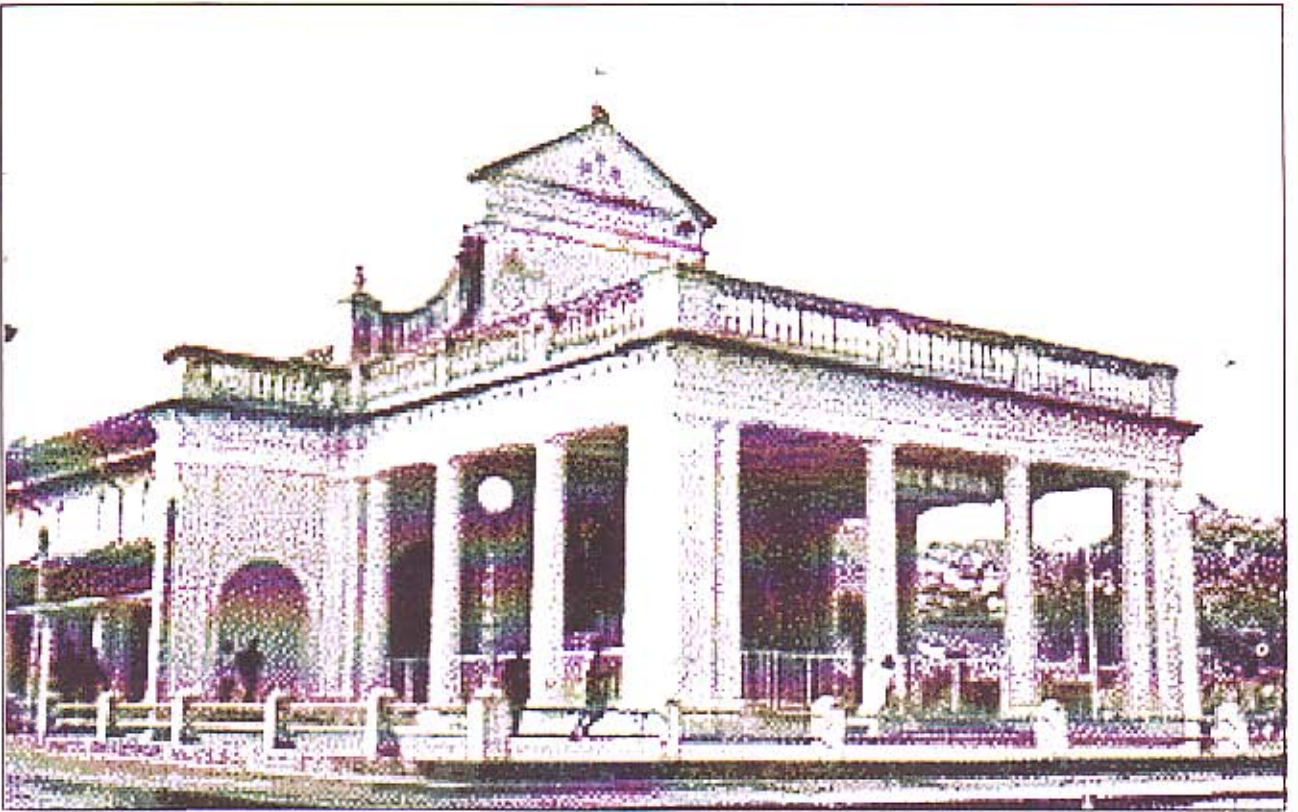


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A file photo of the highly venerated 17th century Roman Catholic church at Madhu in northern Sri Lanka which was damaged and 38 people killed on 20 November in the fighting between the LTTE and the army.

- **A Question of War and Peace**
- **Presidential Election**
- **Doors for Talks Still Open Says LTTE Leader**
- **Voting for Peace**
- **Pakistan: The General Drifts Aimlessly**
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- **Book Review: Crimes Against Humanity**



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-Voltaire

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A Question War or Peace

With just a week to go, the campaign in the presidential election has reached fever pitch. The intensity of the propaganda war in the south of the country between the main contestants, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga of the Peoples Alliance and Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party is only matched by the intensity of the war that is raging in the north of the country between government forces and the LTTE.

Indications are that the advantage maintained by President Chandrika has been gradually eroded and the support for Wickremesinghe has been steadily increasing. The contest is said to be finely balanced with Chandrika having a slight edge.

There is evidence that Chandrika has lost ground among the minority Tamil and Muslim communities who provided enormous support in her last election held in late 1994. At that time she was fighting on a platform of peace promising to bring an end to the ethnic war by negotiating with the LTTE, a line which was quite attractive particularly to the Tamil voters. But she was put off course from her preferred platform of restoring peace when negotiations with the LTTE ended prematurely and abruptly in April 1995 leading to a brutal war between government forces and the Tamil Tigers which is continuing to this day. The war brought untold hardship and suffering to the people of the Northeast where hundreds of thousands of people became displaced.

The sudden and unexpected death of the Ceylon Workers Congress leader Thondaman has turned out to be another major blow for Chandrika. Prior to his death he pledged his and his party's support to her. Thondaman who had a strong hold on the plantation Tamils would have without doubt guaranteed her the overwhelming majority of their votes had he lived.

In her campaign document on "The Ethnic Question and the War", having stated that she was forced to go into war by the actions of the LTTE, when it withdrew from the peace process and resumed hostilities, Chandrika promises to "empower the various provincial or regional councils in a manner that would enable the diverse communities in our country to enjoy self government or autonomy in the conduct of their day to day affairs." Some see the reference to "provincial or regional councils" and "autonomy or self government" as a reference to asymmetry that could recognise the Tamil areas of the Northeast as special. The document also includes "An acceptance of the need to have negotiations with the LTTE and all other interested parties."

However, the LTTE leader V Pirpaharan has made a powerful intervention in the electoral campaign with a vitriolic denunciation of Chandrika in his annual Heroes Day speech describing her regime as a "curse" upon the Tamil people virtually making a clarion call to them to defeat her. He knew that the only candidate who could defeat her was Wickremesinghe, and therefore some view the LTTE leader's call as signal to vote for him. While the LTTE has warned of dire consequences against those who campaigned in support of Chandrika in the east of the island, it seems to have given the green light to Wickremesinghe to campaign there freely which he has done to his immense advantage. It is said that posters supporting him have appeared without let or hindrance in the east even in LTTE controlled areas.

As for Wickremesinghe, he has presented a set of proposals, which on the face of it looks attractive and impressive. He has promised to de-escalate military operations, increase essential food and other supplies to the people in the war-torn areas, set up an interim council with the participation of the LTTE and other representative groups to run the administration of the Northeast and begin negotiations with the LTTE. Whether these measures will satisfy the LTTE even on an interim basis is quite doubtful.

The offer of an interim council with an overall majority of seats for the LTTE was made in September 1987 and the LTTE then did not view such an arrangement as acceptable leading to the military confrontation with the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

If past experience (as was amply demonstrated during the ill-fated negotiations between the Kumaratunga government and the LTTE in 1994-

(continued on next page)

LTTE Leader Offers "Peace Talks Under Conditions of Normalcy"

Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in his annual Martyrs' Day message, called upon the Sri Lanka government to de-escalate the armed conflict by ending military aggression and occupation of the Tamil homeland and initiate peace talks under conditions of normalcy for a negotiated political settlement of the Tamil conflict.

"Though the LTTE stands today as a formidable force with the military capability to liberate our homeland, we have not abandoned the path of peace. We want to resolve the Tamil conflict through peaceful means; through civilised methods without recourse to bloodbath and destruction of life", Mr. Pirapaharan declared.

Mr. Pirapaharan said that peace talks should be held in a peaceful cordial atmosphere of mutual trust with the assistance of international third party mediation. He defined peaceful atmosphere as "a condition of normalcy characterised by cessation of armed hostilities, withdrawal of troops occupying the Tamil lands and the absence of economic blockades".

The following are extracts from the translated text of Mr. Pirapaharan's speech as released by the International Secretariat of LTTE, 211 Katharine Rd, London:

"Our current military successes

have surprised and astounded the world. This is a unique historical achievement in the art of contemporary warfare. The dimensions of this military victory have not only amazed our enemy but also astonished several international countries that have been actively helping Sri Lanka's war effort by providing training, arms and funds.

The vast tracts of fertile lands of Vanni, which were invaded and occupied by the Sinhala armed forces after years and months of massive military campaigns, after sacrificing thousands of lives, have been liberated by our fighters at a rapid pace within a short span of time. A colossal military structure with its multiple military complexes, well fortified bases and camps suddenly collapsed with the onslaught of the Tiger offensive. We have liberated almost all the ancient strategic towns in the Vanni region. I am happy that we have redeemed a sector of Manal Aru, which is the heartland of Vanni where the state's army massacred the indigenous Tamils and created Sinhala settlements.

Our massive offensive campaign in Vanni code-named 'Unceasing Waves 3' has effectively demonstrated to the world the extra-ordinary growth and development of the Tiger fighting forces in the art of modern warfare. The speed of our strikes, the ability of rapid deployment, the unified com-

mand, the high discipline, the spectacular offensive tactics and the tremendous courage displayed by our fighting formations have astounded the world military experts.

This war is being waged for liberation of our land. Tamil Eelam is our homeland, a land which belongs to us historically, a land on which we were born and bred, a land of our sustenance and resources, a land that forms the very foundation of our national identity. Our enemy claims that this land belongs to him.

For more than fifty years - ever since the Sinhala chauvinists assumed political power in the island - the lands of the Tamils have been systematically usurped. Our land has been subjected to tyranny and oppression. On one side, there have been devious schemes by which our lands have been forcefully annexed and given to Sinhala colonisers. On the other hand, our lands have been militarily occupied and their resources destroyed and the people who lived on those lands have been reduced to the state of destitution. It is against this injustice we have been fighting. Therefore our liberation war is essentially a war to liberate our lands and to establish our sovereignty: our right to rule in our homeland.

Our people have now understood the aim and objective of this liberation war. Our people, who have lost their lands and the livelihood that derived from the lands and have become destitute, realise the value and significance of their own lands. They also realise the necessity of chasing away the alien forces that have invaded and occupied our territories. It is because of this realisation wide sections of the popular Tamil masses are supporting and participating in this war of liberating our homeland. Our liberation war has now expanded and developed into a higher stage as the people's war of liberation.

In my annual speeches on the Martyrs' Day, I have always emphasised the importance of peace and peaceful ways of seeking a negotiated political settlement. At the same time, I have also pointed out the fact that Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism was not prepared to resolve the ethnic conflict through peaceful means.

The two major Sinhala political parties, who have assumed political

(Continued from page 3)

95) is to go by, the LTTE will certainly demand first a cessation of hostilities (not a de-escalation of military operations) and then followed by the creation of conditions of normalcy and cordial atmosphere of mutual trust. The LTTE leader defined (in his recent Heroes Day speech) cordial atmosphere as "a condition of normalcy characterised by cessation of armed hostilities, withdrawal of troops occupying the Tamil lands and the absence of economic blockades". That means government troops will have to withdraw from the Tamil areas, all restrictions on transport of goods have to be removed and there shall be unrestricted rights for fishing in the northern waters. The LTTE will insist on the "day to day problems of the Tamil people" be solved as a prerequisite before any substantive talks for a political resolution of the conflict begin. And such problems of the people can be addressed only by undertaking an elaborate and extensive programme of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-torn Tamil areas, and such an undertaking must be under the control of the LTTE. Whoever wins, it is on the capacity and readiness to accept and deliver these measures that the question of war and peace in Sri Lanka depends.

power alternatively in the Sri Lankan political system, are essentially chauvinistic organisations. Both these political parties have bred and flourished in the anti-Tamil Sinhala Buddhist racist ideology. For the last half a century these parties competed with each other in intensifying the oppression against the Tamil people. In this diabolical history of racist oppression it is Chandrika's regime which has inflicted the worst form of tyrannical oppression.

The five-year rule of Chandrika has been a curse on the Tamil people. The monumental tragedy that our people encountered in the form of war, violence, death, destruction, displacement, hunger and starvation was the worst form of tyranny ever suffered by the Tamils. Chandrika's oppressive rule marks an epoch consisting of blood stained pages of our history. Her tyrannical rule left a permanent scar on the soul of the Tamil nation.

While masterminding an authoritarian tyrannical rule against the Tamils internally, Chandrika Kumaratunga portrayed herself internationally as a goddess of democracy committed to peace. Having implemented a notorious military programme aimed at the total invasion of the Tamil homeland she interpreted her project as a war effort for peace. The entire international community believed her and supported her military project. In this deceptive disinformation campaign to cheat the world, treacherous Tamil elements played a crucial role.

We do not trust Chandrika. She does not have the honesty and determination to resolve the Tamil national conflict in a fair and reasonable manner. We perceive her as a modern representative of a neo-Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism. It is for this reason we refused to engage in a direct dialogue with her. Yet, we did not close the doors for peace. I made an announcement last year in my Martyrs' Day message that we were prepared for peace talks with the assistance on international third party mediation.

Though we called for third party mediation we have emphasised the necessity of creating certain objective conditions conducive for peace talks. We explained very clearly that these objective conditions entail a situation of normalcy free from military aggression, occupation and economic str-

ngulation of the Tamil nation.

Chandrika's government refused to accept our proposal for creating a congenial peaceful atmosphere for peace talks. Chandrika was not prepared to bring an end to the war, to stop the military aggression of our land and to lift the economic blockades. The government wanted to use the military campaigns and the economic embargoes as political pressures on the Tamils. The concept of the 'war for peace' as enunciated by Chandrika's government signified a military solution. This grand military project aimed at a total invasion of the Tamil homeland and envisages the defeat of the Tamil Tiger movement and finally the eventual subjugation of the Tamil nation. Chandrika worked tirelessly for the last five years to implement her military scheme. Though the project brought about severe setbacks and debacles to the armed forces, she was determined not to abandon her military programme. Therefore, she did not reflect seriously about peace nor has she taken any constructive steps towards peace talks.

Chandrika conveyed to us a message through third party source that she was prepared to hold secret talks with certain conditions while continuing the war effort. We rejected her proposal. It is absurd and practically impossible to hold peace talks on one side while engaging in a bloody war on the other side. It is an extremely difficult task to involve in a friendly dialogue with the enemy while our people are subjected to death, destruction and suffering. Furthermore, we do not want to engage in a negotiating process with conditions and time frames. Chandrika did not sincerely extend her hand of friendship. She wanted to lay a trap under the cover of peace talks. But we were not prepared to fall into that peace trap.

Swept by the 'Unceasing Waves' of the Liberation Tigers, Chandrika's military project crumbled as a house of sand built on the seashore. The spectacular victories that we gained in this current offensive campaign have turned the balance of military power in our favour. The massive effort made by Chandrika over the last five years to weaken the LTTE and to achieve military hegemony was shattered by us in the matter of a few days.

Though we stand today as a form-

idable force strengthened by manpower, firepower, moral power, and people's power and have the military capability to liberate our homeland, we have not abandoned the path of peace. We want to resolve the Tamil conflict through peaceful means, through civilised methods, without recourse to a bloodbath and the destruction of life.

We wish to re-iterate that peace talks should be held in a cordial peaceful atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill with the assistance of international third party mediation. By peaceful atmosphere we mean a condition of normalcy characterised by cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of troops occupying Tamil lands and the absence of economic blockades.

We cannot allow the Sinhala State to use the conditions of war, military aggression of our lands, and economic blockades as tactics of pressure against the Tamils. We wish to engage in peace talks as equals with mutual understanding in a cordial environment without external coercion and constraints.

We are keeping the doors of peace open and are sending signals of peace and goodwill to the Sinhala nation. But we are aware that Sinhala political leadership will not agree to create a peaceful environment as we suggest. We are also aware that Sinhala chauvinistic leadership will not easily abandon their longstanding policy of military violence and repression against the Tamils. Therefore we do not live in fantasy hoping to resolve our national conflict by engaging in a rational dialogue with Sinhala political leadership.

The anti-Tamil Sinhala racist political system - which totally disregards human rights and liberties - offers no alternatives to the Tamils other than to fight, secede and establish an independent Tamil state. It is along this secessionist path that the Sinhala nation is driving the Tamil nation.

Years ago our people made a decision that an independent state of Tamil Eelam is the only and the final solution to our national conflict. For the last several years, our freedom movement has been fighting a bloody liberation struggle carrying the cross of our people's aspirations for freedom. Today we have reached a turning point in this long historical journey towards emancipation."

Chandrika has the Edge but Ranil closes in

The race to elect the next Executive President of Sri Lanka has got into top gear amidst reports of many incidents of campaign related violence in several places. The propaganda war between the two primary contenders has become sharper and very personal with quite a lot of mud-slinging at each other. But the central focus remains the ongoing ethnic conflict with both candidates claiming to have the formula for its solution. In the meantime, the LTTE's military encounters with the armed forces continue unabated in the North-East of the country.

If the incumbent, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, thought that she would have an easy ride when she surprised the country with her sudden and premature decision to seek a fresh man-date from the people, she may have mis-calculated.

Though many described him as weak, indecisive and uncharismatic, there is much evidence that the man who wants to replace Chandrika, the United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, has gained much ground. His Cambridge Place residence and Albert Crescent office has become lively with lot of new visitors. Says Bradman Weerakoon, the distinguished civil servant who was secretary to six prime ministers, "I get the feeling that the days of 1965 had returned." His reference was to Dudley Senanayake's residence, Woodlands, where people of different races, faiths and political convictions thronged as Sirima Bandaranaike's government was floundering.

A swing towards Ranil Wickremesinghe seems to have set in recent weeks and the crowd at his meetings is swelling. Elated UNP leaders are predicting Wickremesinghe's victory. They estimate that Wickremesinghe would collect 44% of the votes which President Kumaratunga garners 42%. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna's Nandana Gunatilleke may collect 6% and the

remaining ten candidate 4% of the vote. The balance 4% would be the spoilt vote which independent candidate Tennyson Edirisuriya were his supporters. Edirisuriya had announced that he and his supporters would spoil their votes to indicate their disapproval of the executive presidential system and the confrontational



Chandrika Kumaratunga

Ranil Wickremesinghe

electoral politics, UNPers say this would require the counting of the preferential votes. The Presidential election system authorises the Elections Commissioner to announce the winner if he or she obtain 50 percent of the vote plus one. If no candidate collects that percentage of votes he has to count the second and third preferences marked in the votes cast for the losing candidates and add them up to those obtained by the respective contestants. The candidate who scores the highest number of votes is declared elected.

An intelligence report that reached the President in November last week has predicted a Wickremesinghe's victory with 50.8% of the votes had upset her considerably. She shouted at a group of her supporters who were at the Temple Trees and do the campaign. "Some of these people cannot go to their electorates. They are hanging around here to go with me," she shouted.

Some of her close supporters are beginning to doubt President Kumaratunga's chances of a victory. "It is a very close fight. The outcome may go either way," said Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Ports Minister M.H.-

M. Ashraff, a good assessor of election trends.

Political analysts say the odds were in favour of the President when she called for a snap poll on October 20. The gap between her and Wickremesinghe was wide. People saw her as peace-friendly, capable of militarily weakening the LTTE and Wickremesinghe as the spoiler of her peace efforts. He was also seen as a weak, ineffective, indecisive, selfish leader who had no interest in the welfare of the country. He was also perceived as an intemperate man ill at ease among the masses.

Surveys showed that peace constituency that helped her to sweep the 1994 presidential election had expanded since then. It was to capitalize on this growing constituency, the anticipated war victories and the adverse public perception of Wickremesinghe the President decided on the snap election. She also wanted to catch the UNP unprepared and with its incessant internal bickering.

All these calculations seem to have gone awry. The UNP would appear to have been well prepared for the snap poll and it announced Wickremesinghe's candidature the very next day. Wickremesinghe was ready with a new style campaign and a program of action which he described as a pact with the people. He was prepared to project a fresh image of himself as a frank, down-to-earth politician who was ready to solve the problems of the people.

"I am not going to give you any pledge because I know I cannot keep them. I cannot bring prices down because it is not in my hands but in the international commodity prices. Instead I will take all possible actions that would improve your income, earning power. That would help you overcome the difficulties caused by the increase in prices," he tells every meeting.

He tells them that he had met over 300,000 persons during the past three months and had identified their problems and needs. People want peace, economic development. They want to study the English language and enjoy the benefits of the information technology. "I will do those things, I will make the Sri Lankan society knowledge-based," he says.

"I have come to a pact with you. I will do what I undertake to do," and he had placed a simple 6-page document in their hands with the title "My Pact with the People". It reminds one of the US Congressman Newt Gingrich's "My Contract with the American People". The slick presentation of Wickremasinghe's campaign confirms reports of the role played by a leading Public Relations firm from Britain where spin-doctoring during election campaigns has developed into a fine art.

President Kumaratunga seems to have made a grave mistake by trying to splinter the UNP, a mistake similar to what UNP made in 1994 when it admitted Anura Bandaranaike who was causing problems within the SLFP. The admission of Sarath Amunugama, Nanda Mathew, Wijeyapala Mendis, Susil Moonasinghe and Prof. Stanley Kalpage and their group failed to weaken the UNP as 60% of the people interviewed in the last week of November in the ORG-Marg Smart survey showed. People think that they are a pack of power hungry politicians who were sidelined by Wickremasinghe.

The entry of Moonasinghe and Kalpage has roused the suspicions of the minority communities - Tamils and Muslims - as they consider them as the ones who blocked the UNP from helping the government to enact its devolution proposals in parliament. In fact Ashraff had voiced this suspicion openly. Moonasinghe had conveyed to Ashraff through a friend that he was hurt over it. "What is he if he is not a racist?" Ashraff had queried. Moonasinghe is said one of the men close to the the Sinhala chauvinist Vira Vithana Movement.

Admitting Mendis also has caused dissension inside the governing party. At a campaign meeting at Kaduwala on December 1 Minister Jayaraj Fernando refused to sit with Mendis and took a back seat. He went to the front row only after Mendis left. "How can I sit with the man who was harassing my supporters all these years?" Fernando asked.

President Kumaratunga's dependence on her uncle Deputy Defence Minister General Anurutha Ratwatte to deliver her a military victory during election time had misfired. Ratwatte launched Operation Watershed to link the troops at Ampagamam with those at Paranthan through a series of limited moves and achieve his cherished

opening of the land route to Jaffna on the eve of the presidential election. It backfired. The Tigers in two sharp and piercing operations, code named Unceasing Waves 3, retrieved the entire Vanni territory government troops had captured in 18 months at a colossal cost of losing over 3000 soldiers and huge amount of military hardware in two spurts, eastern sector during November 2-5 and the western sector a week later. Government troops that lost ten major camps in ten days had been pushed into defensive position at Mannar, Vavuniya and Weli Oya. They are also threatening Elephant Pass and Palaly Camps.

The impact of the massive military defeat, dubbed the Vanni debacle, had affected morale in the south of the island. Wickremasinghe has made use of that military debacle very deftly. He attributes the defeat to political interference, the desire to show a military victory during the election. He also attacked the poor strategy of Ratwatte saying that that had spread the military over an uncontrollable wide area. The President responded with suggestions of a possible conspiracy between some sections of the army and the UNP. It said the presence of retired army chief of staff Lt. Gen. Lucky Algama in Vanni just before the debacle suggested such a conspiracy. Algama and the UNP had denied it. He had gone there on social service work, Algama had explained to the police investigators who had questioned him.

With President Kumaratunga's charismatic smile losing its appeal and Wickremasinghe's image steadily improving, doubts about her ability to score a win at the first count have surfaced. In all the three previous presidential elections winners had polled over 50% of the votes. In the first presidential election held in 1982 President Jayewardene obtained 52.9% of the votes polled. In the second held in 1988 President Ranasinghe Premadasa gathered 50.5% of the votes. In the third held on 9 November 1994 People's Alliance candidate President Kumaratunga polled 4,709,205 votes, an unprecedented 62.28% while UNP's Mrs. Gamini Disanayake collected 2,715,283 votes, being 35.91%. The other four candidates shared the balance 1.81% of the votes. Since then President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's popularity had considerably eroded as shown by the performance of her party in the

Provincial Council election held early this year. In the five provincial councils - West, Central, North Central, Uva and Sabragamuva - PA garnered only 45.26% of the votes against UNP's 42.56%.

To raise that percentage to 50 she will have to fall back on the block votes of the three minority groups, Jaffna Tamils, Muslims and the Indian Tamils, who backed in 1994. Her campaign, at the initial stage, was thus focused on showing that she was the only leader who had the vision to find a political solution to the ethnic problem. She declared, in her address to the nation on October 20, that she called for the election to get a mandate from the people for the government's political package. Elect me first and then give me the two-third majority at the parliamentary election to enable me to resolve the racial conflict, she said.

Wickremasinghe countered her on two counts. First, he told the people that the government's peace package would not bring peace. "Substantial section of the Sinhalese and Tamils have rejected the President's peace package. LTTE had rejected it. Even moderate Tamil parties have rejected it. The government's proposals are not going to bring peace to the country. We must talk to the LTTE and others and work out a solution acceptable to all and then amend the constitution accordingly," he said.

Second, he placed a practical formula for a solution. Addressing Colombo-based Foreign Correspondents Association on November 10 he said: "We cannot afford this war. It is a big drain on the economy. With the war on we cannot develop the country. My priority is to end the war by working out a political solution to the ethnic problem."

He then propounded the main elements of his solution:

1. Commence talks with the LTTE as soon as he was elected President.
2. Establishing a temporary administration for the North-east for two years in which the LTTE would be invited to participate.
3. Lifting of the economic embargo on Vanni.
4. De-escalation of the war.
5. Fixing of the date for the election of the North-east Provincial Council.
6. Third Party Mediation

Mrs Kumaratunga realised that Wickremasinghe's formula would be

more attractive to the Tamils and felt that the Jaffna Tamil vote bank was slipping away from her hands. Using the statement alleged to have been made by Wickremesinghe to the effect that if he was elected he would hand over the administration of the North-east to the LTTE, she accused her rival of having hatched a conspiracy with the LTTE. She charged that the UNP leader's reported proposal would lead to the division of the country.

President Kumaratunga, in her latest publication addressed to the voters, "The Ethnic Question and the War" is seeking a mandate to take the country out of the quagmire of ethnic strife and mistrust and rebuild the confidence and trust among all the peoples by implementing a new Constitution. "I seek your mandate through which you will empower me to set in motion the process of introducing a new Constitution for the Republic of Sri Lanka which shall be to the benefit of all of us," she said in the publication.

The salient points in the proposals for a New Constitution presented by Mrs Kumaratunga are:

1. Bringing about far reaching

changes in the colonial framework of our constitutional structures, to enable all sections of the people, irrespective of community, ethnicity or religion, to participate and contribute to the process of political power, and thereby be participants in power sharing, to bring about a modernising and change in the very nature of the power structure as it prevails today.

2. Empowering the various provincial or regional councils in a manner that would enable the diverse communities in our country to enjoy self-government or autonomy in the conduct of their day to day activities, and thereby build a richer unity in diversity.

3. Establishing firmly the territorial integrity, indivisibility and sovereignty of the Republic of Sri Lanka.

4. Using the more advanced concepts of Human Rights now accepted in the world to widen the scope of Human Rights and Fundamental Rights in the country.

5. While re-asserting the rights of those who speak the Sinhalese and Tamil languages, to declare Sinhalese, Tamil and English as official languages of the country.

6. To grant citizenship rights in Sri Lanka to those all sections of the population who do not yet enjoy the rights of citizenship.

7. The abolition of the prevailing Executive Presidential system.

8. Guaranteeing the independence of the Judiciary and the Public Service.

The document further states: "We must give content and meaning to our freedom so that Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim, every citizen of this our country will be able to live with the dignity and self-respect that is one's inherent right."

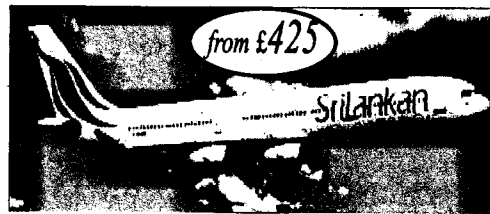
The Tamil groups that had backed President Kumaratunga for the past five years are distancing themselves from her. After a 12-hour internal battle on December 4 the Working Committee of the TULF decided not to support either of the candidates. A strong section wanted the party to back Wickremesinghe and shouted down secretary general R. Sampanthan's plea to back the President. The decision not to support either of the two candidates was the compromise reached to safeguard the unity of the party. TELO has decided to support Wickremesinghe.



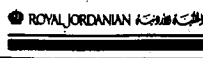
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PEOPLE & POLITICS

Pirapaharan's Message

Compared to the previous ones, the 1999 Heroes Day message delivered by the Tamil Tiger leader V Pirapakaran on 27 November was the most upbeat, bullish and hard-hitting. He could afford to do so in the backdrop of a string of recent successes on the military front resulting in the recapture of almost all the territory the LTTE lost to the government forces since 1996.

The message peppered with vitriolic attacks against President Chandrika Kumaratunga's regime reflected the extent of the Tiger leader's hatred and anger. Pirapaharan made it clear that he would not like to hold talks with the present government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga who is running again for the Presidency in the election to be held on 21 December. He described the five-year rule of Chandrika Kumaratunga as a curse on the minority Tamil people. "Chandrika's oppressive rule marks an epoch consisting of blood stained pages of our history. Her tyrannical rule left a permanent scar on the soul of the Tamil nation."

Pirapaharan also revealed that Chandrika had sent a message through

a third party offering to hold secret talks on certain conditions while continuing with the war. "We rejected her proposal. It is absurd and practically impossible for peace talks while engaging in a bloody war on the other side," he said.

Not mincing his words, the Tiger leader said, "We do not trust Chandrika. She does not have the honesty and determination to resolve the Tamil national conflict in a fair and reasonable manner."

Political analysts felt that the LTTE supremo was sending a clear signal ahead of the election that if Chandrika was returned to power, the conflict will go on without any prospect of negotiations. Was the LTTE leader telling the voters, if they wanted peace, defeat Chandrika, and that means to vote for her main rival Ranil Wickremesighe who has announced his intention to begin talks with the LTTE with third-party mediation?

Asserting that the LTTE stood today as a formidable force with the military capability to liberate our homeland, they had not abandoned the path of peace and wanted to resolve the

Tamil conflict through peaceful means. Peace talks should be held in a peaceful cordial atmosphere of mutual trust with the assistance of international third party mediation. He defined peaceful atmosphere as "a condition of normalcy characterised by cessation of armed hostilities, withdrawal of troops occupying the Tamil lands and the absence of economic blockades".

It is quite likely that if the UNP leader Wickremesinghe won at the forthcoming election, he will commence talks with the LTTE. But will he be able to provide the "peaceful atmosphere" as defined by the LTTE leader which includes the withdrawal of government troops from the North and East? Will he agree to withdraw the troops from the Jaffna peninsula? If not what then?

Pirapaharan has himself given the answer in his Heroes day message: "Years ago our people made a decision that an independent state of Tamil Eelam is the only and final solution to our national conflict. Today we have reached a turning point in this long historical journey towards emancipation."

Blasingham in London

Meanwhile, the LTTE's political adviser Anton Balasingham, who with his wife Adele returned to London for medical treatment made his first public appearance on 27 November at a function to mark the Heroes Day commemorated by the LTTE.

Balasingham in an hour long speech said that the LTTE is determined to secure the Tamil people's aspirations and drive out the occupation forces of the Sri lankan Army, adding that LTTE had sufficient manpower, firepower and peoples power to liberate the Tamil homeland. "And our recent successes have demonstrated our capability, giving new confidence that an independent Tamil Eelam can be established," he said.

Balasingham affirmed the LTTE's position that third party mediation was essential for negotiations to take place between the parties for the settlement of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Revealing that since the war broke out in April 1995, President Chandrika had "offered to negotiate with mediation three times, but had placed unacceptable conditions." The Commonwealth Secretariat and the government of Norway were suggested as mediators. The

(Continued from page 8)

EPRLF has decided to be neutral. PLOTE has not come out in open support of President Kumaratunga. EPDP is the only Tamil group to back the President. It is reported that the EDDP has been appointed President Kumaratunga's polling agent in the Jaffna district and it is carrying on a poster campaign. Former North-east chief minister and leader of the EPRLF Varatharaja Perumal has hitched his bandwagon to President Kumaratunga for which he has been suspended by the party.

Indian Tamil community too is also divided. Though Ceylon Workers Congress is sticking on with the President, smaller groups have crossed over to Wickremesinghe's side. Even in the CWC a strong section favours Wickremesinghe and cracks have appeared in that monolithic organisation. Muslims are also divided. SLMC leader Ashraff will find it difficult to deliver the same number of votes it delivered for the President in

1964.

President Kumaratunga is said to be worried about losing support from parties which had been her allies up to recently. To retain the support of the peace constituency she has announced her readiness to talk with the LTTE after the elections. To stabilise her rural support base she announced a series of bonanzas to a variety of working sector. Prominent among them were the Rs. 500 monthly pay hike to the 300,000 garment workers. Manufacturers complain that that would kill the industry that had recorded 5% negative growth. Pensions also have been raised. Some commentators say that these pay hikes, put together with war losses and election expenses would damage the economy.

Taking all factors into account including the fact that she is the incumbent with all instruments of the state machinery is at her disposal, President Kumaratunga has the edge in this campaign, but there is no doubt that Ranil Wickremesinghe is closing in. ●

problem with Chandrika's suggestion, according to Balasingham was that she wanted the LTTE to negotiate in secrecy without the people of Sri Lanka or rest of the world. She wanted the talks to take place in a foreign country in utter secrecy. She also wanted the talks to take place while the war continued. Saying that this "secrecy was unacceptable to us and the Tamil people," Balasingham asked, "How can we sit and talk in a nice hotel in a foreign country while our people are being killed and starved?"

Referring to his illness, Balasingham said that when he fell ill in the Vanni with kidney failure, President Chandrika Kumaratunga had been approached by Britain, Norway and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to grant him safe conduct by allowing his transport abroad for treatment. Even though the LTTE released captured Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers as a sign of goodwill, the government had seized the opportunity of his predicament to impose conditions on the LTTE, he said. "They wanted the LTTE to cease operations in Jaffna, not interfere with local administration and not target the supply ships to the Army there," he said. "All these things which, peculiarly enough, had nothing to do with my kidney" he said amidst laughter. "Then the LTTE leader Pirapaharan told me not to worry, that they would take care of my transport requirements," he said, "I was brought out by LTTE boat and ship." "A government which would exploit my illness is not going to be bothered by the hardships of the Tamil people," he said.

Balasingham also sought in his speech to allay some "misapprehensions and fears" generated in India about the establishment of a state of Tamil Eelam. Dismissing suggestions that the creation of a separate in Sri Lanka would fan the flames of Tamil nationalism of separatism in Tamil Nadu, he said, "It is baseless for people entertain fears that the people of Tamil Nadu will demand a separate state if Tamil Eelam was established. The Tamil people in India enjoy a federal democracy. They are not being persecuted, bombed or starved. Why should the clamour for a separate state?"

The LTTE is pledged not to get involved in India's internal affairs, and was not opposed to India's national or geopolitical interests. On the contrary,

the "future state of Tamil Eelam would be an ally of India," Balasingham said.

Whither the Visionary?

Recently an article appeared in the Colombo weekly, 'The Sunday Leader' under the title 'Ranil: Hamlet Turns Visionary' praising him for his newly found understanding of the problems of the Tamil people and his vision for solving them. In commenting on this article, a columnist in 'The Daily News' noted that in giving this headline to the article and "comparing Ranil to Hamlet, the very epitome of indecision among all of Shakespeare's characters, it was obvious the "Leader" was doing so with very good understanding. It was an apt description of Wickremesinghe's constant dilly-dallying about the ethnic question, and his inability to take a firm decision on this all important national issue. Hamlet is always remembered by his dilemma, best described in his monologue, 'To be or not to be, that is the question'. In that sense the "Leader" was right on target in its assessment of the UNP leader."

The intention of the Daily News columnist was clear - to poke fun at the UNP leader who is contesting for the top post. And he did so by quoting reputed dictionaries.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'a visionary': "Visionary - adj. & noun; 1. a given to seeing visions or to indulging in fanciful theories; existing only in a vision or in the imagination; imaginary, fanciful, unpractical; hence 2 n visionary person."

Webster's Dictionary defines a visionary as follows: "Visionary noun - someone who imagines how things should be and pays little regard to how they actually are or are likely in fact to be; 2 adj. conjured up in the imagination without being related to facts inclined to be a visionary."

Handing Over Chandrika

UNP presidential candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe has kicked up a storm of protests in the Sri Lankan Presidential campaign, sniping at President Chandrika Kumaratunga that he would hand her over to LTTE chief Prabhakaran if elected.

Probably unnerved by the repeated accusations by the leaders of the Peoples Alliance that Ranil Wickremesinghe, if he won, would hand over the North-East to the LTTE, Ranil went a step further and got into more trouble

when he said at a public meeting: "My motive is to win the election and work for the whole country free of political rivalry. Therefore, if people accept me please cast your vote for me. I shall not hand over the country to Prabhakaran, however I shall if necessary hand over Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to Prabhakaran. She can go and reside in the Wann. Now tomorrow on TV they will show this and say what a hard hearted man Ranil is. I know Chandrika from my young days."

While Ranil's supporters wanted his statement to be treated as a joke made in lighter vein, Chandrika's supporters have raised it to the level treason. A columnist in Colombo newspaper considered the UNP leader's statement as an insult to all women: "Ranil Wickremesinghe, as the leader of the UNP, now has to apologise not only to President Kumaratunga about this statement, but also to all the women in Sri Lanka, including the women members and supporters of the UNP, for his contempt for the rights of women and the unparalleled insult to all women at the core of this statement."

At a later public meeting, Mrs Kumaratunga paid her rival back in kind for the comment he had made. "I should remind him that he has no right to hand over the President of a country, or any other woman, to Prabhakaran. We don't mind him offering his own spouse to Prabhakaran!"

Meanwhile Wickremesinghe strenuously denied that he had agreed to hand over the administration of the North-East to the LTTE. His lawyers have sent a letter to the Lake House group of newspapers demanding a retraction of the statement from the Presidential Secretariat which made the allegation and asserting that the statement that Wickremesinghe had a plan to hand the administration of the North and East should he win the forthcoming election was totally false.

An Intriguing Question

The relative silence on the part of some extremist Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist organisations during the ongoing presidential election campaign is truly intriguing. Organisations like the National Movement Against Teerorism (NMAT) and the Sinhala Veera Vidhana (SVV) which carried on a relentless and sustained campaign against the PA government's devolution proposals characterising them as a

betrayal of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation have become eloquent by their silence.

The NMAT has been carrying on a systematic campaign demanding the government to intensify the war against "Tamil Tiger Terrorism" until it is annihilated. They were very active in breaking up peaceful meetings that called for an end to the war by negotiating with the LTTE. The SVV, the leading light of which is Rev. Sobitha Thero, was more sinister. This organisation that exhorted the Sinhalese people not to have any dealings with Tamil or Muslim owned business establishments. They asked the Sinhalese not to rent out or lease their homes to Tamils or Muslims. In some areas, such as Kiribathgoda, they even prevented Tamil and Muslim traders from putting up signboards at their business premises. There was always the accusation made that the SVV was working in collusion with and having the active support of some leading figures in the UNP. That archetypal chauvinist of the Jathika Chinthanaya persuasion, who has of late distanced himself from these organisations which he embraced most avidly not so long ago, has lamented that their silence is due to the fact that they have been massively penetrated by the UNP. The question is who has penetrated whom? Will these dark forces permit Ranil Wickremesinghe, if he wins in his bid for the top post, to keep his promises in resolving the ethnic conflict by de-escalating the war, negotiating with the LTTE and setting an interim council under the control of the LTTE to run the administration of the North-East until permanent solution is reached.

Ashraff's Poetic Troubles

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader and cabinet minister M H M Ashraff has ruffled the feathers of many. The cause of Ashraff's troubles is that in his book of poems written in Tamil titled "Nan Enum-ni" is included a poem titled "Lord Buddha and the Poet".

The orchestrated chorus of protests has resulted in Mr Ashraff tendering a statement of apology. His statement said: "I notice that once again I have been brought into a controversy. The poem I wrote on the title "Lord Buddha and the Poet" has caused disturbance in some circles. Before I explain the poem and the contents I would like to reassure to the Maha Sangha and Buddhist Community that I have the

greatest respect for Lord Buddha and the Buddhist Community.

I am certain it is the mischief makers who are trying to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. However, if my poem or its contents have caused pain of mind to anyone, sincerely and genuinely I wish to tender my apology and regret.

A poem has to be looked at from the viewpoint of a poetical language which is not the ordinary language. If anyone wants to understand a poem according to its ordinary language, every poem may become controversial.

All I tried was to bring about the prevailing shortcomings in the Government Policy in conformity with the Buddha Dhamma.

I strongly believe that the day every Sinhalese in this country becomes conversant in Tamil language and the Tamil speaking people become conversant in Sinhala language, the ethnic problem will come to an end. My objective through the poem was to tell the Sinhala readers that the Sinhala language and the Dhamma are two different things.

I admit and I now realise that there is a problem in the last paragraph of my poem where I get Lord Buddha to say that he will be re-born again. Now I realise that it is a mistake. Once again I feel sorry for this.

In another poem contained in the same book I am inviting Prophet Mohamed to rise again to solve the contradictions prevailing in the Muslim Community. Muslims in any event do not believe in re-birth. The fact I am asking Prophet Mohamed to come again is no insult to Prophet Mohamed. I hope my

Buddhist brothers and sisters will understand the contextual content of this poem."

Lord Buddha and the Poet

*One day I met Lord Buddha
He greeted me "How are you, Poet"
I replied in Sinhala
Assuming he would be pleased
Lord Buddha was puzzled
"I do not understand," he said
It was in Sinhala I spoke," I said
He smiled and said that
He does not know Sinhala
"Didn't you come to Sri Lanka
long years ago?
Have you forgotten the history
of having taught us your Dhamma?"
"Yes all that is true but... but".*

*"But... What do you mean by but?
Tell me the truth quickly," I said
Sinhala is a beautiful language
However I conveyed my Dhamma
In a different language, he said
"If that be so, when did you
learn Tamil," I asked,
"After the injustice of 1956," he said
"Even my message and values are dying"
With sadness, He began....
Do you say this even after witnessing
the flowering of Your statues
all over Sri Lanka
Lord Buddha replied me
"Because the truth has
gone to deep slumber
And jealousy is flying all over
There is no place untouched
By robbery and theft,
The government displaying
The taverns as its sign of commitment
to the Sasana. The souls have plunged
As a result of being surrounded
By gambling centres
And dances of the naked damsels
Competition and destruction
of human life have increased
In the name of war and struggle,
The frustrations of the poor
Became a bonfire
For the inflamed economy,
And the peace I gained
under the Bodhi tree
Gets more and more distant everyday
The art I discovered to conquer
Sadness appears to be dying
Lord Buddha declared.
"Sir, you are the Great Lord Buddha,
It's not correct for
you to be worried," I said
Lord Buddha thereupon gave me a smile
"Are you now okay,
You may now smile," I said
Lord Buddha looked at me once again
"Saints neither smile nor laugh,
Nor do they worry"
When their followers flout
their rules I began to understand
the language of his eyes
"Oh Sir, I am mad,
please forgive me," I said
Buddha looked at me once more
Again did he give me a flowery smile,
"Oh Lord, Why not you pray
for our dying nation?" I asked
He said, "I can see a way
out of this problem"
"I want to teach the Dhamma once again
In a language they understand"
"But you don't know Sinhala
How will you do that," I asked
"I want to know whether these people*

(continued on next page)

Peace Alliance Seeks Answers From Presidential Candidates

We, the undersigned, believe that the ongoing war in the North-East is an outcome of the long unresolved ethnic conflict and the most serious problem that the country faces. We call on the people to vote at the forthcoming Presidential Election for the candidate who demonstrates, by word and deed, the ability to resolve the conflict and bring lasting peace to the country.

We request the Presidential candidates to answer the following questions:

1. Are you for ending the war soon and what action will you take to achieve this?

2. What are the basic principles of the political solution that you propose? Please be specific. In particular we ask:

(Continued from page 11)

will learn Tamil

At least in order to communicate with me".

"I will be reborn in Sri Lanka very soon I shall abide by a new rule to teach my Dhamma

in Tamil soon," said he,

Having heard him, the Red Lotus flowers

At his feet began to sing in happiness,

The skies too were pleased to hear them.

End Piece

Accusatory letters to each other by the two main candidates has become a familiar feature in the current presidential election campaign. In a recent letter addressed to his main rival Mrs Kumaratunga, the UNP leader Mr Wickremesinghe, inter alia, said: "For many people Sri Lanka has become a terrifying place in which to live." To even to think of saying this, it must have required some nerve for a leader of a party which presided over a regime under which hundreds of dead bodies of persons cruelly killed were floating in rivers, many more were incinerated on burning vehicle tyers, journalists like Richard de Zoysa were picked up at midnight and their murdered remains were dropped from helicopters into the ocean, tens of thousands disappeared without trace, etc. etc. ●

(a) whether you are prepared to go beyond the limitations of the present Constitutional structure to achieve effective devolution obstruction to the devolution of power, and

(b) how do you propose to solve the problem of the unit of devolution in the North and East?

3. How do you propose to achieve a consensus in the South with regard to the content of the political solution?

4. Do you support a bipartisan approach (PA/UNP) to talk with the LTTE, and how do you propose to achieve this?

5. To bring about a peace agreement, how do you propose to deal with the LTTE? If you are prepared to talk to the LTTE, what confidence-building measures with the LTTE do you propose for implementation at this time?

6. Do you agree to third party facilitation/mediation and if so what form should this take?

7. How do you propose to ensure that the new Constitution becomes Law? What Constitutional charges would you envisage and what steps would you take to implement such changes?

8. Pending the war coming to an end what action would you take regarding the following problems:

(a) What extra relief measures would be given to those who have been and are being displaced and made refugees by the war?

(b) The provision of food and medicine in adequate amounts for the

people in both the cleared and uncleared areas affected by the war and improvement of their pathetic living conditions.

9. What have you done in the past to achieve peace and find a solution for the ethnic problem and based on this experience how would you proceed to achieve a lasting peace.

Prior to the Presidential Election we will be calling a meeting of the entire peace community and the mass media, and be presenting them with the answers we receive, and our own conclusions. We will also be sending you an invitation.

Please send your answer to reach Dr. Jehan Perera, Secretary, National Alliance for Peace, 291/36A, Havelock Gardens, Colombo 06 by the 06th of December 1999.

The following are the signatories on behalf of the National Committee and the Action Committee of the National Alliance for Peace: Ven. Malwatte Walgouvagoda Wimalabuddhi, Nayake Thera, Ven. Madithiyawela Vijithasena Anunayake Thera, Ven. Thalalle Dhammaloka Nayake Thera, Ven. Prof. Kumburugamuwe Vajira Nayake Thera, Ven. Mapalagama Vipulasara Nayake Thera, Rt. Rev. kenneth Fernando, Rt. Rev. Dr. Malcolm Ranjith, Mr. Javid Yusuf, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, Mr. W. H. Piyadasa,

Mr. Bogoda Premaratne, Mr. Godrey Gunatilake, Ms. Irangani Serasinghe, Mr. Tissa Abeysekera, Mrs. Dulcie de Silva, Prof. Tissa Vitarana, Ms. Jezima Ismail, Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Dr. R. O. B. Wijesekera, Mrs. Anita Fernando, Ms. Sunila Abeysekera, Mr. Shirley Tissera, Prof. S. T. Hettige, Mr. Andrew Samaratunga, Dr. Jehan Perera, Mr. E. Nadarajah, Mr. T. M. R. Rashideen, Mr. Kingsley Rodrigo, Rev. Fr. Oswald Firth and Ven. Batapola Nanada.

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Former Chief Minister Returns as Political Activist

Former North-East Province chief minister Varatharaja Perumal met with the Colombo media 24 November at Holiday Inn. Physically, he had not changed much. He looked as though he had lost the fire, ebullience. He took more time to reply questions. Nine years of exile in Ajmir, Madhya Pradesh and nine months in Colombo amidst tight security had mellowed him, made him more contemplative.

A close aide of Perumal telephoned media institutions in Colombo that afternoon to tell them that the former chief minister wished to meet them at Holiday Inn at 5 p.m. but was told to keep the venue and time secret. Hotel authorities too were asked to be secretive about the meeting. Perumal came under heavy security and two of his personal bodyguards were beside him during the meeting keeping a close watch.

"I have come back after nine years in exile in India and nine months in the cold in Colombo," Perumal said, "and I am talking to you as a political activist who has resumed his political career." He thanked the media for attending the sudden meeting and the governments of India and Sri Lanka for the security and the logistical support given to him during the period of exile.

The Sinhala media was more interested in questioning him about his unilateral declaration of independence in 1960. One shouted from the back of the crowded room: "You declared an independent Eelam which even Pirapakaran has not done so far." Perumal smiled and replied softly: "Even I did not declare Eelam." "Why not? You moved the resolution at the meeting of the Provincial Council and it was adopted," the reporter shot back. "You have only read the last page of the resolution. It was a 5-page document," Perumal countered.

"The first four pages of the resolution I moved in March 1990 listed 19 demands that we wanted President Ranasinghe Premadasa government to grant. If the government failed to do so, the last page said, Tamils would be left with no alternative but to declare Eelam," Perumal explained.

"I was very careful not to violate the constitution," he added with firmness.

"Why did you do that?" he was asked.

Perumal replied: "We were forced to do that. The entire administration was dismantled by that time. All the good officers who were with us were dragged to Colombo. We had no funds. The chief minister's car was taken to Jaffna to be handed over to Mahattaya. Even the typewriters in the provincial council were given to the LTTE. So how could we function?" Perumal queried.

He revealed a well kept secret about this matter at an interview he gave Sri Lanka Broadcasting Service on December 1. He said President Premadasa had done everything to cripple his administration and wanted to hand it over to the LTTE. The EPRLF had decided not to fight the LTTE and the government forces but to leave for India.

"We received a secret instruction from India to dissolve the North-East Provincial Council. That is why we moved the resolution and left for India," he said.

The radio interviewer asked him: "Is it the LTTE that crippled the North-East administration?"

"It was the Premadasa government," Perumal replied.

Both at the radio interview and at the November 24 media conference he was asked: "Do you still believe in Eelam as a solution to the Tamil problem?"

"No," he replied emphatically. "The situation has changed. The Sinhala opinion has altered. Both the government and the opposition are ready to give an autonomous administration with substantial powers to the North-East Province. The thinking of the Tamils too have changed. They are prepared to accept an autonomous unit within a united Sri Lanka."

He added: "Both main political parties have given top priority to finding political solution to the ethnic conflict."

Radio interviewer asked: "Is it that this change in attitude the result of the

war the LTTE had waged?"

Shrewd Perumal saw through the question. He did not want to give the credit to the LTTE. "No. It is not the murders of the LTTE," he said. But he could not explain the factors that caused the change in the Sinhala thinking.

Perumal, while stating that Ranil Wickramasinghe's alleged claim to hand over to the North East for two years is no reason for panic, added that when the North east PC assembly was being dissolved, it was he who first proposed to the govt to hand over the province to the LTTE along with the 38 seats EPRLF had in the assembly. He also said that then SriLankan as well as Indian governments were of the opinion that the LTTE could be brought on to the path for peace he made the above suggestion openly, but the LTTE refused it.

He said he had met President Chandrika Kumaratunga twice, the first time a few months ago and the second on November 19. He was questioned on whether the second meeting made him to decide to come into the open. He evaded the question.

"Did the President ask for EPRLF support?" he was asked pointedly. Again he was shrewd. "We discussed the ethnic crisis. The question of supporting the President at the elections is a matter the party has to decide."

Radio interviewer probed him on that. EPRLF secretary general Suresh Premachandran had issued a statement saying that his party would not support the President or the Opposition Leader the interviewer pointed out. "That was his view," Perumal said. "EPRLF Working Committee is meeting in a few days. The party's position will be decided at the meeting," he said.

Interviewer would not accept that position. "Suresh had said in that statement that that was the party position."

"Unlike other parties there is internal democracy in the EPRLF. Every member is entitled to his opinion," Perumal said.

"To the extent of voicing it publicly?"

Perumal replied: "That is the uniqueness of the EPRLF." Then he added: "I am still in the EPRLF and these are my views."

On December 6 Suresh Premachandran announced that the EPRLF had decided to suspend Perumal from

(continued on next page)

Junior Minister Defects

A key ruling party minister, who helped form a coalition government in Sri Lanka, resigned from the government on 6 December and switched sides to support the opposition United National Party candidate, Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Deputy Minister for Estate Housing, P. Chandrasekaran, who held junior rank but was responsible for providing the crucial one-seat majority to form a coalition administration in August 1994, said he was fed up with the government led by President Mrs. Kumaratunga.

The decision of Mr. Chandrasekaran, who heads the Up-Country People's Front (UCPF), reflects the first formal split in the vote-base of the estate workers. It also further narrows the close contest between Mrs. Kumaratunga and the Opposition Leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe, in the Presidential race. Chandrasekaran said he was confident opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe would win the December 21 presidential election, adding he would be able to win concessions for his minority Tamils in tea plantations with an opposition victory at the

(continued from page 13)

the party. He gave two main reasons: First, Perumal supported President Kumaratunga violating the party decision not to support any candidate and instructed his supporters to paste President Kumaratunga's posters in Jaffna. Second, he wanted to start a military wing of the party while its policy is to function as a fully democratic party.

"Soon after his arrival, without the knowledge of the party leadership, Mr. Perumal entered into discussions with politicians, officers and armed forces and intelligence agencies, thereby creating an impression among party members that there are two rival factions within the party. Although he was aware that the EPRLF has already submitted its amendments to the proposed political package of the Government to end the ethnic conflict, Mr. Perumal on his own submitted another set of amendments which completely deviated from that of the party," Mr Premachandran added. ●

polls.

Parting ways with the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), Mr. Chandrasekaran was elected to Parliament in 1994 as an independent and made a Deputy Minister. The CWC, led by the late Thondaman, aligned with the UNP in the last polls but backed the PA after the polls and wrested a Cabinet portfolio.

With a background in radical politics, Mr. Chandrasekaran was making inroads into the estate Tamil vote after the formation of the UCPF. With his announcement, the estate Tamil vote also gets divided as the CWC, headed by Mr. Arumugam Thondaman, the grandson of the late Thondaman, has pledged support to Mrs Kumaratunga.

Chandrasekaran said the UNP leader had promised to increase wages of tea workers by more than 55 percent.

"It was we who helped Chandrika to form a government in August 1994," Chandrasekaran told reporters adding, "It is we who will ensure that Ranil Wickremasinghe will become president this time." He said the election had given him an opportunity for political bargaining for the 250,000 minority Tamils working in the tea plantations.

Chandrasekaran's departure from the Kumaratunga camp is a further

blow to her in an area where her support-base is weak and affected by the death of S Thondaman, leader of the largest estate workers trade union-cum-party, the Ceylon Workers' Congress. Days before his death, Thondaman had pledged his party's support to her in the elections. In his last letter to the President before his unexpected demise, Mr Thondaman wrote, "I wish to convey to you with pleasure, that the Indiya Vamsavali Makkal Perani which met in N'Elia on 30 October, 1999 has unanimously decided to actively support You Excellency at the forthcoming Presidential Elections. Furthermore, I wish to assure Your Excellency as the President of the Ceylon Workers Congress, that members of my party as well as the representatives and other office bearers of the CWC who are spread all over the plantation area are at Your Excellency's disposal to work cordially with other organisations supporting Your Excellency's candidature in the respective districts to ensure your victory." However, it is now said that the party leadership is now divided despite the assurances of support for Chandrika from Thondaman's grand-son, Arumugam, who has taken over the leadership of the CWC.

Analysts say Kumaratunga faces a tougher battle than in the last election in 1994 when the minorities supported her overwhelmingly as she made establishing peace in the island her main campaign plank. ●

Bishops Urge People to Cast their Vote

The Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka have called upon the people to cast their vote on December 21 and urged the candidates to refrain from violence and other irregularities.

The Catholic Bishops Conference in a statement on 3 December said, "On this all important occasion we the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka and members of the Conference of Major Religious superior call upon all to cast their vote as it is their sacred duty by the nation to do so. Destroying one's vote is tantamount to a shirking of a grave responsibility. The candidates concerned must ensure that a democratic and free election is conducted, where the voters are allowed to be the decision makers, without let or hindrance and

all candidates to eschew every type of coercion, irregularity, manipulation or violence during their election campaign, the election day itself and the days following the election.

The Bishops also requested all candidates to gracefully accept the verdict of the people and to act accordingly. All candidates should ensure that their party supporters do not resort to any irregularities and respect the democratic right of everyone for a free exercise of their franchise and all candidates to facilitate the smooth progress of the election by placing no hindrance whatsoever on the officials conducting the election, and by not seeking to unduly influence or coerce them to any irregularity.

Independent Commission on "Disappearances" Urged

Recent developments in Sri Lanka have reinforced the need for an independent commission to investigate the "disappearance" of hundreds of people arrested by the army in Jaffna in 1996, Amnesty International said on 7 December.

"The international community is waiting to see how the government deals with human rights violations, committed under both the previous regime and the present one," Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané said, in a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunge, asking her to set up such a commission.

As a preliminary step, the government should make public the findings of an internal investigation by the Ministry of Defence into "disapp-

earances" in Jaffna in mid-1996, Mr Sané said.

The Defence Ministry's Board of Investigation has reportedly informed relatives of the "disappeared", in letters sent out last week, that it cannot establish the fate, or whereabouts, of 374 people arrested by the army in mid-1996, out of more than 700 cases probed.

The human rights organisation pointed out that unless the Board's findings are made public, it will be difficult to verify them. "It is important that this be done since it is already clear that some of the findings do not inspire public confidence," Amnesty International said.

Relatives have been told that the fate of at least two of the "disappeared"

is not known, even though their bodies were among those exhumed and identified in June this year at Chemmani in Jaffna, the organisation pointed out.

Amnesty International also urged the Sri Lankan government to seek international expertise in forensic criminal investigation to help bring to justice the killers of those whose remains have recently been exhumed by the authorities. The United Kingdom, the United States and Australia have shown interest in providing such assistance.

Amnesty International had sent international experts to Chemmani to be present during the exhumations of the remains of 15 people in September this year, and their analysis in October. These experts concluded that a pattern of injuries had emerged, making it easier to identify the perpetrators of these crimes. "By seeking international expertise, and by developing its own facilities for advanced forensic work, including DNA testing, the Sri Lankan government can speed up this process," Amnesty International said.

Editor Grilled Over Madhu Church Report

One of the country's most senior newspaper editors, Mr. A. Sivanesaselvam, Editor of the weekly 'Thinakkural' news journal, recently fell victim to this quality when the security authorities summarily hauled him up for questioning. On 24 November, Mr. Sivnesaselvam, by no means someone with a 'radical' reputation nor someone who could easily be mistaken for a Tiger 'terrorist', was taken into custody and detained for more than seven hours in the offices of the CID.

This veteran, Colombo-based journalist, with a professional reputation spanning several decades, was not being questioned in connection with LTTE arms, or urban bombing operations or for harbouring Tiger cadres. Rather, this highly respected journalist, long known for his moderate political outlook, was detained for so many hours for questioning purely about some items published in his newspaper. In fact, even the suspect items - about the plight of refugees following the attack on the Madhu Church in which 37 innocent civilians were killed - ultimately did not turn out to be not so 'suspect' once an accurate translation from the Tamil was done!

The question is, if a person as unlikely as Mr. Sivanesaselvam (who is a

member of the National Library Services Board of Sri Lanka and current President of the Tamil National Journalists' Association) must be questioned about publications pertaining to war refugees, would it not have sufficed for the CID to have visited him in his office and interviewed him there?

Thankfully, the CID's handling of Mr. Sivanesaselvam did not proceed much further down the path of incarceration and 'grilling'. His interrogators had attempted to find out whether he was being backed by the LTTE or under pressure from that organisation. The editor had denied involvement with any organisation, let alone the LTTE, but had reported the situation at Madhu without being partial to anybody. Although released at 10.15 pm on the same day, his uncomfortable, perhaps traumatic experience would remain permanently etched in his memory, to say the least. At the same time, questions will remain as to whether the CID's treatment of this senior Tamil journalist was purely an overreaction prompted by the Department's security concerns or whether there was an attempt to deliberately intimidate a journalist and a newspaper.

The Editors Guild and the Free Media Movement severely condemned the action of the CID.

Bishop Urges Tamils to Vote

The Rt. Rev. Rayappu Joseph has advised the people in his Diocese of Mannar that it is important to for the people to cast their votes at the Presidential election.

The statement from the Bishop said,

"At this juncture, I wish to point out to you how important it is to elect a leader who will lead the country with a vision and usher in permanent peace based to justice, a leader who will be capable of bringing to end with no further delay the unbearable burden that the people are given to bear."

"It is our basis right to freely make use of our right of franchise. ... We are bound as individuals and as communities to strictly avoid all types of election violence: to be vigilant over the evil of rigging of votes and to do everything to ensure the free exercise of the right of franchise."

"I wish to draw your attention to the gruesome incident that took place at Madhu on 20.11.1999. This is a pitifully indication of the height of evil in the country. This process of evil should be brought to end. God is the author of lives that these will be the seed for the birth of our long awaited peace, let us go to the polls to elect a leader the time demands."

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350,000 people in Wannu Face Starvation

The Bishop of Mannar, Rt. Rev. Rayappu Joseph, who visited the Wannu area at the weekend, said recently that most of the 350,000 people living in the district are starving, and has requested the Governor of the North-East Province, Major General Ashka Jayawardena to take immediate action to send food to the Wannu area.

The Vicar General of the Mannar Diocese, Very Rev. Fr. Anthony Xavier Croos, has sent a letter to the Governor on behalf of the Bishop saying that food had not been available in Wannu from October 16. The paddy the people had, has been all used for seed paddy and

no fishing is possible in this rainy season.

"Thus most of the people are starving and the situation of the children who keep on crying to their helpless parents for food is an unbearable and a common sight there. His Lordship requests Your Excellency to take immediate action to send food to Wannu where there are nearly 350,000 people", he has said.

The Bishop has also brought to the notice of the Governor that due to the present disturbance in the main land area of the district of Mannar, 90% of its paddy cultivation is about to be aban-

doned, threatening an year of starvation in the year 2000 in the district.

Meanwhile the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Conference of Religious Superiors in a joint declaration has called upon the Government and the LTTE to declare Madhu a Zone of Peace under the supervision of the Church. In a joint declaration, they have recalled that 38 people were killed in the recent attacks on the Madhu shrine and that at present 16,000 refugees from surrounding areas have moved into the church seeking security and refuge.

They have also called on the government and the LTTE to allow all pilgrims or any person who seeks refuge in the Shrine to be allowed to come in without any difficulty and also to ensure that no armed persons are allowed into the shrine reservation.

Poll Shows Slight Lead for Chandrika

The second opinion poll conducted by ORG-MARG and published in the Colombo weekly "The Sunday Times" has found that the incumbent, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga of the Peoples' Alliance (PA), continues to have an edge over Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP), in the Sinhala majority areas of south Sri Lanka, in the run up to the December 21 Presidential elections.

The ORG-MARG polls were conducted only in the mainly Sinhala south, and not in the war-torn North East. The results, therefore, pertain mainly to the Sinhala majority residing in the southern, central and western parts of the island.

Though the pollsters had not directly asked who one would vote for, indirect questions, such as which party was better equipped to tackle the key problems of the country provided an insight into the possible voting pattern in the Presidential elections.

To take the burning ethnic question first, 37 per cent said that the PA would be able to find the best solution to it, while only 15 per cent said that the UNP had the best plan and 28 per cent thought that the PA was better for solving the country's unemployment and cost of living problems. Only 26 per cent thought that the UNP was better suited.

The pollsters had interviewed 1351 voters in the island, barring the Tamil North and East, between Nov. 19 and 25. The earlier poll was conducted in the same area between October 28 and November 2. It had given the PA an edge.

Between the two polls, the PA has been able to keep the lead in terms of vital parameters, though the lead has

narrowed. In the earlier poll, 44 per cent thought that the PA was best suited to solve the ethnic problem. What is, however, disturbing is that no party seems to have the overwhelming support of the people on the two vital issues facing the country. About 22 per cent of the people said that no party would be able to solve the ethnic problem and 18 per cent said that they did not know, indicating that near 40 per cent of the people had no hope that the ethnic problem, which had claimed more than 60,000 lives in 16 years, could be solved in the foreseeable future.

MSF Warns of Worsening Situation for People

Medecins Sans Frontieres, the Nobel Prize winning non-governmental medical and human rights organisations said recently that it was "deeply concerned that continued heavy fighting in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka will worsen the already precarious situation of the civilian population." A six-page statement issued by MSF noted that indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian property must stop. MSF calls upon the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to abide by international humanitarian law, giving particular attention to those provisions affecting the civilian population.

MSF added: "The actions by both the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE have placed civilians at risk. While alerting civilians of dangerous areas can help to reduce civilian casualties,

international law provides that issuing warnings to a civilian population does not negate the requirement of civilian immunity from attack or the civilian non-combatant status.

"The restrictions on access of the population to humanitarian assistance has sharply reduced the level of assistance provided to civilians in the north. Unless such restrictions are stopped, the civilian population will continue to suffer from shortages of medical care, food and shelter materials. Both parties should agree to the establishment of humanitarian corridors and safe areas to improve access to humanitarian assistance. "The recent fighting has resulted in the increased deployment of landmines. Both sides should abide by the provisions of the 1997 Landmine Convention and cease producing and deploying anti-personnel mines."

Just over a fortnight ago, the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in his annual Heroes Day speech reiterated his offer of peace talks with international mediation. The LTTE also seems to have given the green light to the UNP's presidential candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe to campaign in the east of the country.

While campaigning in Batticaloa and Ampara Mr Wickremesinghe expressed his determination to make the LTTE a partner in whatever solution was arrived at to bring peace to the country.

But with the presidential elections due in less than a fortnight, and its leader's peace offering in the air, the LTTE launched its latest military offensive. This was a multi-pronged land and sea attack on the massive Elephant Pass army camp that stands at the gateway to the Jaffna peninsula. But unlike in the recent past, the Sri Lankan army seems to be standing its ground and repelling the attack with the LTTE taking substantial losses.

The successful defence of Elephant Pass would repair some of the damage to the army's battered morale in the aftermath of last month's loss of most of the hard won Wanni territory. But more importantly for the government, this military encounter will partly restore the government's claim that it has prosecuted the war effectively against the LTTE. It once again provides the government, if it so intends, the flexibility to enter into negotiations with the LTTE with a sense of strength and not collapse.

Track Record

Coincidentally, the successful defence of Elephant Pass came shortly after President Chandrika Kumaratunga brought out her election statement on "The Ethnic Question and the War." This is a very comprehensive and admirably crafted document. It is rich in depth of feeling, experience and thought. The UNP candidate's "My Pact with the People;" by way of comparison, appears to have been written more with a mass audience in mind. The solution to the ethnic conflict provided in the UNP's document, while attractive, is exceedingly skimpy in detail and content.

Some of the relevant points in President Kumaratunga's document include the assertion that the PA would be "Empowering the various provincial

Vote for Peace and Democracy

Jehan Perera

or regional councils in a manner that would enable the diverse communities in our country to enjoy self government or autonomy in the conduct of their day to day affairs." The distinction drawn between provincial and regional councils offers a welcome hint of asymmetry that could recognise the Tamil areas as special.

The reference to self government may provide a meeting point with the self determination sought in the Thimpu principles. In addition, the presidential statement accepted the reality of the LTTE's dominance in the north-east. It included: "An acceptance of the need to have negotiations with the LTTE and all other interested parties."

Supplementing these assertions, which are still to be acted upon, is the actual fact that the government has a genuine (even if inefficient) track record in the "Carrying out awareness building of the need for a political solution and our proposals for it through the Sudu Nelum Movement, the North-South Bridges of Understanding Programme, the North-South sports events, youth exchange programmes and through a wide range of peace education and awareness building discussions carried out in schools."

While the UNP has no comparable document or track record of educational work done, it has been dismissive of the government's efforts. Addressing the electorate in the eastern towns of Batticaloa and Ampara, Mr Wickremesinghe is reported to have expressed his confidence that by working together with the LTTE in an Interim Council, mutual trust for negotiations would be "naturally created."

The Big Question

The UNP's presidential candidate also added that "In such a backdrop, we can discuss constitutional reforms and bring about necessary changes. Today the government has got imprisoned within constitutional frames. We will not be able to go even one step further by dragging on useless arguments

about constitutions." He has a point. There has been too much dogmatism and inflexibility in accommodating other points of view (most notably in terms of power-sharing at the centre) in the government's devolution package.

There is little reason to doubt that if he wins the presidential elections, Mr Wickremesinghe will be true to his word and immediately seek to commence peace talks with the LTTE. For the past two or more years he has been consistent in asserting that the LTTE has got to be negotiated with for peace to be a reality. But whether he will be able to persuade the LTTE to enter into an Interim Council under the existing constitution, and one he proposes will be based upon the ethnic ratio prevailing in the north-east, is a big question.

It is relevant to note that in 1987 the LTTE rejected a comparable arrangement of participation in an Interim Council. There is no doubt that in negotiations, the LTTE will demand the maximum as they did with the government in the 1995 peace talks. They made various demands that had serious military implications. The major problem with the UNP's position is that it is not based on any firm set of political principles which are any different from those present in the existing constitution. The highly centralised nature of the present constitution will remain untouched by the any proposed Interim Council.

The LTTE has every reason to be mistrustful of the promises of politicians that are not backed by either a proven track record of commitment to Tamil rights or a political consensus that has already been achieved. They have seen a track record of broken promises given by a succession of governments to Tamil leaders beginning with the B-C pact of 1957. Due to their mistrust it can be expected that the LTTE will demand that the government should make the major concessions first and, thereby, prove its good faith. Unless the UNP is prepared with a principled position beforehand a new UNP government will be forced to either enter into one-sided compromises or to risk a breakdown of the peace talks like happened in 1995.

Ultior Motive

But it may well be that the UNP has prepared such a principled position. If

it has, it should trust the voters and state what they are. For their part it is incumbent on the voters to disregard the appeals made by certain groups, who stand for "Sinhala unity" and who oppose any deal with the LTTE, that they spoil their vote.

The vote is an essential part of democracy and responsible citizenship in a democracy. Without the vote, democracy becomes meaningless. Those who are exhorting the people not to vote or to spoil their votes should be subjected to the test. What is it that those "spoilers" have offered the people in the past? It will be seen that many of those who wish to negate the people's right to vote are at the extreme ends of society.

In the past (and even in the present) they have advocated policies of ethnic hatred or intolerance or both. Be they in the north or south, they have never enjoyed the confidence of the people and been voted into positions of authority. Perhaps realising that their paths to power do not lie through the ballot, they are trying to take the people on another journey - to another form of government, in which there is no vote.

Despite the misgivings we may have about the practice of democracy in our country, the voters have a wide choice at these elections. It is clear that of the 13 presidential candidates only Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremesinghe have a realistic chance of winning the elections. But that does not mean that people have no choice but to vote for one of the two front runners. If we reject them totally, we still have a choice of 11 others.

The other presidential candidates may not be able to win the elections. They are also untested in government, but certainly some of them stand for acceptable policies that light a beacon for the country. Surely some of them, such as Vasudeva Nanayakkara (human rights), Rajiva Wijesinha (liberalism) and Nandana Gunatilleke (socialism) may merit our vote. We can give one of them our first preference. And if we do not reject both of the two front runners totally, we can give one of them our second preference.

Sri Lanka is fortunate to have two front running candidates to whom the electorate feels familiar enough to call them by their first names. It says much for their basic tolerance that we can criticise them publicly, and that posters that mock at them can be publicly

Election: Tamils Should Boycott

Prof. Kopan Mahadeva

Tamil voters and Tamil political parties including armed activists are currently in a dilemma as to what they should do at the forthcoming presidential elections. A similar puzzle is bound to arise when parliamentary elections take place in due course. In making a decision now, Tamils of the different groups should take into account the consequences of their voting in previous elections of the past two decades. They must foresee the likely outcomes of the various options available to them as regards their obvious common goal of winning freedom for Tamils; freedom from de-facto Sinhala Buddhist oppression and chauvinism practised in various forms by all successive governments of the last five decades of the so-called democratic, post-independence era. Whatever is now decided should be applicable to all similar elections of the near future, to demonstrate and maintain sober Tamil consistency and unity, until the main goal is achieved once and for all.

The PA Government of Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga came to power in 1994 with the mandate of, inter alia, solving the problems of the Tamils and hence of the country through peaceful

dialogue with the LTTE, as well as of abolishing Jayawardane's (UNP's) presidential system of government which is hindering real democracy. Neither of these important promises has been fulfilled. Contrarily, Tamil homelands of Northeast Sri Lanka are now occupied and controlled by the government's armed forces. The half-hearted peace talks of 1994 and early '95 were abruptly terminated at the first minor hurdle, and a policy of militarism was ruthlessly reintroduced. There is no guarantee at all, not even a reasonable hope that the PA Government will deliver justice to the Tamils if they again vote for PA's nominee in the coming election. Hence this course of action is like suicide. It will only result in Tamils going round the same cycles of unrealisable hopes.

The option of fielding a Tamil candidate at the presidential election might seem to be a truly democratic method, which may appeal to the international community. Such option is also being bandied about. But it will not serve any purpose in practice. Firstly, no Tamil candidate will ever win, considering the population ratios of Sri Lanka, as has been proved even lately by Kumar Ponnambalam. Also, such a course might give the wrong impression that Tamils support the present lopsided unitary constitution under which the elections will be held. It is the 1972 & 1978 constitutions which have been the main instruments of subjugation of Tamils. Also, the current agony of Tamil suffering and agitation will then be prolonged almost indefinitely. Even from our Sinhala brethren's viewpoint, such a course will have the effect of leading them up illu-sory garden paths as regards an equitable and lasting solution to the Island's ethnic crisis.

Another possible option is to vote for the UNP candidate. But Tamils should not forget that despite the fact that both Mr J R Jayawardane and Mr Premadasa started off by appearing to Tamils to do evenhanded justice, both succumbed finally to racialism and favouritism, making life a living hell for Tamils. Though Premadasa in

practice went all out to help individual Tamils whom he trusted, and, having been a grassroots politician, sincerely understood and sympathised with the problems of the Tamils, he used underhanded methods of governance. Had he lived, he might have ultimately succeeded in making the scales even, but only 'might have'. And Mr Wijetunga who followed him was too short-lived in office and selfish, to do any justice to the Tamils. Their present leaders, on the other hand, have not demonstrated strength of conviction, even as President Chandrika did in her pre-election years and as lip-service during her presidential reign, for the Tamils to reasonably hope that UNP will at least repay them for their votes.

There seems to be only one option for the Tamils to follow. That is, to boycott the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections completely - not in silence but vociferously, as had been practised by the LTTE for some years now. All Tamil political parties and armed groups should openly and unitedly declare, and publicise internationally that they are boycotting the forthcoming and all future island-wide elections - not because they don't believe in democracy but because they have seen no real democracy from the unitary form of government practised in Sri Lanka under the present constitution. The time has come for all Tamil parties and groups to stand together in this passive and democratic protest.

Two thirds of the Muslims of Sri Lanka are Tamil-speaking, and hence are Tamils. They have to live among the majority Hindu and Christian Tamils. This section of Muslims would do well to support the rest of the Tamils in the intended form of democratic protest. Those Muslims who, by choice, live among the Sinhalas and who themselves speak Sinhala at home, would naturally support either of the Sinhala presidential candidates. Up-country Tamils are all Tamil-speaking, and have suffered even more, economically and educationally for example, than the Tamils of the Northeast. Now, especially since they have lost Mr Thodanman who had his own personal methods of solving their problems, they should do well to join with the majority of Tamils and boycott the elections.

The suggested course of non-voting by Tamils will put to an acid test, the winning Sinhala candidate and party as to how they will govern and effect

TAMILS MUST VOTE

T Somasekaram

One day, after a one-to-one discussion with the late Saumyamoorthy Thonadman about another matter, I told him with sincere feeling, "Sir, we never had a leader like you, our problems are due to that." That lion smiled and nodded his head in agreement. We have had rigid Gandhians, eminent lawyers, leaders of the non Gandhian type, but never a leader who really understood power, where it lay, and how to look after his people, when his people form a minority. They never displayed the flexibility that we require to "look after our people".

Now they are back in full force. One group says, "Don't vote". Another says, "Let us put forward a common Tamil candidate." What they are really saying is, waste the precious resource called the vote, in an empty and meaningless gesture. When CNN or BBC announces the results of the presidential election on 21 December, will the candidates other than those of the PA, UNP and possibly JVP, even be mentioned? Will they refer to the low voting in the Tamil areas within the 15 seconds they might devote to the election in Sri Lanka?

Sri Lankan Tamils have forgotten the illuminating stories we were taught in elementary school. A father gave a bundle of firewood to his son and said, "Break the bundle". The son tried and failed. Then the father said "Untie the bundle and break them", and the task was finished in a few minutes. The lesson is that unity is strength.

Sri Lankan Tamils formed 12.6% (or 1 in 8) of the population of 14.3 million as enumerated in the census of 1981. The mid-1998 figure, according to the registrar general was 18.8 million. The total number of Sri Lankan Tamils, assuming that the percentage has come down by 1.67% to 11% due to heavier outward migration, will be 2,000,000 in the country. After the voting age was lowered to 18, the percentage of voters is approximately 61% of the population. In other words, Sri Lankan Tamils have a vote bank of

constitutional reforms to dispense justice to the Tamil nation and its minority communities in a united Sri Lanka with equal sovereignty and opportunities as for the Sinhalas. ●

1,220,000. Twelve lakh votes.

Now let us think of two imaginary scenarios. Suppose we could cast our votes in the presidential election in the Maldives, which has a total population of 400,000. We would swamp the country and even an SL Tamil can become the president of the Maldives! Let us imagine that we could vote in the recently concluded Indian elections, in the state of Tamil Nadu. Our bloc vote would determine the winner. Now we are having the same chance within Sri Lanka. If we vote en bloc, we will determine whether the PA or UNP candidate wins.

There is no need to form organisations, paste posters or carry out TV and other media campaigns or hold meetings with thundering orations. Simply talk on the grapevine - by word of mouth, letter or telephone. Decide who is the better candidate - and vote unitedly for one of the two main candidates. Even if you want to record a protest vote by voting for Vasudeva Nanayakkara or some other candidate, cast your second preference for one of the two main candidates.

I was in public service for 35 years before retiring in 1992. In the later stages of my career, I had a close ringside view of how the engine of government works. Whatever system is adopted, unitary district provincial federal or regional real power will remain in Colombo. The United States is a federal country with 50 states, with 50 elected governors and others lower down the line such as highway engineers and attorney generals elected by the people. There is careful separation of powers, legislative judicial and executive. But who runs America? In whose hands does the power to wage war or have peace, economic progress, social development, or to provide disaster relief, lie? In the hands of the man sitting in the White House. So it will be in Sri Lanka, whatever form of government is adopted. Alex-ander Pope summed it all up in a couplet, "About forms of government, let fools contend, What is administered best is best."

The vote is as precious to us as good water for drinking and farming in the arid lands we live. Don't waste one drop. ●

Peace At Last in Northern Ireland

Gerad Pandyan

If the vexed disputes of Israel-Palestine and Ireland are seemingly on the path to resolution, why not Sri Lanka? This question is uppermost in the minds of several persons of south Asian origin in London. This is easier said than done. Of course, the Palestine and Irish problems are long-pending ones and their apparent resolution has involved a third negotiating power - the United States. Given its dominant position in the post-cold war era, the US has seen it right to take upon itself the mantle of resolving age-old disputes. What are the reasons? Possible US domination of the Irish markets?

Pressure from the Irish diaspora in the US? Or president Bill Clinton's desire to champion peace as seen by the US worldview? The relative path to peace in Palestine has even taken the US to bring arch enemies Syria and Israel to the negotiating table. Well, this has meant that the countries, or the parties, in dispute might better listen, or at least make the right noises that they are listening. And sometimes, get to the task of implementing what they have been listening as well, come what may!

Last week, northern Ireland certainly entered a new era. The province's political landscape is changing, as political foes banded together to try and rule in peace after 30 years of armed conflict. Without fanfare but with hope, a coalition of Protestant and Roman Catholic ministers took over responsibility at Stormont for day-to-day running of the province from British ministers who had shuttled in and out from London as guerrilla war had been raging. Historically, Ireland had laid claim over the northern part of the island, which has been under British rule. And the struggle had long assumed a Catholic-Protestant dimension, with those in northern Ireland swearing allegiance to British rule. The Irish struggle had caught the imagination of Karl Marx himself, who supported the Irish nationalist aims.

Now, in a new era, Catholics and Protestants have at last made peace. The

current aim of both sides is to banish sectarian hatred and the sombre legacy of strife, reaching back generations, that mercilessly struck down Protestants and Catholics and sent British soldiers home in coffins. The cult of violence has had a knack of non-differentiation of the oppressor and the victim, or the occupier and the occupied. The struggle for Irish freedom had taken huge tolls for both sides and the society fast getting militarised. Now, the guns of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) remain and they can still jar peace hopes. Martin McGuinness, one-time IRA commander and now a Sinn Fein minister in the new cabinet, has stated that he has been working toward disbanding of the IRA's arms. McGuinness, who was a hate figure for the Unionists, will sit with the likes of Sir Reg Empey, holder of a British knighthood.

For the first time, Sinn Fein shares power with Unionist politicians who are pledged to uphold rule from Britain. Sinn Fein now expects the IRA to open talks with disarmament authorities later this month. The launch of a new four-party ruling coalition has marked the revival of the stalled 1998 Good Friday peace pact.

Protestant First Minister David Trimble, who took the first leap by getting the mandate of his Unionist party for the new set-up two weeks ago, said: "We're going to have an institution with responsibility, and with responsibilities to the people too." This meant that the Unionists would no longer look up to Britain for support, but rather go for direct deal with Sinn Fein. On the other side, Seamus Mallon, a moderate Catholic nationalist who is the province's Deputy First Minister, agreed with Trimble: "It is an awesome responsibility, absolutely awesome."

However, it is known that mistrust between the various parties dies hard and suspicion thrives on uncertainty. The appointment of Martin McGuinness as education minister has already kicked off protests with Protestant school students walking out of classes

in Kilkeel County Down. Years of mutual mistrust has made one of the groups - the Democratic Unionist Party - maintain an open hostility to the presence of Sinn Fein.

The peace process has arrived as a two-fold exercise: firstly, US Senator George Mitchel, the chief negotiator, has had extensive talks with all the groups concerned. Key Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams' trips to the US in the past few years and president Clinton's trip to Ireland had made it possible.

Mitchel made the Good Friday agreement work again, narrowing down the differences. Secondly, with the British and Irish prime ministers Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern committed to pushing the talks further, the onus fell squarely on the Unionists and the Sinn Fein. And in a historic mandate, Trimble's gambit paid off, with a majority of his Unionist party members sanctioning the peace process and the new set-up. "We've taken the jump. Now, it's your turn, Mr Adams," said Trimble, in a swift quote.

And the IRA came out with an expected statement, disclosing that "it is committed unequivocally to the search for freedom, justice and peace in Ireland. In our view, the Good Friday agreement is a significant development, and we believe its full implementation will contribute to the achievement of lasting peace. We acknowledge the leadership given by Sinn Féin throughout this process". The IRA further stated that "it is willing to further enhance the peace process and consequently, following the establishment of the institutions agreed on Good Friday last year, the IRA leadership will appoint a representative to enter into discussions with Gen John de Chastelain and the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning".

Following this, the Irish parliament at Dublin passed a historic resolution rescinding its long-held constitutional Irish claims over northern Ireland.

This meant that Ireland would consist of two regions and not one as envisaged by the nationalists. This paved the way for the setting up of a new government at Stormont. Of course, the main question which remains is that of the IRA's willingness to decommission arms. Sure, after all the riots and bombings, the IRA has

(continued on page 25)

Pakistan: The General is Drifting Aimlessly

T.N.Gopalan

Najm Sethi is a respected journalist from Pakistan, widely acclaimed for his courageous stand against the authoritarian acts of the now ousted Nawaz Sharif. When he was abducted and kept incommunicado, human rights organisations all over the world raised a chorus of protest. It was almost under the pressure of international opinion that the then Sharif government set him free.

That man recently produced a two-part documentary for the BBC which turned out to be almost an apology for the Musharraf regime. He is candid enough to openly voice his predicament in the documentary: "Having fought for the democratic rights all along, how could I reconcile myself to military dictatorship?" But the fact is he does seem to be doing exactly the same thing, repeatedly inter-cutting with interviews with the Chief Executive, as General Pervez Musharraf prefers to call himself, even while depicting Sharif and his cronies as also the Bhutto clan in most lurid colours.

The message is obvious. "Pakistan has little option given the total bankruptcy of its political class. One has to trust Musharraf and give him sometime." He would not dare raise the point that the armed forces have not fared any the better either in the tortuous history of the country.

Writing in his Friday Times, one commentator despairs that the outside world should look upon with mistrust the new government and that India should cash in on the situation. He goes on to proffer some gratuitous advice too: "The first step in this direction could be a serious focus on issues like human rights and the rights of the disadvantaged groups - women, children and the minorities. There are many laws on the statute books that are shameful, to say the least. Those laws must be scrapped. The second step could be constitutional reform in terms of devolving powers to the federating units. The third step could be land reform. It must be appreciated that so far this package does not include the foreign policy. While it is very difficult at this stage to wind down certain policies, certain other steps can be taken to make the policy more rational."

After nearly two months in office Musharraf has not given the slightest hint of heeding such well-meaning advice or that he would prove any different from the rest of the ruling elite. In his references to his own class during his interview to the BBC, he keeps harping on the responsibility as also the failings of the elite and condescendingly talks about the urgent need to provide some relief for the commoners, but does not tell you how proposes to go about it.

Apart from some tentative efforts to make the big defaulters cough up the money they had looted from the banks, the CE regime seems to be drifting along, aimlessly, if anything its emerging fundamentalist contours and anti-Indian line reminding one uncomfortably of the Zia Ul Haq times.

There was another disturbing reminder. It looked like Nawaz Sharif could go the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto way. Unable apparently to come up with any strong evidence against him in any other case, or too much in a hurry to fix him, the Musharraf government is now saying that Nawab Sharif and his cohorts including his brother sought to deny permission to the PK-805 flight to land in the Karachi airport on 12 October when Musharraf was returning from Colombo, in an attempt to prevent him from creating problems for the government after his dismissal as the Chief of Armed Services, thus putting at grave risk the lives of over two hundred other passengers, a crime which could invite death penalty.

Till the first week of December charges had not been framed and it looked like it would be quite a while the government manages to do so.

All kinds of theories abound on Musharraf's approach. Some say that he would not really go to the extent of executing Sharif - times have changed a lot since executed Zia Zulfikar Ali Bhutto - and that he only intends to keep the pressure on Sharif and hopefully force him to quit politics in return for clemency. Yet others say Musharraf is only groping his way around the legal maze, but once he comes across the correct formula he would certainly go for the jugular and make an example of Sharif, thus putting

the fear of God in the minds of every kind of pretender to the throne.

That apart, what does the military dictatorship propose to pull the country out of the quagmire it finds itself in? Set up a National Reconstruction Bureau. And what will it do? "The National Reconstruction Bureau on Thursday unfolded a nine-point "field of focus" and announced that a mechanism would be evolved to ensure that the systems introduced by the military set-up were not easily reverted by the succeeding governments." At his maiden press conference, NRB chairman Tanvir Naqvi said that the fields of focus as approved by the National Security Council would include politics, government, law enforcement, public employment, primary health-care, education, population welfare (sic), public information and economy. In its sweep and vagueness, the agenda reads like the manifestos of political parties released at the time of every election and quickly forgotten once the polls are over.

Naqvi also said that the government would not take any action in contravention of the Quran and Sunnat. Every step of this government, he stressed, would be within the parameters of Islam. And hear an Islamic scholar expounding on the glories of Islamic polity - "(it) revolves round the norms and institutions of authority, liberty, equality, consultation and justice as set out in the Holy Quran thus: "Obey Allah, obey His Apostle and the authorities from amongst you but in case of differences or disputes refer, the matter to Allah and His Apostle..."

That is to say that the issue would have to be decided by "an independent and impartial judicial forum in accordance with the Holy Quran and Sunnah. This completely rules out the sovereignty of the Parliament or of the people and establishes the sovereignty of Allah." Clearly the fundamentalists are licking their chops in anticipation. Sharif himself took a lot of steps forward in that direction, and it looks the present regime will only complete the unfinished agenda.

The sufferings of the minorities, even of the Shia sect and of the women in general in a Pakistan increasingly Talibanised are already there for all to see. Only anxious that the West could take some precipitous step and remove him from power, Musharraf glibly talks of a modernised Islam, even invoking Kemal Attaturk.

Before the overthrow of the Sharif government, a liberal commentator,

M.B.Naqvi, had outlined the perils posed by the so-called Islamic stream. "Three of them - Jamaat-i-Islami, Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) and Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP) - are the larger ones but there are so many other smaller factions and groups. Their stock in trade is rhetoric about Islam that is calculated to excite religious zeal bordering on fanaticism. It has no linkage with any specific problem of Pakistan like mass poverty, over-population or stagnating economy. They would all profess to enforce Shariat without prior codifying it in a form that will command general acceptance from all sections of the Muslims.

"What they do is to employ a sectarian version of Islamic Shariat that cannot but promote divisiveness in a most radical fashion. Moreover, most have created armed militants wings, one result of which is rampant sectarianism in the country and plenty of evidence of religious intolerance being promoted toward both religious minorities and Islamic sects." It is this process which looks like getting accelerated under Musharraf now.

If he has desisted thus far from imposing a martial law regime or suspended media freedom, that is because

he knows that such steps would evoke angry responses from the West. If the US has swung round to giving a clean chit of sorts to him and is now willing to put him on probation, that is because of the mask of moderation he is wearing at the moment. But the long-term dangers are all too obvious to bear iteration.

In the case of India he continues to be hostile, keeps harping on Kashmir and his government is overtly encouraging all kinds of Mujahideen groups. What with the Sangh Parivaar in power in India, this process is bound to deteriorate in the days to come.

Musharraf himself has made it clear that he is in no hurry to leave and has openly stated that he enjoys wielding unquestioned power. One is only reminded of a sequence in Salman Rushdie's Shame in which the character resembling Zia is interviewed by a TV reporter. At one stage, the poor reporter, musters up enough courage to question the dictator on his authoritarian ways - "Ahem...sir, it is said that you don't suffer fools gladly..." (He could go that far only.) The dictator retorts, "Who told you? Am I not doing so now?" and breaks into a guffaw, to the acute discomfort of the reporter.

From the safety of her exile, Benazir Bhutto recently noted that the civil structure in Pakistan had crumbled because of a deterioration of civil dialogue, the lack of political consensus, the partisan hysteria and the rule or ruin philosophy. It has led to the stifling of political liberties and ultimately to the collapse of state structure, she said.

Musharraf, though, does not seem to have dispensed with politicians altogether, at least not yet, though he keeps both the mainstream parties far away from the corridors of power. Addressing a group of Pakistani Americans, he in fact had a piece of advice for his "politician brothers" - "(they) have a very profound role to play and I urge them to remove dissension and discord to achieve the objectives of stability."

He did concede, "Our economy has collapsed and we are near bankruptcy. We have been looted and plundered. Our banks and financial institutions are near being emptied." However, he said he was not all that despondent. "We shall pull Pakistan out of trouble," he asserted.

Given the way things are shaping up in that benighted country, few would share his optimism.



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Convicts Get Reprieve in Rajiv Murder Case

T.N.Gopalan

In a dramatic turn-around of fortunes, the four persons sentenced to death in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, Nalini, Murugan, Chinna Santhan and Perarivalan seem to have got reprieve at least for the time being.

The Madras High Court has struck down as void Tamil Nadu Governor Fathima Beevi's order rejecting the mercy petitions filed by them on the ground that she had not sought and obtained the advice of the state government before deciding on the issue.

Justice K.Govindarajan also directed Fathima Beevi to consider the mercy petitions afresh after obtaining the advice of the council of ministers as required under the Constitution.

With the fate of the four virtually in the hands of Chief Minister Karunanidhi himself, pressure is mounting on him, predictably from the pro-LTTE

lobby, with some support from the human rights organisations too, to recommend to the Governor to grant clemency and commute the death sentences of the four.

On November 30 a thousand-strong rally was taken out in the state capital of Chennai in support of clemency for the four and later a petition was presented to the Chief Minister urging him to come to their rescue.

It is indeed a long and heart-breaking journey for the four since May 21, 1991- the ghastly deed, the panicky flight, social disgrace, apprehension by the police followed by harassment and torture, finally culminating in the horrendous order of the TADA court judge Navaneedham V. who directed that all the 26 who stood trial before him to go to the gallows.

But the Supreme Court of India

seemed to have greater understanding of the law or perhaps worked under less political constraints. Whatever the case, 19 persons were acquitted and three others including Robert Payas, Jayakumar and Ravichandran sentenced to life. Only the four remained to become victims of the hangman's noose.

When they filed their review petitions before the Supreme Court again, their counsel pointed out that the planners and perpetrators of the crime were dead and three of the seven accused sentenced to life. In the circumstances, the four too could be shown some leniency, he argued.

The learned judges would not agree. The roles of the four were "very different" from those of the rest and so they had to face the punishment. There was one dissenting judgement though, from Justice Thomas, who felt that it was not the rarest of rare cases deserving death penalty. The same judge on the previous occasion too had sought to speak up for Nalini and stressed the need to save the daughter of Nalini and Murugan "from imposed orphanhood," in vain though.

The option left for the four are only mercy petitions. Under Indian laws, a

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person condemned to death could appeal to the Governor of the respective state for clemency. If he or she finds no response, then the next forum of appeal is the President of India - there have been quite a few instances wherein mercy petitions have worked at one level or the other.

What is happening in the case of the four is indeed interesting. There have been signature campaigns organised by several groups, not all of them pro-LTTE, petitions presented to the President of India, street-corner meetings organised and so on, demanding that the death sentence be commuted in the case of four.

It was not as if there is a Tamil nationalist fervour sweeping the state or that human rights organisations across the country had become very vibrant - only the more vocal groups had decided to raise the decibel level

(Continued from page 21)

been on a ceasefire for two years from a bloody war against rule by Britain. The Unionists who voted for the peace agreement are concerned that if the IRA delays its arms decommissioning process, the agreement would not work.

Where lies the key to the success for peace in northern Ireland? In the British Labour party's recently-implemented doctrine of devolution for Scotland, Wales and northern Ireland? In the Irish government's historic move to relinquish claim over northern Ireland? In Sinn Fein's stated aim of persuading the IRA in the ultimate efficacy of civil and democratic processes? In the Unionist dream of ruling from Stormont? Or, in president Clinton's cherished desire to get at least one peace agreement back on rails before he quits office, given the fact that the Oslo agreement between Israel and Palestine is still in tangles? Perhaps, the current situation has arisen from a combination of all these, with president Clinton's aims overdetermining the flow of events towards relative peace giving a fillip to the political process.

Observers can easily realise that it pays, for the IRA, to have Sinn Fein around, for the tough tasks of representation and negotiation.

Historically, all struggles have had military as well as political wings and it is pure statesmanship which has always known that the political side has to control the military wing. It is to be seen how the Sinn Fein manages this task. ●

to the maximum, swept as they are apparently by the LTTE magic. All kinds of arguments are marshalled, from humanistic to moral to legal, in support of the four's plea for mercy.

The capital punishment is any way abhorrent, they were not the key-players, the trial had been conducted under the TADA which is no more in the statutes, Nalini and Murugan especially leave behind a child which was born in captivity and which has not known parental affection, they all have suffered enormously in the last seven years and so on.

PMK leader Dr.Ramadas wrote a moving letter to Congress President Sonia Gandhi. Even though she might have suffered the most in the demise of Rajiv, she should be magnanimous enough to pardon the four and recommend to the President of India that they be granted clemency.

After all they had not been motivated by self-interest when they got into the act. Well, yes, they might have been misguided into believing that they were acting in the best interests of the movement they had been devoted to.

Even a Keralite lady whose husband was killed in Saudi Arabia and who had pardoned the killers, thus saving their lives, appealed to Sonia to set an example to the rest of the humanity by joining the plea for commuting the death sentence in the case of the four.

Sonia promptly responded appealing to the President for clemency to the four and declaring unequivocally that none of her family, she herself or her children, Priyanka and Rahul were vindictive and would like the death sentence to be commuted.

Interestingly Vai.Ko. himself maintained a mystifying silence, though the LTTE-supporters still swear by him. "He is silently working for our cause only," they assert. If finally the four escape the noose, thanks to some action or the other of the Centre, the credit could perhaps go partly to Vai.Ko. After all he is always eager to flaunt himself as the most trusted loyalist of Vajpayee and he would certainly have lobbied the case of the four.

Jayalalitha and Vazhapadi Ramamurthy played true to their known positions, both vehemently opposing the commutation plea, whereas Karunanidhi himself seemed to have tied himself up in knots or played a very deceitful role during the entire period. At one stage he said he was in principle opposed to the capital punishment. "Whatever the crime, a life-term is the best

form of corrective action. Only that gives the guilty a chance to reform himself or herself over a period of time," he philosophised when the four sent in their petitions to Governor.

In reply to a specific question he did assert that his views on the capital punishment applied with full force to the Rajiv case too, but he came to deny having said anything like that at a later stage. That apart few cared to recollect that only last year he did welcome the off-with-their-heads judgement. "Is it not a bit too harsh?" he was asked and he responded, saying, "Was not the crime itself terrible?" Any way when hauled over the coals by the Rajiv loyalists over his reported comments that he would like to see the death sentence commuted, he denied having ever said so, and with a straight face at that to the very correspondents before whom he had made the earlier statement.

Even more important, after the High Court set aside the Governor's rejection of the mercy petitions, Karunanidhi asserted that Beevi had done nothing wrong, nothing unconstitutional. It also turned out that he had endorsed a noting from the Home Department to the effect that there were no grounds to reverse the Supreme Court ruling and any way Fathima Beevi, being a retired Supreme Court judge could decide on the matter for herself. At least that was what Nakkeeran, the brash pro-Tiger and pro-DMK bi-weekly claimed, and there was no denial from the government at any stage.

When the four challenged the rejection of their mercy petitions, it came out that the Governor herself had not sought the views of the state council of ministers on the issue as is mandatory in such cases. In fact the counsel for the four pointed out that Beevi herself had sat on a bench of the Supreme Court which stipulated that the governor shall act on the advice of the council of ministers in deciding on mercy petitions. All that an embarrassed government counsel could do was to seek repeated adjournments which was fine by the other side.

Finally the Additional Advocate General T.R.Rajagopalan went on to argue that under Article 161 of the Constitution there was no need for the Governor to seek and abide by the advice of the council of ministers. The relevant Business Rules were silent on the issue. She had enough discretion to decide on the issue herself. Anyway all the material facts in the case had been presented to the Governor by the state

government and she had acted only according to her reading of the facts and the notings on the files, endorsed by the Chief Minister himself. The AAG had also averred that in over 240 instances in the past, the then Governors had decided on the mercy petitions merely on the basis of the facts made available to them. In no case had the opinion of the council of ministers been sought.

But Justice Govindarajan rejected those arguments and held that the mere absence of any mention in the Business Rules would not override the constitutional requirement to obtain the advice of the Council of Ministers when deciding on mercy petitions under Art.161. He was also categorical that the issue did not fall within the purview of the discretionary powers of the Governor. He cited several supreme court judgments to show that seeking the opinion of the council of ministers was mandatory on the part of the Governor in such matters.

Even during the hearing, it may be noted here, the judge had intervened to observe that simply because certain norms had not been adhered to in the past, it would not validate Beevi's action now. What mattered was whether she had acted in accordance with

the Constitution or not. Hence ruling that Governor's order as "invalid in law and cannot be sustained," he set it aside and said, "It is for the Governor to pass fresh orders on the petitions after getting the advice of the council of ministers."

"Now there is no way Karunanidhi can play a double game. After all this ruckus, he would have little option but to recommend commutation. And there is no appealing against the Governor's decision. Even if Karunanidhi chooses to ditch us for some reason or other, we can still appeal to the President of India who in turn will have to seek the advice of the Vajpayee government, at which time we are confident that the mercy petitions will not be rejected, not straightaway surely..." claimed a pro-LTTE enthusiast.

Ram Jethmalani, the Law Minister, is reported to have assured the LTTE lobby that the government would sit on the mercy petitions as long as possible, even if for political reasons it is not able to accept them and grant the four reprieve. The pro-LTTE lobby within the ruling National Democratic Alliance, in the form of the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MD-

MK), seems to have really worked well and wangled some assurance from the Vajpayee government that "it would not take any decision in any hurry on the mercy petitions of the four, if and when they are submitted to the President of India..."

With the DMK unlikely to incur the odium of the Tamil nationalist constituency, it is almost certain that the state government would suggest clemency and commutation of the death sentence into a life-term when the Governor refers back the relevant files to it. And thus the four could be said to have as good as already earned the reprieve, it is generally felt here.

But then the ageing Karunanidhi does not seem to know which way to decide, to cultivate the Tamil nationalist constituency yet again - its strength being highly questionable - or to play it safe and appease the middle classes by playing it safe and refusing to reverse the Supreme Court ruling, leaving the matter to be decided by the President of India. And when it goes to the President, the clemency plea from Sonia Gandhi may have a greater impact in reaching his decision. For the present the suspense continues, though the odds could slightly be in favour of the four.



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Freedom of the Press must be Unlimited

Mario M. Cuomo

The more I learn about government and especially about democracy, the more deeply convinced I become that one of our greatest strengths as a people is our right to full and free expression. No people have benefited more from the gift of free speech and free press. Never before in history has the gift been so generously given or so fully used. From the very launching of our nation, these freedoms were regarded as essential protections against official repression.

When the geniuses who designed this wonderful ship of state came to draw the blueprints, they remembered Britain and other lands which had discouraged criticism of government and public officials, declaring it defamatory and seditious. The founding Fathers considered that to be one of the worst parts of British tyranny. They were convinced that much of the struggle for American freedom would be the struggle over a free press. So, they were careful to provide that the right of free expression, through a free press, would be preserved in their new nation, especially insofar as the press dealt with government and public officials. They declared that right of free expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution and wrote it in the simplest, least ambiguous language they could fashion:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press ..."

Having provided for the right of free speech for the whole citizenry, they went further and provided separately for "freedom of the press"; as broadly as possible, not tentatively, not embroidered with nuances, not shrouded and bound up in conditions, but plainly and purely.

Gambling on Liberty

The Founding Fathers knew precisely what they were dealing with. The press of their time was not only guilty of bad taste and inaccuracy, it was partisan, reckless, sometimes vicious, and, indeed, the Founding Fathers were themselves often at the point end of the press sword.

In view of that experience, they might have written amendments that never mentioned freedom of the press, or they might have tried to protect against an imperfect press like the one they dealt with - with conditions, qualifications,

requirements, and penalties - but they did not. They knew the dangers. They knew that broad freedoms inevitably would be accompanied by some abuse and even harm to innocent people. Knowing all the odds, they chose to gamble on liberty.

The gamble has made us all rich. Over all, the press has been a force for good - educating our people, guarding our freedom, watching our government - challenging it, goading it, revealing it, forcing it into the open.

Teapot Dome, the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, the revelations of corruption in New York City - these are all examples of disclosures that might never have occurred were it not for our free press. The press' insistence on forcing the White House to begin to tell the truth about the Iranian arms transaction is a dramatic reminder of how the press works incessantly to assure our liberty by guaranteeing our awareness. Less dramatically, the work of revelation by the press goes on day after day at all levels of government, all over the nation.

Surely, the preservation of this extraordinary strength is worth our eternal vigilance. That is why I believe it is appropriate to consider the matter of freedom of the press now, at this moment. It appears to me - and to others as well - that we are approaching a time when shifts in our law seriously may dilute the protection of the press and thereby weaken the fabric of this society.

Our Constitution is not self-executing; it must be interpreted and applied by the Supreme Court. In effect, no matter how plain the language of the great document may appear to the rest of us, the Constitution will say what the Supreme Court says it says. The dimensions of the right to a free press are therefore in the care and at the mercy of the Supreme Court.

In recent decades, the Court has dealt often with the First Amendment and most of the time has expanded its reach, culminating in the landmark protection of the press in the case of *New York Times v. Sullivan* in 1964, *Sullivan* said that, notwithstanding the fact that the press was inaccurate, even negligent, and the inaccuracy substantially damaged a public figure, there would be no liability on the part of the press. Only if the press were guilty of actual malice - that is, a

deliberate falsification or conduct that evinced a reckless disregard - could there be a recovery.

This protection obviously was designed to free the press from the chilling - maybe paralyzing - effect of huge damage awards as a consequence of inaccuracy in trying to report the truth. Some believed this was too much protection; they called it a license to defame, an invitation to dangerous, harmful carelessness. However, some - I among them - thought it was good and necessary policy, good and necessary law; that gamble the Founders took was still a good one.

Changing Interpretations

Supreme Court law, however, is not static or permanent; it changes. In 1985, Justice Byron R. White, who joined the majority in *Sullivan*, announced that he had become convinced the Court had struck "an improvident balance" in 1964. He urged that a better approach would be to return much less protective common-law standards of liability. In a 1986 case, Justice William H. Rehnquist indicated that he too would like to revisit *Sullivan* with an eye to the possibility of overruling it....

Conservatives generally seem to sense this is a good time to strike. Some recently have proposed making simple "negligence" the standard for responsibility for injurious inaccuracy. What would it do to a small newspaper, magazine or station to be subjected to a multi-million-dollar verdict, because a jury discovered its reporter did not make what the jury considered to be a reasonable search, perhaps in the library, perhaps through clips, perhaps seeking out witnesses, perhaps checking their stories, checking out their references, going to experts?

There is considerable other evidence to suggest that the courts are moving gradually, but consistently, away from *Sullivan* and toward less protection for the press. Floyd Abrams, a noted attorney and expert on the First Amendment, says the *Sullivan* principles are now under "sustained attack".

One more point about the Supreme Court: putting aside its somewhat esoteric legal jurisdiction, the truth is that the Court is a living institution. Its nine members are subject to the same public events that affect and instruct you and me. Their decisions to some extent reflect changing circumstances in the world around them or changing ideas about what is reasonable or wise.

This means that, when trying to predict a change in First Amendment rulings, the quality of the press as perceived by the public is a relevant fact-

or. In the Federalist papers, Alexander Hamilton asked: "What is the liberty of the press?... Its security, whatever fine declarations may be inserted in any constitution respecting it, must altogether depend on public opinion and on the general spirit of the people and the government."

This is still true today. A press regarded by the public as reckless invites the attention of the Supreme Court and tempts it to perform corrective judicial surgery. That is what Mr. Dooley meant when he said, "The Supreme Court follows the libel returns."

This raises a number of questions: What is the public perception of the press today? Is it regarded as less than perfect? If so, how specifically?

Official Criticism

It might be worth noting here that, in earlier times, many of our leading public officials were among the press' harshest critics. Today, the press is apt to refer to a public official who criticizes the media as "Nixonian." If, however, presidential labels are appropriate, the media might just as fairly call its critics "Washingtonian," "Jeffersonian," "Lincolnian," "Taftian," "Wilsonian," "Rooseveltian," "Kennedyesque," or "Johnsonian."

For example, George Washington

called the press 'infamous scribblers.' Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Even the least informed of the people have learnt that nothing in a newspaper is to be believed."

Theodore Roosevelt added action to his vitriol. He had Joseph Pulitzer and his New York World indicted for criminal libel after the newspaper charged corruption in connection with the digging of the Panama Canal.

William Howard Taft found one paper so bad as to be "intolerable." He told his assistant not to show him The New York Times. "I don't think reading the Times will do me any good and would only be provocative in me of... anger and contemptuous feeling."

Woodrow Wilson lost his conciliatory disposition in dealing with the press. He said, "The real trouble is that the newspapers get the real facts but do not find them to their taste and do not use them as given them, and in some of the newspaper offices, news is deliberately invented"...

The Best Evidence

The truth is that criticism of the press by its natural targets - public officials, governors, presidents - however illustrious, is not necessarily good evidence of the press' imperfection. Indeed, it can be argued that it is the best evidence of the

press' effectiveness.

The press' job is to find the whole truth, especially that part of it which is forgotten, ignored, deliberately concealed, or distorted by public officials. The better the press does its job, the more likely future generations will be reading colourful condemnations of reporters and commentators by today's politicians, and the more likely that the historical record will be truthful and accurate.

I think I understand this as a public official myself. Although I believe I have been treated very well by the press overall, from time to time I have had occasion to make my own criticisms of some members of the press and their coverage in particular cases. The response has revealed that politicians are not the only ones who are sensitive.

Of much more concern to the press than criticism from me and other public officials should be the criticism that comes from candid, thoughtful members of the press itself. Recently, it has been harsh indeed. What is worse is that the public at large appears to agree.

Harper's Magazine observed in 1985 that, when the Westmoreland case hit the headlines, a "flood" of commentary from the press ensued. Editorial writers noted that the press was "widely maligned, criti-

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cized, abused, and worst of all, 'distrusted.'" They pointed to numerous polls and "the public's conspicuous failure to be outraged when reporters were barred from Grenada." Harper's continued, "Though Americans ritually intone their devotion to the 'freedom of the press', they delight in repeating another prized national dictum; 'Don't believe what you read in the papers.'"

The press itself attributes much of this public disfavour to its own curable defects. Thus, "pack journalism" is a frequently heard complaint, citing the press' dependence on one another, forging a uniform point of view so as to avoid embarrassing differences, written as though every statement previously made by any reporter is indisputable, and the clannish locking of arms against critics from the outside. As Hodding Carter said in 1985, "... We are very, very good at pitching and very, very bad at catching... The press appears to be paranoid when facing criticism itself...."

Tom Wicker adds a larger and more substantive complaint. He feels the media generally is too prone to promote what it believes is easiest for people to accept and in the process fails to cover significant issues adequately.

The criticism that is set out here easily could be offset with generous accolades from sources equally credible. That is not the point. No one is more eager than I to proclaim how successfully the press has done its job over the last couple of hundred years, or how much better government might do its job. Still, we must recognize the fact that this nation currently is debating-in the place where we make the rules, the Court-whether or not to limit the freedom of the press despite its good record of 200 years.

The possibility of limitation is a real one. I believe it requires that we admit the media's confessions of imperfection and what appears to be a disconcertingly serious loss of public favor that could encourage restrictions of First Amendment rights.

The first thing we must do is sound the alert and make it clear that we are facing a real threat of restriction of the constitutional freedom of the press. That is not easy. The drift of the Supreme Court does not get reported in the morn-

ing headlines. It is an elusive subject to which we must direct attention. Then, we must hope-and we can not be sure it will work-that the reaction will affect, for the better, both the press and the courts....

Freedom and Responsibility

Let me offer you what I believe is an opportunity for all the media to make a contribution to the forming of public policy in this nation: Cover the public issues more thoroughly. Cover campaigns even more extensively. Cover state and local government more deeply, not just press events created by candidates or public officials...

The press is about finding the truth and telling it to the people. In pursuit of that, I am making a case for the broadest possible freedom of the press. However, with that great gift comes great respons-

ibility. The press-print and electronic-has the power to inform, but that implies the power to distort. The press can lead our society toward a more mature and discriminating understanding of the process by which we choose our leaders, make our rules, and construct our values, or it can encourage people to despise our systems and avoid participating in them. The press can teach our children a taste for violence, encourage a fascination with perversity and inflicted pain, or it can show them a beauty they have not known. The press can make us wiser, fuller, surer, and sweeter than we are.

One of the miracles of this democracy is that all of us-both the press and the public-are free to make the choices. We must work to keep it that way, to keep the miracle alive. ●

Book Review

Crimes Against Humanity

Crime Against Humanity - The Struggle for Global Justice by Geoffrey Robertson QC, 1999 Allen Lane, Penguin Press - £20

Crimes of War : Ed by Roy Gutman and David Rieff 1999 W W Norton & Co - \$10.95

Reviewed by **Geoffrey Bindman, Bindman and Partners, London**

Crimes Against Humanity is an outstanding original and timely book, charting the development of legal mechanisms for the suppression and punishment of the most heinous crimes, so heinous that they transcend the concerns of individual states to become the responsibility of every member of the international community.

It is no more uncritical or prosaic survey. It is a challenging and hard-hitting critique of the prevarications and hypocrisies of politicians. Although the author has been working on it for some years it has gained new importance and topicality as a result of the Pinochet case. The unprecedented extradition request by the Spanish government to enable it to put General Pinochet on trial in Spain for crimes against humanity committed largely in Chile while he was head of state is a huge step towards a new willingness of states to take their international human rights commitments seriously. Its significance is lucidly described in a final

chapter of the book, a fitting and optimistic conclusion.

Crimes of War is a different but no less important book, comprising short chapters by a large number of experts, each reviewing a current aspect of the complex world human rights scene. The stimulus was the failure of the Western powers (at the time when the book was planned) to overcome the periodical policies of Slobodan Milosevitch. Though subsequently the picture changed, the idea of exploring systematically the topics raised by modern conflict remains valid and the execution of the idea extremely effective. By enlisting a large number of distinguished journalists, lawyers and politicians to examine each of over 1,000 topics in 1,000 words or so, what has been produced is a kind of miniature encyclopaedia of war, but written very much from a humanitarian and reformist perspective. The introduction by judge Richard Goldstone is particularly valuable. (Courtesy of New Law Journal, 29 October 1999)



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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu mother seeks educated bride for son, 29, 5'7", employed as Medical Laboratory Technician in Norway. Send horoscope, details M 1144 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu uncle seeks partner for niece, 26, UK graduate, employed Social Services. Send horoscope, details, returnable photograph appreciated. M 1145 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional groom for graduate daughter, 30 in excellent employment in London. Send horoscope, details M 1146 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

Harichandra son of the late Mr. K.Thuraisingham and Mrs A. Thuraisingham of 30 4/2 Ridgeway Place, Colombo 4 and Sanjutha daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. Sambandanathan of 15 Mendip Walk, Crawley, West Sussex, RH11 7JZ on 27.11.99 at Sri Muthumari Amman Temple Hall, Upper Tooting Road, London SW17.

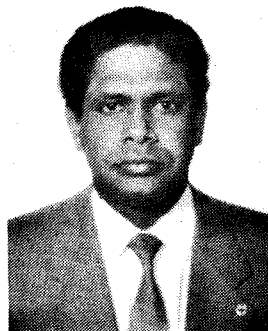
OBITUARIES



Mr. William Fredrick Arul Veerasingam, (80), Retired Manager, Insurance Corporation; dearly beloved husband of Rajes; loving father of Shanathi, Rajie, Vathany, Yamuna,

Viji and Sam; eldest son of the late Mr. & Mrs. J.D. Veerasingham, Surveyor; son-in-law of the late Mr. & Mrs. Kanagasingham; father-in-law of Kulendran, Loganathan, Robertson, Nithiananthan and Milton Hunt; grandfather of Angel, Regie, Christie, Roshan, Sam, Maureen, Lloyd, Doreen, Rehan and Fred; brother of Walter Veerasingham, Seetha Hallock and Vimila Niles; brother-in-law of Rathy, Malinee, David Hallock and the late Navam Niles passed away on 7th November 1999 and was buried on 10th November in Toronto.

The members of his family thank all those who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted in various ways during the period of bereavement. - 112 Portsdown Road, Scarborough, Ontario M1P 1V5, Canada. Tel: 416 755 1268.



Mr. Kathiravelu Krishnamoorthy (Baby Rasa), beloved husband of Selvaranjane; son of late Moothathamby Kathiravelu (Uyarapulam, Anaicoddai) and late Sivakolunthu Kathiravelu ("Theivampathi", Atchuvvely); son-in-law of late Iyakone Selvadurai (Proctor, Chunnakam) and Thavamany Selvadurai (Uduvil); brother of Maheswari Nadesan (Canada), Ganeshamoorthy (Germany), Sivamoorthy, Bascaramurthy,

Thivakaramoorthy (all of Canada) and late Sarveswari Segarajasingam passed away on August 21, 1999 in Canada and was cremated on August 25. The members of the family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them during the period of bereavement. - 402 - 2466 Eglinton Avenue East, Scarborough, Ontario M1K 5J8, Canada. Tel: 416 265 3416.



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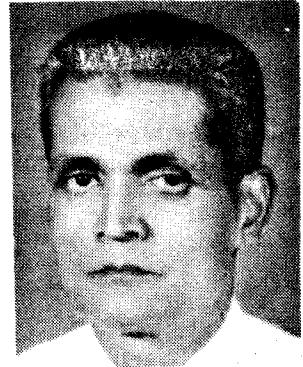
Sivalingam - Dr. Tambi Dorai of Harrow, Middlesex, UK; retired Medical Officer-in-Charge at the Central Chest Clinics (Colombo, Puttalam, Anuradhapura and Welisara in Sri Lanka) and Associate Psychiatrist at Carlisle, UK passed away on Wednesday, November 24, 1999. He was the beloved husband of Savithiri Devi; devoted father of Yuvaraj (USA), Vijayaraj (UK) and Shantharaj (UK); loving father-in-law of Saradha and Mangala (both of UK); affectionate grandfather of Raju (USA), Janaki, Nisha, Shobana and Keeran (all of UK); brother of late Mr. T.D. Shanmugarajah, late Mrs Ratneswary Subramaniam, Mrs Tharmeswary Ratnasingam (UK) and late Mrs Ganeswary Tharmalingam. The funeral was held on Sunday morning, 28 November.

The family wish to express their sincere gratitude to the many friends and relatives for the unsolicited support, their kind thoughts and messages of sympathy and for attending the funeral.

Mrs S.D. Sivalingam, 173 Northumberland Road, North Harrow, Middlesex, HA2 7RB. Tel: 0181 429 3545.

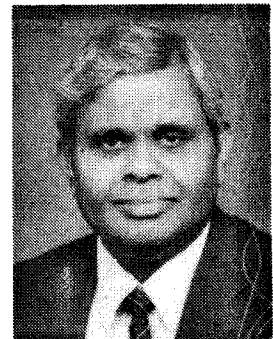
May God Keep Him in Peace

IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of Mr. Karthigesu Balasingam, Retired Station Master of 105 Palaly Road, Kanthermadam, Jaffna on the third anniversary of his passing away in Scarborough, Canada on 15th December 1996.

Greatly loved, deeply missed and always remembered by his beloved wife, children, daughters-in-law, son-in-law and grandchildren - 5 Empringham Drive, Scarborough, Ontario M1B 3Y1, Canada,



In loving memory of Mr. Thambo Thuraisingham (Tom) on the first anniversary of his passing away on 16th November 1998.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his loving wife Pathmasani; sons Naresh Arjuna and Dinesh Nagulan; daughter-in-law Asha and grand daughter Tiana. - 2 Fullers Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7TE.

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Tenth Death Anniversary



Sinnathamby Kulasingam

In ever loving memory of Mr. Sinnathamby Kulasingam, son of the late Mr. T.N. Sinnathamby, former Head Master, Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam and late Mrs. Sinnathamby on the Tenth Anniversary of his passing away on 24th December 1989.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his children Dr. Gunapopathy Ponnampalam (Sri Lanka), Tharmarajah, Vijayaladchumy Ramanathan (both of UK) and Sivapalan (Australia); sons-in-law Ponnampalam and Ramanathan; daughters - in-law Chandravathana Tharmarajah and Manjula Sivapalan and grandchildren Vishakan, Bhavan, Kugan, Theepan, Thulaseekaran and Sathiasorupan - 3 The Orchard, Wickford, Essex SS12 OHB. Tel: 01268 766624.

Sixth Death Anniversary of

Mrs. Gnanambikai Perumal Pillai



(4th July 1924 -
12th December 1993)

Wife of late Dr. C. Perumal Pillai

Amma

Six years have drifted by, since you were taken from our midst. Your loving care and gentle guidance still strongly missed. In your peace we find solace. Your children, Ravi, Usha, Jeeva and Ranjit and families.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Jan 1 New Year & Millennium Day; Feast of Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

Jan 2 Eekathasi.

Jan 3 Pirathosam.

Jan 6 Amavasai.

Jan 7 Feast of St. Raymond.

Jan 8 South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Jan 10 Chathurthi.

Jan 12 Shashti.

Jan 13 Feast of St. Hilary.

Jan 15 Thai Pongal.

Jan 16 Karthigai.

Jan 17 Eekathasi; Feast of St. Anthony.

Jan 18 Pirathosam.

Jan 20 Full Moon.

Jan 21 Thai Pooasam.

Jan 22 Feast of St. Vincent.

Jan 24 Sankadharachaturthi.

Jan 28 Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Jan 31 Eekathasi; Feast of St. John Bosco.

At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/4068.

Jan 22 & 23 4.00pm. Bhawan's Founder's Day

Celebrations. Variety Entertainment of Music & Dances.

Jan 29 6.30pm Bharata Natyam by Kumaran Bala.

Jan 30 5.00pm Bhavan & Gandhi Foundation UK present Mahatma Gandhi Smaran in memory of the Mahatma.

MIOT's Tear Drops, 1999

The Medical Institute of Tamils presented its fifth Tear Drops cultural programme at the Thurrock Civic Centre in Grays before an enthusiastic audience. This programme has enabled the children in the UK to help the children, suffering from the effects of war in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The programme commenced with the Mangala Villaku Etram by Dr. S. Pasupathirajah followed by Tamil Thai Varlthu sung by Abberami Srisikandarajah and Agalya Sivakumar, students of Harrow Tamil School. This was followed by a splendid veena recital by Umia Kukathasan, Arthee Yogendran and Vahini Ganeswaran, students of renowned veena teacher Smt Saraswathy Nadarajah

MIOT's President Dr. E. Velayuthapillai spoke about the aims of MIOT and its activities in 1999. This was followed by a touching speech by nine year old Arabi Senthilselvan on the urgent need for help and peace in the Tamil homelands.

The Chief Guest, Sister Christiobell, Director of Annai Illam, Kilinochchi detailed the tragic plight of the displaced Tamils in Vanni and the various attempts made to help those suffering due to no fault of theirs. She explained how Annai Illam project is helping them and emphasised the ever increasing need for more help from kind hearted people so that the project could continue to help the victims.

Soft music provided by Nishanthan on Mirthangam, Parthipan on Violin and Maithili singing, was well received by the audience. Students of popular music director Thiru S.K. Panchu of Sabrina Music Group gave an exciting performance which lifted the programme. This was followed by a Jeans Dance by sisters Biruntha and Biravinah Balasundram, students of Smt

Sayanee Gunanathan and Thulatha Nadanam by Theepan, Watson, Janusha, and Sabrina.

Jayaseelan, Arangan, Karisan, Gayathiri and Vinojeen, students of Thiruvalluvar Tamil School, East Ham participated in an educational drama directed by Smt Thavamani Manoharan followed by Bharatha Natyam by two versatile and talented dancers Gayathri Sooriyakumaran and Vidhya Maheswaran who won the hearts of the audience.

Junior MIOT president Rishkaesan Gnanachelvan gave an account of its activities for 1999 and proposed the vote of thanks. Ramanan Natgunathayalan and Anantha Ratneswaran compered the show and Doctors Poologanathan and Ratneswaran managed the stage very well.

Dr. P. Kukathasan, MIOT's cultural affairs secretary wishes to thank all participants for their active co-operation in this fund raising event, free of charge and donors of funds towards the programme particularly Western Jewellers of Tooting.

Funds raised through this programme will be sent to two voluntary organisations Viz:

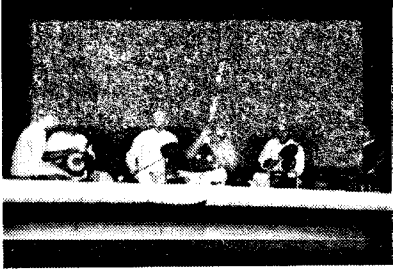
Saiva Apiviruthi Sabai, Trincomalee and Annai Illam, Kilinochchi to meet urgent needs of victims of war.

Forthcoming Medical Publications and Conference

Dr. Anton Sebastian's latest book 'A Dictionary of the History of Medicine' has been released and has been reviewed in the November Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, London. His other publications, **Dates on Medicine** and **A Dictionary of the History of Applied Sciences** will be available in January 2000.

He is due to take part in the conference of Sri Lankan Doctors organised by the Sri Lankan Medical Association of North America (SLAMANA) on 29th December 1999 at Trans Asia Hotel, Colombo. It would last two days and is expected to be the largest gathering of Sri Lankan doctors both expatriate and local.

Double Bill of Lalgudi Jayaraman & Dance Drama Pancha Ishwarams of Lanka



On a perfect autumn evening, a full capacity audience at the University of London, Logan Hall was treated to a double bill of South Indian classical music and dance of the highest calibre by the Shruthi Laya Shangam. The London audience has become rather blasé as a result of regular performances by top notch artistes in recent years. However, the prospect of Padmashri Lalgudi Jayaraman, the living legend of Carnatic music and Bharatha Natyam dancers from Kalakshetra, the same evening left enthusiasts gasping in eager anticipation. And what a memorable evening Saturday, 16th October proved to be!

The first half featured the violin trio. Lalgudi performed with his artistic and natural heirs, Lalgudi GJR Krishnan and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi. Accompanying the trio on the Mridangam was the renowned percussionist Trichi Sankaran and the ghatam was played by Bangalore Prakash. The opening Varnam in the raga Bowli and the closing Thillana in Sindhubairavi were both compositions of Lalgudi. These along with the repertoire of kritis and keerthanas in the middle, were rendered by Krishnan and Vijayalakshmi in a holistic style, together bringing out the **bhava** of the lyric and the beauty of the **raga**. Lalgudi's uncompromising stance on not disrupting the **bhava**, the lyrical mood, for pure **laya**, the rhythm, is well known. The diverse scholarly rhythmic patterns executed by the trio in the unique **Lalgudi bani**, particularly apparent during the **kalpanaswara** exchanges, were in total unison with the **bhava**. The melody from the strings, in harmony with the rhythmic sequences woven by the percussion, brought out the beauty of the lyrics in crystal clear fashion to the enthralled audience.

Bakti rasa flowed from the maestro's violin. The delicate variations in tone magically emanated through subtle movements of Lalgudi's bow, at times so subtle that the hand appeared to be still. This unique technique remained unparalleled. The music was always melodious, soothing and sympathetic. GJR staked his claim as a maestro in the making with the performance of **Shrikanthimathi** in the raga Hemavathi. He was consumed in the rendition of this composition by St. Muthuswamy Dikshitar, which left the audience equally spellbound.

Vijayalakshmi's rendition of Lathangi was enchanting.

Sankaran provided magnificent accompaniment on the mridangam. His masterly mix of the **Chathusram**, **kantam** and the **thisram** in Adi tala, for the thani, commanded respect. Variations of **vallinum** and **mellinum** flowed like a river rustling over pebble stones and gathering momentum to end in a crescendo of rhythm. The **thoppi** was unique, reflecting the stamp of Sankaran's guru Palani Subramania Pillai. Lalgudi's body language, a beatific smile, an appreciative nod and an assenting slant of the head, conveyed his full approval to Sankaran. Lalgudi's appreciation also extended to Pragash, who excelled on the Ghatam, displaying confidence, enjoyment and reverence.

Lalgudi introduced a delightful twist at the end of the finale, Thillana, changing from **chathusram** in four beats to **thisram** in three. As the performance drew to a close, the feeling was craving for more. Some two hours had passed, it was as though time had stood still. Indeed, for an artiste of Lalgudi's calibre an extended duration is surely appropriate, but Shruthi Laya Shangam had a challenging task of time management; fitting in the violin concert and the dance drama which was to follow, both within the same evening!



Pancha Ishwarams of Lanka, the brain child of Shruthi Laya Shangam, had its world premiere that evening. The dance drama was written by Padmashri Lalgudi Jayaraman and Professor Va Ve Su, set to music composed by Lalgudi himself and presented by the doyenne from Kalakshetra, Smt Vijayalakshmi Krishnaswamy. Vijayalakshmi's production was a master class in choreography. The five temples in Sri Lanka, dedicated to the supreme Lord Ishwaran, were brought to life in this excellent production. Naguleshwaram in the North, Thiruketheeswaram and Muneshwaram in the West, Koneshwaram in the East and the 'lost' temple Thondeshwaram at the south tip of Lanka were depicted in this dance drama. The contribution of Shri S. Arumugam, a much respected elder figure among expatriate Sri Lankan Tamils in the UK, in compiling the history of the temples was gratefully acknowledged.

Three dancers from Kalakshetra – Sunita, Mathangi and Anushya, were joined by Srinidhi from Chennai and Shobana from London. The grace and serenity of Sunita, the versatility and dex-

terity of Mathangi, the dignity and elegance of Srinidhi and the fleet-footedness of the vivacious Lankan Anushya, were matched by the poise and bhava of Shobana, who also displayed the rigour and discipline of the Kalakshetra movements in equal measure. The co-ordination between the dancers was pleasing to the eye. Smt Vijayalakshmi, a professor of dance at Kalakshetra and direct disciple of Smt Rukmini Devi herself presented Pancha Ishwarams of Lanka with verve, versatility, dignity and style.

Vijayalakshmi's choreography was full of variation, never repetitive and did full justice to the beautiful lyrics. The story of each temple was depicted in its own unique style. The dancers brought out the **bakthi bhava** movingly and never more so than when the lost temple of Thondeshwaram was portrayed. Lalgudi's poignant lyrics and music left many in the audience deeply moved. The words '**Kandu un thaal panियum kaalam vaaraatha**' and '**Vinthaiyuru gopurum, vilangu mani mandapamum, aadal aranguhalum, aaru kala poojaihalum**' recreated Thondeshwaram in the mind's eye. In addition to the excellent bhava, the dancers also executed the pure dance sequences in pure Kalakshetra style, clear straight lines and firm jathis.

The tales of Pancha Ishwarams were brought to life by the clarity of the excellent singer S.P. Ramh, who sang the compositions of Lalgudi to bring out the true essence of the composer's ideas. Ramh is the prime disciple of Lalgudi and the maestro was no doubt justly proud of his sishya's performance that evening. Shri Jegdeesan, the talented percussionist from Kalakshetra, played the mridangam and udukkai with deft and masterly strokes. Smt Pavathra Mahesh's veena spoke the lyrics and brought the varying emotions. Currently based in the UK, Pavithra is also a disciple of Lalgudi. The young violinist, Kumar Ragnathan, who has a direct lineage to Lalgudi via his guru Smt Lakshmi Jayan, played with confidence, unaffected by the seniority surrounding him.

Lalgudi's artistry resonated throughout the whole evening; as the distinguished leader of the violin concert and also the brilliant composer and architect of the dance drama. What struck me most was his generosity to his accompanists and his sishyas. This benevolence was apparent, be it while performing on the stage or seated in the front row watching approvingly while the dance drama unfolded. The audience reciprocated appropriately. As Lalgudi himself noted, fully attentive silent spells were punctuated by spontaneous and thunderous applause. The artistic collaboration behind the event reinforced the cultural and historic ties between India and Sri Lanka. Praise also to the Shruthi Laya Shangam, who worked with the full support of their patron Shri R Venkataraman, for

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commissioning and funding the events and making such a remarkable evening possible. Quite simply, it was a pleasure and a privilege to be there.

Ravi Sanguhan

London, November 1999.

Sportsman P. Sivalingam Passes Away

Peethamparam Sivalingam, fondly known as Siva and P. Siva in Badminton circles passed away peacefully. He was a sportsman, a friend to all, a gentleman in every sense and a man of few words.

Born in Malaysia, he received his initial education at Victoria Institute, Kuala Lumpur and later on at St. Joseph's College and University College, Colombo. As a Civil Engineer, he was attached to the Public Works Department and then to Shell Company of Ceylon until his retirement.

I have known him best as a sportsman. He was involved in a large number of sports and reached national level in table tennis, badminton, lawn tennis and hockey, which not many sportsmen can boast of. However, Siva was best known as a dazzling player in badminton, who played intelligently and skilfully. Having hailed from Malaysia, he had the knack which no others did. He excelled as a player, captain and official of the game. In 1949 the Ceylon squad, led by P. Sivalingam, Raff Jansz, Sufiyan and Marzook Osman. Sam Schoorman, and R.P. Nadarajah played a friendly tie with the Malaysian Thomas Cup team. Siva was the only player who triumphed defeating A. Samuel, Captain of the Malaysian team. This was indeed a great performance. Since then there has been no looking back for Siva, as he went on to win many badminton titles and was the best player in Ceylon at the time.

His pioneering efforts were seen with the formation of the Badminton Association of Ceylon in September 1950 and in 1953. He was the first national champion and went on to win the triple crown at the inaugural championships. In 1954, he captained the first official Thomas Cup Championship team against Pakistan in Colombo and in 1957 again, against Japan in Colombo. He was President of the Association from 1964 to 1971 and later on from 1975 to 1978 with the change of name to Sri Lanka Badminton Association.

On a few occasions as a youngster I remember him, for Siva and I lived down Fernando Road, Wellawatte and was able to witness him play at the Cosmopolitan Sports Club situated down the same road. He was an unassuming, soft spoken person in addition to being a giant in badminton. He was very much older than me and my interest in the game was very much influenced by him. I tried very much to emulate his skills and performance.

We in badminton circles will miss Siva. He helped to develop the game by imparting his knowledge, skills and experience to the younger generation. His name will go

down in the history of the game and the Badminton Association as a pioneer and a pillar.

On behalf of the Badminton Association of Sri Lanka, I wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to his wife Saradha and Shankari, Narayani, Ramana and Anantha. May he attain Nibbana.

Sam Chandrasena.

Aruna's Bharatha Natyam Arangetram



Aruna Kumaravel, disciple of Smt Subathra Shanteeban and a pupil of the Kingston Institute of Tamil Culture, ascended the stage at Ashcroft Theatre on 10th October 1999. Aruna has been learning dancing for the past ten years or so and has given several performances with other pupils at various venues in the past. This experience showed in the 'Arangetram' when she danced with confidence and grace. Her facial expressions (Bhava) were excellent and her movements on the stage were full of elegance.

Smt Subathra is a disciple of the 'Thananjayans', a well reputed couple who are perfectionists in their approach to the art and its teaching. It is therefore not surprising that Smt Subathra having imbibed the knowledge with commitment and dedication is following in their footsteps. All the dances were well choreographed and the pieces appropriately chosen for the occasion.

The two pieces still lingering in my mind for perfect rendering by the vocalist and well performed by the dancer are the Kriithi by Muthusamy Deekshitar, 'Meenaksi' in Gamagakria raga and the Bharathi composition, 'Asai Mukam' in Jonpuri. Especially in the second, the dancer's expression of feelings of longing was brilliant.

The music support was given by the leading artists in London. Smt Pushkala Gopal sang with a lot of Bhava and invoked the devotion in every listener. Sri Balachandrar followed on the Mruthangam, Sri L. Kothandapani on Violin, Sri Gnanavarathan on flute and Sri Sithamparanathan on various percussion instruments gave support and enhanced the programme.

The impression is often given that Arangetrams are staged to help produce a creditable C.V. when applying for

University education or for the parents to exhibit their affluence. It is hoped that this Arangetram would not fall into this category, as Aruna has the potential and has spent some years in learning this fine art. It would be pleasing to see that she develops and propagates this art for many more years.

Miss Manoranjitham Arumugam



(10.01.1917 - 09.07.1999)

An Appreciation

Miss Manoranjitham Arumugam is no more with us. We still feel her presence with us because of her contribution towards the welfare of the students in all the schools in which she has been teaching. She toiled hard and rendered thirty years of faithful service at Ramanathan College, Jaffna. Every student has high regard and respect for her. Her life is an open book to us. She was steadfast and righteous. We have great admiration and love for her dedication to the schools where she was teaching. She also served at Methodist Girls' School, Point Pedro and Saiva Mangayer Kalagarn, Colombo. All the schools progressed well during her time. She had lived by the noble proverb, ('எம் கடன் பணி செய்வதே') till her last breath. A thousand mourners of loyal teachers and students will cherish her teachings and will remember her for ever.

Ramanathan College, Jaffna Old Students Association UK Branch.

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