

Tamil

TIMES

VOL XIX NO. 4 ISSN 0266-4488 15 APRIL 2000 90p

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*"I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it."*

-Voltaire

**Tamil
TIMES**

ISSN 0266 - 44 88
Vol. XIX No. 4
15 APRIL 2000

Published by:
TAMIL TIMES LTD
PO Box 121, Sutton,
Surrey SM1 3TD
United Kingdom
Phone: 0181 644 0972
Fax: 0181 241 4557
Email: prajan@gn.apc.org

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

UK/India/Sri Lanka.....	£15/US\$25
Australia.....	Aus\$45
(Australian Bank cheques only)	
USA.....	US\$35
Canada.....	Can\$40
All other countries.....	£20/US\$35

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LATE NEWS

Tigers Overrun Elephant Pass

April 23 - The Tamil Tigers overran and captured the strategically important Elephant Pass military complex on 22 April. Its fall constitutes the worst debacle the Sri Lankan military in its 17-year battle against the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan Defence Ministry has conceded that the camp has fallen to the Tigers. In a communique, the Defence Ministry said security forces "relocated their defences in the northern sector of Elephant Pass" and simultaneously "vacated the southern defences" of the vital Army complex to "make sure of the security of Jaffna."

Latest reports say that, rather than resting on their laurels with gaining control of the Elephant Pass, the Tigers are pressing on and advancing further into the peninsula relentlessly pounding the defending troops with artillery and mortar fire.

The sprawling Elephant Pass military complex housing an estimated 5,000 troops and an enormous quantity of military hardware has always been under the control of the Sri Lankan army, and all previous attempts by the LTTE to capture it had resulted in failure with heavy casualties. Now for the first time the flag of the LTTE has been raised at Elephant Pass with the Tigers controlling again for the first time the only land-based gateway to the Jaffna peninsula from the mainland.

With the fall of this strategic military camp, many believe that the Tigers have already commenced their battle to recapture the Jaffna peninsula the control of which they lost to government forces in late 1995. "The fall of this crucial base at the gate of Jaffna will facilitate the LTTE to gain its strategic goal of liberating Jaffna," a LTTE statement said.

Though the battle for Elephant Pass had been predicted during the previous two weeks with the LTTE pounding and capturing the mini-bases surrounding it, many military analysts in Colombo appear to be surprised at the ease and pace with which the Tigers overran Elephant Pass. Even the LTTE leadership is said to have been pleasantly surprised at the speed with which the army capitulated.

A military officer was quoted saying that the government forces withdrew from the Elephant Pass area after it became clear that it would be very difficult to hold on. The troops left through a narrow land corridor of Kilaly and headed toward Jaffna. The officer said the military's biggest concern now was to stop the Tigers from moving their artillery guns closer to the Palaly airport and military base situated within the Jaffna peninsula.

The LTTE claimed that over one thousand troops were killed in the battle for Elephant

Pass. But the Defence Ministry said that one hundred and twenty eight soldiers and 162 militants were reported killed and over 600 soldiers injured in the battle.

A statement issued by the LTTE on 22 April said, "Yakachchi and Elephant Pass bases forming the giant military complex of the Sri Lankan army on the gateway to Jaffna fell to the combat formations of the Liberation Tigers this afternoon following 48 hours of fierce and bloody fighting. Over one thousand Sri Lankan troops were killed and the rest fled in total disarray.

"LTTE's Special Forces and commando units stormed into the Yakachchi military base in the early hours of the morning in a multi-pronged assault and overran the well-fortified camp after several hours of intense fighting. The LTTE commandos, who penetrated central base, destroyed several artillery pieces, tanks, armoured vehicles and ammunition dumps.

"Overwhelmed by the fury of the Tiger assault the Sri Lankan troops who desperately held the base without supplies and reinforcements for the last 2 days, fled in total confusion.

"With the fall of Yakachchi and with the collapse of the command structure of its defending troops, the LTTE combat units moved swiftly and stormed into Elephant Pass from different directions. Unable to withstand the LTTE's multi-pronged assault the Sri Lankan troops ran amok in chaos.

"The majority of the soldiers of the 54 Division fled through Killali lagoon in the midst of heavy fire from LTTE fighters suffering heavy casualties.

"LTTE fighters are now in full control of the Yakachchi-Elephant Pass sector and have amassed a huge haul of heavy weapons, ammunition and military vehicles.

"The conquest of Elephant Pass complex, the largest and well-entrenched military base in the north, signified a major military victory of the Tigers in the current campaign against Sri Lankan troops in Jaffna. The fall of this crucial base at the gate of Jaffna will facilitate the LTTE to gain its strategic goal of liberating Jaffna."

The statement added that a large number of civilians along with the Tiger fighters took part in the flag raising ceremony that symbolized the conquest of a strategically important region by the Liberation Tigers."

Tigers Launch Major Military Offensive to Recapture Jaffna

D B S Jeyaraj

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has launched a military onslaught again in what appears to be an attempt at recapturing Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka which it lost to government forces in late 1995. Fighting on a large scale erupted again when the current confrontation began around midnight on Monday March 26th with the Tigers launching a multi-pronged offensive against several military installations in the peninsula. Fighting rages on, with intermittent intervals of non-fighting for logistical reasons. Even as the people of Sri Lanka are being deprived of factual news about the situation because of the prevailing censorship on war-related news, news reports in the print, electronic, audio and visual Tamil media outlets abroad along with information gained through telephone by directly contacting informed sources in Jaffna provide an insight into the unfolding LTTE war strategy in the peninsula and related developments.

The LTTE is adopting a different military strategy in the peninsula as compared with its earlier offensives in the Wanni. The prize targets are Jaffna town and the Elephant Pass military complex. The underlying principles behind current LTTE strategy in the Jaffna peninsula are four-fold.

Firstly the LTTE does not want to repeat its 1991 fiasco of attacking the Elephant Pass camp directly and is deliberately avoiding an all out onslaught. Secondly the Tigers are pursuing encircling manoeuvres aimed at cutting off all access and supply routes to the Elephant Pass isthmus thereby seeking to isolate and strangulate the forces stationed there. Thirdly the LTTE has already entered the peninsula through points in the eastern and southern coasts and have established entrenched

positions that the army had been unable to demolish so far. Now they are extending those positions further. Fourthly the Tigers are keeping in reserve a large contingent on the northern mainland that could very likely be deployed to capture Jaffna town.

What is going on now in the peninsula is stage four of the third phase of "Operation Alaigal Oivathillai" (Unceasing or ceaseless waves). The first phase was in Mullaitheevu in July 1996. The second was in Kilinochchi in September 1998. The first stage of the third phase was in the eastern and the second in the Western sector of the northern mainland of the wanni. Both were in November last year. The third stage was launched in December last year and was focussed on the Southern, South eastern and Eastern flanks of the peninsula.

As a result of those operations the LTTE began occupying the coastal areas of Vettalaikerny, Kattaikkadu, Aaliyawalai, Uduthurai, Mulliyan, Thattuvaankoddi and Nallathannithoduvaai on the South eastern sector of the peninsula. The LTTE also seized Pullaveli to the north of Elephant Pass. It also took Kurinchatheevu to the west of Elephant Pass. It had earlier taken Paranthan and Umaiaalpuram to the south of Elephant Pass in the Northern mainland.

A consequence of all these was that Elephant Pass was encircled on almost all sides with access and supply routes cut off except for Iyakkachchi to its north. It may be recalled that the Tiger siege of Elephant Pass in 1991 was broken only through the establishment of a beachhead in Vettalaikerny-Kattaikkadu. Subsequently permanent camps were set up here to ensure smooth supplies by way of sea. Prior

to the current round of fighting the Iyakkachchi camp along a bend on the strategic A-9 highway served in a sense as the gateway to Elephant Pass on the peninsula. Supplies were provided by road from Jaffna via the Kandy road.

The LTTE has also established fixed positions on the South western sectors of the peninsula. These are in east Ariyalai, Koilakkandy, Thanankilappu and Keratheevu. Logistical enhancement is made possible through boats plying the Jaffna lagoon from the Pooneryn, Nagathevanthurai and Sangupiddy areas of the mainland. A battery of long-range artillery maintained on the Pooneryn coast fires at regular intervals across the lagoon into the Thenmaratchy sector of the peninsula. A key focus from this angle is Kilaly on the south-western coast of the peninsula. It may be recalled that Kilaly ferry was for long the transit point for persons entering and exiting the peninsula during the 1990 to 95 period when the LTTE was in control.

In order to combat the "creeping advantage" of the Tigers in the peninsula, the Colombo government stationed the entire 54th division in the Elephant Pass sector. More importantly the elite 53rd division was deployed in the east coast of the peninsula. This division consists of crack commando forces trained in Pakistan as well as by the US and also the special air brigade. It was the 53rd that was in the vanguard of successful military operations in Jaffna during 1995-96 and the Wanni in 1997-98. Also Colombo newspapers quoting military intelligence sources warned of heavy Tiger build up in the mainland areas south of the Peninsula as a prelude to a Tiger manoeuvre. Apparently the armed forces were planning a major operation aimed at recapturing Tiger areas in the peninsula and mainland when the LTTE struck. News Reports indicate that the LTTE preempted the armed forces by 48 hours. Had the LTTE not anticipated an operation by the armed forces and attacked first, the current military equation in the north may have been arguably different.

The present wave of fighting began around midnight on the 26th of March. Tiger cadres infiltrated military lines and launched a commando type raid on an artillery installation and ammunition

dump located in the general area of Pallai which is a key junction to the north of Elephant pass on the Jaffna-Kandy road. At least eleven pieces of artillery were decommissioned. The artillery points installed in fan like formation were of crucial importance in controlling the roadway beyond Pallai on the A-9 highway. This operation was conducted by squads of the LTTE commando division known as "Siruthai" or leopard. Subsequently another seven further points north of Pallai were also destroyed.

At about the same time LTTE cadres also seized strategic points on the Jaffna-Kandy road thereby interdicting the A-9 highway. LTTE points were established in the north of Pallai in the general area of Muhamalai, Indrapuram and Ithavil. The LTTE acquired first a stretch of land four and a half kilometres long and one and a half km wide. Later the LTTE extended its hold from the northern outskirts of Pallai to the southern borders of Eluthumattuval. Later the army advanced southwards from Eluthumattuval and beat back the Tigers to some extent. At one point the army claimed that they had wrested back control of the areas captured by the LTTE. This claim proved only partially true. While the army did get back some territory the LTTE continued to retain areas along the road that include Arasakerny, Ithavil, Inthirapuram, Muhamalai and Kovil Kadu.

The Tigers have now entrenched themselves in this rectangular swathe with fortified positions. All road transport along the A-9 highway downwards from Mirusuvil remain curtailed. If the Tigers can hold on to this position then no road transport from Iyakkachi and Elephant Pass to Jaffna is possible along this road. The strategic value of this to the Tigers is illustrated by the fact that deputy military chief Balraj who is second only to Velupillai Prabhakaran in the LTTE's military hierarchy is personally leading the LTTE in this area. A highlight of this confrontation was when an advance column led by Balraj was surrounded by soldiers of the 533 and 534 brigades. Spirits soared within the military establishment over the prospect of either capturing or killing the LTTE deputy military commander. But another contingent led by a

Tiger leader Kannan broke through and relieved pressure on Balraj thereby foiling the army's ambitions.

At present the armed forces are using a makeshift circuitous route by turning westwards from Palai, passing through Puloppalai, reaching Kilaly and then proceeding by the south western coast to Kachai and then turning east to the Jaffna-Kandy road again at Kodikamam. Current reports however state that the LTTE is pounding the Kilaly-Kachai-Kodikamam area by artillery. All passenger traffic has been stopped along the Jaffna-Kandy road from the south of Kodikamam. Thus it is possible to conclude that this road route to Elephant Pass for use by the army too is now under intense pressure. The fact that the armed forces are compelled to use this roundabout route disproves the army boast of having reclaimed the Jaffna-Kandy road.

Given its crucial positional importance the armed forces too are trying very hard to dislodge the LTTE from the points along the road. Apart from continuing exchanges of artillery fire at least four counter offensives spearheaded by the armoured and mechanical divisions have been conducted.

The LTTE has so far withstood most of these. The Tigers also claim to have captured two South African made "Buffel" tanks and three armoured cars and also destroyed five tanks and seven armoured cars. The LTTE has now developed an artillery division named after former Jaffna commander Kittu and is developing an armoured division named Victor after the ex-Mannar commander. Former Jaffna and Mannar commander Bhanu is in charge of both these. Bhanu is assisting Balraj directly at present.

Tragically about 15000 people have been affected as a result of escalating fighting between the Tigers and the army. About 6000 displaced persons wanting to flee the battle zone to safer areas were trapped as a result of the ban on civilian traffic. In addition, the government and non-government organization activities in the affected areas have been severely curtailed. A serious humanitarian crisis has developed in catering to the needs of the displaced persons with inadequate shelter, food and medicine. Only the Catholic church

is able to alleviate some of the problems but does not have enough resources.

The Medicin Sans Frontiers NGO has issued a statement calling attention to the serious shortage of medicine and drugs. There have also been charges about the military having installed artillery guns in the Pallai hospital compound thereby endangering the patients and staff.

In the meantime the LTTE and some other Tamil organizations are accusing the troops of deliberately restricting civilian movement in the war zone so as to utilise them as protective human shields or buffers. Some reports originating from pro-LTTE sources allege that because the troops are intermingling with the refugees and are also stationed amidst the civilians the Tigers are finding it difficult to unleash artillery barrages for fear of hitting the people. Hence the comparative lack of pace in military advances. Some international organizations including the International Red Cross have also drawn attention to the developing humanitarian crisis and the vulnerability of civilian population. Also several civilian protest demonstrations have been staged in Jaffna urging the authorities not to restrict civilian movement.

When some government officials went with food and offered cash amounting to 2000 rupees per displaced person in the affected areas the people turned it down saying "Is this money for our coffins?". They demanded that they be allowed to move out. The army chief of staff Lionel Balagalle in a statement denied that civilian movement was restricted. He said that the outflow from the affected areas was slow because civilians had to be screened thoroughly for fear of LTTE personnel infiltrating and masquerading as civilians. Currently about a 100 to 150 people are allowed out each day. Though the crisis is diminishing it has not gone away completely. But any fresh offensive launched by either side involving long-range artillery fire will inevitably worsen the situation for the civilian population.

The Iyakkachi camp and Elephant Pass complex further to the south of the peninsula too are under attack. LTTE cadres were conducting artillery barrages and keeping both under virtual siege from points to the north and north

east of Iyakkachi in Sangathaar vayal and Kovil vayal and points in the south east of Elephant pass at Thattuankotti and to the west at Kurinchatheevu. So despite the LTTE not conducting a direct assault at present, Elephant pass and Iyakkachi are marooned unless of course the military balance in these areas undergo drastic transformation. The LTTE however launched a full-fledged frontal assault on Iyakkachchi camp on April 17th. Correct information about this round of fighting is yet to emanate from the frontlines.

Simultaneous to the attacks in the Pallai-Muhamalai area on March 26th, LTTE cadres also launched a number of attacks on points along the east coast of the peninsula. The east coast known as the Vadamaratchy East division extends from Point Pedro downwards to Thalaiady for a distance of 18 to 20 miles. It further extends right down to Chundikulam lagoon but the areas come under the Pachilaippalli division. This region is bounded on one side by the sea and on the other by the all pervasive Jaffna lagoon. It is sparsely populated with fishing as the chief livelihood.

LTTE cadres used Nelliyan, a tiny hamlet on the western interior of Thalaiady, as their launching pad. A ferocious attack was unleashed on the military complex of Thalaiady-Maruthankerni-Chembianpattu. There is a road proceeding westwards from Maruthankerni that reaches the Jaffna-Kandy road on the Puthukkaadu junction. Fighting erupted on the Soranpattu-Maasaar areas on this road too. Chembianpattu is about two km to the north of Thalaiadi while Maruthankerni is about three - fourth of a km to its west. All three were linked up in a gigantic triangular military complex that housed also the operational headquarters of the elite 53rd division.

Even as this attack commenced other Tiger groups began attacking the camp on Maamunai and Amban further northwards along the coast between Chembianpattu and Nagarkovil. With increasing LTTE pressure the armed forces effected strategic withdrawals on a staggered basis. First the smaller Amban camp, next the larger Maamunai camp and finally the massive complex at Thalaiady-Maruthankerni-Chembi-

anpattu with the 53rd hq were vacated. According to official communiques the army is now repositioning itself by abandoning the coastal strip and reinforcing positions on the interior to the west of the lagoon. This seems to be the only valid strategy available that would contain LTTE encroachment into the interior.

As a result of all this the LTTE is now in control of the eastern peninsula coast up to Kudarappu on the south of Nagar Kovil. It has acquired new territory stretching to about ten miles. There are however three other camps in Nagar Kovil, Manalkaadu and Vallipuram along this coast between current LTTE positions and strategic Point Pedro the northernmost point of the peninsula. Women cadres of the LTTE's Sothiya brigade are now occupying the newly acquired east coast areas. This segment of the attack itself was a combined venture of the Charles Anthony infantry division and the Sea Tigers division. The Tiger cadres were clandestinely ferried by sea from Chalai on the Mullaitheevu coast already under LTTE control and landed in points between Nagarkovil and Vettalaikerny inclusive of Chembianpattu and Thalaiadi. The sea Tiger component was led by Veerendran while the land based cadres were led by Vasanthan a hitherto unheard of Tiger leader.

The LTTE is now keeping the pressure on at Nagar Kovil. Using a rough track between Eluthumattuval and Nagar Kovil that weaves its way through interior areas the LTTE launched a surprise attack on the Nagar Kovil camp from a different direction. The soldiers managed to stave off the assault. The Tigers also sank two Dvora gun boats off the Nagar Kovil coast. One P 463 was a direct Israeli product while the second P 493 was a replica constructed at the Colombo Dockyard. The Tigers used a recoilless RCS 106mm gun from the coast and hit one vessel that was about 600 metres from the shore. The second one came close to rescue the survivors and got hit too.

One vessel sank while the other has been stuck on a sand bar close to the shore. At least 16 men including the two captains are presumed dead. The Tigers also salvaged a lot of sophisticated thermal detecting devices and

electronic equipment from the vessels. They also seized a lot of arms including 20mm and 23mm cannon, cannon shells and 40mm grenades and 3 grenade launchers and about 20 heavy weapons.

When the attacks in Pallai and Thalaiady commenced on March 26th the Tigers opened up another front too. While the attacks were on the LTTE Kilinochchi area commander Theepan led a land based expedition. Around 400 cadres led by Theepan ventured on foot across the Chundikulam lagoon currently in marshy condition in the South-east of the peninsula. These cadres enhanced, consolidated and strengthened Tiger presence in the south and south east of the peninsula. Theepan's fighters also launched an attack on army positions in the Vathirayan area to the west of Vettalaikerny and east of Elephant pass.

Heavy resistance is being proffered. If the Tigers succeed in breaking through Vathirayan then Elephant Pass is likely to be assailed from another point too. But the LTTE is now in possession of the Eastern seaboard from Kokkuthoduvaai in Mullaitheevu district on the mainland to Kudaarappu on the Jaffna peninsula. Movement between the mainland and peninsula need no longer be dependent on the sea alone. Apart from the monsoon season the Chundikulam lagoon can be easily crossed on foot.

The Tamil media has drawn attention to some other developments of a serious military nature. It is reported that some army positions in the interior of Kudathanai, Mulli, Kodikamam, Manthuvil and Varani areas have been closed and personnel redeployed. This according to the media reports enables the Tigers to circumvent army positions by following a circuitous path along the lagoon shore and proceed to places like Anthanathidal, Kappooothu, Mattuvil and Vadharavathai along the lagoon shores without meeting up with the army in any place. The intricate geography of the peninsula particularly in the case of its porous lagoon does afford the Tigers an opportunity to reach the Vadamaratchy, Thenmaratchy and certain parts of the Valigamam sector through this route. There is vast potential to be exploited by the Tigers. What the LTTE proposes to do

in this regard remains to be seen.

The LTTE has also been attempting to cross the lagoon and seize Kilaly on the south west. But the armed forces have repulsed those attacks so far. The present LTTE objective seems to be that of seizing the Maruthankerni-Puthukkkaadu road on the east of the A-9 highway and the Palai-Puloppalai-Kilaly road on the west while holding on to and possibly expanding its positions on the Jaffna-Kandy road. If it is successful then the Tigers would have succeeded in bisecting the lower portion of the peninsula with Elephant Pass and Iyakkachi garrisons trapped. (Currently Iyakkachi is being attacked) At the same time it continues its encircling and strangulating strategy without taking Elephant Pass head on.

A significant aspect of the current fighting phase is the deployment and excessive reliance on long range artillery by the LTTE. It is said that only a force of around 1500 are being used for direct combat in all parts of the peninsula. These cadres are a combination of its infantry, commando, artillery and armoured divisions along with women's brigades and sea Tigers.

What is of great concern to the Sri Lankan government however is the view currently gaining ground that the Tigers are planning to attack Jaffna shortly. LTTE ideologue and Political adviser Anton Balasingham stated in an interview to the pro-LTTE fortnightly "Tamil Guardian" that the Tigers would very soon knock on the gates of Jaffna, the cultural capital of Sri Lankan Tamils. Reinforcing Colombo's apprehensions about the Tigers attempting to seize Jaffna are the reports supplied by its intelligence agencies.

These reports state that LTTE cadres are being systematically ferried into the peninsula from Sangupiddy to Keratheevu. In addition reports state that a large quantity of armaments are being stockpiled in Thanankilappu and East Ariyalai on the peninsula. This seems to be in anticipation of a massive military venture within the peninsula. It is also stated that senior military commander Karuna or Karuna Amman is waiting along with around 1000 cadres in reserve on the mainland coast adjacent to the peninsula. It is feared in Colombo that the LTTE may use

Thanankilappu or Ariyalai as a launching pad and mount fierce onslaughts on Chavakachheri or Jaffna town or both. Even if the Tigers cannot capture Jaffna at present a lightning raid can cause immense military, political and psychological damage.

While the current focus seems to be on Elephant Pass military observers can never rule out a surprise twist by the LTTE. Given established positions in the peninsula the LTTE is quite capable of changing direction and targetting Jaffna town, Chavakachcheri or Point Pedro. Colombo knows that even if it cannot seize these places the very fact of an attack would provide a symbolic and psychological victory particularly in the case of Jaffna. The LTTE suffered tremendously in terms of prestige and practicality by losing Jaffna. According to Tiger sources LTTE leader Prabhakaran has vowed that the Tigers will be in Jaffna before the year 2000 ends. Colombo newspapers state that LTTE hopes of retaking Jaffna town is not feasible. But telephone conversations with Jaffna residents reveal that they have reconciled themselves to that possibility. In their minds it does not seem a remote one.

Military analysts have also drawn attention to the excessive media focus on Elephant Pass. It is erroneous to assume that the retention or abandoning of Elephant Pass will be the sole decisive factor in the Jaffna situation. In comparison with Jaffna, Elephant Pass is not so very essential for the LTTE. It must be remembered that though Elephant Pass is the gateway to Jaffna peninsula it has never been under LTTE control at any time. Even at the height of LTTE hegemony the greater part of the peninsula and northern mainland remained under LTTE control but never Elephant Pass. The LTTE could always manage without having Elephant Pass militarily. Also the terrain surrounding the camp is not favourable to an all out attack or direct siege - a bitter lesson learnt in 1991 losing over a thousand of its cadres when the LTTE launched Operation "Tharai Kadal Aahayam" (Land Sea Air). As such it is quite possible that Prabhakaran may prefer to risk the loss of a thousand cadres in trying to take Jaffna rather than the Elephant Pass Isthmus. His current

strategy of strangulating it may be longer but more feasible and economical. But the fall of either Jaffna or Elephant Pass would be a demoralising blow to the armed forces and would be the beginning of the end for the government grip in the peninsula.

On the other hand despite LTTE successes and claims the armed forces cannot be written off that easily. There are certain factors to be noted in this respect. One is that the Tiger presence on the peninsula is numerically quite precarious given the fact that it is sandwiched in between the 54th (Elephant Pass) and 53rd divisions (Pachilaipalli) in one sector and the 51st (Vadamaratchy) and 52nd (Thenmaratchy) in others.

Though the manpower in a Sri Lankan military division is much lower than the average norm, the combined strength of four is about ten times the size of the LTTE component in the war zone. The numerical balance is against the LTTE. In addition to greater manpower the armed forces have a definite superiority in terms of firepower inclusive of long range artillery as well as tanks and armoured vehicles.

Secondly the advantage of an air force is yet prevalent and visible. This places the LTTE at a great disadvantage. The current exercise has seen incessant aerial bombardment and shelling by the forces. A number of LTTE boats have been destroyed and expeditions foiled. Also given the land and sea situation the skies are of utmost logistical importance to the armed forces. Of course the LTTE with its anti aircraft wing led by Shankar has attempted to counter the air force with surface to air missiles and .50 calibre long range guns. At least one plane and two helicopters have been damaged so far. Nevertheless it is the air advantage that has enabled Colombo to withstand and contain the LTTE to this extent at least.

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is in an unenviable position of seeing her war for peace strategy crumbling. Yet the first lady is still defiant and keeps herself informed of battlefield developments round the clock. After an emergency war council meeting she instructed Army Chief Weerasuriya, Navy chief Tissera and Air Force chief Weerakkody to relocate

to the Palaly base in Jaffna until the current LTTE advance is halted and situation restored. "Stay in Jaffna and do your duty" was her crisp command. Kumaratunga has also gone on record that there would be no ceasefire or withdrawal of troops from Jaffna "Even if the LTTE kills me". The service chiefs however returned to Colombo after a few days without achieving the tasks entrusted. It is reported that the Air Force chief had a narrow escape when a Tiger shell landed within a few yards at Kodikamam. Incidentally after the debacle Brigadier Gamini Hettiaratchy, the 53rd division commander, has been relieved of his post. Major General Sisira Wijesinghe has been appointed as 53rd head.

After several days of fighting the LTTE says that about 140 of its cadres have been killed. The defence ministry says that around 230 of their men have been killed or are missing in action. While the LTTE does not give out figures of injured persons the Armed forces say more than thousand are injured with most of them being classified as

walking wounded. Unofficial estimates place the casualty figures on both sides considerably high. Predictably both sides exaggerate the casualty figures of the opposing side. The premier casualty on the Tiger division is the death of Major Lakshiya the women corps leader in the Muhamalai fighting.

The current LTTE offensive comes at a time when peace initiatives are on the agenda with Norwegian facilitation. The LTTE requested a ceasefire and repositioning including that of confinement to barracks of armed forces in Jaffna as a prelude to talks. The government however turned it down. Colombo opted for a gradual deescalation after talks commence and categorically ruled out a ceasefire before that. This approach has enabled the LTTE to launch an attack without any qualms though valid queries can be raised about the Tigers flouting the spirit of a peace initiative if not the letter. The Sri Lankan foreign ministry has issued a tough press release harshly critical of the LTTE leading to speculation in the media as to whether Norwegian aided

peace talks will ever get off the ground. The situation is further compounded by the opposition of the Buddhist hierarchy to talks with the Tigers or devolution.

On April 18th the Tigers launched a fresh offensive and seized the strategic Puthukkaddu junction on the Jaffna-Kandy road. A great deal of territory in the genera areas of Pallai, Iyakkachchi, Soranpattu and Maasaar have been seized. Several military positions have been destroyed and personnel killed in the on going fighting.

Though fighting rages on at present its longevity and future direction depends upon the LTTE's ability to sustain current levels of fighting particularly the maintaining of its artillery barrages. Frontline reports state that the LTTE is able to fire artillery regularly and intensely. On the other hand the ability and resilience of the armed forces in taking effective counter measures will also have a bearing. What seems likely is a prolonging of the conflict with intermittent lulls necessitated by logistical requirements. ●



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Making a Genuine 'Southern Consensus'

Lakshman Gunasekara

The on-going dialogue between the PA and the UNP is perceived today as the core process in the current peace effort, judging by the way the many other actors in the whole scenario are holding their breath and watching developments each Tuesday or Wednesday at Temple Trees.

Some describe the on-going talks as the search for a 'Southern consensus'. What is meant by 'Southern' is an interesting subject for those semioticians who would love to dissect the 'significations' at work here. But how inclusive will that consensus be, is more my concern.

Very often the current inter-party talks are described solely as a dialogue between the PA and the UNP. In reality, the 'talks' taking place right now are quite multi-lateral in character and to describe them as a bipartisan dialogue is to hide the role of the ethnic minority political parties.

If the PA-UNP talks hug the headlines, not so well acknowledged are the inter-party discussions between the Tamil and Muslim parties and between them and the PA and the UNP that take place in-between the meetings at Temple Trees. These meetings are equally important to the process of inter-party dialogue as the ones between the two Sinhala-led and Sinhala-based giants of the electoral scene. Hence, my preference for the term 'inter-party' dialogue rather than 'bipartisan'.

There is no doubt, however, that the present phase of this inter-party dialogue is to obtain what is euphemistically described as the 'Southern' consensus. To indulge in a little bit of semiotics, let me argue that the words 'South' and 'Southern' are generally used as euphemisms to refer to 'Sinhala' and the 'Sinhalas'.

Political discourse

It is very interesting to note that, in the English language (and, therefore, in the political discourse, there is need

for an 'euphemism' at all. Would it be correct to say that, in this discourse, it is easier to refer to the ethnic minorities directly as 'Tamil' and 'Muslim' but that one tends to balk at using the word 'Sinhala' to describe the ethnic majority? For example, the terms 'Tamil parties' and 'Muslim parties' come to the tongue rather easily while many (elite, anglicised) participants in the English language discourse would prefer 'national parties' to 'Sinhala-led' or 'Sinhala-based' when referring to the UNP and PA.

Does this semantic practice reflect the general reluctance of the anglicised elite to resort to ethnic categories - a reluctance stemming from their own identity make-up which cuts across these current, dominant Sri Lankan ethnic differentiations?

I further suspect that the Sinhals engaging in this discourse are more likely to avoid the use of 'Sinhalese' to refer to the ethnic majority, and would rather say the "majority community" whereas the non-Sinhals do not find it so difficult to use the name. Do we have here a process of sublimation - just as much as, in Western news media jargon in the days of the Cold War, the Communist Bloc countries were explicitly referred to as "communist" while the word 'capitalist' was avoided and Capitalist Bloc countries were usually described as "non-communist", "Western Bloc", "advanced industrialised nations" etc. ?

Indeed, it is rare for the average big business industrialist to use the term 'capitalist' in self-reference. (Sinhala ultra-nationalists, of course, at this point would insist that they are not shy to name names. Neither, for that matter, are the hard Right ideologues shy about using the word "Capitalist")

This semantic practice is an important ideological tool. When it comes to self-reference, an explicit naming, according to the formal differentiating categories, endangers a particular sense of subjectivity, of 'Self'. It is that kind

of subjectivity in which the Subject is (culturally) placed in a socially superior position or, a rigidly differentiated position vis-a-vis the Others. Just as much as one would use the word 'I' in referring to oneself rather than one's name (that which formally differentiates oneself from the Others). And if Others too participate in the same word game, then that indicates their (perhaps partial) assimilation into that 'Self'. This could happen when these Others are subjected to and become subservient to a more powerful discourse that is imposed by that 'Self'. In the Sri Lankan case, that happens when some members of the ethnic minorities adopt the sublimating terminology of the Sinhals thereby effectively participating in an identity which is not their 'Self'.

The 'Southern Consensus' refers then to the consensus that is required to be achieved among the majority Sinhala community regarding the need for, and the contours of, a negotiated political settlement of the ethnic conflict. At this point I cannot resist an 'I told you so': reminding readers of my argument in these columns in 1998 that the Sinhala community should make up its collective mind for war or peace.

But then, can a 'Southern' consensus be achieved by a mere 'bipartisan' dialogue? Even if one were to ignore the rantings on the sidelines of the Sinhala ultra-nationalist groups, surely the electoral map shows that the UNP and PA are not the sole political parties representing collective Sinhala interests.

Political alliances

In addition to such parties as the Mahajana Eksath eramuna (MEP), the remnants of the DUNF, and other nationalist or 'national' (i.e. multi-class) parties, there are the radical-Left and the liberal-Left parties (Yes, there are Marxists here today who say that they are also Liberals!) such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), the United Socialist Party and, most importantly, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

The most powerful electoral party of the Left by far, the JVP has, in the recent past, opted for political alliances with the NSSP, USP and some smaller

Maoist left-overs like the 'Diyesa' group.

The very socio-economic class composition of the constituency of these Left parties make their existence and dynamism important in relation to the bigger 'bourgeois' parties, namely, the UNP and SLFP-PA. While the UNP and PA have a large cross-class or multi-class character in their constituency, their leaderships and general policy have tended to represent more the interests of the social elite - principally the capitalist class.

The JVP and the smaller Left parties, in their constituency, leaderships and general policies, very clearly represent social interests outside the elite and, at least in their rhetoric if not in their political programmes, would seem to be anti-elite and anti-capitalist. This differentiation indicates that there are significant segments of the Sinhala community which are not represented by the two 'mainstream' parties, the PA and UNP. In fact the dynamism of these smaller parties indicate that there are some sharp divisions at the sub-com-

munity (social class) level among the Sinhalas. In these circumstances, a conversation between the PA and UNP takes on a somewhat incestuous character. It is a discourse limited to the elite and the political Establishment.

Surely, recent history has shown the extreme dangers of the limiting a discussion of something that actually affects the entire community to a dialogue between two parties representing only some social interests within that community.

In 1987, the UNP bulldozed its way through the SriLankan political arena in implementing the provincial councils formula. Although the SLFP did not support the Indo-Lanka Accord, it did not actively oppose it. This is because the SLFP is also largely in tune with the policy and outlook of the UNP and cannot oppose such policies. Chandrika Kumaratunga's own daring breaking of ranks and support for the Accord considerably diluted the SLFP's opposition at that time.

It was the JVP that stridently opposed the Accord and the resulting prov-

incial council system and used its exclusion from the mainstream political process to mobilise much of the non-elite classes in an uprising that clearly demonstrated a popular rejection, at least among the Sinhalas, of that 'solution' to the ethnic conflict.

Today, the JVP is no longer outside the Parliamentary process. In fact, in a remarkable policy about-turn, the JVP is also participating in the provincial councils. This is all the more reason why the JVP cannot and must not be excluded from the inter-party discussions on a political settlement of the war.

Rather, if we are to learn the lessons of 1987, there should be every effort to take on board all those Sinhala parties that are willing to participate and cooperate in the effort to build a 'Southern Consensus'. In fact this would help broaden the ranks of the defenders of the peace process among the Sinhalas and further weaken the mobilisational capacity of those small extremist factions that are hostile to a political settle-

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SEVEN COMMANDMENTS

There was a roundtable on "War and Peace in Sri Lanka: Options for Canada," on March 22 in Canadian capital Ottawa. Participants included State Secretary Raymond Chan and Canadian High Commissioner in Colombo Ruth Archibald. Chan reiterated the Canadian position that the solution to Sri Lankan Tamil problem should be political and diplomat Archibald reported her perceptions about the ground situation in Sri Lanka.

"People are undoubtedly for an end of hostilities and their position was made clear at the December presidential election," and added, "There is unanimous agreement among all Sri Lanka's political parties to persuade their communities to work towards peace."

Chan indicated Canada's backing for Norway's facilitation role to bring the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to the negotiation table. But that was before the torching of the Norwegian national flag by a Buddhist priest

(Continued from page 10)

ment. Most importantly, it will lend far greater credibility to the claim that the 'Southern Consensus' is indeed a genuine 'consensus'.

An initiative that seeks a solution to the conflict that is durable, that will not see any back-tracking on reform, must ensure the maximum societal support for that solution and this can only be ensured by the broadest possible participation in the process of finding a solution.

For this purpose, there must be a careful structuring of the on-going inter-party dialogue process that will ensure that, at certain stages, other political actors, such as the JVP, other Left parties and the MEP (among others) are brought into the dialogue. The exclusion of these groups and the naive assumption that the plotting of the future course of our polity could be done by the political Establishment alone is not only a crudely elitist politics but also a dangerous track to follow. It is one that is likely not only to result in major obstacles to the reform effort but could also result in further social conflict as in 1987. (Sunday Observer)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Colombo Correspondent

on April 6 in front of the Norwegian embassy in Colombo. But Archibald was aware of the Buddhist extremist feeling, as there was another procession on March 16 when a petition signed by the four influential Mahanayakes of the three Buddhist Chapters.

In that letter the Mahanayakes indicated that since the Tamils had placed their demands before the country's political leadership they had no alternative, as the guardians of the Sinhala race and Buddhism, to spell out their own demands. They told President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to do nothing that would harm the Sinhala people. They also expressed their opposition to Norway's facilitation role. Norway, they charged, had been favouring the Tamils.

At the April 6 meeting the Mahanayakes issued the Seven Commandments which they asserted were non-negotiable:

- Sri Lanka should continue to be a unitary state. Legislative supremacy of parliament and independence of judiciary should be maintained.
- The whole country constituted the homeland of all citizens.
- The provisions in the present constitution about Buddhism, national flag and national anthem should be maintained.
- There should be no division of the country on the basis of ethnicity.
- Devolution of power should not be used as a means to solve the ethnic problem.
- Foreign facilitation or mediation should not be accepted.
- LTTE should be crushed militarily.

The seven non-negotiable points were carefully drawn by a group of lawyers and judges to checkmate the Thimpu principles that underpin the Tamil demands that provide an alternative to a separate state called Eelam. The Thimpu principles are:

- Recognition of Tamils as a distinct nationality.

- Recognition of an identified Tamil homeland and the guarantee of its territorial integrity.

- Based on the above, recognition of the inalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil nation.

Tamil nation.

- Recognition of the right of full citizenship and other fundamental rights to all Tamils who look upon Sri Lanka as their country.

On the receipt of the March 16 letter President Kumaratunga sent Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris to Kandy to assure the Mahanayakes that they would be consulted before a solution is worked out for the ethnic problem. The Mahanayakes told Prof. Peiris that they would never agree to the division of the country on ethnic basis and warned the government against talking to the LTTE.

EU'S DEMARCHE

The European Union (EU), most of whose members are Sri Lanka's donors, sent a demarche, a diplomatic warning letter, welcoming the current PA-UNP effort to work out a southern consensual basis for talks with the LTTE. Norway had specifically told President Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe previously that UNP-SLFP 'one upmanship' game must give way to a consensual approach to a solution is necessary.

LTTE too had made that clear at the sounding stage last year. "What is the use of reaching an agreement with the government if the UNP dishonours it when it comes to power," LTTE's theoretician Balasingham had told Norway. LTTE insists on a bipartisan approach by the Sinhala leadership.

EU's effort to issue a demarche originated early March when focus was given to the impact of their assistance at ground level and on human rights violations. As is the custom in the EU, the secretariat circulated at the request of the president a version of the terms of reference for a troika demarche in Sri Lanka. Since no member state objected, it was delivered to President Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe by the French envoy in Colombo.

The EU's statement said that its partners reaffirm their interest in cooperation with Sri Lanka for the

purpose of the country's democratic, social, economic development. Respect for human rights and democratic principles are among the most essential elements of this co-operation. However the EU is deeply concerned at the continuing violent confrontation between the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE which continue to destabilize the country, to inflict great loss of life and suffering to the civilian population and to slow down the urgently needed social and economic development of Sri Lanka.

The statement added that for the projects aided by EU countries to have the desired impact peace and stability are essential. "The Union, furthermore, urges the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to end the military confrontation and together with the opposition and the civil society to work seriously for a just and peaceful solution."

The demarche wanted a tripartite commitment to discuss proposals for constitutional reform and devolution of power, the commitment coming from the government, the opposition and the LTTE. The EU pledged its support for

the peace process and to Norway for its efforts.

BALASINGHAM INTERVIEW

Anton Balasingham's interview to the Tamil Guardian was given before EU's demarche was served on the president and the opposition leader. So, LTTE's reaction to the EU demand is also not known at the time this was written. Balasingham had had extensive discussions with the Norwegians, especially with former Foreign Minister Knut Volleback. Whether he had met the special advisor Erik Solheim is not known but they are scheduled to meet soon in Oslo where Balasingham is convalescing after kidney transplant.

Balasingham had expressed his fear about the fate of the Norway facilitated talks in view of the mounting opposition by the Buddhist clergy. He said: The opposition mounting from Buddhist clergy when political efforts are made to resolve the Tamil ethnic conflict is not a strange phenomenon." He expressed the disillusionment of the Tamil people that the four Mahanayakes who ought to preach peace are

propagating war.

PA - UNP TALKS

Two points made by Anton Balasingham of the LTTE in the interview with the 'Tamil Guardian' were raised by Wickremesinghe during the fourth and fifth round of bi-partisan consensus building talks held on 5th and 6th of April. Balasingham had said conditions of war which had disrupted the social, cultural and economic life of the Tamils should be de-escalated for any meaningful talks to be held. He also explained what he meant by de-escalation. It is easing the military and economic hardships heaped on the Tamils by the UNP and PA regimes.

Wickremesinghe is reported to have said Balasingham's interview on April 5 required detailed analysis. He raised two specific matters mentioned in the Balasingham interview. The first was his comment about the President's alleged claim (in her interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review) that she saved Balasingham's life by consenting to Norway treating him for his kidney

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One Island, Two Nations?

D B S Jeyaraj

"Bhaveyya Ko Lokaahithey Pama-davaa?" (Who should be heedless as regards the welfare of the world?) - The Mahavansa ch. 12 vs 55.

Four organisations, namely the Jatika Sangha Sabha, the National Joint Committee, the National Movement Against Terrorism and the Sinhala Veera Vidhana have made a joint declaration on April 6, enunciating seven non-negotiable principles to be taken into account in the process of constitution making.

A press release states that this declaration was made under the leadership of the Maha Sangha.

At the YMBA Borella meeting that spawned the declaration, the only Maha Nayaka present was the Ven Madihe Pannasecha of the Amarapura Nikaya. Although the Maha Nayakas of the Asgiriya and Malwate chapters along with the Ramanna Nikaya were absent, the organisers of the meeting claim that these venerable prelates too endorse and support the declaration. There is no reason to doubt the claim as all the organisers of this historic meeting are as Shakespeare's Mark Anthony remarked, "Honourable".

The seven principles of the declaration are as follows:

1. Sri Lanka should continue to be a unitary state and the legislative supremacy of parliament and inde-

pendence of the judiciary should be maintained.

2. The provisions in the present constitution relating to the national flag, the national anthem, and the Buddha Sasana should remain inviolate.

3. There should be no division of the country for political or administrative reasons on the basis of ethnicity.

4. Sri Lanka being the homeland of all its citizens, the claim that the north/east is the homeland of the Tamils is rejected.

5. The 13th amendment to the constitution should be repealed and all legislative action taken under it should be treated as null and void. The provincial councils should be abolished. The merged north-east should be de-merged.

6. Devolution of power should not be used as a means to the resolution of a non-existent ethnic problem.

7. Executive presidency should be abolished.

The declaration speaks for itself in crystal clear terms and needs no elaborate explanation. Apart from the seventh principle of executive presidency abolition, all others seek to undermine the existence and question the legitimacy of the presence of minorities in the country. Even the point about the

executive presidency is arguable because there is a line of thought that the presidential system is slightly more favourable to the minorities. This is because of the perceived necessity to garner votes from all sections of the country and not rely exclusively on majority community votes alone. But the counter to this reasoning is that this situation is possible only when the Sinhala vote bloc is sharply divided between two parties resulting in a dependency on minority votes.

But if and when there is an overwhelming tilt of Sinhala votes to one side, the minority vote becomes irrelevant. Also the underlying assumption is that the minority communities will always vote en masse for one. In any case the performance of executive presidents despite being elected by overwhelming minority community support has not necessarily been favourable to those segments.

The 6th principle is quite unnecessary because the gist of it has already been incorporated in the earlier ones except that it refers specifically to a non-existent ethnic problem. The quintessence of the other five principles as outlined by members of the Buddhist clergy and laity contrast sharply with the five noble precepts as stated by the enlightened one or even Jawarhalal Nehru's five Pancha Seela' concepts for peaceful co-existence. This declaration embodies principles that are almost the antithesis of a peaceful coexistence policy.

Apart from denying the problems and grievances of the Tamil people it calls into question their inherent right of existence on this island with a secure identity. It rejects the fact that the northern and eastern provinces have been their areas of "historical habitation" as recognised by the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987. Ironically, the very same people who say that India should mediate instead of Norway are relentlessly advocating the jettisoning of all gains, real or imaginary that accrued to the Sri Lankan Tamils as a result of previous Indian intervention.

A permanent freeze is sought on any form of power sharing. The structure of the state is to be rigidly unitary. Also, even provisions like the sword bearing Lion flag and the song which began earlier as Namo Namo Matha etc are being emphasised as authoritative

(Continued from page 12)

failure. It is learnt that Chandrika stood by her story saying that the Norwegians had requested her permission twice.

The other one was a serious matter. Wickremesinghe had questioned the utility of the PA and UNP reaching a consensus in enacting a new constitution and then talking to the LTTE. "If you happen to reach an agreement with the LTTE then you will have to go again to the parliament to incorporate that agreement into the constitution," he is reported to have asked. The President had replied that she doubted the LTTE coming to a political settlement. "Even if they do not agree I want to give the Tamils their rights,"

On the question of de-escalation

raised by the UNP leader, the President had replied that that would be linked to the progress of the talks. She would not agree to the withdrawal of the army from Tamil areas, particularly from the Jaffna peninsula. "I'll not do that even if I am killed," she had said.

PA-UNP talks would be resumed in May and both delegations have agreed to sit the whole day during the first fortnight. The President had indicated that the PA- UNP meetings should be completed by May 29.

What is the significance of May 29? That is the date on which Sri Lanka Aid Group is meeting in Paris to decide on the amount of grants to be made to Sri Lanka! ●

symbols of the dominant race rather than being inclusive of all the island's inhabitants.

When the Donoughmore reforms ushered in territorial representation as opposed to communal representation in the State Council of 1931, the Tamils felt insecure and threatened. This was because the numerical superiority of the Sinhala people provided them dominance of the island's polity through territorial representation. This led to some Tamil leaders pleading for retention of the communal representation system enabling many Sinhala leaders to take the high ground and pontificate on the evils of communal representation as opposed to territorial. There was a great deal of hypocrisy here as the then Sinhala leaders were for territorial representation only because it provided them a means to dominate all other communities and reduce them to subservient minority status. A fact borne out by the trials and tribulations undergone by the Tamil people since independence. Such hypocrisy is very much transparent in the recent declaration too when it is sanctimoniously proclaimed that there should be no administrative division of the country and that the Tamil homeland claim be rejected as Sri Lanka is the homeland of all its citizens.

This seemingly magnanimous declaration about Sri Lanka being the homeland of ALL its citizens is again downright hypocritical. It ignores the historical claim of sovereignty by the Tamils on the basis of the Jaffna Kingdom falling to the Portugese on the battlefield. It ignores the Tamil areas being administered separately by the colonial powers and how Britain unified the whole island into one entity in 1832. It ignores the modern definition of the right of self determination and the Tamil claim of being entitled to it. It ignores the very real grievance of the Tamils in seeing the one time Tamil majority Eastern Province being subject to ongoing demographic change through systematic state aided colonisation

paving the way for Sinhala dominance. It ignores the fact that in 1958 and '77 and '83 the Tamils had only the north-east to take refuge in despite all of the island being nominally the homeland of ALL its citizens.

It was at least the partial recognition of Tamil fears and grievances that led to the Indo-Lanka accord defining the north-east as areas of historic habitation for the Tamils.

The declaration does not toll bells of doom for the Sri Lankan Tamils alone. It rings of impending doom for the sacred concepts of equality, liberty and fraternity for all the minority communities of the island including Sinhala Christians. The Sinhala Buddhist ultra right has been clamouring for long to assert authoritative hegemony in what it sees as its natural right.

By ignoring the underlying causes that led to the ongoing war and by focusing only on its negative consequences, it sought to build up credibility and acceptance for its project among the Sinhala people. But the Sinhala people constantly rejected these self-styled saviours and hitherto confined them as the lunatic fringe of Sinhala politics. But by playing on the fears, doubts and confusion among the Buddhist clergy over the future course of the on-going war, they are seeking to succeed in coming in from the cold. By acquiring the consent and endorsement of the upper echelons of the Buddhist clergy in promulgating these obnoxious and divisive provisions on the pretext of being patriotic, these elements have endowed their nefarious project with a semblance of clerical recognition as if this neo fascist enterprise has been graced and sanctioned by the Maha Sangha.

When Sinhala was enacted in 1956 as the only official language it was the lament of the Tamils that they had been rendered officially illiterate by the stroke of a pen. What the April 6 declaration has demonstrated to the world is that, in the sphere of ethnic reconciliation, nothing really has changed in

the mindset of its authors.

It has been the claim of many Sinhala liberals and leftists that the tragic past where the rights and grievances of the Tamils were ignored and denied was no longer valid. The Sinhala people had realised the nature and gravity of past injustices. Devolution had been universally accepted and the debate now was about the degree or quantum of devolution it was said. But the validity of these claims has been seriously undermined by the latest declaration of the supreme hierarchy of Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka.

What is worse is their demand for total war. This identification of clergy with war is a throwback to an anachronistic period of history - that of medievalism in the Christian era.

The peace lobby and enlightened Sinhala people are somewhat aghast by all these developments. In a bid to reassure themselves and placate Tamil anxiety they point out to the negligible support for the Sinhala hawks in the country proof of which is in the abysmal performances of these hardliners in the polls. They point out that Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremesinghe together obtained 95% of the votes in the last presidential election and how the Bhumi Putra' candidate was routed. So the Sinhala hardliners are of no consequence, it is argued. But this line of reasoning is somewhat flawed in the current context.

In the first place it underestimates the role and influence of the Buddhist clergy, particularly the Maha Nayakas. It would be wishful thinking to assume that individual junior priests, however progressive they may be, can flout or defy the hierarchy openly and successfully. The concurrence and collaboration of the Maha Sanga in the framing of the April 6 declaration is perhaps the greatest asset acquired by the Sinhala hawks.

Also there are other realities too like the impact of the war on Sinhala psyche, militarisation of society, the importance of the army in present day Sri



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Lanka, the influence of the arms lobby and the interests of certain extraneous forces etc. All these factors point to an escalation of the war along with an exclusion of Tamil rights as being imminent rather than a negotiated peace. In that sense the April 6 declaration has provided the sanction of the clergy.

It would also be self-deluding to believe that the declaration endorsed by the Buddhist hierarchy would prove worthless because only a microscopic segment of Sinhala Buddhists are for it. It is argued in this respect that only a few thousands including a few hundreds of priests including many young samaneras were present at the gathering that formulated the April 6 declaration. The absence of a large crowd in the preliminary stages is no indicator of things to come.

A brief examination of past history would demonstrate that some of the acknowledged Sinhala hardliners never received much popular support. The Bhasa Peramuna of Dahanayake-Chandrasiri outlived its purpose. The Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna of Konara Mudiyansele Appuhamy Rajaratna and wife Kusuma faded into oblivion. The Sinhala Mahajana Pakshaya of Richard Gothabaya Senanayake was defeated ignominiously at the polls. There was a time when Cyril Mathew doubled as the minister of industries and scientific affairs and the industrious minister of anti-Tamil affairs in the JR Jayewardene era. He was considered all powerful with his JSS goon squads and caste based bloc of MP's. Yet when JR Jayewardene summarily rejected him, there was no split in the party. Even his own son was not sympathetic to his plight. Thus past history demonstrates that notable Sinhala hawks have often become nonentities in the long run.

But this phenomenon has not resulted in the policies articulated by them becoming obsolete. What happens instead is that the medium gets rejected but the message is absorbed by the establishment. The policies outlined are not accepted in the blatant and crude manner in which the hardliners espouse them. Instead the governments of the day modify and refine them in a more acceptable way. The garb of legality rationalised by the necessity for social justice or the imperative to correct real or imaginary historical wrongs are

proffered. Thus Rajaratna or Mathew may not be there on the scene but Rajaratnaism or Mathewism will continue to flourish under a thinly disguised veneer. In that context many of the April 6 declaration proponents may not have mass support but much of what they propose could become acceptable to the masses and by extension the government.

In that respect the tendency on the part of various governments to buckle under or cave into demands made by pressure groups of the majority community regardless of the actual clout possessed by these sections is also a matter of concern. The Buddhist Commission in the times of L. H. Mettananda succeeded in foisting its agenda on both major parties then. The triumvirate of Nath Amerakone, V. W. Kularatna and Sivali Ratwatte imposed standardisation on the Sirima Bandaranaike regime in the seventies. Both SWRD Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake jettisoned the solemn agreements they had entered into with S. J. V. Chelvanayagam in 1957 and 1968 in the face of opposition through extra parliamentary pressure tactics though their governments elected by the people were the legal and moral repositories of state power. A crucial element in all this was the sanctioning by the Buddhist clergy of this pressure and opposition.

Given this historical background, the minorities in general and the Tamils in particular are compelled to view the recent development with unconcealed dismay. The Buddhist hierarchy aligning with the political hawks and promoting war instead of negotiating peace through devolution does not augur well for the future. It also reminds many of the not so distant past and brings to the fore the ingrained wisdom of Karl Marx's utterance about history repeating itself.

Even if the hawks from the Buddhist laity are inconsequential, the seal of approval provided by the upper echelons of the clergy add much weight and depth to the April 6 declaration. Few mainstream politicians will dare to defy the Maha Nayakas openly. Who can forget the political fate of Sir John Kotelawela? An avant garde politician like Mangala Samaraweera may tell the Sinhala Commission to confine its report in the dustbin of history but even

he cannot afford to openly flout or admonish the Maha Sangha, particularly the Amarapura Nikaya. If the Maha Nayakas have made up their minds definitely, then attempts to appease them like presenting Benz cars would be futile. Few political leaders can brazenly defy the clergy.

There is always the theoretical possibility that persons of goodwill may be able to discuss matters with the Maha Nayakas and perhaps persuade them to revise their views. That is however a remote possibility. In any case this role cannot be undertaken successfully by Sinhala liberals, leftists, non-Buddhists or secularists. No member of the minority communities can afford to do it. No foreign diplomat or academic can do it. The only person or persons who can do this will have to be from those with impeccable Sinhala Buddhist credentials. At present no likely candidate is visible on the political horizon.

There also rises the moot question of how President Chandrika Kumaratunga will handle this development. As is typical there has been a lot of hasty and superficial reporting by the foreign press in projecting the April 6 declaration as a direct challenge by the Sinhala Buddhist elements to the President who is courageously attempting to evolve a consensus on devolution and settle with the Tigers peacefully. The new development is portrayed as regressive reaction against a progressive President. But the reality is not that neatly compartmentalised and is more complex.

A little noticed feature about the agitational activity of the Sinhala hardliners so far is the congruence of interests so far between their agitation and the government's agenda. Ever since the so called war for peace was launched, the Kumaratunga government has displayed a marked reluctance to opt for peace negotiations while paying lip service to a negotiated peace. It also went through the motions of a search for a political consensus on devolution and has released three sets of proposals outlining a scheme of intended devolution. The recalcitrance of the UNP allowed the government to convey an impression to the world at large that the UNP was obstructing its new constitution. The support extended by Tamil political parties enabled it to claim the

(Continued from page 16)

Consortium meeting and ensuing elections in mind. With or without a consensus she is very likely to commence some preliminary jaw jaw with the LTTE before May 19 so as to show that she is serious about peace. The fact that what is being evolved now falls far short of LTTE expectations is irrelevant to her because she does not believe in or intend entering genuine negotiations with the Tigers. All that matters now is to convince the international community of her good intentions regarding peace and paint the LTTE as intransigent. If successful, all aid problems will cease and the country can go on fighting merrily while the arms bazaar gets its 10%. In the process she also hopes to win elections. If these plans work out well then instead of peace the country will witness colossal warfare.

Unfortunately for Kumaratunga the Sinhala hardliners don't seem to understand all this. They are unable to comprehend that a sophisticated game of make believe has to be played out first before undertaking another fierce phase of fighting. Norwegian facilitation is a necessary evil at this time. Besides the old game of anti-Tamil politics cannot be played under the older cruder rules. The rules are different and the playing field changed. A minimum necessity in these days is that some amount of devolution has to be granted in terms of substance. But the Sinhala lobby, which at least is honest in its anti-Tamil attitude, is unable to change its approach. So the friction or tension between the government and the Sinhala hardliners is mainly on these grounds. In that respect it is a pity that the President's envisaged meeting with the Maha Nayakas did not take place last Monday. Had that occurred, then much misunderstanding could have been eliminated.

At a time when feelings were sky-high about the enthronement of Sinhala as the official language it took a Colvin R de Silva to warn the nation that one language meant two nations and two languages one nation. If that lesson has not been learnt and the politics of accommodation not accepted then it does not require a Colvin again to warn of what lies ahead. The rejection of devolution and insistence upon a unitary state may result in Sri Lanka being one island with two nations. ●

Marking Women's Day Amidst Rise in Abuse

By Special Correspondent

Many events – lectures, seminars, declarations and statements from women's organisations and high profile politicians, and even demonstrations and pickets – took place in Sri Lanka to mark the International Women's Day.

However, the trend seems to be that violence and abuse against women appear to be on the increase in Sri Lanka

A few days before, Galle High Court Judge Sarath Ambepitiya sentenced the mother of a 13-year-old girl and the mother's lover 10-year's rigorous imprisonment and Rs. 10,000 fine for the rape of the child. They were told to pay Rs. 50,000 each as damages for the child who is now the mother of an 8-month-old boy. Failure to pay damages would add 2 more years of jail for each of them.

The mother of the girl, a middle aged woman has a 19-year old boy as her lover. She had encouraged her lover to rape her own daughter since she was 10-years-old. This story is equally revolting. A 13-year-old mother gave birth to a nice baby early April. The nurse asked for the name of the father. They informed the police when they were told that that was her 17-year-old brother. The police arrested and produced him before the Gangodawila Magistrate.

Parents appeared before the Magistrate and told him that both of them are working and the brother and sister were at home in the afternoons after they return from school. They knew about their incestuous relationship after the girl had conceived. They accepted the daughter and grandchild. The magistrate remanded the boy.

Incidents of abduction are also on the rise. Three armed men snatched a girl returning home from her school and gang raped her, Anuradhapura police said recently. One of the kidnappers was their former neighbour. In another

incident near Badulla, a school teacher was raped and her body dumped into a nearby jungle.

Gang-rape of working girls is also on the increase. Hotel girls and garment workers are the special birds of prey. Recently two girls employed in a leading hotel in Mount Lavanaya were pushed into a waiting vehicle and taken to an abandoned house and gang-raped by a group of wealthy young men. Two garment workers in Ratmalana were waylaid and gang-raped in a similar fashion two weeks ago.

Extortion threat is a new phenomenon that had surfaced in recent years. A few days ago an extortionist who telephoned a doctor-father threatening the abduction of his school going daughter if he failed to pay a ransom of Rs. 100,000 within three days. The doctor complained to the police who with the assistance of Telecom officials tracked the culprit.

"Violence against women is on the increase," shrieked a woman rights activist protesting against the public stripping of a woman in Colombo. Sriyalatha, the 29-year-old mother of a 10-year-old daughter was loitering aimlessly near Muthaiah Park close to the place where top ministers live. She was wearing shalwar kameez the loose dress suicide bombers wear. Detective policemen who "cover" that area watched her for some time and reported their suspicions to the nearby sentry. The police officer went up to her and demanded her National Identity Card. She said she had lost it. Police threatened to arrest her and she cried.

Suspicion further aroused the police officer prompted, "Suicide Tiger" and aimed his rifle at her. "Please do not shoot me. I have a child to look after," she pleaded.

Two more policemen joined and they too pointed their weapons at her and moved to a safe distance. About a hundred persons had gathered and

watched the drama. Among them was Sunday Times photographer J. Weerasekera. He rushed there hearing that the police had trapped a suicide bomber.

"The woman was dressed in a shalwar kameez. She was standing in the middle of the road and the officers on both sides. She was ordered to raise her hands. She did not obey. She begged them not to shoot her and started to cry. Then she was told to raise the upper part of the cloth and to remove the brassier. Then she was ordered to lower the lower part of the dress and the underwear up to her knees. Then she was told to put the cloths on," Weerasekera said. Security guard N.G.Perera confirmed the story.

Police arrested her and put her in a police cell. They said she had failed to explain her presence at Muthaiah Park and later added that she was a sex worker. Both accusations were true. She was living with an army volunteer who died three years ago. She was refused any payments since her marriage was not registered. Failing to get any support from her family she handed the child to a child care centre in Kurunegala and came to Colombo in search of a job and ended as a sex worker. On that morning she was waiting to meet her client.

Sriyalatha had been released but police harassment of women at checkpoints and during cordon and search is continuing. On April 4 a Tamil girl on her way to the tuition class was arrested near Colombo Town Hall and taken to a police station where she was tortured by two policemen. She was released on the intervention of a senior officer.

Now the police say the victim is unable to identify the police station to which she was taken or the police officers who tortured her!

A Call to TULF Leaders

Rev. Dr. S. J. Emmanuel, Germany

As a Tamil Christian Priest of Jaffna, I feel it my duty, at this critical period of our history, to make an urgent appeal to you on behalf of our people. From my student days, I have admired Thanthai Chelva and his leadership, and followed up the sad turn of events thereafter. In recent times, I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. A. Sarnbandan, Mr. Joseph Pararajasingam and Mr. Mavai Senadirajah, and of exchanging views with them regarding the Tamils. Today, while watching the latest developments taking place, both within and without Sri Lanka, I write to you, humbly reminding you of an indispensable role, that the TULF is called to play at this decisive point in the history of the Tamils of Tamil Eelam.

As senior politicians, you all are the most qualified to tell the story of the Tamil struggle, at least up to the decisive turn taken in 1976-77. For reasons well known to you, you have distanced yourself from the militant struggle on behalf of the Tamil people, and characterised your leadership as that of the Tamil "moderates and democrats, who can work within a Sinhala Buddhist dominated democratic system", however corrupt and dictatorial it may be, to win the basic rights of the Tamil people. These two terms - moderates and democrats - used in relation to the militant struggle of the Tamils - have won for you a respectable niche and a

credibility, in the so called democratic institutions and nations of the world, while those militants fighting and dying for the Tamil cause as well as those innocent Tamil civilians killed by the Sinhala forces have been all branded as terrorists and terrorist-supporters.

During this long 17-year period of death, destruction and displacement of Tamils, you have chosen to play your role first from India and later in Colombo and in the Army-captured Jaffna. Hoping against hope, that some good and democratic solution will come out of the Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist Government, you have supported the Government and its devolution proposals, presumably with the intention of modifying them along Thimpu principles which were agreed on by all Tamil groups at Thimpu.

During the darkest hours of suffering of the Tamil people, some of you have tried, from time to time, to run to the President, to bring to her notice the plight of the Tamil people and in your characteristic style, pleaded for some mercy to soften the atrocities committed against the Tamil people. In gratitude for your support to her Government, she did at times tone down her aggression and offered temporary favours, only to follow it up with more vengeance on a later date. The bitter price, the Tamil struggle had to pay, for these little and temporary favours, was enormous and devastating. The Government of Chandrika and her Foreign Minister were making the biggest propaganda against the Tamil cause that the "moderate and democratic Tamil leaders of the TULF were not backing the separatist demand of the Tamil terrorists" but are in support of the Government and its devolution proposals. In fact, making this propaganda to the South and to the outside world, President Chandrika, was oppressing and killing the very Tamil people, you were, probably in your hearts, trying to protect and defend. Is this not a determined stab on your back?

While declaring the so-called "war

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for peace", I know by my personal experience in the war zones, the President was not targeting merely the LTTE, but the whole Tamil people. If you add up all the pleadings you were making to her on behalf of the Tamil people, it will become clear that the proclaimed "war for peace" was factually a war against the Tamils, escalated by bombs, blockades, rapes and mass-murders behind a media blockade. Besides your not voting for the extension of emergency, how did you oppose this war against the Tamils? Were you not aware, that your style of "pleading with the powers for clemency" and her benign stepping down to meet you, were really weakening, if not negating, the whole Tamil Struggle for Justice?

The above double-faced action of the Chandrika Government is not a true democracy, but only a "dictatorial democracy. By holding parliamentary elections, though corrupt with vices, she convinces the world outside that there is democracy. But by imposing the majority-consensus, won among the Sinhalese Buddhists for war on the Tamils, she

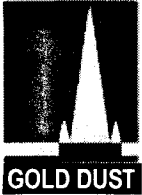
practices ruthless dictatorship of one nation on the other. This peculiar character of the Sri Lankan "democratic dictatorship", which you have till now faithfully served, has reached the hour for questioning and exposition. Only you "moderates and democrats", acknowledged by the world as part of this democracy, could tell the world the truth of this "dictatorial-democracy", not having the true power and potential to resolve the present conflict in the country.

Any keen observer of recent developments in the South of Sri Lanka will agree that **the historic moment of truth has arrived.** With Norway agreeing to play a role of facilitation or mediation, the world is observing the political events in Sri Lanka more closely. The false propaganda so far successfully made by the President and her Foreign Minister, that there is not a Tamil problem but only a Terrorist problem, the increasing consensus between the PA and the UNP that the Tamils must be subjugated by a slight devolution of power within a unitary

form of government (as allegedly agreed with the Tamil moderates!) and the extremist non-negotiable views as expressed by the Buddhist Mahanayakas - these are all attempts at twisting the Truths of history concerning the Tamils and covering up the multitude of injustices heaped on the Tamils. It is at this critical period of our history, I appeal to you, Sir: Stand up! And speak with one clear voice the Truth concerning the Tamils and their just demands to be a respectable people in the land of their birth.

The President has made much use of your support as from a democratic and moderate Tamil party and she will go even further with this "stab-on-the-back approach", in order to achieve the verdict given to her by the Sinhala people. Recently she made two claims - one misleading the world that she had a democratic mandate of all the peoples of Sri Lanka, including the Tamils, and the other that she had had successful talks with you on the key proposals of the devolution package. Except

(continued on page 28)



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Dear Peria Annah

You must be following closely the current war situation here. As I write there is fierce fighting between

government forces and the Tigers. The news is that the Tigers have launched an offensive to recapture the peninsula, and the military is trying to prevent it.

Both sides are using long-range weapons indiscriminately. We the civilians, as usual, have become victims undergoing tremendous hardship. I will relate you a few pathetic incidents connected with the war.

The wedding of Sugirthamalar of Ariyalai was fixed for Monday, March 27. Early that morning the bride's party set out in a hired car to Palai to bring the groom to the bride's home where the marriage was to take place (the ritual mapillai alaippu). When they reached Eluthumadduwal junction army stopped the party and ordered them to return.

When the bride's uncle pleaded a young soldier sternly admonished: "Aiyah! Do you want to have a funeral instead of a wedding? Listen to us and return so that you can have your wedding another day."

They returned and postponed the wedding. But the parents of a newborn babe never returned. Their corpses too were not recovered. Young parents and the aunt of a 4-day-old child set out from Jaffna Teaching Hospital on Monday morning in a hired three wheeler to their Palai home. When they were around Muhamalai they were fired upon by an army ambush and the mother died with the 4-day-old baby on her lap. The fond dad and the three wheeler driver also died on the spot. The aunt survived with severe injuries. The baby was unharmed! They were brought back to the Jaffna hospital and the efforts by the Catholic clergy to retrieve the bodies of the dead had failed.

The story of 31-year old Subashini was equally heart-rending. She was asleep in her Maruthankerni home on Sunday night when a shell struck a coconut tree and fell on it. She was pinned under a collapsed wall and was removed to Manthikai hospital on Monday in a serious condition. The

A Letter from Jaffna

doctors, in view of her delicate condition, delivered the baby before they amputated her leg.

These were all incidents that occurred at the first flush of the two-pronged Tiger jump to finish the siege of the Elephant Pass military complex. They seized the 4-kilometer stretch from Muhamalai to Palai hospital of the Kandy Road main supply line that provided the Elephant Pass military complex, the largest and the highly fortified army cantonment in Sri Lanka.

The LTTE anticipated an army operation to wrest back the control of the Kandy road and asked people of Pachilaipalli area to leave for Kodikamam. They complied. The trek to safety commenced on Sunday, April 2 morning when LTTE guerillas held their fire. Over 5000 persons, mainly the old and the infirm, women and children, traversed the alternate route the army used as their supply line- Palai to Kilali and then Kachchai and from there to Kodikamam or Chavakachcheri. Over 1500 had gone when the army intervened and banned the refugee flight. Nearly 250 persons who were prevented from leaving sought refuge at St. Anthony's Church at Kilali and the balance in the neighbouring areas. They had no food, They had very little water and they had no sanitary facilities.

The forces launched their offensive to reopen the Kandy road on Monday (3 April) and since then war intensified. Manikkam from Inthirapuram in Palai told me this: From Sunday to Thursday we had only kanchi. There was just no food. Even if we had food we would not have eaten it. How can we eat when our lives are in danger? Shells were exploding everywhere. Bombs were exploding shaking the very ground on which we lay. Bullets were buzzinbg over your head.

The 74-year-old Sittambalam was a diabetic. He often crept to the fence to ease himself. On Tuesday evening when he was crawling to the fence he was shot. His corpse was lying there, near the palmayrah leaf fence till

Wednesday noon when some kind-hearted persons burried it.

Manikkam said there was commotion around noon on Wed-

nesday (5 April). "Seeing three lorries and pick up vehicle I ran there. All were shouting. "Take back the food parcels, the food commodities and the cooking utensils. Do you all want us to cook and eat and stay here?" shouted an old man. Another screamed: "Are we to buy our coffins with the 2000 rupees?" That is the refugee relief payment for displaced families.

The refugees seized the pick up vehicle and declined to release it. The civilian officials fearing for their lives delivered the commodities and utensils to the army and fled in the lorries.

An enraged Jaffna public pressurised the NGOs to act and they decided on Wednesday afternoon to block Jaffna kachcheri on Thursday (6 April) with satiyagrahis. Jaffna army commander Major General Chula Seneviratne informed Jaffna Additional Government Agent that the army was not holding back the civilians and they are free to leave. It is known that he had ordered the ground commanders to release the civilians but they were not obeying.

On Thursday, March 6, the army permitted the refugees at Kilali to leave but over 4000 persons are still trapped in the conflict zone.

I think I should write to you about the bumper onion crop and also about the sudden interest the Colombo diplomatic community evinced about economic development of Jaffna but the eruption of the war had made me change course. Before relating the onion story let me add the latest about the plight of banana cultivators. A kilo of kathali banana sold for Rs. 3 last month and now things have gone worse. In the banana plantation areas of Kopay, Neerveli and Kaddaikadu ripe bunches are hung in cattle sheds for the cattle to enjoy a feed.

You know that onions cannot be used as cattle feed. So, in Vadamarachchi they have started to bury onions, just to escape the stink of rotting onions.

The plight of the Jaffna farmer was pointed out by agricultural officers at a

meeting attended by British High Commissioner Linda Duffield during the last week of March. She was stunned to hear the prevailing market prices of onions and bananas in Jaffna. "What is the price we pay for these things in Colombo?" she queried the High Commission defence advisor Robert Kendells. He did not know his onions. He turned to the development secretary Martin Dawson who promptly said, "About Rs. 40 a kilo."

High Commissioner's face brightened, reports said, and she said; "We must send Jaffna onions to Colombo." An elderly officer pointed out that that was what happened before the ethnic conflict broke. Jaffna produced most of Sri Lanka's need those days, she was told.

That veered the talk towards prospects of the Norway aided peace talks. "I came to sound your thinking about the peace talks," Linda Duffield said. In separate meeting with Jaffna's intellectuals she confided that Britain backed the Norwegian initiative.

Australian Deputy High Commissioner, Cathy Klugman, and the officials of Dutch embassy, USAID and UNDP too indicated their support for the Norway facilitated talks.

Earlier Norwegian ambassador, John Westberg, and European Community's Colombo representative, Ilkka Usitalo, had visited Jaffna and had extensive discussions with officials and others.

Indian Deputy High Commissioner S. Tripathi did not join the ICRC hospital ship that took the diplomatic group to Jaffna. He took the flight and did an extensive study of the Jaffna scene. He went to Selva Sannithi temple and said, "I enjoyed that pilgrimage."

Perhaps the Indian diplomat prayed to Selva Sannithiyan seeking his blessing to relieve the suffering of the civilians in Jaffna during his visit to the temple. But, if he did so, the prayer has not yet been answered.

Your younger brother
Anthony
10 April 2000

On Ronnie de Mel, Ethnic Issue and Devolution

Dr S Narapalasingam

Mr. Ronnie de Mel has been the Minister of Finance during the entire period 1977 - 1988, when the late Mr. J R Jayewardene held the reins of power. He finds pride in being the only parliamentarian who has presented the country's annual budget consecutively for 11 years. He has been a prominent member of the two major political parties - the SLFP and the UNP, and been a Member of Parliament since 1967, representing the people in the South. Before entering politics, Mr. de Mel was a senior civil servant.

Although a high-ranking member of the opposition United National Party, which appears to be in mortal political combat with the governing People's Alliance, de Mel appears now to abhor adversarial politics. He now describes the Executive Presidential system, under which he served as Minister for a number of years, as a Frankenstein monster that is designed to protecting the abusers of the power given on trust by the sovereign people. He presents himself as an advocate for a new constitution that will reinforce parliamentary democracy, protect human rights and the interests of the minorities and introduce a political system acceptable to all communities. He states that these changes are urgently needed "to bring about or at least pave the way for lasting peace in Sri Lanka". Mr de Mel is also a strong supporter of the efforts to bring about a bi-partisan consensus between the governing PA and the Opposition UNP on issues relating to constitutional reform and the resolution of the ethnic conflict, and he is one of the five-member UNP team that is engaged in ongoing talks with a team representing the PA.

There is no doubt that the Executive Presidential system also contributed to the moral decay in government and the rise of a new culture characterised by violence, indiscretion, indiscipline and corruption. These in turn have eroded social standards in every sphere. Both

the social and cultural values have declined dramatically within a short period. The violent and anti-social behaviour of many exercising power or having the right connections with those wielding power has become very common after 1978. All these tragic developments were ignored in the pursuit of high economic growth, as if this was the panacea for all the social and economic problems confronting the country.

During the parliamentary debate on the national Budget 2000, Mr. De Mel speaking from the opposition bench recollected the many attempts made in the past without any success to solve the ethnic problem. He said: "It is fashionable, Sir, sometimes to blame the Tamils; sometimes it is fashionable to blame the Muslims for this failure. But I have always strongly felt that we Sinhalese are most to blame for this intractable situation, which is the root cause of most of our present ills".

"The first serious attempt to solve this problem was the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957. It failed largely due to the intransigence of the UNP, the abortive march to Kandy and what followed. The second serious attempt to solve this problem was in 1965, the Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact. This was strongly opposed by the SLFP and its allies. There was the famous march to Temple Trees. The Rev. Dambarawe Ratnasara died and the Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact was abandoned. The third serious attempt to solve this question was the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987.But the SLFP, the JVP and their allies strongly opposed this Accord. It was clearly opposed and even sabotaged by powerful forces within the UNP. Mr. J R Jayewardene lost his nerve and began to vacillate in the face of this opposition and the Accord collapsed. When the Government tried to bring the 8 LTTE leaders captured by the Indian Army to Colombo they committed suicide at Palaly Airport and the entire Indo-

Lanka Accord and the peace effort collapsed thereafter”.

“Therefore, Sir, every serious attempt to settle this problem and bring about peace in Sri Lanka has failed due to one of the two main parties, either the UNP or the SLFP opposing the peace efforts at every stage. I must say in all fairness, Sir, that Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and her husband Vijaya then in the SLMP supported the Indo-Lanka Accord in 1987 though with some reservations although they were opposed to the UNP politically. That was indeed a magnanimous political gesture.”

The former Finance Minister identified three serious problems facing Sri Lanka today. The first is the ethnic problem that has led to what is called the North-East conflict. A national consensus for peace is a sine qua non for making any significant progress towards its resolution. The second problem relates to the relatively slow economic development and growth. Rapid development and growth are needed to solve the pressing problems of the people like unemployment, poverty, better health and education, better roads, better railways, more power, water, housing and so on.

In his reckoning, Sri Lanka needs a minimum of 8 per cent growth every year at least for ten years to become a Newly Industrialised Country (NIC), like Malaysia or Singapore. The third important problem is the political culture of corruption and terror which the republican constitutions have bestowed to the country. Actually, it is the 1978 Constitution framed by the government in which Mr. De Mel was a Minister is the real culprit. In order to lay the foundations for peace as well as for a new political culture he is now advocating a new Constitution sans the Executive Presidency.

He also revealed that he obtained all the foreign aid necessary to reconstruct the North and East at a Special Aid Group meeting in Paris, particularly convened for this purpose. He had also obtained further aid directly from India. This was during the initial period when the Indo-Lanka Accord held the promise of restoring peace with the effective functioning of the provincial councils established under the Accord. But the promised aid

could not be utilised as the conflict continued with even greater intensity following the rejection of the Accord by the separatists in the north and the Sinhala nationalists in the south.

There are two important factors that should not be overlooked here. The first is that the donors had viewed the Indo-Lanka agreement as a significant development towards the resolution of the ethnic conflict. Second, the devolution of powers was within the constitutional democratic political structure, acceptable to them. The aid promised would not have been forthcoming if they had perceived that the devolved system of government was in any way going to harm their own political and economic interests in the region.

The substantial foreign aid that Sri Lanka obtained after 1977 was solely due to the opening of the domestic market for imports, the attractive incentives provided to foreign investors and the relaxation of the previous stringent restrictions on foreign exchange transactions accompanied by abandoning the fixed exchange rate system. In contrast, almost every aspect of the economy was controlled by the previous government during 1970-1976. It is incorrect to assume that it is solely the collective generosity of the donors that influences their decision to provide aid for development to the poorer countries. If this is the case, Mozambique's recent plea to cancel her debt obligations consequent to the terrible devastation caused by the deluge in living memory would not have been rejected by the Aid Donors Club.

During the cold war period, some dictatorial states did receive assistance from either one of the two super powers but this is no longer the case. In any event, this has no relevance to Sri Lanka or to any of her provinces. The foreign countries believed in 1987 that power was being devolved to the people to enable them to participate in the decision-making process. Devolution was meant to intensify the democratic process making democracy more meaningful to the people.

The term “foreign aid” is misunderstood by many people. All the funds provided for reconstruction and development by foreign governments are

not outright grants. It also includes soft loans where the repayment is over an extended period and interests on outstanding debt are generally below the market rates. The obligation to settle the foreign debt lies directly or indirectly (as in the case of government guaranteed loans) on the government of Sri Lanka. The IMF plays the pivotal role in establishing the creditworthiness of the recipient, without which foreign loans even on commercial terms cannot be obtained that easily.

Mr. de Mel has placed much emphasis on a single macro-economic indicator viz. economic growth for remedying the ills hurting the people. The second JVP insurgency in the south occurred when the economic growth rate was high. A high annual growth rate of 8 per cent on average for about ten years or more is not a sufficient condition for averting social and political unrest. It is also fashionable to talk about sustainable growth, which commonly is understood to mean the continuity of the process of generating adequate savings for investment required for high growth. Without going into the technical details, it is sufficient here to mention that this entails persistent efforts to improve the productivity of labour and capital and to reduce the reliance on foreign loans for financing investment. If the burden of servicing foreign debt widens the annual deficits between exports and imports, it would become a major constraint to economic growth. Besides these related factors, sustainable growth also requires that its benefits reach the vulnerable segments of the society as well.

Development should also not damage the environment and exacerbate the ethnic division in the country by denying opportunities for employment and income generation to minority groups. The latter results from discriminatory development and administrative policies applied to penalise specific ethnic groups and regions on racial grounds. The feudal state in which the vast majority of the subjects are illiterate and subservient to the landlords is now mere history and the old concept of economic growth has little relevance now. Regional imbalances in development are now a potential threat to peace and the unity and stability of the state.

Human development embraces all

aspects that go to satisfy the aspirations of both the society and all its members within the internationally recognised rights of individuals and ethnic groups. The basic restraint for compliance is that the exercise of any of these rights either by individuals or groups must not infringe the rights of others. The common rules set by a civilised society also demand this form of tolerant behaviour. The various UN Declarations and Covenants on Human Rights, Civil and Political Rights as well as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reflect values common to all cultures, all religions and all stages of development. These have been assembled into five broad groups: (1) Personal security; (2) Rule of Law; (3) Freedom of Expression; (4) Political Participation; and (5) Equality of Opportunity. Economic growth without any of these rights cannot lead to human development.

Democracy in a plural society also connotes power sharing among the communities at the centre and greater autonomy at the regional level. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities (Resolution 47/135) states in Article 2 (3) "Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and where appropriate regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation."

Mr. de Mel concluded his speech expressing his wish to see before he departs from this world, the dawn of peace, quick economic development and growth, a new political culture free from "dushanaya" and "bheeshanaya" (corruption and terror) and also the rapid development of the South. All are very noble and desirable aims, which many patriotic and peace-loving citizens would also like to see before they die. The only difference being that a person from the North or East would like to see the rapid development of their region not at the expense of development elsewhere but as a matter of their inalienable right. The development potential in the North and East has been neglected vis-a-vis other regions for political reason.

The table below illustrates the regional disparity in industrial development.

Province/ District	Total No. of Industries under the Ministry of Industrial Development and Board of Investment				
	(At End of Year)				
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Western P.	2060	2184	2317	2423	2612
Colombo D.	(1514)	(1607)	(1685)	(1742)	(1842)
Gampaha D.	(465)	(490)	(528)	(563)	(630)
Kalutara D.	(81)	(87)	(104)	(118)	(140)
Central P.	90	99	101	109	127
Kandy D.	(60)	(65)	(64)	(69)	(82)
Nuwara Eliya D.	(20)	(23)	(25)	(28)	(30)
Matale D.	(10)	(11)	(12)	(12)	(15)
Southern P.	118	124	126	131	142
Galle D.	(64)	(68)	(69)	(69)	(76)
Matara D.	(26)	(29)	(30)	(34)	(37)
Hambantota D.	(28)	(27)	(27)	(28)	(29)
North Central P.	27	26	29	31	32
Anuradhapura D.	(21)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(26)
Polonnaruwa D.	(6)	(5)	(7)	(8)	(6)
North Western P.	91	94	114	127	160
Puttalam D.	(52)	(55)	(68)	(77)	(102)
Kurunegala D.	(39)	(39)	(46)	(50)	(58)
Uva P.	31	29	30	33	33
Badulla D.	(24)	(22)	(22)	(25)	(26)
Moneragala D.	(7)	(7)	(8)	(8)	(7)
Sabaragamuwa P.	36	37	40	44	54
Ratnapura D.	(23)	(24)	(25)	(28)	(29)
Kegalle D.	(13)	(13)	(15)	(16)	(25)
Northern P.	03	02	02	02	03
Vavuniya D.	(3)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)
Jaffna D.	0	0	0	0	(1)
Eastern P.	12	10	11	13	19
Amparai D.	(9)	(7)	(7)	(9)	(12)
Batticaloa D.	(1)	(1)	(2)	(2)	(4)
Trincomalee D.	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(3)

Source: Central Bank Annual Reports 1996 - 1998 (Table 25).

Within the paltry total for the North-East region, there are more industries in the Amparai district than in all other districts combined. It is true that after the government sponsored 1983 anti-Tamil riots, the conditions in the North-East were not helpful for development. Paradoxically the opposition to development was from forces within the region itself. The same forces have also obstructed civil administ-

ration in the North-East as part of the strategy to undermine government's jurisdiction. But even before this tragedy, industrial and related infrastructure development was negligible in the North-East.

The spatial distribution of industries seen in the above table, shows the enormous volume of the resources needed over the next several years for the rapid development of the North-

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East region in addition to that required for rebuilding the economic infrastructure destroyed by the war. The conditions that must satisfy the aid givers have already been described succinctly. Suffice to mention that there are now more claimants for the limited resources many of them victims of natural disasters than there were a decade ago.

Mr. de Mel wants a new sea port in the south, at least one new international airport there, the express highway from Matara to Colombo, new Free trade Zones in the South, a new and faster railway from Colombo to the South and further development of the University of Ruhuna and the Karapitiya hospital. All these will no doubt boost the overall development of the South and improve the quality of life of the people there whose economic fortune has remained low despite the high economic growth registered following the liberalisation of the economy in 1977.

Mr. de Mel is widely known and respected as a broad-minded politician and he knows the reason why the sea and air ports in the North-East have remained undeveloped since independence. He has also supported devolving powers to the regions. Recently, some scholars and retired senior administrators have taken great pains to advance theoretical arguments against devolution focusing mainly on the problems it will create for national economic development, ignoring the skewed development that has occurred under the centralised system.

The justification for devolution is very strong from the developmental problems that the centralised system with its lopsided representation at the centre created in the country. The diverse regional interests were not represented suitably at the central decision making level. Had all the reasons advanced now by the centralists worked towards the rapid and balanced national development benefiting the people in all the provinces, the need for extensive devolution would not have arisen at all. It is human instinct for the people to form perceptions from real experiences and theories and promises without proofs are useless in matters concerning their welfare. ●

The Celebration of Neelan's Life and Work

Cat's Eye

It was the kind of event about which Neelan Tiruchelvam had dreamt - an international conference in Colombo that brought together a galaxy of leading scholars, human rights activists, UN and NGO representatives and artists for a feast of ideas, art and culture. It was an event the like of which the country had never witnessed before in celebrating the life and work of one single individual.

January 30th, until February 1st, 2000 the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, the Law and Society Trust and Tiruchelvam Associates joined forces for the Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemoration Programme. The Commemoration was attended by more than 200 local and international participants. And for that moment, Sri Lanka transcended its war-torn reality. For that moment, Sri Lanka became an international centre of intellectual, artistic and cultural exchange and excellence. For that moment, the world of ideas overshadowed the world of guns and war. And for a moment, if only just a moment, peace seemed like something more than a dream.

The organisers were, in some sense, lucky. After a violent and destabilizing pre and post election period - that witnessed numerous assassinations and assassination attempts, widespread ethnic based round-ups, detentions and prison violence, and relentless fighting in the North - a small space seemed to open. The main opposition party indicated its willingness to support the government's efforts to seek an end to the war. Rumour spread of a Norwegian peace initiative, and both the government and the LTTE seemed amenable. The time was right to contemplate peace and national reconciliation. As such, the Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemoration Programme was perfectly timed.

The Handshake of Reconciliation

In this context, Justice Albie Sachs had a story to tell. It was a story that

resonated; a story that needed, and still needs, to be heard. The former member of the ANC and present member of the South African Constitutional Court, Justice Sachs's story was one of personal healing and reconciliation that mirrored and helped give meaning to the process in South Africa of national healing and reconciliation. Sachs's is a story of initially reluctant, but necessary and in some respects inevitable, forgiveness. After being confronted with the man who had helped plan the bomb attack that left Sachs physically scarred, without sight in one eye and without one arm, Sachs advised the man to go before the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation and to tell his story - to reveal fully his role in and responsibility for the violence.

Many years later, after the man had done as Sachs had advised and had publicly accepted responsibility for the atrocities to which he had contributed, Sachs met the man again by chance. The man told Sachs that he had done as Sachs had advised; that he had gone before the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation; that he had told his story. Sachs responded with a profoundly simple handshake. Despite the lack of prosecution or formal punishment, despite the fact that the man was granted amnesty, Albie Sachs shook the man's hand. It is that handshake, and others like it, upon which national reconciliation has been built in South Africa.

With this story, as told by Justice Sachs in his inaugural address, the conference component of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemoration formally was launched, setting the tone for the two-day conference that was to follow. Messages from Aung San Suu Kyi, Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, and US Assistant Secretary of State Harold Koh were also delivered. All of the statements reflected profound admiration and respect for Dr. Tiruchelvam and his

work, as well as a commitment to peace in Sri Lanka. India's former Prime Minister, I K Gujral, and the President of the International War Crimes Tribunal for Rwanda, Navanethem Pillay, also made important inaugural addresses on issues of governance, peace, human rights and international responsibility for human rights violations.

Falling Victim to Intolerance

It was, perhaps, the personal stories that were told that most vividly brought to life the underlying themes of the Commemoration - peace, human rights and national reconciliation. Almost every participant came with a story. Whether shared in an open forum or only with a few close colleagues, the stories were of shared grief, profound respect and enduring inspiration. Most participants were, in fact, drawn to Colombo precisely because of their very personal connection to Dr. Tiruchelvam.

"May I first of all deeply thank the organisers of this conference for having brought us here to share our grief and renew our commitment to the cause of human rights and in honour of the

memory of the region's greatest human rights activist. In our South-Asian style, joy and grief is best expressed amongst friends who share the same feelings. Our friend, Neelan Tiruchelvam, whose loss we greatly feel, especially today, lived for the cause of human rights and lost his life for it. He was not just an activist, but was also a thinker who had a vision and the energy to pursue it. I had little doubt that he was aware of the risks he undertook; a man who preached tolerance was to fall victim to the forces of intolerance. It was this aspect of his death that affected me most. Each one of us, I believe, was forced to reassess the situation and to come face to face with the reality of the depths to which we have sunk." (Asma Jehangir, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions.)

The stories that were told came in many forms: expressed in the course of the conference through the personal narratives of the speakers, but also through the artistic elements of the Commemoration. One such story was presented in the Commemoration's

screening of Prasanna Vithanage's new, award-winning film, Pura Handa Kaluwara (Death on a Full Moon Day). Currently making the rounds on the international film festival circuit, the film was screened for the first time in

Sri Lanka as part of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemoration Programme. The film presents a moving portrayal of loss and suffering brought about by the war in Sri Lanka; the war shattering the otherwise serene dry zone landscape. The story is told through the 'eyes' of one man - a blind father, whose soldier son is killed in the war. Pura Handa Kaluwara, which was screened on Sunday, January 30th, helped give expression to the reality of Sri Lanka's war. This reality was accentuated by the very nature of the Commemoration, but is too often obscured at such conferences. In this respect, the Commemoration attempted to integrate the theoretical with the practical.

Art and Culture

The Commemoration combined the scholarly conference with film, two art exhibitions, a dance performance and

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a Carnatic concert. In so doing, it combined space for the mourning of loss with space for celebrating life. Participants, both local and international, were encouraged to truly contemplate the situation in Sri Lanka - not only through scholarly papers and discussions, but also through artistic expressions arising out of Sri Lanka's experience.

The stories came in many forms. The Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemoration Exhibition for Peace and Reconciliation, which ran from January 29th to February 1st, arose out of and was devoted to issues of war and peace. The exhibition was comprised of a group of fourteen artists, all of whom are committed to the promotion of peace and national reconciliation in Sri Lanka. It was clear from all the paintings that each artist had, in some way, been touched by the war. Further, as survivors of state violence, some of the artists had directly and violently experienced the effects of Sri Lanka's protracted conflicts. In putting the exhibition together, the Commemoration looked to the artists' community in Sri Lanka for their commentary on the themes of the Commemoration. While some of the installations and paintings had been exhibited before, there were others that had been created specifically for the Commemoration to remember Neelan. The opening of the exhibition, which was held at Gallery 706, was on the 29th of January, which marked Neelan's sixth month death anniversary. Artist Jagath Weeresinghe's moving opening address included an announcement of an Artists Against War project planned in memory of Dr. Tiruchelvam. In addition to the Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemoration Exhibition for Peace and Reconciliation, Artists Against War gave their flag exhibition - an exhibition made up of 10 original work silk-screened 10-foot flags - for display during the Commemoration. In fact, they gave two sets of the exhibition, which were exhibited both at the corner of Kynsey Road and Rosmead Place, to mark the place where Neelan was assassinated, and outside the conference site. Both the Exhibition for Peace and Reconciliation and the Artists Against War exhibition sought to highlight Neelan's vision of and commitment to a vibrant civil society in which the arts play a prominent role, not only as a means of expression, but also in the quest for peace and justice. ●

Clinton's Visit And Yankification of India

T N Gopalan

US President Bill Clinton seemed to hold the entire Indian sub-continent in his thrall for nearly a week. In India especially, the ruling elite and their sidekicks, the middle-classes, hung on religiously every word uttered by the lame duck president and celebrated the visit as a turning point in the country's history. Every movement of his entourage was meticulously recorded for the benefit of the posterity.

But the US media treated the event virtually as of no consequence, the CNN even putting out an item questioning the rationale of such visits undertaken at a huge cost to the tax-payers.

Many commentators gushed about the youthful-looking President's charming his way into the hearts of Indians. "It is only when you see him up close that you understand why he is not just the most powerful leader in the world, but is such an extraordinarily attractive survivor. The energy he exudes, the legendary empathy he builds up instantaneously, his consummate skill in putting across his view and the easy, boyish charm that hides a shrewd, sharp mind, mesmerises those he encounters...."

And the analysts, supposedly hardened realists, did little better - "On the one hand, the growth of a vigorous constellation of Asian democracies, with strong trade ties between them, would clearly represent a bulwark against Chinese expansionism reinforced by a military-strategic component, such as an independent nuclear deterrent in India and a deepening American military presence in Asia as the primary source of great-power equilibrium..." But then at the end of it all, nothing concrete took place, no aid, no great inflow of the foreign direct investment (FDI), no political action to underscore the much-talked about meeting of minds, nothing.

Some mild rebuke to Pakistan was seen as a full-throated endorsement of the Indian position on Kashmir, which certainly it was not. The shocking killing of 35 Sikhs in Kashmir right when Clinton was in India was a grim

reminder of the enormity of the problems posed by the Jehadi militants, and who could not be wished away by the angavastram-clad Clintons.

The so-called "vision statement" issued jointly by Bill Clinton and Atal Behari Vajpayee did pledge "to deepen the Indian-American partnership in tangible ways, always seeking to reconcile our differences through dialogue and engagement, always seizing opportunities to advance the countless interests we have in common." "...this is a day of new beginnings," they declared solemnly, "We have before us for the first time in 50 years the possibility to realise the full potential of our relationship. We will work to seize that chance, for our benefit and for all those with whom we share this increasingly interdependent world."

Taking at face value such vacuous statements, the right-wingers exclaimed in raptures, "It's the 'vision thing.' For all who had India-US relations tied to the apron-strings of Pakistan or Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the two leaders demonstrated that the two countries shared a convergence of interests in the new century, unburdened by ideological or cold war imperatives." They were also mightily pleased that the US would not seek to bludgeon India into signing the CTBT even while affirming that it wanted India to forego the nuclear option altogether.

Even sweeter music to their ears was the sermons Clinton delivered on the Pakistan TV. An early return to democracy, a crack-down on terrorist groups, respect for the Line of Control (LOC) and creating conditions for a dialogue with India and an explicit refusal to mediate were among the highlights. A riled Pak commentator on the BBC blamed the US President for placing all the onus on her country's shoulders.

Ah, here at last the US has understood us and is standing by us - that was the standard scream in India. Well, they were saying that at last ending the decades-long "sterility of non-alignm-

ent," India under the BJP had moved over firmly into the US camp and was firmly ensconced there.

In a passage in the joint statement, ignored by many, is the commitment by India to join the US in launching "an international Community of Democracies." Like the Communities of Americas and the NATO, the new global "Community" would be used by the US to promote its ideological project, and the BJP has no qualms in lending a helping hand, as rightly pointed out by CPM leader Prakash Karat.

The new-found relationship does not stop there. The National Endowment for Democracy, funded by the US State Department, is to establish an Asian Centre for Democratic Governance in New Delhi, aptly the partner this side being the Confederation of Industry (CII). Who else but the industrialists could promote democracy?

But speaking at Hyderabad, a city he chose to visit only to honour the

(Continued from page 19)

for a statement from Mr. Joseph Pararajasingam, denying the second claim, there was no official statement from the TULF denying or questioning her claims to the UNP. Your present silence is an eloquent affirmation of her claims. Dear Sirs, please stand up as democrats and moderates before the world, and speak out unanimously and eloquently the very Truths you yourselves have formulated and professed in Vaddukoddai and in Thimpu?

I am making this appeal to Tamil leaders, conscious that they got democratically elected by some sections of the Tamil people. As a religious leader, I humbly exhort you, Sirs, to stand up immediately and speak courageously for truth and justice concerning the Tamils. The time has come for you either to serve the Cause of the Tamil people, as unanimously espoused in Vaddukoddai and Thimpu Resolutions or to bow out of a situation, in which your "conniving silence" may further damage the Tamil Cause. At least then, if you bow out, the world will come to know, within what type of democracy and against what oppression, the Tamils of Thamil Eelam are struggling to survive. ●

much-vaunted "cyber-politician," Chandrababu Naidu and where he met the doyens of India's industry, Clinton suddenly seemed to remember the need for a reality check amid all the euphoria over the "revolution in information technology".

"While it is good that 25-year-olds are becoming millionaires and Indian companies are shooting up the Nasdaq, higher profits cannot be the only criteria. There has to be a higher purpose... While India has 30 per cent of software engineers, it also has 25 per cent of the world's poor. There's a lot to do..."

And the vision statement itself talks glibly about the determination of the two countries to join "a relentless battle against poverty in the world, so that the promise of a new economy is felt everywhere and no nation is left behind." It further asserts that trade liberalisation is one of the most effective weapons available for the purpose and says "...growth is the key to rising incomes and rising standards." What the statement would not say is that the so-called growth project has not exactly worked miracles and that the IMF prescriptions have, at best, created a skewed world.

Witness this - "The combined assets of the three wealthiest billionaires exceed the combined gross national products of the 48 least developed countries. The combined net worth of the world's 447 billionaires in 1996 equalled the estimated combined annual income of the poorest half of the humanity. Half a billion people, including 160 million children under five, are chronically malnourished... Some say this lopsided distribution of the world's wealth is the unavoidable by-product of a "free" market system that is as implacable and efficient as the laws of nature. But the outcome can be made far less cruel and much more just through integrated economic and social policy..." That was no unrepentant fellow-traveller speaking, but John Langmore, Director of the United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development.

However, Clinton at least had the grace to acknowledge that the USA too faced poverty and other related problems not withstanding its enormous technological prowess. The Indian netas (leaders) and industrialists had no

such qualms.

Kalinidhi Maran, Chairman of the SUN TV, could not contain himself when recalling his encounter with Clinton as part of a group of young achievers - "I have seen him on television and I've seen him in the papers. But here, I was in person with him.... Meeting the most powerful person in the world was a unique and interesting experience. I saw him as a statesman and a visionary. I never saw the politician in him...." The way the politicians bowed and scraped and, grinned and grovelled to express their gratitude to the great man for his great gesture in gracing the Indian soil would turn the stomachs of anyone with an iota of self-respect.

If India's Minister of State for External Affairs broke into poetry while receiving the Clintons, the MPs vied with each other to shake the President's hands after his lecture in the parliament. Some of the more excited would not release their grip. At one stage Clinton became weary and confined himself to greeting the enthusiasts with folded hands.

A Congress MP wanted to do something different. And when she got a chance to close in on Chelsea Clinton, she effusively thanked her for her visit and wished that she would come again, but next time as the US President! Chelsea blushed and squirmed, the dynasty politics has not taken root over there after all.

There were some protests nevertheless, mainly from the Left parties and non-governmental organisations. There was also one which raised some eye-brows. This one from the Tiger lobby in Tamil Nadu. Led by that unabashed apologist Pazha Nedumaran, they denounced Clinton for arming the murderous Sinhalese regime in Sri Lanka. Quite unusual still. Long since, under Prabhakaran, the Eelam struggle had become deideologised.

But such instances have been few and far between any way. The liberalisation process has already resulted in the Indians internalising America. As that another symbol of the complacent, self-righteous, but essentially mindless middle-classes, the India Today celebrated, "The Yankification of India has begun in earnest. And it's not as if the Yankees are coming. They are here, they are us."

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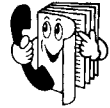
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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu mother seeks partner for British-born daughter, medical doctor, 30. Send details. M 1162 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional groom for British-born daughter, 24, solicitor, London English law firm. Send horoscope, details. M 1163 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu Tamil engineer, settled in UK seeks accomplished Hindu bride. Send horoscope, details. M 1164 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna aunt seeks professional partner in UK for niece, 26, 5'6", Sri Lanka graduate doing MBA in UK. Send horoscope, details. M 1165 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional groom for attractive, graduate daughter, 26, British citizen, Mars seventh house. Send horoscope, details. M 1166 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Christian parent seeks bride for son, 32, medical doctor UK, religion no bar. Send details M 1167 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu brother seeks partner for Accountant sister, spinster, 48, 5'5", working in Colombo, now on holiday in London. Send horoscope, details M 1168 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu mother seeks professional partner for medical doctor daughter, 34, vegetarian, in Srilankan government service, willing migrate. Please send horoscope, photo, details. M 1169 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Sivayogan son of Mr. & Mrs. C. Balasingam of 1765 Victoria Park Street Apt 206, Scarbor-

ough, Ontario M1R 1S5, Canada and Nemasalasorubi daughter of Mrs. S. Thurrailingam and the late Mr. Thurrailingam of 1 Rasavalli Lane, Colombo 6 on 9th April 2000 at Hotel Sapphire, Galle Road, Colombo 06.

Pathmaraj son of Mrs. Thavamalar Kulasingam and late Mr. Kulasingam of 48 Dutch Road, Uduvil, Sri Lanka and Kayathiri daughter of Mr. & Mrs. V. Tharmarajasingam of Gala Industries Ltd., P.O. Box 608, OTA, Ogun State on 9th April 2000 at Miami Reception Hall, Wellawatte, Colombo 6.

OBITUARIES



Mr. Mathiaparanam Bavanathan, formerly Teacher, Jaffna Central College Jaffna, Srilanka; son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Mathiaparanam; son-in-law of the late Vidwan and Mrs Pon Muththukumarar; beloved husband of Nirmala; precious father of Gowri Sree Sathya and Sathyojathan (Murugesu); brother of Kamalathevy, Vivekanathan, Nalayinithivi (all of Srilanka) Sarvanathan (Germany), Dr. Sreetharan (UK), Sriethevy (Canada), Chiyamalathevi (Srilanka) and Dr Krishnanathan (Australia); brother-in-law of the late Mr. Thavarajah Kanagasabai, Karunaipooma. (Germany), Dr. (Mrs) Maharajani Sreetharan (UK), Soccalingam (Canada), Muhunthan (Srilanka), Rajani (Australia), Hema,

Sivagnanasambanthan (both of Srilanka), Thayanithini (Australia) and Sivamanohari (Srilanka) passed away peacefully in Adayar, Chennai India on 26.3.2000 and was cremated in Chennai on 30.3.2000.

The family, brothers and sisters sincerely thank all those who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and provided support and assistance in many ways during the period of sorrow and bereavement. - 'The Lotus', 1 Balmoral Gardens, Sanderstead, Croydon, Surrey CR2 0NN. Tel: 0208 657 0018.

Cherry Wood Lane, Morden, Surrey SM4 4HQ.



Mr. Vallipuram Nadarajah of Kopay North; loving husband of Dr. Maheswary Nadarajah (Wilmslow, Cheshire); doting father of Dr. Mahendran and Dr. Vinotha; brother of Thavalingam (Toronto), cousin of Sithirathan (Sydney), Thilakarajah (Kopay North); brother-in-law of Dr. Gnanasingham (Colombo), Mrs. Balasaraswathy Sothisrihari (Harlow, Essex), Balakrishnan, Sathasivam both of Colombo) and Bhagyalakshmy Singharayer (Hatfield, Herts) passed away on Wednesday, 22nd March 2000. The funeral and cremation took place at the Southern Cemetery, Manchester on Saturday, 25th March 2000.

Mahes and children wish to thank all friends and relations who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy, floral tributes and helped in various ways They regret their inability to thank them individually. - 17 Longmead Gardens, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 1DA. Tel: 01625 522490.

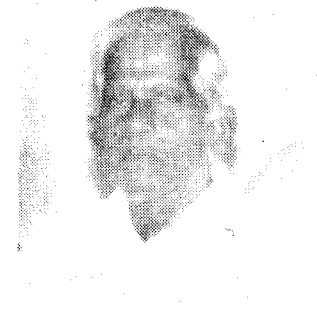


Born 23.07.1910

Died: 26.03.2000

Mrs Katpakam Muthubalasooryar, daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. Chelvarayan; beloved wife of late Muthubalasooryar; loving mother of Swami Yogeswarananda (Rishikesh), Rajan, Sarweswaran, Vijayan, Roopa, Yogi, Vasanthi and Shanthy; sister of late Mannavarayan, late Mahadevarayan, Rajarayan, Mrs Maheswary Vivekanandarajah and Mrs. Pavalam Kanagalingham; mother-in-law of Ganeshanathan, Sivapalan, Thanabalasingham, Alalasundaram, Selva, Malar and Vatsala; grandmother of Gayathri: Girthika, Meena, Senthil, Sarvesh, Satish Ramesh, Kishani, Mathuri, Priya, Nirushi, Dharshan, and Kumaresh; great grandmother of Harshini and Shayaka passed away on 26th March 2000 in Bambalapatiya, Colombo 4.

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted them during the period of bereavement. 152



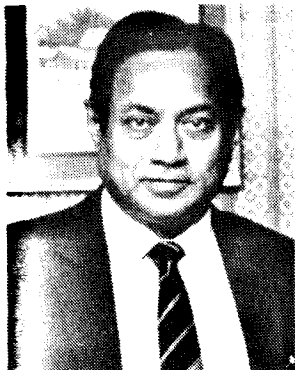
Sivapragasam Thirunavukkarasu (81) son of late Mr. & Mrs. V. Sivapragasam of Kokuvil East, Jaffna; son-in-law of late Mr. & Mrs. N.

continued on page 31

continued from page 30

Muthuthamby of Station Road, Kondavil; beloved husband of **Thuraiaratnam;** loving father of **Mrs Lankadevi Sivarajah (Colombo), Sivakumar (Abu Dhabi), Mrs Sarojinidevi Sivapalan (Kondavil), Rajkumar (France) and Mrs Sutharshini Paranthaman (Australia);** brother of **Mrs. Selvanayagam Mylvaganampillai (Kuala Lumpur),** late **Mrs. Arulammah Nagalingam, Nadarajah, Ananthamoothy (both of Canada), Ratnasingam (UK) and Sivasubramaniam (Dehiwela);** grandfather of **Hariharan, Gobiharan, Harshananth, Mathangi, Varagi, Lakshitha, Kam-sitha, Sanjeevan, Sanjay, Janani and Arani;** brother-in-law of **Thavaratnam (Colombo)** passed away in **Kondavil** on **Saturday, 15th April 2000** and was cremated on **16th April. - 2070 Camilla Road Apt 609, Mississauga, Ont L5A 2J7, Canada. Tel 905 279 0918.**

IN MEMORIAM



In loving and precious memory of **Dr. Ernest Ariasingam Champion** on the first anniversary of his passing away on **April 29, 1999.**

Thank you Lord for our loved one whom you blessed with great intellect, wit and humor. We thank thee for his generous heart and gentle ways. He built a home where love, peace and joy reigned.

Large was his bounty and soul sincere.

He was a loving and devoted husband, father and grandfather who considered his family a precious gift from God.

He served his God and fellowmen with faith and loyalty.

The one who loved will always be with us in memory and prayer for the love between us is a spiritual bond

that death cannot sever.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife, **Peace Seevarnalar,** children **Rohan and Rosha,** daughter-in-law **Nancy,** son-in-law **Ronald McCoy,** and grandchildren **Hunter, Rajiv, Bon, Dan, Dinesh and Maya.** No.3 Callandar Ct., Perryburg, Ohio 43551, USA.



In loving memory of **Mr. Vaithilingam Sivagnanasundram (Churchill)** on the first anniversary of his passing away on **11.4.99.**

Fondly remembered by his beloved wife **Nageswary (Lily);** loving children **Ranjan, Mohan, Thayan and Gowri;** daughters-in-law **Renuka and Premini;** son-in-law **Ajan;** grandchildren **Mathangi, Sangavi and Ranjitha;** brother **Dr. Sivapalasundram;** sisters **Gnanalakshmi, Yogalakshmi and Jeyalakshmi;** sister-in-law **Pavalakodi;** brothers-in-law **Nalliah, Vaheisvaran and Sivasubramaniam;** nephews and nieces. - 1 Paradise Place, St. Clair, NSW 2759 Australia.



In everloving memory of **Mr. Vellupillai Nadarajah,** former **Director, Ceylon School of Social Work;** son of the late **Mr. & Mrs Vellupillai of Chetty Street, Nallur, Sri Lanka;** son-in-law of the late **Mr. K. Mutulingam** and of **Mrs Mutulingam of Tellipallai, Sri**

Lanka on the ninth anniversary of his passing away on **04.04.91.**

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife **Muthu Ambikai;** daughter **Dr. Sakunthala;** son **Dr. Ravindran;** son-in-law **Dr. Suresh Thayalan;** daughter-in-law **Meera;** grandchildren **Arjun, Nisha and Sathya.** - 11 Baronia Croft, Highwoods, Colchester Essex CO4 5EF.



In loving memory of **Mrs Grace Nagarathnam Rasiah** of **Varuthalai-Vilan and Illavalai;** beloved wife of the late **Mr. M.A. Rasiah (former Headmaster)** on the third anniversary of her passing away on **5th April 1997.**

With fondest thoughts and prayers from her family - 40 Hillingdon Road, Kingswood, Watford, Herts WD2 6JG.



In loving memory of **Mr. Visvalingam Sivasubramaniam,** **Principal Emeritus, Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam** on the fourth anniversary of his passing away on **26.4.96.**

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife **Sironmany;** children **Dr. Sivanandarajah, Sivagnanasunderam, Dr. Sivapalan, Sivathasan, Sivaratnam, Sivamanoharan** and **Sivaloshanadevi;** son-in-law **Thavarajah;** daughters-in-law

Manimehaladevi, Anandhi, Yogeswary, Kamaladevi, Supathiradevi and Devahi; grandchildren **Sutharshan, Priyatharshini, Suseenthiran, Suhanthan, Sutharshika, Suloshan, Sutharharan, Sulakshan, Arooran, Gajamohan, Gajaharan and Vaishna.** - 135A Sudbury Avenue, Wembley, Middx HA0 6AW Tel: 020 8385 0477.



In loving memory of **Mrs. Puvaneswary Canagasabai** beloved wife of **Mr. S. Canagasabai, Retired Supervisor of Textiles, Sri Lanka;** loving daughter of the late **Mr. & Mrs. Ponnampalam,** on the first anniversary of her passing away on **3rd April 1999.**

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her children **Somasegeram, Gunasegaram, Indradevi, Renu-gadevi, Jeyasegaram, Sandrasegaram, Ranjanadevi and Pararajasegaram;** sons-in-law **Narendran and Velauthan;** daughters-in-law **Selvathy, Pathmavathy, Pakialuxmy, Krishnavalli and Maria** and grandchildren, nephews and nieces. - 110 Deans Lane, Edware, Middx HA8 9NR.



In loving memory of **Mrs Maheswary Kanagaratnam,** beloved wife of the late **Mr. Kanagaratnam (P.H.I.) of Kokuvil East** on the first

continued on page 32

In Memoriam



In loving memory of Mr. Vellupillai Kumarasamy on the first anniversary of his passing away on 20th April 1999.

கண்ணெட்டா இடத்திலுமைக் காலன் கவர்ந்தேக
புண்பட்ட மனத்தினராய் புழுக்கி உளமொடிந்து
விண்முட்ட நாமிட்ட ஓலமது கேட்டிடவே
கண்ணெட்ட உறவினர் நாம் கதறி அழுகின்றோம்

பண்பட்ட குலத்துதித்த குமாரசாமி வேந்தே நின்
விண்ணுற்ற ஆண்டொன்றின் நிறைவுறுதினம் யாம்
புண்பட்ட இதயத்துன் பெருந்தன்மைகளை நினைந்து
எண்ணெட்டா இனசனர் யாம் ஏங்கியழுது நின்றோம்

பண்ணுநலம் பலவும் புரிந்திங்கு வாழ்ந்து சென்று
விண்ணுறைந்து முந்நான்கு திங்கள் மிகப் போயும்
எண்ணிறந்த உறவினரோ டன்பர் மிகச் சூழ்ந்து
கண்ணெட்ட மெய்பதற்கு கதறியழுது நின்றோம்

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his beloved wife Sarojini; loving children Nirmala, Baskeran, Shyamala and Dayaharan; sons-in-law Rasalingam and Uthayakumaran; daughter-in-law Gnanamanohari; grandchildren Gayathiri, Gayan and Arjuri; relatives and friends. - 24 Rowlands Ave, Hatchend, Middx. HA5 4BH. / 37 Mississippi Road, Seven Hills, NSW 2147, Australia. / 10 Fairway Drive Warwick, QLD 4370 Australia.

continued from page 31
anniversary of her passing away on 3rd April 1999.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving children Mahendran, Sarojinidevi, Rajendran, Rajini, Kulendran, Raveendran, and Puvanendran; brother Thedchanamoorthy; sister Puvanewary; daughters-in-law Sugirtha, Kamalini, Pavalam, Rathy and Jeyanthi; sons-in-law Yogaratanam and Gunasuntharam; grand children Pradeepan, Prasanthan, Sanjeevan, Dhamayanthi, Nirooshan, Yalini, Nimalan, Kavitha, Mayooraan, Soruban, Ruben, Prameela and Bindhuja. - 85 Cole Park Road, Twickenham, Middx TW1 1HX.



In loving memory of Mrs Thiyalnayaki Sivalingam on the first anniversary of her passing away on 18th April 1999.

Greatly missed and fondly remembered by loving children

Jeyakumaran, Kaladevy, Gnandran, Dr Jeyagowry, Sureshkumar and Sivasuthan; sons-in-law Ganeshamoorthy and Dr. Kumaran; daughters-in-law Yogendradevi, Vallinayaki, Malathy and Balasuhanthini; sister Sethunayagi Sivasithamparam; grandchildren Havitha, Sinduja, Kalyan, Neruban, Rathulan, Pratheeban, Aparnah, Geevithan and Abisha. - 24 Sixth Cross Road, Twickenham, Middx TW2 SRB. Tel: 020 8977 6277.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

May 1 Pirathosam; Feast of St. Joseph.

May 2 Feast of St. Athanasius.

May 3 Amavasai.

May 4 Karthigai.

May 7 Sathurthi.

May 9 Sashdi.

May 13 6pm Carnatic Vocal Recital by Smt Bhushany Kalyanaraman at London Sivan Temple Hall, 4A Clarendon Rise, Lewisham, London SE13 5ES (Near British Rail, Lewisham) in aid of Temple Building Fund. Tel: 020 8318 9844/01277 223981.

May 14 Eekathasi; Feast of St. Matthias; 6pm SCOT presents Carnatic Vocal Recital by Smt Bhushany Kalyanaraman at the Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London

W14 9HQ (Near Underground West Kensington) in aid of Relief & Rehabilitation in North & East Srilanka. Tel: 020 8445 7924/ 01277 223981.

May 15 Pirathos.

May 17 Full moon; Vaikasi Visakam.

May 20 Feast of St Bernadine of Siena.

May 21 7.45pm Veena & Vocal Concert by Prince Rama Verma at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room. Tel: Box Office 020 7960 4242.

May 22 Sankadhara Sathurthi.

May 26 Feast of St. Philip Neri.

May 27 Feast of St. Augustine of Canterbury.

May 29 Eekathasi.

May 31 Pirathosam; Feast of the Visitation of Blessed Virgin Mary.

At the Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 020 7351 3056/4068

May 6 6pm Bharata Natyam by Vasundara Doraswamy.

May 13 6.30pm Carnatic Vocal Concert by Balu Raghuraman.

May 14 6pm Hindustani Vocal by Hemang Mehta and Bharatanatyam by Vrunda Mehta..

In Memoriam



In cherished memory of Mr. Chinnathampy Rasiah on the sixth anniversary of his passing away on 24.04.94.

**Deep in our hearts you will always stay
Loved and remembered every day.**

Greatly loved and deeply missed by his sorrowing wife Gunamany, beloved children Rajan and Rajini, loving daughter-in-law Janaki, son-in-law Lakshman, grandchildren Thabojan, Prashanth and Sulakshan, sister-in-law, nephews and nieces, - 14 Greenbriar Avenue, Wheelers Hill, Melbourne Vic 3150, Australia./ 7 Sessions Road, Lafayette 94549, California.

Annual Festival Programme

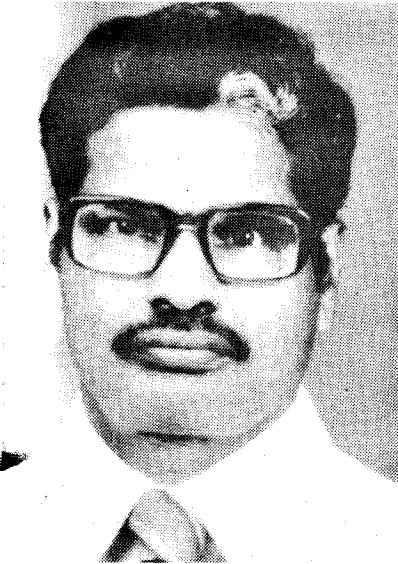


Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple, Dell Lane, Stoneleigh, Surrey KT17 2NE.

The Annual Festival Programme of the Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple commences on 14th May 2000 with the Vinayagar Poojah followed by the flag hoisting ceremony on 15th May, continued everyday with the Chariot Festival on 28th May and the Theertham Festival on 29th May.

All devotees are invited to partake in the festivals and gain the grace of Goddess Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman. For further information and details contact the temple on 020 8393 8147 or 020 8542 5803 or 01622 693938.

Mr. Ponniah Velautham of Udupiddy - An Appreciation



No one and above all I ever thought or even felt in the wildest of dreams that cruel

fate would snatch away from our midst Thamby Velautham so suddenly, creating profound shock in the minds of all who knew him, I am unable to accept that he is no more. It was in June last year that I met him at Udupiddy at the Veerapathira Temple and discussed various matters and in particular the Temple, the loans connected with the building operations outstanding and the creation of a fixed deposit account so that the interest accruing could be utilised for running the temple without interruption. As I write this note the picture of his figure and face is crossing my mind. He passed away under tragic circumstances, resulting from an unfortunate accident on the night of 29th February 2000 in his own house right before the eyes of his beloved wife and a son.

He was popularly and affectionately referred to as Vector Velautham due to his brilliant application of the vector method to solve mathematical problems with ease admired and appreciated by his students. Both of us hail from Udupiddy, where we were born, lived in close proximity and with close acquaintance with each other's family. He grew up as a shy and reserved young lad going about his studies in his own way. He was a brilliant student, excelled in Pure and Applied Mathematics and after graduating in Mathematics began a teaching career at Velautham Vidyalayam, Point Pedro. Very soon he distinguished academically and became the most sought after teacher/tutor in Mathematics for advanced level students in the whole of Jaffna.

When he was ill in hospital, he met a young nurse and was deeply impressed by her care and affection and married her against opposition from the members of his family. Their life was of deep affection for each other, absolute harmony and peace and they had four sons. He had the means to cater to every need of the family and lived a happy and contented life adored by the folks of Udupiddy. He was a man of exemplary character, soft spoken always friendly and smiling. He had no malice but goodwill for all. These sterling qualities coupled with his charming personality endeared him to each and everyone who had the good fortune of knowing him. The pure white clothes Velautham always wore, indicated his inner purity. Many a time he got angry with his students for not paying sufficient attention to their studies. His anger was spurred by his love to create and for caring admonition and encouragement.

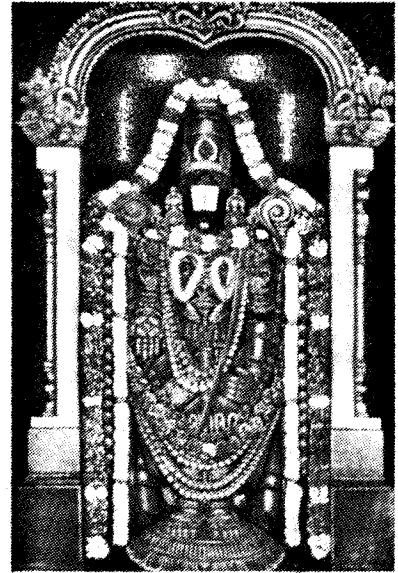
My close association with him became closer with the rebuilding of the Veerapathirar Temple. Our ambition was to bring the Temple under the people's management and renovate it in a grand way. It was declared a Public Charitable Trust and plans were initiated to rebuild it.

I had to leave for the UK and he took great pains to remodel the temple and it is today one of the biggest temples in Jaffna

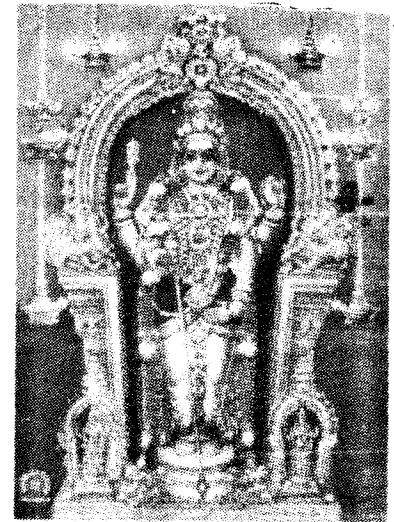
with several Deities and Mandapams.

The Temple is today a Standing Monument for Thamby Velautham. May his soul rest in peace in the abode of God.

V. Kanthaswamy (Thiraviyumu).



The Sri Venkatesa (Balaji) Temple of the United Kingdom, Dudley Road East, Tividale, Oldbury, West Midlands B69 3DV cordially invites all devotees and friends to the



Maha Kumbabhishekam of Sri Subramanya Swami (Murugan) Temple (Grand Opening and Sanctification ceremony) from Friday, 5th May to Sunday, 7th May 2000 at the Temple. Officiated by Sri Swaminatha Sivacharya, Thiruvannamalai, India

(Chief Priest of Sri Rajarajeswary Amman Temple, Stoneleigh, Surrey) For further details Telephone: 0121 544 2256.

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இலங்கையின் கப்பல் போக்குவரத்து களஞ்சியங்களுக்கு
கிரமமான, நம்பிக்கையான சேவை.

★ கொழும்புக்கு அர்ப்பணம் மிகுந்த உன்னத சேவை. (16 தினங்கள்) ★ தேயிலைப்
பெட்டிகளிலிருந்து, முழு அளவிலான தனிப்பட்ட பொருள்கள் வரை. ★ கார், மற்றும்
20 அடி, 40 அடி முழு வர்த்தக சரக்குகளுக்கு விசேட கட்டணம். ★ மின்சார உற்பத்தி
யந்திரம், யந்திர வகைகள், உபகரணங்கள். ★ சலவை யந்திரம், குளிர் சாதனப் பெட்டி
போன்ற வீட்டுப்பாவனை மின்சார உபகரணங்களுக்கு வரிவிலக்கு.

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