

Tamil TIMES

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Kumar Ponnambalam



Funeral Procession in Colombo

- Murder of Ponnambalam
- Bomb Blasts in Colombo
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-Voltaire

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CONTENTS

A Tragic Commentary	03
Boost for Peace Process	04
Tiger in the Lion's Den	05
LTTE Expresses Shock	06
Bomb Attacks in Colombo	10
Terrorism Convention	11
Presidential Election Results	12
Rape and Murder	12
North-East Insights	13
Search Operations	14
Presidential Election 1999	15
Chandicka's BBC Interview	19
Who Killed Ponnambalam?	21
The Hijack Crisis	25
Crises as Catalysts	27
Classified	30

A Tragic Commentary

Sri Lanka was already in a deep hole in the form of its intractable ethnic conflict in the run-up to the second millennium. In such a situation, commonsense demands you must stop digging. But the tribal nature of politics in Sri Lanka has not permitted commonsense to prevail. The politicians of all parties - whether of the violent or non-violent or the mixed variety - continued digging deeper and deeper totally oblivious to the fact that they themselves and the people whom they claim to represent, speak and fight for are in an abyss of their own creation.

If the wish is to emerge out of this abyss, then first and foremost, one should permit commonsense to prevail and stop digging and find ways and means of getting out of it. But the weeks that led to and followed the ushering in of the new millennium did not provide any evidence of such a trend in sight.

It was a month of violence characterised by continuing war in the north-east and suicide bomb attacks and assassinations in the south in the context of a presidential election, in which Chandrika Kumaratunga won a second six-year term as President having survived an assassination bid. The political air became highly polluted with allegations of a conspiratorial plot against the government in which the main opposition party, some leading business personalities, elements within the military and even some tycoons and editors in the privately-owned media industry were alleged to have been involved. Those who were accused by the government of the plot made counter-allegations against the government of a witch-hunt.

Then there was the brutal assassination of the Tamil politician, Kumar Ponnambalam, an outspoken critic of the government and belatedly to become, in his own words, an "inveterate supporter" of the Tamil Tigers. His assassin and those behind his murder are yet to be identified, but the perpetrators of this brutal crime have to be condemned unreservedly.

Another Tamil lawyer-politician like Kumar Ponnambalam was Neelan Tiruchelvam. He was also an internationally renowned human rights activist and constitutional lawyer. Hence, for the tragic fate that befell a Tamil politician in the little island often ignored by the world media, there was an unprecedented level of universal condemnation of his assassination in July last year. Some within the Tamil community were critical of the outpouring of grief and the scale and extent of the condemnation that followed Tiruchelvam's murder. The question from the critics was, when so many Tamils are being killed in this ethnic conflict, why concentrate, highlight and give so much publicity to an individual's murder, and why does he deserve it.

The answer is simple. The practice of deliberate and premeditated murders of even well known and high profile personalities without fear of consequences for such acts is symptomatic of a society in which, gross human rights violations, including arbitrary and extra-judicial killings, have become a familiar phenomenon to which many more ordinary civilians become victims. Whether one likes it or not, it is the violations against and even killing of such personalities that attract wider attention and concern. And it is by drawing attention to the fate that befall such personalities, one can seek to portray the reality of the situation that prevails, and attract and mobilise concern and attention to the grave malady that afflicts the whole society.

Today many, more so his wife and children, mourn and condemn Kumar Ponnambalam's murder. Why? Everyone has a right to life and that is the fundamental right of all other human rights. No one should arbitrarily deprive another's life, and this right is available even to self-confessed murderers and traitors under the United Nations Charter. Kumar was an unarmed civilian politician who is entitled to the protection of international humanitarian law even in the context of an internal armed conflict. Kumar was a lawyer who made his services available in the defence of many detained without trial and many accused under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In the exercise of his right to free expression, in his speeches and writings, he was a severe critic of the government, its leaders and their actions. Pursuant to the same right to which he was entitled, he spoke out without mincing words in defence of what he perceived as the interests of the Tamil community and by extension in support of the LTTE.

Like many others, by the commission of this heinous crime, Kumar's wife has lost her husband and his children have lost their father in January 2000 just as Neelan's wife and children did in July 1999. If internationally recognised human rights are deemed to be universally applicable and not selectively, then those who carried out these murders, wherever they originated from or whatever motivations with which they acted, stand condemned.

It has to be noted for the record and for some of us to be enlightened that, in recent times, no Tamil political leader of some standing - belonging to political parties of the violent or non-violent or the mixed variety - has had the fortune of departing this world otherwise than by violent means, and that is the true and tragic commentary of our times. Of the recent political gladiators in Tamil politics, the last to have had the fortune of natural death were the All Ceylon Tamil Congress leader G G Ponnambalam and the founder leader of the Federal Party later to become the leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front S J V Chelvanayakam, and that was many decades ago. The only exception being the patriarch of the plantation Tamils of the central highlands in the island, S Thondaman, who passed away recently having served his people from whom he received a grateful send-off into history.

A Boost for Peace Process

Political developments in Colombo seem to indicate a positive trend.

The government has announced a program to find a political solution to the island's ethnic problem. The peace process may be on track to be progressed in stages in quick succession. The government is planning to table a new draft constitution in the parliament before April this year.

In the first stage, the government will brief the political parties in the ruling People's Alliance and in the second stage have discussions with the political parties representing minority communities in Sri Lanka. In the third stage, the government will have detailed discussions with the main opposition United National Party with a view to reaching a consensus on the proposed political peace package.

Thereafter the government would invite the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for peace talks. In the fifth stage a new draft constitution will be tabled in Parliament during the month of April.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has appointed a committee comprising members of her alliance parties to work out modalities to expedite the process of getting the devolution package through Parliament.

A positive reaction from the Tamil Tigers to the new moves in Colombo is crucial to the ending of the protracted ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The peace process received an unexpected boost 19 January when the main opposition UNP made a U-turn and pledged legislative support to the government's peace plan, which has been circulation since 1995. "The signals are positive and the peace process

is moving forward once again," a senior government official in Colomb is quoted as saying.

Kumaratunga's power-sharing plan, which seeks to turn the country into a de facto federal state, was stalled by the UNP, which refused to provide the mandatory two-thirds majority needed to push it through the island's parliament.

Norway confirmed few days ago that a trip to Sri Lanka by Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek to broker peace talks between the government and the LTTE was postponed because the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was abroad. Vollebaek's visit is to be rescheduled as soon as possible.

Another senior Norwegian diplomat, State Secretary Wegger Stroemen, has been involved in efforts to mediate talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE according to reports from Oslo.

Tamil and leftist parties here have welcomed the unexpected opposition support for Kumaratunga's peace plan, which they said would help revive the peace process. They urged the president to seize the opportunity.

Dharmalingam Sidhathan, leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) said, "We have always maintained that there should be a consensus between the UNP and President Kumaratunga's People Alliance for there to be lasting peace in this country." Many sections in Colombo are surprised at the sudden change of stance by the UNP leader who has opposed the government's proposals for the last five years. Some see it as a desperate gamble to keep the UNP and

his leadership of it intact.

In recent weeks, it was speculated that many MPs from the UNP were to split and cross over to the government. There were also reports of a challenge to his leadership. In a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunga on 19 January Wickremesinghe said that despite reservations, his party would extend parliamentary support to the constitutional reforms that include controversial measures for devolution of power. In his letter, Mr Wickremesinghe said, "It is our position that your course of action is not the solution. But since you do not have another solution we will not stand in the way of the course of action you intend to adopt. Therefore in order to ensure that it is successfully introduced we will extend to you our support in Parliament."

According to ruling party sources, the government would now extend an official invitation to the UNP leader to join the peace process and he would also be requested to name at least three members to the committee already appointed by the President to make the changes to the new constitution.

Wickremesinghe's overtly conciliatory offer came amidst reports that the government was planning to introduce a bill that would enable Opposition members to cross over to the Government without losing their seats in Parliament.

The government had planned to push through parliament the "cross-over" bill so that her Government can muster the mandatory two-thirds support required to pass the constitutional reforms through Parliament.

It was being speculated that a number of UNP members were ready to switch allegiance to the ruling People's Alliance (PA) for a variety of inducements, but could not as they would lose their seats in Parliament under existing anti-defection provisions.

By extending UNP support to the package, Wickremesinghe was seen as trying to blunt the rationale for a proposed legislation that will splinter his party and threaten his leadership of it.

Latest reports from Colombo indicate that the government itself has decided to abandon the plan to proceed with the Cross Over Bill. They said the government was now in the process of trying to work out a method to seek the two-thirds majority in the House through a dialogue with all political parties represented in parliament. ●

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KUMAR PONNAMBALAM: TIGER IN THE LION'S DEN

D B S Jeyaraj

The moving finger of fate has etched the name of one more Tamil political leader in the roll of departed souls. All Ceylon Tamil Congress General Secretary and leading lawyer Kumar Ponnambalam was shot dead in the predominantly Tamil suburb of Wellawatte in Colombo on January 5th. G.G.Ponnambalam junior as he was described officially was a flamboyant and controversial politician who stridently fought the Sinhala political establishment in the name of the Tamil cause. In recent times he was bold enough to project himself as an "unall-oyed and unrepentant supporter" of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam while living in the heart of the capital. His death has sent shock waves within the Tamil community particularly the Dias-pora.

The identity of his killer or killers is yet unknown. An element of mystery shrouds it. January 5th saw an explosion at Flower road at the gates of the Prime Minister's office at 9.05 am.. A woman with explosives strapped to her body had detonated herself when suspicious police persons tried to frisk her bodily. At least 13 people were killed and 29 injured as a result. When news about this incident spread tension was prevalent amidst the Tamil population of Colombo which feared reprisals.

Kumar Ponnambalam was planning to go out with his son to inspect a Benz car which he intended buying and adding to his fleet of 19 cars of that make. After hearing about the explosion he decided not to go out and instead set about arranging his files and papers. At about 10am a man dressed in a blue shirt and black trousers who identified himself as "Shantha" called on Kumar at his "Gitanjali" residence in Queens Road, Colombo 3. When informed of Shantha's arrival by his aide Thomas, Kumar asked him to send the man in.

After talking with him for about 30

minutes in the house, Kumar left with Shantha. Instead of a chauffeur Kumar himself drove with Shantha sitting by his side. Kumar told the servants that he would be back in an hour. He did not say where he was going. Kumar was



driving a dark blue Benz numbered 65-2590. He wore a black and white shirt with a flowery design and dark blue slacks. He seemed quite comfortable in travelling with Shantha. Kumar had removed his watch, gold chain etc before going, a fact that was realised only after his death.

According to family members a person called Shantha had been phoning and talking with Kumar on and off from November 1999 onwards. On a certain occasion when Shantha had telephoned while Kumar was away from home, his son had asked for Shantha's telephone number to which his father could call him, Shantha had been evasive. When his family members had asked him as to who this Shantha was, Kumar had explained that Shantha was calling him about a case he was handling for him. The aide Thomas who let Shantha in on the fatal day has gone on record that he assumed the man was a Sinhalese because he spoke Sinhala fluently. Some confusion however has arisen about the name because some Tamil newspapers and correspondents in Colombo had reported the name as "Shanthan", which is a typical Tamil name.

Barely an hour later Kumar Pon-

nambalam was discovered murdered at Wellawatte by passrs by. His car was found parked at Ramakrishna Terrace a lane that links Ramakrishna and Vivekananda roads on the sea side. Kumar's body was found slouching at the drivers seat. The front window of the air conditioned vehicle had been lowered some inches. It is presumed that the assassin had fired the two lethal shots through the opening. The shooting was precise with one bullet on the head and the other in the chest. A standard Browning 9 mm was presumed to be the murder weapon. Since no one in the neighbourhood had heard shots it is suspected that a silencer was used. There was no sign of the man called Shantha. Subsequently Police have said that there was evidence that another person too had been sitting in the rear seat of Kumar's car for a while. No one knows as to why Kumar went out with Shantha or why he came to that place.

The LTTE was quick to accuse the Sri Lankan government and its "quis-ling tamil groups" of the killing. The tone and tenor of President Kumaratunga's victory speech warning LTTE supporters in the South to beware and Kumar's hard-hitting rejoinder to the President provided the backdrop to the allegation that the government was in some way connected with Kumar's killing. The Tigers also praised Kumar in a special press release. He was also honoured posthumously by LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran who conferred the title "Maamanithan" or eminent person on him.

The pitch was queered further when a hitherto unknown outfit calling itself the National movement Against Tigers sent letters by fax in Sinhala to media institutions. It stated that Kumar Ponnambalam had been executed by their organizations for supporting the LTTE. Four related reasons were given. It was signed by a self styled commander in chief "Vijaya Ranabahu". It also threatened to kill others who helped the LTTE directly or indirectly. The note was reminiscent of the warnings issued by the JVP in the old days. This note fuelled suspicion that a Sinhala extremist organization with or without armed forces collaborators had sprung up in Colombo.

The situation was further confoun-

ded by a message of sympathy sent to Mr. Ponnambalam by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Though the content of the message was formal and normal the confusion was in the date. The message hand-delivered by the President's Security division officials was dated 6th May 1999. This again has led to much speculation. Had the Presidential secretariat made a simple error or was there more to it than what met the eye was the question. Had the month been written in numerals the mistake could have been perceived as genuine but here it was written in letters. One newspaper drew attention to the fact that Kumar had in April 1999 attended a pro LTTE conference in Canada after which certain rumours about Kumar's position vis-a-vis the LTTE had circulated in the country. In any event the official press release that announced the President's letter of sympathy stated that the message was dated 7th Jan 2000. Various conspiracy theories, including the unexplained relationship of Kumar with the mysterious "Shantha", are now being circulated about the circumstances that led to Kumar's murder.

Kumar Ponnambalam was 61 years

old when he died. He was born on August 12th 1938. His father as is well known was the brilliant criminal lawyer and politician G G Ponnambalam who led the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC). Kumar was educated at St. Patricks Jaffna, Royal College Colombo and also at Aquinas. He then proceeded to Britain where he obtained an LLB from London University and an MA from Cambridge. He also passed as a Barrister. Upon returning to Sri Lanka he concentrated on his legal career while dabbling in politics too more so after his father's death. He married Yogalakshmi, the eldest daughter of Murugesampillai a former additional government agent of Jaffna. Yogi as she is generally known is one of the leading neuro surgeons in Sri Lanka. Kumar leaves behind a daughter and son Mrinalini, a doctor attached to Durand nursing home, Kollupitiya and Gajendrakumar, a lawyer practising at the chambers of eminent Presidents Counsel Daya Perera in Colombo.

Kumar was the Tamil Congress Youth league president while his father was alive. After the demise of the senior Ponnambalam in 1977 February Kumar contested for the Jaffna seat in the 1977

general elections as an Independent. The Tamil Congress itself had become a constituent of the Tamil United Liberation Front then. Kumar contested against the TULF as that party denied him nomination for the Jaffna seat. The break became permanent in 1978 when Kumar succeeded in reviving the Tamil Congress as a legally separate entity though erstwhile Congressmen like the Sivasithambarams etc were now in the TULF.

The Tamil Congress under Kumar strove valiantly to carve out its own niche in Tamil politics but met with little success. Kumar contested many elections including the Presidency in 1982 but was not successful. In the process, however, he played a useful role as a watchdog of Tamil interests. His most notable contribution was in 1988 when he co-authored along with former Liberal Party leader Chanaka Amaratunga the Democratic Peoples Alliance manifesto of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike. At this time he had very little in common with the separatist line adopted by the different Tamil militant groups. As time progressed Kumar became increasingly distrustful of the Sinhala political establishment and adopted a tough

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In the 1994 general election he contested in the Colombo district leading a group of Independents. He was routed obtaining a derisory number of votes. Thereafter Kumar became more radical. He was particularly scornful and scathing in his attacks on the TULF and other Tamil groups and parties and dubbed them as "quislings" for their "collaborative politics".

He lost faith in the ideal of a united Lanka and became enamoured of the Thimphu principles which asserted the right of self-determination for the Tamils. In recent times he publicly and repeatedly articulated the view that separation was the only way out for the Tamils, and this he did in spite of the fact that, under the sixth amendment to the island's constitution, advocacy of separatism was declared an offence. The past five years has seen Kumar blazing forth as a bitter critic of Kumaratunga and an ardent advocate of the LTTE though it is a banned organisation in Sri Lanka. He travelled all over the world attending conferences, seminars, mass meetings and rallies organised pro-LTTE Tamil expatriates to espouse the LTTE cause. He also wrote and spoke on the same lines while in Colombo. In spite of all this his party remained the All Ceylon Tamil Congress still.

A commendable feature about Kumar was his service to the Tamil community as a lawyer. There was a time when Kumar was a successful lawyer arguing a variety of cases and minting money in the process. He even learnt Sinhala and conducted his cases in that language. In recent times he had transformed himself into a virtual Tamil rights lawyer. Most appearances were over PTA and emergency regulation detentions, cases under PTA, writs of habeas corpus, trials of alleged army offenders like Kokkatticholai and human rights violations etc. He took up unpopular causes like appearing for some of the accused in the Central Bank Bombing incident for example. At the same time he had his own code. When some of his clients were implicated in the attempted murder of EPDP leader Douglas Devananda at the Kalutara jail he refused to appear for them. It must be remembered that when Kumar took his oaths (owing allegiance to Sri Lanka's unitary constitution) under the Sixth Amendment, he explained it as being necessary to retain his eligibility

to practise his profession as a lawyer.

Kumar Ponnambalam was also very frank and forthright. To use a cliché he did not mince his words. Diplomacy was absent. This earned him a lot of enemies. Also it sometimes blunted his communicative capacity. Nevertheless it has to be acknowledged that he has not hesitated to confront the high and mighty in the process. By doing so he has drawn attention to many of the acts of commission and omission affecting the Tamil people. At a time when most Tamil politicians in the Island had only praise for Chandrika

Kumaratunga's magnanimity it was the lot of Kumar to dissent. He was in that sense the irrepressible boy who shouted out that "the emperor had no clothes". Kumar Ponnambalam was the one man Tamil opposition to the PA regime, and his criticisms of President Kumaratunga were quite vitriolic.

Another remarkable thing about him was his courage. He seemed to have acquired an immense degree of personal and political courage over the years. As to whether the abrasive style and content of the challenges posed by him achieved any worthwhile result is another matter but there is no denying that his very act of confrontation itself was a factor to be reckoned with. As he himself has stated on more than one occasion Kumar believed that a Tamil had to say what he had to say staying right in Colombo. There was a time when his father aroused a collective Tamil pride within the community by his slogan "Thamilan endru solladaa, Thalai nimirnthu nilladaa" (State you are a Tamil and stand erect holding your head high). In recent times the son personified that slogan.

This display of courage has been described as foolhardy and exhibitionistic by his critics. Yet there is no denying that it did strike chords that were mutually antagonistic. Many Tamils were impressed by Kumar while most Sinhalese were angry. In particular Tamil expatriates, who only five or six years ago took very little notice of him, were amazed at Kumar's bravura. Whenever he travelled abroad he was always asked how he was courageous enough to stay on in Colombo and take on the government openly. Kumar would reply with characteristic immodesty, "It's in my blood". His open support of the LTTE in particular made a great impression. He has been described as the "Tiger who growled

within the Lion's den". He was very much a darling of the Tamils abroad. He may have never won an election in Sri Lanka but if he solicited expatriate Tamil votes Kumar would have been a sure winner.

Another notable trait was his persevering fighting spirit and never say die attitude. His party the All Ceylon Tamil Congress had become a caricature of its former self. Only a handful of members remained. Kumar himself had been consistently rejected by Tamil voters be it in Jaffna or Colombo. A lesser person would have called it quits and retired to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle that was very possible given his immense wealth. But this man would bounce back each time and move on from election to election. His greatest political ambition was to enter Parliament, a goal that has constantly eluded him.

Nevertheless by his political resilience and recent reorientation of his political ideology he managed to endear himself to a large segment of the Tamils. For the first time after 1956 the Ponnambalam's were on the dominant side of Tamil politics. There is the irony of sweet revenge for the Tamil Congress in this. After being dubbed as traitors by the Federalists for several decades the tables were turned. The erstwhile Federal Party leaders now of the TULF are the ones he called traitors and quislings. Kumar and the Congress had been salvaged and redeemed.

Whatever Kumar Ponnambalam's current Avatar in politics those who knew him well were aware that he was not a Tamil racist though he espoused an extremely hawkish Tamil line. In that respect he was very much a mirror image of some counterparts in Sinhala politics who mouth communal drivel but in personal life are non-racist. Kumar was in reality a Colombo Son of the Soil. He was in his element when going for the Royal Thomian. It was his background and connections that enabled him to a very great extent to remain in Colombo and espouse the Tiger line. It was also that which helped greatly in getting his point across to the Sinhala dominated media.

But another aspect that helped him in his lifestyle that bordered on political brinkmanship was the fact that he was never taken seriously by the English speaking elite. To them he was merely GG's "Junior". Indeed Kumar's predicament in his younger days was his

being compared and contrasted with his father. Ponnambalam senior was the standard by which Ponnambalam junior was measured. It took years for him to outgrow this. Despite his controversial views those who knew him well regarded him only as an "enfant terrible" of Tamil politics. Despite his tigerish growls to some he was at best like chairman Mao's description of imperialism - a paper tiger.

Sadly the enfant terrible of Tamil politics was being perceived by some sections of the Sinhala masses as a dangerous Tiger living in their midst. Kumar himself contributed to that perception by his public pronouncements and writings. The real LTTE cadres in Colombo do not advertise the fact that they are LTTE for obvious reasons. But Kumar though no disciple of Prabhakaran was asserting that he was a follower of the Tiger philosophy. As the LTTE itself has stated in the statement issued after Kumar's death he was the "only Tamil leader who openly and fearlessly supported the armed freedom struggle of the liberation Tigers". He kept on flaunting it in the face of his adversaries and went on taunting them. One gathers from Kumar's relatives that he knew death was inevitable. Yet he carried on as usual, issuing challenges to the state. When President Kumaratunga issued a warning to supporters of the LTTE in Colombo, Kumar took up the challenge and brazenly flung down the gauntlet.

One supposes that the assassins must be pleased with themselves for killing Kumar dubbed as the "de facto spokesperson of the LTTE in Colombo". But what has been lost on these killer squads is the fact that Kumar being alive was a living testament to the tolerance of Sinhala society. As long as he was allowed to speak out fearlessly and forthrightly from Colombo the democratic credentials of the government were enhanced. The fact that Kumar could speak, write and act the way he did was proof of the permissiveness and accommodative ability of the "Sinhala" state. The fact that many newspapers, owned and edited by Sinhalese provided considerable space to publish his articles and statements was also an extension of this tolerant state of mind. One wonders whether the felling in one stroke or to be exact two rounds of gunfire is reflective of a changing situation towards intolerance. ●

Kumar's Murder, Police Look for "Two Man" Killer Squad

Investigators inquiring into Kumar Ponnambalam's killing, after a process of 'inclusion and elimination' believe that it was a second man and not the one who travelled in his car that shot the politician. Investigators are now convinced that it was a 'two-man' killer gang involved in the mission. The fact that the man called "Shantha" who called at his home and then travelled with Ponnambalam on the day of the murder is absconding makes him also a suspect in the crime, the police said.

A spent bullet recovered from within the car on the foot-well behind the driver's seat and two empty bullet casings recovered outside have been despatched to the Government Analyst for a ballistic examination and report.

CDB chief, Senior Superintendent Bandula Wickremasinghe directing investigations said that suspect Shantha who called at Ponnambalam's house on January 5 had been a total stranger to the inmates of the Ponnambalam's household. But it has now come to light that this man might have associated with the politician much more closely from November last year.

Mr. Ponnambalam's son has told

police that suspect Shantha used to call his father off and on the telephone. When he was not available, suspect Shantha had always been reluctant to give his contact number to them.

The Colombo Detective Bureau (CDB) conducting investigations into the killing of All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) leader Kumar Ponnambalam are looking for two women, one of them a minor employee of the Colombo Municipal Council for questioning.

Colombo DIG Jagath Jayawardena and CDB Director Bandula Wickremasinghe with a special police team, had questioned over 200 persons along the Ramakrishna Road, Wellawatta. "We have received information about a vehicle which had been seen at Ramakrishna Road on the day of the incident," the CDB director said.

Whatever the police may say regarding their investigations, Kumar Ponnambalam's wife's suspicion, which has been conveyed to two Ministers who visited her home, is that elements within the government were instrumental in the murder of her husband. □

LTTE Expresses Shock And Confers Honour

The LTTE while expressing deep shock and grief, has accused the Sri Lanka government and "Tamil quisling groups" of masterminding the murder of Kumar Ponnambalam.

The LTTE in a statement issued on 5 January said, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) wishes to express its deep shock and profound grief over the brutal killing of Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam, a courageous Tamil leader who fearlessly exposed the hypocrisy of the Sinhala state and audaciously championed the cause of the Tamil nation.

We accuse the Sri Lanka government and the Tamil quisling groups of masterminding and executing this heinous crime to silence a brave, daring voice of reason that defended the rights of the Tamils.

Mr Ponnambalam's sudden death is a great and irreparable loss to the Tamils, a monumental tragedy that has befallen the Tamil nation at a critical historical time. Faced with constant threat to his life and property, Mr Ponnambalam lived in the heart of the Sri Lankan capital and boldly challenged his racist adversaries. His speeches and writings, which touched on extremely controversial issues, expressed its truthfulness, genuineness, uprightness and indomitable spirit for justice.

He pleaded for the rights and liberties of thousands of innocent Tamils in Colombo who were subjected to constant persecution at the hands of the tyrannical Sinhala state. He also voiced for the Tamils rights at international forums. Mr Ponnambalam was the only Tamil leader who openly and fearlessly

supported the armed freedom struggle of the Liberation Tigers. He endorsed the policy of the LTTE as the authentic political project based on the right to self-determination of the Tamil people.

By his gallant and heroic life in advancing the legitimate cause of the Tamils amidst all dangers, Mr Ponnambalam has earned the respect and admiration of his people as a true Tamil patriot."

Mr Kumar Ponnambalam has also been bestowed with the Most Eminent Person (Mamanithan) award by the leader of the LTTE, V Pirapaharan. The LTTE said the award was for Mr Ponnambalam's "dedicated patriotism and for his outstanding contribution to the

cause of Tamil liberation".

"Conferring this highest national award for extra-ordinary services on Mr. Ponnambalam, the LTTE leader Mr Pirapaharan praised him as a great patriot who courageously championed the freedom of the Tamil nation."

In a special statement Mr Pirapaharan categorised Mr Ponnambalam as "a revolutionary political leader who fought for human justice with sincere determination and commitment."

Living in the heart of the Sri Lanka capital and disregarding the dangers that threatened his life, he challenged the evils of Sinhala chauvinism, the LTTE leader had observed.

"Mr Ponnambalam was an outst-

anding patriot who deeply loved his Tamil homeland. He supported the formation of an independent Tamil state based on the right to self-determination of the Tamil people. He firmly believed in the armed revolutionary struggle as the authentic political mode for the emancipation of the Tamils," Mr Pirapaharan said.

"Therefore, he openly and courageously supported the LTTE and its political ideology. He defended the cause of our liberation movement in the international arena. His courage, dedication and the deep commitment with which he contributed to the cause of freedom is highly commendable." □

Kumar's Son Gives Evidence

Testifying before Galkissa Magistrate Sumathipala at the Magisterial inquiry into the death of late Kumar Ponnambalam, his aide, G. Thomas has identified the person who met the late Mr Ponnambalam at his home on the day of his assassination as Shantha as the person who had accompanied Ponnambalam in his car.

Thomas said that he had been working as a mechanic at the residence of Ponnambalam for about ten years. His employer had a collection of 19 Mercedes Benz cars at his home which were maintained by Thomas. On January 5 while working in the garage, he heard the call bell at the gate ring. He went towards the gate and looked out to see a caller waiting outside. The caller introduced himself as 'Shantha' and said that he'd come to see

Ponnambalam. Thereafter he told his employer, who was upstairs at the time, that one Shantha had come to see him. Ponnambalam directed him to let him in and told him to be seated in the verandah.

Shantha, who didn't strike Thomas as threatening, wore a blue shirt and black trousers. "Since that person spoke fluent Sinhala I thought that he was a Sinhalese," said Thomas. Thereafter he proceeded to the garage to continue his chores.

Thomas testified that he saw his employer leave with Shantha. They travelled in Ponnambalam's Mercedes, bearing the registration plate No 65-3590. Ponnambalam drove while Shantha sat in the passenger-side front seat.

Thomas proceeded to the scene of Ponnambalam's killing with the M.P.'s son when they heard the news, Thomas told the inquest.

Gajendra Kumar, a lawyer like his father and grandfather and the only son of Kumar Ponnambalam, giving evidence said, "My father Kumar Ponnambalam, wearing black trousers and a white T-shirt with black stripes, left the house on that fateful morning with one 'Shantha' saying that he would proceed to Wellawatte and return within half an hour. "But that was not to be. He thereafter never came back home alive. We only saw him lying dead at the wheel of his blue Mercedes Benz."

Gajendra Kumar continued that his father had left home that day around 10 a.m. He and his father were to bring a vehicle from the garage. But on hearing that there was a bomb blast at Flower Road, they changed their plans and

his father went to Wellawatte saying he would get back in half an hour.

He said he wanted to advise his father not to go out because of the bomb blast but before he could do that, his father had driven out. He also believed another person was in the car. Referring to the mysterious 'Shantha', Mr. Gajendra Kumar said he had come to the residence that morning and had also called several times earlier. Shantha spoke in Sinhala and he believed he was a Sinhalese.

Later when he went to the scene, with Mr. Thomas, he saw his father fallen inside the vehicle. Both windows of the air-conditioned Benz were open and the automatic gear was at parked position. The cellphone number 077311922 was missing.

The inquiry will resume on January 21. The leading criminal lawyer Daya Perera, from whose chambers Gajendra Kumar practises his profession, is looking after the interests of the Ponnambalam family. □

TULF Condemns Kumar's Murder

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) has strongly condemned in a statement issued on 5 January the killing of All Ceylon Tamil Congress president, Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam.

The statement issued by the Secretary General of the TULF Mr. R. Sampanthan said, "The TULF is shocked by the news of the assassination of Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam, General Secretary of the A.C.T.C. and strongly condemns this brutal killing. Such killings do not help to stem the cult of violence that plagues the

country."

"Freedom of expression is a basic tenet of a vibrant democracy. If Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam's assassination is attributable to the exercise of this fundamental right it would indeed be a dangerous trend, and would seriously erode the right of a citizen to think and express himself with independence."

"We convey our deepest sympathies to Mrs. Ponnambalam, the children and other members of the late Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam's family." □

Bomb Attacks Precede Presidential Election

A total of 33 people were killed and over 137 seriously injured in two suicide bomb attacks on 18 December at the final campaign rallies of the two main parties contesting presidential election held on 21 December last. As tension mounted in many parts of the capital as the news of the bomb attacks spread, troops of the Sri Lanka Army were deployed on the streets and a curfew was imposed in Colombo and other suburban areas "to maintain law and order".

The two bomb attacks occurred within minutes of each other though at locations several miles apart. The first one was at Jaela some ten miles from the capital city where the opposition United National Party (UNP) held its final rally in support of its candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe. A bomb exploded, when the Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, Member of Parliament, was addressing the meeting, which killed eight people, including retired Major General Lucky Algama, and injured 37 others.

The second one was at about 9.15pm at the Colombo Town Hall grounds where the rally was held by the governing Peoples Alliance in support of the incumbent President Chandrika Kumaratunga. It was obvious that the main target of the attack was the President. After finishing her speech as she was walking towards her car surrounded by security service personnel, a woman rushed towards her target. Even as the security officers attempted to stop the woman proceeding further, she detonated the incendiary device strapped around her body causing a massive explosion.

Addressing the nation from her hospital bed in Colombo a day after surviving the assassination bid, President Chandrika Kumaratunga appealed for calm. "I can assure you that I am in no danger from the injuries I have received in this cowardly attack," Kumaratunga said in the recorded radio address, broadcast by state media. "I am well and shall be up and about very soon." She urged people to maintain communal harmony and said that members of the Tamil community should not be

attacked in reprisal for the blast.

Saying that the presidential election would be held as scheduled on December 21, "I specially call upon you not to carry out any attacks or reprisals to any member of the Tamil community or any political rivals Let us all remain united as a nation in this grievous hour. I appeal to all my fellow citizens that it is their bounden duty, as it is mine, to protect all their fellow Tamil citizens."

Examination of the video cassettes covering meeting have revealed that the suicide bomber who tried to assassinate the President at the Town Hall rally was dressed in red and holding up an umbrella while standing in the third row. The CID also said that this woman was again seen under an umbrella held by another person. How the assailant managed to breach the tight security cordon imposed around the Town Hall grounds and enter so close to her intended target remains a mystery.

Many police officers in charge of the security arrangements have been blamed and liable to be penalised. Inspector General of Police Lucky Koditawakku suspended senior officials in charge of providing security to the Town Hall grounds. Reports said the investigators have held some of the officers belonging to the Presidential Security Division (PSD) responsible for the security breach that enabled the suicide bomber to get close to the president. The PSD had taken over the venue 36 hours prior to the December 18 rally. The mayor's office was also sealed and he was forbidden to enter. Mine detectors and sniffer dogs checked the entire Town Hall grounds. Every person entering the ground to attend the meeting was physically frisked and had to pass through a metal detector.

The severed head of the suspected suicide bomber was found a day after the attack. Investigators have identified the woman who detonated explosives strapped around her body in the Town Hall explosion in which she too was also killed. Police identified her as Gunanayagam Leela Lakshmi, a resident of the eastern town of Batticaloa.

She is reported to have joined the LTTE 10 years ago and was a member of the Black Tigers squad of suicide bombers.

Investigators visited Ms. Lakshmi's home and questioned her mother and younger sister. They also visited the school where she studied and questioned the principal and other teachers.

There had been doubts as to whether the bomb attack at the UNP rally at Ja-Ela was carried out by a suicide bomber. In fact some of the leaders attributed the attack to persons connected with the governing party. However, police sources assert that it was carried out by a suicide bomber. The daily newspaper "The Island" of 29.12.99 displaying the detached head of the alleged Ja-Ela suicide bomber under the caption - "Can you identify him?" reported, "The head appearing in the above photograph has been verified as that of the suicide bomber who had exploded the bomb at the UNP propaganda rally on December 18th at Ja-Ela" according to a communique from Police Headquarters.

"The head of the suicide bomber had been found on the roof of the stage where the propaganda rally was held and is at present lying at the mortuary at Ragama Base Hospital. Police Headquarters is seeking the assistance of the general public to identify this suicide bomber."

The police identified the suicide bomber as one "Sukath" from Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka. They said a member of the LTTE, now in police custody, has revealed the identity of the suicide bomber involved in the Ja-Ela attack. He had said that 'Sukath' and he had been trained together by the LTTE. The body samples of Sukath are reported to have been taken to Malaysia by Dr. Ananda Samarasekera for special investigation.

A team of seven U.S. technical experts are reported to have arrived in Sri Lanka recently to help local experts to investigate the two suicide bomb blasts that occurred on 18 December. The investigators said that the special US scientific team had conveyed their conclusion to their Sri Lankan counterparts that the explosion at Ja-Ela was also an act of a suicide bomber. The US team is to submit a comprehensive report in connection with their investigations into both incidents.

Many international leaders have

expressed their condemnation of the two bomb attacks. President Clinton expressed his deep condolences to the families of those killed by two bomb and his press secretary Joe Lockhart said Clinton also sent to Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and others injured in the blasts his best wishes for their quick recovery. Clinton said it was particularly distressing that these "heinous acts" had occurred during a democratic election campaign. "I have full faith that these events will only reinforce the strong com-

mitment of the Sri Lankan people to democracy and peace," he said. "He hopes these tragedies will not deter the people of Sri Lanka from their strong commitment to democracy and their hope and determination for peace," Lockhart said.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed shock at two suicide bombings in Sri Lanka and condemned terrorism, saying the violence could dim prospects for peace in the country. He sent his condolences to the President and to the families of those killed and

injured. "He has sent her a message wishing her a speedy recovery," U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard said. "The secretary-general wishes to reiterate his condemnation of terrorism from whatever quarter." "He is concerned that these continuing acts of terrorism in Sri Lanka may make the prospects for achieve peace even more difficult," Eckhard said.

An Indian foreign ministry spokesman said "the government strongly condemns the blasts as acts of wanton terrorism." □

Bomb Attack Near PM's Office

Thirteen people including, five members of the Prime Minister's Security Division (PMSD) including two women constables were killed and about 25 others wounded in a suicide bomb explosion at the Flower Road police post in Colombo around 9 am on 5 January. The blast happened in front of the Prime Minister, Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike's office, but she was not there at the time the bomb went off.

A woman, who turned out to be the suicide-bomber, was seen loitering in a suspicious manner in the vicinity of the PM's office and as she was stopped for questioning by the police, she triggered the explosive device strapped around her body causing a massive explosion. Four members of the PMSD and a woman translator, who was helping the police to question the woman who claimed that she did not understand the Sinhala language, died on the spot, while seven others died at the hospital.

The intended target of the suicide-bomber is not known, but it is speculated that it could have been a senior cabinet minister who would have travelled along that road to attend a cabinet meeting which was to have taken place that day.

The suicide bomber has been identified as 22-year old Yashoda Thilakarathnam from Kolavil, Akkaraipattu in eastern Sri Lanka. Her parents were taken into custody from their home and taken to Colombo for questioning. According to a senior police officer there had been contradictory reports regarding the daughter's departure from their home. He said that the parents had

claimed that two years earlier their daughter had been taken away by the LTTE. The parents had also told the police that the ID card found at the scene was that of their daughter Yashoda but they could not identify the head found at the scene of the explosion near

the Prime Minister's office.

Assistance of the DNA tests has been sought by the police in this investigation to find the identity of the assassin. This is said to be the first time this technique is being used in terrorist related investigation in Sri Lanka, according to police sources. Fort Magistrate A.A.R. Heiyatuduwa has made an order directing the parents to give blood samples for DNA testing to confirm the relationship between the parents and Yasoda. □

Anti-Terrorism Convention

The United States, Britain, France and Sri Lanka were among the first seven nations to sign a treaty aimed at cutting off financing of terrorist organisations as it opened for signature at the United Nations headquarters.

"The International Convention for Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism" was adopted by the General Assembly on December 9 last and will go into effect 30 days after 22 countries ratify it. Others to put their signatures on the treaty on the opening day yesterday were Malta, the Netherlands and Finland.

Approving the measure, the Assembly noted that the number and seriousness of acts of international terrorism depend on the financing that terrorists might get. Existing multilateral treaties did not expressly address such funding, it said.

According to the convention, it is a criminal offence for anyone to provide or collect funds to be used for acts that constitute terrorist acts as defined by

existing treaties.

Any other act intended to kill or harm civilians to intimidate them or a government or international organisation would fall under the treaty's jurisdiction.

The Convention obliges states-parties to closely monitor the collection or receipt of money by organisations in support of terrorist activities in another country. It covers fund raising for terrorist purposes, which is done both directly as well as indirectly, through so-called 'charitable' fronts. The Convention also requires states to freeze and prevent access to such funds by groups supporting terrorist organisations, intended for use in terrorist activities and to investigate information that a person who has or is alleged to have committed such a crime is in its territory, and also to prosecute or extradite persons found guilty of involvement in such financial activities for terrorist organisations. □

Presidential Election Results

Chandrika Kumaratunga was declared President of Sri Lanka following the election held on 21 December.

Seeking a second term, Chandrika as governing Peoples Alliance's candidate obtained 51.12 percent or 4.2 million votes. Her main rival, the opposition United National Party's candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe obtained 42.71 or 3.62 million votes.

The following are the votes obtained by the candidates who contested: Chandrika Banadaranaiké(PA)

4312157 (51.12%)
Ranil Wickremesinghe (UNP)

3602748 (42.71%)

M.D. Nandana Gunathilaka(JVP)
344173 (4.08%)

Harishchandra Wijayatunga(SMBP)

35854 (0.43%)	W.V.M. Ranjit (Independent-2)
27052 (0.32%)	Rajiva Wijesinha (LP)
25085 (0.30%)	Vasudeva Nanayakkara (LDA)
23668 (0.28%)	Tennyson Edirisuriya (Ind-1)
21119 (0.25%)	Abdul Rasool (SLMK)
17359 (0.21%)	Kamal Karunadasa (PLSF)
11333 (0.13%)	Hudson Samarasinghe(Ind-3)
7184 (0.09%)	Alwis WeerakkodyPremawardhana
3983 (0.05%)	Ariyawansa Dissanayaka (DUNF)
4039 (0.05%)	

Rape and Murder of Sarathambal

Sarathambal was the latest victim of the continuing tragic tale of sexual exploitation and murder of women by the Sri Lankan armed forces in the areas under their control. Human rights and women rights activists say the cases of Krishanthi, Rajani, Koneswary and Sarathambal were only the tip of an iceberg. Majority of the cases go unnoticed and unreported, and no action is taken about the few that get reported.

The case of the rape of a Vaddukoddai baker's daughter is one of the rare cases where police acted. She was raped at the beginning of last year by naval ratings and two of them were arrested but the case is still pending in the Mallakam court. About the incident where soldiers abducted and raped a young woman in Chavakachcheri the police took no action on the complaint made to them. The incident where a dumb woman was dragged to a nearby bush and raped is more horrifying. The police said they were unable to initiate any action, as the victim could not make a statement about the incident!

Krishanthi's case is an exception since the international community expressed its indignation at the rape and murder of a girl in school uniform and

the gruesome killing of her mother, brother and a relative who went to the army checkpoint to make inquiries about her. The government that bowed to international pressure made a show of it by ordering a trial at bar which convicted the accused army men. But Rajani's and Koneswary's cases are dragging on. Rajani was raped and killed and her body dumped into an abandoned cesspit. Koneswary's case was more gruesome. She was raped and blasted by detonating a grenade on her private parts.

Sarathambal's rape and murder is similarly repulsive. The 29-year-old wife of a Hindu priest and mother of a child was living with her younger brother at Kannakai Amman temple in Pungudutivu, an island under the control of the Sri Lanka Navy. Around 8.30 on December 28 night four men dressed in black uniform went to her residence adjoining the temple and knocked at the door. The terrified Sarathambal and her brother Irasasekara Sarma (19) refused to open the door. The intruders broke the door open, smashed up the hurricane lamp and attacked Irasasekara Sarma charging that

he was a Tiger supporter. They tied his hands, gagged and blindfolded him and carried him out of the house. The other two carried Sarathambal to the nearby vacant house, stripped her, gagged her with her inner garment, and raped her repeatedly. The two who attacked Irasasekara Sarma too joined them in the rape.

Irasasekera Sarma who freed himself shouted that his sister had been abducted. Neighbours who assembled went to the vacant house and recovered Sarathambal's clothes but found no trace of her. Despite the curfew they marched to the nearby navy checkpoint and lodged a complaint. Next morning they found the naked body of Sarathambal in a compound of palmyrah trees covered with dry palmyrah leaves.

Angered residents of the area, over 1000 strong, marched to the Navy office carrying dried palmyrah leaves and shouting, "Is this the protection you are affording us?" Officers in the navy camp promised investigation and assured they such things would not recur but transferred all the officers in the area to another station.

Kays magistrate Ms Sarojini Ilangoval who visited the scene on December 29 evening found that Sarathambal had been bitten badly all over her body by the rapists and there was evidence to show that she had been raped repeatedly. Then she had been carried to a compound where she was found.

Colombo's Inquirer into Sudden Deaths, Dr. L. B. L. de Silva who performed the autopsy on the body that was flown to Colombo reported that the death was due to gagging and that there was evidence that the deceased had resisted. Her thighbone had broken and there were serious injuries on the inside portion of both thighs. There were also injuries on her private part and several bite marks on her breast,

Magistrate Ms Ilangoval who held the inquest on January 8 pronounced that Sarathambal's death was murder and ordered the police to arrest and produce the offenders before the court. Irasasekara Sarma in his evidence said he suspected the navy personnel and said he could identify them. The navy had transferred all its men who served in the area the very next day after the rape. Their transfer had created serious doubts about the offenders being brought to book. □

INSIGHTS INTO NORTH-EAST THINKING

A press release dated 12 January issued by the National Peace Council states as follows:

An opinion poll on the ethnic conflict carried out in the north-east in addition to other parts of the country has revealed that most people in the north-east do not wish special treatment with regard to the devolution of power. This is the first time that an opinion poll on the ethnic conflict has been carried out in the northern and eastern districts. The figures indicate that for most citizens being treated equally is of paramount importance, overriding the need to be treated specially as a separate category.

Jaffna respondents were strongly in favour of an equal devolution of power to all provinces with 72 percent in favour while only 27 percent favoured asymmetric devolution. In Batticaloa the figures were 64 percent favouring equal devolution and 34 percent favouring asymmetric devolution. Overall 66 percent of Sri Lanka Tamils and 55 percent of Sinhalese favoured the equal devolution of power.

However, on the issue of the merger of the north and east, the responses from Jaffna and Batticaloa were very different. While 59 percent of Jaffna respondents were in favour of an outright merger of the north and east, an overwhelming 71 percent of the Batticaloa respondents favoured a referendum to decide the issue. Only 14 percent of Batticaloa respondents were prepared to accept the merger and 12 percent wanted the north and east to be separate.

The difference in the approach to the merger issue in the northern and eastern districts suggests that the issue of self-determination applies to regions in addition to communities. The referendum being an instrument of self-determination, the people in Batticaloa appear to have expressed their wish to decide for themselves what kind of arrangements they will live under rather than have others to decide for them.

The survey was carried out by Research International and commissioned by the National Peace Council. It was conducted in all provinces of the country, including the north-east districts of Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincoma-

lee, Batticaloa and Ampara. A total of 2994 persons were polled which consisted of 70 percent Sinhalese, 16 percent Sri Lanka Tamils, 10 percent Muslims and 4 percent Estate Tamils. The survey was carried out during November 21-26 and December 2-10, 1999 (for the northern districts).

The survey clearly highlights that the people who have to deal with the war in their everyday lives are the people most opposed to a military solution and who favour a negotiated one. The survey shows that the vast majority of Tamils polled, amounting to 84 percent, support a negotiated solution between the government and LTTE and do not believe that violence would bring a solution. In Jaffna those favouring peace talks was 94 percent with Batticaloa registering 82 percent. On the other hand, only 48 percent of the Sinhalese were in support of such negotiations, and upto 37 percent of them favoured a military solution.

There were two other important issues on which there was a marked difference based on ethnic community. Regarding third party foreign assistance, 53 percent of Sinhalese opposed it while

73 percent of Sri Lanka Tamils supported it. Regarding the devolution package only 41 percent of Sinhalese wanted it used as a basis for talks with the LTTE (with 48 percent opposing) while 56 percent of Sri Lanka Tamils favoured such talks.

The poll results, however, also reveal that on most issues relating to the ethnic conflict all ethnic communities are basically in agreement, though in different degrees. The survey showed that a majority of all ethnic communities support government-LTTE negotiations, equal devolution to the provinces and the business peace initiative. They all oppose the censorship of war-related news and believe that not enough essential supplies is being sent to the north-east.

The overall results of the opinion survey, and the specific results obtained from the north-east, provide strong evidence that the majority of Sri Lankans, and the Tamil people in particular, remain committed to a peaceful and negotiated solution in which they will be assured of equality in the country. The conflicting parties, and the government and LTTE in particular, should give deference to this desire for a peaceful settlement on the part of a majority of Sri Lankans and address crucial issues, including the rights of self-determination, security and political equality, in working out such a solution. □

THE SHRINKING POPULATION OF JAFFNA

Not many years ago, Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka was one of the most thickly populated parts of the country. Today its population has markedly shrunk.

Jaffna's Government Agent K. Shanmuganathan said that compared to other districts in the island, the population of the peninsula should be in the region of one million at present. But now only about 498,000 people are living in the Jaffna district, he said.

He was addressing a workshop on rehabilitation, reconstruction and relief development works in Jaffna district. The Consortium of Non-Governmental organisations in Jaffna District conducted the workshop in collaboration with the World Bank and other humanitarian agencies in Colombo.

The workshop was held at the Bastian Hotel in Jaffna town.

Mr. K. Shanmuganathan added that the displacement of people from the peninsula increased with the outbreak of hostilities following the arrival of the Indian Peacekeeping Force. The year 1995 witnessed exodus of people from Jaffna to Vanni and other areas. Fifty percent of those displaced have not been resettled, he said.

At present 6,871 families live in camps meant for displaced. Due to the present unsettled situation, the number of displaced has increased to 13,000 families.

Civil administrative officers in the northeast including Jaffna are working under the Ministry of Defence. Even to transport food items from Colombo to Jaffna they are required to obtain permission from the Defence Ministry. All persons living in the peninsula should own special identity cards. □

Suicide Bomb Blasts And Search Operations

Harassment by the police and the army is resented by the Tamils. Sudden swoops and herding into police cells like common criminals have hurt their pride and dignity. President Kumaratunga's effort to minimize the harassment had been appreciated. Police and the army behave better and treat the people with respect. But when they are loaded into police vehicles and locked up in the cells they boil with anger. Their wrath is not against the LTTE but against the government.

Tamils know that cordon and searches are the outcome of LTTE's bomb attacks. But they say that without the LTTE their plight as a community would be worse. The January 5 bomb blast opposite the prime minister's office at Flower Road was caused by police mishandling, military analysts accuse. Two policemen on guard duty at the gates of the prime minister's office summoned a young girl loitering aimlessly on the opposite pavement. They questioned her and asked her to lift her hands. The girl pleaded them not to force her to lift her hands. They persisted. When she lifted her hand the explosive device attached to her body exploded killing 13 persons and injuring 25 others.

At the time the blast occurred President Kumaratunga was on telephone talking to Minister Jayaraj Fernando-pulle. She heard the explosion and shouted: An explosion. Then she as Fernando-pulle: There was an explosion. Did you hear? Fernando-pulle replied: No madam. I did not here. President Kumaratunga cut the call and called her security who confirmed that there was a blast. She summoned the National Security Council and discussed with the service chiefs and the IGP the security of Colombo. She asked the police to flush out the Tigers and the police wanted a curfew, which was granted.

Her target was some one else and there was speculation about the target. Police say it might be Deputy Defence minister Anurutha Ratwatte. No one is certain. But the identity of the suicide bomber had been ascertained with certainty. It is not because of any clever investigation. She had used her genuine national Identity Card. Her Sinhalese

mother and Tamil father Tillakaratne had been arrested from their village Akkaraipattu. The bomber had left home two years ago to join the army but had joined the LTTE.

The National Security Council that met soon after the blast was told of 11 other suicide bombers in Colombo to attack top politicians. Police wanted a curfew to be declared to conduct a through search of the city. A 14-hour curfew was clamped at 11.55 pm on January 6 night after police and the army sealed off all the entrance to Colombo and Dehiwala municipal areas. The area was divided into five zones and placed under different army or police command. Small groups headed by policemen

searched Tamil houses and arrested over 2000 young men and women and taken to the various police stations in the city.

"They were not given even water to drink. They were made to sit in the open grounds and sent before hooded men for identification. If they signal a person as a suspect then they are kept for further investigation. Others were finger printed and photographed and released. It was all disgusting and revolting," Ceylon Worker's Congress MP Yogarajan said. He was the only Tamil parliamentarian who went round the police stations to inspect the situation. Other Tamil leaders sent fax messages to the President and released them to the press.

Analysts said the curfew and search exercise had failed to detect any suicide bomber or hideouts. It only helped Tamil people to be more annoyed and to increase the sense of uncertainty among others. □

TULF Calls for Inquiry

The Secretary General of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Mr.R.Sampanthan, has requested the President Chandrika Kumaratunga to order an impartial inquiry into the incident resulting in the death of one Tamil prisoner and injuries to several other Tamil prisoners at Kalutara prison.

Mr.Sampanthan in a letter to the President states that the Kalutara prison has been a hotbed of tension over a long period. This has been largely because a large number of Tamil prisoners have been held in detention for long periods of time; in some instances extending to several years, without investigations against them being completed and or charges being framed against them in court.

He further states: "You will appreciate that it is a fundamental human right that any person in custody should be either called upon to face trial in court, or be released from custody within a reasonable period of time.

"The Committee appointed by you to deal with unlawful arrests and harassment decided that the Police should complete and submit to the Attorney General before January 31-all investigation reports in respect of all persons taken into custody prior to 1999, and that the Attorney General should wherever he decides to do so, file indictments in court before 28th February, 2000. It

was also decided by the Committee that persons in custody against whom such action was not taken would have to be released. "While the Committee would no doubt follow up this matter, I would request Your Excellency to issue directions that even in the case of persons arrested in 1999, investigations be concluded expeditiously, so that the Attorney General can make a determination one way or the other even in regard to such persons.

"I would also urge that an impartial inquiry into the incident which happened yesterday be held at the earliest by an Independent person.

"The frequency of such incidents at the Kalutara prison would seem to suggest that the relationship between the prison authorities at Kalutara and particularly the Tamil prisoners has deteriorated over a period of time.

"I would also urge that the Inquiry makes a determination as to circumstances under which one Tamil prisoner came by his death and several others were injured and as to whether any one and if so who is culpable in that regard.

"I would also urge that the Inquiry also address the question of what further arrangements and adjustments are necessary to further improve the administration of the Kalutara prison, so that such incidents can be avoided in the future." □

Presidential Election 1999 and After

D B S Jeyaraj

Sri Lanka's fourth Presidential election was held on December 21st last year. It has resulted in Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga being elected. Kumaratunga who created history when she became Sri Lanka's first woman President in 1994 has established another record as the first ever to be re-elected to Presidential office. J R Jayewardene was also President for two terms but his first was not through election, but by virtue of an amendment (Second amendment) to the republican constitution of 1972. Kumaratunga however was elected on both occasions though her majority this time was far less when compared to the first time.

The run up to the election had its share of violence, a phenomenon that has now come to be accepted as inevitable during election time in the Island. The zenith of escalating violence was experienced on December 18th the last day of public meetings. Within minutes of each other two explosions occurred at the Peoples Alliance meeting at the Colombo Town Hall and the United National Party meeting at Ja - Ela. At the PA meeting Kumaratunga was injured and has reportedly lost sight in her right eye. Several others including Colombo DIG of Police T N de Silva were killed and many including Cabinet ministers G L Peiris, Alavi Moulana, and Kingsley Wickremaratne were injured. At the UNP meeting too several innocents were killed or wounded. Among these the most high profile victim was retired Army major general Lucky Algama who was tipped to be the Deputy minister of defence in a potential UNP cabinet.

The attempt on the President's life as well as the UNP meeting incident once again illustrated the urgency and importance of the unresolved ethnic crisis. It demonstrated again that the "war" was not something that was confined to the Tamil majority areas of the Northern and Eastern provinces alone but something which could spill over to any part of the Island in spite

of so-called intensive security. The attempt on Kumaratunga's life brought out another fact that has been visible in recent times about the determining factor in contemporary Sri Lankan politics. It is not the major political forces of the Sinhala south but it is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam led by Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The implications of the LTTE factor were evident from the conduct and outcome of the election itself. Although several issues were debated in the run-up to the election, the one that undoubtedly dominated the campaign of the two front-runners, Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremasinghe, was the resolution of the ethnic crisis. In discussing possible solutions the LTTE dominated the political discourse as a paramount or key player. It could be well stated that the election itself was in fact fought on that single issue. It is against this backdrop that the result and the possible options based on the verdict have to be assessed.

Kumaratunga obtained 4,312,157 (51.12 per cent) of the votes cast in defeating Wickremasinghe, whose tally was 3,602,748 votes (42.7 per cent). In 1994 she won 62.8 per cent of the votes. On the other hand, the UNP, which got 35.4 percent in 1994, has improved its tally. Ironically, the clincher in Kumaratunga's favour seems to have been the sympathy wave generated by the LTTE's botched attempt on her life. Earlier, certain acts of commission and omission by the Tigers pointed to an LTTE-engineered victory, albeit with a slim margin, for Wickremasinghe. The assassination attempt may have caused a perceptible shift in the voting pattern. Although Kumaratunga's courage is laudable and her victory commendable, there are valid apprehensions about the specific objective, the qualitative nature and the quantitative credibility of the mandate obtained by her this time. It is also necessary to analyse the voting pattern of the minorities in general and the Sri

Lankan Tamils in particular as manifested in this exercise.

As for its quantitative credibility, the question that arises is whether the victory achieved is a legitimate one. Were the votes procured through free and fair means or were they garnered through electoral fraud and malpractice? Lord Meghnath Desai the head of the International Observers team that inspected polling and other members of that panel including former Indian Election Commissioner, G.V.G. Krishnamurthy, have given a clean chit, saying that the election was by and large fair. As participants in the electoral exercise as observers their pronouncements do have a certain amount of validity. It is implicit from their view that although the electoral process may have been found wanting by the more exacting Western standards, it was quite credible in the South Asian context, where a little bit of "fraudulence" is inevitable. It must be noted that the UNP took umbrage at this and charged the Observers of partiality and alleged that Lord Desai was a personal friend of Chandrika.

The Colombo-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV), however, stated that the election was "marred by serious violations, systematic impersonation, ballot-stuffing, violence against and intimidation of voters, officials and monitors alike, and abuse of state machinery and resources in a significant number of polling centres throughout the country." It is of the view that "the result has been irredeemably compromised in 59 of the country's 160 electoral divisions. Of these, 35 were in the seven Sinhala-dominated provinces in the South. The other 24 were in the Tamil-majority North-Eastern Province, where the CMEV had recommended that "the entire election be nullified". It alleges that "the minimum ground conditions to ensure a free and fair vote were unavailable" in the N- E and that "a fresh occasion be provided to the people in these areas to exercise their sovereign right to vote." According to the CMEV, the election was a less-than-satisfactory democratic exercise for over a third of the country, which rendered the final outcome unacceptable.

At a press conference after the election, Wickremasinghe propounded the view that the reason for his defeat was poll violations. He downplayed the

sympathy factor in favour of Kumaratunga. Other commentators disagreed. According to this viewpoint there was no denying the fact that there were "infringements of the franchise", but the UNP would be deluding itself if it ascribes its defeat to that factor alone. It would be erring if it thinks that the sympathy vote was its nemesis. According to these circles the ground reality was that Kumaratunga would have edged out Wickremasinghe in the seven southern provinces with or without the alleged electoral malpractices or the sympathy wave, which may have helped enhance her majority. Likewise, the tense situation that prevailed after the assassination attempt may have restrained Tamil voters from going to the polls. In the final analysis, these factors contributed to her margin of victory but did not cause her victory.

A straw in the wind is the outcome of postal voting. Postal voting was done by government servants who were unable to vote in their own constituencies. They cast their votes long before the so-called sympathy wave arose and under conditions that were not conducive to vote-tampering. The overall

trend shown by the postal vote was that Kumaratunga had an edge over Wickremasinghe. Subsequently Wickremasinghe stated publicly that there had been vote rigging in the postal votes too. 35,000 Samurdhi animators all of them PA appointees had indulged in postal voting though they were not entitled to it. The UNP has also filed an election petition in court challenging the verdict on the basis that the election was fraudulent.

In spite of the flaws in the electoral process, it would be incorrect to assume that the entire majority gained by Kumaratunga was due to fraud. Even if the theory of acquisition of votes through fraud is accepted, the number of votes thus acquired would not have been enough to reverse the verdict in favour of the UNP, although the margin of Kumaratunga's victory would have been greatly reduced. Thus, the legitimacy and credibility of Kumaratunga's mandate in quantitative terms might have been somewhat eroded but not negated.

Then comes the qualitative nature of the mandate. There is clearly an urban-rural dichotomy. The UNP sees

ms to have done well in urban areas while the P.A. has fared well in rural areas. More importantly, there is also a visible majority-minority divide in terms of ethnicity. While both parties have drawn votes from all sections, the UNP appears to have gained more from the minorities, particularly the Sri Lankan Tamils.

The UNP won more votes in the Tamil-majority districts of Wannai, Batticaloa and Trincomalee in the Northeast. In Jaffna, where allegations of rigging were abundant, it was beaten narrowly. The UNP also came first in the upcountry districts of Badulla and Nuwara Eliya, where Tamils of recent Indian origin are concentrated. It fared creditably also in Kandy, Matale and Ratnapura districts. The UNP swept all the electoral divisions in its citadel, Colombo, where a substantial number (49%) of Tamils and Muslims live.

In Amparai district, the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress helped tilt to some extent the Muslim vote in favour of the P.A. Although there is a visible ethnic cleavage in the voting pattern, it would not be correct to perceive an extreme polarisation in terms of ethnicity. With

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minority parties such as the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Muslim Congress supporting Kumaratunga, a reasonably large number of minority votes were harvested by Kumaratunga also.

According to a preliminary estimate, it was the UNP that secured the greater part of votes of Sri Lankan Tamils, Tamils of recent Indian origin, and Muslims, with the proportion in each segment decreasing in the same order. In a sense, the decline in Kumaratunga's vote share, compared to that in 1994 can be attributed to the drop in minority votes for her, while the improved performance of the UNP is because of the accretion of minority votes to that party. The salient feature of the election is that Kumaratunga has become alienated from a majority of minority voters. Her mandate this time is more from "Sinhala" voters while Wickremasinghe's standing with the minorities, notably the Tamils, has improved enormously.

The voting pattern raises vital concerns about the real or perceived objectives of the mandate. There is some ambiguity here. The primary platform of both candidates was the resolution of the ethnic crisis. The difference was how they both proposed to achieve it.

Wickremasinghe argued for a resumption of talks with the LTTE through the good offices of a third-party mediator. He also suggested a de-escalation of the war and the setting up of an interim administration for the Northeast. Wickremasinghe promised the restoration of food and medical supplies to Tamil areas, the removal of restrictions on fishing, agriculture and transport, and the ending of the harassment of Tamil civilians by way of searches, arrests and detentions. While he had no specific blueprint for the extension of devolution, talking alternately of both asymmetrical devolution to the N-E as well as mechanisms for sharing power at the center he was willing to concede that the final decision on this matter could only be taken after dialogue with the LTTE. The highlight of his appeal to the Tamils was his promise to alleviate the problems faced by the people and to hold talks with the Tigers. This, in contrast to the "pie in the sky" promise of Kumaratunga's devolution package, projected a "here and now" approach.

Besides, Wickremasinghe also catered to the general Tamil perception that durable peace would be possible only through the cooperation or co-option of the LTTE.

Kumaratunga on the other hand was not as consistent as Wickremasinghe on this issue mainly because events overtook her. Her avowed rationale for advancing the date of the presidential election was that she wanted a strong mandate to push through her proposals, which she projected as the only solid basis for a political settlement. Her campaign relied greatly on her ability to convince the Sinhala voter that her "war for peace" was succeeding against the LTTE. The carrot for the Tamils was the devolution package. She also paid lip-service to the idea of talking to the Tigers. Kumaratunga hoped that all credit accruing to her regime from perceived victory over the Tigers on the battlefield could be translated into votes. Unfortunately for her, the success of the LTTE's military operation, Ceaseless Waves III, changed the situation and nullified that line of campaign.

She then changed tactics midway and began to accuse Wickremasinghe of selling out the country to the LTTE. She portrayed Wickremasinghe's proposal for talks and promise of an interim administration as an appeasement of the Tigers. The implicit undercurrents of her campaign became an emphasis on continuing the war as opposed to Wickremasinghe's call for an end to the war. This made even her staunch ally, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), adopt a neutral position, and opt indirectly for leftist candidate Vasudeva Nanayakkara. The Sinhala hawks, however, recognised the turn of Kumaratunga's campaign and began extending her support. Some of the leaders in the UNP who took hardline pro-Sinhala positions crossed over to her side. Such elements from other groups too started climbing on to her bandwagon. Although Kumaratunga herself never abandoned her progressive stance, the fact that she accommodated these Sinhala hardliners in her camp affected her credibility as a genuinely non-racist Sinhala leader.

As a result, it remains unclear as to what the primary objective of her mandate is. The Sinhala hardliners claim credit for her victory and are urging her to prosecute the war without resorting to negotiations. The experience of sur-

viving an assassination attempt at the hands of the LTTE is seen as a further reason for her to adopt a hard line. On the other hand, moderate and saner counsel within the P.A. and minority opinion urge a softer approach.

Kumaratunga herself has been adding to the confusion by sending mixed signals through her public pronouncements, which are both contradictory and ambiguous. It will be, however, her future deeds rather than her current words that will indicate what she considers the objective of her mandate to be. Even that prospect may not be a very definite indicator given the past experience where the sweeping mandate for peace in 1994 ultimately led to the most savage phase of the war. Under these circumstances, the big question is what Kumaratunga proposes to do regarding the resolution of the ethnic crisis.

In her interview to the BBC, Kumaratunga said that she was prepared to talk to LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran. Both these statements are illustrative of her statespersonship. However, concrete action on the ground is necessary to pursue these goals. Certain vital decisions have to be taken. First and foremost is to decide the future of her devolution package. Is she prepared to go through with her original intentions? Or will she abandon or dilute them further to satisfy Sinhala hardliners? If she wants to go ahead with them, she has four options. One is to call early parliamentary elections and seek a mandate to convert the new Parliament into a Constituent Assembly.

The second option is to hold a non-binding, consultative referendum on the Constitution. If she wins a convincing vote, then that verdict could be used to put moral pressure on the Opposition parties, chiefly the UNP, to endorse it in Parliament. The third would be to encourage further defections from the UNP, gain a two-thirds majority in Parliament and pass the Constitution. Again this would entail a referendum. A fourth option is to present the proposals in Parliament, get it passed with a simple majority dissolve the House immediately, and go in for elections seeking a two third majority with the proposals as the main plank of the PA manifesto.

The problem however is the necessity to face a referendum and the changed nature of Kumaratunga's support base. Unlike in 1994, when she had a

63 per cent mandate which cut across racial and religious lines, her current mandate is obtained by and large from a Sinhala electorate consisting of hard-line elements, who are at worst opposed to devolution and at best lukewarm about it. As such, the possibility of winning in a nationwide referendum, even if the parliamentary hurdle is cleared, is remote. Also, the result shows that the UNP is not a spent force; confronting it on this issue head on is a recipe for disaster. There is also the LTTE. The Tigers are suspicious of the devolution scheme and will do everything possible to scuttle the referendum. Therefore, the danger of massive violence resulting in communal strife is real. Incidentally, the fact that Tamils voted in large numbers for the UNP denotes that the devolution package despite its significance and long term importance does not get priority in their scheme of things.

What therefore seems more possible and workable is for Kumaratunga to follow up her invitation to Wickremasinghe and cultivate him more seriously. Instead of trying to break up the UNP, it would be better for her to

arrive at a bipartisan consensus on the ethnic issue. A framework for this is already available in the form of the agreement signed by Kumaratunga and Wickremasinghe consequent to the initiative by former British Deputy Minister Liam Fox. It would be more realistic for Kumaratunga to approach the LTTE in association with the UNP and through the good offices of a third-party mediator as envisaged in the agreement. The draft Constitution package can be a basis for negotiations, instead of it being presented as a fait accompli to the LTTE.

But to rely on talks aimed at a lasting settlement as the only means to resolve the crisis would be a grave error as past experience has shown. With the wisdom of hindsight it can be said that Kumaratunga's biggest blunder was to hope for the passage of the devolution proposals while pursuing the war. This created an impression that the package was being projected to deceive world opinion while the military option was being pursued relentlessly. More important, Kumaratunga failed to alleviate the sufferings of the Tamil people as a result of the war. The basic problems

of the Tamils were neglected; rehabilitation and development was going on at a snail's pace. Kumaratunga's one-point agenda of constitutional reform as a panacea for the ethnic crisis was unworkable and detrimental to her politically, as she discovered too late.

Therefore, past mistakes should not be repeated. Kumaratunga can and should seek ways and means of bettering the plight of the minorities in general and the Tamils in particular while trying to negotiate with the LTTE. In this regard, it would be imperative for her to revive the defunct Northeastern Provincial Council. As a first step, the interim administrative council for it can be appointed and development work initiated. In course of time, the concurrent list of functions could be discarded and devolution enhanced as per the terms of the joint accord reached by the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) during the Select Committee sittings chaired by Mangala Moonasinghe, the Sri Lankan envoy to India.

Kumaratunga could also appropriate the proposals made by Wickremasinghe during the election campaign

(continued on next page)

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Chandrika's BBC Interview

Shortly after being sworn-in as President for the second term following her election on 21 December, President Chandrika Kumartunga flew to London where she received treatment for the eye injury she sustained a suspected LTTE suicide-bomber attempted to assassinate her on 18 December. While in London, she was interviewed by the BBC's George Arney on December 30.

Arney asked her after a brief introduction how she felt about the horrifying moment.

Chandrika: I was screaming, but I was not hysterical. Medically, they say, I can carry on. But probably I have lost the sight of an eye. I have been saved by a miracle and I can't stop at marvelling at it.

Q: What kind of an effect it will have? Are you going to be afraid to go out?

A: I am surprised that I don't feel fearful. I don't take risks because it's foolish. I am the only leader who survived an LTTE assassination attempt and lived to tell the tale. I feel there is something special that somebody somewhere wants me to do.

Q: You feel you have been saved for a purpose. What is that purpose?

A: I was struck by what I would say

is man's most bestial and horrendous weapon, that of hatred and terror. I was swinging in and out of consciousness. The first thing I thought was of my children that they should not be upset by seeing me covered in blood because they have seen their father being assassinated like that. I gave instructions not to let them come till I was cleaned up.

Next I sent for my secretary and told him that I had heard that our supporters were on the road, trying to kill Tamils and UNP supporters because they felt that the UNP was also conspiring in the whole thing. I wanted to go on the air and tell them that I don't want any single Tamil person or anybody touched in vengeance.

Q: What about your future dealings with the Tigers? After what happened can you deal with them?

A: We have solved most major problems in our country. There is only one left. I think for the sake of my country and my people, whom I love very much, we have to negotiate with Mr. Pirapakaran.

Q: You are willing to sit down with Mr. Pirapakaran?

A: If he is willing to give up his devilish ways, if he is willing to give up the only weapon he knows, which

is that of terror and hatred. If he is willing to come into the democratic process and sit down and talk. Apart from separating the country, I am willing to talk about anything else.

Q: How likely is that? Why should he change now?

A: I believe in the great goodness of man. And I believe that the Tamil people, for whom I and my government have done so much, have to look truth in the face. They have to stop supporting this terror; they have to stop supporting destruction of their own people. They have to tell Pirapakaran look here, stop, come to the negotiating table.

I wish to tell you something which I have not said up to now. When I stretched my hand of friendship, as I called it, within 10 days of coming to office, we had a honeymoon period of eight months discussing with them. We gave everything that the LTTE asked for, which was good for the people of Jaffna and the North. We didn't give them arms and withdraw the army. We said if the talks are going well we will withdraw the army. He broke up the talks at a crucial stage. I wrote to him- we exchanged forty odd letters-and I said we have already got on paper a whole series of political proposals to resolve the ethnic conflict. He refused and started attacking. He has balked at every point, when actually and constructively we have said we are willing to discuss what is on the table.

And all I can say is that the LTTE does not want to have a political settlement. They wanted to kill me before the political settlement came in and they wanted to provoke the people who were already on the streets. That might have happened if not for my call from the near-deathbed. Thank God I still had my mind to talk. Otherwise Pirapakaran would have walked in and taken over because the army was also very confused. So it is sad but I have a message for the Tamil people.

There is no doubt that Mr. Pirapakaran does not want a peaceful settlement. We have offered everything other than a separate state. We offered the most extensive devolution and I have said we are ready to be quite flexible even on what is on the table. We "have offered equal opportunities bill and all kinds of things to the Tamil people.

I have ensured that not a single Tamil person have been touched for five years despite all the provocation

(continued from page 18)

and take unilateral initiatives. She could re-establish her credentials among the aggrieved Tamils before asking them, as she is doing now, to rethink on their support to the LTTE and bring the Tigers to the negotiating table. It is quite obvious that the harsh and inhuman restrictions imposed on the Tamil people have in no way affected the LTTE. It has only served to increase the number of LTTE recruits. It would be better for Kumartunga to remove some of the harsh measures and improve the existential conditions of the Tamils. Tamil should be implemented in every sphere as an official language, in accordance with the Constitution. In order to contain a Sinhala extremist backlash, she could co-opt Wickremasinghe in this course of action and present it as a joint effort.

The optimism generated by some of Kumartunga's earlier statements have been negated by her subsequent three and a half hour marathon talk on TV. If that performance is an indicator, a PA-UNP rapprochement seems ruled out. There are also hints of a very hard line being adopted against the LTTE and through practical extension the Tamils. It remains to be seen whether the new millennium would usher in a change in the political mood where the P.A. and the UNP forge a consensus and enter into talks with the LTTE, which too will abandon, hopefully, the military option and the demand for secession and opt for a just and honourable negotiated peace. "Hope", however, "springs eternal in the human breast". But at present prospects of a dawning peace seem rather dim. ●

that the LTTE was committing to make Sinhala people to kill Tamil people. We have protected them fully. So it is obvious why whenever it comes to discussing a political settlement Pirapaharan stalls and kills.

Q: He wants to fight on?

A: Probably. I believe that Sri Lankan Tamils abroad, who are living in luxury, isolated in their ivory towers, have to take a bold decision. I am talking to them with the wounds on my face. I have done so much for them. I don't know why they cannot see and think with their hearts and minds. By being falsely influenced by lies that are spread by the LTTE, they have untenable faith in their leader as he hates me. All I am saying is, persuade him that he will have to give up his politics of terror. It is terrible. It is devilish. He has to fight for his people with his heart and mind. He has to come to the negotiating table and give up his fear for peace.

Q: Why do you think that the Tamils living abroad can bring any influence to bear on Mr. Pirapaharan?

A: Because they are financing him. He buys arms with their money, Now I will like to tell you something. Since mid-1997 I have agreed to two international facilitators, who have been shuttling up and down between the LTTE and my government, trying to bring them to the negotiating table. The LTTE has refused completely.

Q: Could you tell me who that negotiators have been?

A: The first was Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth and finally after one and a half years they dropped him like a hot potato and said we don't want to talk to you. Then more recently the Norwegian government has been talking with Anton Balasingham in London. They kept them dangling again and said we will see after the election. I said if they say they are going to see after the election they are definitely going to try to and kill me. So all I have to say is we have used two respectable international facilitators. The LTTE is lying when it says it wants to discuss.

Q: After your swearing in as President for the second term you asked Ranil Wickremesinghe, your opponent in the Presidential race to join hands with you. What exactly did you mean by this? Did you ask him to join the government of nation

UNP MUST COOPERATE FOR ANY HOPE OF PEACE

Jehan Perera

The two murderous events that took place last week indicate that the recently concluded presidential elections has not contributed anything towards reducing tensions in society. Usually, the immediate aftermath of an election is a time of optimism and hope of a new beginning. But not so in this instance. The problems facing the country, and in particular the polarisation within society, appears to have got enhanced.

With its suicide bombing in front of the Prime Minister's Office, which killed and wounded over thirty persons, the LTTE has shown their continued desire, and ability, to escalate the conflict. The assassination of Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam later that same day have given notice to all political and social activists that the days of death squads may be on its way back.

The crowd who came to Kumar Ponnambalam's funeral to pay their last

nal unity?

A: Mr. Wickremesinghe must prove to the people of my country and his that he can sit around a table and work in a mature way with an honest, sincere committed government like mine to solve this problem together. We could invite the LTTE, I don't mind Pirapaharan or whoever it is. We could talk and solve this problem. Thereafter we can have national governments.

Q: After your terrible experience, do you feel more optimistic or less optimistic about chances of bringing peace back to Sri Lanka?

A: I have a message to my compatriots and perhaps for the world. This happened exactly seven days before the birthday of the Prince of Peace, seven days before Christmas. I have been seared with the weapons of hatred and terror but somehow I have been spared to live, to talk of love, compassion and forgiveness. And I think this is the moment for all of us to emerge at the high point of human spirituality. Well nothing else matters more than the advancement of man through the use of man's noblest possessions, his mind and heart.

respects to him was large and almost all Tamil. It was another indication of the dreadful polarisation that has taken place in Sri Lankan society. There were only a handful of Sinhalese and foreigners. Not a single government politician could be spotted. This was in marked contrast to the crowd at Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam's funeral five months ago.

The different participation at the funerals of these two scions of distinguished Tamil families, both of whom were eminent lawyers, politicians and civic activists, mirrored their different visions of Sri Lanka. In the latter phase of his life Kumar Ponnambalam stood for Tamils and Tamil rights alone. He would go to the most terrible of prisons to provide legal assistance to the hundreds of Tamils locked up indefinitely as LTTE suspects, such as the one at Kalutara where the prisoners rioted upon hearing of his murder.

By way of contrast, Neelan Tiruchelvam stood for a multi-ethnic and plural society, in which the human rights of all would be protected through improved systems of governance. It was liberals and elites, both local and foreign, who could best comprehend the value of his services that lay in working for structural change from behind the scenes.

Five months ago at the time of Dr Tiruchelvam's assassination, the prospects for the country were better than they are now. With him playing a leading role, there seemed to be the possibility of the constitutional reform process moving forward. There was some hope of forward movement that would be through consensual mainstream politics. But by assassinating Dr Tiruchelvam through a suicide bomber, the LTTE effectively scuttled such a scenario from emerging.

It can be surmised that the LTTE have no wish for consensual mainstream politics if they suspect that it seeks to exclude them. They prefer to keep the vicious cycle spinning and spiralling to ever new heights. They seem to believe that through hatred and conflict they will achieve their objective. In whitewashing the brutal actions of the

LTTE, such as the murder of Dr Tiruchelvam, Mr Ponnambalam did not seek to undo the vicious cycle, but sought to keep it going.

Today, the government leadership appears to be caught up in this vicious cycle. President Kumaratunga's recent speeches and interviews have evoked polarised responses, which highlights the polarised nature of society. Instead of being conciliatory following her election victory, she has been bitterly critical of all her perceived opponents, including the LTTE, the opposition UNP, the media and assorted individuals. Mr Ponnambalam responded strongly and fought the harsh words of the President with harsh words of his own.

More than anything else, what the country needs is a leadership that will stop feeding the vicious cycle of hatred and violence. We need a leadership that will be calm and detached in the face of heightened emotions and will not descend to the level of the lowest common denominator even if that is what might yield a harvest of votes today. We need a leadership that will be statesmanlike, and see that in a multi-ethnic and plural society there will always be different ways of perceiving the truth.

A grave responsibility, therefore devolves upon the UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. He heads the third important actor in the national conflict, the other two being the government and the LTTE. In today's context Mr Wickremesinghe's special strength lies in the fact that he has, by and large, remained aloof from the hatred and emotion in the battle being waged between the government and LTTE. The poise and dignity he demonstrated in the speech he made at the Election Commissioner's office shortly after losing the Presidential Election in an indication of an inner strength. His personal detachment and lack of passion, which have been often considered to be his weakness, could turn out to be of great service to the country at this crucial time.

As the third great party in the national conflict, the UNP can either escalate it by taking the offensive against either or both of the other two parties to the conflict. In deciding its course of action, the UNP should consider the realities of the situation. It is not well positioned to fight fire with fire in the manner that the government and LTTE can. It simply does not have the

instruments of coercion, whether they be the Presidential Security Division or suicide bombers that the other two parties have.

It is clear that should the UNP embark upon a confrontational course with the government with President Kumaratunga in her present frame of mind, the outcome would not be positive to either the UNP or to the country. The main confrontation between the government and UNP at present is over the 16 votes in Parliament necessary to obtain a 2/3 majority to pass the constitutional reform proposals. It is because the UNP has so far been withholding these 16 votes that acrimony between the government and UNP has built up to such a high level.

It appears that shortly before the Presidential Elections, Mr Wickreme-

singhe reached some sort of understanding with the LTTE that could have resulted in a de-escalation of the conflict had he been elected as President. It is now necessary for Mr Wickremesinghe to reach a similar understanding with the government.

The most tangible way to de-escalate the UNP's conflict with the government would be for Mr Wickremesinghe to offer the President a "conscience vote" on the constitutional reform proposals. He could release his parliamentarians to vote according to their conscience on the constitutional reform proposals, and not necessarily according to the party line. This statesmanlike gesture could be the first step in transforming the confrontational politics in the south and extending it to the LTTE in the north.

Who killed Kumar Ponnambalam?

Lakshman Gunasekara

Now does one identify and arrest or otherwise 'intercept' a suicide bomber and survive? The obvious (after much mulling over) approach would seem to be to "come from behind" and grab the suicidal man's or woman's hands before she or he could punch the button or nudge the switch. But suppose she hears you and self-destructs as you close in (too close)? Too bad. So does one just take cover - quietly, without alerting him? But what about the other people who may be around - wherever? What about your duty if you think you are a 'citizen' or, if you are a security guard, police officer or soldier at a city checkpoint?

Such is the trauma of those of us far away from the combat zone and living it out in the targeted city. The successful identification of a suicide bomber by others would, most likely, be the end of identities all around - within the range of the blast and shrapnel. A fierce fusion of identities in the single moment of diffusion.

Surely this is the same feeling of helplessness that civilians (or fighters, for that matter) must feel as they hear the high-pitched whine or whistle of incoming heavy artillery shells or, as bombs and missiles rain down from

attacking aircraft. Each salvo of high explosive, with their overlapping blast radii ensuring inevitable blanket destruction over large areas, prompts the same terror of indiscriminate murder and destruction as that cast by the suicide bomber, secreted time-bomb or triggered explosive.

There may have been a time when the battlelines were clearly drawn and the sources of terror were identifiable, and thankfully few: the State was 'Sinhala-chauvinist', the army spread terror among the hostile or disgruntled Tamil, the moderate Tamil politicians were the 'moderates', the secessionist insurgents were the 'terrorists'.

Then, political violence was ushered into the previously non-violent, civilian-institutional mainstream of Sri Lankan politics by successive UNP regimes beginning with the Dharmista government of J. R. Jayewardene. As government-related thug gangs stoned judges' homes and government-related labour union members were deployed in state-owned vehicles to burn and destroy Tamil-owned industries, shops and mansions, violence infiltrated the heart of government and the systems of law and order.

This was the foundation for a whole

State of terror: the 'bheeshanaya' so aptly named by President Ranasinghe Premadasa (probably borrowing from Dharmasiri Bandaranayake's play titled 'Dhavalala Bheeshanaya'), the very despot who then proceeded to mete out that terror. As the Premadasa himself so royally pronounced from the Patti-rippuwa of the Sri Dalada Maligawa in his inaugural presidential speech to the nation in 1988: "If the JVP fails to come into the democratic fold then other people would use other people's names and cause much destruction" (or something to that effect expressed in Sinhala).

That was already happening in late 1988 as unknown gangs of armed men in un-marked khaki uniforms armed with standard-issue assault rifles and handguns, roamed the Ruhuna and other JVP infested regions throughout the country indiscriminately killing all and sundry and identifying themselves as 'Kola Koti (Green Tigers), 'Kaha Ballalu' (Yellow Cats), 'Gonosso' (Scorpions), among other feared pseudo-nyms.

These para-military or state-linked militia death squads were plunging into the sea of violent political action provoked by the JVP-related armed groups as well as other (minuscule) leftist armed groups such as the 'Rathu Sebalu' (Red Soldiers) and the People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA). Some death squads in the Ruhuna even used the name of PRRA in their counter-insurgency rampages but betrayed their non-insurgent origins by printing the Sinhala letter 'pra' on their warning posters instead of the 'pra' used by the original PRRA to signify 'life'. Soon, no one knew who was killing whom. Who killed Vijaya? Who killed Lalith? Who killed General Kobbekaduwa?

Who killed Kumar Ponnambalam? Can one tell from the method?

On occasions, there are the signature killings - the adoption of a classic style: for example, the suicide bomber either driving a vehicle bomb or throwing her explosives strapped body at the target. Anyone can identify this style as the LTTE. Neelan Tiruchelvam was killed thus, along with many others prior to him.

Then there are the other shootings with handguns or rifles or grenade-throwings - these are methods used by a whole spectrum of killers; ranging from underworld contract assassins to covert operatives of either State military or pro-state Tamil militant groups to

LTTE 'pistol-gangs'. Then the identification of the killers becomes a complicated process if not a guessing game. One has to assess the political orientation of the victim or victims and look to see who are opposed to the particular orientation and who might benefit from the elimination. One also has to evaluate the capacity of the potential killer to carry out the deed as well as the inclination (who has the most desire).

Kumar Ponnambalam was killed in such a manner. That it was a 'professional' execution is of little doubt given its style - including the time it took to be discovered. So many different kinds of killers use this particular method of a lone gunman or of a small unit using a hand weapon with the minimum noise and fuss and bother that easy identification of the killer(S) is not possible.

And suddenly there is a mysterious new violent group on the scene - if the faxed statement, written in Sinhala and incorrect English, claiming responsibility for Ponnambalam's killing that was sent to some media organisations is to be taken at its face value.

In this statement, a new organisation calling itself the 'Koti Virodhi Jaathika Peramuna' (National Anti-Tiger Front) has claimed that it executed Kumar Ponnambalam for his public defence of the armed actions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Since all actions of the LTTE are considered 'terrorist' by sections of the population - principally the Sinhala ultra-nationalist groups - it is possible that some new faction of the Sinhala 'ultras' has launched its own counter-terrorism against those supporters of the LTTE's terrorism. The Front's statement is signed by one Vijaya Ranabahu (a typical nom-de-guerre) who designates himself as the 'Commanding Officer'.

The veracity of the faxed statement remains in question, however. In the first place, the killing of Ponnambalam seems to have the slickness and professionalism that only a very experienced and highly organised armed group could possess. Even if the first Sinhala ultra-nationalist armed group has indeed burst on to the scene, it is likely that their first armed actions would be less professional in execution.

Furthermore, the evidence pertaining to the Ponnambalam assassination indicates the possibility of a 'mole' being infiltrated into the circle of Ponnambalam's associates. A mysterious 'Sha-

nthan' or 'Shantha' reportedly escorted Ponnambalam on that fateful drive to Wellawatta on Wednesday (5 January) morning - someone in whom Ponnambalam obviously had enough confidence to agree to accompany him on that fatal outing.

If this Shanthan or Shantha is a Tamil and is involved in the assassination, it makes it unlikely that a (hitherto unknown) Sinhala ultra-nationalist group is responsible.

The finger of suspicion then more likely points to the murky world of Tamil militant groups, ex-militant 'contractors' and their underworld networks. It is quite possible that the so-called Koti Virodhi Jaathika Peramuna is indeed a false red herring cooked up by the real assassins in an attempt to point the finger of suspicion away from them. The real assassins could perhaps be an anti-LTTE Tamil militant group hostile to Kumar Ponnambalam's recent political antics. It also could be the LTTE itself, perhaps uneasy that Ponnambalam's maverick style could take attention away from the Tigers - the real 'heroes'.

Whoever did this cruel deed, it is reprehensible. Kumar Ponnambalam was never involved in actual warfare himself. What he mainly did was to give expression to some of the political aspirations and political program of the Tamil nationalist movement as a whole. He was one of the few Sri Lankans who dared to publicly espouse the cause of secessionism. In doing so he aroused the fury of the Sinhala ultra-nationalist who can scarcely conceive of even a minimal devolution and a multi-ethnic state let alone a separate Eelam.

What drew Ponnambalam to the brink of the world of violence was his recent attempts to legitimise the assassination of Neelan Tiruchelvam. While defending political aspirations and goals keeps one within the arena of civilian politics, the legitimisation of killing or a military offensive, however, inexorably draws one into that vortex of violence. Nevertheless, even if they risk of being affected by that violence then becomes real, that is not to justify the deliberate killing of a non-combatant. Such behaviour taints an organisation, supposedly committed to just and emancipatory causes, with the unhealthy stain of authoritarianism, injustice and immorality.

But the finger of suspicion has never stopped in its search in conn-

action with the assassinations of Lalith Athulathmudali, Vijaya Kumaratunga and many others. Kumar Ponnambalam's assassination then brings us close to that dark abyss of the 'State of terror' that many had thought was dispelled with the electoral defeat of the UNP led by the JR-Premadasa regime.

It was in the midst of that dark, violent world that writer-philosopher Gunadasa Amarasekara first published his 'I See a Streak of Light in the Darkness' (Gananduru Mediyama Dakinemi Arunalu) collection of essays - what is today the classic expression of the Jathika Chinthanaya philosophy (Amarasekara, 1988). That was the era of the Kola Koti.

Ten years later, in 1998, in his foreword to the new revised edition of his book, Dr. Amarasekara sees the entry of this stream of thought into the mainstream of political discourse, within a mere decade, as a measure of its success (Amarasekara, 1998: page 8). Sadly, Dr. Amarasekara's conception of 'indigenous thought' has become pushed to the margins of what is today the discourse of Sinhala ultra-nationalist ideology. While 'Ganaaduru Mediyama...' may not be equated with the ruthless supremacism espoused by some of the ultra-nationalist Sinhala groups, it is these groups that now dominate the Sinhala nationalist discourse leaving little space for the other more mainstream and non-supremacist perspectives that do exist.

More ironically, if 'Ganaaduru mediyama...' first emerged amidst the underground violence of the Kola Koti, its latest revised edition precedes the advent of this mysterious Koti Virodhi Jathika Peramuna (KVJP) seemingly active in today's dark nether world of violence, racism and fascism. Even if an armed Sinhala 'ultra' group is not yet a reality, the hysterical tone of the various Sinhala hard-line groups and their increasing degree of organisational capacity indicates a dynamism if not a ferocity that could, in the future spawn such an armed movement.

If the extremism of the LTTE drives that organisation to physically eliminate and intimidate all those it perceives as hostile to its interests, what will prevent a similar development on the Sinhala side of the ethnic divide?

It must be remembered that Mahatma Gandhi was killed by a Hindutva extremist unhappy with the Mahatma's recognition of ethnic equality within

Peace: Millennium Wish of the Business Sector

T. Sabaratnam, Editor, Ceylon Commerce

Pace was the millennium wish of Sri Lanka's captains of industry and top public officials concerned with the economic development of the country. Peace was their first priority and they aver that without peace Sri Lankan economy would be ruined.

John Keels chairman Ken Balendra, Ceylinco chairman Lalith Kotelawala, Aitken Spence chairman R. Sivaratnam, Hatton National Bank Managing Director Rienzie Wijetilleke, Carson Cumberbatch director Mano Selvanathan and other top business magnates consider Peace as the first need for Sri Lanka.

Said Balendra in answer to a questionnaire sent by the morning tabloid Daily Mirror: My millennium wish for the country is peace, harmony and prosperity to all our people and the country to achieve a position of pre-eminence in the region in the short term and in the world in the medium term;

Kotelawala who heads the business community's peace initiative replied: For the country my only wish is peace that is genuine and not restricted to paper or an agreement. I hope that the LTTE will take heart from what the

UNP has done and jointly work together to achieve peace for all the Sri Lankans or express its position. I wish we could put an end to all the violence, which affects every one, and I pray that hatred would cease.

Wijetilleke, Selvanathan and Sivaratnam, all good businessmen, asserted peace is essential for Sri Lankan private sector to blossom fully and display its vitality.

Top public sector managers too give top priority to peace. Said Central Bank governor A.S. Jayawardene: My millennium wish for the country is peace, peace and peace. Peace was also the desire of Bank of Ceylon head Dayani de Silva: My wish for the country is peace and for the bank the continuance of its position as the premier bank of Sri Lanka. Mahendra Amarasinghe, chairman, Commercial Bank of Ceylon and Planter's Association of Ceylon wished: Peace is my wish for the country and for the corporate sector sustained economic growth.

Economists too attribute war as the major cause for the slowing down of Sri Lanka's economic growth. It consumed last year more than Rs. 60 billion, a third of the country's yearly national income. The government is resorting to domestic borrowing to foot the war bill. Treasury bonds to the tune of Rs. 104.8 billion and Treasury Bills worth Rs. 124.9 billion had been issued at the end of November 1999 and plans to raise a further Rs. 25 billion by the end of March 2000 were detailed in the Vote on Account. With the current escalation of the war since November 2 when LTTE launched its devastating Oyatha Alaigal and the debacle of the armed forces in Vanni and the current siege of Elephant Pass defence expenses will soar further.

The Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka's best known economic think-tank has, in its latest 1999 State of the Economy report states: The economic cost of Sri Lanka's secessionist conflict have been substantial and are still mounting. Its costs to the country's social fabric appear to be even larger

the Indian nation. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike too was killed by forces who were supposedly on his own side but forces which were unhappy about SWRD's inclination to be fair by all ethnic groups despite his initial 'Sinhala Only' emphasis. Similarly, the heroic Zionist war record of Yitzhak Rabin did not save him from an ultra-nationalist assassin's bullet after his accord with the Palestinians took the late Israeli Premier away from the Zionist supremacist trajectory.

The virulence with which both Chandrika Kumaratunga as well as Ranil Wickremesinghe have been attacked by Sinhala ultra-nationalist groups indicates the extreme hostility of these sections and their marginalisation from the mainstream of Sri Lankan politics. Only time will tell whether this virulence in words will mutate into violent deeds. ●

though they cannot be measured. It is a burden Sri Lankans can ill afford, particularly at this stage of its development. The country's development prospects depend heavily on how speedily a lasting peace can be achieved."

The effect of the escalating war was felt heavily by the economy last year, which had been described by economists as an uneventful year. Some have called it as the lost year for the economy. Whatever description one may choose there is no doubt that it was a year where little was achieved and perhaps much was lost. It was about the only year where Sri Lanka recorded a decline in exports. In the first nine months of the year, for which statistics have been finalized, exports declined 7% from the corresponding period of 1998 which itself was a bad year for exports. Industrial exports slipped by 4.5% and agricultural exports dropped by 18.5%. The decline in export incomes had serious impact on domestic incomes, corporate profits, domestic savings and economic growth.

The slowing down of the economy is also reflected by the decrease in imports of all categories. The most distur-

bing factor was the decrease in the imports of intermediate and investment goods. Import of investment goods declined by 13%, an indication of the loss of business confidence.

The performance of the corporate sector was poor last year and an atmosphere of despondency prevail all round. Corporate profits were further down from the bad 1998. Even Hayley's, one of the best-quoted companies, show 20% decline in profits for the first nine months of the year. Similar gloomy story is told by most of the company reports published recently.

Business leaders also blame the country's confrontational politics for the current plight of the country. They call it the bane of Sri Lankan politics. It is the main cause that stand in the way of finding solutions to all major problems, including the ethnic question, the country faces. They were encouraged when President Chandrika Kumaratunga invited, in her acceptance speech on December 22, UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to join her to bring peace to the country. They hailed her statesmanship. But their expectation had been dashed on January 3

when President Kumaratunga slipped back to her usual confrontational posture. In a three and a half-hour chat on the Rupavahini she scolded all her opponents, the UNP, private media, LTTE, Tamils and the business community.

The Institute Policy Studies comments: "In the final reckoning, Sri Lanka's economic future will depend on how successfully it is able to slough off the partisan destructive political culture that has frustrated the full benefits of economic development."

The January 3 return to confrontational politics and January 5 bomb blast and the assassination of Kumar Ponnambalam had caused Colombo share market to tumble down further. On January 6 All Share Index was down 5.7 points while the Milinka was down 9.9 points. Brokers said that investors shaken by these events pulled out of the market fearing a period of instability. The January 8 curfew and the fruitless search for the Tiger suicide squad which police intelligence claim to have infiltrated into Colombo for major strikes at prominent politicians or important targets further depressed the market. On

(continued on next page)

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The Hijack Crisis Damages BJP Image

T.N.Gopalan

The passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines plane were at last released unharmed on the new year's eve after an ordeal that lasted eight days, in exchange for the release of three Kashmiri militants.

The entire nation heaved a collective sigh of relief, and the arrival of the "new millennium" was celebrated by the middle classes with elan and gusto, but the mood was relatively sombre in the BJP circles.

The first crisis which overtook the barely three-month-old Vajpayee government had left red faces all round. While the Opposition chose not to create any problem during the crucial negotiations, they sharpened their knives immediately after the release of the passengers and went for the jugular.

The government, the left parties said, must take the responsibility for letting the crisis spin out of control and unwittingly narrowing down its own options to a point where it was left with few choices.

From allowing the plane to leave Amritsar to "relying too much" on the

Taliban and failing to mobilise international opinion against the hijackers and their "sponsors," the list of charges against the Vajpayee government was lengthening by the hour.

Who goofed up where, who gained most, what role did the Taliban actually play are all questions bound to be debated endlessly in the days to come. But the fact remains that the BJP's tall claims of putting in place a "hard state", a state which would not cave in helplessly before terrorism of any variety, stood exposed as pathetically hollow.

For years the party had been denouncing the Islamic-fundamentalist-inspired terrorism as the greatest danger faced by the world and blaming the successive governments at the Centre for their "soft" approach to the problem.

In 1993 when the then Narasimha Rao government was caught up in the Hazratbal shrine crisis - Kashmiri militants had taken over the shrine - and talks were on to force them out without any damage to that renowned place of pilgrimage, Lal Kishen Advani, then the BJP President, thundered, "The Rao

year," said the Bentara Beach Hotel boss.

Tour operators reported cancellations, especially from Scandinavian countries and Germany. "We ate in for a lean year again," said a Ceylon Tourist Board Official who added that it had formed a "crisis committee" to take steps to meet the situation.

Economists, administrators and businessmen are now worried about the future of the economy. If war and confrontational politics escalate the country will be torn asunder. Trade unions are on the war path. Business community on which the government is relying to create jobs and wealth is down hearted. The people, especially the poor section of the society, are distressed by the rising cost of living. Southern insurrectionists are steadily rising their head. The feeling of Tamils, the major minority community, is hardening. It is gloomy all around. ●

government is feeding the terrorists with biriyani, our party would have responded with bullets."

And as Home Minister, Advani has been talking big about pursuing a "pro-active" policy in Kashmir, not to forget that after India conducted its Pokhran-II tests, he had warned Pakistan of the changed "geo-strategic" balance. On both counts he had to face humiliating rebuffs.

While Pakistan's Changai tests proved that it was not far behind in the nuclear race, the motivated and ruthless militants have been making life difficult for the security forces like never before in Kashmir.

It has been pointed out that while in the past they had been looking for soft targets like migrant labourers or tourists, now they are taking on military and police posts and that even during the eight-day crisis a dozen or more persons including quite a few senior police officers lost their lives during the operations against the militants. So much for the much-vaunted "hard state".

In fact it was rumoured that Advani did take strong objection to the way Vajpayee government caved in to the demands of the terrorists and threatened to resign and had to be coaxed into holding his hands. Apparently Advani and his ilk are yet to realise the constraints of a democratic polity, though at the BJP convention at Madras, held during the hijack crisis, the hard-liners seemed to have beaten a hasty retreat all along the ground, giving the "moderate Vajpayee" a lot of leverage.

Be that as it may, the hijack drama did expose a lot of chinks in the Indian state. A group of unnamed, unidentified (not even after the crisis came to an end) persons took control of an Indian Airlines plane, Kathmandu-New Delhi flight with 189 persons on board at Lucknow, thirty minutes after it had taken off from Nepal on December 24.

They diverted it to Lahore, but the Pak authorities refused permission to land and the Airbus-300 landed in Amritsar as it was dangerously low in fuel. The hijackers demanded refuelling failing which they threatened to kill the passengers one by one.

What exactly happened in Amritsar, during those crucial 45 minutes would perhaps never become public. How the authorities bungled it all so much as to allow the aircraft to fly out of their grasp, with disastrous consequences,

(Continued from page 24)

January 10 All Share Price Index dipped another 8.8 points and Milanka Price Index plummeted 22.6 points.

The tourist industry that enjoyed a good patch in 1999 was shattered by the January 5 blast and the Ponnambalam slaying. Both events strengthened the lurking doubts about the security and safety of Colombo which the twin explosions of December 18 at government and opposition rallies had created. Friday morning curfew had created further complications.

Hotels in Colombo said some of the reservations had been cancelled. "At least 30-35% of the reservations had been cancelled," said Trans Asia's Lobby Manager Ramzi Razak. "This is the season. But unfortunately, the trade had been badly affected this time," he said. Similar was the lament of all five star hotels in Colombo. Beach hotels in the south and north of Colombo were seriously affected. "We are in for a bad

would remain an untold story, notwithstanding the inquiry ordered.

Clearly the hijackers should have been on the horns of a dilemma – whether to risk staying back for refuelling or to gamble and fly out to some safer destination despite the low fuel. Why no attempts were made to storm the plane or at least block its path? It would have been risky. Anyway the hijackers were getting nervous by the minute, had already stabbed to death one of the passengers. Well before the commandos could land there, the hijackers ordered the pilot to leave whatever the consequences. Such are the various responses. But the fact remains that someone somewhere had grossly mishandled the issue. Thereafter all that India could do was to wait and watch helplessly before caving into their demands.

The halt at Lahore – this time the plane allowed to land at the instance of the Indian government - the refuelling, the refusal of the Pak government to do anything to stop the plane from leaving the airport, Taliban's initial refusal to permit it to land in Kandahar, the brief halt at Dubai, refuelling again, release of a few passengers and the last lap of the drama, seven days in the Kandahar airport, conditions inside deteriorating, the Taliban's game of hunting with the hounds and running with the hares and the final release of the three hard-core militants including Maulana Azhar, a cleric from Pakistan and detained in Kashmir for over years, and the safe passage for the still-to-be-identified hijackers, all that make a nerve-tugging reading.

Whatever be the legitimacy of the Kashmiri militants' claims, whether one is justified in subjecting so many persons to such cruel treatment for eight days is itself a moot point.

Mercifully apart from the newly wed Rupin Katyul no one else was harmed. Surely they were not demonic as portrayed in the hysterical Indian media. They were fighting for a cause and to further their ends they had decided to do something, and they did it perfectly, without being too very inhuman. The released passengers came out with stories which put the hijackers in a better light than what was projected earlier.

Nothing wrong in subjecting a 100-

odd persons from the upper classes to some inconvenience for a few days in the cause of a higher ideal, so goes the argument of some.

But then at issue is not whether separatist causes make sense. Hijacking and the kind of the ordeal the passengers underwent at Kandahar could even be condoned if these militants behave responsibly otherwise.

Sadly whether it is the LTTE or the Kashmiri Mujahideen groups or the Basque separatists, all of them take to mass terror, totally unjustifiable on any count.

The Kashmiri groups, especially the foreign-trained, are known to have been ruthless, and they give little thought to the agony and miseries of the Kashmiris themselves. A few days after the hijack drama was over, a powerful bomb blast claimed 16 lives in Srinagar. The release of the three militants would surely give a big boost to the various Mujahideen groups and such acts of mass terror could become more frequent in the future.

It may be recalled that the release of eight militants in exchange for the life of Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, the Home Minister in the V.P. Singh government, in 1989, marked a turning point in the history of militancy and the valley has not known any peace since then.

What with a Musharraf, seemingly obsessed with Kashmir, determined to turn all the screws on India by encouraging the jihad groups, firmly in the saddle in Pakistan, things would only take a turn for the worse in the days to come.

There is also another disturbing fall-out, the revanchist backlash. For instance the three-day BJP conclave at Chennai in the last week of December last all its sheen, what with most top leaders including the Prime Minister and the Home Minister keeping away because of the discussions on Kandahar in New Delhi. An absent Vajpayee still won a decisive victory over the right-wingers. They gave in meekly to the moderates, abandoning, at least for the moment, all divisive demands like building a Ram temple at Ayodhya, the abolition of the constitutional provision which guarantees some special privileges for Jammu and Kashmir and the uniform civil code, in order to keep

the allies in good humour and thus keep the coalition at the Centre in tact.

The proceedings were colourless, and there was nothing to cheer for the cadres sold on Hindutva in the so-called Chennai declaration. And so to sustain their morale the party lashed out at Pakistan for its cross-border terrorism, thus at a time the government of India was sedulously keeping away from making any harsh comments against that country in their desperate efforts to ensure the safe release of the passengers.

Subsequently, Advani, the hard-line face of the party, was supposed to have expressed his strong opposition to the deal with the hijackers, though for the records he endorsed the government's actions. The so-called moderate Vajpayee himself, feeling humiliated as he is after the Kandahar fiasco, is resorting to some hysterical rhetoric lately.

He has called upon the US to declare Pakistan a terrorist state and is talking of "zero tolerance". "We will be guided by the principle of zero tolerance in our fight against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir as also in the North-East," he declared recently.

Wasbir Hussain, Editor of the Northeast Daily, commented, sadly, "Apparently the Vajpayee government has decided to stop looking at (political) solutions to the problems confronting it. One must remember that most of the insurgency movements in the country are separatist movements and are unlawful activities under the Constitution... Such movements are bound to be violent. If the government decides to go ahead with its new hard line and were to adopt a bullet-for-bullet policy, insurgencies perhaps would never end in this country..."

With a newly invigorated and fanatical militants on the one side, supported in every way possible by Pakistan, a Hindu revivalist party in command this side of the border and a totally useless and thoroughly corrupt government in place in Kashmir itself, the vicious cycle of violence in the region is bound to spiral out of control in the next few months.

And sending a chill down one's spine, Musharraf warned the other day that he would not hesitate to use the nuclear option in order to ensure the safety of his own people. ●

CRISES AS CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

Mohan Guruswamy

As the millennium draws to a close, it is not only an appropriate point in time to look towards the future and to a new age, but also a similarly appropriate moment to look at lessons from our experiences. At the beginning of this millennium, the population of India was less than 20 million. At the beginning of this millennium, India began somewhere near Kabul and extended eastwards to Cambodia and Vietnam. At the beginning of this millennium India's was one of the great and dominant cultures of the world. Her wealth and power put her ahead of what we today call the West.

In a thousand years we have travelled a great distance. We are 50 times bigger in terms of population. We are many times poorer materially, culturally and even spiritually. Politically India is truncated. Let alone Kabul and Cambodia, even Taxila and Jaffna are foreign places. We were conquered from the the West twice: Once from over the mountains and the last time from across the seas. Both these prolonged episodes have laid an indelible mark on our present. What we are now has been shaped in good measure by the two cultures that were imposed on us. It can be argued that we became culturally richer in the process but there is little doubt that we also became materially much poorer and weaker.

At the beginning of this century, all India was less than twice as big as Uttar Pradesh in terms of people and extended from Khyber to Kohima. But by now it is a poor country, systematically plundered by a civilisation and culture whose main offshoot still dominates the world politically, technologically and economically. This, very briefly, was our inheritance at the time of Independence. How far have we travelled since then?

One of our major achievements since Independence is that for the first time in many centuries we are able to provide a modicum of food security for our people. Even though hunger and

malnutrition persist, famine is no longer a frequent visitor to the land. Materially we have been able to improve somewhat and the per capita figures seem to acknowledge this. But in terms of sheer numbers the tide seems to be still against us.

In the past 50 years, the number of people living below the bare poverty standards has more than doubled, to number 320 million now. Just as the number of illiterates has increased to about 450 million.

It is said that India will have a stable population somewhere in the middle of the next century after we add at least another 500 million to our numbers. If the performance of the past 50 years were to be repeated, it would be easy to assume that the numbers of people who will be without education and also in abject poverty then will be larger than they are now. To reduce the numbers and not just the percentages must be the biggest challenge that confronts us.

To say that we have failed in tackling this in the past 50 years would not be untrue. Governments still seek to hide behind the percentages, but the reality cannot be hidden. Can we do better in the next 50 years? Yes we can. But are we going to do better in the next 50 years? The answer to this must be very unlikely. The reasons of this lie as much in the system of government we have as in the value system that seems to be dominant these days.

The democracy that has now taken root in this country is a transactional system. Politics now is without a vision for the future and almost only about gaining power. It is so focused on the present that the future is seldom thought about. Immediate benefits thus have gained precedence over nation building.

We get something of what each of us clamours for. How much we get depends upon how well we can bargain to the disadvantage of others. We all belong to groups now. Our leaders have

seen to that. So the group that can effectively parley its numbers and organisation in the political marketplace gets the most. Thus, what the state can give generally gets distributed in proportion to strength and not according to need.

The paradox here is that those who are in need are generally least organised to effectively bargain and so get the least. They might have the numbers but that does not mean very much by itself in the political marketplace.

Even when the group gets organised the priorities of the group and its leadership may not coincide. The group might need schools, dispensaries, drinking water and access roads. But the leaders want factories, universities speciality hospitals, highways and airports, whose large outlays mean more avenues of patronage and wealth. We, therefore, seldom hear the leaders who claim to be championing the cause of the poor and underprivileged demanding for more primary schools and basic health care facilities. The group might need minor irrigation works. But the leaders generally want major projects. The reasons are again obvious. Thus even now 70 per cent of the country's farmlands are still rain fed. Thus even now less than 50 per cent of the irrigation potential remains unharvested. What our social engineers seem to overlook is that the groups are also stratified and the interests of all the upper layers largely coincide.

Now it is time to make my first prediction. Our system is unlikely to change for the next decade or two. So the priority that will continue to be accorded to rooting out poverty and ignorance will not change substantially. The present trends will, sadly, continue. If by the middle of the next century we have a population of about 1.5 billion or 150 crores, at least a third of it will be both below poverty line, and uneducated and unskilled. In the course of the past decade we have become increasingly fragmented. We are divided by caste, religion, region and other narrow considerations. These divisions have existed throughout our history. They have been as much a curse as a blessing. Because we were divided we became easy victims of foreign conquests. But paradoxically enough because we were highly structured and socially organised we survived as a larger cultural entity.

The winds of modernisation have, ironically enough, been more success-

ful in breaking down the social structures that preserved our culture and order than in demolishing the divides that did us harm. Instead of reform, revival has now become the order of the day. Hindu Samaj and the Islamic Umma are now both under siege by the revivalists. One breeds upon the other. Many of the institutions and practices of region-based societies are now inadequate or not in keeping with the times and need to be reformed. Religious obscurantism mental condition afflicting the intellectually weak, as well as a handy instrument for the unscrupulous and ambitious seeking a shortcut to influence and power. Hinduism which being less dogmatic had throughout the ages shown a great ability for self-reform also seems to be coming under the revivalists' grip. The number of Hindus who seem to be getting irrationally threatened by other religious persuasions is on the rise. We are also well aware of the situation in the Islamic world. Sadly, one sees little signs of this abating in the next decade or so.

The concept of planned development, self-reliance, equitably shared economic growth, and social moderni-

sation which were integral to our philosophy of governance were discarded in 1991 in favour of something we have come to terms with as "liberalisation." This liberalisation has nothing to do with liberty from the familiar oppressions. It has more to do with "libertarianism" which is the philosophy of aggressive individualism and unabated accumulation. A nation that idolised Mahatma Gandhi and Jaiprakash Narayan is now being taught to idolise the most successful accumulators of wealth. We are being taught that the attainment of individual comforts, physical enjoyments and luxuries, the embarkation on a spiralling journey of conspicuous consumption is more important than the national good and welfare. If liberalisation were to mean more openness, more fairness, more economic and social justice, greater stimulation of entrepreneurship and creativity, nobody would be critical of it. What is now happening in the guise of liberalisation is the abandonment of the collective in favour of the individual. It is not surprising that in this atmosphere the poor and oppressed will get more alienated each passing day. This increasing alien-

ation, if not alleviated, will inevitably reach a flashpoint at which we will be engulfed by a major conflagration.

Even the food security we have now come to take for granted is under threat. As the population growth continues on its present and seemingly unalterable path, unless agricultural production and productivity keep pace we will be caught up by shortages again. Already we have seen that the per capita availability of pulses has been dropping. Agricultural growth has begun tapering down and has been hovering at less than two per cent annually in the past five years. At present levels of consumption this might just about be enough.

But per capita consumption levels are rising. Considering that many and vast sections of the population have bettered their levels of income and standards of living. We must also not forget that we have greatly expanded the acreage under cultivation, particularly in the last two decades. When this is factored in, the levels of agricultural productivity that prevail are still very poor. Our productivity is still among the lowest in the world. This is not a good augury for the next millennium.

Chitra Visweswaran

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on Mondays in **Alpertown Community School**, Stanley Avenue, off Ealing Road, Wembley HA0 4JE.
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I will not dwell much on the problems of infrastructure, environment and the pace of industrial development. These are well documented, widely discussed and often seem the only concern of the elites. Of these I believe the pace of industrialisation will continue to proceed largely satisfactorily. I am not commenting as to who will own most of the major industries by the middle of the next century. But if we allow our major industries to pass into the hands of the multinationals we will be left as producers of low value added products and involving processes that will be harmful to the ecology.

There are events taking place elsewhere in the world, which we can ill afford to ignore. The seeming triumph of Western values and ways and the emergence of a unipolar world pose a grave challenge to our sovereignty. We have already seen the enormous pressures we are being subjected to over the CTBT. This is only the beginning. Other unequal treaties and agreements will also be, similarly, sought to be rammed down our throats. There is a good chance that this desire to legiti-

mise the West's superiority and advantages will induce the sole superpower and its allies to resort to a new form of gunboat diplomacy.

The new technologies and the large advanced conventional weapon systems now under development will make this feasible. We hear of a new battleship called the Arsenal Ship under development in the United States. This vessel is intended to carry over 500 highly accurate conventionally armed missiles of various configurations giving it the capability of very credibly threatening selected high value targets with very little collateral damage. How do we react to such threats? Clearly, the CTBT is to also ensure that we are without any means to face such challenges.

I do not believe that nuclear disarmament will provide a more secure global agreement. We require a global agreement on the development and deployment of conventional weapons. If this is not secured, India, which will acquire great economic weight around the year 2025 when we are likely to emerge as one of the three largest economies in the world, will face new security th-

reats. A new world order relying more on coercive diplomacy is sought to be established and we must find an antidote to this.

I am not one of those who believe that we ran the risk of fragmentation. We have survived as a continuing civilisation for many thousands of years and will continue to do so. It is the State and not the nation that is challenged. If the State continues to demonstrate its inability to improve the lives of the poor and deprived, if it continues to demonstrate the inability to even offer them any hope, and if it continues to appear caring, the State as it exists might face graver crises with increasing frequency. We could try to paper over the crises or squelch them in the short run but it is not possible to leave people increasingly dissatisfied for very long.

We must develop the attitude of seeing each crisis as an opportunity to induce change. It is then possible that these crises might impart a new direction to the State and provide the leadership with more effective instrumentalities.

(Courtesy: Asian Age)

Murder of Ponnambalam

Cat's Eye

The murder of Kumar Ponnambalam indicates to us that democratic space in this country has been curtailed. The inability to tolerate Kumar's views implies that our right to freedom of expression and association has been diminished. We hope his death is not a turning point and that intolerance does not grip this country in a cycle of terror.

Kumar Ponnambalam was a controversial figure. He often used harsh words and some say he even sowed the seeds of hatred. His presence in our society was a testament to our tolerance and his words were part of our vibrant democracy. His senseless murder has to be condemned. He was an unarmed civilian who was entitled to his views no matter how distasteful these views

were in some quarters. We also remember his early years as a lawyer, when he was a member not only of many civil rights groups, but also appeared for many Sinhalese political clients, (whom other lawyers shunned most notably the case of Dharmasekera, the leader of a Left group.

We also remember how he actively campaigned against the 1982 Referendum. We mourn Kumar's death as we also mourn the death of all innocent victims of mindless violence. Whether their deaths are caused by bombs or bullets, our society bleeds because of the senselessness of their deaths. Our condolences go out to his wife, a dedicated doctor of the community and her children.

"The Terrorist"

"The Terrorist", was filmed in South India during the fall of 1997. It was the first small budget independent film ever made in the Tamil language.

Santosh Sivan, the director of the film was a well known cinematographer and this film was his first directorial venture. In 1998, it won the India National Award for best Tamil film. It has since been screened at various film festivals all over the world, including Toronto, London and Cairo. At the Cairo Film Festival, it was awarded the Golden Pyramid for Best Film. The jury was chaired by John Malkovich. In January of 1999 it was screened at the Sundance Film

Festival in Park City, Utah. After nearly a year, "The Terrorist" is scheduled for a theatrical release on January 14th in New York.



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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu seeks partner for medical doctor spinster sister, 30, in employment in Colombo. Send horoscope, details M 1147 c/o Tamil Times.

Graduate and part qualified accountant, male, 44, single from good Tamil Hindu family with British citizenship status, seeks compatible girl. Please send details with photograph. M 1148 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional bride for son, 28, 5'3", British citizen, post graduate qualifications in Investment Management and working for American Investment Bank. Send horoscope details. M 1149 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu mother seeks bride in mid-thirties for accountant son, director of own firm. Send horoscope, details. M 1150 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional partner for fair pretty daughter 36, MBA, ACCA accountant. Send horoscope. Details. M 1151 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional groom for fair attractive daughter 26, Biochemistry graduate in good employment, British citizen, Mars seventh house. Send horoscope, details. M 1152 do Tamil Times.

OBITUARIES



Thambirajah, Paul Adalbert
(St. John's Academy Jaffna;
Forest Dept Land Develop-

ment and RAOC) formerly of 17/4A Railway View, Chundikuli, Jaffna; beloved husband of Gladys (Girly); loving father of Vasantha, Rajan (both of UK), Gajan (Australia), Susie (USA), Radha (Canada) and Ruban (UK) father-in-law of Ranjan, Julie, Ranjana, Gunam and Naresh; loving grandfather of Georgina, Paul, Jeremy, Gabrielle, Jonathan, Althea, Matthew, Mark, Lavaniya and Naveen passed away peacefully on 20th December 1999. The funeral service took place at All Saints Church, Wingerworth, Chesterfield, UK on 23rd December followed by cremation the following day.

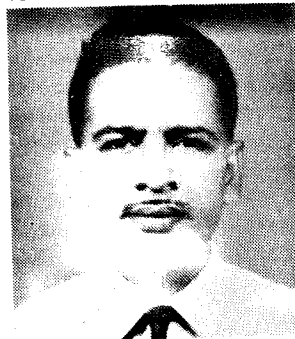
Our sincere thanks to all those who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of condolence. - 9 Hockley Lane, Wingerworth, Chesterfield S42 6QG, United Kingdom. Tel: 01246 205322.



Mr. N. Thambimuthu, Perumalkovilady Jaffna, Sri Lanka; beloved husband of Nesamma; precious father of Dr. Rajakulendran (Oxford), Mahendrarajah, Shanthamalar (both of Jaffna), Satkunarajan, Atputharajah (both of London), Saromalar (Jaffna), Sugunamalar Balarajan, and Raviraj (all of London); beloved father-in-law of Shobana, Vasanthi Jeyaratnam (Bank of Ceylon, Jaffna), Shanthini Premini, Sunderalingam, Ravisekera, Shivanthini and Dharshini passed away peacefully in

Jaffna on the 11th December 1999 and was cremated on the 12th December.

All the grandchildren and the members of his family wish to thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted in several ways during the period of our sorrow and bereavement. - Dr. T Rajakulendran, 1B Church Road, Sandford-on-Thames, Oxford OX4 4XZ, UK Tel: 01865 774134/T Satkunarajan Tel: 0181 550 1535.



Masilamani Vivekananda:

The death occurred in December 1999, in Vancouver Washington, USA of Vivekananda, son of the late Advocate and Mrs. M.A. Masilamani of Batticaloa, Sri Lanka; beloved husband of Vallinayagi; loving father of Susruta and Pradesa (all of the USA); brother of Capt. Senthil Masilamani (Newbury Berks, UK), Mrs. Rajeswari (Indrani), Kanaganayagam (Chilaw Sri Lanka); brother-in-law of Mr. & Mrs. M. Sivasidambaram, Mr. & Mrs. S. Sunderalingam and Mrs. Rajes Phillips (all of Vancouver USA).

He served in the CRNVR in Sri Lanka during the entire period of World War 2, later joined the Postal & Telegraph Services, working in Colombo, Jaffna, Batticaloa and Wellawatte. On retirement from the Postal Department he emigrated to the USA, where he worked as counsellor for the underdeveloped being attached to the Providence Medical Systems in Portland, Oregon, where he passed away while in service.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere

Heaven did a recompense as largely send

He gave to misery (all he had) a tear

He gained from Heaven ('t was all he wished) a Friend.

-- Capt. S. Masilamani, 6 Kingsbridge Road, Newbury Berks RG14 6EA.



Lily Arulpragasam (81), beloved wife of the late Mr. Sinnathamby Arulpragasam of Pandateruppu, Jaffna and loving mother of Aruleelinayagam (Sri Lanka) Arulleenayagi (Canada), Balasingam (UK), Keerthisingam, Jeyasingam, Kulasingam (all of Germany), Thanasingam (UK) and Suryakumari (Sri Lanka); mother-in-law of Indira, Jeyasingam, Shanthini, late Daisy, Thevi, Rajes, Vergi and Charles; grandmother of Mayuran, Joy Sulakshana, Smily Gopi, Percy Dinesh, Thushan, Subo, Sujith, Suja, Suki, Neil, Nina, Eric, Evon, Pamela, Erina, Schiron, Claudia, Roshceba, Manoj and Vinoy passed away in Colombo on 19.12.99 and was buried at the General Cemetery Kanatte, Borella on 23rd December.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted them in several ways during the period of bereavement. -

62 Elmstead Gardens, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7BE.



Mr. Eliathamby Vaithilingam, (82), Retired Headmaster, beloved husband of late Kanagammah; son of late

Continued on page 31

Continued from page 30

Eliathamby and Kuttipillai; loving father of Shanthamalar, Sivananthasakthy, Ketheeswaralingam, Aingaringam, Kugathasalingam and Gnanasakthy; brother of late Rasamma, Kanapathipillai, late Namasivayam and Kandiah; uncle of Rajadurai and Thatchanamoothy; affectionate grandfather of Shobana, Amirtha, Bamini, Jagan, Gajanan, Praveena, Prashanth, Ainjita and Shangavi; father-in-law of Balasingam, Muthurajah, Gowri, Sushila, Swarna, and Senthilooriyogan passed away on Wednesday, 5th January 2000 and was cremated on Sunday, 9th January.

The members of the family wish to thank all those who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and for their support during this time. - 46 Highlands Gardens, Ilford, Essex IG1 2LD. Tel: 0181 518 5904.



28.04.1923 - 08.01.2000

Mrs. Sivapakium Muthukumarasamy (Pakium) of Isleworth, Middlesex, UK passed away on Saturday, 8th January 2000.

She was the beloved wife of Krishnar Muthukumarasamy, retired Head Guard, Potpathy Road, Kokuvil East; daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Nagalingam, Urumpirai; devoted mother of Jeya, Shanthi, Sivakumar, Viji (all of UK), Anandakumar, Dharmi (both of South Africa), Chandra, Skandakumar, Aruna and Suganthy (all of UK); loving mother-in-law of Sritharam, Ponnampalam, Mala, Sathyathan, Subha, Gajendran, Nirmalanandan, Devi, Sucindran and Balaranjan; affectionate grandmother of Gajan, Senthuran, Sathya, Jenny, Vicky, Arrthy, Amy, Kanthan, Pirana-

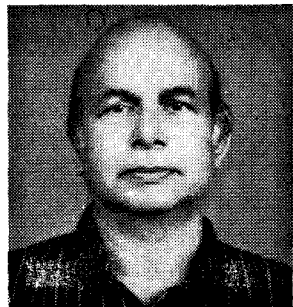
van, Darshi, Shiya, Dusha, Harry, Yalini, Aran, Myu, Priya, Ganan and Adavan.

The funeral was held on Monday, 10th January morning. The family would like to express their sincere gratitude to all those who attended the funeral, sent messages or floral tributes and assisted in various ways throughout the period of bereavement. - K. Muthukumarasamy, 2 Raybell Court, Linkfield Road, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 6QT. Tel: 0181 847 2717.

IN MEMORIAM

Mrs Lalithambal Sandrasekaran of Nainativu, Sri Lanka passed away in London on 28.1.99. The First Anniversary of her demise is on 28.1.2000.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her husband and children Parameswaran (Canada), Jegatheswaran (Australia), Seethanatheswaran, Premachandran, Vasanthi, Ravichandran (all of UK), grandchildren Lakshmi, Sharmila, Sumi, Sasha, Prasanna, Sathes and Dinesh; daughters-in-law Charmaine (Canada), Sugi (Australia), Gowry (UK); relatives and friends. 37 Grove Road, Ealing, London W5 5DS, U.K.



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

In Loving Memory of Our BELOVED**APPA**

Naganather KUMARASINGHAM
(Advocate, Colombo)

Born : 14.4.02
Rest : 22.1.71

AMMA

Sugirthalakshmi KUMARASINGHAM

Born : 2.1.07
Rest : 20.5.80

You are sadly missed and fondly remembered by your ever loving children - Saras Murugason (UK), Senathirajah & Priya son and daughter-in-law (New Zealand), Kamala & Dr C. Shanmuganathan daughter and son-in-law (UK), Dr. Balakrishnan & Renuka son and daughter-in-law (New Zealand) AND Grandchildren - Sudha, Sharmini, Ranjit, Shirani, Dharmini, Sanjay, Janani, Chenduran, Shivashankari, Harshan, Gita and Dr. & Mrs. C. Kulanayagam Brother-in-law and wife and children (UK). You are greatly missed forever, and are in the thoughts of all your family and friends.

GOD'S LOVE is like a beacon
Burning bright with FAITH and PRAYER
And through the changing scenes of life
WE can find a HAVEN THERE!

146, Ridge Lane, Watford WD1 3SU

January 1994.

'Love and remembrance Last for ever'

Sadly missed and dearly loved by his family.



In loving memory of **Mrs Ganeswary Tharmalingam** of Kondavil East, Jaffna on the Seventh Anniversary of her passing away on 211.93. Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving

husband Tharmalingam; children Brabalini, Bremjit and Ranjit; son-in-law Dr. W.N. Linganathan; daughter-in-law Dr. Vani Bremjit and Shamini Ranjit; grandchildren Abhirami, Sathya, Praneela, Praseetha, Prashoban Praveen and Anjana. 5 Beaulieu Boulevard, Beaulieu Park, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 6EU. Tel: 01245 466363.

Memorial Service

Skanda Varodaya College Old Students Association (UK) will be holding a Memorial Service in remembrance of revered old student and former teacher the late Mr. M.S. Sebestiampillai on Saturday, 12th February 2000 at 3pm at St. Mary's Church, Wellesley Road, Croydon, Surrey (near Home Office). All past students and friends are welcome. For further details please contact Mrs. Gilda Kumarathan on 0181 763 2538.

IN MEMORIAM Fifth Death Anniversary



In loving memory of Mrs Sivagamasunthary Sitsapesan on the Fifth Anniversary of her passing away on 19th January 1995.

*Its been five years since you left us,
And we have missed you much
There's been an empty sadness
In the hearts of all you touched.*

*We didn't want you to leave
Though you had to go away
But there is a special place
inside us
Where you will always stay.*

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

FORTHCOMING EVENTS
Feb 1 Eekathasi.

Feb 2 Pirathosam; Feast of the Presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Feb 5 Amavasai; Feast of St. Agatha; South London Tamil Welfare Group. (SLTWG) Women's Front Meets. Tel: 0181 542 3245.

Feb 9 Chathurthi.

Feb 11 7pm Asia House presents a concert of Indian Classical Music - Sarod by Amjad Ali Khan and Tabla by Zakir Hussain at Royal Festival Hall. Tel: 0171 499 1287; Sashdi; Thiruvizhakku Pooja; Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Feb 12 SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285

Feb 13 Karthigai.

Feb 15 Eekathasi.

Feb 17 Pirathosam.

Feb 19 Full Moon; Masi Maham.

Feb 21 8pm Santoor by Sri R. Visweswaran, Nephew of Carnatic Great G.N.B at Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall. Tel: 0181 451 4555.

Feb 22 S a n k a d a h a r a Chathurthi

Feb 25 7.45pm Shankara Asian Arts presents Bharatanatyam by Padmashri Chitra Visweswaran at Queen Elizabeth Hall. Tel: 0171 402 2033 Box Office 0171 960 4242.

Feb 26 SLTWG Drop in.

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

Feb 8 7.30pm Improvisations: East and West - Kadri Gopalnath & Evan Parker on Saxophone.

Feb 25 7.30pm Students Mini Concert series.

The Late Dr. T.D. Sivalingam - A Tribute

It was over 50 years ago that we met as medical students in Colombo. Life in those days was not easy. There were no student hostels. We had to live mostly in lodgings or with relatives, where ever possible. Our main interest was the study of medicine. Thanks be to God, some of us had cultivated eastern values of ways of life. Dr. Sivalingam was one such person. Our lives centred around devotion to God, respect for elders, teachers and towards people who had become victims of one illness or another.

It was my privilege to have lived close to Dr. Sivalingam, in lodgings, not too far away from the medical college in Colombo. Amidst our studies we found time to hold healthy conversations, laugh and relax in a simple way. The foundations that were laid in us continued all the years of our lives. Dr. Siva radiated a unique charm and joy to one and all around him. I have no doubt that this was divine joy which must have contributed to the recovery of the patients who came under his care. After we qualified as doctors we went our various ways, working in various parts of Ceylon.

Although Dr. Siva did not talk much about God, his life was centred around godly ways. In the early 1950s, we were fortunate enough to work under the direction of a Senior Consultant Physician - Dr. John Wilson, who was dedicated to help victims of tuberculosis. While working at one of the largest Chest Hospitals at Welisara, outside Colombo, Dr. Sivalingam learnt the art of dedication. This was more than simple medical skills. During these days there was no specific treatment for tuberculosis.

Death was virtually staring in the faces of the patients inflicted with 'T.B'. Unless one was dedicated to the task of caring, one could not have worked there. It was a time when people were even scared to walk into the hospital for fear of being infected with T.B. Due to medical research, specific medications slowly became available.

At that time, Dr. Sivalingam was one of the few chosen to go abroad and specialise in the treatment of chest diseases. Having lost touch with Dr. Siva for a few years, I met him in the heart of London, one evening in early 1960. I can never forget that meeting. Dr. Siva lived in lodgings, while his wife and children were in Colombo. In those days we had to take care of our lives with the small sum of money at our disposal. When I met him, he was on his way to his lodgings carrying some provisions. It was a great joy meeting him by the roadside. He made a statement which had a deep meaning. He said, 'We are like pebbles by the seashore. The waves keep beating and the pebbles roll along and become smoother and smoother with time' I began to see a meaning to our human lives. This made a great impact on me. When I mentioned to Dr. Siva a few months ago, he did not seem to remember what he had said. In other words he was a man among men, who almost radiated light in a dark world without being aware of it. After that strange meeting, Dr Siva went to Scotland for his studies and lived and worked there.

I lost touch with him again. Again in a strange way I was able to establish contact with him about 3 years ago. By now he was leading a quiet life after retirement. He was somewhat bothered about a heart condition for which he was receiving treatment. However he had not lost his unique charm.

We were able to hold a conversation as always. He discussed matters relating to his personal life. He never showed any evidence of being afraid of the 'last enemy - death. He was keen to introduce me to his wife and sons. He was particularly keen that I should meet his eldest son and grandson who lived in the USA. I knew his life was now centred around the family.

When I heard from his youngest son, Shantha, that he had gone to his heavenly home peacefully, it did not come as a shock. I have no doubt that he would have been welcomed in the heavenly abode. His Father and our Father, God would have welcomed him saying 'Well done beloved one'. We can certainly rejoice that Dr. Siva has no more earthly suffering. He is at peace with the Maker. As I was called to pay a tribute as his mortal remains were cremated, I did pause to encourage his wife and sons. Death could not claim victory. The spiritual self of Dr. Sivalingam will ever remain with all who came into contact with him. Saint Thiruvalluvar made these well known remarks about the responsibilities of the father and the sons. When translated from Tamil, it goes this way.

It is the responsibility of the father to see that his sons attain the highest possible position in life and society. When the sons then move around in the world, people must remark, 'What must have been the measure of the father to have sons like these?' Well, I am sure Dr. Sivalingam and his sons, Yuvaraj, Vijayaraj and Shantaraj do fit in very well to reflect the message conveyed by the Saint.

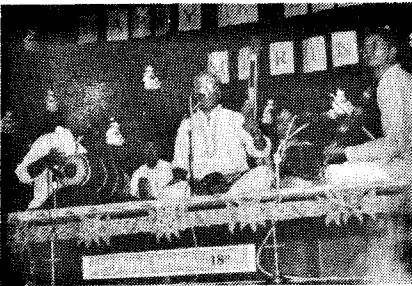
We thank God for the life of this beloved son of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Dr. Sivalingam.
Dr. P.C. Kulanayagam.

Maulia Tops in Short Story Competition



Eleven year old Maulia, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Selvarajah of Hailwicks Road, Luton has won the first prize in the short story competition in the under 16 Section. Early last year she was one of the three top Luton children selected and presented to the Prime Minister and his wife. Her story 'Turning a New Leaf' will appear in a future issue of Tamil Times.

Carnatic Scholar Sings at Birthday Party



These days Youngsters celebrate their birthdays with a brunch at the local McDonald. In their teens they often celebrate outside home in a disco. Young Marino Kumarathan, of Croydon, Surrey (an accomplished Miruthangam player trained by Sri Muthu Sivarajah and who had his arangetram some years ago) celebrated his 18th Birthday in style - with a difference (very much similar to the style in which his brother Angelo celebrated his birthday a few years ago).

Marino's parents had chosen the Bharatha Vidya Bhavan as the venue and had invited many of Marino's Aunts and Uncles associated with his childhood and growing up. Professor T.V. Gopalakrishnan (a Vocalist and Miruthangam Player and a respected Grand dad of the South Indian Carnatic Music Scene) was also present.

I had the pleasure of compering and doing the introductions. With invitees coming from various places far and wide and some flying from distant continents, I had the funny feeling that I was asking in real TV style 'This is your life Marino' with the big red book in my hand.

The invitees were treated to starters by Sangeetha Vidwan Srimathi Sivasakthi Sivanesan. Marino accompanied on the Miruthangam and Balu Raguraman was on Violin. Next followed the main treat. A Vocal recital by the visiting Indian Scholar Professor T.V. Gopalakrishnan. Marino's elder brother Angelo provided accompaniment on the Miruthangam, Marino on Ganjira, their Guru Muthu Sivarajah was on Tabla and Balu Raguraman on Violin. Everyone enjoyed the TVG recital which was in typical TVG style. Shortly before the conclusion, the Birthday Boy Marino cut the Birthday Cake and served the Professor, the artistes and all on stage and the audience.

All invitees were treated to Dinner at the Bhawan Dining Hall. It was indeed a rare Birthday Party compared to the numerous parties I had attended in London. Congratulations to the parents Meera and Kumarathan.

Wimal Sockanathan
14.12.99

Gracious Ganapathy of Seychelles

Seychelles Arulmiku Navasakthi Vinayakar Kovil is a remarkable fulfilment of an initiative of a few Hindu families, some of them expatriate Tamils mostly from Sri Lanka and South India in a country, where ninety five percent of the population is Catholics.

When the plans for the temple were mooted during the early 1980s, the initiators had to overcome several obstacles mostly due to the feeling that such a venture would not succeed in Seychelles. It was determined leadership that led to the

founding of the Vinayagar Kovil with a consecration festival of Kumbhabisekam seven years ago.

The land for the temple was purchased with the help of generous supporters from many families and the role played by the Bank of Baroda. The Government of Seychelles encouraged the venture in no small way and very soon Victoria, the capital of the Western Indian Ocean state became also the seat of a Hindu deity apart from the Catholic and Anglican cathedrals and a mosque. There was religious unity amidst a diversity marked by concepts and beliefs of 'One God' ordained by cultural factors that are unique to nations and peoples. This further reflected Seychelles ideals of democracy in reality.

In order to mark the seventh anniversary, the temple trustees have published an excellent souvenir. It features some well researched articles on the Hindu faith and philosophy. The features on Lord Subramanya and the festivals of the Tamil people convey useful information while there are comments and observations on the Hindu faith that are inspiring, some written no doubt with young people in mind. Naturally an effort of this type needs financial support and the role of commercial institutions within Seychelles and overseas is all too evident.

I am particularly privileged to comment on this souvenir since I am all too aware of the early years of the struggle of the initiators and how they met their challenges and the fellowship I enjoyed in the weekly bhajans before the temple was founded.

Richards Karunairajan
Mississauga, Canada.

EMS – Portrait of the Long March

Ironical though it was, the newspaper, Malayalam Manorama, made its first major foray into book publishing on 18 December with a pictorial essay on the legendary Indian Communist leader E.M.S. Nambudiripad, who during his life time always found himself at the receiving end of this leading Malayalam daily.

The first copy of the photo essay, 'EMS Portrait of the Long March', by the chief photographer of Malayalam Manorama Mr. B. Jayachandran, was received by President Mr. K.R. Narayanan at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi before a packed audience which included immediate family members of EMS, his party members and political opponents.

Dwelling on the 'long momentous and tempestuous career of EMS', the President described the publication as a 'tribute to a personality whom we used to call a modern-day Shankaracharya from Kerala'.

In the President's view, Nambudiripad's biggest distinction was that he led the first elected Communist government in the world. 'Though the experiment did not last long due to Central intervention, that one event shook the world and changed the character of Communism in the country. It is he who brought the Communist movement into the electoral and parliamentary arena of the country', the President said.

Stating that the assimilative power of Indian politics was the strength of Indian democracy. Mr. Narayanan said, 'EMS also made a significant contribution to coalition politics. Though dogmatic, he was practical in the application of dogma and to him goes the credit of coalition politics.'

Asserting that no one can deny the role played by Communism in the social transformation of Kerala, former Prime Minister Mr. I.K. Gujral said 'EMS was the byword for Leftist intellectual brilliance' and had left an 'indelible mark on our thinking and public life.' 'His is the second long march in human history after China's long march', Mr. Gujral said.

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