Parliament on 24th October 1997, as the Select Committee Report on Constitutional Reforms included the character of the State, land alienation, police powers, regional finance, and lists of devolved powers. According to Prof. Peiris all

another for their own ethnic communities, could not make up a collective and sustainable long-term vision for Sri Lanka. The first meaningful framework of institution-building was introduced in 1987 with the establishment of provincial councils. The irony was that even that measure was forced on the Jayewardene regime by the Indian state amidst much resistance by the majority of political forces.

Why this hard-headed political conservatism? Why this monumental blindness to future? Is it because the Sri Lankan state lost its sight in childhood? Blind to the future, the Sri Lankan state has grown up during the past 50 years in a self-made political culture of resistance to reform.

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these were taken up for discussion at various meetings of the Select Committee. The character of the State was considered on July 11 and July 23, 1996 while land powers were taken up on November 22, 1996, police powers on November 29 and December 3, 1996, regional finance on December 5 and 6 and lists of devolved powers on December 9 and 12 of the same year. To the credit of Prof. Peiris it must be said that he had been extremely accommodative to the ideas of the UNP and when the latter proposed the Executive Committee system, this was accepted for the regional councils.

The desire of the Government to reach consensus among all the parties in the Select Committee was never in doubt. Prof. Peiris had even met and discussed separately with the members of the various political parties in order to reach a consensus on the proposals for constitutional reform. He had also expressed the Government's appreciation of the participation of the UNP at all the 77 meetings. At the weekly Cabinet news conference held on 15 January 1998, he announced that the President had directed not to reject proposals just because these came from the UNP.

Ranil's Contradictory Postures

Even as the UNP delegates were participating in the deliberations of the Select Committee, the leader of the party Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe was making statements at meetings with the press and foreign diplomats, which not only deviated from the conciliatory positions taken by some members of the UNP in the Select Committee, but also showed that his own position on some of the key proposals presented by the Government was changing from time to time. He first kept on saying that the Government's devolution package would not produce the desired result unless negotiations with the now banned LTTE resumed. This was announced publicly, knowing well that the LTTE leader had rejected even the original devolution proposals of the Government and his own party's opposition even to the watered down version.

By the end of 1997, after the conclusion of the Select Committee meetings, Mr Wickremasinghe abandoned his previous insistence on Government resuming talks with the LTTE and was saying that the Government and the LTTE and the UNP alone would not be

able to solve the ethnic problem and that "it was incumbent on the Government to get the consensus of all parties and organisations concerned".

The UNP leader when he visited India was supporting the 13th Amendment to the present constitution, which was introduced following the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987. The interest taken by the then Government of India under the leadership of the late Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in ending the civil disturbances and the military operations of the Sri Lankan Government in the North-East, was instrumental in the restricted powers devolved to the regions under the Provincial Council system. It was later found to be ineffective in exercising the powers even on those subjects assigned to the provincial councils, because of the overriding powers the centre had on many key areas and inadequate transfer of resources to the provinces. These virtually undermined the whole concept of devolution.

Prof. G L Peiris has explained on several occasions the weaknesses in the system of Provincial Councils constituted under the 13th Amendment. Even the leader of the opposition Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe had earlier admitted that the Provincial Council Act did not go far enough to address the grievances of the minority Tamils.

In proposing the concept of asymmetrical devolution, the UNP leader has actually accepted the fact that the Tamils have special grievances which warrant far reaching political autonomy for the Tamil majority regions in order to resolve the ethnic problem. To many Tamils this proposition appeared sensible and gave the impression that the UNP was really committed to meaningful devolution of power to the Tamil majority regions.

Subsequently, the leader of the opposition came up with the idea of "needs-based devolution", keeping the 13th Amendment as the foundation. He said that the UNP would support proposals to give more powers to the provinces but these must be based on the specific needs of each area. This stand in theory was not inconsistent with his concept of asymmetrical devolution.

The UNP leader was also seen as supporting the recommendations of the previous Select Committee, whose chairman Mr. Mangala Moonesinghe. He said in an interview, published in The Sunday Times (Sri Lanka) of November 9, 1997: "During my visit to

India, we made clear that we accept the unit of devolution as laid down in the Indo-Lanka Accord and in the 13th Amendment; we stated that the UNP does not agree with the proposals of the Government to re-demarcate the existing provinces. I expressed the view that we should build on what has been already accepted in the 13th Amendment, the Indo-Lanka Accord, the Mangala Moonesinghe Report in addition to the proposals in the present package that are accepted by all parties." However, this idea was not fully developed into a concrete set of proposals for constitutional reform.

Long after the Parliamentary Select Committee had concluded its meetings and submitted its report to Parliament, and as the Government and other minority parties were pressing for UNP support in parliament to make headway, the UNP leader began forming committees within his own party in order to prepare alternative proposals for constitutional reform. UNP as the party that has ruled for many years since independence and the main opposition party in the present Parliament need not have waited for the Government to come up with its own proposals to resolve the national issue and could have put forward them earlier to resolve the ethnic conflict. Had the UNP leadership taken the national issue seriously and set up the very same committees while the Select Committee was considering the Government's devolution proposals, this would have expedited the collective approach.

The UNP leader had acknowledged that Prof. G.L. Peiris had shown willingness to be flexible and what had been presented as Government's proposals were not final. But he did not reciprocate in the same vein and rejected the request of the Chairman of the Select Committee, Prof. G. L. Peiris, to expedite the work and submit the UNP's complete suggestions for constitutional reform by the end of January, 1998.

If the UNP's true intention is to drag the continuing conflict until the next Parliamentary election, notwithstanding the ever rising human and economic losses and the excessive suffering of the people, then it may be achieving this narrow objective at the expense of the larger interest of the country. All rational persons who have followed closely the political trends in Sri Lanka in recent years would know that the

national crisis cannot be resolved by overthrowing the present government. Any future government will face the same problems, perhaps more intensely. UNP leaders cannot be unaware of this reality but still they do not want to abandon partisan and sectarian tactics that has taken the country to the present shameful state.

Under the existing Proportional Representation system (with preferential voting), no single party can obtain the two-thirds majority needed to amend the present constitution. The 16 amendments in 10 years to the constitution were possible because of the huge majority the UNP then had in Parliament under the previous voting system. In order to retain this majority, the life of the Parliament through the questionable referendum was extended by postponing the elections under the PR system to 1989. There has been no amendments to the constitution after 1989, when the members of parliament were selected under the PR system. If the confrontational attitude towards the resolution of the national issue continues, it is certain that the problem with all its disastrous consequences will be carried into the 21st century.

UNP's Alternative Proposals

An examination of UNP's alternative proposals revealed so far for constitutional reform lends further support to its delaying strategy, notwithstanding the pompous preamble which states that these proposals seek to infuse a new political culture that would rid the country of all the ills, which have "disenchanted the people with the process of democracy itself." The fact that inefficiency, incompetence and corruption in the administration have more to do with the integrity of the leaders responsible for making decisions and giving orders than with the system itself has been ignored. This is really an indirect admission of the undemocratic and corrupt way, the UNP ruled the country during the 17-year period 1977-1994. Unfortunately, some of the practices are still lingering because of the Government's pre-occupation with the military operations directed against the rebels and measures taken to tighten security not only in the border areas but also elsewhere, including the areas in the North-East presently under the control of the army.

In so far as the ethnic problem is concerned, UNP's first instalment of the

alternative proposals unveiled on 29 January 1998, deals only with power sharing at the centre. The sharing of power amongst all communities at the centre as proposed by the UNP is to be effected through: (1) A Second Chamber where the minority communities would be adequately represented; (2) Adequate representation for minorities in the Cabinet of Ministers; (3) A President and two Vice-presidents to represent the three major communities; and (4) A modified Executive Committee System at the Centre. Without going into the details of each of the above proposals, it is relevant to note the following for the present purpose.

With regard to (1) the report states that "the method of securing the aforesaid balanced and fair representation in the Second Chamber will have to be discussed in the Select Committee and embodied in the Constitution." "The concept of a Second Chamber is vital in the national context and needs detailed discussion in the Select Committee. The views of all parties and interest groups and political parties should be solicited." The same suggestion is made in respect of some other proposals. In effect, the UNP wants to start the Parliamentary Select Committee process all over again!

Under the system proposed by the UNP, it is the responsibility of the President to ensure "the adequate representation of all the main communities in the Cabinet of Ministers." "For this purpose no more than three members of the Second Chamber may be appointed to the Cabinet of Ministers to ensure where necessary that all communities are represented therein." The term "adequate" is vague. The method of electing the President and the two Vice Presidents is through an Electoral College, consisting of the members of the first chamber (parliament) and the second chamber. As noted earlier, the intention to annul the deliberations of the Parliamentary Select Committee and restart the process again is also clear from: "The criteria for selection and the electoral process of the Vice Presidents need to be discussed and a consensus created between all parties in the Select Committee."

The following statement gives the illusion that the proposed system entails a triumvirate at the helm of government involving the members of the three main communities - Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims: "The system of election

must ensure that members of different communities will hold each of these posts. One Vice President will in addition be the Chairman of the Constitutional Council whilst the other will be the Chairman of the Second Chamber. Hence the Vice Presidents will not be mere ceremonial figures but perform important Constitutional functions connected with their posts." Once the Executive Presidency is abolished and the office of the President is itself reduced to a mere ceremonial role, what role will the Vice Presidents have in governing not by virtue of being Chairman of the Constitutional Council and Chairman of the Second Chamber but as Vice Presidents per se? Surely these posts will also be nothing but ceremonial. The UNP's proposal in this regard represents tokenism at its worst.

The bipartisan approach to resolve the ethnic problem, which the UNP leader agreed last year in the then hopeful accord facilitated by the intervention of the former British Foreign Secretary of State, Mr. Malcolm Rifkind and the efforts of the Under Secretary of State, Dr. Liam Fox, has often been cited by him to find fault with the Government for having failed to consult him. The bipartisan approach was intended to facilitate the resolution of the ethnic conflict. The proposed constitutional reform is also intended to achieve the same result. By adopting delaying and obstructionist tactics and refusing to co-operate with the Government in an effort to prevent progress being made, it is clear that it is the UNP and its leader who are guilty of abandoning the bipartisan approach.

UNP released the second (not the final) instalment of its alternative proposals at the end of the first week in March, 1998. Having accused the PA Government of not releasing at the very beginning the entire devolution package, the UNP is now committing the same "mistake". The devolution concept in this instalment shows that the somersault of the UNP from the earlier positions indicated by its leader to virtually the same position as in 1987 under the 13th Amendment and the Provincial Council Act. With regard to devolution of powers, it has been stressed that the party cannot go beyond the limits of provincial councils. The cosmetic changes suggested to the existing lists of subjects, categorised under Provincial, Concurrent and Reserved Lists can be discerned from the

following:

"In addition to the subjects in the present Provincial List, subjects which are related to Culture, Youth Affairs, Women's Affairs, Sports, School and Technical Education, Promotion of Religious Activities, Health, Housing, Local Government, Roads, Irrigation and Agrarian Services should be devolved to the Provincial Councils as List 1. The subjects which then remain in the present Concurrent List together with other subjects identified by the Select Committee will constitute List 2. Subjects in List 2 shall be devolved to Provincial Councils according to needs of each province". It is important to note here that as an example of the constitutional mechanism, whereby the Provincial Councils could assume the powers in respect of the relevant subjects set out in List 2, UNP has stated: "A Provincial Council could with the concurrence of Parliament take for itself subjects according to its needs." Essentially, this is tantamount to keeping the previous Concurrent List with the above ambiguous concession. The proposal that "the subjects not listed in either List (1 and 2) are subjects reserved for Parliament and we see no reason to list them in a Reserved List", may in practice give rise to friction between the centre and the provinces. It is amazing that the UNP needed 3 years to come up with such a pathetic and confusing set of devolution proposals.

In respect of the rights of the minorities UNP's position is: "We recognise that Buddhism shall retain its foremost place, while guaranteeing the rights of all other religions. No law or executive action should subject any community or religion to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are made liable. The rule of law and the equal protection of the law to all citizens must be the bedrock of the Constitution." Surely, similar provisions existed in Section 29(2), (3) and (4) of the 1947-72 Soulbury Constitution but how the underlying principles were violated is now part of the tragic history of Sri Lanka after independence.

Not surprisingly, not one party representing the minorities in Parliament has shown any willingness to accept the UNP's proposals for constitutional reform in the present form. Even a naive person cannot miss the motive of the UNP and Opposition Leader when he insisted at the beginning that talks with

the LTTE must be resumed, when his party's proposals cannot even convince the members of the moderate Tamil parties, who have accepted the concept of one united country.

In sum, the structure proposed by the UNP guarantees that the same old majoritarian rule, where the will of the majority community prevailed and which permitted the passage of Sinhala Only Bill and the implementation of policies detrimental to national unity will continue in another disguised form. It is this very structure that needs to be changed for uniting the divided people and embarking earnestly on the hitherto neglected task of nation building.

A Test of Sincerity

Early this year, Mr. Wickremasinghe categorically assured the Mahanayakes that his party would not extend support to the PA Government's proposed constitutional reforms based on the devolution proposals in the Select Committee's Report, when the subject came before Parliament. Without the support of the UNP, any fundamental change to the present constitution is impossible. The Government even with the support of some minor parties in the opposition

has only a thin majority and two-thirds majority is required as a first step towards amending the constitution.

If the Government holds a non-binding referendum on its devolution proposals which the UNP has already promised to oppose, it will only reinforce the political deadlock regardless of its outcome. The decisive way for the Government to resolve the issue early is to accept those proposals of the UNP on devolution of power which it has advocated since the 1994 Presidential elections and which are consistent with the Government's aim for devolving powers in the manner proposed in the Select Committee Report. With regard to the governing structure of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the Mangala Moonesinghe Committee's recommendation seem to be a way to resolve this contentious issue. The political parties representing the minority communities have a tactful role to play in persuading both sides to agree to a common reform package. The UNP as a responsible national party cannot reject its own proposals, which it has actively advocated until recently without giving valid reasons.

The UNP has made clear in the rider

filed in Parliament that it is "for genuine devolution of power within a united and indivisible Sri Lanka." It has also made public pronouncements earlier that the devolution of power must go significantly beyond the 13th Amendment and involve the transfer of additional power and resources to the regions. There cannot be any serious problems in accepting some proposals of the UNP such as the establishment of Independent Elections Commission, Independent Public Service Commission, Independent Police Commission, and Independent Judiciary. The concept of power-sharing at the centre is sound and deserves close examination with regard to the composition of the second chamber and the Constitutional Council as well as the executive system it entails.

50 years of confrontational politics in Sri Lanka has only helped the extremists on both sides of the ethnic divide to influence policies and events that have taken the country along the present ruinous course. The stark reality is that the co-operation of the PA and the UNP is essential for meeting the challenges of the Sinhala and Tamil extremists.

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A BJP GOVERNMENT IN PLACE AT LAST

T N Gopalan

At long last, the leader of the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP), Atal Behari Vajpayee, is all set to become India's next Prime Minister.

There was uncontrolled euphoria among the Indian middle (or muddle) classes, not to speak of the businessmen, at the BJP's performance at the election. Of Vajpayee, a sensible man, wiser by years of experience, the right leader to rein in the Hindutva zealots and the best person to practise consensus politics from which there was no escape under the circumstances, went the more measured panegyrics.

As the days passed, the initial euphoria became tempered by the uncomfortable recognition that any government headed by the BJP would, for its survival, be at the mercy of a motley crowd of minority regional parties which were its electoral allies making decent governance almost impossible.

The high drama of hide and seek staged by the AIADMK leader Jayalalitha Jayaram, reportedly making impossible demands such as the dismissal of the Karunanidhi-led DMK state government in Tamil Nadu and the inclusion of her one time enemy becoming her latest ally, Dr Subramanian Swamy,



as the Union Finance Minister, as pre-conditions for her party's support, is indicative of the problems the BJP-led minority government would have to face in the days to come.

Well it may be a multi-party coalition, a la the United Front government formed last time, subject to pulls and pressures from a hundred different directions. Still the BJP with its commitment to see the nation march forward and its known patriotism and relatively less corruption, could weather many a

has a special responsibility to defuse the Rancorous relationship between her party and the UNP. This will be in keeping with the potent message for reconciliation she conveyed in her speech delivered to mark Sri Lanka's 50 years of independence. She said: "Let us, those of us, who have taken on the responsibility to guide and govern the nation, whatever our party or political affiliations may be, march towards the future in unison, putting behind us mean desires for petty, personal or political gain. The nation's need today is so great and urgent that it permits space only for largesse of heart and mind, which will in the national interest supersede all that is irrelevant and small." If this appeal does not yield the desired result nothing else will and in this case one does not have to be an expert to predict the consequences. ●

storm and provide the people a reasonably decent government, something they have not seen for many years now. Such is the euphoria marking the Press as also the general public.

As had been widely expected the elections did not throw up a decisive verdict. It is a hung parliament yet again, with no political party or combination enjoying an absolute majority. While the BJP emerged as the largest single party with 178 seats (16 more than its tally last time), its allies including the Akali Dal, the Samata Party, the AIADMK, the Trinamul Congress and the Lok Shakti managed to mop up 78 another seats, leaving the BJP front 16 seats short of a majority.

For its part the Congress, for all the much-vaunted Sonia factor, fared rather poorly, bagging only 141 seats, only one more than what it had in the previous Lok Sabha. With its somewhat tentative allies like the Rashtriya Janata Dal of Laloo Prasad Yadav, it inched up to 170 seats.

The other combine, the United Front, came off much worse. From over 175 seats it had commanded last time, its tally has come down to 93, four of its major constituents, the Janata Dal, the DMK, the TMC and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) getting a severe drubbing while the Samajwadi Party, the Telugu Desam Party and the CPM managed to retain their hold.

Try as they might and the Congress, UF and the other secular parties outside the BJP umbrella could simply not muster more than 261, leave alone 272. Though on paper the BJP Front and the UF-Congress combine seemed more or less evenly matched, the real story was different. For one the BJP Front, a pre-poll one, was relatively that much more solid and stable whereas the Congress and the UF had fought each other in many places. To bring them all together to form a government when the BJP-combine had crossed the 250 mark, a psychological barrier of sorts, was a tough task.

Making matters worse the TDP from Andhra Pradesh because of its own political compulsions decided to tacitly support the BJP government, saying, "Our first enemy is the Congress and not the BJP," Mr Chandrababu Naidu declared that he would maintain "strict neutrality", remain "equidistant" from both the parties, but in effect it only meant supporting the BJP since by that criterion he had to abstain from voting

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The importance of the bipartisan approach must be seen from a broad perspective that includes the above aim.

The declared commitments of both the PA and the UNP leaders to a just and fair political solution to the most intricate and vexed problem will be put to the final test in the coming months. Not only the people of Sri Lanka but also others interested in the future of Sri Lanka will judge whether they have been serious or not when they made these declarations. What is at stake here is not just the long-term viability of one country with diverse groups of people living harmoniously as her loyal citizens but also that of multi-party democracy as a workable political system throughout the country.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga

during the crucial vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha.

After a few rounds of informal discussions the UF and the Congress gave up their attempts to put together another non-BJP formation. President K R Narayanan had little option but to invite Vajpayee to form the government even though the BJP fell short of the magic figure of 272 seats.

But the BJP had scored its first victory when it was able to forge a broad alliance, shedding for good its image of being an untouchable. Everyone had his or her own compulsions to join hands with it, though they all were and are still wary of the BJP's Hindutva plank.

However, even while standing by its known agenda in its manifesto, the BJP declared, not very bashfully, that it would keep out the "provocative, controversial" issues out of the "national agenda" it would draw up for the coalition government. That was enough to satisfy its allies who jumped into the fray with zest and without any apparent misgivings.

Whether it was the sober Ramakrishna Hegde or the more militant Dr Ramdas or the forever sabre-rattling George Fernandez, they could play the stability card to the hilt even while reassuring their respective constituencies that they had not jettisoned their cherished principles in their quest for seats.

The result was there for all to see. The BJP was not able to do much in UP, scoring only 57 seats, just five up, thanks to the sharp polarisation on caste lines and the Samajvadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav backed by the backward castes and the Muslims won an impressive 20 seats. The much vaunted Dalit outfit Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which refused to enter into alliance with anyone in an attempt to prove its strength, finished with a meager five.

In Rajasthan and Maharashtra the BJP and its allies had to suffer stunning reverses, the blows in the latter state being even severe and much more galling given all the rhetoric of the Tiger Thackeray.

But the reverses were amply made up elsewhere, in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. Even in Bihar it was a very good show, the BJP front's tally being 28. Between it and Laloo, the JD and the CPI were simply wiped out. In West Bengal and Kerala the Left Front retained its hold,

though Mamata-BJP's record of eight seats in the former should make for some introspection.

Leave alone the anti-incumbency factor which is supposed to have worked in most states, the secular parties had played their card pretty badly even as the BJP was getting its act together. Complacency had spelt the ruin of the DMK combine in Tamil Nadu, the myopic anti-Congressism had paved the way for the division of the secular votes in such crucial states as the UP and Bihar and the arrogance of Congress had driven Hegde into the BJP camp in Karnataka and had unnecessarily split the anti-BJP camp in Gujarat.

It was perhaps wise on the part of the UF and the Congress to opt out of government formation and leave the BJP to face the music. Sooner than later the BJP coalition would buckle under the irreconcilable contradictions plaguing it. Right at the beginning Jayalalitha made it clear that she had not sweated it out just to make Vajpayee the PM and she demanded Karunanidhi's head.

When the BJP was playing it coy, she announced abruptly that she would only extend support from the outside, introducing an element of uncertainty straight-away.

Incidentally she also archly suggested that her new found toady, Dr Subramaniam Swamy, be made the Finance Minister - after all so many cases against her and her confidante Sasikala are being pursued by the Finance Ministry and none but this Harvard educated expert could tackle them and ensure that she lives in peace. But the BJP which had never relished the company of Swamy in the first place would not heed that plea either.

Then Jayalalitha had the entire nation in a tail-spin over supporting the BJP for a couple of days, going underground, refusing to issue the letters of support from her and her allies and letting it be known that they would not be forthcoming unless her demands were met. She gave in reluctantly only when the BJP bluntly turned down her demands and threatened to sit in opposition rather yield to her naked blackmail. Her image might have hit the rock-bottom yet again, but the point is the brinkmanship she attempted was a sobering experience for all concerned.

The tight-rope walking that Vajpayee will have to do to keep his government going will be a fascinating

spectacle by itself. But going by the BJP's record in the UP in the recent past, it is clear that it will go to any length to keep itself in power. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, the mother of all Sangh Parivaar, seems willing to allow its progeny to sup with the devil if it comes to that in order to get at the reins of power, but it will certainly not be willing to be a silent bystander if a BJP-led government fails to fulfill any part of its own Hindutva agenda. What will happen then, whether the BJP's allies will give in meekly in their naked pursuit of power or resist afraid that their constituencies might be affected remains to be seen. Looking beyond what happens when the BJP-led coalition is finally brought down and another round of elections takes place - will the people return the BJP with absolute majority for itself or, appalled by its divisive agenda and possible fall-out during its reign, opt for secular alternatives? Will the Congress and the UF and other secular parties see the writing on the wall and regroup to fight the communal elements? More than anything else the very language of political discourse is bound to undergo a sea change under a BJP regime, marking a throw-back to the pre-democracy era and a sharp lurch to a narrow-minded Hindutva, if not a fascist, plank, raising ugly visions of the ethnic depredations in the erstwhile socialist states in East Europe.

Politically there might not be much to choose between the DMK and the AIADMK. But Jayalalitha surely represents a turn for the worse and the political idiom under her has only gone to degrade the polity to depths never before plumbed. It is this cultural degeneration one is concerned about when one evaluates a BJP rule or Jayalalitha's and not the clichés about development or progress.

A die-hard Prabhakaran supporter called on this correspondent after the results were out and crowed over Karunanidhi's defeat - "he has let us down so badly," etc. - and derived a perverse satisfaction over Jayalalitha's victory.

He went on to hope that under a BJP government the struggle of the Tigers would get greater support from India. "After all we are Hindus."

One cannot argue with such a mindset, how realistic that person is, and the like. But we all seem to be living through some dangerous times. ●

THE NEW DISPENSATION AT DELHI AND LANKAN TAMILS

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

The new dispensation of a BJP-led coalition presents a paradoxical situation for the Lankan Tamils: some of them long-time allies are part of the government, but it is to be seen what they can do, at least at their level, to end the suffering of the Lankan Tamils.

For instance, Samata Party president George Fernandes has been a passionate spokesman for the rights of the Lankan Tamils. When many political parties decided to remain silent over the plight of the Lankan Tamils, Fernandes was quick to react to each historic situation confronting the Lankan Tamils, keeping in line with his past stand. He recently defied a ban to hold a convention in his Delhi residence to express solidarity with the sufferings of Tamils in Lanka. He has been pleading that the LTTE's involvement in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case should not be trotted out as a reason for India's silence on the Tamils' issue. His party is a key partner and he remains a key ideologue of the BJP-led coalition.

Of the parties from Tamil Nadu, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) of the maverick Dr S Ramadoss will be part of the new government, while the Marumalarchi DMK of V Gopalasamy (now Vaiko) will support it from outside. Both leaders have supported the LTTE on-and-off, the former vigorously so even during times of crisis in Tamil Nadu. Even during the recent Jain Commission controversy when the Congress party wanted the three DMK ministers to be dropped, Dr Ramadoss went ahead and publicly burnt the copies of the report, while Gopalasamy maintained a studied silence, mainly with a view to put the DMK in discomfiture. Now that both parties function as appendages of the AIADMK led by Jayalalitha at least for the time being, they cannot be expected to voice out their feelings and demands in support of the Lankan Tamils.

Other sympathisers of the Lankan Tamils in the new dispensation are former Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde and former Janata party leader Yashwant Sinha, who is

now in the BJP. Of the other national parties, the Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal, both part of the new government, have come out on occasions in support of the Lankan Tamils, the former mainly on a dubious Hindu communal plank.

However, the BJP itself has been adopting a hostile line similar to that of the Congress on the issue, perhaps somewhat less strident in tone. It is not yet clear what the draft National Agenda of the BJP-led coalition contains on India's relations with its close neighbours and on the low-intensity conflicts which could affect minorities in societies and also India's relations with its neighbours. No one can expect the BJP, which unabashedly speaks of a hegemonist agenda for India in the subcontinent, including going in for a nuclear bomb, to take a fully sympathetic attitude to minorities of smaller countries in neighbourhood.

However, political and historical contexts may yet ensure some kind of "operational space" for such minorities in a given situation. It is to be seen whether the BJP goes in for a passive-confrontationist or an active-conciliatory approach towards the peoples of India's neighbours.

The BJP agenda, which has been on the anvil, is likely to have a stentorian tone vis-a-vis Pakistan and the Kashmir dispute, but it would not be surprising if it even remains silent on the issue, putting it on the backburner. After all, this issue is one on which the BJP and some of its allies are not united. And the Indian bureaucracy, which matters most in such occasions, is likely to plod on with its current stand on turning a blind eye to the goings-on in Lanka and treat the whole affair as a matter of security.

In any case, the final report of the Jain Commission, which has to be soon tabled in the Indian parliament, is certain to pose a problem or two for the BJP-led coalition. The AIADMK led by Jayalalitha is likely to queer the pitch for the dismissal of the DMK government in Delhi over the issue of its help to the LTTE in the late eighties prior to

the assassination. And, with Sonia Gandhi at the helm of affairs, the Congress(I) may not remain silent.

This, again, does not augur well for the possibility of the Indian government taking a decisive stand on the Lankan Tamils' issue. Hence, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's hands may remain tied even if Fernandes and others might push him to say and do a thing or two in favour of the Tamils of Lanka, in contrast to the long, long silences of Narasimha Rao, Deve Gowda and I K Gujral in the last eight years.

Beyond the Coimbatore serial blasts and hustle of elections and the surprises they have brought off, there were a few events which proved that India still has a few compassionate beings left in the soil of Tamil Nadu. Even as the Sri Lankan naval personnel continue to fire on fishing boats which set sail from Tamil Nadu, the fishermen of Akkaraipattu near Nagapattinam saved four Sri Lankan naval personnel who had been afloat for more than four days after the sinking of two ships by the LTTE in the last week of February. The fishermen of Akkaraipattu got their first warning as the bodies of two Sri Lankan naval personnel were washed ashore at Kodiakkarai. As they waited for more bodies of Sri Lankan naval personnel, they sighted four naval cadets who were about to be drowned. All the four cadets were Sinhalese. The fishermen brought them ashore, gave them first aid and entrusted them to the Indian Naval Detachment at Nagapattinam. Well, the fact that the Lankan navy off Rameswaram had just shot down Krishnan, a fisherman from Rameswaram, did not prevent the fishermen of Akkaraipattu from getting into the saving act. If only political parties and governments of the subcontinent learnt this compassion from their peoples!

BRIEF: Tamil from Norway held: 40-year Edward Leon, a Lankan Tamil who is now a citizen of Norway, was arrested at the Mandapam refugee camp near Rameswaram on February 26 when he picked up a quarrel with the authorities of the camp where he had gone to meet his sister Siriya Pushpam. Two days earlier, the Tamil Nadu police conducted a search of the camp for suspected LTTE members.

JAYALALITHA STORMS BACK INTO RECKONING

T N Gopalan

Belying all predictions of doom, the AIADMK-BJP front has scored a sensational victory in the Lok Sabha polls. It won 30 of the 39 seats at stake - the AIADMK's own tally is 18, the Pattali Makkal Katchi's four, the BJP and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) got three each while Dr Subramaniam Swamy heading the one-man outfit Janata Party and Vazhapadi K Ramamurthy of the Thamizhaka Rajiv Congress won the seats they contested.

The DMK-front had to be content with a measly nine - DMK five, Tamil Maanila Congress three and the Communist Party of India one. The DMK also won the lone Pondicherry union territory seat.

The devastating bomb blasts in Coimbatore, killing more than 60 persons, barely two days before the first round of polling on 14 February, had set the alarm bells ringing in the DMK-TMC camp.

A group of Islamic fundamentalists had taken a terrible revenge against the terror unleashed on the Muslims by a blatantly communal police force two months earlier. The state government was blamed for allowing such deadly groups to grow unchecked with an eye on the Muslim votes-bank.

But Karunanidhi moved in swiftly and contained the damage. There was a severe crackdown on all fundamentalist outfits and no riots broke out. Opinion poll after opinion poll predicted a sweep for the DMK-TMC combine, discounting any adverse impact of the blasts and the exit polls did the same. But the electorate willed otherwise.

Vai Ko won by a massive 1.3 lakh votes, so did Vazhapadi Ramamurthy, Dr Swamy scraped through, Dr Ramadas was crowing as his PMK, humiliated by an arrogant DMJ time and again, had won four of the five seats it had contested and the AIADMK were chanting "Amma Vazhga, Puratchi Thalaivi Vazhga," ("Long Live the Mother, Long Live the Revolutionary Leader") in the party headquarters as the results streamed in. Ramadas had

no qualms in declaring that the full credit for the stunning victory should go to "sister Jayalalitha alone" and none else.

Karunanidhi and Moopanar were too shell-shocked to react. While DMK union ministers Murasoli Maran and T R Balu managed to win from the capital constituencies, another minister, T R Venkatraman, bit the dust in Tindivanam. For the TMC only the high profile finance minister P Chidambaram emerged unscathed, others including M Arunachalam, Dhanushkodi Adhithan and S R Balasubramanian were decisively defeated.

What explains the stunning verdict? Why should the DMK TMC combine which had received such an overwhelming mandate only 20 months ago suddenly find themselves dumped by the same voters?

Does the 30-9 tally in favour of the AIADMK merely mean that Jayalalitha has stormed back into reckoning after a brief stint in the wilderness and now her journey to the Fort St George (the seat of power in the state) is unstoppable? Generally the lay perception seems to be that the results only go to show that she is standing tall now on her own strength, helped though by the BJP's stability card, and more crucially by the serial blasts in Coimbatore. But there seem to be many other dimensions to the lady's triumph.

First a look at the results clearly indicate the contests have been quite closely fought - in only eight of the 39 constituencies the margin exceeds one lakh votes, 50,000 plus in another ten, in a few cases the victors like Rangarajan Kumaramangalam and Dr Subramanian Swamy just managing to breast the winning tape with margins in the range of 7,000 votes to 20,000 votes. And Dr Swamy would not have won if the CPM had not contested at Madurai and polled over a lakh of votes.

And it was not as if the PMK was roped in by a wise and maneuvering Jayalalitha but it had been virtually kicked into her camp by an arrogant DMK. So too the votes of the radi-

calised followers of the Pudhiya Thamizhakam could have been secured by the DMK-front if only Karunanidhi and Moopanar had been more accommodative.

And none of these parties have anything to do whatsoever with either the BJP agenda or the MGR vote-bank. Incidentally the rival AIADMK too - in nominal alliance with the Cong-I but largely left to fend for itself - could cause the defeat of the DMK-front in two constituencies.

So then the first possible conclusion, however cliched it might sound, is that the AIADMK front has benefited immensely by the division of votes in the rival camp. The DMK-TMC combine could sweep the polls in 1996 even in a multi-cornered contest because such was apparently the fury of the electorate against the excesses of the Jaya regime and Karunanidhi and Moopanar had come to symbolise the crusade against the imperious and corrupt lady.

In the absence of a perceptible wave and apparent voter apathy all over the state - except perhaps for Coimbatore where the people's ire against the fundamentalist activities was unmistakable even before the blasts - any significant division of votes anywhere could prove decisive.

Besides with the Vanniars solidly behind her because of the PMK and the Thevars too because they idolise Sasikala and the radicalised Dalits miffed by the haughty DMK-TMC, she was on a strong wicket.

The DMK front saw a sharp 12 per cent swing against it, compared to the 1996 figures. With 42.74 per cent of the votes polled, it bagged ten seats whereas with a less than five per cent lead, the AIADMK alliance has notched up 30 seats. Last time round the TMC had perhaps walked off with an overwhelming proportion of the Congress vote-bank (roughly commanding a 20 per cent support against 30 per cent each commanded by the DMK and the AIADMK) but what has happened to it now? Has it just vanished into thin air, with Moopanar losing his curiosity value once the anti-Jaya wave subsided and people had other things to worry about, like price rise, Islamic militancy and caste clashes?

He also might have suffered some erosion of votes thanks to the Sonia factor. Besides quite a few of his sitting MPs fielded again were extremely un-

popular. He hummed and hawed for quite some time before opting for the bad eggs again. The results then are a resounding slap on Moopanar's complacency and refusal to accommodate more allies in the front for fear that his party's strength in the Lok Sabha would come down, coming in the way of his own prime ministerial ambitions.

For his part Karunanidhi tripped up on the issue of choosing his allies - even as Jayalalitha was becoming wiser by the day after the debacle last time, sparing no effort to forge a broad anti-DMK front, the septuagenarian DMK chief failed to see what could be in store for him if he played his cards badly.

He did not care to fully allay the suspicions of the powerful Naadar community that his nephew Murasoli Maran was somehow standing in the way of the retrieval of their Tamil Nadu Mercantile Bank from the grip of a group of corporate raiders from the North.

He perhaps thought that Jaya was finished and hence he turned away many a potential ally. He has now paid the price. His good governance, relatively free of corruption and interference by his partymen, has failed to stand him in good stead. Even before the horrendous Coimbatore blasts, anti-DMK feelings were very much evident in many pockets - steep hike in bus fare, indifference of the local MP, slowdown in economy resulting in all round economic hardship for all of which the DMK-TMC combine was blamed.

And unfortunately for him the blasts came about at a time when the urban middle-classes had come to be attracted by the stability card. The BJP was no more the untouchable for them, a party of the Hindi-speaking northerners but something that could provide a credible alternative to the Congress which they had trusted all these days. In such a situation the blasts could have swung many a voter against the DMK front.

Well where does Jayalalitha come in all this? All the factors put together by themselves would not have been sufficient to inflict such a crushing defeat on the DMK-front but sorely needed a charismatic figure as a rallying point.

By coming down from her pedestal, hitching up a broad alliance, wisely kicking aside the moribund congress but taking in the party of the future, hoping that way to bask in the BJP's clean image and that way restore some of her tarnished reputation, tirelessly campaigning across the length and

breadth of the state and telling the MGR-faithfuls that she was still around to lead the party, she fulfilled the role of a rallying point.

Her future from now on would depend on whether she could continue to practise an accommodative politics, acknowledging the emergence of new sectional forces. But can she change, one wonders, given the unedifying saga of her tantrums during the run-up to the ministry-making

Paradoxically even while the sect or caste identities played a major role in the latest elections, so did the more general thirst for peace, cutting across all caste and class strata, something the

journalists and psephologists failed to grasp adequately.

Ironically since 1967 when the DMK was voted to power for the first time, the Dravidian ideology had been crumbling remorselessly, and there has been a progressive march towards integration with the national mainstream. The Tamils became comfortable in the company of the Hindi-speaking Brahmin-Thakur oligarchy of the Congress under MGR. And now, under his protégée, their remaining inhibitions against the temple-inspired Hindutva BJP have been shed for good. It is a middle class striving for peace and stability now and no more quest for any exclusivist Tamil identity. ●

Readers Forum

Bombing of Religious Institutions

The bombing of the Dalada Maligawa has shocked people of all faiths who respect the sanctity of places of worship. I for one am shocked and dismayed at the level to which our quest for justice and dignity has descended.

I categorically condemn this action and request both parties to this conflict to refrain from afflicting destruction to places of worship, whether they be Christian, Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist, and to hospitals and refugee centers.

Those innocent persons who had gone to that sacred place were the victims to a act of war that should not have taken place at that location. I do not condone acts of violence against any groups of persons engaged in acts of worship at places of worship, refugee centers or hospitals.

The bombing of many Hindu kovils and christian churches, and the massacres of islamic worships in their mosques, and bombing of buddhist temples and assaults on clergy of all faiths are reprehensible and should be avoided at all costs.

My father, an Anglican Christian taught me to respect all faiths. I was

raised as a saivite hindu, and chose to be a christian in my first year at the engineering faculty. When my father died my mother and I were visited by an old buddhist monk, Rev. Ratnapala Thero, who had travelled 180 miles from Tissamaharam to pay his respects to our family. He informed us that unbeknownst to our family, my father had been supporting an orphanage and school administered by the buddhist temple, for about 30 years. The monk informed us that my father had begun supporting them since his tenure as the District Medical Officer (DMO) at Tissamaharama, in 1943. He requested a photograph of my father and published an eulogy about his acts of charity. I was deeply moved by this old gentleman's sense of duty and honor. A Sinhala buddhist gentleman graciously honoring a Tamil christian.

In our history, tolerance for all faiths and places of worship has always been sacrosanct. Emperors Raja Raja Cholan and his son Rajendra cholan, both adherents of the saivite faith, were exemplary in the tolerance and respect they displayed to the Jain and buddhist subjects in their far flung empire. Our own King Ellalan was a paragon of virtue and was noted for his sense of honor and integrity. He was so revered by his buddhist subjects, that on his demise at the hands of King Dutugemunu, his opponent to the throne decreed that King Ellalan's burial site was sacred, and anyone who passed the site had to pay obeisance to King Ellalan's memory.

We must be known not only for our martial skills and sense of justice but also for our compassion, mercy and

strong values of honour, integrity and reverence for all faiths. This is what elevates and ennobles our struggle for justice and freedom.

My deepest sympathies go to the families that lost loved ones in this tragedy as well as all the incidents of violence that have been perpetrated against innocent Tamilians, Sinhalese, and Islamic civilians.

Prof. John C. Balachandra

Director, Applied Research & Design Center, School of Engineering and Computer Science
California State University
Sacramento, CA, USA

A Senseless Attack

The bombing of the Dalada Maligawa deserves our fullest condemnation as a senseless act. The LTTE cannot expect the world to believe that it was not the perpetrator of this crime just because it has not claimed responsibility. The Maligawa is sacred to the Buddhist and a serene symbol of pride to all peoples of Lanka.

The tangerine of such a monument to a country's cultural heritage shows the extreme insensitivity of the attackers and their lack of cultural values. This particular attack has hurt the Buddhists most deeply and aggravated the communal tensions in a city in which Tamils, Muslims and other minority communities have been peacefully co-existing with the majority Sinhalese community.

The Maligawa and its environs are part of the most pleasant memories of my life as a student at Peradeniya in the 1960's and I have been returning to this bewitching site as often as I could. I last visited it in the middle of December 1997 and stayed overnight in a charming little hotel overlooking the lake, the Maligawa and the whole hill capital. A memorable experience of this stay was the gentle manners and hospitality of the Sinhala and Tamil staff of the hotel. Barely seven hours before I checked in, I was in the war-torn, brutalised and depressing, fast with its bunkers and numerous security checkpoints and now I was in Kandy in the company of Sinhalese and Tamils under one roof feeling completely at ease and sipping a dram of Old Arrak while ordering pittu with pol sambol and kin

ONE PERSON - TWO CULTURES

By Pravin Jeyaraj

Being a British-born Tamil, I have always been pulled between Eastern and Western cultures - the one of my parents and the one of my peers. The two have always appeared to be mutually exclusive.

The food dish most Anglo-Asian children have been brought up on is curry, in its many forms. I can remember asking my mum why I could not have burgers and chips. When I was younger, I used to think that curry was the only Asian food. As I grew up, I

hodi for dinner.

The Manager, a Kandyan Sinhalese, opened a room and showed me a fascinating collection of Kandyan and colonial antiques. One of the paintings on the wall was that of a Tamil gentleman 19th Century. I had experienced two different realities of my country on the same day.

The news of the bombing came as a rude shock and angered me. In the past 15 years, the war has caused destruction of cultural treasures and symbols in the North-East and deeply hurt the feelings of the Tamil speaking people. I would not expect any self-respecting Tamil to feel happy about the attack of the Maligawa. An eye for an eye makes us all blind.

As a people who have experienced the grief of seeing their most treasured library burnt to ashes and their places of worship damaged. Tamils should be able to sympathise with the people who have been hurt by the dastardly attack on the Dalada Maligawa. All of us Sinhalese Tamils, Muslims and other Lankans are fast losing the few remaining threads that unite us in our diversity which has been systematically turned into mutual distrust and hostility by the forces of ethno-nationalism in the past five decades.

Let us hope the forces of peace and humanity will gather the strength to prevail over the forces of war and inhumanity and help us find a lasting solution to the national crisis and re-invest the unity we enjoyed in our diversity.

Dr N Shanmugaratnam

Norway

discovered that Asian cuisine consisted of a variety of smells and colour. My father is always telling me that when he first came to England, the natives regarded curry as some form of "poison". Nowadays, a vindaloo is a popular way to end a session down the pub or a heavy night clubbing.

In "Asterix in Britain" (popular children's comic), the Britons take a time-out at five o'clock to have a mixture of milk and hot water. This is done without fail, even when attacked by the Romans. Asterix combines their mixture with some strange herbs, to use as some sort of magic potion, which the Britons love. That herb was tea. Although this story is fictional, one cannot disagree that tea has become an English institution.

I have heard my share of authentic Asian music - from classical to film to dancier attempts. Unsurprisingly, my tastes are not the same as my parents'. However, Eastern influences have had an effect on Western styles, with amazing results.

One of the successful bands of 1996 was called Kula Shaker. Two of their singles, "Tattva" and "Govinda Jeya" - a fusion of Indian classical and Sixties rock. Their influence, The Beatles, was one of the first bands to adopt Indian styles into their music (Ravi Shankar), with George Harrison himself donating his house to the Hare-Krishna followers.

Other musicians have jumped on the bandwagon. In the video for Michael Jackson's song "Black or white", there is a sequence showing a Bharata Natyam dancer in action. One can also hear the sound of a sitar or other Indian instruments in the background of other top 40 songs.

Second generation Asians have played a part in shaping the music world of the Nineties - both by adopting western music as their own or by mixing it with eastern styles. Sonya Madden is the lead singer of an alternative rock band, Echobelly. Jothi Mishra has notched up a number one single as White Town with "Your Woman" this year. Apache Indian has been dubbed the "first Asian pop star"

with his combination of rap and bhangra - and been nominated for a Brit. Award in the process. 1997 saw the return of Bally Segoo - the DJ - to the charts. And until recently, no-one knew that Freddy Mercury - frontman of one of the biggest rock groups ever (Queen) - was one of us. Mercury hid his true identity because, when he started, being Asian was a disadvantage. This shows how attitudes have changed over the last 20-30 years.

The most popular youth television show last year was called "This Life" - on BBC1 - in which there were not one but two Asian actors with lead parts. One of them, Ramon Tikaram, also had a supporting role in the film "Kama Sutra", which was released in Britain last year and the part of Judas Iscariot in the hit musical "Jesus Christ Superstar."

"Kama Sutra" is about sexual equal-

ity in a bygone period of Indian history. The original book though, as everyone knows, is the Hindu bible of love and sex. Many women's and men's magazines recommend the book, to spice up one's sex life.

Asians have made it into the literary world too. The teenage writer, Bidisha, recently published her first novel with a second on the way. She made her name writing for the Big Issue. The winner of this year's Booker Prize was Arundhati Roy, the author of "The God of Small Things". Roy was the first Anglo-Asian woman to receive such an honour.

One of Walt Disney's most successful films was "The Jungle Book", written by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling, although Indian, received a British education. As well as the adventures of Mowgli, Baloo, and the other jungle creatures, he also wrote "Kim" - the story of an Indian boy in search of his true heritage - and "The Just so Stories" - describing how different animals ob-

tained their distinguishing features.

When I was younger, I attended a Tamil community school every Saturday. This was one of many ethnic minority associations in the United Kingdom that were set up by parents to introduce their children to their own language and culture. I used to be embarrassed that, while my classmates were having fun, I had to go to Saturday school.

However, I had had an advantage over them. My school friends had a Western culture. My parents had an Eastern culture. But like all second generation Asians, I could claim both as my own. Realising that the two can combine has made me proud to be the bearer of a dual heritage.

When I was five, a friend (quite harmlessly) said to me that I was like chocolate. On hindsight, I can see how this is true. Cocoa and milk are two separate substances but both are necessary to produce a tasty bar of chocolate.

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- Bertrand Russel

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FORTHCOMING WEDDING

The marriage of Devika, daughter of Thilagam and Sundera Mather of Worcester Park, Surrey to Dr. Peter Yates, son of the late Bert and late Jean Yates of Port Elizabeth, South Africa will take place on 4th April '98 at The Amadeus Centre, Little Venice, London W9 2JA.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

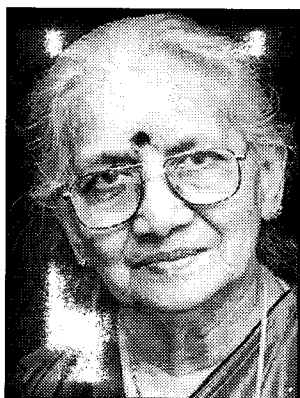
Sailaji daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gunaratnam of 20 Charlemont Road, Colombo 6 and Easwaran son of Mr. & Mrs. Ponnudurai of 86/1,3/1

Fussel's Lane, Colombo 6 on 11th February 1998 at Miami Hall, Alexandra Road, Colombo 6.

OBITUARIES

Thayapary Rasaendiran, beloved wife of Mr. Rasaendiran; loving mother of Rajini; daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. Thillaiampalam of Aiyandar Kovil Street, Jaffna; daughter-in-law of the late Mr. Nannithamby & of Mrs. Nannithamby, Kampandai, Chulipuram passed away on 3rd February 1998.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and support and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 34 Grangeway Gardens, Redbridge, Ilford, Essex IG4 5HN.



Mrs Sivagamasoundaram

Pararajasingham, dearly beloved wife of Mr. Thanabalingham Pararajasingham; beloved sister of late Mrs. Mangayatkaraasi Arumainayagam; loving sister-in-law of late Mrs. Vallinachiar Sivarajah and Mrs. Manonmani Foot, loving mother of Balasingham, Balayohini, Varothayasingham and Sri Malini; loving mother-in-law of Mahadevan, Mahaluxmi and Girija; loving grandmother of Mayura, Jananie, Keerthi and Smruthy; loving aunt of Sivakumar, Shasi, Pani and Shanthi and loving great aun to Narmadha, Krishna, Lukshman, Sanjeev and Anushka passed away peacefully on 5th February 1998. The funeral rites were performed on the 10th of February by Swami Chaithany Ananda of Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam of Rochester, New York, a close friend of the family.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 27 Mayford, Howard Road, Surbiton, Surrey KT5 8SB. Tel: 0181 390 3589.



In cherished memory of the late **Mrs. Mercy Rasamalar Gunasegaram**, beloved wife of the late Mr. Samuel Jeyanayagam Gunasegaram, formerly Director of Education, Sri Lanka on the First Death Anniversary (6.3.98).

Greatly loved, deeply missed and always remembered by her beloved daughter Vijeyadevi and son-in-law Prof. George Thambyahpillay (Nigeria), sons Mr. Wimalalraj

Gunasegaram and Dr Jeyandran Gunasegaram (USA) and grand children (USA and Australia).

First Death Anniversary

Dr. C. Perumal Pillai

16th February 1920 - 2nd March 1997

Greatly missed. Shall always remember your loving care and generosity. May your soul rest in peace. Your ever loving children Ravi, Usha, Jeeva, Ranjit and families.

In Loving Memory of Our Beloved

Daddy Mummy

Ponnampalam Vemalaranee
Kanagaratnam Kanagaratnam

Born: 11.10.1908 10.7.1923



Rest: 2.3.1982 31.3.90

Gently with love your memory is kept

Your affection and kindness We will never forget

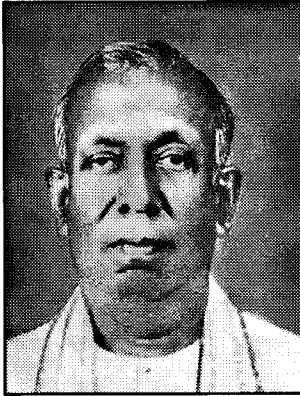
You both are always in our thoughts

And for ever in our hearts.

Remembered with love and affection by sons Sara, Brem and Dubsy; daughters-in-law Lalitha and Shyamala; and grandchildren Janarthan, Mehala, Uthistran, Arani and Anuja. - 19 Huxley Place, Palmers Green, London N13 5SU. Tel: 0181 886 5966.

25th Death Anniversary

of the late
Mr. S. Mandalanayagam, former Village Headman, Chunnakam who passed away on 11th March 1973.



In loving memory of our dear Appu, who will always be in our thoughts.

Fondly remembered by his children Pathmalogini (Australia), Chellappah (UK), Sambanthan (Singapore), Wigneswaran (Australia), Kamalalogini, Thokaiambikai, Nalinalogini (Canada), Koneswaran (Sri Lanka); sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

Correction to 15th February issue.

(a) In Memoriam - First Death anniversary - Mr. Ponniah Pathmanathan passed away on 11.02.1997.

(b) 31st Day Remembrance of Mrs. Kathiraspillai Sangarapillai.

i. Beloved wife of late Mr. K. Sangarapillai (Malayan Pensioner) of Linga Vasa. Karanavai Center, Karaveddy.

ii. Add loving sister of Mrs. Vethanayagi Marpanapillai.

iii. Kind-hearted mother-in-law of Mrs. Banumathy.

The above errors are regretted.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

April 2 Shashti.

Apr.4 Feast of St. Isidore.

Apr 5 Sri Rama Navami.

Apr.6 11.00am. Colombuthurai Sri Yoga Swamigal Abhisekham and Guru Poojah at Shree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London SW19.

Apr 7 Eekathasi.

Apr 9 Pirathosam.

Apr. 10 Pankuni Uthiram; Good Friday.

Apr 11 Fullmoon; Holy Sunday (Easter Vigil).

Apr 12 Easter Sunday.

Apr 14 Veguthari Hindu New Year's Day.

Apr 18 6.30pm London Tamil Centre presents Cultural Evening at Logan Hall, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. Tel: 0181 904 3937/907 6638.

Apr 19 Second Sunday of Easter.

Apr 21 Feast of St. Anselm.

Apr 22 Eekathasi.

Apr 23 Feast of St. George.

Apr 24 Pirathosam.

Apr 26 Amavasai.

Apr 27 Karthigai; Third Sunday of Easter.

Apr 28 Feast of St. Catherine of Siene.

Apr 29 Chathurthi.

Apr 30 Feast of St. Pius.

May 2 6.30pm Kokuvil Hindu College O.S.A. presents Variety entertainment at Archbishop Lanfranc School Hall, Mitcham Road, Croydon, Surrey. Tel: 0181 578 3159.

At Bhavan Centre 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/4608.

Apr 3 7.30pm Australian Academy & Bhavan jointly present Indian Music.

Apr 4 6.30pm Bharatha Natyam by Gauri Kesari from India.

Apr 5 6.00pm Shree Ram Navami Celebrations. Bhajan, Pujah and Prasath. All welcome.

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**AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER**

The Annual Dinner-Dance of the Vembadi Old Girls' Association (Australia) was held on 28th February 1998 at the Ryde Civic Centre in Sydney. Old Girls and their guests started arriving at 7pm, greeting one another, renewing old friendships, making new ones while recounting the wonderful memories of dear old Vembadi. At 8.15 the School Anthem was sung and the President of the association Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam welcomed the gathering. She said that since the previous year's function was such a great success there were requests for a similar one this year. She thanked the members of the committee, prize donors, advertisers and all those who had assisted in many ways.

She also spoke briefly about the illustrious history of the school and achievements of Vembadi girls. Pointing out the significance of the palmyrah palm and the butterfly on the school crest she said that Vembadi girls were expected to be strong and straight like the Jaffna palmyrah tree in body, mind and spirit and beautiful as the butterfly in thought, word and deed. She said that Vembadi girls endeavoured to uphold these ideals even in far away Australia.

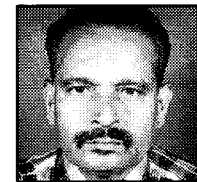
At 8.30, 'Amits', the popular Sri Lankan

band invited everyone to dance and soon the dance floor was packed, the guests trying everything from Rock and Roll to Waltzes to the Macarena! During dinner, served at 8.30, there were two raffle draws, a coffee break at 10.30 and the major draw at 11.30. Most of the old girls and guests were swinging up to closing time at 1am.

During the coffee break, the President presented a bouquet of roses and a small gift to the energetic secretary of the O.G.A., Mrs. Shantha Fonseka who had shouldered most of the burden of planning and organising this very successful function.

Poet Honoured: Seventy six year old Mr. Thuraiappah Kanaqarajah of Sydney had one of his poems published in 'Caress of the Moon' a treasury of today's poetry by the International Library of Poetry. Entitled 'Australians' the poem which appears below highlights what it means to live in the 'lucky country'.

Australians, we are happy and gay
Up and alive, both night and day
Superbly living in a democratic way
Together we stand with all our might
Rightly thinking with great foresight
Always striving to do what's right
Love, not hate, do we embrace
In all our actions we emerge with grace
Adopting ourselves to multicultural ways
Never will we submit or yield
Since being superb in every field.

**Mr. Jesudasan John Atputharajah
An Appreciation on his Retirement**

Mr. Atputharajah, a dedicated teacher retired on 28.10.97 after 37 years of service. After his education at St. John's College, Jaffna, he completed his Arts Degree at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya in 1960 and the Diploma in Education in 1973. He took to teaching at Hartley College, Point Pedro and served that institution with great devotion. Over the years he had been teaching at several educational institutions viz: Manipay Hindu College, Kegalle Sulaimania Maha Vidyalaya, Chavakachcheri Hindu College, Jaffna Central College and as a lecturer at Addalaichenai, Bama-Nigeria, Kopay and Palali Teacher Training Colleges.

In addition to teaching Geography, English, Education and Christianity, he has contributed substantially towards the administration of these institutions and in extra curricular activities. He published the 'Golden Era Geography Text Books', a useful series for secondary school students and teachers. His greatest contribu-

continued from page 31

field of Teacher Education, serving as a Master Teacher supervising teachers following the Diploma in Education course.

He was much liked and respected by his students and colleagues and was accorded a fitting farewell by the Teacher Education Institutions of Jaffna on his retirement. This is a humble tribute to a great man who continues to serve his fellow countrymen, not allured by attractions abroad.

An Admirer.

Thai Poosam Celebrations in Seychelles

Thai Poosam day on 10.2.98 was a holiday for the Hindu Employees of government and semi-government institutions in Seychelles. They attended in large numbers the Kavadi procession and religious ceremonies organised by the Seychelles Hindu Kovil Sangam.



The highlight of the day was the Chariot Kavadi for the first time in Seychelles. It aroused a lot of interest among the devotees and the onlookers which included many tourists. A devotee, his body, cheeks and tongue pierced with steel hooks carries a decorated Alahu Kavadi on his head, while pulling a four wheeled chariot along the route of the procession. The chariot was pulled by strong ropes tied to hooks clinched to the devotee's back. There was a mixed expression of feelings from the crowd, some expressed surprise, some watched with awe while others could not believe how a human body could endure all the pain in pulling the Chariot Kavadi. The procession was lively, with appropriate Nathaswaram and Thavil music while folk dances to the rhythm of music was enjoyed by all.

The multi-coloured sareed womenfolk with pots of milk on their heads following the main procession chanting devotional hymns added much needed religious fervour to the occasion.

Top Travel Agent Again

Tapobrane Travel the well-known Sri Lankan travel agent in the UK has been adjudged the top travel agent for Air Lanka in 1997 with the highest sales ever made by a UK appointed Air Lanka agent. This is the sixth consecutive year of this achievement. Well done Tapobrane!

A Classical Extravaganza

The music and dance ensemble organised by the Institute of Tamil Culture and Fine Arts at Croydon Ashcroft Theatre on March 1st was unique in many ways. A specially scored orchestra with strings, wind and percussion, a Bharata natyam feature and a dance drama, Krishna Leela, filled the bill. The timing of the show from six to nine fifteen, avoiding the formality of in-between complimentaries and concentrating on the programme alone kept the audience spellbound.

When did we have an occasion to watch and listen to a Carnatic orchestra in London? It was thoughtful of the organisers to have persuaded a team of top ranking string, wind and percussion instrumentalists, Malini Thanabalasingam (veena), L. Kothandapani (violin), P. Gnanavarathan (flute) and Sithamparanathan with his morsing. It was a unique presentation in which we could discern the hidden hand of Sivanandam school through Malini's deft leads. This group as a team should venture further afield.

The Bharata Natyam by students of Sudharshini Ramachandra evoked memories of Kalakshetra where she attained a postgraduate status. The movements, poses, descriptive hastha spreads and other abhinaya variations were enthralling. In the item Durga Anjali, the grand finale was reverently depicted through patterned formations. It is gratifying to see Sudharshini maintain the standard of excellence.



To crown it all was a Dance Drama, Krishna Leela, produced by Subathra Shanthhepan, with a host of children of different ages. Subathra, known to this reviewer as a student of Shantha Dananjayan's Bharata Kalanjali in Madras seems to have spread her wings wider through associating with stars like Pushkala Gopal and Shobana Jayasingh. Handling a host of children, aged between three and thirteen the eternal saga of Sree Krishna was portrayed through Bharata natya motif, a stupendous exercise. Depicting the image of Krishna at various stages, the infant Krishna, played by a three year old boy and the next stage by his seven year old sister earned the appreciation of the whole house. The music for this dance drama was provided by the well known artiste Pushkala Gopal whose authority in Bharata natyam and Carnatic

music is well known. It must be mentioned that along with Pushkala, her daughter Shruthi also sang for the dance drama as well as the Bharata Natya item. The Institute of Tamil Culture and Fine Arts deserves congratulations.

- Sivapatha Sundaram.

Sampoorna Ramayana Dance Drama



The popular epic 'Ramayana' by Saint Valmiki was staged as a full length Dance Drama 'Sampoorna Ramayana' by the students of the Brent Asian Academy at the Beck Theatre, Hayes, Middlesex, UK on 21.2.98.

The first part of the programme was 'Seetha Kalyanam', from Rama's birth to his wedding to Seetha. After the interval it was 'Rama Pattabishekam' from Rama's exile for fourteen years to his coronation.

With a cast of more than fifty students from the age of five and more, it was an ambitious project for a very young academy. Every minute detail of the story was portrayed and some of the dances performed were of a high standard. Karthiga Vijayatharan as the Senior Rama, Amirthavarshini Vigneswararajah as the young Seetha and Harjeet Kang as Jadayu were outstanding in their performances.

The group dances were very colourful and lively, except for the fact that some were a bit too lengthy. With all the facilities available at the theatre, the lighting did play up at times. The scenery, setting and the glamorous costumes took us to the good old days of the ancient Kingdom of Ayodhi. It was a successful performance to a packed audience.

The dance drama was choreographed by Vasuki Arunan and Chitra Somasundera Desigar, two young and talented dance teachers of the Academy.

The music composition and vocal support were by Ambika Thamotheram and Somasundera Desigar. The Orchestra back up was by the staff of the Fine Arts Section of the Academy.

The Chief Guest Pushkala Gopal, a dancer and choreographer herself commended the performers and wished them well. The live wire behind the production was Nalini Kuganathan, the Head Teacher of the Academy. Well done!

Deepa.

15 MARCH 1998

Kumaran's Mridanga Arangetram



It was with great pleasure and reminiscence that, together with my wife I sat in the Commonwealth Institute symposium on 27th September 1997 to witness Selvan Kumaran Sriskantharajahs' Arangetram. It was eight years ago we witnessed the first of Dr. & Mrs. Sriskantharajahs' children's arangetram, that of Vasuky, also the vocalist for her youngest brother's arangetram. The second, Kumuthan's Mridanga arangetram, was held five years ago also here. So it was with great expectation and anticipation that we accepted the kind invitation to be Chief Guest once again.

Kumaran is a disciple of Shri Karaikudy R. Krishnamoorthy, who joined the Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts in 1959 and studied first under the tutelage of the late Madurai Krishna Iyengar and later Ramanathapuram Padmasri Murugabhoopathy. Kumaran is lucky to have learnt under such an acclaimed guru with the rare distinction of being an accompanist for both Karnatic vocal and classical dance.

At the age of fourteen, Kumaran has already achieved great fluidity and firmness in his finger movements, which was evident in his display of an immense variety of third and fourth kalam nadais. He has a tremendous sense of rhythm, and as the mridangam is an accompanying instrument he also has the empathy required to become an excellent accompanist. This talent came out very early on in the performance; in the svara sahitya passages of the Pancharatna Kriti, Jegadananda, in ragam Nattai. During the syncopations in the svara sahitya passages the vocalist takes the lead, singing only with the rhythmic accompaniment of the mridangist. The violinist then repeats the main essence of what the vocalist sang, with the accompaniment of the ghatamist. To Kumaran came the harder task of accompanying the first rendition of each line of the svara sahitya, therefore needing total rapport of rhythm and melody; rhythm and svara - Kumaran handled it brilliantly and was indeed able to caress intricate patterns within the rhythm layed-down by the vocalist.

Kumaran was able to render a masterly Thani Arvathanam, in Misra Nadai, to per-

fection. Misram is a very difficult rhythm in which to play a thani, but Kumaran did not only play effortlessly but he was also able to enjoy the dialogue between himself and the ghatamist. He further demonstrated his skills during the Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi - here rhythmic accord is essential, and empathy with the vocalist is important.

Kumaran was supported by the vocal talent of his sister Vasuky, an accomplished Bharata Natya dancer and teacher. This was also an arangetram for Vasuky, and she gave a full vocal performance - revealing such confidence on the stage. Vasuky initiated her karnatic music training in 1992 under the expert tutelage of Smt Saraswathy Pakiarajah and devoted the three months leading up to the arangetram under the dedicated guidance of Smt Shanti Sreeram. Smt Sreeram is a disciple of Smt Prema Hariharan and Shri P.S. Narayanaswamy. She is a recipient of the Indian Central Government Scholarship and has a M.Phil. in Karnatic music.

Vasuky's grasp of tala is superlative, and was a delight to witness whether it was in the alapana, kalpana svara or the Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi. Her vocal dexterity over three octaves and unequivocal knowledge of the ragas was stunning throughout the concert, again with particular mention of the Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi, which would have been a highly complex and standard composition for even the most elite musician. The way in which Vasuky delivered the piece was emphatically praised by the composer himself, Shri Krishnamoorthy.

For a girl born and brought up in this country, Vasuky's rendition of Kandanaal in ragam Maduvanathi was breath taking. She captured the true meaning of the words and expressed them not only in her melodious voice but also with her abhinaya - this priceless rare skill stems from her additional talent as a dancer.

One moment that will always live with me was during the end of her svaras for the Hindolam piece, Samaja Vara. In these svaras she gave us a vision of the future, because the way she finished on the top note was way up among the professionals - it was masterly. I have no doubt that she has the ability to become a very great singer (as well as a doctor!). Singing at this level requires carrying the whole song with you, but not only in the message and bhavam but in the technique as well - at many occasions she demonstrated that brilliantly.

The Arangetram or Ranga Pradesha is a step, right of passage, a doorway through which the artist goes to further increase his/her skill, it is a very big step and both Kumaran and Vasuky made that step there that night with total success to our total delight.

The accompanists were Shri T.L. Kothandapani, the violinist, who was effortlessly enchanting, Shri Paskaran Sreekaram, the ghatamist who learned to play the mridangam and ghatam under the tutelage of Shri Krishnamoorthy and clearly seemed to be enjoying every moment of

the performance and Shri Storme Watson, as usual unperturbable on the tambura. Along with Smt Anandarani Balendra as the compere, Kumaran had an experienced and talented team to work with.

After just over three hours of a delightful musical rendition of the highest calibre, there followed a speech by the writer and his vote of thanks. Then followed a Tillana in ragam Revathi, the most lively and dynamic piece of the concert. It was well structured and again composed by Shri Krishnamoorthy. On conclusion of the Mangalam there was a standing ovation, which was well deserved - both Kumaran and Vasuky's performance were of the highest order.

Dr. A.M. Dempsey, Headmaster of Tiffin School, where Kumaran is a pupil gave a glowing speech in which Kumaran's Rugby and Cricket talents as Captain of both 'A' teams and his involvement in the school orchestra were praised upon, as well as his outstanding academic ability. I was delighted to see Tevaram extracts, Thaayumaana Swamigal Paadal, extracts about the deities and from the sacred Kural in the fully informative brochure extremely well produced.

Our thanks go to the devoted and hospitable parents, Dr. & Mrs. Sriskandarajah for another wonderful evening. Indeed we are all touched by the privilege of witnessing the talent of both Kumaran and Vasuky - I wish them that bright future they so richly merit.

Dr. John R. Marr.

Joint New Year Celebrations

The Sri Lankan Railway Past Employees Welfare Association UK is organising a Tamil Hindu & Sinhalese Buddhist New Year Celebrations at the London Shri Muthumari Amman Temple, Tooting, Broadway, London SW17 on 11th April 1998. The proceedings will commence with Religious Ceremonies (Pooja) from 10.30am to 12.30pm, serving of Prastham (Lunch) from 12.30 to 1.30pm, Carnatic Music and Bharatha Natyam Dances from 2.00pm to 4.00pm.

All are kindly requested to participate in the celebrations.

Children's Thyagaraja Festival

London's Carnatic Music Circle and Lalgudi School of Music (UK) are jointly holding a Children's Thyagaraja Festival on 25th and 26th April 1998 at Archway Murugan Temple featuring competitions on Thyagaraja compositions, Music quiz and Concerts by young and upcoming artistes of UK. For further information, please telephone Dr. Lakshmi Jayan on 0181 204 3162.

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