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-Voltaire

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The Forgotten War

The dawn of the New Year saw the ritual of many messages of peace and goodwill from politicians and religious leaders of Sri Lanka. But Sri Lanka entered the last year in the run up to the millennium without even the remotest signs of peace returning to the violence-ridden isle which, according to the much believed legend, was blessed in ancient times by the visit of the Prince of Peace himself, Lord Buddha. The war continues unabated between government forces and the Tamil Tigers both sides suffering thousands of casualties during the past year as it has been the case in previous years.

When the LTTE withdrew from peace talks with the government and resumed the war in April 1995, the government announced a twin-tracked strategy. Offering a political package of constitutional reform involving more extensive devolution of powers while at the same time prosecuting the war with more vigour in the hope that the LTTE could be weakened to such an extent that it would return to the negotiating table and agree to a political solution. This was described as the "War for Peace" strategy.

After over three years, what is clear is that the "war" part of this strategy is the one that is being prosecuted, while the "peace" part has become unstuck for which the main opposition United National Party (UNP) can claim credit.

There is no prospect of the government's devolution and constitutional reform proposals being progressed because the ruling party, even with the support of an assortment small parties, does not have the required two-thirds majority to obtain parliamentary approval for its proposals.

The UNP initially appeared to take a responsible position in participating, discussing and proposing amendments to the government's proposals during deliberations in the all-party Parliamentary Select Committee. Having delayed the process for over three years, the UNP finally delivered the coup-de-grace when its leader recently announced that his party would under no circumstances support the government's proposals.

The UNP leadership also has been resisting all efforts at developing a bi-partisan consensus on the ethnic issue between the Peoples Alliance and the UNP. The attempt by the country's captains of industry and commerce to bring about a consensus between the two parties has also not found much success because of the UNP's obstructionist stance.

In this context, what appears to be certain for 1999 is that the war will continue bringing in its wake further death, destruction and displacement of people.

Towards the end of 1998, the Ministry of Defence in Sri Lanka released figures of casualties of the ethnic conflict since July 1983 in Sri Lanka. Up to 5 December 1998, 8,208 security service personnel were killed, 17,492 wounded, and 1,321 missing in action. During the period of 17 years of the United National Party (UNP) administration, 3,647 personnel were killed, 8,635 wounded and 1,087 missing in action. The Ministry's report also placed the number of LTTE guerrillas killed in military operations during the period of the UNP's rule at 6,107 and 9,911 since August 1994 when the Peoples Alliance (PA) came to power.

Though it has never given figures regarding its wounded combatants, the LTTE has announced that over 14,000 of its fighters had attained "martyrdom" since 1983.

What is significant to note is that, in this conflict where the warring parties are said to be fighting on behalf of the people whom they claim to represent, there are not even approximate figures for the civilians who have been killed or wounded. While the losses on either side - the State and the LTTE - are recognised, mourned and commemorated, the death among civilians, whether they be Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims, does not find a place in the figures either side officially publish.

Whether the figures mentioned above are accurate or not is not the point. But what they profoundly reflect is the sheer human carnage that has been going on in the island. What is more tragic is that not only those who are engaged in this self-destructive war, but also the rest of the world seems to have come to terms with the perpetuation of the carnage at this scale. It is not Kosovo or Gaza or even Sierra Leone for the international community to be concerned about. Despite the fact that far more people have been and are being killed and displaced in the fighting in Sri Lanka than in former Yugoslavia or for that matter in any other part of the world, the war in Sri Lanka is a forgotten one because it has gone on for too long and the killings and accompanying horrors have become so routine and common-place as every day normal occurrences that even to the world media the essentially internalised war in the island does not have any significant "news value". Perhaps what might become of "news value" to be reported is when the unexpected and the non-routine were to happen - when those responsible for this war and its tragic consequences decide to and in fact make peace.

NEWS REVIEW

The announcement of January 25 as the date for elections to the North-Western Provincial Council saw a flurry of activity in the political arena. While complaints of incidents of politically motivated violence began to flow in from the very beginning of the polls process, the Commissioner of Elections reiterated that he would strive to ensure implementation of the law.

Economic issues also took precedence in the month of December, with the PA's fifth budget being passed in Parliament, and a Free Trade Agreement being signed with India at the end of the month. The budget debate had been heated, and at some points acrimonious, with the budget allocations put forward for the Ministry of Livestock Development and Estate Infrastructure headed by CWC leader S. Thondaman being defeated. The budget was finally passed, after a third reading, on December 17, with a majority of 38 votes. 124 MPs, including those of the EPDP, DPLF and CWC voted for the proposals, while 86 from the UNP, the TULF and TELO voted against the government's proposals.

On December 29, President Kumartunga began her visit to New Delhi, India where she signed a Free Trade Agreement between Sri Lanka and India with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee. The agreement has been widely criticised by local industrialists and some economists as being one that will permit the undermining of local business and industry. However, the text of the Agreement signed on December 29 remains more a statement of intent, with details such as items of which imports will not be permitted open to further negotiation between the two countries. The Agreement is viewed by political observers as being a re-affirmation of the bonds between the two countries, and a possible precursor to other, more politically inclined agreements in the future.

The visit to the island by a group of South African Parliamentarians representing different political parties paved the way for a continuation of

the discussion on whether South Africa would be able to play a facilitating role in re-opening the peace process in Sri Lanka. Throughout their visit, the members of the delegation were careful to highlight the focus of their visit as being the promotion of peace particularly in the context of widespread reports in the Sri Lankan media about the LTTE having set up bases in South Africa. Relying on their own experiences of the South African struggle against apartheid, they emphasised the need to build unity across diversity.

The Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Norwegian Parliament, Mr. Hakakon Blankenburg and MP Erik Solheim also visited Sri Lanka during this month. They had meetings with various political leaders.

December saw the appointment of a new Army Commander, General Srilal Weerasooriya. Operation Jaya Sikurui came to an abrupt conclusion at the end of November with its original target of securing the main supply route to Jaffna not being met. Soon afterwards, the military launched a very short and quick Operation, code-named Rivi Bala (Sun Power) that took troops into a 134 square km. area around Oddusuddan in early December. The onset of the monsoon has now effectively put an end to the fighting in the Vanni until February.

Censorship of news regarding the war was transferred from the military authorities to a civilian, the Director of Information, Mr. Ariya Rupasinghe. At his first press briefing, he reiterated the government's call to journalists for strict adherence to the Publication and Transmission of Sensitive Military Information Regulations, promulgated some time ago.

After almost one year of repeated appeals regarding food scarcities in the Vanni, the Commissioner General of Essential Services made a visit to the Vanni in early December. This was seen as a major achievement in terms of the re-assessment of the situation

there by the government. The fact that he met with representatives of the LTTE during the visit was also extremely significant.

In the meanwhile Batticaloa continued to be without electricity for the third month, with little attention being paid to the plight of the residents of the area by either the state or political leaders representing the District. The fact that the capital of the District and one of the three key urban centres of the Eastern Province has remained in darkness since October 1998 speaks to the reality of life in the region, with the state machinery being unable to operate in certain areas despite it being technically under military control.

Members of the government continued to be embroiled in controversy over their political and personal conduct. There was controversy over the payment of Rs. 250 million as compensation to Messrs. Evans Ltd. who had been awarded a contract for the development of the Colombo Fort area which was cancelled after preliminary work had already been done. Media and Telecommunication Minister faced possible legal action over the summary dismissal of Telecom Chairman Hemasiri Fernando, and trade union action in the Posts and Telecommunications sector was pending.

On December 10, groups throughout the island celebrated Human Rights Day with a wide range of activities, from quizzes for school children to demonstrations to rallies to art exhibitions and film screenings. The Sri Lankan human rights community was especially celebratory, following the award of one of the five UN Human Rights Prizes for 1998 to Ms. Sunila Abeysekera, the Executive Director of INFORM.

On the War Front

One of the first steps taken by new Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Weerasooriya, was to declare a two-day amnesty for deserters. The security forces continue to face severe human-power shortages, and new recruitment drives have not been as successful as expected.

Political commentators viewed the abrupt ending of the Operation Jaya Sikurui to be indicative of a re-thinking of the military strategy regarding the Vanni by the defence authorities. Focusing on keeping the bi-section of the Vanni in place and preventing the

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LTTE from moving its base from the Mullaitivu sector on the east coast to the west coast seemed to be a priority.

On December 16, the Navy intercepted and destroyed a Sea Tiger craft on the seas near the Delft island. It was surmised that this craft contained a group of LTTE members proceeding to attack the bases of the EPDP which are located on Delft island. There had been an earlier attempt at an attack, and members of all Tamil political parties except the EPDP were prohibited from entering the island area.

Meanwhile, speculation regarding the LTTE's acquisition of air power was confirmed when on Great Heroes Day on November 26 commemorated annually by the LTTE, there was a display in Mullaitivu of an Aircraft belonging to the Air Tigers during the customary annual speech of the LTTE leader Mr Prabhakaran.

Attacks on Civilians

On December 26, Mr. Pon Mathimugarajah, aged 50, the Secretary of the TULF's Jaffna District Branch was shot dead by an unidentified gunman in Nallur, Jaffna, at a public function held to commemorate the death anniversary of the film-star turned Tamilnadu political leader M.G. Ramachandran. The senior Deputy President of the TULF Anandasangari and a group of party members travelled to Jaffna to participate in the last rites of the slain Mathimugarajah.

There were continuing complaints of indiscriminate firing and shelling by the security forces in and around the Jaffna peninsula. From Kilaly came a report of a 15 year old boy, Amirthanathan, and another child, who were killed when soldiers who had entered their home on a search mission reportedly opened fire on the civilians who were inside the house at the time.

Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action regarding 8 young men who had 'disappeared' in the Vavuniya area between October 27 and December 21, 1998. It was alleged that they had been abducted by the Sri Lanka Army and PLOTE.

From the Vanni there were several reports of civilian deaths and injuries due to indiscriminate air strikes carried out in the third week of December.

In Trincomalee, a 15 year old schoolboy, Nakuleswaran, was injured when the Police fired at random in the

village of Tambalagamam. M. Vadivel, an old man of 74, who was injured by a shell fired from the army camp at Elephant Pass on December 3, died in hospital in Colombo on December 16.

Displacement

Following months of dispute regarding the actual numbers of displaced persons living in the Vanni, in the Mullaitivu Kilinochchi areas in particular, the Commissioner General of Essential Services N.A. Obadage and David Ratnavale, Chairman of the Presidential Task Force on Human Disaster Management made a 2 day visit to the Vanni on December 7 and 8. They travelled both within and outside the areas under army control. He visited the Government Agents but also had opportunities to meet with civilians as well as with representatives of the LTTE. After his return to Colombo, Mr. Obadage had discussions with the President which resulted in a Presidential directive to increase food rations issued to the displaced living in parts of the Vanni which are not under the control of the armed forces. From December 1, the number of persons receiving dry rations in the Vanni has been increased by 55,000.

Operation Rivi Bala led to the displacement of almost 12,000 people who were living in and around Oddusuddan, which was captured by Sri Lankan troops on December 4. These persons moved into schools and kovils in the Pudukudiyirippu area. It was while Deputy Defence Minister Ratwatte was visiting some of the displaced at the Sivan Kovil in Oddusuddan that the LTTE fired artillery and mortars at the building. The Deputy Minister and the 3 service Chiefs who were accompanying him escaped unharmed, but 5 servicemen were killed and 42 injured in the incident. Security forces urged these displaced persons to move into Vavuniya, into the 'cleared areas' and they trickled in to the southern Vanni throughout the month of December.

The ship LANKA MUDITHA resumed its trips between Kankesanthurai in Jaffna and Trincomalee on December 11, and began the process of returning many displaced persons to their places of origin within the peninsula. The pressure on the transit camps set up in Trincomalee to accommodate the displaced persons who went from Vavuniya and Mannar en route to Jaffna had developed into a

major problem when sea transport was suspended due to sea-borne attacks by the LTTE. The commencement of the transport of the displaced persons stranded in Trincomalee transit camps to Jaffna would hopefully ease provided ferrying of these people is not prevented by the monsoon or by resumption of attacks by the LTTE.

Meanwhile, problems with security clearance continued to obstruct displaced persons wanting to return to their villages. On December 29, only nine of 34 families from Trincomalee who had reached Vavuniya from Mannar were granted permission to return to Trincomalee. The others must continue to remain in the Vanni.

The suspension flights between Jaffna and Colombo following the shooting down of Lion Air flight 602 on 29 September with over 50 passengers on board continues to present a major problem for civilians to travel to and from Colombo.

Prospects for Peace

On his birthday, which coincides with the LTTE's Heroes' Day (Ma Vee-rar Thinam) LTTE leader Mr. Prabhakaran spoke to a large group of his followers at a public rally in Mullaitivu, and the whole text of his long speech was reported in the press. The fact that in this speech he said that the LTTE had not 'closed the doors to peace' and reiterated their agreement to third party mediation was seen by many as a signal to the southern political parties and the government in particular. The LTTE leader also emphasised that negotiations on the political issues should be preceded by talks to redress the day to day problems faced by the Tamil people and by the creation of a congenial climate of peace and goodwill to hold peace talks.

Many, including most Tamil political parties, and even the leader of the main opposition party, the UNP, felt that the LTTE leader's offer merited a positive response. Peace organisations, some religious leaders and civil society activists regarded the LTTE leader's speech as signalling a readiness to resume negotiations and urged for a positive response from the government.

During a meeting with the Indian press while on her visit to India at the end of December, President Kumartunga said the LTTE must accept "cer-

tain conditions" to resume the peace process. She however did not elaborate on the conditions. However, she clearly stated that Sri Lanka was not seeking Indian assistance in brokering a peace settlement. In addition, both the Foreign Minister and the President have repeatedly stated that they are not accepting any suggestions regarding a third-party mediation to the conflict, though they were not averse to third party facilitation.

The organisations which represent the business community that launched their own peace initiative a few months ago have now decided to meet separately with the ruling Peoples Alliance and the opposition United National Party, in order to keep up the pressure on the two parties to reach some bi-partisan agreement regarding modalities of seeking a resolution to the ethnic conflict.

On the Political Scene

The Parliamentary dispute generated by the UNP's actions to reject the allocations for the Ministry of Livestock Development and Estate Infrastructure, which is headed by CWC leader Mr. Thondaman, spilled over into the broader political arena in different ways. Various anti-UNP demonstrations were organised by the CWC and other groups that support it.

Thousands of plantation workers belonging to the Ceylon Workers Congress from Agrapatana, Holbrook, Kotagala, Talawakelle, Bogawantalawa, Hatton and Norwood struck work on the morning of December 16, to protest against the defeating of the vote of Mr. Thondaman's Ministry. The shops in these areas were closed for about four hours due to the strike. Nearly 30,000 workers from 90 estates in Horana, Ingiriya, Matugama, Dodangoda, Bulathsinhala and Agalawatte in the Galle and Kalutara Districts also staged a token strike on December 21 in protest against the UNP's action.

However, the turnout was not as large as could have been expected, and contributed to the speculations that the CWC's grip on the plantation Tamil community is finally slipping. In addition, there were rifts within the CWC over Mr. Thondaman's attempt to place his grandson in a position of authority over-riding other senior members of the organisation, while he was away.

Meanwhile, at the 45th Annual Convention of the UNP in Kataragama on December 19, Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe publicly declared that hereafter the UNP would not seek electoral alliances with any other party including minority parties. The Convention was attended by MP's, former members of the Provincial Councils, members of local bodies, leaders of newly formed cluster organisations and representatives of the party's branches at various levels.

During December, Sinhala nationalist groups mobilised against a proposal floated by the Ministry of Tourism to grant 35 acres of land in the Sita Eliya area in the central highlands of the island, to erect a temple to Ram. Myth has it that this was a place where King Ravana hid the Princess Sita whom he had abducted from India. Buddhist priests, Buddhist organisations and the Sinhala Weeravithahana Movement expressed their stiff opposition to the action taken by the Minister of Tourism and Aviation, Dharmasiri Senanayake in this connection.

Provincial Council Elections

On 8 December, seven political parties and four independent groups handed in nominations for the election for the North West Provincial Council to be held on 25 January. Of them, 6 political parties and 4 independent groups remained in the fray at the end of the day. Nomination papers handed in by the Eelavar Democratic Party were rejected due to a technicality. The PA list is headed by S.B. Nawinna and the UNP list by Gamini Jayawickrama Perera. The JVP, the New Left Front, the Muslim United Liberation Front, the Liberal Party and one independent group are in the fray. The SLMC, refuting a spate of rumours that it was going to contest the NW Provincial Council elections on its own, ultimately decided to join the PA list. According to the Commissioner of Elections, there are 446 candidates vying for 52 seats in the two Districts of Kurunegala and Puttalam which will go to the polls.

From the day the elections were announced tension began to mount in the Province and there were reports of sporadic violence in the days leading up to the handing over of nominations. Shootings and assaults, intimidation and arson were among the most

commonly reported. On nomination day itself, several clashes were reported between supporters of the rival political parties. By December 24, Police sources said they had received 39 reports of polls-related violence in the NWP. The Committee to Monitor Election Violence (CMEV) has, in its reports, pointed out that this figure is less rather than more of the true picture on the ground in the NWP. According to its own figures, the CMEV had records of over 150 reports of incidents of violence from the Province.

Secretaries of all parties and leaders of independent groups contesting the NW Provincial Council elections met with the Commissioner of Elections Dayananda Dissanayake on December 18 to begin a series of discussions regarding the conduct of the elections. At this meeting, in regard to the question posters being exhibited in violation of election laws, the Inspector General of Police Kodituwakku informed the gathering that Police personnel could not be used to remove the posters. He said that although security arrangements to ensure a peaceful election had been made, the numbers of Police personnel who could be deployed for this purpose was restricted. Therefore, there were limitations to what they could be requested to do. The Elections Commissioner however said that legal action could be taken against those who display posters and banners in violation of election laws.

The Commissioner of Elections has also begun discussions with the citizens' groups involved with monitoring elections, the People's Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), the Movement for Free and Fair Elections (MFFE) and the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA). The UNP has asked for clearance to have foreign observers for the elections. However, it must be noted that permission was denied for foreign observers at the local government elections of March 1997.

Following the spate of complaints regarding the use of violence in the election campaign, a group of government and opposition parliamentary back-benchers set up an alliance against violence during the elections. The election monitoring groups also initiated a move in which the four major contending parties - the PA, the UNP, the JVP and the New Left Front -

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signed a pact of No-Violence.

Visit by South African MPs

The delegation of South African Parliamentarians from a range of political parties who visited Sri Lanka in early December, met with a wide range of political leaders and other key persons, including members of the government as well as the opposition. They also visited Jaffna, where they met with representatives of the security forces, as well as with civilians and political and religious leaders including Jaffna Catholic Bishop Dr. Thomas Savundranayagam. The delegation, however, was unable to meet with any representatives of the LTTE while in the island. The visit was at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, and its main purpose was to obtain exposure to the real nature of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The delegation was led by MP Ibrahim, Chairman of the Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs and ANC member. Others were: Dr. E. Jesset (ANC), S. Mgidi (ANC), Y. Karrim (ANC), D. Dalling (ANC), Dr. K. Raju (Inkatha Freedom Party) and Desmond Padiachey (National Party). Dr. Rajoo, at present Deputy Chairman of the South African National Assembly, is well-known for his keen interest in Sri Lankan affairs, and is seen as a representative of the 600,000 strong Tamil community in South Africa.

On departure, the delegation affirmed that they would brief South African President Mandela about their visit, including their awareness of the necessity and urgency for the establishment of peace in Sri Lanka. The delegation would also submit a report on its visit to Sri Lanka to the government of South Africa with copies to all party leaders. "The future of the country depends solely on the cessation of hostilities", Mr. Ibrahim was quoted as saying in an interview to state television prior to their departure from the island on December 17.

The delegation said it would urge the South African government to facilitate progress towards peace in Sri Lanka and said that the South African government would be willing to respond to any proposal or request made by the government of Sri Lanka regarding possible initiatives for a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict. However, they were careful to emphasise

that the Sri Lankan government should have the final decision regarding such facilitation.

Following their return to South Africa, local newspapers reported that the delegation had met with pro-LTTE groups there in order to discuss their impressions of the visit.

Human Rights

The Chemmani Grave Site: William de Hagland, an international forensic expert, arrived in Colombo in early December, on the request of the government, to assist in the investigation of the alleged mass grave at Chemmani. Interestingly, there have been a few reports in the press raising the issue that since there has traditionally been a graveyard at Chemmani and since the military has admitted burying some bodies there legally, the exhumation and investigation could be compromised. In any event, the onset of the monsoon pre-empts any exhumation until at least February. In the meantime, in view of the widespread criticism that the government was procrastinating on the issue of going ahead with the investigation, it is said that the authorities are to make an application to court for permission to open up the Chemmani grave.

The case in which three members of the STF are accused of raping Sivajothy Krsihnapillai (31) in December 1996 in Mandur, was taken up before the Batticaloa District Court on November 30. The accused are in remand and the case is proceeding.

The inquest into the death in Police custody of 18 year old schoolboy Sathasivam Sanjeevan was held at the Kalmunia District Court at the end of November. The boy's father, speaking at the inquest, said he felt his son had been subjected to severe torture by the Police while in their custody.

The Presidential Secretariat said that over 100 members of the security forces would be charged in Court for involvement in disappearances. These charges would be framed in the context of the findings of the Presidential Commissions of Inquiry into Disappearances. 28 cases have already been filed, in the Gampaha, Matara, Hambantota and Ratnapura High Courts.

Anti-harassment Committee: Following repeated complaints regarding the various problems created for Tamils in particular due to the regulations requiring registration of "temporary

residents" in Colombo, the Anti-Harassment Committee said on December 27 that from January 1, 1999, Police would introduce a set of new regulations in place.

Although the Committee said that these changes were designed to benefit those who are compelled to register in this way, others have commented that the new requirements are more complicated and cumbersome and will place financial burdens on the registries as well.

Human Rights Day

On December 10, the Co-ordinating Committee for Peace and the Right to Life of Border Villagers held a demonstration and public rally in Colombo which focused on the need for peace. An Interim Report of the Citizens' Fact-finding Commission which had spent the past 3 months hearing testimonies in border villages in 8 Districts throughout the country was also formally submitted to the Co-ordinating Committee on this occasion.

In Colombo, the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality, the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at the University of Colombo and the Law and Society Trust were among those who organised activities for the day.

December 10 saw the first ever public demonstration of Tamil women in Colombo. The group of women from different parts of the island, came together with a prayer for peace and marched from Colombo 6 to Colombo 4 in spite of the rain. Two days earlier, on December 8, the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum which is a broad federation of women's groups from all parts of the island, organised a demonstration and public meeting against violence against women, in Nugegoda, a suburb of Colombo.

In Batticaloa, a forum of several women's groups working in the Eastern Province organised a demonstration and meeting, while in Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Jaffna, different political parties and groups took the initiative to celebrate the day.

December 10 also saw the gross violation of human rights taking place. In the early hours of the morning, an armed group attacked 9 young men who were engaged in a fasting campaign near the Samurdhi Authority in Battaramulla. They were all young persons who had been selected as ani-

matoms for the Samurdhi programme at the village and community level. Over the past 2 years, large numbers of these animators have pressured the government to make their positions permanent ones and also give them a decent wage. A few months ago, these steps were taken by the government, but some of the more vociferous campaigners were dropped from the list. This is one of the reasons which led to the strike. All 9 were injured in the attack, one of them seriously.

Media Freedom

On December 17, the Supreme Court found in favour of a fundamental rights plaint filed by Sumith Jayantha Dias, a programme producer at the semi-state television station, ITN, alleging that Deputy Minister of Ports and Shipping, Reggie Ranatunga and some others, including the Chairman of the Minuwangoda Pradeshiya Sabha, had assaulted him. Dias had filmed a lorry set on fire in Gampaha by supporters of Mr. Ranatunga in January 1997, and had resisted the MP's colleagues who sought to take away his camera. The Court found that the pe-

tioner's rights under Article 14 on the right to information had been violated.

Ranatunga was ordered by the Supreme Court to pay Rs. 50,000 as compensation. This sum would have to be paid by Mr. Ranatunga in his personal capacity, while the court also ordered the government to pay Rs. 75,000 and others implicated in the case to pay a further Rs. 25,000.

Tamil Detainees

36 Tamil detainees at the Kalutara Prison once again launched a "fast unto death" on December 14, demanding the expedition of their cases, as promised by the Attorney General's Department several months ago. Two of those who had joined the fast attempted to commit suicide by jumping from the roof slab on which they were seated, claiming their demands had not been taken into consideration. They sustained severe injuries and were admitted to hospital in a critical condition.

Gangland Killings

The assassination of the notorious underworld figure "Soththi Upali"

(Arambawalage Don Upali Ranjith) in Piliyandala on December 17 brought the total number of underworld killings to 5 within the first half of December, 1998. Upali, who was one of the accused in the Lalith Athulathmudali assassination case, was a well-known figure with political connections and it is very likely that this killing was also engineered with political interests. He was killed on his way back from Court, where the Athulathmudali case had been called and the non-summary proceedings fixed for January 7. Commentators pointed out that this was the fifth gangland killing in Colombo over a period of two weeks; another victim was Imtiaz, a well-known political figure and a PA member of the Colombo Municipal Council.

Campus Unrest

On December 17, the University of Colombo was closed abruptly, following a clash between two groups of students from opposing political groups.

However, since the University was due to close on the 18th in any event, work has not been seriously disrupted. Four students who were injured in the



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clash were admitted to hospital, but were later discharged.

Controversy has also erupted among students regarding the proposal to establish a private fee-levying medical college in Colombo. Approval for the establishment of this institution has already been granted by the Board of Investment, as a BOI project. Students allege that permitting private tertiary education institutes to operate will disadvantage students from the national education system. A protest demonstration was held in Colombo.

Arrests in Colombo

On December 21, Police sources said that the LTTE cadre who is alleged to have masterminded and led the attacks on the Central Bank and

Galadari Hotel was arrested in Colombo. This 27 year old who is reported to be a resident of Batticaloa, had studied in Point Pedro and undergone special training in the learning of the Sinhala language. On December 22, newspapers also reported the arrest of a 25 year old youth, code-named "Ramanan", believed to be the leader of the LTTE's Financial and Intelligence Divisions in Colombo who had been living at the Maligawatte flats in Colombo 10 with his parents. A computer, a stock of cyanide capsules and national identity cards were recovered from another raid on premises in Dean's Road, Colombo 10, also on December 21. One person was arrested; later on, a person alleged to be his brother, was taken into custody in Dambulla.

all hues braved the heavy rain lashing the North to participate in the funeral procession and cremation of the slain TULF Jaffna branch secretary at Kombeyan Manal cemetery on the outskirts of the Jaffna town on 30 December.

All Jaffna Municipal Councillors and the public joined the funeral procession in buses, cars, autos and other vehicles as the body that lay in state at the TULF headquarters at Stanley Road in Jaffna left for the general cemetery.

Senior vice president and ex-MP of TULF V Anandasangari who flew in to the peninsula presided over the funeral arrangements. Mr. Anandasangari was accompanied to the Jaffna peninsula by Pon Sivakumar brother of late mayor of Jaffna Pon Sivapalan who was assassinated by the LTTE almost three months ago.

TULF Municipal Councillors K. Sinnathurai, S. Ganendiran, Kandian, PLOTE MMCs Kirubarajah, representatives of EPDP, EPRLF and president of North Ceylon Journalists Association Kathirgamathamby addressed the large gathering.

Mr Anandasangari in his address 'called upon the LTTE to make a public declaration that they will not harm unarmed Tamil politicians. 'We will see that all other armed Tamil political parties will also throw away their weapons to move about freely without fear of attacks or assassinations'.

'You all are assassinating our leaders because we are unarmed and we will continue to be unarmed'. This is because we have followed in the footsteps of our late leader S. J. V. Chelvanayakam 'Thanthai Chelva' who was committed to the Gandhian principles of non violence.'

'You make things impossible for nonviolent political parties like ours to move freely and at the same time blame us for obtaining government security. Every one of us is committed to win back the lost rights of the Tamil people,' he said.

'You all have gunned down unmercifully an outstanding social workers who had been living with you all for decades from his birth,' he noted. He said Mr. Mathimugarajah had sacrificed his life for principles and for the cause of the Tamils.

'Late Mr. Pon Mathimugaraja was commemorating the 11th death anniversary of late M. G. R. who in one

Another TULF Leader Killed

Mr. Pon Mathimugarajah, aged 50, the Secretary of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Jaffna District Branch was shot dead on December 26 1998 by an unidentified gunman in Nallur, Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka at a public function held to commemorate the death anniversary of the film-star turned politician and Chief Minister of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the late M.G. Ramachandran.

The assassination of Mathimugarajah, preceded by the murder during the same year of two Mayors of the Jaffna Municipal Council, also belonging to the TULF, attributed to the Tamil Tigers has been roundly condemned.

The TULF press release issued by its senior vice-president Mr V Anandasangaree strongly condemned the brutal killing of Mr. Pon Mathimugarajah. It said: "The Tamil United Liberation Front very strongly condemns the brutal killing of Mr. Pon Mathimugarajah, the Jaffna District Secretary of the TULF and the founder president of the All Ceylon MGR Association. He was a Justice of the Peace and a keen social worker for more than quarter of a century. His loss to the party and to the people of Jaffna cannot be compensated in any form.

"Pon. Mathimugarajah like our ex-Mayor Mr. Sivapalan was a talented

poet, good writer and also a fluent speaker. His demise apart from being a great loss to the Tamil United Liberation Front in particular, is also a greater loss to the Tamil literary world and the people of Jaffna.

"He organised a series of events to last for three days, to commemorate the death anniversary of the late Mr. M. G. Ramachandran that fell on the 24th of December. It was while making arrangements for the evening function that he was killed.

"It is humiliating to ask as to who committed this heinous crime. Why was this crime committed? No one will give the answer. But who ever did this would not have certainly gained anything at all either for himself or for the Tamil cause, other than increasing the score of his killings.

"It is surprising that the assassinations of leaders like Mr. Amirthalingam, Mr. Yogeswaran and a host of many others have not opened the eyes of these assailants. Let us hope that at least Mathy's death that has further enhanced the number of widows among us and also deprived four more innocent children of their sole bread winner, will open their eyes. Let not the Jaffna soil get filled up with only skeletons. Good sense must now prevail and the thirst for blood also must come to an end."

Amidst heavy security, thousands of mourners and politicians of

day apart from the many assistance he gave you collected five crore from people in Tamil Nadu and gave four crore to you and one crore to EROS a group that was working in close coordination with you.

'The Sri Lankan and Indian governments agreed to hand over the interim administration of the North East to you all and all other Tamil political groups were somewhat in consensus to give you this, you all did not accept that offer.

'If you had agreed to that offer and formed an interim administration our areas could have been developed and become gold mines but today whenever we dig only skeletons come out.

'We thought that with the cruel slaying of leader Appapillai Amirthalingam you all would have realized your follies of killing moderates whose contributions to our cause was immense even now it is not too late even after the death of late Pon Mathimugaraja for you all to renounce violence and may he be the last person to be gunned down,' Mr. Anandasangari told the gathering.

'I call on you all to come back to your senses so that all those who are committed to fight for the lost rights

of Tamils may move about freely.

'When 17 of us Tamil MPs were in Parliament when the police or security forces personnel arrested our youth leaders we MPs went to their rescue and did all that was possible to prevent any of them from being tortured by the services or police personnel.

'But what are you doing now to our members and leaders? So come back to your senses and renounce violence so that we unarmed Tamil moderate politicians can move about freely without being assassinated in cold blood by you all,' he appealed.

Mr. Anandasangari said people claim that "we live comfortably in Colombo with armed escort".

"We have been driven to that position because we are shot down like birds. If the LTTE give an undertaking that they will not resort to arms to hunt us down and their other opponents. The other Tamil groups like the PLOTE, ELO, EPRLF and EPDP will then lay down their arms," he said.

'The LTTE killed Jaffna MP Yogeswaran and his wife Sarojini, Mayor of Jaffna who gave refuge and food to the Tigers. The LTTE exterminated their own comrades and leaders of other Tamil groups. The LTTE

continue to assassinate the leaders of TULF. What crime have we committed either in words or deeds to befit the highest punishment? Now it is said that a 'votary of liberty' had killed our District Secretary," Mr. Anandasangari said.

"Freedom fighters never kill innocent party workers. When Mrs. Yogeswaran was killed it was said that an organisation called Sangiliyan Force killed her. It was the TULF that honoured Sangiliyan by organising a function. King Sangiliyan fought against the foreigners who were armed. Here young men who are trained to kill are bidding to kill innocent persons without knowing why and what they are doing," Mr. Anandasangari said.

"The TULF is not in the political arena to seize power. We are prepared to give way and offer our cooperation to any measures that would benefit our race. We are not the henchmen of the Government. We voted against the budget and at every motion brought by the Government for the extension of emergency. We choose to examine the political package of the Government because it contained features akin to those of a federal constitution," Mr. Anandasangari said.

Amnesty Concerned at "Disappearances"

Amnesty International is concerned about the "disappearance" of the eight men who went missing in Vavuniya district between 27 October and 21 December 1998. The "disappearances" have been attributed to the army and members of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), one of several armed Tamil groups opposed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), currently fighting the security forces in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Most of the "disappeared" are internally displaced people. Among them are four juveniles.

The Amnesty statement dated 23 December identified the eight "missing" persons as Pakiyaratnam Yogeswaran (16), Subramaniam Atpudarasa (17), Selvarasa Tamilchelvam (16), Mylvaganam Jayaseelan (23), Lakshman Ketheeswaran (22), Nadarasa Rajaratnam (30), Veeraiah Udayakumar (30), and Gunakularasa

Danushan (17).

Veeraiah Udayakumar was last seen being taken away from his home at Sittampapuram on 27 October by members of PLOTE. Lakshman Ketheeswaran was taken into custody the same day in Sittampapuram at around 10am. Nadarasa Rajaratnam was also taken into custody from his home at 92/6, Sittampapuram at around 6pm on 4 November by members of PLOTE. Sittampapuram is a camp originally established for refugees who returned from India to Sri Lanka but who were unable to resettle in their homes due to the ongoing conflict. It is suspected that members of PLOTE took them into custody at their Kovilkulam camp, but to date they have denied any knowledge of the men's "disappearances".

Gunakularasa Danushan, a student, was arrested on 22 November on his way from Maharabakulam, Poonthoddam to Vavuniya town. He

was taken away in a white van known to be used by the army. Army officials deny he is in their custody.

Pakiyaratnam Yogeswaran was last seen being taken into custody at around 11am on 25 November while having a bath at a well near Veppankulam camp. He is originally from Sandilipai, Jaffna, but had been living in the Veppankulam camp for displaced people since February 1997. It is suspected that he was taken into custody by the army, but to date army authorities have denied his detention.

On 20 December, Mylvaganam Jayaseelan from Kurumankadu was seen being taken away by two men travelling on a motorcycle in front of Shanthi clinic, Vairakuliyankulam. It is suspected the abductors were members of PLOTE. To date his fate or whereabouts have not been established.

On 21 December, Subramaniam Atpudarasa and Selvarasa Tamilchelvam were seen being taken into custody by PLOTE at Kovilkulam. They both work at Asian Cool Bar, Vairakuliyankulam, Vavuniya and had been

on their way to see a friend in Kovilkulam. It is suspected they too are detained at Kovilkulam PLOTE camp but PLOTE leaders are denying that they are in their custody.

In an updated statement on 11 January 99, Amnesty International said that members of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Colombo police have reportedly been to Vavuniya to investigate the 'disappearances' of the eight above-named people, arrested by members of the army and the People Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) between 27 October and 21 December 1998. The results of the investigations have not been made public. To Amnesty International's knowledge, all eight remain unaccounted for.

Another man, Ponnuthurai Ravindran (alias Ravi), a displaced person from Killinochchi, a current resident of Veppankulam, Vavuniya is also reported to be missing. He was last seen at the office of PLOTE in Station Road, Kurumankadu, Vavuniya on 26 November 1998.

Ponnuthurai Ravindran apparently visited the PLOTE office on a regular basis and is reported to have had an identity card provided by PLOTE. However, when relatives made inquiries at the PLOTE office, they were told he was not there. His relatives fear he may be held in PLOTE custody against his will.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern about the persistent use of unauthorized places of detention, particularly by armed Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE. In Vavuniya, evidence has emerged of three unofficial detention places run by members of PLOTE after one prisoner escaped in September 1998.

During a visit to Vavuniya later that month, Amnesty International delegates found evidence of severe torture at two unauthorised places of detention run by members of PLOTE at Kovilkulam and Rambaikulam. Around that time, approximately 40 prisoners were estimated to be held in unacknowledged detention at these places.

The organisation has welcomed the introduction by the government of measures to safeguard the welfare of detainees. These include the requirement that detainees only be held in officially gazetted places of detention, that keeping a detainee in an un-

Land for Hindu Temple Opposed

The government's decision to donate 35 acres of land to build a Rama Hindu temple at Sita Eliya in the central Kandy district has been characterised by extremist Buddhist organisations as an act of betrayal.

An ad-hoc group calling itself the Organisation of Buddhist Associations for the Prevention of Invasion by Mosques and Kovils has protested against the move to construct a Rama kovil in Sita Eliya.

At a protest meeting held at the Young Men's Buddhist Association Hall in Borella, the organisation charged that such moves were "detrimental to the culture and Buddha Sasana of the country". It accused the government of giving over 35 acres of land in the Sita Eliya area to the construction of a Rama kovil.

Addressing the meeting, Secretary of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, Jagathseela Kulathilaka asserted that throughout history those in want of power has continued to betray the rights of the Sinhala Buddhist people of the country.

"This handover of land is such a betrayal of the rights of the future generations of the country. We have continued to sell the rights of the Sinhala Buddhists of this country for the want of more votes. This violation continues today and the Sinhala people are left helpless at the hands of these power hungry politicians", he claimed.

Secretary of the Kandy Deshanarakshaka Society, Ven. Udawatte Nanda thera called upon the government to resign if it was "unable to protect

authorised place is an offence; and that each arrest has to be reported immediately to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRC), and not later than 48 hours from the time of arrest. Amnesty International understands that members of the army in Vavuniya have repeatedly failed to inform the HRC of arrests and detentions within the stipulated period. Despite continuing appeals by local and international organisations, no action has been taken to bring an end to the use of unauthorised places of detention by PLOTE.

the rights of the Sinhala Buddhists of the country".

"It is such a strange predicament that has befallen the Sinhala Buddhists of the country. On the one side there is Minister Thondaman threatening the rights of the Sinhala people to their lands in the upcountry while on the Eastern province Minister A. H. M. Assraff threatening their right to land in the East.

If this is not enough there is Prabhakaran fighting for land in the North. It is a time of us losing our own standing in our own soil.

How long must the Sinhala people suffer these discriminations?" We now need the permission of Thondaman to distribute any land in this country as was proven by the issue over Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake distributing some land recently among the people. What is happening in the areas close to Digavapi? There too Muslim people are taken and settled in shanty type houses and then later they are mysteriously set on fire and the Minister in charge of Rehabilitation, goes and provides them permanent housing. And these people are permanently settled in the East, he alleged. This is the predicament of land distribution in this country today.", he lamented.

Former Chancellor of the University of Peradeniya, Prof. addumabandara said that it has now become a question of priorities and how much we really want to protect the land among ourselves.

"This is all the land the Sinhala people have to call their own on this earth, where their own language is spoken. Why do we continue to call it our own if we are not even prepared to protect it?

Where is democracy in a country where the rights of the majority race are violated? If harassment to them by, be it Muslims or Tamils, cant be avoided where is the democracy?" he queried.

"Any one who speaks for the rights of the Sinhala Buddhists in this country is referred to as a racist. The question is how long are we prepared to sit and watch our rights being violated in this manner?", he asked.

Talks of War and Peace As People Suffer

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

The move to persuade the Government and the UNP to pursue a bi-partisan approach towards a lasting solution to the North-East conflict was initiated recently by the leaders of the business community. Their immediate aim is to facilitate dialogue between the Government and the UNP that will result in a unified approach to a political settlement of the conflict. Both sides have each nominated four senior persons to liaise with the business leaders but so far the initiative has not shown any sign of forward movement.

The National Alliance for Peace (NAP) which was launched formally on November 11, in the wake of the initiative of the business community, hopes to bring mass pressure on the PA Government, the UNP and other relevant parties to co-operate in the peace effort. All peace groups agree that the LTTE must be brought into this process. Peace is undoubtedly uppermost in the minds of the vast majority of Sri Lankans. With the dawn of the new year, the ritualistic appeal for unity and co-operation to achieve peace has been made by religious and political leaders. But peace keeps eluding solely because the various leaders expect their opponents to yield, while sticking to their own positions. They are paying scant attention to the sufferings and wishes of the people.

Popular Wish

The vast majority of the people, regardless of ethnic, religious and regional differences want the conflict to be settled politically. The recent public opinion survey conducted by Professor S.T. Hettige of the Department of Sociology of the University of Colombo revealed that 77.4 per cent of the respondents did not think military action alone could solve the ethnic problem. This is the view of the Government as well. Even the military commanders have made this clear on several occasions. All the main political parties recognise that a political

solution is necessary to end the conflict.

The Ceylon Mercantile Union has also called for a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict. The employees of banks in Sri Lanka have also expressed concern over the costly and long drawn out armed conflict between the Government and the LTTE. They have drawn attention to the economic effects of the war on the people and the country at large and called for an early settlement. Defence expenditures and public debt servicing have risen to excessive levels causing problems to the allocation of public funds and the containment of the overall budget deficits within prudent limits. Their adverse effects will also be felt in the years to come.

LTTE's Position

The offer by the LTTE leader to negotiate again, after three failed attempts since the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, cannot be viewed in isolation of the prevailing muddled situation. His annual "Heroes Day" speech delivered on 27 November 1998 has been interpreted in different ways by politicians, peace activists and political analysts. Some have seen in his speech a shift in the LTTE's hitherto hardline stance offering window of opportunity in the for reaching a negotiated settlement, while others seem to think that the it was nothing but a call for talks about talks accompanied by preliminary pre-conditions to be satisfied before the commencement real peace talks.

Among those in the first category are the major political parties representing the minorities, notably the TULF and the CWC as well as the various peace groups including the NAP. The leader of the United National Party, which has its main support-base in the south was quick in urging the government to respond positively to the LTTE leader's offer. UNP and Opposition Leader Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe in an interview with the press said: "This is a major move

by the Tigers and it is a very positive one to which the Government must respond to. They can't stay silent." He is also reported to have said: "Their genuineness is a matter to be tested. It may be a concern on everybody's mind but you can't hold back an opportunity like this on those grounds." The concluding statement in the LTTE leader's speech reads: "We do not anticipate that the hawkish and racist attitude of Sinhala chauvinism will undergo fundamental transformation. If such change does not take place Sinhala chauvinism will bear the responsibility for creating the concrete historical conditions for the birth of independent Tamil state." The UNP leader has interpreted this to mean that the LTTE is not now insisting on its demand for a separate Tamil state adding that: "Prabhakaran has said that if this offer is not made use of they will get back to their demand of a separate state that means they are not considering it right now. We have never seen an offer like this before."

In this context, it is relevant to draw attention to the answers provided by the LTTE leader in his speech to his own questions - "What are we demanding? What are we struggling for?" These were: -

(a) We aspire to live peacefully with freedom and dignity, without the interference of anyone, in our own soil; in our Motherland where we were born and bred; in our historical homeland which belongs to us;

(b) We should be recognized as a community of people, as a social formation with distinct characteristics;

(c) We aspire to choose freely a political model suited to us to govern ourselves.

Charging that "successive Sri Lankan governments had neither integrated or assimilated our people within the unitary system nor allowed our people the right to secede. Instead, they have always attempted to repress and subjugate our people," the LTTE leader said, "It is for this reason we have been compelled to fight a political struggle we continue to fight for political rights, for our right to live in freedom. Now the Tamil struggle has expanded and escalated into a war between two nations."

A careful study of the LTTE leader's clearly expressed views corre-

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spond to what has come to be known as the "Thimpu principles". These are: (1) Recognition of Tamils in Sri Lanka as a nation; (2) Recognition of the existence of an identified homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka; (3) Recognition of the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation; and (4) Recognition of the right to citizenship and other fundamental rights of all Tamils in Sri Lanka.

What is clear is that the LTTE leader visualises the existence of two separate nations, Sinhalese and Tamils, living in freedom without interference from each other in their defined separate homelands choose freely the political model suited to each to govern themselves. Implicit in the recognition of the right "of self determination of the Tamil nation" would enable the Tamils to freely and voluntarily decide for themselves whether they want (a) to set up a separate state of Tamil Eelam of their own; or (b) a loose association or confederation of two independent states (as in the case of the independent republics of the former Soviet Union or the European Union); or (c) the formation of two federal units within the island, a Sinhala Unit and a Tamil Eelam Unit with very well defined and highly restricted Central Unit dealing with matters of common concern to be agreed by the two federal units. Implicit also in the right to "choose freely the political model suited to each to govern themselves" is that they could decide whether to have a politically pluralistic multi-party system or a single-party led state as its "political model".

The conditions set by the LTTE leader in his "Heroes Day" speech are that political negotiations with the Government must be preceded by : (a) Creation of an atmosphere of peace and normalcy, free from the conditions of war and economic blockades; (b) Initial talks to discuss the removal of such pressures as the military aggression on "our soil" (meaning the North-East) and (c) the restrictions imposed on the economic life of "our people". The fact that LTTE is not in any hurry to engage in political talks to reach a political settlement but more eager to have the pressures removed is also obvious when the LTTE leader said, "Our people want their day-to-day urgent problems resolved immediately. They cannot wait over an indefinite time until the peace talks

resume and the ethnic conflict is discussed, resolved and the solution implemented. They want the war to come to an end and the occupation army that torments them to withdraw and their existential problems addressed immediately."

Analysts have pointed out that during the last failed talks held in early 1995, although the LTTE entered without preconditions it subsequently stipulated four conditions for political negotiations.

These were removal of the economic embargo, lifting of the fishing ban, removal of Pooneryn camp, and the right for its cadres in the East to carry arms openly. It is also believed even during the earlier talks with the Government headed by President Premadasa, the discussions focused on similar non-political matters. Hence the doubt about LTTE 's readiness to reach a peaceful political settlement of the conflict through serious political negotiations continues.

"Our people are facing unbearable suffering in the form of death, destruction, displacement, hunger and starvation. They live as prisoners in their own homeland, facing daily various forms of military atrocities," the LTTE leader lamented in the same speech. A discerning person may well ask why established civil bodies that could readily attend to the "day-to-day urgent problems" and ease the suffering of the people are not allowed to function normally? Why were the two Mayors of Jaffna assassinated within weeks of assuming their offices? The emergence and functioning of civil administration in the Tamil areas with the gradual decline of the role of the military and restoring some form of normalcy for ordinary people to lead a normal life with commodities essential for their survival reaching them without being obstructed would have gone a long way in solving the day-to-day urgent problems@ of the people. The question therefore is as to why every effort at bringing back non-military civilian administration in the Tamil areas is being prevented by brutal assassinations, as in the case of the Jaffna Mayors and scores of others, reportedly by the LTTE. The answer seems to be, as determined by the LTTE, that the Tamil 'civilians in the north and east must live under either the control of the LTTE or the military. If the LTTE is

unable to dislodge the military, then there is no choice for the people other than to live under military control.

UNP's Stand

The then UNP government led by former President J R Jayawardene rejected the Thimpu principles as unacceptable when they were put forward by the Tamil political parties during their negotiations with a delegation of the government held under the auspices of the Indian government at Thimpu in Bhutan in 1985. Asserting that the island is comprised of a single Sri Lankan nation inhabiting a single unitary state, the UNP government then rejected the premise of the Tamils being a nation, the northern and eastern provinces of the island being the homeland of the Tamils, and the right to self-determination on the basis that the acceptance of this premise would lead to the division of the country.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987 which gave effect to by the 13th Amendment to the island's Constitution sought to manage and reconcile the divergent positions reflected in the Thimpu principles and those of the then UNP government. Even that was found to be unacceptable to the LTTE which continued its armed struggle.

The present government led by President Kumaratunga has come up with its own proposals for devolution of powers which can be described as more extensive than that was provided in the 13th Amendment. The LTTE has summarily rejected them as inadequate to meet its aspirations. However, what is most relevant in the context of the recent pronouncements of the UNP and its leader is that have vowed to oppose these proposals on the basis that they are granting too much to the Tamils. They are also vowed to uphold the unitary state and are hostile to those aspects of the government's proposals which smack of federalism, and are also opposed to the merger of the northern and eastern provinces as a single territorial unit for purposes of devolution of powers. What is more significant is that the UNP and its leadership has persistently resisted widespread calls form a bipartisan consensus between the government and the UNP on a political package that could form the basis for negotiations with the LTTE.

In the context of the clearly stated LTTE position, no politically sane person can visualise how the LTTE will accept the unitary system of rule as a basis for negotiations, which the UNP wants to preserve. It opposes the Government's devolution proposals because these violate the unitary constitution. Any one who has followed the various vague and in some instances contradictory statements of its leadership on devolution would definitely have serious qualms about the party's sincerity in calling for the Government to negotiate with the LTTE. Many feel that the UNPs stance is predicated by electoral politics - firstly by its determination to see that all efforts by the government to secure a negotiated settlement fails, and secondly by its desperate desire to regain power for which purpose its needs the votes of the minority communities which it hopes it can achieve by making platitudinous statements proposing talks with the LTTE.

Government's Position

The Government's position on future peace talks with the LTTE was clarified in the interview given by

President Chandrika Kumaratunga to the renowned journalist Mr. N. Ram, which appeared in the "Frontline" magazine of December 19, 1998 - January 1, 1999.

Her responses to many questions concerning the ongoing conflict were quite forthright and clear. She said: "We are willing to talk because I do not like to settle this by war. We don't want mediation, we are willing to take third party facilitation. We would want discussions without very many conditions, except the one that there should be a limited time frame that we should decide upon at the beginning of the talks. If not, the LTTE would do what they have always done - that is, drag on and on until they build themselves up again militarily and then start attacking again. So we want to have a fairly tight schedule," adding "There is, of course, one more. We have said that the unity of the state is not negotiable - Unity, not Unitary."

The first condition may appear too rigid considering the intricacy of the problem but such a condition has been laid down in the talks between the Irish nationalists and unionists

that resulted in the Good Friday agreement. At the same time, one should not forget the fact that in the case of Northern Ireland much discussions preceded the final talks with the help of facilitators. With regard to the second condition, not only the present government but also no future Sri Lankan government will be willing to even consider any discussions that undermine national unity and threaten the country's territorial integrity. In fact, this will not be welcomed by any foreign government and continued insistence by the LTTE leadership on the concept of two distinct states will only result in undermining the reasonable case for devolution.

It is an undisputed fact that President Chandrika Kumaratunga is the only incumbent head of State who has been willing to relinquish the unitary constitution, which has been rejected over the past four decades by the majority of the Tamil people. She has steadfastly maintained that only through extensive devolution of powers a lasting solution to the ethnic problem could be found.

In the interview given to Mr. Ram,

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she also expressed her sorrow in not being able to constructively give the Tamil people what her Government wanted to give through the devolution package. She blamed the intransigence of the UNP leadership for the Government's difficulty in changing the constitution so as to give legitimacy to the devolution proposals.

India's position on the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka has been emphasised again during the recent visit to New Delhi by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. In his address at the banquet, hosted in her honour the President of India, Mr. K. R. Narayanan said: "We in India are very conscious of the challenges that the people of Sri Lanka continue to face as they strive to live together in peace and harmony in a pluralistic society. We applaud your statesmanship in coming forward with new initiatives to address the aspirations of all sections of Sri Lankan society. We are confident with your wise leadership, Sri Lanka will achieve peace and tranquility, within the framework of national unity and territorial integrity." Incidentally during this visit, India and Sri Lanka signed a landmark agreement on 29 December 1998 to establish a bilateral free trade area.

Bipartisan Approach

In the ongoing conflict between government forces and the LTTE and the political power struggle between the ruling and opposition parties, it is the people on either side of the ethnic divide who have been losing so far. All parties which have sustained this conflict in different ways have been operating consciously in pursuit of their own political goals. It is not a simple straightforward contest between two sides. At least there are three parties for whom political power is the main aim. In the case of the LTTE, it wants power outside the collective system. Since the LTTE has no compulsion of facing any imminent elections, its tactics are of course different.

Third party is needed not only because of the mutual mistrust between the antagonists but also because of the power struggle between the two main political parties. Assistance in the first instance will be needed to bring them together and finalise the arrangements for the talks to begin. The role it should play subsequently during the talks will have to be agreed

upon by the participating groups.

The necessity to involve the UNP in the talks right from the beginning either directly or indirectly as envisaged in the Liam Fox initiative is quite apparent. Since the UNP has urged the Government to have "unconditional talks" with the LTTE, it cannot simply take the position of an onlooker. For a meaningful joint effort, there must be prior discussions between the two parties with the aim of reaching an understanding on the kind of political framework on which talks can be had with the LTTE. At some stage in this preliminary discussions, the main party representing the Muslims in the Eastern Province should be consulted. The Muslim factor cannot be ignored in the light of the distinct views on the unit of devolution expressed by Muslim leaders.

The bipartisan approach is essential for two main reasons. First, LTTE will be forced to take the talks seriously, as the suggestions coming from the opposite side will be seen as implementable. Second, both the government and opposition parties cannot use the success or failure at the talks to gain political benefit. This is important in view of the fact that both the general and Presidential elections are due shortly. If for some reason this does not materialise, then it is futile to start any talks which are bound to fail.

The Suffering People

Attention has been drawn to the immense suffering of the people in the war-torn areas by independent groups, concerned citizens, the LTTE and some political parties. Not in all cases the motive is solely selfless, prompted by humanitarian consideration. In the context of the North-East conflict, human suffering has several characteristics.

The loss of family members including the breadwinners, disabilities caused to surviving members, want of adequate food, medicine and other essentials, displacements from permanent places of domicile, loss of personal and family possessions, loss of livelihood and lack of basic amenities such as shelter, health care and transport services are the ones that are widely known. Others which are less perceived include living in constant fear of tragedy befalling at any time, the psychological trauma of those

who have experienced all kinds of hardships, losing self-respect and dignity whenever threatened and humiliated by armed persons from either side, inability to escape from the troubles and generally living in a permanent state of violence and depredation. Not only

Tamils but also many Sinhalese and Muslims too have become victims of inhumanity.

It is unreasonable to blame only one side for the deplorable plight of the civilians. No humane person will suggest that innocent people including children must endure these hardships until a political solution to the ethnic problem is agreed and implemented. If both sides are keen to ease the suffering of the people, ways and means can be found to ease the burden. This does not require any negotiations at the political level. What is needed from both sides is the acceptance of the principle that humanitarian needs of the people, including the facilities needed to transport and distribute the essential goods should be left solely to the relevant civil organizations. There should not be any interference by either warring side in their operations. Nor should there be any link between the humanitarian needs and the military or political goals of either side. Irrespective of military considerations, civilians should be allowed to freely return to their homes and to areas where they can survive with less suffering.

In fact, voluntary moves by both parties towards easing the suffering of the people will definitely go a long way in creating the congenial climate for starting in earnest the political discussions that must obviously take place for reaching political solution. Far too many people have suffered long enough for no reason other than being born a Sinhalese, a Tamil or a Muslim. They deserve a better life in the land, whose people for generations have been known worldwide for their religious devotion, friendliness and hospitality. Those who claim to be leaders must show some mercy and co-operate in liberating the people from their present misery while preparing for political talks. That will serve to prove their genuineness in seeking to redress the problems of the people whom they claim to represent and lead.

A Question of Political Consensus or Leadership

Jehan Perera

From the business elites to religious leaders to a host of civic organisations and NGOs, everyone is calling for a political consensus. A government-UNP combine is seen as some sort of panacea to the many ills that afflict the country, and in particular the ethnic conflict. However, the upsurge of political violence between the two major political parties that is taking place in the run-up to the provincial council elections later this month, does not bode well for such a political consensus.

In the fragmented political context of the present, the violence in the Northwestern Province has pitted Sinhalese against Sinhalese. It is to be expected that the smaller Tamil and Muslim communities would be watching the fracas with considerable unease. The inability of the leadership of the majority community to peaceably resolve their own rivalries bodes ill for the fate of the minorities, especially in the settling of their own inevitable disputes with the majority.

It would not be surprising if many of them felt that the leadership of the majority, by their behaviour towards one another, had lost the right to determine the future of the minorities let alone their own people. In fact a senior (in years) Tamil lawyer was outspoken enough to say as much at a social occasion. But of course the situation is not so black and white.

The Tamil community has also shown itself capable of producing a cannibalistic political culture, with the LTTE assassinating every possible political rival from within the community.

Black and white analyses are also essentially based on considerations of morality. However, a moral right to rule (or not to rule) does not necessarily correspond to the legal right. So long as the Sri Lankan constitution remain a unitary one, the leadership of the Sinhalese majority, unworthy though they might be, will continue to have the final say over the affairs of the country, including those

of the minority communities. This is why constitutional reform is so important for those who wish a more equitable sharing of power and responsibility in the country.

Further, even very deep cleavages within the political leadership of the majority community does not have to forestall political reform from taking place. There is no better example for this than Bangladesh, which is a fellow South Asian society, ridden with possibly more acrimonious party political rivalries. In that country, governments have not been permitted to rule by several month-long boycotts of Parliament by the opposition and by politically motivated general strikes. So far Sri Lanka has not faced this type of political struggle.

BANGLADESHI EXAMPLE

Despite facing formidable handicaps, in December 1997 the Bangladeshi government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was able to bring a 22 year old armed conflict to an end by signing a peace accord with the ethnic insurgents belonging to the Shanti Bahini. On two occasions now Sheikh Hasina has shown what a leader with a single minded determination can do, first by toppling the previous government well before the end of its term and second by her peacemaking.

In February 1998 the Bangladeshi government unilaterally pushed through legislation in Parliament that gave effect to the peace accord. Although the opposition under former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia threatened dire consequences, they have so far proved unable to undermine the peace agreement. The opposition leader first pledged that the peace accord would only be signed over her "dead body" and then announced that she would lead a protest march of half a million against the accord, but she delivered on neither promise.

The reason for the failure of the opposition protests against the peace accord is that the ordinary Bengali

citizens prefer to live in a country at peace than at war. Besides the government did not have to go way out of the political mainstream in signing the peace accord. They built on what the former government under Mrs Khaleda Zia had already negotiated with the Shanti Bahini.

Due to the peace accord's essential continuity with the past, the opposition protests against the accord would seem to be politically motivated by large sections of the population. This may partly explain their reluctance to be mobilised in street demonstrations against it. In addition, other influential segments of Bengali society are aware that a peace settlement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts will be crucial in enabling the port city of Chittagong to benefit from being a hub of southeast Asian commerce and an economic powerhouse of the Bangladeshi economy.

THE PARALLELS

There are parallels to the Bangladesh conflict in Sri Lanka today that make a similar breakthrough to peace possible. A stage has been reached in Sri Lanka where political leadership matters more to conflict resolution than achieving a political consensus between the government and opposition. So far, despite valiant efforts by the most influential segments of Sri Lankan society this consensus has failed to materialise and is unlikely to do so in the near future. In its place there has to be political leadership of the kind that President Chandrika Kumaratunga gave in the early period of her rule in 1994-95, but which she has subsequently lost.

Just like in Bangladesh, the war in Sri Lanka has few supporters among the general population. The fantasies of a quick win have long receded on both sides of the divide. Recent public opinion surveys, such as the one carried out by Prof. S T Hettige of the University of Colombo bear out the scepticism of the great majority of Sinhalese about the possibility, and desirability, of a military victory.

Also like in Bangladesh, the government's proposed devolution package is in the same continuum as the former UNP government's 13th Amendment which established the provincial councils. Only a bare 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court agreed that the 13th Amendment was within

the unitary constitutional framework. While all attention is now on President Kumaratunga and her government's devolution package, neither of these are the only options available to the country. The 13th Amendment (to the Constitution which gave effect to the devolution arrangement agreed under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987) would have been a major step in the right direction if it had been implemented with sincerity, by either this or the former government.

For reasons of their own the government's constitutional framers wanted to show that there was a clear break with the past and therefore voiced their complete rejection of the 13th Amendment. Certainly, the government's devolution package goes beyond the unitary framework in a categorical manner. But it is not so remarkably different from the 13th Amendment to be rejected outright by the UNP opposition.

It is noteworthy that the UNP leadership, while refusing to give their support to the devolution package have also not opposed it tooth and nail.

Simply put, their heart is not in that fight as they know, deep within themselves, that the country has to go beyond the unitary constitution to solve the ethnic conflict. This explains their lack of strong conviction in opposing the devolution package and their inability to come up with a credible alternative to it that remains within the unitary constitutional framework.

In other words, although neither the government nor opposition are prepared to publicly acknowledge it, they are very near to each other in accepting a non-unitary (federal) system as the solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Here too, the example of Bangladesh offers a hopeful message. In Bangladesh, having failed the people to take to the streets to protest against the peace accord, the opposition is now complaining that the peace accord violates the specifically "unitary" nature of the Bangladeshi constitution.

Basically, the BNP opposition in Bangladesh claims that the implementation of the peace accord requires constitutional amendment, which calls for a 2/3 majority in Parliament. So far, even without a 2/3 majority, and without any constitutional ame-

1998 in Retrospect

A Lack of Moral Dimension in a Culture of Complacency

Kishali Pinto Jayawardena

In her contribution to a 1998 Commemorative Anthology of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights put out a few weeks back by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CNN journalist Christiane Amanpour reflects that she was twenty years old before her conscience "kicked in", before she understood the real meaning of words like freedom and human rights.

In writing that is as vibrant as her personality on television, Amanpour points out that she is now forty and that "the intervening years sometimes like an atonement for that early ignorant indifference." For her, the introduction to "human rights and violations", as she puts it, came with the Islamic Revolution.

"Suddenly, my whole world spun around people that I had grown up admiring and I respected. They were put before firing squads, a beloved uncle was put to death in prison," she comments. Her catalogue of her eight short years as foreign correspondent seems indeed like a guidebook to human rights violations with detailing of tyranny, oppression, slavery, torture, indignity, inequality, invasion of privacy, the denial of political rights, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, the denial of free speech, of association and of worship.

Throughout, her problem was a troublesome inner voice which kept on compelling her to speak out when it would have been wiser to keep quiet, to witness horrors about which she

could speak unflinchingly to the world but which kept her awake at night and to tell stories that confronted the official lies with the truth. It was in this seeking for the truth that she became aware of the moral dimension to her work. Here again, she experienced conflict.

Journalists are, by definition of their work, expected to be objective. In distinguishing between the aggressor and the victim in particular violations of human rights, was she transgressing this golden rule?

The answer, which came after years of striving, was finally in the negative. She phases it thus, "I realised that objectivity means giving all sides an equal hearing, it does not mean treating all equally. When you do that, when you cannot distinguish between victim and aggressor, rapist and victim, you enter the zone moral equivalence. I could not do this, I took some hits, there were complaints that I had lost my objectivity, that I was siding with one faction. My answer is that I sought the truth and that I became aware of the moral dimension to our profession. I also became aware of the of a journalist's words and the consequences they have."

Twenty years after discovering that she had a conscience, Amanpour put it to use in her profession as a journalist, where "having started out ignorant and somewhat indifferent, I have found out that our (work) can be a for good, can advance universal rights, can expose those who would destroy them." Her powerful sincerity easily overrides the cynical mistrust so often expressed about journalists and journalism.

She states that "by her experiences, she has been shaped forever as a person."

As 1999 dawns for Sri Lankans, now living in a country identified as one of the most violent conflict zones in the world, Amanpour's personal awakening cannot but come too soon

ndment, the government is seeking to implement the peace accord, of course in partnership with the Shanti Bahini. So may it be in Sri Lanka, when the country has a leader as convinced of the rightness of her cause as Sheikh Hasina. Unilateral implementation of a peace agreement by a government without opposition support, brings its own problems, but it also has its advantages, such as an end to war. ●

for each and every Sri Lankan. Her awareness of the "moral dimension" to her work is not limited, by definition, to journalists or to human rights activists. Instead, the same duty to manifest this "moral dimension" and to speak out in instances where it is outraged can be claimed from any person, be it a private sector executive, a banker, a lawyer or a businessman. The problem is, of course, that the contrary is happening in a society that seems to be rent by cynicism, complacency and a self centred preoccupation that borders on the grotesque.

Take for instance, this Christmas and New Year celebrations. As the cities were jam-packed with shoppers and hotels competed with each other to host the "grandest New Year's dance", groups of women were meeting in secret in the major towns for quite a different purpose. They were the mothers, wives and sisters of the "disappeared", those service personnel caught in recent operations in the North and the East whose bodies have never been recovered and who are now inhumanly categorised as "missing, presumed dead". The women are meeting thus to explore ways and means of finding out what has happened to their men, their planned action is unobtrusive for fear that if they speak out, they will be further penalised or that their other sons who are in the forces would be affected. Part of their anguish comes from the sheer uncertainty of it all, the inability to see the bodies of their sons, husbands and brothers for the last time, to know that they are really dead.

For them, the end 1998 year celebrations are a parody of the agony that they are undergoing, the agony that many of them sense, would never be lessened.

They are not alone in their despair, their plight is ironically shared by women fated to be "on the other side" due to the vagaries of race, the women in the conflict areas whose children have been coerced into war by the LTTE and women in other parts of the country who live daily in fear that they or their families would be harassed, because a so called liberation army is fighting for a separate state which many of them do not wish to live in.

This, then is Sri Lanka, at the end of 1998, a country named as having one of the highest rates of disappear-

ances in the world. A country where a culture of complacency has set in, where sometimes one is driven to a torturous longing for the brutalities of a previous era, which was however accompanied by a critical mass of indignation, sadly so lacking now.


Looking back at 1998, the increasing activism by the courts regarding violations of rights brought before them, remained the one saving grace in an otherwise commonplace year. In particular, the Krishanthi Kumarasamy case where the rape and murder of a fifteen year old school girl and the subsequent murder of her mother, brother and neighbour who went in search of her, by eight soldiers and one policeman on duty at the Chemmani check point marked the coming together of forces across the country, united in their condemnation of the horrendous incident. The case also saw the growth of hope that the 1990's will see swift justice for those members of the forces who engage in rights violations. The call was made for a genuine rethink by both ordinary people and their leaders as to the reality of the events happening in the country and a surge of angry public opinion emphasised that abuses by members of the security forces have to be acknowledged and a consciousness created that such incidents are, indeed, hugely counter-productive. However, at the close of 1998, it appears that the momentum caused by the Kumarasamy verdict has petered out. Other cases, similarly gruesome in nature remain to be pursued. Identified mass graves such as the one at Suriyakanda in the South and Chemmani in the North have yet to be fully investigated and arbitrary arrests, disappearances and torture at the hands of the armed forces are still reported.

The National Human Rights Commission is still struggling to prove itself and its ambitious mandate, while the government has yet to account to the families of those who disappeared during 1988-'89. The recommendations of the three Disappearances Commissions which looked into the involuntary removal of persons and submitted remedial measures that could be taken have not been implemented up to date, the purpose of that particular exercise apparently being merely to portray the UNP as the villain of that particular era.

Meanwhile, censorship curtailing freedom of expression has now been in force for over five months and excepting sporadic outbursts in caustic editorials, it seems that no one is bothered over much. In truth, what prevails is a culture of complacency, an air of "going about our business", being mildly shocked at the atrocities of the war, exclaiming over the breakdown of civil society as instances of open rape, murder and violence become commonplace and jolted out of our complacency only when particularly brutal rape and murder takes place as in case of Rita Manoharan or a terrorist explosion occurs in the cities.

What is gravely needed, as we go into 1999, is a shaking of this complacency, an awareness of the "moral dimension" articulated with so much feeling by Amanpour and which could be demonstrated not only by picketing in the streets but by intentional indignation, individually and collectively expressed. Without this consciousness on the part of every individual citizen, 1999 can be no better for the country than 1998. The nightmare is that, quite possibly, it could be worse.

(Courtesy of The Sunday Times)

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15 JANUARY 1999

'We are willing to Talk, I don't like to Settle this by War'

- President Kumaratunga

Interview by N. Ram, Editor of 'FRONTLINE'

In 1994, a watershed year, she was elected, first, Prime Minister and then President in a tidal wave of a popular victory - under rules of the game fashioned by the conservative United National Party (UNP), under a Constitution the President herself characterises as "bizarre" and "fraudulent," as the head of a multi-party People's Alliance spearheaded by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which her father founded and her mother, the battle-scarred and ailing octogenarian Prime Minister, led for decades.

When President Kumaratunga took over the reins from the UNP, which had gone through a prolonged decline related largely to the failure to solve Sri Lanka's principal national question - the long-festering and bloody ethnic crisis - there were huge expectations among all sections of the people, Tamil, Sinhala and the rest. "Never before," as she notes *inter alia*, "had the people of the North openly showed approbation of a 'Sinhala' leader like that."

A central part of the Chandrika Project was to function not as a Sinhala, but as a Sri Lankan, leader with a non-chauvinistic approach to (what she readily recognises as) the country's principal national question and a determination to resolve it by breaking with the past. It is very much part of her understanding, based on observed experience, that the tragic part of the history of independent Sri Lanka can be summed up in two phrases - the Sinhala Only trap and the Eelam trap.

Only the Pol Potist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has brought nothing but large-scale misery and "illfare," as Amartya Sen might characterise it, wherever it has been able to reign or reach, will deny the possibility of radical and genuine change offered by the Chandrika project.

The nature of the change can be expressed in the inter-play, and clear political distinction, between the words "unity" and "unitary" in the steadily deteriorating Sri Lankan national context. In an earlier era, on one parliamentary occasion relating to the Sinhala Only Bill which presaged ethnic tragedy, the inter-play and distinction were unforgettably expressed by a Sri Lankan politician from the Left, Colvin R. De Silva: "Two languages - one nation; one language - two nations."

For many years, Sri Lanka has had an active, progressive intelligentsia, men and women whose intellectual and enlightened political work has been characterised by the complete absence of chauvinism, and for whom the equality

of different sections of the Sri Lankan people has been a social, political and moral given. There have also been small political parties, invariably on the Left, which have swum against the strong current of majoritarianism. The early influence of the universal and progressive values of this enlightenment is a part of Chandrika's political make-up; Chandrika, who began her political career in the grass-roots Left, is the first genuinely non-chauvinistic Prime Minister or President of her country. No predecessor government was willing to consider giving up the confining constitutional-political framework of a unitary state - and to move in a federal direction (by whatever name called). But President Kumaratunga seems to have no conceptual inhibition on this score: "Yes, unity - not unitary. Quite different." This is the main reason why the constitutional devolution package for the North-East that is on offer from her Government must be recognised as the farthest-going and most progressive attempt in the history of independent Sri Lanka to find a just solution to the Tamil question.

It remains to be added that the Chandrika project has run into fierce trouble in the North, with the LTTE which is engaged in a deadly and punishing armed conflict, and political obstacles in the South, where the main Opposition party, the UNP, has rejected the constitutional proposals and called for unconditional talks with the LTTE.

President Kumaratunga dominates Sri Lankan politics and her political charisma and direct popular standing (as distinct from the parliamentary prospects of the People's Alliance) appear to remain substantially undiminished. Not surprisingly under the circumstances, sharp criticisms and misgivings are being freely voiced about the effectiveness of her governance.

These include allegations that the President is imperious and strong-handed, although no one has suggested seriously that her Government has resorted to any violence outside the context of the war against the LTTE or, for that matter, to anti-democratic ways experienced under various predecessor regimes, both UNP and SLFP. Again, while few disinterested observers question the fact that the media function under a more liberal environment under her Presidency than at any time in recent memory, there is unhappiness in various quarters over the domestic censorship imposed by her Government on the coverage of the war in the North-East.

To gain an insight into the tangled situation in Sri Lanka today, to gauge the prospects of peace given an intransigent and resourceful killer politico-military organisation which is also expert at deceiving national political leaders, parties and governments, and to probe various facets of President Kumaratunga's perspective and practice, I sought an interview, which was given at Temple Trees in Colombo in the afternoon of December 7.

Of Chandrika's major or substantive predecessors as head of state and government who grappled with the ethnic issue in the recent period, President J.R. Jayewardene was famously articulate, accessible but very different in style and content; and President R. Premadasa authoritative, organised and resourceful but virtually inaccessible to interviewers. President Kumaratunga comes out in a candid and honest way, bordering on come-what-may disinterestedness, which reflects both her politics and her personality.

From the hour-long, tape-recorded interview, on the eve of the Sri Lankan President's official visit to India:

N. Ram (NR): *It has been four years since you became President of Sri Lanka. What do you perceive to be the most significant achievement of your Government over these four years?*

President Chandrika Kumaratunga (CK): Well, do you want only one significant achievement or would you be satisfied with a few?

NR: *With a few.*

CK: I think the most significant achievement of our rule is that after nearly two decades we have proved that even under great pressure, the Government in Sri Lanka can be democratic. For two decades people were made to believe that because there was an ongoing conflict and a civil war, governments couldn't help but be undemocratic and that they had to use a lot of terror at the state level to govern. Our greatest achievement is that we have proved that under all these pressures, the Government can continue to respect democracy and govern efficiently.

The other great achievement is that, for the first time, the Sri Lankan Government has consciously and honestly accepted that Sri Lanka does not need to be a unitary state. It can be united, can be one country, but it can have substantial devolution of power in order to satisfy the minorities in the country.

For both these achievements, especially for the second, we have had consciously to do a lot of political work, canvassing and campaigning. Convince the Sinhala majority, especially about the political solution offered as a solution to the minorities' problem. And we have been able to do even that successfully in Sri

Lanka.

We were sincere enough not only to promulgate this or to announce it and try to make it law, but also to go to the people constantly - village to village, area by area - convincing them. We had a huge programme, the Sudu Nelum movement, the White Lotus movement. Have you heard of that?

NR: Yes.

CK: These are the sea-changes we have been able to make. There were also smaller achievements such as - and I feel that it is also a very important one - the third achievement, the anti-corruption drive that we started. I won't say we have been able to wipe out corruption but we have certainly, at the top level, managed to ensure that all big Government development projects are not decided on criteria based on corruption. We have also been able to tighten systems and procedures and bring in new systems and procedures to plug loopholes to the maximum extent possible.

NR: In a sense, the tragic part of the history of independent Sri Lanka - there have been many achievements, but the tragic part - can be summed up in these phrases: the Sinhala Only trap and, in reaction to it and retaliation against it, the Eelam trap.

CK: (Nods in firm agreement.)

NR: You, President, won a tremendous mandate on the promise and programme of breaking with this history. How would you judge your project four years from the time it was launched?

CK: I was personally convinced that both traps are wrong for the country. Being a student of politics, I had studied the issue very closely and discussed it at length with friends who were interested and involved in the subject and who had suffered because of it. I was convinced beyond any doubt that we had to get out of both these traps. I was so convinced, but my party wasn't convinced at all - they were caught in the same trap. They thought that one shouldn't even talk about these issues at election time! They thought as all the Sinhala-based parties thought, including the Marxist parties.

But I was so convinced of what the people thought because I had gone to the villages for twenty years before I became Prime Minister or President. I talked with them for hours. My style of politics was hands-on.

I had talked about this ethnic issue especially during my (Sri Lanka) Mahajana Party days and I was convinced that the people would respond. I took the bull by the horns, and, especially in the second of the four elections we had within eighteen months in 1994,

the Southern Provincial Council election - the South is supposed to be very chauvinistic and pan-Sinhala - I tried this hesitantly at a couple of meetings and had a lot of response. And then went on and on. I was told, "Be careful, don't talk about the issue during this election," and we won a resounding victory there.

I was justified that time; and I was so happy that what I thought about the people's thinking was right. And therefore I got the courage. And we go on. We have had the courage right through. We still tell people, "This is what is right." I still believe that the majority of the people are with us. But the longer this goes on, the more tired the people will get - and less enthusiastic about possible political solutions.

NR: You have had to take two tracks: military operations and a willingness to go for political negotiations to find a solution within - I take it that the only stipulation is that it must be within - the framework of a united Sri Lanka. What happened? How do you look at the experience vis-a-vis the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)? What did you actually expect along the political track?

CK: Do you mean when we started discussions with them?

NR: Yes. You had a ceasefire and you had this tremendous mandate.

CK: I had studied enough about the LTTE to know that they were not just going to jump into a peace agreement - and even less so Mr. (V.) Prabhakaran, the leader. I saw him as a ruthless leader of a very rare type. I would classify him with Adolf Hitler and a few others.

But I thought that a leader cannot be alone, especially a guerilla leader. I explained this to my people, my Cabinet Ministers and so on, when we started going for talks with them. I thought that a guerilla leader has especially to depend on his people. I believed that all his supporters, his cadres, were not as obsessed (with the armed struggle for Eelam) as he was.

We saw there was huge enthusiasm amongst the Tamil people when we came, amongst the people in Jaffna who were being ruled by Prabhakaran. I wasn't just guessing - I was banking on the people's will which we had seen. I also realised that there must be a lot of young cadres who were with Prabhakaran and the LTTE who also wanted peace - who also, for once, had some faith in a 'Sinhala' leader.

You know the euphoria there was in Jaffna soon after I won. I was banking on that popularity for his people, the ordinary citizens plus the LTTE cadres, to prevail upon Prabhakaran and pressurise him to come to some kind of agreement

outside of the war. But obviously, Prabhakaran was stronger there than his people or his cadres! Secondly, I really banked on the people's power. Never before had the people of the North openly showed approbation of a 'Sinhala' leader like that.

NR: Yes.

CK: This is where Prabhakaran had to continuously tell his people a lot of lies, in their publications and in their various media activities, against me. This was all to convince them about why he broke the talks. They told a lot of lies because the people wouldn't otherwise have accepted it.

My other thought was this. Just because you think somebody is impossible, that's not a good enough reason politically to say, "Oh, I'm not going to talk to them." You have to keep trying. If the Israelis and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) could get together, if the Irish and the British could get together, we couldn't see why we shouldn't. So it was one last attempt - as far as I was concerned, it was a last attempt at humanism. Everybody had attempted in a very professional way to talk to Prabhakaran and it had not worked. The Sri Lanka Government and the Indian Government put a lot of effort into it.

So I thought: at least let us show the man that there are governments in Sri Lanka that are capable of being human and of understanding the Tamil people's problems. And that is what I was attempting to do. That was the first stage, to break the ice, to build bridges (all of which were broken and blasted) between the two sides, the sides being the LTTE and the Sri Lanka Government. The Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil people was no problem, I knew, as long as we were sincere.

That is why I sent the first team; the team was briefed, saying "this will be the first stage." For the next stage it would be a more professional, political kind of team that would go - if they agreed to begin to talk about political solutions. The first team was just to find out - a receiving trip - and also building bridges and friendship.

I have the series of - 42 - letters which I am going to publish very soon. The ones that he and I exchanged, 42 or 43.

NR: Will you give us copies?

CK: Certainly, certainly. I will give you autographed copies as you were one of the people responsible for our meeting the LTTE (in Chennai) long ago.

NR: Yes, when your husband Vijaya (Kumaranatunga) and you came to Chennai in 1986.

CK: Yes. So right from the beginning, after we started talking with them - we came in on the 19th of August (1994), I

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wrote to him before the 31st of August, talks began somewhere in October, and two months later I wrote to him saying the political proposals were in hand: "Would you like to give dates to discuss this?"

As far as I was concerned, the delegation that was going was going for the purpose I mentioned and also to persuade him to give dates to us to begin talking. Talking about beginning the political talks. But he never - he refused to - he just did not touch on that. So we couldn't go on to the second phase of getting more professional about the discussions.

Even the LTTE has taken up the UNP's (United National Party's) criticism that we were not professional enough, that I didn't send a professional enough team. Well, I sent my Secretary, that's important enough. The LTTE says I made a joke of the talks. The Secretary to the President is the highest public servant in the country. He was a very senior lawyer in the country. He is the President's Secretary and everybody knows that he has my confidence; I thought it was the perfect person. He's a charming person, his PR is good and then I sent a group of other people - including one Tamil person - to talk, and as and when it was required we sent Army people and Navy people depending on what had to be discussed, right through that process.

NR: Were these only talks about negotiations?

CK: It was partly that. It didn't begin like that. It was, as I said, mainly building bridges. And then talk about negotiations. What they used it for was to get as much as they could out of us materially to gain time with the ceasefire to build up militarily to start the war.

NR: There is a *deja vu* about this. Since the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983, the LTTE has apparently shown no willingness to talk substance or propose an alternative to their Eelam. The only time they spelt out anything was at Thimphu in 1985: the right to self-determination and the three other "cardinal principles," they pitched it at a very high and abstract level. Even India failed to get anything where the LTTE could be pinned down to say, "This will be a reasonable alternative to Eelam," federalism or whatever. It's the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) that did this, the LTTE didn't do it. There is nothing on record that suggests - and this is a question - that the LTTE is willing to propose, or be serious about negotiating, any alternative short of Eelam. Or could it be different?

CK: No, we have no indication at all that they will change... for the moment.

NR: I read Prabakaran's address on

Heroes' Day where basically, he says: we are willing to go for peace talks - he uses the words "peace talks" for talks that might lead to negotiations and "political negotiations" for what might lead to a solution. For peace talks, he says we are not putting down any conditions but the atmosphere should be conducive. Reading it, it appears that you must make concessions on the control of Jaffna (they call it "occupation"), the "economic blockade" and so on. He says the LTTE is ready to participate in peace talks with international, third party mediation - because we have no faith in the "Sinhala leadership," he explains. This comes in response to what you have said. You have reiterated your willingness to go for a political settlement. What would be your response to that?

CK: As I said, we have always, from the moment the LTTE without any rhyme or reason broke the talks, had the same position. It has not changed. We are willing to talk because I do not like to settle this by war. We are not a military type of government. We'd much prefer to settle this politically and are consistent about that. And at this stage, we will be willing to discuss, as I have always said to various people. We don't want mediation, we are willing to take third party facilitation... foreign. We have many offers, so we can choose.

NR: Would that be a good offices role?

CK: Something like that, yes. And we would want discussions without very many conditions, except the one that there should be, as I have said, a limited time frame that we should decide upon at the beginning of the talks. If not, the LTTE will do what they have always done - that is, drag on and on and on until they build themselves up again militarily and then start attacking again. So we want to have a fairly tight schedule and, if the talks are not finished by then, we say bye-bye to the talks. Apart from that, we are not asking for very many more conditions.

There is, of course, one more. We have said that the unity of the state is not negotiable.

NR: Not unitary, but unity...

CK: Yes, unity - not unitary. Quite different.

NR: You're emphasising this. Now, may I have a brief assessment of the military experience? It seems to have had its ups and downs. The Sri Lankan state was able to regain possession of Jaffna, repeating what the IPKF (Indian Peace-Keeping Force) did in 1987. That seemed to be an impressive military achievement. There have been other gains and progress in your attempt to open the

Main Land Route (MLR). But there have been setbacks as well, like Killinochchi. And today we read that the Deputy Defence Minister and the three Service Chiefs had a narrow escape. Are these part of the game or...

CK: Part of whose game?

NR: The game of war. The question is about the military balance since the peace process broke down in 1995. I asked your political opponents this question: would you say the LTTE is weaker, stronger or about the same? Some people say they are stronger. Many other assessments say that there have been net gains for the Sri Lankan state and that the LTTE has been weakened or checked. You, President, would know the most about this.

CK: Let me tell you very honestly that the LTTE is much weaker than it was when we took over from the UNP government. In 1994, the LTTE was absolutely ruling the entire Northern Province, other than in tiny Army camps here and there, where the Army had just locked themselves up inside and were not even moving out. When the Palaly people had to go out to collect their water, they had to ring up the LTTE and ask permission and go and collect the water. We had seen this happening continually. It was completely under their sway.

We have taken the whole of Jaffna Peninsula and we have taken parts of Mannar. We have now taken the entire road - there are only two main roads from the South to the North; we have taken the one that goes west towards Mannar. We have taken two-thirds of the one that goes straight up to Jaffna. To Killinochchi and beyond.

They have lost a lot of cadres and so are physically much weaker. They are also politically much weaker, because they have lost their people. Eighty-five per cent of the Tamil people who live in the Northern Province are now living in Government-controlled areas. And these people are helping us, as I'm sure your Frontline people would have gone to Jaffna and reported to you. They say, "We are much happier now than under the Tigers" - though, of course, things are not yet back to normal in Jaffna.

Once again thanks to the Tigers! They won't allow development work to go on properly. They have started blasting guns here and there. So we have to go very slowly. They keep threatening people, their people have killed two Mayors of Jaffna. We had just started the work nicely after the local government elections. They keep harassing the normalisation process but we go on - slower than we would if the LTTE was not harassing us, sabotaging the development work we are trying



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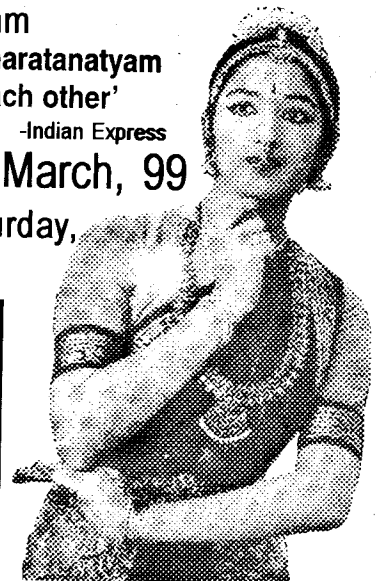
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to do for the Jaffna people. And they have told foreign journalists, "Please don't let the LTTE come back again. We prefer to be under the Army than to have the LTTE here."

I think that is a huge victory for the Government and a big defeat for the LTTE politically. They are finding it difficult to get cadres. They have recently been - you would have heard that also - taking them forcibly from their parents. And the parents were protesting. Some of the children who had been taken have run away.

NR: *Could you tell us something about the experience of these children? At what age do they start?*

CK: We have children they have taken at the age of eleven. And they send them to battle. They train them for about a year. They don't let them see their parents. Earlier they used to pay the parents two thousand rupees, now they pay three thousand.

NR: *Including girls?*

CK: Including girls. We have two little girls with us (we have lots of girls now, I'm talking of the first two we've had). They came in a group to attack one of the Army camps in the North and the attack was repelled. But quite a few of the girls - Sea Tigers - who came were arrested. And the Sea Tiger leader, what's her name, Akila, who trained...

NR: *...who is an accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, A-3.*

CK: Exactly. She was the leader. She was the one who trained the women, who used to train them - she's now dead. Akila trained the woman Dhanu, who assassinated Rajiv Gandhi, and Akila also came for this attack. They were arrested by the Navy: some of them ran away, some were killed, these two girls were arrested. Akila was older and she ordered all the girls there to swallow their cyanide capsules, which some of them did. These two girls did not: they pretended to bite on the capsules but threw them away. Akila thought they had also bitten on their capsules. She bit on her cyanide capsule and she died.

NR: *Is that right?*

CK: Yes, she died about two-and-a-half years ago. And these two girls were caught together with Akila. She died in that incident. And the two girls were there. I got them moved down to Colombo. They were then thirteen and fifteen; they had been taken at the ages of eleven and thirteen. On their way back from school, the two girls had been grabbed, forcibly, in Jaffna (then the LTTE was still in Jaffna) and taken to some camp, also within the Jaffna Peninsula, and trained.

In three years they had been allowed to go and see their parents only once and

they were accompanied by LTTE cadres in case they ran away. And they said, "We don't like this. We don't like to be here." We asked them what they wanted. They said, "All we want is to be sent abroad somewhere, because if we live there (in Jaffna), we will be killed by the LTTE. And we want to continue our studies." Those girls are still with us. We, in fact, interviewed them within the first one week; they talk only Tamil. We have the whole cassette. That was sent all over the world.

The LTTE is very annoyed about this and they have been asking us for these two girls back, saying they would give us ten, then twenty, then it became forty of our arrestees - "if you give these two girls back." They are very keen on having them back. It's very bad publicity.

Now we have loads of them, dozens of children in the recent six months. Some of them have run away and come to the Army camps for protection; others were taken (prisoner) by us after attacks.

NR: *So they speak of Army desertions, but not LTTE desertions.*

CK: Exactly.

NR: *Now about the Army itself, the morale of your Army and the phenomenon of desertion that has been reported. Are you very concerned about it? There was even talk that some kind of conscription or draft might be introduced.*

CK: (Smiles.) Well, there is about five to eight per cent desertion. That's not very high, given the intensity of the military conflict that is going on. But then when we give them amnesties, a lot of them come back again and we keep giving amnesty all the time.

What I'm worried about is not desertion so much as the whole war itself. It has to end. It's terrible, the idea of young boys dying; sometimes I go to funerals of people I know, from families I know. It's terrible.

NR: *Do they know what they are fighting for? Is that clear?*

CK: They know, they know. And after we took over, they also know that they are not fighting the Tamil people. I made some very clear speeches on this. I suppose you saw those speeches?

NR: *Yes, they were reported.*

CK: I said that it is a battle for peace. That it is not a war against Tamil people. That it is only a war against those who are enemies of peace, the LTTE.

NR: *Prabakaran, in fact, in his recent speech refers to some of these phrases.*

CK: Really?

NR: *Yes, he has quoted them.*

CK: And he is criticising me for them.

NR: *He sees you as the most brutal,*

he calls you "the protagonist of..." You really want to know precisely how he characterises you?

CK: Yes. They depict me in the most terrible ways. They had some booklet where they had me, you know, like a Dracula, with these two teeth sticking out. Have you seen that?

NR: *No.*

CK: It's terrible. They have taken one of those very popular photographs of mine where I'm smiling broadly and they have drawn - you can do that in the computer - two pointed teeth coming out of my mouth like this, with blood pouring down the teeth.

NR: *This is the translation from the Tamil original, not the thing they put out in English (there are some differences): "We do not believe that Chandrika, who figures as the protagonist of the most blood-stained chapter in the fifty year history of racial oppression in Sri Lanka, will, having established peace in the land, solve the Tamil national question in a peaceful way."*

CK: Where did he make this speech?

NR: *It's Prabakaran's Heroes' Day speech.*

CK: This time?

NR: *Yes, this year (on November 27, 1998).*

CK: But then why does he want...

NR: *I suppose this also means that the military campaign is hurting.*

CK: But why then, in the same speech, does he want discussions with us? He doesn't know what he wants. If he has lost faith in Chandrika, then why is he...

NR: *I don't want to make any trouble for your plans...*

CK: (Laughs.)

NR: *...for your peace moves! May be this is rhetoric. Your original, and now reiterated, project of finding a non-chauvinistic solution to this longstanding ethnic question, which may be considered Sri Lanka's principal national question perhaps...*

CK: It is.

NR: *...has been the boldest attempt by any government to respond to Sri Lankan Tamil aspirations. I have this assessment from people who are objective, Tamil moderates in particular. There was the high point of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of July 1957; I think the political package that came with the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987 was substantially a step forward; but everyone is agreed that your Government's constitutional proposals represent something beyond what your father (Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandanaranaike) attempted - and it was thwarted - and what the Indian*

engagement attempted. What previous governments had inhibitions about - that is, going beyond the unitary framework - you clearly went beyond. And you have made it clear that you are committed very much to this. What do you think is a reasonable time frame for this attempt? Prabakaran may be very intransigent, but surely there are the Tamil people, other political parties, moderates...

CK: Well, if the UNP agrees to at least discuss constructively and then finally come to a consensual agreement with us and make this law, I think Prabakaran's intransigence is not important. If we can bring in legally the solutions that we have proposed - long-lasting solutions to the problem - the Tamil people (as I sometimes rhetorically say, for I believe something like that will happen), the few Tamil people who are left with Prabakaran will turn against him.

But we have to prove this to the Tamil people. For once the Tamil people know that in fifty years of Independence, here is a 'Sinhala' leadership that is sincere in wanting to live with them in peace while giving them all their rights. They know that in their heart of hearts and they say so. But we have still not been able to constructively give them what we have wanted to.

We have started all the processes but we have not been able to conclude them satisfactorily simply because of this bizarre Constitution of the UNP, which they themselves amended sixteen times in nine years. It is a fraudulent Constitution, as I say, which stipulates that even to change a dot or a comma in the Constitution, you need a two thirds majority!

And on the other hand, you have a very, very bizarre electoral system - one does not exist and has not existed anywhere else in the world - that this Constitution brought in. They have ensured that no party will ever make two thirds in Parliament. If you look at it in terms of India's electoral system (the first-past-the-post system), our party won 80 per cent - not two thirds but eight tenths - of the seats in Parliament in the '94 parliamentary elections. But when it is translated into figures according to the way votes are counted under this Constitution, we have only one vote more in Parliament.

So it is the UNP's responsibility. They started this war. They made it worse. They brought in a Constitution which will not allow a political-constitutional solution of the problem. So it is their bounden duty to vote with us. We have said we do not expect you to accept this lock, stock and barrel. Come, let's discuss. But for three, four long years, they have shown intransigence and have

been lying through their teeth - you can quote me like that.

That is the only problem. I think that if we can make this law, the Tamil people, the few who are left with Prabakaran, will turn against him. That will be the end of Prabakaran's intransigence.

NR: *You will still try to engage the UNP in an attempt to find bipartisan agreement on the constitutional proposals?*

CK: We are still trying but they are still playing their usual games! Now they are having secret meetings with the LTTE. The C.I.D. investigated an incident in which the UNP's MP, Dr Jayalath Jayawardana, got into the vehicle of an NGO and went into the Wannu jungles and met with (Anton) Balasingham (Political Adviser to the LTTE) and Tamilchelvan (a senior LTTE leader). And strangely now, you find Prabakaran saying something and one week later the UNP's leader says the same thing!

NR: *Another question, linked but somewhat different: the executive presidency. You made a promise to abolish the executive presidency and there are proposals for change, but it is linked with the resolution of this principal national question. Would that be right?*

CK: Yes. That is also part of the constitutional proposals. Some amendment has to be made in the form of the new Constitution. It is part of the new Constitution that we are proposing.

NR: *The UNP doesn't like this linkage.*

CK: We are not going to just give them everything they want without their giving us anything! I say, "Okay, you agree to the resolution of the ethnic problem," which they started, which they made worse, "We will agree to the abolition of the executive presidency." Don't you think that's fair?

NR: *Yes, I think there should be that link. May I also ask you about your thinking on the sequence of elections ahead, because there is a lot of speculation in the press and in the political arena about which election will come first, the parliamentary or presidential...*

CK: We haven't actually decided. Actually, I haven't decided. So we will have whatever we think we can win. That is obviously our goal.

NR: *Within the Constitution.*

CK: Within the Constitution. We will certainly have the elections in time. But now the question is whether you are having them early or not.

NR: *And which election first? The presidential...*

CK: (Laughs.) That is what everybody is speculating about. I shall leave

you in suspense on that one.

NR: *And would you like to say anything on the non-binding referendum? It was mentioned in the press that if the UNP did not co-operate, you would perhaps resort to that technique to put, I suppose, moral pressure...*

CK: All that may be part of the process I was telling you about. If the UNP doesn't respond.

I just want to make one other point: the business community of Sri Lanka has done its bit (the private sector umbrella effort under the chairmanship of businessman Lalith Kothalawala to bring together the ruling People's Alliance, the UNP and others for an interaction on, inter alia, the ethnic question). I thought that was a very good effort, because for the first time, civil society was getting involved. They are really sick and tired of this deadlock - a deadlock not from our side, but from their side. And I thought it was a jolly good idea, especially given the fact that all the big people in the business community are very close to the UNP.

The Government was very supportive. We said we would participate and let the UNP also come. Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe (the UNP leader) is being totally dishonest on this issue, utterly and completely dishonest. First, he was looking for any excuse not to participate. He said he was not coming because G.L. Peiris (Minister of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration, and Deputy Minister of Finance) was coming. I do not know what he has against G.L. Peiris. I was surprised, because he was very friendly with G.L. Peiris, he has come here many times with him to discuss devolution matters and all that. And all of a sudden, he said because he was there... he was just picking quarrels for nothing. At which point I said, "Okay, I don't know what quarrel he has with him, let's not waste our time. If he doesn't like G.L.'s face, I will lead the delegation. I will come to the BMICH (Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall)." He said, "Oh, even if she is coming, I am not coming." That was the first thing, a shocking thing.

Then, secondly, he now has written ... finally he said we will nominate our delegation, let the Government nominate their delegation. I nominated three people, a very good list of people, not all of them politicians. The UNP kept delaying. Apparently this group had rung up Mr. Wickremasinghe and he had sent some absolutely stupid letter, which is just playing ducks and drakes with the whole thing, saying things that had not happened.

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Telling the Chairman of this initiative that when they discussed the matter, Mr. Wickremasinghe had said he would discuss with the Government only if the LTTE was also there. He said that in the letter but the business people say, "We never talked of the LTTE." How can they bring the LTTE? They have neither the power nor the ability to do that.

Their main point was to get the UNP and the Government together. Because they were devastated that the two sides were just not succeeding in getting together. You know, facilitate the getting together of the UNP and the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party), because they knew people from both sides at a personal level. He says, "You know I told you that you should get the LTTE. So what is happening, is the LTTE coming?" He is just being very dishonest about the whole thing. That means this will not happen either.

NR: *You will visit India later this month and there have been preparations for the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement, which will be a major development. Other subjects will be covered. You have always been seen as a friend of India and during your Presidency bilateral relations have been very good, according to the press. But how do you, as a leader, see the engagement of India in this business, the plus and minus points? Some of us would say that India is morally obliged, given the inputs it made earlier, to help Sri Lanka and your Government to find a solution in better ways perhaps than have been on offer. How do you see that?*

CK: Well, I would tend to agree with you. I think India does have a moral obligation, given the fact that they were also partly responsible for the commencement of the war. Not India, but the Indian government of that time. But we have had a lot of moral support from Indian Governments and, perhaps excepting one or two instances, not much more than that.

NR: *I see. How do you see this Free Trade Agreement and why is it so important? You seem to have personally spent a lot of time on bringing this forward and taken a lot of interest in the details. It would be very significant?*

CK: It would be. For the Sri Lankan economy, it would be very significant. India stands to lose very little by giving us these concessions, but we stand to gain a lot.

NR: *Your impression of the other, the non-LTTE Tamil parties, both the democratic TULF and the militants who seem to have entered in some way the democratic stream. Do they amount to much?*

CK: (Smiles.)

NR: *Are they working with you?*

CK: They are working with us, they are very supportive of political solutions we have offered. They have, of course, been critical of some of the clauses and we have done some discussion with them, as we have tried to engage the UNP. We have, of course, done this consistently.

NR: *So they have been more positive than the UNP?*

CK: Much more positive than the UNP. All the minority parties and, as you know, every single one of the minority parties in Parliament is either in the Government coalition or supporting us in Parliament. I would say that as a whole all these parties are trying their level best, but the LTTE systematically decimated the Tamil leadership of this country. Systematically. So how they can call themselves liberators of the Tamil people, I don't know. They have killed off some of the best of the best Tamil leaders. Political leaders, intellectuals, professionals - anybody who opposed the LTTE's violence and terror has been killed off.

I think that it is a very big tragedy for the Tamil people today that they do not have a sufficient number of strong democratic leaders. Those who are there are now ageing. There are a few young people but it is not enough.

NR: *One of the complaints in Prabakaran's latest Heroes' Day address is that the international community is apathetic and insensitive to history and to the sufferings of the Sri Lankan Tamils. He pays tribute to international sensitivity to other human rights issues, "but not to us." This is a clear complaint, several paragraphs are devoted to this plaintive complaint.*

Against this background, we have published in Frontline (December 4 and 18, 1998) a two-part article by Rohan Gunaratna on the LTTE in South Africa. This has also been covered in the press in Sri Lanka. First, the organisation had a base in South India - Tamil Nadu in particular - and once that was over, after 1987, it shifted to South Africa. It has worked to establish links with the Tamils there, the descendants of former indentured Tamil labourers who form a substantial section of the South African population. The LTTE seems to have made some contacts with ANC (African National Congress) leaders or at least individuals. Gunaratna's investigative article speaks of training camps in South Africa, some procurement and so on. It is also reported that your Foreign Minister has taken this up and you yourself have expressed concern. Could you tell us something about this? Is there truth to these reports?

CK: Well, it is true that we are con-

cerned about the South African Government's probable - whether it is the Government or the ANC, I don't know - links with the LTTE. The LTTE has successfully pulled the wool over their eyes by pretending to be liberators. And the ANC, I suppose, having had a history of liberation, was sympathetic. But we are now striving to explain to them the nature of the LTTE, its behavioural patterns and the dangers which lurk for anybody who supports the LTTE. They must not forget that the LTTE systematically kills off all those who support it!

But it is only the South African Government - all the other governments that at one time, because of the UNP's wrong and idiotic policy towards the ethnic question, all those western governments and others who supported the LTTE or sympathised with the LTTE have now completely veered from that policy. Because they accept that this Government has an intelligent, humane and correct policy towards the problem.

NR: *There is another complication, it seems, legally. Prabakaran is Accused No. 1 in the Rajiv assassination case. This is not some dubious trial, but very professionally done. And Pottu Amman is Accused No. 2 and Akila, if it is the same one (you referred to as dead), is Accused No. 3. So here is the leader of a movement who is wanted in your neighbouring state. I suppose he has not surfaced and, therefore, it is not up to the Sri Lankan Government, which can't reach him. Do you think that at the moment it is an academic question or a real question: that is, that talks are possible for a negotiated settlement and the leader (of the movement) is the prime wanted in a major criminal case? Have you thought about this?*

CK: Well, I suppose this is an issue that comes up with many guerilla leaders, but that doesn't, that shouldn't, prevent a government from talking with them - if a solution is possible.

NR: *Any concluding thoughts on how Sri Lankans, the ruling coalition and alliance, the Opposition, Tamil parties, the people of your country should respond to this challenge? What would be your appeal as head of state and government? What do you expect them to do over the next few years?*

CK: Well, I have been consistently saying this. We expect them - both sides - to move away from the traps that you were mentioning earlier: Sinhalese from the Sinhala Only trap and the Tamil people from the Eelam trap. And I believe they have already moved away, so there is nothing much to appeal to on that score.

Of course, there will always be the

(continued on next page)

THE PARALLEL AND PARADOX OF MINDLESS VIOLENCE

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Where does a parallel get drawn between Cambodia and Sri Lanka in terms of violence? Sure, the former has had a different kind of endemic violence, certainly not of the ethnic variety, but based on international intrigues propelling warring factions.

Yet, the power struggles in Phnom Penh and Colombo do have a parallel. And negotiations to end both civil wars also have had to follow international initiatives. This is the parallel and paradox of the two countries. And, most certainly, for some, the personalities of Pol Pot and Velupillai Prabhakaran, both liberators turned oppressors par excellence, strike another dangerous parallel. If similarities abound on the issue of ruthlessness of killings or assassinations, the differences between the two leaders, in terms of particular traits, are even more so, as is the case with every dictator or aspiring dictator: every tyrant is power-hungry in his own unique way.

Pol Pot, the dreaded 70-year-old general, remained a puzzle even in his death which took place in April last year, of an apparent heart attack. His quest for an agrarian utopia, initiated

soon after the Khmer Rouge captured power in the mid-1970s, ended four years later with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

However, the Khmer regime, in the meanwhile, killed thousands and thousands of Cambodians in the absurd "Marxist-Leninist" quest for an utopia, wherein the labour camps were worse than Siberian horror stories under Stalin. Indicted for killing more than two million Cambodians, Pol Pot had escaped punishment by keeping a local population on the Thailand border captive. As he lay ill dying, his young wife and teenaged daughter cried after which the last bastion of the Khmer Rouge guerillas fell to the Cambodian troops.

The drama that followed saw prime minister Hun Sen establish control over Cambodia, having driven out prince Ranaridh after an internecine battle. Hun Sen swiftly moved in to consolidate his hold and got Ranaridh back into the country after the latter's father, king Norodom Sihanouk, "pardoned" him on the basis of a Japan-brokered agreement.

Hun Sen got two Khmer Rouge leaders to surrender to him last month. The two leaders, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, had been ideologues for a long time, the former even having been the president of the infamous 1976-79 Khmer republic, when Pol Pot was in full control. Hun Sen himself was then a dissident Khmer leader who had managed to escape a purge and flee to neighbouring Vietnam even as the Khmer Rouge army resorted to setting up the "killing fields". Now president, Hun Sen has wrested the power of pardon from the king, who is undergoing medical treatment at Beijing, and effectively pardoned the two Khmer leaders, leaving the king with no option but to endorse the decision. The king later made a statement critical of the move.

According to Hun Sen, the two leaders have apologised for the "killing fields", and hence, there is no need for their trial, since a national

reconciliation process was on. Hun Sen has even hinted at the possibility of the two leaders being pardoned even if an international tribunal finds them guilty of the Khmer regime's mass murders. Hun Sen's argument is that he wants the civil war in the embattled south-east Asian country to come to an end.

The attempt to get Pol Pot accountable for all the murders was more bizarre than a Kafkaesque novel.

Languishing in the jungles for a long time, he was never allowed to be captured. Next, even as he was ageing, his possible surrender or capture was part of the deal which other Khmer leaders had been making with the Hun Sen regime for a long time. Thereby, Pol Pot became a liability for all Khmer leaders, except for Ta Maak, the one-legged general who is still at large with about 150 guerillas.

Finally, it was announced that Pol Pot had been detained by Khmer commanders themselves, but was never handed over to the process of law.

Also, any kind of verdict on the Khmer Rouge issue is far from clear. Hun Sen had sent his message on this to United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan a year ago, following which UN human rights experts visited Cambodia. According to UN special representative to Cambodia, Lathan Mehrotra, Kofi Annan will "soon" take a decision on the issue, probably this month. In the meantime, the UN will have to contend with the United States' firebombing of Baghdad in the face of the defiance of Saddam Hussein.

Hence, even if the UN decides to try the Khmer leaders, it would be a long and difficult process, almost a farce.

The meeting between Hun Sen and the two surrendered leaders took place at the former's residence in Takmau town near Phnom Penh. "I am welcoming them with flowers, not bullets," Hun Sen said, even as another former Khmer Rouge commander, Ieng Sary, who had received an official amnesty two years ago, looked on smiling. It would be difficult to ascertain whether the pardon received by the two leaders is a tactical move by the president to muster crucial electoral support against the prince: one more round of political drama, but trauma for the Cambodians.

(continued from page 25)

extremists but we don't have to take notice of them. If history took notice of the extremist minorities, the human race could never have moved forward. I believe that a majority of all people of this country want peace. That is what we want them to continue to want - and support us in seeing through these measures.

We cannot wait for ever, jelled in a situation where the UNP has fixed the Constitution, fixed the war, and refuses to make it change. We refuse to be jelled to that situation and be frozen there.

We will very soon have to take decisions that may not completely be in keeping with the present Constitution - but will not be anti-constitutional or anti-democratic. My request, my appeal to the people of Sri Lanka is to support us politically on that issue.

NR: Thank you very much, President.

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All these apart, the background of the Khmer leaders is what makes shocking reading. In the crucial months before Pol Pot's death, the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh travelled to Cambodia to meet Chea Samy, the renowned dancer and also Pol Pot's sister-in-law, her husband, Pol Pot's brother, another of Pol Pot's brothers, and Khieu Samphan's brother as well. He found out from Chea that she and her husband had realised, only after the 1976 Revolution, that it was indeed their little-lost relative who was in full control of the Khmer Rouge regime. They saw his picture on the kitchen wall of the labour camp in which they had been dumped.

The Revolution was simply against all art: especially music and dance. Chea and her husband had endured the labour camps as any other ordinary Cambodian had done: Pol Pot was incorruptible; he had held out nothing for relatives or friends; in a way, he had not even remembered them!

Another baffling revelation came from Chea: she had known princess Soumphady who was the greatest of dancers of Cambodia this century. In the early part of the century, when Chea had not even been born, the princess had travelled to France, along with king Sisowath's entourage, and had captured the hearts of the French; and their rain-dances had been immortalised by none-other-than sculptor August Rodin in a series of sketches. Sisowath's son who became the next king took a liking to Luk Khun Meak, a dancer from the region of Kompon Thom. Luk, a flamboyant dancer, brought her relatives from the village to the palace, and, among them, was Saloth Saar, a boy of six, Saloth Saar, who was to be known across the world as Pol Pot.

And it was true, Amitav Ghosh learnt from Chea, that Luk died of starvation during the Revolution and one of her daughters had her breasts sliced off as a punishment for stealing.

Indeed, Amitav Ghosh finds from Chea that Saloth was an indeed amiable boy. At the palace, Saloth obtained a government scholarship to study electronics in Paris. At Paris, he spent a lot of time reading and knew the great French poets Rimbaud and Verlaine by heart. He had also studied Marxism-Leninism and after a few months of returning to Cambodia, he

The Hindutva Brigade Targets Christians

T N Gopalan

The Sangh Parivaar have started baring their fangs once again. Christmas for the Christians of Gujarat in western India became one prolonged nightmare as the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad unleashed mayhem on them, their churches and other institutions managed by them.

Following furious nation-wide protests, the state government there, run by who else but the BJP itself, was forced to rather reluctantly rein in the Parivaar. Still even by the first week of January sporadic incidents continued to occur leading to widespread demands for the dismissal of the state government for alleged collusion and inaction against the offenders.

As noted commentator Harish Khare points it out: "Gujarat has been a veritable laboratory for the Parivaar in their attempts at mobilisation of the Hindutva agenda. The Christian provide a soft target; the Muslims have demonstrated that they have a capacity to retaliate...." It should be noted here that Gujarat is perhaps the strongest bastion of the BJP having a two-thirds majority in the state Assembly.

Though the nationwide revulsion aroused by the incidents should warm the hearts of the minorities in Gujarat - after all they will realise they are not all that

vanished into the jungles and surfaced only during the Revolution!

The Cambodian Revolution, Amitav Ghosh interprets, is a mindless attempt to do the impossible: to reverse the current of history and annihilate the middle classes. It is to the credit of the resilience of the middle classes that they held on braving the heaviest of odds and those who endured every bit of it included the closest relatives of the Khmer Rouge leaders.

The 1976 Revolution has a silent aura about it now: its various participants, including Khieu Samphan and Hun Sen, don't want to talk about it. However, the bits and pieces of the Revolution would remain, spread both in time and space, and perhaps, Sri Lanka is one place which continues to suffer in this manner. ●

defenceless - and anyway they would not be able to mount any serious challenge to the Hindus there, given their relatively small proportion, the problem of tackling the majority chauvinism should prove daunting in the years to come.

Significantly the Gujarati language Press sought to project the Christian missionaries as the villains and gleefully lapped up the propaganda of the Sangh Parivaar, reinforcing the popular prejudices even further.

Not surprisingly the right-wing organisations dubbed the English language media as anti-Hindu and said only they were exacerbating the situation still further by putting out exaggerated and distorted reports.

According to reports, till 1996 the state had recorded only a solitary incident of attack on the Christians though it has been notorious for Hindu-Muslim clashes. But the very next year it rose to nine and shot up to as many as 38 last year, and that after the return of the BJP to power.

By far the most serious incident was reported from Rajkot in the earlier phase, when twenty copies of the New Testament were burnt in a raid on a school by the Sangh Parivaar. The provocation, the alleged forcible conversion of the Hindu students by the school authorities. A few Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) activists were taken into custody, but nothing much happened thereafter.

In the latest instance a little-known outfit, called the Hindu Jagran Manch took out a rally on the Christmas day to protest against conversions. Allegedly some provocative speeches were made and there was some stoning. Then all hell broke loose.

Churches in the Dang and Surat districts were attacked, Christian institutions were ransacked and set fire to and several missionaries beaten up. "Oh, they were not churches in the strict sense of the term, only make-shift, anyway it was the Christians who attacked a "peaceful rally" provoking the attacks, while none would be allowed to take law into their hands, the government cannot be a passive spectator in the face of the questionable activities of the missionaries" - such was the government's reaction, giving

greater fillip to the hoodlums.

As the incidents continued and not just the opposition but even its allies started criticising the attacks, the Centre was forced to sit up and take notice and it made some noise, deputed a central team to investigate what was going on and present a report.

The VHP was unfazed. It saw a conspiracy by the Christian West and their agents. Comically its chief utilised the occasion to lash out at India's Economics Nobel Laureate for the year, Amartya Sen.

"The prize has been awarded only to propagate Christianity and wipe out Hinduism..." he asserted. But how come the poor Sen could undertake such a formidable task? Well, did he not announce that he would utilise the money to establish a trust to spread literacy which in turn would only benefit the missionaries!

Naturally questions have arisen as to the timing of the incidents. They come in the wake of the drubbing handed down to the BJP in three state Assembly polls which in turn was followed by a brainstorming session of the Rashtriya Swamyam Sevak Sangh (RSS). Have the Sangh Parivaar started wondering whether falling back on the Hindutva plank is the only

way to seize the political initiative yet again?

After all its foundation is its communalism, its sectarian campaign. And it was the infamous Rath Yatra of the Lal Kishen Advani way back in 1990 which is perceived to have provided a tremendous boost to it. And the yatra was by way of asserting the "right of the Hindus to build a temple at the Ram Jama Bhoomi (Lord Rama's birth-place)." After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the BJP had to play down the temple issue since it found the resulting communal conflagration did not really bring in too many votes to it. If anything in the 1996 elections, the constituency wherein Ayodhya is situated went to the CPI. The subsequent collapse of the United Front at the central level, of the coalition of the backward castes and the Dalits and, most importantly of the Congress itself, led to the BJP's resurgence, but still on a very limited scale. And under Sonia Congress seems to be winning back its lost lustre, even the alienated Muslims preferring to rally behind it instead of such disparate forces led by the Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav. In fact in a recent Assembly by-election in the Uttara Pradesh, Yadav's candidate lost his secu-

rity deposit,

In such a scenario, what to do to bounce back into reckoning? The Vajpayee regime has been a near disaster and some avowedly corrective measures are being attempted to improve its image. But the larger question of winning the electorate's confidence remains.

That apart the party's Hindutva agenda cannot be kept in cold storage eternally. It is in such circumstances the Gujarat riots have taken place. And it is a safe place to experiment, what with their own government in place there. By attacking the Christian missionaries as western agents, the saffron brigade could hope to win at least a section of the rising middle classes raised on a diet of the uniqueness of Hindutva - similar to the Jathika Chinthanaya variant propagated by Sinhala-Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka.

If attacking Muslims is proving costly, why not hound out the Christians? After all Sonia herself is a Christian and an anti-Christian hysteria could prevent her from gaining any further mileage because of the BJP's own blunders. At least such are perhaps the fond hopes of the Parivaar.

And many New Delhi correspondents have reported receiving a scurrilous

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pamphlet attacking the Rajiv Gandhi clan on the ground that Sonia is a Roman Catholic, that her husband had converted to Christianity and that even his father Feroze Gandhi was a Muslim, not a Parsi and so on. Of course it was an anonymous pamphlet, but no great intelligence is required to guess who could have brought it out and for what purpose.

At the Bangalore meet of the BJP, its ageing president Kusabhai Thakre asserted that the Vajpayee government had better implement the party's ideology, and told the Prime Minister sternly that excuses like compulsions of coalition politics would not wash.

It is clearly a war between the moderates and the hawks within the ruling BJP and also an attempt for the beleaguered party to grope for a way out. But then it is the innocent Christians, at this juncture that is, who are paying for its political compulsions. More important the secular ethos that has kept the country together taking a severe knock and that is a matter of serious concern.

While the Christians are indeed a soft target and would not be able to retaliate in kind - apart from the adverse international publicity that attacks on them generally provokes - Muslims are a different proposition altogether. If an emboldened Parivaar decides to take them on next, the result could be disastrous.

The vain attempt to take over a dargah in Karnataka, the rape of nuns in Madhya Pradesh - justified by a VHP functionary as the legitimate response of the patriotic youth upset over the anti-national activities of the missionaries - even the unprecedented sacking of the naval chief Vishnu Bhagwat who was accused of being half a Christian and anti-Hindu by one of his deputies, the virulent attack on Sonia as a Christian, the constant snipings at the missionaries and the bogey of conversion, not to speak of the targeting of the Muslims in various

ways in various states, all these point to a sinister pattern.

Did not Guru Golwalkar, who succeeded Hegdewar, the founder of the RSS, as its leader, say that only those whose janmabhoomi (land of birth) coincides with the punyabhoomi (holy land) can qualify as first class citizens of any country?

The Parivaar have not lost sight of their agenda, they will never. One has to read the foaming-at-the-mouth rantings of a man like Gurumurthy, a chartered accountant by profession but who is considered one of the most authentic voices of the Hindutva, in the columns of the Indian Express, against the Muslims, the Christians and the Communists to get an idea of the deep seated anathema of this fundamentalist gang towards anything opposed to its self-proclaimed values.

As has been repeatedly pointed out in these columns, fortunately India is a far too complex a country, with too many varied, even contradictory forces at work on its polity, to make it easy for the Parivaar-type loonies to overrun the entire country in the fashion of Adolf Hitler and his Nazis.

Still it should be a sobering lesson for those among the Sri Lankan Tamils who have hoped to gain the support of the BJP and its front organisations for the Eelam cause.

The LTTE might have alienated the Muslims, and the more passionate among its supporters might brush that issue aside as if it is of no consequence, but would they like to alienate the Christians too? The BJP touch is fatal. It destroys the soul of anyone it comes into contact with.

Bishop's Appeal

The Bishop of Jaffna has in a New Year message appealed to all parties, including the LTTE, to avoid extremist positions and seek peace through dialogue in a spirit of accommodation.

In a new year message published in the Jaffna daily 'Uthayan', Bishop Thomas Savundranayagam said the LTTE leader's radio broadcast on the occasion of Heroes Day had held out hopes of talks to end the war. The people, the Bishop said, were being subjugated and destroyed because of the war and he appealed to the LTTE to enter into a dialogue to bring an end to the ethnic conflict in a spirit of accommodation.

"You should consider the sufferings inflicted on the people by your extremist actions in the course of your struggle" and "you must take into account the human angle."

Bishop Savundranayagam asked the government to give up the concept of waging 'war for peace' and stop paying only lip service to the goal of attaining peace. The government should set aside its particular likes and dislikes and take bold steps towards bringing a lasting peace, he said.

He appealed to the opposition UNP to look at the ethnic question and the war from a non-partisan angle in the interest of the welfare of the people. The Bishop urged the opposition to sincerely co-operate with efforts to find a solution.

Addressing the Tamil parties, Bishop Savundranayagam appealed to them for unity as unity essential for survival. They should set aside their prejudices and mutual animosities and work for the common good of the Tamil people, he said.

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Murali son of Mr. & Mrs. Nee-lakandan of 175 Kandy Road, Chavakachcheri, Sri Lanka

and Padma Rani daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Narashiman of 40 Burges Road, East Ham, London E6 2BH on 14th December 1998 at London Sri Murugan Temple, Church Road, London E12 6AF.

Mohamed Altaf son of Mr. & Mrs. M.Y.M. Raof of Turtle Way, Seycelles and Fathima Maheesa daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Abdul Musawwir of 43 Kongtree Road, Galle, Sri Lanka on 15th December 1998 at The Civic Centre, Harrow, Middx., UK.

OBITUARIES



Miss Daisy Selvaranee Rasiyah (78), Retired teacher, Vembadi Girls High School and Union College; daughter of late Mr. and Mrs. S.K. Rasiyah of Tellipallai; loving sister of Mrs. Amirtharane Ratnasingham, late V.R. Selvarajah, late H.R. Kanagarajah and Thevaranee; sister-in-law of late Mr. S.J. Ratnasingham, Mrs. Selvaranee Kanagarajah (Australia) and Mrs. Inpamani Selvarajah (Sri Lanka); loving aunt of Dr. Kumaran, Dr. Dayanthi Devasagayam, Vasanthi, late Rajan, Mohan, Thabitha Giritharan, Suthaharan, Suhanthi, Sutharmini Chelliah and Pamini; grand aunt of Loretta, Rebecca and Ramyan passed away peacefully on 10th November 1998

and buried on 14.11.98.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who helped them during the time of bereavement, attended the funeral, paid floral tributes, sent messages of condolence and shared in their grief. - 64 Jessup Close, London SE18 7HB. Tel: 0181 311 9967.



(15.11.1908 - 17.12.98)

Sivapakiam, beloved wife of the late A. Navaratnam, Retired Malayan Medical Service, passed away peacefully at the age of 90, in Yellowknife, Canada on 17th December 1998 and was cremated in Edmonton on 22nd December.

She is the beloved mother of Anandavalli, mother-in-law of late T. Shanmugarajah, J.P., Attorney-at-law of Kondavil, grandmother of Sharmini, grand mother-in-law of Ranjit and great grand mother of Praveen and Ranjana all of Yellowknife, Canada.

She is also the beloved mother of Jeyatheva, formerly General Manager (Finance) of Walker, Sons & Co. Ltd., Colombo and later of Malawi and Botswana, mother-in-law of Sarojinidevi (Saro), grandmother of Shyamala and Revathy, grand mother-in-law of Balakrishnan and Rajan Rajasingham and great grandmother of Sathya, Sanjay and Nisha, all resident in Sydney.

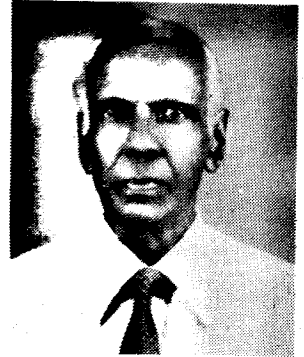
She is also the beloved mother of Sugunatheva, formerly an Architect with British Rail and presently with Barnet Council, mother-in-law of Thangamanohari (Thanga), grandmother of Keshava and Keshini, all resident in London.

She is also the beloved mother of Vimalatheva, formerly Marketing Manager of Jafferjees and now at VTV Group and mother-in-law of Katpakeswari (Thevi) of

Colombo.

She will be missed by her close family, relatives and friends.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives for their attendance at the funeral, expressions of sympathy and for all the assistance rendered during their bereavement. - N. Sugunatheva, 17 The Drive, Northwood, Middx., HA6 1HQ. Tel: 01923 825219.



Mr. Muttiah Selvaratnam, Retd., Government Servant, of Vaddukodai, Sri Lanka; born 3.5.1919; son of late Velupillai Muttiah and Theivanaipillai Muttiah of Vaddukodai; beloved husband of late Saraswathy Pushpadevi; loving father of Varapirasathan (Oman Aviation SVCS), Senthan (UK) and Seyon (NDBS Stock Brokers Pvt Ltd.); brother of late V.M. Wijeyaratnam, late V.M. Seevaratnam, V.M. Sathianathan, late Mrs. Pathmavathy Thiagarajah, Mrs. Ponmalar Coomarasamy and Mrs. Jeyaladchumy Jeyasingham, passed away peacefully on 10.12.98. The funeral took place at his residence, 13/11 Alexandra Road, Wellawatte, Colombo 6 on 12.12.98.

The family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and support during the period of great sorrow. - 99 Landseer Avenue, Manor Park, London E12 6HS. Tel: 0181 478 3785.

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15 JANUARY 1999

IN MEMORIAM

First Death Anniversary



In loving memory of **Mrs. Pakiaratnam Kandiah**, wife of late Mr. Saravanamuthu Kandiah; daughter of late Mr. & Mrs. Ponnambalam; the only sister of Mrs. Parimalaratnam Thirunavukarasu of Yogaswamy's abode, Colombuthurai; beloved mother of Sivayogaratnam, Sivayoganathan, Sivayogeswary, Sivayogaiswaran and Sivayogan; loving mother-in-law of Varatharajah, Sivathasan, Umasakthy, Sivayogi and Amirthavalli on the first anniversary of her passing away on 3rd February 1998.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by children, grand children and great grand children.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who condoled with them during the past year of great sorrow. - 3 New Leasow, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham B76 1YL.



In loving memory of **Mrs. Ganeswary Tharmalingam** of Kondavil East, Jaffna on the Sixth Anniversary of her passing away on 21.1.93.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving husband Tharmalingam; children Brabalini, Bremjit and Ranjit; son-in-law Dr. W.N. Lingandhan; daughters-in-law Dr. Vani Bremjit and Shamini

Ranjit; grandchildren Abhirami, Sathya, Praneela, Praseetha, Prashoban Praveen and Anjana. - 32 Anvil Way, North Springfield, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 5LZ. Tel: 01245 466363.

Fourth Death Anniversary



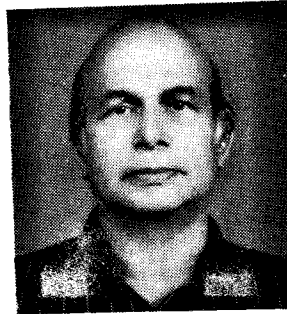
In loving memory of **Mrs. Sivagamasunthary Sitsapesan** on the fourth anniversary

of her passing away on 19th January 1995.

It's four years since you died,
And left us in tears and pain.
Now you are gone,
Though our lives go on,
They will never be quite the same.
Your life had touched so many,
and though with us you had to part,
In our minds
You have left behind
Your warm and loving heart.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by her husband Sitsapesan, son Manoharan, daughter Savitri, daughter-in-law Rebecca, son-in-law Varathan and grandchildren Holly, Daniel and Luxmmi. - 6 Cambria Lodge, 2c Oakhill Road, London SW15 2QU. Tel: 0181 870 1072.

Fifth Death Anniversary



In loving memory of **Justice Tellippalai Wanam Rajaratnam**, retired Supreme Court Judge and Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka on the fifth anniversary of his passing away on 15th January 1994.

'Love and remembrance
Last for ever'.

Sadly missed and dearly loved by his family.

Dr. Jaishan Wins BBC Award



Dr. Jaishan K. Mahan won the Young Achiever's Award 1998 in the BBC Asian Awards Programme conducted at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham in November.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Feb. 2 Feast of the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Feb. 5 Feast of St. Agatha.

Feb. 6 6.00pm Tamil Chamber of Commerce (UK) launches Two Tamil Books 'Vinvetiyil Veerakaviyugal' (Tamil Nadu Govt.'s First Prize winner) & 'Diana Vanjithara? Vanjikkaappattara?' authored by Dr. K. Indrakumar, at the Trinity Community Centre, East Avenue, Manor Park, London E12. All welcome; South London Tamil Welfare Group (S.L.T.W.G.) Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Feb. 8 Feast of St. Scholastic.

Feb. 11 Eekathasi; Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Feb. 13 Pirathosam; S.L.T.W.G. Women's Front meets. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Feb. 14 Maha Sivarathiri.

Feb. 15 Amavasai.

Feb. 19 Sathurthi.

Feb. 20 S.L.T.W.G. Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Feb. 21 Shashti; Feast of St. Peter Damian.

Feb. 22 Karthigai.

Feb. 26 Eekathasi.

Feb. 27 Pirathosam.

At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HG. TEL: 0181 381 3086/4068.

Feb. 10 6.30pm Republic Day Celebrations. Chief Guest: His Excellency Sri Lalit Mansingh, High Commissioner for India. All welcome.

Feb. 14 4.00pm Maha Sivarathiri celebrations. Bhajans-Puja-Prasad. All welcome.

Jaishan entered the Medical Faculty of Leicester University from Warwick school in 1992. During his medical studies, he achieved a certificate of competence from the Trauma Centre, Washington, USA; received the Queen's Commission from the British Army. He qualified in 1997. He won the university colours for rowing, is a keen Scuba diver and participated in the Belize Coral Quay project.

Jaishan is a keen mountaineer and has organised expeditions to Mt. Kilimanjaro in 1996, to Bolivia in 1997, both sponsored by the British Army. He has climbed Mt. Elbus, the highest in Europe.

Bharata Natya Arangetram of Ahila and Mithila - An Appreciation



On St. Cecilia's day, November 22nd 1998, we were privileged to see the Dance Debut of Selvi Ahila and Selvi Mithila Ramakrishnan at the Secombe Theatre, Sutton. This Arangetram was special inasmuch as, from the outset we, the audience, were made to feel participants rather than mere spectators at a most important family event. We saw the Puja at the beginning that is the empowerment by God - through the agency of their Guru, Smt Subathra Shanteepan - of the young artistes. What a privilege and a joy to witness!

We were thus enfolded as it were in the whole evening's performance, and followed with eager pleasure and pride each successive item in the well-balanced programme.

From her working with the highly-respected Dhananjayans and the fact that she had trained the two dancers, Smt Subathra was able to bring choreography to bear in a brilliant manner. This was particularly in evidence in the climactic Varnam 'Innum en manam' set to Charuheshi Ragam, and in the second half of the programme, the Bhajan in Raga Behag. The empathy between the two sisters, and between them and their Guru was particularly apparent and most moving.

No shade of the spectrum of the emotions or rasas was neglected, and I was especially struck by the moments of both pathos and humour that lit up their programme.

Ahila and Mithila throughout their performance, exhibited outstanding qualities of dignity and composure, with a collected and thoughtful mien that made very clear to us all their deep appreciation of, not only the cultural but the spiritual import of what they were doing. Bharatanatyam is not

merely an art form, but a profoundly enriching experience of the spirit, and we are so indebted to the youthful and joyous dancers for sharing their talent with us that evening.

Nattuvangam was of course provided by their Guru, Smt Subathra Shanteepan, and the loving care with which she guided and watched her pupils the whole evening was exemplary. Ahila and Mithila were warmly supported by the vocal accompaniment of their Guru in music at Bhavan's UK Centre, Mrs. Sivasakthi Sivanesan, whose singing was a scintillating delight throughout the performance. Our Mridangam teacher at the Bhavan, Sri M. Balachander, provided rhythmic accompaniment with every manifestation of loving support. Melodious accompaniment on the violin came from Sri Kothandapani and Sri P. Gnanavarathan played the flute delightfully.

The excellent brochure was the work of Ahila and Mithila's dear father Sri Ramakrishnam, and we congratulate him and Smt Ruby Ramakrishnan on the evening and thank them for their kindness and hospitality and their gift to the world of two such delightful young people as Selvi Ahila and Selvi Mithila.

Dr. John R. Marr.

Maulia Invited to 10 Downing Street



Maulia, ten year old daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Selvarajah of Hall Wicks Road, and pupil of Hart Hill Primary School, Luton was one of the three top Luton children invited to tea with Cherie Blair, the Prime Minister's wife at Downing Street on 8th December 1998. Margaret Moran, M.P. for Luton South took the trio, after Luton schools nominated the three special pupils aged between nine and thirteen. Maulia is described by her school as an all-round pupil of achievement extremely helpful to everyone and a budding author having already written a book.

After tea, she met the Prime Minister,

who congratulated her on her achievements, and to whom she presented a copy of the book, 'A Dangerous New World' authored by her. The visit of a lifetime ended with a tour of the House of Commons, live interview with Anglia television on Westminster Green and a VIP dinner at Planet Hollywood.

Maulia's father Mr. N. Selvarajah was Chief Librarian, Evelyn Rutnam Institute for Inter Cultural Studies, Jaffna, Sri Lanka before arriving in the UK.

Indumathi's Well-Interpreted Performance



Indumathi Srikumar from London gave a scintillating Bharatanatyam recital on 28th December 1998 at the Bharatha Vidya Bhavan Hall, Mylapore during the Chennai Music and Dance Festival, under the auspices of Sri Kapali Fine Arts. A disciple of the late Venkatachalapathi, she follows the Kalakshetra style. A ragamalika thalamalika Natyanjali composed by Dhananjayan was the opening item, which was appealing. The Sranjani Varnam, 'Sami Nee' which describes Lord Muruga was the main item. The sancharis included the tale of Valli being duped by Muruga, disguised as a hunter and an old man, who finally reveals his true form to Valli. The interpretation was excellently enacted by Indumathi.

The intricate theermanams were very well executed with precise footwork. The song 'Karpagavalli' in praise of Karpagambal, the Goddess at Kapali temple, composed by Veeramani Iyer of Jaffna, interestingly depicted the Goddess who transforms herself into a peacock to worship the Lord. In 'Kanden Kanden', an Arunachala Kavirayer composition, Anjaneya's happiness on seeing Sita was brought out beautifully with emotion. The Tillana, in Behag raga and Kanda Ekam tala was of a high standard highlighting the accurate footwork of the artiste.

Rajasekharan's excellent singing and nattuvangam were an asset to the performance. R. Thiagarajah - Flute, Seetharama Sarma - Violin and Balachandran - Mridangam gave enormous support to the recital.

15 JANUARY 1999

Shagobi and Shobitha



Friends, relatives and enthusiasts of Bharatha Natyam were provided with an unusual treat at the Logan Hall, University of London on the 14th of November 1998. The hosts were VSSK (Gopal) and Mrs. Sakintha Kumarasamy presently of Essex. Their two pretty daughters Shagobi (18) and Shobitha (16) performed their Arangetram with such professionalism that the audience nearly forgot that this was a maiden concert and not a full scale performance by some professionals from Tamil Nadu. The vocal rendition, the accompaniments and above all the Nattuvangam uplifted the arangetram to an extremely high standard which you see only in Tamil Nadu Festivals.

Shagobi and Shobitha had their early education in Ooty, South India and learnt the grammar of Bharatha Natyam from K.R. Ponniah Pillai of Salem. After settling down in Essex, England they came under their present Gurus Pushkala Gopal and Unni Krishnan for the aesthetics of dance. Pushkala and Unnikrishnan, both from the Dhananjayan tradition of Tamil Nadu - need no introduction to Bharatha Natyam enthusiasts from Britain, where they are highly respected for their knowledge and style of presentation.

The performance opened with the Vinayaga Sthuthi - 'Pirabo Ghanapathi' - a song by the great Saint Gnanananda of Thabovanam made popular by his chief disciple Swami Haridas - the singing saint of the south.

After Alarippu, 'Eru Mayil Eri Vilyadum Mugam' - on Murugan and the Jathiswaram, Shagobi presented a beautiful composition in Telugu by Sri Annamacharya - a sacred song on the deity at Thirupathi. Next followed the Varnam presented as the Nrithyobaharam, a composition in Tamil by Smt Kalpagasundari, mother of Pushkala Gopal. 'Aranginiley Aada Vanthal' - a selection from Chilapathikaram, one of the greatest of Tamil Classics described the performance by Maadhavi in King Pandyas Court was a memorable composition by Sri Thandayuthapani Pillai and was excellently performed by Shobitha.

The Ashtapathi - Jayadev's love lyrics on Radha's love for Krishna could not have been more adequately performed. Although performed alone by Shagobi, the audience saw two Radhas on stage. The

Guru Pushkala's solo vocal rendition of the ashtapathi with a thamboor in hand transported the audience direct to Gokulam. Well done Guru and Sishya.

The item chosen for the Sabtham was indeed a happy choice. Jaffna's greatest poet, Inuvil Veeramani Iyer had composed the Das Avatharam (Ten reincarnations) of God Vishnu especially composed and sent from Jaffna for Shagobi and Shobitha, who did justice to this dramatic duet.

Special mention should be made of the choice of a solo male vocalist throughout the programme. Srivatsan - a reputed singer brought down from Bangalore had a soothing voice which enriched the Arangetram right from the Pillayar Sthuthi up to the Thillana and Mangalam. Congratulations to the Kumarasamis, Shabogi and Shobitha.

Wimal Sockanathan.

Vanee's Bharatha Natya Arangetram



On September 12, 1998, Vanee Siva, daughter of Dr. Thiru Siva and Rathy Siva of Staten Island, New York; a senior student of Shoba Sharma, had her Bharatha Natya Arangetram at the Edward Nash Theatre in North Branch, New Jersey, USA. This event was attended by well over seven hundred art lovers.

Shoba Sharma is a senior disciple of the Dhananjayans and is the founder of Natya Academy of Indian Classical Dance in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

Mr. Robert Browning, the artistic director of the World Music Institute in New York City, was the Guest of Honour at the Arangetram. Mrs. Shantha Dhananjayan also graced the occasion with her special appearance.

Vanee was accompanied by musicians from India and Canada. They were Baba Parameswaran - Vocal, V. Vedakrishnan - Mridangam, B. Muthukumar - Flute and Thanathevy Mithradeva - Violin. The compere was Vanee's aunt Mrs. Niranthari Ketheescharan.

The honour and privilege of being the first student of Shoba Sharma to have had an Arangetram, couldn't have gone to a better student. Vanee is not only talented, but also had the 'bhavyam' humility that makes

her dance all the more beautiful. A lot was expected of Vanee and she lived up to the expectations with a flawless and thrilling presentation. She exhibited excellent skills in nritta and abhinaya. Her expressive face and precise footwork made her recital a pleasure to watch. In recognition of her artistic talent, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts presented her with an Apprenticeship Award and Grant to continue her education and training in Bharatha Natyam.

Hartley College Past Pupils' Association (UK)

As the Hartley College Past Pupils' Association attained its Sixteenth year of existence, the Annual General Meeting and Dinner were held on 7th November 1998 at one of the most prestigious venues in the UK - The Queen's Stand of the Epsom Race Course.

After the toast for the Queen proposed by Mr. Easwaramohan, the President of the association, the toast for Hartley College was proposed by Mr. R. Raveendringam, Secretary of the Trustees. Mr. A. Sriharan, the Vice-President proposed the toast for the association. Dr. M. Theivendra, the renowned Johnian cricketer was the Guest Speaker and his speech was followed by the toast for the guests proposed by Mr. S. Surendranathan.

The eminent old boy, the legendary cricketer, scorer of centuries and Captain of the College Cricket team, Mr. M. Nadarajasunderam was the Chief Guest. He is the president of the Point Pedro branch of the Past Pupils' Association and is the Head of the Department of Management Studies at the Jaffna University. In a touching speech on the achievements of Hartley College in the present volatile political situation, he appealed for assistance from the old boys for the essential needs of the college. The secretary Dr. B. Baskaran proposed a vote of thanks in verse and the proceedings ended with Three Hearty Cheers from Mr. T. Rajkumar.

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