

Tamil TIMES

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- **Tigers & Monks Reject Govt Proposals**
- **Govt- UNP Consensus**
- **Interview with Norway Envoy**
- **Power-Sharing, a Must**
- **Book Review**

President Chandrika Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe after reaching bipartisan consensus (top left); LTTE advisor Anton Balasingham (top right); A Sivanandan, author of 'When Memory Dies' (left)

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★ 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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Israeli-Palestinian Peace Effort and its Relevance

It was in September 1993 that the then Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat appeared on the lawn of the White House in USA amidst a blaze of international publicity committing themselves to bring about peace through negotiations. Prior to this, the Israelis and Palestinians had been negotiating for over two years behind the scenes with facilitation provided by the Norwegian government to arrive at what has now come to be known as the Oslo Peace Accord. The Accord was designed to begin a peace process in an effort to bringing an end to the bloody conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians which had continued for several decades engulfing the entire Middle East into periodic wars. It was negotiated and arrived at while the fighting between the two sides was continuing.

Rabin paid the ultimate penalty for his peace efforts when an Jewish extremist gunned him down for betraying the Jews. Still there are many extremist Jewish individuals and organisations who continue to oppose any peace move with the Palestinians. There have also been many atrocities committed by Palestinian hardliners who continue to assert that the PLO and Yasser Arafat have sold out the Palestinians to the Israelis.

It was former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson who said that a week in politics is a long time. Certainly, the time that has elapsed between 1991 and 2000 is a very long time indeed. During this period, hardline elements on both sides of the divide have been trying their hardest to undermine and scuttle the peace process. Despite obstacles and the vast differences between the entrenched positions on basic issues held by Israel and the PLO, and not ignoring the compulsion to recognise and respond to the concerns, fears, and expectations of their respective constituencies, the peace process has survived.

This month witnessed intense and sustained activity in an effort to bringing the peace process back on track. With the active encouragement and support from President Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and their respective teams met for two weeks day after day at Camp David with a view to striking a peace deal on all outstanding disputed issues. But they failed and have returned home accompanied by screaming headlines in the world media highlighting the breakdown of the talks. But what is significant that has been missed out is that both sides have promised not to return to violent confrontation, but to try and try again to reach an accord in the coming months..

Whatever the hardliners on both sides may say, the Israeli-Palestinian experience is worth following. Even where the basic positions between warring parties are transparently irreconcilable - and there have been many between the Israelis and the Palestinians - the only alternative to war is to continue negotiating until the irreconcilable issues are reconciled through a process of compromise and pragmatic realisation of each others fears, concerns and limitations. Unlike war-making which is an easy option for the impatient, peace-making is a hard and difficult option which requires enormous patience and courage of ones conviction to sit and talk day after day, week after week, month after month, and if necessary even year after year. Along the way, it may be necessary to arrive at interim measures and partial deals on certain specific areas. Experience has shown that it is unrealistic to aim for a final and complete solution in one go within a short specified time to an intractable conflict lasting decades. A stage by stage approach coupled with the commitment not to return to violence and war has been the hallmark of the peace effort by Israelis and the Palestinians.

The Norwegians who facilitated the Israeli-PLO dialogue are now seeking to facilitate the commencement of a dialogue between the Government and the Tamil Tigers. Though the historical and ideological divide between the Jews and the Palestinians is much more fundamental than in the case between the Sinhalese and Tamils, the Israeli-Palestinian experience in peace-making has a lot to commend itself to be followed in resolving the Sri Lankan conflict. One can only wish and implore the conflicting parties in Sri Lanka to follow the example of the PLO and the Israelis - agree a basic framework for negotiations (as in the case of the Oslo Accord) followed by a ceasefire with a commitment not to return to violence and war and negotiate over whatever period it takes to arrive at a lasting solution.

● LTTE REJECTS GOVT-UNP PROPOSALS

Whatever developments may dominate the southern political scene, they are of little consequence to the position of the Tamil Tigers. They have summarily dismissed the constitutional reform and devolution proposals that emerged from the Government-UNP consensus. To the LTTE the proposals have "failed to address the national aspirations of the Tamil people".

In an interview with the pro-LTTE "Tamil Guardian" published from London, LTTE's political advisor Mr Anton Balasingham said that devolution package "fails to address the key demands or the national aspirations of the Tamil people as articulated in the cardinal principles of the Thimpu declarations."

Recalling that the LTTE had rejected the government's devolution package when it was presented in 1995 because it had serious limitations, Balasingham said that the proposals have now been severely diluted. "The LTTE will not study or comment on any proposals that tends to ignore the key issues of self-determination and nationhood of the Tamil people," he said.

The LTTE spokesman was particularly contemptuous of the other Tamil groups referring to them as "Tamil mercenaries" and accusing them being guilty of treachery for which they would not be forgiven. Rejecting the proposal for the setting up of an Interim Council for administering the North-East Province (which was one of the elements contained in the Government-UNP consensus), Balasingham said that the government was living in a fool's paradise. "We are not that stupid to seek a few seats in a temporary administrative set up renouncing our people's only means of defence. i.e. arms."

Balasingham was certain that even if the government established an Interim administrative council it would not be able to function in the North-east, under the prevailing conditions. He reminded that the Northeastern Provincial administration could not function even under the might of the Indian army. He warned that the government may throw a few rotten bones in the form of an Interim Administration to those power hungry Tamil mercenaries in her alliance, but "should realise

NEWS REVIEW

that history will not forgive their treachery."

According to Balasingham, the withdrawal government troops from the Jaffna peninsula is a precondition for any peace talks. "There is a prospect for a cease-fire and peace talks only if the troops occupying Jaffna are withdrawn. If the government is determined to continue the military occupation of Jaffna, then the conditions of war will prevail." He added that the LTTE's military Operation "Unceasing Waves" will never stop until our strategic objective is achieved. That is, when the Jaffna peninsula is fully liberated from the alien military occupation."

In regard to the position of the Indian and United States governments that any political solution to the ethnic conflict must be within "unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka", Mr Balasingham said, "In so far as the ultimate solution to the Tamil question is concerned it is not the American superpower nor the Indian regional power or the Sri Lankan state power that have the power of determination. It is our people, the people of Tamil Eelam, who will ultimately determine their own political status and destiny."

● MONKS REJECT REFORM PROPOSALS

The Mahanayakes of Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters, who together control 10,000 of the 15,000 Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka, have written to Sinhala Buddhist MPs asking them to vote against President Chandrika Kumaratunga's devolution package, which had been agreed with main opposition UNP, which is likely to be presented in Parliament on August 24.

One newspaper quoted one of the priests as saying, "We reject this draft Constitution in toto. We rejected the proposed Constitution from its inception and we continue to reject it."

Tilak Karunaratne, the General Secretary of the Sinhala Urumaya, an ultra-nationalist outfit formed recently, told journalists that the letters from the Mahanayakes posted from Kandy on 19 July, had warned that the proposed

devolution package and the provision for an interim council for a temporarily merged north-east Tamil province would divide the country on ethnic and religious lines. Such a division would eventually lead to the creation of a separate Tamil Eelam.

The warning assumes importance in the light of the President's accepting a suggestion from the Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP) that the referendum on the merger of the north and east to form a single Tamil dominated province be held at the end of ten years and not five years as proposed.

Karunaratne said, "We reject this package in toto. Dilution of the country's unitary status and the proposed interim council in the north and east would eventually lead to the separation of the country."

Hearing of the monks' missive to the MPs, President Kumaratunga on 21 July dispatched Constitutional Affairs Minister G L Peiris to talk to the two Mahanayakes at their temples in Kandy.

According to Mr Karunaratne, the Mahanayake of Malwatte, Ven. Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi Thero, did not even want to see Peiris. And when he did eventually see the Minister, he gave him "a dressing down". Peiris seems to have had less difficulties with the Asgiriya Mahanayake, Ven. Udugama Sri Dhammadassi Ratnapala Buddhakittita Thero, who was mostly interested in the retention of the clause giving Buddhism the foremost place in Sri Lanka.

Apparently, he was mollified when this was assured, but the prelate's stand on the package as a whole is still unclear. On the impact of the Mahanayakes' stand on the minds of the MPs and their constituencies, Karunaratne said that it could be substantial. "The monks are the opinion makers in the villages," he explained.

But the general secretary of Peoples' Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), D. Siddharthan MP, said that the monks' influence would pale into insignificance if the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the opposition United National Party (UNP) agreed on the package. But his fear was that the UNP might backtrack and scuttle the new constitution. "The PA's insistence on keeping the Executive

Presidency for the full six year term even with a parliamentary system in place, and the government's opposition to having an independent election commission immediately, could be used by the UNP as an excuse by the UNP to opt out of the bipartisan agreement," Siddharthan said.

● CHARGES OF RANIL-LTTE LINKS THREATEN BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS

Reports published in some Colombo newspapers that Opposition and UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe has been having alleged secret contacts with the Tamil Tigers have raised political controversy even threatening the emerging bipartisan consensus between the government and the UNP.

Four months of dialogue between President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government and the UNP took an unpleasant turn on 22 July when Wickremasinghe stormed out of the meeting having protested to President Kumaratunga about a police probe, claiming it attempted to establish that he had clandestine contacts with the LTTE. Although Kumaratunga denied knowledge of any investigation, Wickremasinghe walked out, followed by the rest of his delegation.

In walking out of the talks, Wickremasinghe accused the government of carrying out a smear campaign against him ahead of the scheduled November parliamentary election and told the President that he would boycott future discussions, although other members of his delegation would return to continue the talks.

The island's minority Tamil and Muslim parties reacted to the turn of events with dismay saying that they no longer have hope of a consensus between the opposition and government on constitutional changes to end the island's civil war.

"I think we will virtually have to bid goodbye to bipartisan talks," said Rauf Hakeem, secretary of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. He said only the minority Tamil and Muslim parties can now put the talks back on track by acting as conduit between the government and opposition.

"Wickremasinghe's threatened

boycott is a big, big setback," said Dharmalingam Sidharthan, leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), a Tamil group. "The other members may attend the discussions but they have to refer to him for decisions," he said. PLOTE is a former rebel group that renounced violence and joined the political mainstream.

"In the present context, everything seems to be going for a six," agreed V Anandasangaree, vice president of the Tamil United Liberation Front, using a cricket term.

Ports and Shipping minister of the government and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader M.H.M. Ashraff told a local weekly newspaper that his government was acting in an "irresponsible" manner at a time when both parties were involved in a dialogue to reach a consensus in view of bringing a solution to the on going conflict. Ashraff said that accusations against Wickremasinghe will endanger the on going talks.

Some political commentators think that Wickremasinghe has acted in a hasty and irresponsible manner by staging a walk out at a crucial juncture. They feel that, in the runup to the election, it is natural in the world of adversarial politics that parties are likely to make all sorts of allegations against each other to gain political mileage.

The UNP leader's walkout followed publication of reports in the state-controlled media that Wickremasinghe had a two-hour meeting with Gnanakoon, allegedly an LTTE leader in-charge of the group's shipment of arms and ammunition, at a hotel on June 18.

Three other UNP leaders, Malik Samarawickrama, Lalin Fernando and Arjuna Mahendra, were also present during the meeting, it said. The UNP leader went on a private visit to Singapore last month amidst a series of meetings with Chandrika to formulate a new Constitution.

The disclosures came at a critical time when Kumaratunga and Wickremasinghe have been trying to formulate a new Constitution to reach a political settlement to end the ethnic war. Wickramasinghe, however, did not deny his meeting with Gnanakoon in Singapore.

An angry Wickramasinghe denied

any links with the LTTE and accused the government media of launching a smear campaign ahead of elections. Reacting to allegations made by the Sri Lankan media that he met Gnanakoon, the UNP leader Wickramasinghe said Gnanakoon was a businessman who frequently visited Colombo. "If he is a known LTTE leader, why has he not been arrested during his trips to Colombo," he queried.

The UNP leader alleged that the state-controlled media was making these allegations in order to denigrate him and his party before the parliamentary elections which are scheduled to be held later this year.

Similar allegations of a shadowy link between the LTTE and the UNP were made in the run-up to the Presidential election last year. The allegations gathered strength with Mr. Wickremasinghe's promise to form an interim council to govern north-eastern Sri Lanka that could be run by the LTTE. The fact that that the LTTE did in fact provide practical help, particularly in the island's eastern province, urging the people to vote for Wickremasinghe during the presidential election made the allegations made by his adversaries to look credible. Now with the Government re-opening its accusation of a nexus between Wickremasinghe and the LTTE, commentators say that the tone for Sri Lanka's next general election seems to have been set. The "revelation" of Mr. Wickremasinghe's alleged "clandestine meeting" was a sign that the ruling People's Alliance will fall back on the strategy, tried and tested successfully in the Presidential elections, of painting dark pictures of a conspiracy between the UNP and the LTTE.

● THE PRICE FOR CONSENSUS

The government had to pay price for securing the bipartisan consensus with the UNP on its constitutional reform proposals. The price paid was the "dilution" of some of the key provisions contained in the government proposals which had the support of the Tamil parties.

The differences between the government and the UNP were narrowed down on the basis of a Working Paper

prepared by the UNP's former Constitutional Affairs Minister and President's Counsel K. N. Choksy. An explanatory note to his Working Paper cautioned both sides on the usage of words and terms that were sensitive. Choksy described his Working Paper as the basic framework of the constitution if accepted by both sides.

Choksy in his explanatory note stated that the paper embodied the principles of government upon which the constitution is based which would be used as the "Key" to interpretation in the event of any legal dispute between the Central Government and the Regional Councils in regard to their respective powers. He had pointed out that the rival political contentions on the side of the majority community is to maintain the territorial unity of the country, whilst the Tamil parties are anxious to ensure adequate devolution entrenched in the constitution which cannot be legally assailed.

Choksy had recommended the avoidance of the use of controversial terms such as 'unitary state', 'union of regions', 'indissoluble' and 'indivis-

ible'. He recognised the fact that the Republic consisted of the Centre and Regions while enunciating and recognising that the legislative and executive powers of the Republic are distributed between the Centre and the Regions, to the respective extents spelled out in the Constitution. Choksy has also ensured the maintenance of the unity and territorial integrity of the Republic whilst devolving powers to the Region.

It is learnt that Choksy's Working Paper will substantially form chapter one of the new constitution titled "The State, Sovereignty and the People" and which contain the following:

- 1) Sri Lanka is a free, sovereign and independent Republic which shall be known as the Republic of Sri Lanka and in which the sovereign, legislative, executive and judicial powers of the people shall be exercised by the Central Government and the Regions as hereinafter provided in the constitution.
- 2) The territory of the Republic shall comprise the capital territory, the regions, the territorial waters and the air space above.

3) It shall be the duty of the people and of all organs of the State to safeguard the Independence, sovereignty, unity and the territorial integrity of the Republic.

4) In the Republic of Sri Lanka, sovereignty is in the people and is inalienable. Sovereignty consists of the powers of government, fundamental rights and the franchise.

5) The legislative power of the people shall be exercised by Parliament and by the People at a Referendum and by the Regional Councils to the respective extents and in the manner as hereinafter provided in the constitution.

6) The executive power of the people shall be exercised by the President of the Republic on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers and by the Governors of the Regions as in hereafter provided by the constitution.

7) The judicial power of the people shall be exercised by the courts, tribunals and institutions created and established or recognised by the constitution or by law. In matters relating to the privileges, immunities and powers of

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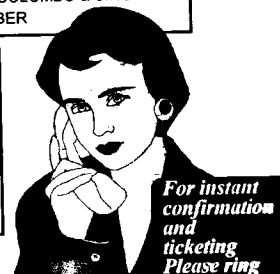
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parliament and its members, the judicial power of the people may be exercised by parliament according to law.

8) The franchise of the People shall be exercised by the people at the election of Members of Parliament, regional councils and local authorities and at a Referendum.

9) The fundamental rights of the People which are by the Constitution declared and recognised shall be secured and advanced by all organs of government, and shall not be denied or restricted or abridged save in the manner and to the extent hereinafter provided in the constitution.

10) The State shall foster a Sri Lankan identity amongst its citizens by recognising the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual character of the Sri Lankan society.

11) No Regional Council or Administration shall, by direct or indirect means promote or otherwise advocate or attempt to promote or otherwise advocate, a) the separation of any region or part thereof from the Republic, b) the alteration of the area or boundaries of a region, c) the change of the name of a region, d) the formation of a new region by separation of the territory from any region or by unifying two or more regions or parts of regions or by unifying any territory with part of any region. Provided however that a regional council or administration may make representations to the Central Government regarding matters referred to in sub paragraph (b), (c) and (d) above.

12) The National Flag of the Republic shall be the Lion Flag depicted in the..... schedule hereto.

13) The National Anthem of the Republic shall be 'Sri Lanka Matha' the words and the music of which are set out in the schedule hereto.

14) The National Day of the Republic shall be the fourth day of February.

The acceptance by the government of Choksy's paper in pursuit of a bi-partisan consensus is regarded by the UNP as a victory for its position. But the Tamil parties regard the amendments made as unacceptable and expressed serious objections putting the government in a difficult situation.

One commentator said that what is acceptable to the Tamil parties is not

agreed by UNP, and what is acceptable to the UNP is not agreed by the Tamil parties.

● EXECUTIVE PRESIDENCY

The government's constitutional reform proposals provide for the abolition of the Executive Presidency and a return to the Westminster model restoring parliamentary supremacy with the Prime Minister becoming the most powerful figure. However, the proposals also provide that, during the transitional period, Chandrika Kumaratunga will continue as the Executive President.

However, this transitional provision has become a bone of contention between the ruling party and the UNP although most of the Tamil and Muslim minority parties have expressed support for such an arrangement.

The government wants Mrs Kumaratunga to be an Executive President for a full six-year term for two reasons: First, it gives continuity during the critical transitional phase; and second, the Executive Presidency at this point of time is a reflection of the peoples' will. "Mrs Kumaratunga had won the Presidential elections only last December and that was for a six-year term. She had got the people's mandate to be an Executive President for six years. The people's wishes must be respected," argues Prof. G L Pieris, Minister for Constitutional Affairs.

The government's argument for continuation also rests on the fact that the minorities want the Executive Presidency based on direct elections to remain because they feel that a President elected by all the people will be more responsive to the needs of all the people than a Parliament composed of sectional interests. But the UNP points out that it was Mrs Kumaratunga who had first promised to abolish the post of Executive Presidency. It was one of her key election promises in the last elections.

● UNP FACING INTERNAL CRISIS

Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party is facing a serious internal crisis. Its leader is unable to keep the party's Members of Parliament within its fold. At the end of last year, four MPs and some other leading members

crossed over to support President Kumaratunga in her re-election campaign in which she won against the UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. Two of the MPs who crossed to support the Peoples Alliance government are now Ministers. Up to now, the UNP leadership has not been able even to take disciplinary action against the defectors who operate as an independent group continuing to entice and encourage more members to defect to the government side.

Indications are that the UNP is expected to suffer further losses from its depleting number of MPs with more decamping to follow in the aftermath of its former finance minister Ronnie de Mel who signaled an imminent cross over to the ruling party recently when he broke ranks and voted with the government in Parliament supporting the renewal of the state of emergency. In voting as he did, Ronnie de Mel, opposed the decision of the UNP to vote against the extension of the State of Emergency.

Ronnie de Mel is a prize catch for the government. He is a high profile senior parliamentarian whose reputation is that he had been the island's longest serving Minister of Finance, for eleven years from 1977 when the United National Party was in power. Ronnie's predicted cross-over to the government has occurred amidst speculation that a group of UNP MPs may cross over so as to enable the ruling People's Alliance to secure a two thirds majority in Parliament necessary for the passage of the government's constitutional and devolution proposals.

Crossing over from side to the other is not a novel experience for Ronnie de Mel. He was a leading member of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) when it was in power in the 70s. He crossed over to the UNP on the eve of the 1977 general elections. He crossed over to the PA (the chief constituent of which is the SLFP) in 1990 but joined the UNP again in 1994. Although Mr. de Mel would prefer to become Minister of Finance, he is expected to assume government office in a ministerial capacity, possibly replacing the late C.V. Gooneratne, who was killed by a Tamil Tiger suicide bomber, by accepting the Industrial Development portfolio.

"Such defections are normal just be-

fore an election, but the problem for the UNP is that it is becoming a one-way street. People are going away, but no one is coming in. It boils down to Ranil Wickremesinghe's leadership. It's so weak and lacklustre, there is no magic in it," Mr. Sinha Ratnatunga, editor of the weekly, Sunday Times is quoted as telling journalists.

Mr. De Mel is the seventh parliamentarian to part ways with the UNP since last November. Talking to the local media, Mr. De Mel said the UNP was in "complete disarray. The UNP is going down the slope to destruction," the 75-year-old parliamentarian told a Colombo newspaper.

According to government sources two other MPs would be shortly crossing over to the PA prior to the elections, and have already come to a certain understanding with the Peoples' Alliance and were only biding their time. These two have been identified as Hambantota district parliamentarian Mervyn Silva and Galle district member Upali Amarasinghe. UNP's former Coconut Industries Minister Harold Herath from Nattandiya is another UNPier who is

said to have been bitten by the cross-over bug.

One time heavyweights of the UNP have distanced themselves from the UNP and have become quite hostile to its leader. Sirisena Cooray, one of the most powerful figures of the party during the former President Premadasa's period, has formed his own political party and is threatening to field candidates against the UNP. Then there is the other heavyweight Wijepala Mendis who is associated with the UNP rebel group which supports the government.

What is truly intriguing is the studied silence for the last several months of Anura Bandaranaike, who crossed over to the UNP from the party founded by his father not because of ideological conversion, but because he could not get along with his elder sister, Chandrika. Anura thought that he should have been the natural choice for inheriting the political legacy and mantle of his father and mother, but felt deceived when Chandrika overtook him. So Anura crossed over to the UNP and became one of its top campaign-

ers. Those close to Anura say that he has now distanced himself from the UNP leader and waiting in the wings for call from his elder sister. Some speculate that it will be only a matter of time that Anura will quit the UNP.

● 'BAN ON LTTE PRECLUDES INDIAN ROLE'

While asserting that India has an active role to play in Sri Lanka, the LTTE's theoretician and chief spokesman, Anton Balasingham in an interview with The Deccan Herald (6 July) that New Delhi cannot play that role so long as the LTTE remains a banned organization in India.

Asked as to whether he thought India can play a mediatory role, Balasingham said, "I will say India has a role to play, it is a regional super power and we cannot wish it away. What we feel is our struggle will not undermine India's geo-political interests. We have already formally said we will never do anything that will be prejudicial to India's interests or interfere in its internal politics. There is apprehension in India that the Tamils' struggle for a

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separate Eelam will have repercussions in Tamil Nadu. I think it is an over-exaggerated fear. India is a federal state and there is no oppression of Tamils like we are facing in Sri Lanka. There is no demand for separation in Tamil Nadu. Our struggle is entirely different. We don't want to create any kind of pseudo-nationalist parties in Tamil Nadu. We need India, we need the support of the Indian people.

"Both sides may have made mistakes in the past. We want to forget them and enter into a new relationship with India. We feel we are a friendly ally of India.

"Presently, India is supporting the government of Sri Lanka and there is no link between the Tamils of Eelam and the Tamils of India. But India cannot play an active role so long as we remain a banned organisation. We recognise India's predominance in the region and we look forward to the time when it will lift the ban on our organisation," Balasingham said.

The LTTE has been a banned organization in India since it was blamed for the 1991 assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Asked about the Thimpu principles, which includes right to self-determination, which the LTTE says can be a basis for negotiations, Mr Balasingham said, "The Thimpu principles are totally misconstrued. Right to self-determination means we might choose to associate with the Sinhala government or accept a federal autonomy. Sri Lanka should not see self-determination as a right to separation. It only means that the Tamil people have the right to decide their own political destiny. Accept the principles first and let us negotiate."

To the question, "In 1989-90 when you entered into an understanding with President Premadasa, you said it was an internal problem of Sri Lanka and India had no role to play and it culminated in the withdrawal of the IPKF. Why do you look to India now?" Balasingham answered, "When we entered into negotiations with President Premadasa, we were on the brink of destruction. The IPKF had taken over the entire north and east and the LTTE and Prabhakaran were fighting for survival. So we entered into an understanding with Premadasa to escape from total annihilation. Now the situation is to-

tally different. For the past ten years, India has practically abandoned the Tamils. But now there seems to be renewed interest in the wake of the escalation of the violence. We are willing to accept India's role."

To the question, "India and the US favour a negotiated settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. Both have banned your organisation because of your pursuit of politics of assassination as an instrument of your struggle. Can you sustain your movement and achieve your ultimate goal without international support?", Balasingham replied, "It is true both the US and India have banned us. But for different reasons. India and the US have their own geo-political reasons. Sri Lanka too has banned us. We realise it will be a difficult task to gain international recognition. We have to rethink and retrospect and overcome the odds."

Asked as to whether he thought Eelam would become a reality in your life time, Balasingham said, "We already control 70 per cent of the territory in the north and east and most areas of Jaffna are now under our control. We are not going to keep quiet. We will take Jaffna and that will give us our cultural capital."

● COURT DISCHARGES MINISTER WITH WARNING

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court discharged a powerful cabinet minister in a contempt of court charge, but warned him against making references to the courts and judges in future.

A three-member bench of the court headed by Chief Justice Sarath Silva ruled that Sports Minister S.B. Dissanayake, reportedly a close confidante of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, did not have mala fide or bad intention when he remarked that the courts would be closed down and the judges could go home if they did not agree with the government's political reforms package.

Dissanayake made the statement last year at a function organised by the Institute of Architects. He said the courts would be closed down if the Supreme Court blocked the draft Constitution bill, aimed at ending the island's drawn-out ethnic conflict, and the judges who did not accept it could

'go home'.

Dissanayake's counsel Faiz Mustapha submitted what the minister meant was that when the new draft Constitution is presented the judges who did not agree with it would have the option to seek premature retirement. He pointed out that Dissanayake also had tendered an unqualified apology to all the judges.

When the minister's remark was brought to the notice of the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice instructed the registrar to call for affidavits from the editors and journalists of the three newspapers which published the news item on Dissanayake's speech. His action followed a call by 11 judges of the Supreme Court to ascertain whether the minister's statement amounted to contempt of court and whether he could be formally charged for the offence.

The Bench of judges, in its ruling, discharged Dissanayake of the contempt of court charges, but said a minister did not have the right to "misbehave." It also said that a senior minister like Dissanayake should be careful while commenting about the courts.

● BAN ON NEWSPAPER STRUCK DOWN

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka on 30 June dealt a major blow to the Government by ruling that last month's appointment of the chief media censor was illegal, thereby effectively invalidating the ban order on the weekly newspaper, Sunday Leader.

The ruling by a three-member bench of the court was made against a fundamental rights plea by the Sunday Leader. The court also asked the state to pay SL Rs. 100,000 (approximately \$1,250) to the newspaper as compensation in the landmark case.

The Competent Authority, as the chief censor was called, was appointed by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to implement restrictions on the media in respected war-related and material involving national security.

By ruling that there was no provision under Emergency regulations to appoint him, the Supreme Court has in effect also said that the censorship of the press carried out by the Competent Authority was illegal.

The ruling was based on a point of law and was not critical of censorship

itself.

The editor of the Sunday Leader, Mr. Lasantha Wickremetunge, said he was "overjoyed" by the ruling. He said the weekly, which is known to be virulently against the Kumaratunga Government, would be back on the stands on the following Sunday.

"The government's march towards dictatorship has been stopped by the Supreme Court. The court has also shown that this government is so incompetent it cannot even draft a simple legislation, let alone fight a war," said Mr. Wickremetunge.

The newspaper was banned from publication on May 22 under Emergency regulations for a period of six months. In late June, the ban period was reduced to two months.

"It is a slap in the face of the Government and a tremendous boost for the freedom of expression," said Mr. P. Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Studies, a thinktank that deals with various issues including those related to the media. He said the judgment was further proof that the Government's decisions were "bad in law" and had no constitutional basis. "Every time the Government is taken to court, they lose," he said.

The ruling in this case is expected also to impact on the fate of the Jaffna daily Uthayan, which was closed down by the censor on May 20, two days before the banning of the Sunday Leader, for alleged violated censorship regulations.

"According to this judgment, the letter (ordering the closure) that was issued to me is also null and void," said the Colombo-based managing director of Uthayan Publications, Mr. E. Saravanapavan.

Since the judgement, the government has re-appointed Mr. Ariya Rubasinghe as "the Competent Authority" strictly following the legal procedure as interpreted by the Supreme Court.

● 200,000 UPCOUNTRY TAMILS TO GET CITIZENSHIP

The Sri Lankan President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, has agreed to give Sri Lankan citizenship to those Indian Origin Tamils (IOTs) who were

forced to take Indian citizenship in 1964 as a result of the India-Sri Lanka pact on the stateless people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka.

Mr M S Sellasamy, leader of the Ceylon National Workers' Congress (CNWC) told the press on 21 July that the President's agreement was secured when ten IOT parties and organisations had met her on the previous day.

Mr Sellasamy said that the Presidential decision would be a boon to about 150,000 or 200,000 IOTs whose fate was sealed without their consent by the Shastri-Sirima pact on stateless Indians in Sri Lanka in 1964.

As the matter concerned India, India was consulted and the Indians had told the Sri Lankan government that it could go ahead and grant Sri Lankan citizenship to the persons concerned, according to Mr Sellasamy.

To solve the festering problem of about a million IOTs rendered stateless by the post-independence citizenship law, India and Sri Lanka had, in 1964, agreed to divide the stateless between themselves, with India giving citizenship to 500,000 with their natural increase, and Sri Lanka giving Sri Lankan citizenship to 375,000 with their natural increase. But sadly, the consent of the concerned IOTs was never sought.

"They were apportioned like commodities in a market," commented the IOT leader, the late Mr S Thondaman. Sure enough, the IOTs concerned did not migrate to India. India did not bother to repatriate them either. The Sri Lankan government turned a blind eye to their existence. But they were suffering from various kinds of disabilities because they had no documents other than something to show that their fathers or grandfathers were granted Indian citizenship more than three decades ago.

The IOT parties, headed by the late Mr. Thondaman, were pressing for a unilateral grant of Sri Lankan citizenship to these people. The opposition United National Party (UNP) was against it initially, but is now amenable, according to Mr Sellasamy.

Both the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the UNP are now amenable because parliamentary elections are near and both are wanting the IOT vote. But predictably, there is opposition from the Sinhala majoritarian lobby.

● INCREASE IN HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Amnesty International in a press statement on Thursday July 20, 2000 said that the present emergency regulations in the country is having a detrimental effect on human rights. The statement said that an increase in torture, "disappearances" and deaths in custody have been reported in Sri Lanka since new emergency regulations were introduced by the President in May 2000.

Amnesty International is concerned that wider powers given to the security forces under these emergency regulations may have contributed to the increase. The regulations confer powers of arrest to "any authorized person" in addition to the police and armed forces, and considerably extends their powers to detain.

Amnesty International on July 20 released a report entitled "Sri Lanka: New emergency regulations - erosion of human rights protection". In particular, the report highlights the removal of several safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention and the danger this poses for the safety of detainees.

In May this year AI emphasized that civilian life must be protected as fighting in the northern Jaffna peninsula escalated. The human rights organization on May 12, appealed to the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to respect international humanitarian law.

AI asserts that previous escalations in this long conflict have brought widespread violations and abuses to the civilian population. "Half a million civilians live in this contested area," Amnesty International said.

"Every effort must be made to respect their security."

International humanitarian law lays down clear standards in the conduct of any war, and applies equally to all parties to a conflict. Both the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE have a responsibility to uphold these standards.

In an apparent response to the heightened conflict, the Sri Lankan authorities introduced new Emergency Regulations on 3 May 2000, granting the police and armed forces wide powers of arrest and detention and allowing for restrictions on freedom of as-

sembly, and extensive censorship of the local media. This, AI adds makes assessment of the true situation in the conflict zone all the more difficult.

Amnesty International has reminded the Sri Lankan government of its obligations under international human rights law not to derogate certain fundamental rights, even in a state of emergency.

"Even in a national emergency, some rights are fundamental," Amnesty International said. "No one shall be subjected to torture or ill-treatment, and the right to life must also be upheld."

In a recent statement welcomed by Amnesty International, the Sri Lankan government said that steps have been taken to protect the lives of ethnic Tamil civilians in the south of the country, against any possible backlash.

Amnesty International takes no position on the causes and nature of the conflict and its appeal is based on humanitarian concerns for the lives and safety of civilians and in view of widespread human rights abuses reported in the context of previous offences.

EX-GENERAL CHARGED FOR MURDER AND DISAPPEARANCES

A retired Sri Lankan Army General and his two subordinates have been arrested and remanded to judicial custody for their alleged role in massacring hundreds of Sinhalese youth during a crackdown against a Left wing party between 1988 and 1990.

Ananda Weerasekera, who presently belongs to the Right wing Sinhala Veera Vidhana, an organisation campaigning against a political settlement to the ethnic conflict in the country, and his associates were arrested and remanded to judicial custody by a magistrate in north central Anuradhapura.

The three were charged with murder, abduction and unlawful detention in connection with the disappearances of hundreds of youth from the area during the army's campaign against the Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna (JVP) conducted under the then United National Party regime headed by R Premadasa.

JVP, a Left wing youth movement, had organised an armed insurrection against the state to capture power. The revolt was finally crushed by the army in which over 60,000 Sinhalese youth were estimated to have been killed.

Making a Way for LTTE And Colombo to Talk

Norway has a lot of expertise in deep-sea fishing. But the plunge it has taken into the troubled waters of Sri Lanka in the hope of coming up with a pearl that will make the Tamils and Sinhalese talk peace is turning out to be a tricky expedition. Norway's special envoy to Sri Lanka, Erik Solheim, has been shuttling between Oslo, New Delhi, Colombo and Washington to find a way to make the Tigers and Colombo begin political negotiations. And the Tigers are willing to talk to Colombo at a later stage. He stopped by at 'The Times of India' and spoke to Shastri Ramachandaran.

Q: Why has Norway got into Sri Lanka?

A: For the simple reason we were asked by Colombo and the LTTE to be the third party for finding a way towards negotiations. Both parties realise that one reason for the failure of earlier talks, in 1990-91 and 1994-95, was the absence of a third party. We are assisting Colombo and the LTTE. We assume we are acceptable because Norway has no military, political or economic interest in Sri Lanka.

Q: Extremist Sinhala groups have opposed your involvement saying that Norway has been a haven for Tamils.

A: We do not expect unanimous opinions or acceptance. We are willing to talk those opposed to Norwegian involvement and seek their advice to avoid misunderstandings. If we do not convince them, we will accept and respect their opposition.

Q: What are the expectations of the LTTE and Chandrika Kumaratunga's government?

A: I think both the LTTE and President Kumaratunga find Norway's role useful; useful in conveying messages between them, avoiding misunderstandings and creating an atmosphere conducive for talks, if and when they are started. There were weaknesses in the earlier process towards negotia-

tions. Our involvement is limited to strictly doing what we are asked to do by both the parties. So far, both parties have shown great willingness to trust Norway to take up a number of different obligations.

Q: What is the framework binding you?

A: A separate Tamil state can come about only as a result of an absolute victory for the military forces of LTTE; and a centralised Sri Lanka can be sustained only if the government wins militarily. Hence, a solution will have to be within the framework of Sri Lanka's integrity; but a solution that meets Tamil aspirations. This is what would be acceptable to the international community, led by India and followed by the United States and others.

Q: Does New Delhi have misgivings about Norway's role?

A: I don't see any 'misgivings'. New Delhi has no reservations about Norway's role. What I have seen and found is only appreciation of the part played by Norway. Norway has one role and New Delhi other and bigger roles. Oslo will consult India at every stage in this process. I am very satisfied with my relations with New Delhi.

Q: What is this "other role" of New Delhi?

A: New Delhi should do what it is already doing: appealing to the LTTE to settle for less than Eelam by agreeing to a solution within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity and integrity, and persuading Colombo to meet a wide range of Tamil aspirations. This is the only way to negotiate, the only way ahead when the parties are setting out on the difficult path of direct negotiations. India has also the bigger role of providing economic and other support for all of Sri Lanka but more for the Tamils.

Q: Are these part of the expectations that Colombo and the LTTE have from New Delhi?

A: The LTTE and Colombo have

different and opposing expectations at this stage. I don't think I should spell out what their expectations are from New Delhi. It is not for Norway to do so.

Q: There is suspicion in some sections here about Norway, a NATO member, coming into the picture and possibly acting to a US-NATO script, not necessarily in the interests of South Asian security.

A: There has been such scepticism in some quarters. These are unfounded. When it comes to Sri Lanka, India is the most important third party and we are consulting India at every stage, more than anyone else, US or others. It is because there is no conflict of interest that both India and the US have accepted us in this role in Sri Lanka.

Q: India and the US have designated the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. The European Union has not. Is Europe soft on the LTTE?

A: Norway is not in a position to speak for or advise the EU. If Norway should be a third party to the conflict, then we will have to talk to the LTTE. Norway relating to the LTTE is a pre-

condition to achieve the aim of resolving the conflict.

Q: Have you made any headway with the LTTE?

A: We have had a series of meetings with LTTE members, who have also met the Norwegian foreign minister and his deputy. We have developed good understanding and built up an excellent rapport with the opposition UNP, ruling PA and LTTE. We have been of the opinion that the UNP has to be involved in the process. The huge problem to avoid is a lot of suspicions and create a level of trust.

Q: How far are you from direct talks between LTTE and Colombo?

A: We have not set any deadline. We are preparing ourselves for talks by keeping communication lines open and we don't expect dramatic results immediately. We want them to act and Norway would be prepared when the parties are ready. The military situation in Jaffna and the coming elections in November might be obstacles to direct talks at the moment. However, there have been several rounds of talks between us and the UNP, the PA and the

LTTE; and the LTTE has been most willing to engage in discussions with Norway and prepare for a positive settlement. Settlement will come when both parties move from conducting war to going in for talks.

Q: What guarantees would you offer to LTTE chief Prabhakaran?

A: Accepting Prabhakaran as the undisputed leader of the LTTE is a must. There can be no negotiated settlement between Colombo and LTTE without Prabhakaran.

Q: What about the charges he is wanted for?

A: That is not up to us. We cannot interfere in the internal affairs of India and Sri Lanka.

Q: Do you hope to be able to persuade Colombo on this point?

A: We cannot take on the task of persuading the two parties on anything but only do what they want us to do. If you take the example of the Palestine accord in 1993, what we did was to provide bed and breakfast, and may be some whisky too, to bring the parties together.

(Courtesy of Times of India, 1.7.2000)

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'The Tamil people will determine their own destiny'

- Balasingham

LTTE theoretician, political advisor and chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, said in an interview that the LTTE would not study or comment on any proposals that ignore the key demands of self-determination and nationhood of the Tamil people. He rejected the government's devolution proposals because they failed to address the aspirations of the Tamil people. He said that there was no prospect for a cease-fire or peace talks until government troops withdrew from Jaffna, and that the LTTE's military offensive would continue until its strategic objective of recapturing Jaffna was achieved.

The following is the interview given by Anton Balasingham to the "The Tamil Guardian", 1 July 2000, published from London:

Q: The fighting in Jaffna seems to have subsided. The government claims that the LTTE's offensive campaign has been stalemated by the armed forces using modern weapons systems. What is your comment?

A: The Tigers' offensive is not stalemated by the army. Our combat formations are consolidating their newly gained positions in Jaffna. The offensive campaign has been temporarily suspended to evacuate the civilians trapped in the battle zones of Chavakachcheri. The army has been using the Tamil civilians as human shields to protect themselves. They have been bombing and shelling recklessly in the LTTE controlled areas causing heavy casualties among the innocent people. The army is desperate and demoralised and taking their vengeance on Tamil lives and property.

(Operation) Unceasing Waves will never stop until our strategic objective is achieved. That is, when the Jaffna peninsula is fully liberated from the alien military occupation.

Q: Have the LTTE fighters faced any setbacks due to the army's use of new weapons systems, i.e. the multi-barrel rocket launchers?

A: The heavy use of this weapon system has been the primary cause of

civilian casualties. This has also caused heavy damage to property in the Chavakachcheri sector. Our fighters are familiar with this weapon system. We ourselves have been using them against the Sinhala troops. The government is operating with the misplaced notion that the introduction of new weapons systems will change the course of the war in their favour. It is not the weapons that determine the success of a military campaign. It is the will, determination and commitment of the combatants that determines the war. The LTTE is blessed with those human virtues, and therefore its victory is assured.

Q: The government and the Opposition have agreed to set up an Interim Council for the administration of the Northeast. The government has stipulated the laying down of arms as a pre-condition for the LTTE's participation. What is your comment?

A: I think the government is living in a fool's paradise. The LTTE controls more than seventy percent of the land-mass of the Tamil homeland. We are also confident that we will take control of the Jaffna peninsula in the near future. We have already instituted a de facto state in the territories under our control. We run a permanent administration there. We are not that stupid to seek a few seats in a temporary administrative set up renouncing our people's only means of defence, i.e. arms.

Even if the government establishes an Interim administrative council it will not be able to function in the Northeast, under the prevailing conditions. The Northeastern Provincial administration could not function even under the might of the Indian army. The Kumaratunga administration is mooted ludicrous ideas for the solution of the ethnic conflict completely disregarding the stark realities of the ground situation in the Northeast. Chandrika may want to throw a few rotten bones in the form of an Interim Administration to those power hungry Tamil mercenaries in her alliance. Yet those who seek after powers and privileges from an oppressive regime at the

cost of the immense suffering of our people should realise that history will not forgive their treachery.

Q: Colombo has become a hive of political activity this week. The final stage of the devolution package is being worked out between the PA government and the UNP. The Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim has been meeting the government leaders. But there seems to be a studied silence in the LTTE quarters. What is your position regarding the devolution package? Is the LTTE prepared to study and comment if the package is given to them?

A: The LTTE rejected the package when it was first presented to the public in 1995 as the Devolution Proposals. We rejected the package on the grounds that it had serious limitations and that it failed to address the national aspirations of the Tamil people. Since then there were two more sets of proposals, the legal draft of 1996 and the proposals for constitutional reform of 1997. Several changes have been made from the original proposals and powers of devolution have been further whittled down in the draft constitution. The PA government and the UNP in an attempt to reach a consensus engaged in deliberations for the last several months diluting further the constitutional reform proposals of 1997. Having sucked the blood and flesh out of the original package, a skeleton is now remains as the final draft.

The LTTE will not accept this package because it has nothing substantial to form the foundation for a permanent solution to the Tamil national question. It fails to address the key demands or the national aspirations of the Tamil people as articulated in the cardinal principles of the Thimpu declarations. The LTTE will not study or comment on any package or proposals that tends to ignore the key issues of self-determination and nationhood of the Tamil people.

These proposals for constitutional reforms are not specifically addressed to resolve the national question of the Tamils but rather seeks to promote the majoritarian interests. Sri Lanka has enacted several constitutions but they have been woefully inadequate for resolving ethnic conflict. As long as constitution makers are constrained from instituting radical structural reforms in the polity enacting new constitutions

has little or no meaning.

Q: Do you think that there is any prospect for cease-fire and peace talks in the near future?

A: There is a prospect for a cease-fire and peace talks only if the troops occupying Jaffna are withdrawn. If the government is determined to continue the military occupation of Jaffna, then the conditions of war will prevail. The LTTE has already liberated large territories in the peninsula. This liberation process will continue until our final goal is achieved.

Q: The world's sole super-power, the United States and India, the regional super-power have insisted that a solution to the Tamil conflict should be found within the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Do you think that these assertions will have a negative impact on your struggle for self-determination?

A: America and India have made these statements for specific reasons. We understand their geo-political concerns and interests. These views are articulated not with an intention to undermine the Tamil struggle for political freedom but to encourage the parties in conflict to seek a negotiated political settlement.

In so far as the ultimate solution to the Tamil question is concerned it is not the American superpower nor the Indian regional power or the Sri Lankan state power that have the power of determination. It is our people, the people of Tamil Eelam, who will ultimately determine their own political status and destiny.

Q: What is the LTTE's position with regard to the Indian assistance of 100 million dollars credit to Sri Lanka?

A: Though the financial aid is provided as a gesture of humanitarian assistance, we feel this credit facility will enhance the resource position of Sri Lanka and indirectly help its war effort. The Tamil people are dismayed because the Indian assistance will not be going to serve a humanitarian purpose but rather it will encourage the Sri Lanka regime to pursue the military path intensifying the suffering of the Tamil people. It is the Tamil people in the North, dying without food and medicine, who urgently need humanitarian assistance. Yet this pathetic human tragedy has not touched the spirituality or conscience of India.

Solution Must Involve Far Reaching Power-sharing

D B S Jeyaraj

"How do you sell a product to the Jaffna Tamils?" The question was posed to me over twenty years ago by a Sinhala Marketing Manager of a prestigious firm in Sri Lanka. I was then a reporter attached to Sri Lanka's premier Tamil daily "Virakesari". The occasion was a ceremonial function to mark the launching of a new brand of tractor by the firm of which he was Marketing manager. Jaffna in particular and the North in general was viewed as a prize market for the "new" tractor.

"None of the conventional marketing strategies and advertising techniques for introducing a new product seem to work in Jaffna," lamented the gentleman. "Yet if we can make the Jaffna man accept a product he will adopt it on a permanent basis," he said. He then went on to mention two types of cars, a sewing machine, a bicycle and another brand of tractor.

All of these were enjoying tremendous sales in Jaffna and were household names for decades.

He then went on to answer his own query. "The Jaffna people cannot be fooled by advertising gimmicks and intensive sales pitches. They have an uncanny ability to recognize a solid product. If they are convinced of its durability and genuineness they will accept it without any hesitation. That is what we hope will happen to our tractor too."

Though two decades and two years have passed, I have never forgotten the pertinent observation made by that Sinhala marketing manager. He understood and appreciated the Tamil psyche and seemed to know exactly how to sell a product in Jaffna. Nothing bogus, only the genuine article! How sad indeed that very few of the Southern politicians attempting to sell solutions to the Tamils have grasped the essence of that wisdom when trying to evolve political solutions that would redress

the grievances and accommodate the aspirations of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The latest in this long line of "solutions" is the one supposedly in the making by the Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga regime right now. Unlike earlier ones this solution is considered to be special because it is allegedly a joint product of both the ruling Peoples Alliance and chief opposition United National Party. It is said that history was made on July 7th this year when both parties achieved a "Consensus" on resolving the Sri Lankan National question termed simply as the Tamil problem. For the first time in Sri Lanka the two major Sinhala dominated parties are said to have agreed on a mutually acceptable solution for resolving this.

The contemporary political history of this Island is replete with instances of the chief opposition party taking up cudgels against any meaningful attempt by the party in power to address the problems faced by the Tamils.

The roles are reversed when governments change. Thus the Tamils saw the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact of 1957 being scuttled by the UNP then in opposition. Likewise the Dudley-Chelva agreement of 1965 was negated by the SLFP, shamefully supported by the LSSP and CP. Of course the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist lobby comprising the clergy and laity aligned themselves to the forces in opposition. It can be argued that the development of the two party system in Sri Lanka was inextricably intertwined with and contributed extensively to the escalation of the ethnic crisis.

It has been stated that the difference this time was that in spite of a great deal of tension and hostility, both the PA as well as the UNP had been able to forge together a tentative agreement aimed at resolving the National question. Superficially, the Executive President and Leader of the Opposition seemed to

have transcended their very real incompatibility of temperament on a personal and deep seated differences on a political level. Once again, the Sinhala hardliners have opposed whatever settlement agreed upon by the PA and UNP.

But the expectation was that with the dominant Sinhala parties acting in unison such opposition could be over-ridden and marginalised.

There is of course a great question mark about the ultimate success of the entire exercise. Given the consistency of both Kumaratunga's and Wickremasinghe's inconsistency there is understandable doubt whether they would really abide by their acknowledged positions. There are also the problems about the transitional arrangements between the soon to be discarded old Constitution and the new Constitution to be ushered in soon.

The UNP expects the executive presidency to be abolished along with the new Constitution while Kumaratunga hopes to go her full term before relinquishing it. This is a major issue as the entire thrust of the UNP's co-operative approach hinges on this vital element. The UNP does not want Kumaratunga to retain the Presidency while the latter wants to do so as long as possible.

Also the PA wants to present the new draft during the term of the current Parliament and deal with the implementation in the next Parliament. The UNP has serious reservations about this. More importantly the forthcoming elections and its attendant consequences of inter-party rivalry could affect the uneasy affinity between both parties resulting in acute hostilities. All these factors could upset the present equilibrium relating to a political consensus. Already such signs are visible. The government controlled Lake House newspapers are indulging in a concerted campaign accusing Wickremasinghe of meeting with LTTE representatives in Singapore.

In response Wickremasinghe has walked out of the talks and minority party leaders have expressed scepticism about the success of the so called Bi-partisan Consensus. The extra round of talks were necessitated because of the Tamil parties expressing dissatisfaction over the so-called Sinhala Consensus.

A paradoxical feature of the present political scenario is the total apathy and to some extent pronounced antipathy of the Tamil people towards this PA-UNP accord. Instead of being jubilant over this "historic Sinhala consensus" the Tamil political parties have only expressed misgivings and protests. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have rejected it outright. The premier moderate party of the Tamils, the Tamil United Liberation Front, has also articulated its opposition and urged inclusion of certain vital provisions. Other Tamil parties too have either rejected it wholesale or urged modifications. Whatever the finer points of intra-Tamil differences there is no denying that the proposed Constitutional draft based on a PA-UNP consensus is not acceptable by and large. Once again, there is ethnic polarisation with Sinhala and Tamil viewpoints being diametrically opposed.

That the Tamil political spectrum with or without the LTTE should view the proposed draft with disfavour should come as no surprise. It would also be foolishly simplistic to attribute the behaviour of the non-LTTE Tamil political parties to fear of the Tigers alone. The real reasons are not hard to seek. There are serious gaps between what is on offer and what could be acceptable. A "Sinhala Consensus" by itself does not warrant or guarantee a Tamil acceptance. A positive Tamil response is possible only if and when the "Sinhala offer" is worthwhile and credible.

Chandrika Kumaratunga's much touted devolution package was first presented on August 4th 1995. A joint product of GL Peiris and Neelan Tiruchelvam, the envisaged scheme was certainly the most far reaching and progressive of its kind in the annals of independent Lanka. It was certainly maximum devolution tantamount to federalism and the proposed change of the unitary structure of the State to union of regions was central to this paradigm shift. It was Kumaratunga's claim that the war against the LTTE was to introduce this progressive package. This helped her obtain national and international support for her so-called war for peace. This war resulted in unprecedented hardship on colossal scales being imposed on the Tamil people. As

a result Kumaratunga found herself in 1999 alienated greatly from the minorities who had voted overwhelmingly for her in 1994.

The "package" too was steadily diluted in 1996 and then again in 1997. Finally the watered down scheme was tabled as a sessional paper on October 24th 1997. Thanks to the prevaricatory tactics of Ranil Wickremasinghe, President Kumaratunga was able to blame the UNP for her failure to legislate and implement the devolution package. All she needed was another 16 votes to obtain the necessary two thirds and the UNP was not co-operating, she complained. After shelving the package she intensified the military drive against the LTTE. After initial victories against the LTTE, the entire situation was reversed in the wake of a string of Tiger successes codenamed "Oyatha Alaigal" or Unceasing waves.

On the political front her bluff was called, when in a Machiavellian manoeuvre, Ranil offered to support her draft Constitution in Parliament. Although he stated that it was not the solution his position was that he would support it to prove that the UNP was not the stumbling block to peace Wickremasinghe said. If Kumaratunga was sincere about resolving the Tamil issue then she should have grasped the offer firmly and quickly. Whatever the ulterior motives of Ranil, all she had to do was present the draft in Parliament and hold him to his word. Instead she took several days to even acknowledge let alone accept the offer. Then came the charade of a renewed search for Consensus. Instead of trying to pass the allegedly finished product of a Constitutional draft a fresh process of Constitution making commenced.

As a result Ranil was able to prove to the world that it was not the UNP that was obstructing devolution. On the contrary Kumaratunga was exposed as not being ready with the package in spite of claiming to have one ready. Under the guise of achieving an agreement with the UNP, the draft was watered down even further from the Oct 24th 1997 position. It was apparent that Kumaratunga was using the "New" search for Consensus as a means to strip the draft of most of its progressive measures in a bid to appease the Sinhala hawks within and without her party. It

also seemed clear that it was not her intention to formulate a package acceptable to general Tamil opinion. If the Tamil parties themselves could not find the package attractive then LTTE acceptance was not possible at all.

The Tamil parties too contributed to this state of affairs by co-operating with Kumaratunga in her so-called "New" search for a consensus. By participating in fresh discussions they allowed her to diminish the extent of devolution further. What these parties could have done was to insist upon her presenting the Oct 24th 1997 draft and then make demands of the UNP to support it. Instead they let PA-UNP discussions drag on. Now under the guise of a PA-UNP Consensus the original draft has been reduced to a caricature of its former self. A case in point is the clause pertaining to structure of the state. If the proposed terminology is accepted it can only result in the central government prevent actual devolution of power to the periphery. Some years ago Kumaratunga found fault with the TULF for not propagating her non-existent package. But now it is

unrealistic to expect that party to lend support to this new arrangement.

The blame for all this is being laid on the UNP. Government circles are telling the Tamil parties that all the progressive provisions of the original draft had to be jettisoned because of UNP pressure. Since the Tamil parties blundered by allowing such a sly move by the PA in the first place they find themselves in a quandary. The UNP is patting itself on its back for having undermined and negated many of the positive features of the original draft. It is now very much a UNP product and not the PA's. Choksy rather than Peries is the current architect. The UNP's conduct in this is understandable in the sphere of political upmanship but cannot be condoned within the context of national good and benefit.

What the UNP has done is to collaborate with the PA and reduce the extent of devolution in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The key issue of lands is a glaring example of this. Besides the core issues of Tamil identity have been ignored. The Indo-Lanka accord allowed a merger of the North

and East and described them as areas of historic habitation of the Tamils. But the new draft seeks the merging of the North and East a specific period followed by a referendum in the East. The focus is on managing rather than resolving the issue.

The PA-UNP bipartisan consensus is a "Sinhala" Consensus. This Sinhala Consensus has failed to take adequate cognizance of Tamil aspirations or understand their fundamental grievances. The problem is not viewed as the "National Question". It is only being looked at as a minority issue. As the Nava Sama Samaja Party General Secretary Dr. Vickramabahu Karunaratne has observed in a press release neither the Tamil identity nor the homeland has been recognized. He has also stated that the left should campaign for the recognition of the Tamil nationality in the Constitution and devolution of power on that basis. Comrade Bahu says: "Chandrika came out with her ideas on devolution on August 4, 1995. Though there were many misgivings about her behaviour towards the LTTE and the resumption of war, many people pinned



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their hopes on this document. In that, there was the possibility of the recognition of the Tamil homeland and a devolution of power on that basis. However this hope evaporated fast when she started discussions with Ranil instead of a dialogue with the Tamil parties including the LTTE..... After five years of empty talks and a barbaric bloody war, she has emerged from talks waving a draft constitution, sans the recognition of Tamil identity or the Tamil homeland... What the left should do today is to campaign for the recognition of the Tamil nationality in the constitution and devolution of power on that basis". Efforts to arrive at a Consensus acceptable to the Tamil parties also are on now through tripartite talks. The PA-UNP divide threatens further progress on this front. If talks break down the Tamil parties will be left holding a hot potato that falls far short of Tamil expectations. Nevertheless unlike the LTTE, the Tamil parties within the mainstream cannot simply reject and sit back. They can only keep on pursuing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow or the goal of a Political Consensus acceptable to all shades of opinion on both sides of the ethnic divide. It is a moot point however that in the absence of a PA-UNP accord the draft Constitution would be presented before the elections. The issue however is quite dicey and the next few weeks could provide an answer.

Against this backdrop it would be pertinent to probe whether Sinhala parties can only go thus far or whether other meaningful options are possible. If the Thimpu principles are non-negotiable then is any settlement possible within a united Sri Lanka is a troubling question. On the other hand what is the extent to which Tamil aspirations can be accommodated within a united entity is also another important question. The following excerpts would help shed more light on the issues.

Firstly a brief paragraph from the Indian newspaper "Deccan Herald" of July 6th. In an interview to SM Murai, LTTE political ideologue Anton Balasingham comments about the right to self-determination. "The Thimpu principles are totally misconstrued. Right to self-determination means we might choose to associate with the Sinhala government or accept federal autonomy. Sri Lanka should not see self-determination as a right to separation. It only means that the Tamil people have the right to decide their own political

destiny. Accept the principles first and let us negotiate".

Secondly a relevant paragraph from the South Asia Monitor of June 1st. This is a report published by the US think tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies. The South Asia division is headed by Teresita Schafer, former US envoy to Sri Lanka. In talking of a possible solution going beyond changes envisaged in the PA-UNP consensus the report says "The only chance would lie in a much more radical approach to power sharing. A loose confederation structure, with some kind of explicit recognition of the Tamils as a collective group within it and with stronger guarantees of their inclusion in power at the national level might be more successful. Two draft Canadian Constitutions proposed that certain legislative changes would require a "Double - majority" of both English and French - speaking Parliamentarians, an analogous provision might be useful. Obviously this type of radical departure would be intensely controversial in the Sri Lankan political mainstream. But half-measures will only prolong the Country's agony," the US report says.

In an ill-advised attempt to woo the Sinhala people the Kumaratunga regime tried to project its power sharing scheme as a recipe for peace. That an equitable settlement would pave the way for peace is true only in the long term. It is not a short term possibility. Thus the Sinhala hardliners are able to campaign against any devolution device on the grounds that it would not usher in peace immediately. The reality however is different.

What the Sinhala polity must be made to understand and appreciate is that envisaged settlements do not relate to the contemporary compulsions of war alone but go far beyond. It is a case of correcting historic wrongs done to the Tamils during post-Independence under the pretext of correcting historic wrongs done to the Sinhala people during pre-Independence times. The original sin or cause of war must be addressed and not the immediate war alone. It is also a case of realising that it is not awarding concessions to the Tamils but simply recognizing their inherent and inalienable rights.

It is myopic to talk of the once privileged position of the Tamils when the present situation is vastly different. The Tamil people are greatly discriminated against and deprived of their rightful place in this Island. A typical example

is employment in the state sector. The Tamils who prided themselves as being the cream of the public service are not even 2% of it now. What is needed therefore is a bold and imaginative solution that would help resolve the national question in conclusive terms. Post Colonial tensions within a state whose boundaries were evolved during colonial times can be best resolved through a reinvention and restructuring of the existing state.

It is in this realm that the envisaged Constitutional draft of the PA-UNP combine falls lamentably and pathetically short. What the Sinhala polity must realise is that the Tamil self-perception now is that of being a distinct nationality. Earlier these perceptions were of different hues but underwent a process of change aided greatly by acts of discrimination and oppression. The 1977 elections where the TULF obtained a sweeping victory on a separatist platform was a watershed in Tamil consciousness. The upheavals and tribulations that the Tamil people have experienced and continue to experience as a result of the ongoing war have only reinforced their feelings of alienation from the Sri Lankan state. This mindset cannot be altered by feeble attempts of political reform. The cliché "an idea can only be defeated by a superior idea" is very much true. The Tamil aspiration articulated through the 1977 elections cannot be satisfied through ineffective and feeble alternatives. There must be genuine power sharing between the Sinhala and Tamil people on the basis of true equality in any envisaged settlement.

So once again to the wisdom spouted by the Sinhala Marketing manager. Let the Sinhala people and their leaders understand the true Tamil position and extend a genuine hand of friendship and equality. Let not war weariness among Tamils be misconstrued as an indication of their willingness to accept permanent second class status. If a genuine and durable product is offered by the South the North would accept it. In the absence of such a product no amount of sophistry or gimmickry would help sell it. If it is to be imposed by force alone then resistance as in the past would be inevitable. The need of the hour is for the PA-UNP bipartisan consensus to be translated into a meaningful and far reaching power sharing formula that would treat the ethnic issue as the National Question and not a simple minority problem.

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PA-UNP Consensus Amidst Objections

From Colombo Correspondent

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga told the TULF delegation in the morning and the envoys of the European Union countries in the evening of July 10 that she is prepared to talk to the LTTE. She refrained from mentioning her earlier conditions that the LTTE should lay down arms and return to democratic fold.

"The doors are open for the LTTE. We have to talk to the LTTE to find a settlement to this problem," she first told the TULF and repeated the same in more emphatic words to the European Union ambassadors whom she had invited to explain the agreement she reached with Opposition and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

When TULF leaders reiterated ethnic problem could not be solved without LTTE's participation she said: "I am ready to talk to them. I am aware that peace cannot be restored without the involvement of the LTTE."

She told the TULF and European Union envoys that the Government-UNP consensus reached on July 6 was historic and would form the basis on which the talks would be held. But she did not mention about the UNP stand that the draft agreement should be sent to the LTTE and Maha Sanha for their reactions before it is tabled in parliament. Wickremesinghe had said that that is a must.

"The ball is now in the Government court. It must send the draft agreement to the LTTE. The LTTE should be told that the agreement is the starting point of negotiations. If the LTTE is prepared to talk on the basis of the agreement negotiating process should be commenced immediately. If they decline to talk alternate approaches for the solution of the problem should be worked out," Wickremesinghe told his party executives on July 10.

Ruling People's Alliance (PA) secretary general D. M. Jayaratne said the draft agreement would be sent to the LTTE through Norwegian facilitators and then it would be brought before parliament. Whether it would be brought to the parliament as a bill or as a White Paper would be decided after receiving LTTE's response, he said. If the LTTE declines

to enter negotiations the draft constitution drawn on the basis of the agreement would be placed before the parliament as a bill. If the LTTE agrees to enter the talks the draft constitution would be placed before parliament as a White Paper so that the people would be made aware of the basis for the negotiation.

Winning over Moderate Tamils

President Kumaratunga was able to win over the European Union diplomats easily. In fact, at the end of the meeting, French ambassador Elizabeth Dahan, speaking in her capacity as the envoy of the country which holds the current presidency of the European Union, thanked the President for her frankness and reiterated the support of the European Union and its members to the Government's effort to work out a negotiated settlement. But winning over the TULF, which asked for a separate meeting when invited for a common meeting with other Tamil Groups, was not that easy. Yet, she was successful in winning the sympathy of the TULF delegation which was led by secretary general R. Sampanthan. Senior vice president V. Anandasangari, Joseph Pararajasingham and Mavai Senathirajah were the other members. At the end of the meeting they were talking sympathetically towards her.

She touched their sympathy chord with her hour-long peroration when she recounted the role she and her husband played in seeking a solution to the ethnic problem. She gave an account of their trip to Chennai and later to Jaffna.

"My late husband and I did everything possible to find a solution to the ethnic strife," she said and accused the UNP for the present state of affairs. "Even now the UNP wants to block any solution," she added.

Then she appealed to the TULF to help her to solve the problem. The TULF delegation, though moved by her appeal, explained her difficulties.

"Madam!" began Anandasangari, "We supported your 1995 proposals. Now that it had been watered down so extensively we find it difficult to convince our supporters."

Pararajasingham detailed the three

basic matters on which they are not in a position to yield as they represented the basic aspirations of the Tamil people: federal character of the state, permanently merged north-east region and the vesting of land on the region.

President Kumaratunga said that in those three areas the government tried its utmost to satisfy the aspirations of the Tamil people. The UNP would not agree and without the concurrence of the UNP it would be impossible to enact the constitutional proposals into law.

Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris intervened: You are aware of the stiff fight we put up to make the country accept the concept of "Union of Regions". UNP blocked it. It is because of our insistence K. N. Choksy (UNP's legal wizard) came up with a compromise.

Article 1 of the government draft tabled by Prof. Peiris in parliament on 24 October 1997 reads: Sri Lanka is one, sovereign and independent Republic, being an indissoluble Union of Regions, and shall be known as the republic of Sri Lanka. The First Working Draft presented to the people on 16 January 1996 did not contain the words "one" and "indissoluble." They were added later following a storm of protest by Sinhala Buddhists who charged that Union of regions was the prelude to the establishment of the state of Eelam. Sinhala chauvinists and the UNP opposed that too and vowed to protect the unitary character of the constitution.

Choksy submitted a paper during the summit discussions last month which took into account the concerns of the majority that wanted to safeguard the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and that of the Tamils who wanted to entrench into the constitution adequate devolution. That objective should be achieved while avoiding the controversial terms like 'unitary', 'union of regions', 'indissoluble' and 'indivisible', he said on behalf of the UNP.

His formulation was: Sri Lanka is a free, sovereign and independent Republic, which shall be known as the Republic of Sri Lanka and in which the sovereign, legislative, executive and judicial powers of the People shall be exercised by the Central Government and by the Regions as hereinafter provided by the Constitution. Another article provides for the legislative power to be exercised by the Parliament, People at a Referendum and by the Regional Councils.

When Choksy read these formula-

tions President Chandrika welcomed it saying: Very good. That solves our problem. We will accept it."

Choksy's formulation avoids the controversial term unitary mentioned in Article 2 of the present 1978 Constitution (It says: The Republic of Sri Lanka shall be a Unitary State) and removes the restriction placed by Article 76 on Parliament from abdicating or delegating its legislative power to any other body.

Sampanthan pointed out to the President that Choksy's formulation still retained the unitary character of the state though it did not specifically state it. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Minister M. H. M. Ashraff countered that saying: "That is the cleverness of the formulation. By vesting legislative, executive and judicial power on the Regions it had introduced the federal character to the state."

Sinhala Urumaya, the recently founded Sinhala chauvinist organization, has made that point in its response to the Government- UNP consensus which had been hailed by moderate Sinhala and international opinion as historic. Its president S. L. Gunasekera has ridiculed UNP spokesman Tyrone Fernando who told the press that the UNP had succeeded in getting the Government to accept the retention of the unitary character of the state.

"What nonsense," he scoffed: "You have vested the Regional Councils with sovereignty."

Sanpanthan objected to the provision that vests the executive power of the Regions on the Governors while in the Central Government it would be exercised by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers. He argued that in the Regions too executive power should be exercised by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers. The President agreed to take up the matter with the UNP at the next meeting.

Interim Administration

The TULF delegation also made it clear that it could not agree to the temporary merger of the north and east. The Government- UNP consensus provide for the temporary merger for five years and the setting up of an Interim Administration for that period. A referendum would be held at the end of that period in the eastern province to provide an opportunity for the people of the eastern province to decide whether to continue to be in the merged region.

The TULF objected to the holding of the referendum. The President cleverly maneuvered out of that situation saying that was UNP's formula and advised the TULF to talk to the UNP.

The Interim Administration proposal was not discussed at the meeting but it is in the air and EPDP, PLOTE and SLMC are interested in it. According to the proposal it will comprise 71 members (36 from the north and 35 from the east) all of whom would be nominated by the President. The Governor would appoint the member whom he thinks enjoy the confidence of the council. He will also appoint two Deputy Chief Ministers, one from the Muslim community and the other from the Sinhala community. The Chief Minister will be in charge of law and order, finance, planning and external borrowing. The Muslim Deputy Chief Minister will be in charge of Muslim Affairs, Health, Social Service and Rehabilitation. The Sinhala Deputy Chief Minister will be in charge of Buddhist Affairs, Archeological sites, museums, transport, housing and urban development. Six more ministers will be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister who will allocate their functions.

TULF has decided not to participate in the Interim Administration if the LTTE is inducted into it. Anandasangari said

they did not take the proposal seriously because it is a matter that should be worked out during talks with the LTTE.

On the question of land too Choksy's suggestion prevailed. According to the Government's draft all lands will be vested in the Central Government and state lands within each region will be vested in the region. UNP opposed that provision. Now, it has been agreed that all lands will be owned by the Central Government and state land within the regions will be with the regions. The Central Government will enjoy the mandatory right to get from the regions the land it requires for its use. TULF is not happy with this change. Priority in land settlements would be to the persons living within the respective region.

Parliamentary Election

Political analysts say that the Interim Administration is another carrot dangled by President Kumaratunga to entice EPDP secretary general Douglas Devananda to be with her during the forthcoming parliamentary election. They point out that she played the same trick last November to get Devananda's backing.

They say that President Kumaratunga's hurry to place a constitutional draft in parliament next month is aimed at the election. She is anxious to announce to the people that she had kept her contract with them to bring back peace to Sri Lanka as she had laid the ground for a settlement of the ethnic conflict. She would ask the voters to give her two-third majority in parliament to enable her to enact the new constitution.

Doubts about the postponement of the parliamentary election had been dispelled. According to the present constitution the expiry of the six-year-period operate as a dissolution of parliament and the period of six-years is computed from the date of its first sitting. The present parliament was inaugurated on 24 August 1994. Election will have to be held within three months from the date of dissolution. The government is considering holding the election in September.

Presidential advisors feel that the government's chance of winning the election would be brighter if it could pass the new constitution in parliament with the help of the UNP. The UNP, naturally, is not willing to oblige President Kumaratunga.

So it had raised a constitutional hurdle. At the conclusion of their meeting

(continued on next page)

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26 June 2000 - Greetings from an embattled Jaffna. It is only over the past two to three weeks that people in Jaffna have been relaxing slightly following the events that occurred in May.

As you may be aware fighting erupted within the Jaffna peninsula for the first time since 1995 as the LTTE attempted to take control of territorial areas within the peninsula. This was not unexpected following their success in overrunning the army base at Elephant Pass the previous month but the suddenness of it still caught everyone by surprise.

I had just completed my night-shift to find that a 24 hour curfew had been declared in Jaffna town. This curfew continued for another 24 hours before being relaxed only for three hours. During this time those of us who had to return home could do so only with great difficulty as far as transport was concerned. Gradually we realised that something serious was going on. News was sketchy but we could hear the loud noises of artillery and bombing Kfir jets. We also heard the sounds of gunfire from time to time.

The fighting was mainly in the areas of Navatkuli, Kaithady, Mattuvil and Chavakachcheri where the LTTE after shelling and forcing the army to withdraw took control. However, once the army had withdrawn they in turn unleashed their artillery on those areas. From relatives and others I learned of the harrowing experiences that civilians underwent. Their survival was dependent on their

A Letter from Jaffna

ability to quickly build bunkers to take shelter in from the rain of modern artillery shells that were landing. People fled from one area to another with meagre belongings, all the while having to build bunkers. They saw many who had died or been badly maimed. Bodies unburied and unclaimed were a common sight. Some of the elderly died during their attempts to escape from the area. The exact death toll is uncertain but put in the hundreds. Some of their elderly who died were from the government 'Home for the Aged' and each side accused the other of responsibility for shelling it.

The destruction was severe in those areas. Chavakachcheri town centre (second largest in the peninsula) has been reduced to rubble. The modern market, the church belonging to the Church of South India, Driberg College have all been extensively damaged. A woman I know and an uncle of mine both recounted how they briefly returned to the town to find their houses destroyed. People fled from those surrounding areas as well as from many parts of Jaffna town. It became a sad but common sight to see families with their belongings piled up on trailers leaving the town to seek shelter elsewhere. For many, if not most, this was not their first experience having undergone similar experiences several times

before. Many people are now housed temporarily in schools. Others have been more fortunate in finding friends or relatives to stay with.

Manipay became a popular place as it is more centrally situated and also because people felt it might not be affected by the fighting. Recent surveys put the number of displaced around sixty thousand. Curfew was a daily occurrence in the areas of fighting and in Jaffna town. For three weeks the curfew was on every day in town except for 3 hours in the mornings. Most shopkeepers had removed their belongings and so the town centre and bus stand was deserted. The irony was that in other parts of the peninsula life went on as usual with temple festivals taking place and people going about their routine almost as if nothing was happening just a few miles away! Due to the curfew banks, schools, the university and the government offices within town could not function. There was no bus service within the peninsula for the first couple of weeks and none into town while the curfew continued. This situation was made worse by the fact that telephone links to Colombo had been badly affected. The only regular link with the outside world was the weekly Red Cross Ship which in addition to transporting patients and medical supplies also carries the mail. Even this was suspended for two weeks increasing the sense of isolation.

The Jaffna Teaching Hospital came virtually to a standstill in the first couple of weeks. The hospital which normally had over six hundred inpatients was down to just forty soon after the crisis began. Few medical staff were in attendance. Full credit to them, without whose services even the little that was achieved could not have been done. They had to travel by ambulance and with a curfew pass. Due to the fighting, the curfew and the lack of transport, very few patients were able to visit the hospital during the first few weeks. In any case the hospital could not have coped if more had turned up. The hospital received casualties due to blast and gun shot injuries but not as many as one would have expected in the circumstances. Attempts made by some

(Continued from page 20)

on July 6 President Kumaratunga asked Wickremesinghe whether it would be alright to pass the new constitution with two-third majority next month and hold the referendum after the election. When this matter was raised at an earlier meeting Choksy objected. He said the new constitution would lapse once the parliament is dissolved if it had not been ratified by the people at a referendum. Prof. Peiris said they had consulted the Attorney General and he had said that it could be done.

Wickremesinghe disagreed and said he had to study the matter further. That

would take time, he said.

Then he said: "I intend asking the Supreme Court for its opinion." "I have no objection to that," President Kumaratunga replied.

She realised that the UNP entered the Government-UNP talks to derive benefit out of that. She was aware of a discussion at the UNP Working Committee where some members questioned the usefulness of its leaders participating in the summit talks. Dr. Rajith Senaratne gave the reply. He said that through participation the UNP and its leader had gained in stature and was also able to get its views incorporated into the constitution. ●



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to have the ICRC declare the hospital a special safety zone was unsuccessful mainly because there is an army camp alongside from which mortars were fired from time to time. Many, it was learned, had been taken by the LTTE to the mainland and casualties had even gone to Vavuniya. It is estimated that around 6000 civilians may have crossed to the mainland from the affected areas.

The administrative set up of many institutions including government ones seems to have been paralysed or made ineffective by the situation. Except for statements made by the Roman Catholic Bishop there was no civil leadership in this crisis. In spite of the close proximity of the fighting people were dependent on radio news eg: BBC, Indian News and IBC for information. This was not always reliable as both sides tended to exaggerate their successes. It was only when people from the affected areas got out that we obtained more accurate information.

Where does this leave us? Not in a very enviable position! There does not seem to be any progress with regard to negotiations between the government and the LTTE. Some of the government's recent statements seen to be almost an invitation to the LTTE to turn down any

thought of negotiation. I hope that it will be possible for the two sides to declare a ceasefire and to progress to talks with the mediation of Norway, Britain or any other acceptable group. The perception here is that the army is on the defensive and this of course may have a bearing on the eagerness of either side for talks.

The alternative however is terrible to contemplate. The Jaffna peninsula is so densely populated that any spread of the fighting, with both sides exchanging artillery fire, will be absolutely devastating. The war seems to have acquired a new level of technical sophistication and with it even greater destructive capability. It should surely be possible with the interest that the international community is showing now for the Tamil community to have their grievances addressed. I hope that if the main points would be conceded by the government there should be no need for further confrontation. Tamil people do not want this situation to continue endlessly. It is only with a negotiated settlement that the kind of development and progress we want can be achieved.

The above is no way a complete picture of the events of May but only some of my impressions of them. The fact that curfew exists only from 6 pm to 6 am

now, and that shops in the town have reopened does not in any way mean that normalcy has returned. With thousands still displaced, schools in town not back to normal and with the daily noises of artillery firing still present, it cannot be. For many who have lost loved ones or who have been maimed or have lost their homes and belongings, life cannot ever be the same again.

I heard that in many countries of the west, members of our community celebrated the fall of the Elephant Pass Camp and may be even other subsequent events. I hope that the internet which provides them with much of the information also carried reports of the harrowing sufferings of ordinary civilians and of the fear in which they continue to live. Unfortunately there is always another side to the coin. I for one certainly hope and pray that we do not see any renewal and intensification of the fighting here. I have seen enough casualties and am not particularly keen on seeing more.

I hope that the present situation offers a window of opportunity for the sides concerned to talk. Tamils have learned to be cynical about the political process but nonetheless yet another attempt should be made to try and avoid the tragedy that will otherwise surely follow. ●

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'There have been no race riots in Sri Lanka since independence', wrote Sivanandan in 1984. 'What there has been is a series of increasingly virulent pogroms against the Tamil people by the Sinhala state, resulting in the degeneracy of Sinhala society and its rapid descent into barbarism.'¹ In fact, this descent into barbarism was only just beginning at the time that Sivanandan's article appeared in *Race & Class*. As the Tamil resistance fought back against the actions of the Sinhalese state, the conflict grew into a full-fledged civil war, reaching its peak in the late 1980's and early 1990's. It is estimated that 50-100,000 people, most of them Tamil, have died in the civil war since 1983. Hundreds of thousands more have been forced to flee their homes, becoming refugees in their own country or joining the growing Tamil diaspora around the world.² Sumantra Bose tells us that a 1992 Sri Lankan government report revealed that an estimated 487,000 children in the north-east had been "affected" by the conflict.³

From July 1987 to March 1990, the regional superpower, India, committed some 102,000 troops in an attempt, first, to broker an agreement between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE (the Tamil 'Tigers') and, subsequently, to crush the guerrilla movement altogether. Needless to say, the misnamed Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) achieved neither of its objectives, experiencing instead a humiliating defeat at the hands of the guerrillas. Since the withdrawal of Indian troops from 'their Vietnam', the Sri Lankan military has escalated its savage campaign against the Tamils, committing tens of thousands of troops in its effort to 'go ahead and finish off the terrorists in the battlefield', in the words of deputy foreign minister Lakshman Kiriella.

The Tamil militants, organised into various groups such as LTTE, PLOTE, EROS, TELO, EPRLF and ENDLF,⁴ have fought as much amongst themselves as against the Sinhalese military, with the LTTE dominating the Tamil nationalist movement. Sumantra Bose points out that 'only the EROS has survived the Tigers' deliberate and sinister policy of get-

Communalism, Socialism and Liberation in When Memory Dies

Nagesh Rao

This review (by Nagesh Rao, a Ph.D student in the Department of English at Brown University) of Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies* (London, Arcadia Books, 1997) is reproduced from *A World to Win* (Race & Class, July-December 1999, Vol. 41 No 12, Institute of Race Relations, ISBN 085001 0578) edited by Colin Prescod and Hazel Waters, which is a compendium of Essays in Honour of Sivanandan to mark his 75th birthday. *A World to Win* focuses on the work of Sivanandan, one of the most seminal thinkers on Marxism, imperialism and racism, a key figure in the black movement, a trenchant critic of the Left and an award winning novelist.

Contributors to *A World to Win* include Prof. Aijaz Ahmad, columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, journalist Melissa Benn, Prof. Jane Carew, playwright David Egger, Commission for Racial Equality Chair Sir Herman Ouseley, educationist Chris Searle and Bishop Wilfred Wood.

Ambalavaner Sivanandan was born in Sri Lanka and came to Britain in 1958. Having initially joined the Institute of Race Relations as a librarian in 1964, he has been Director of the Institute which he helped to transform from an organisation divorced from the experience and needs of Britain's black community into a vital think-tank accessible to all those committed to combatting racism. Siva, as he is popularly and affectionately addressed, is the editor of *Race & Class*, but is best known for his own writings which include *A Different Hunger* (1982), *Communities of Resistance* (1990), and *When Memory Dies* (1997), a novel based on the recent historical and political developments in his native Sri Lanka which has been ravaged by a raging ethnic conflict for the last several decades. *When Memory Dies* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia region) and the Sagittarius Prize in 1998.

ting rid of all potential and actual competitors for Tamil popular support. The most celebrated of the Tamil 'inter-group' clashes was in May 1986, when the Tigers virtually wiped out TELO's political leadership and fighting cadre.⁵ In fact, as early as 1985, 'Tamil rebels for the first time attacked and killed Sinhalese civilians', and, as Stanley Tambiah argues, 'they lost their "moral advantage" in the contest by imitating the indiscriminate violence of their enemy.'⁶ Since then, the LTTE has continued its courageous resistance to the state-sponsored pogroms, but has progressively alienated itself from the vast majority of ordinary Tamils.

Looking back on the past from the perspective of the present, today's 'ethnic conflicts' whether one is referring to the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda, India or Sri Lanka are often seen as the result of centuries-old hatreds and hostilities. Indeed, such a view finds its most vocal proponents in the leaders of various groups involved in these conflicts. Ethno-religious

nationalisms invariably project the 'nation' back into the past, and the nationalisms of the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka are no exception.⁷ However, nationalism, communalism and fascism are all eminently modern phenomena and need to be dealt with as such. When, how, and why did these particular forms of mass politics emerge? What were the historical, social and cultural conditions that led to their rise? What role was played in this process by different classes and social formations? And can we envision a future that is a viable alternative to what seems like an intractable present?

History from Below

Winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Eurasia region) for a first novel, *When Memory Dies* is a monumental work, breathtaking in its scope and ambition. What makes it a novel of epic proportions is both its historical sweep (in this it is reminiscent of the novels of the Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer⁸) and its analytical depth. Its chief accomplishment is the manner in which it lays bare the proc-

esses of history - history as process - while at the same time grappling with the intimate experiences of those involved in making history.

S W Perera has pointed out that *When Memory Dies* 'presents subaltern perspectives, foregrounds subaltern solutions to the problems besetting the island'.⁹ This subaltern perspective is reinforced in the novel by the manner of its narration. Events of national and historical import are presented in terms of their significance and impact at street level and, even here, the novel focuses our attention on the psychology and activity of individual players. Strikes begin and end in the space of a few paragraphs; key characters are murdered in incidents that take up a couple of pages, but the cumulative impact of these numerous, historically untold, unrecorded incidents is an intimate picture of the steady and inexorable ethnicisation of Sri Lankan culture and politics. In other words, "When Memory Dies" presents us with a fictionalised 'history from below': probing the depths of memory and history, it shatters the myth of the inevitability of the present and revisits the past to reveal the complex of human actions that went into making the present. In doing so, the novel not only points to what might have been but leaves us with a hope for what could still be, despite Sri Lankan society's slide towards communalism and fascism.¹⁰

In its recuperation of the historical-realist narrative, in its profound humanism and in its insistence on the recoverability of history, *When Memory Dies* is a crucial intervention into the field of postcolonial writing in English. It resists 'post-modern cop-outs', as the quote from John Berger says on the back cover, and forces us to take stock of a seemingly hopeless political situation. Despite its vivid depiction of the horrors of racism and state terror, and of the inexcusable betrayals of the Left, it holds out a hope for socialism at a time when much of academia has all but given up the project of socialism as utopian. Its artistic integrity lies in the fact that it does this not by proposing simple 'solutions', but through an unstinting affirmation of a revolutionary, democratic vision. The novel takes us through three generations of a Sri Lankan family, roughly from the turn of the century to the present. Book One deals with the period from the early 1920's to the eve of independence. Book Two spans roughly the decade following independence, while Book Three brings the narrative up to the early 1980's. The three sections show a remarkable symmetry in theme, structure and character development. In each of them, a relatively naive male protagonist - Sahadevan in Book One, Rajan in Book Two and Vijay in Book Three comes to political consciousness through his interactions with numerous others. The interplay of characters with different political backgrounds allows us to develop a critical understanding of their politics, and in each section of the novel, one or two characters (S W Lal and Lali, Uncle Para and Padma) are clearly marked out as the educators of the protagonist. Each section is carefully structured, slowly building up to a climax and ending in a tragic death; a death, moreover, which is fundamental in transforming the consciousness of the players in the scene.

Against the backdrop of these structural symmetries, the novel takes on a breathtakingly diverse set of political and ideological questions and shows a remarkable sensitivity to the workings of various political tendencies, from SW's syndi-

calism to Goonesinha's Labour Party politics; from the virulent Sinhalese nationalism of the SLFP to the capitulation to communal politics of the Trotskyite LSSP; from the politics of the PLF insurrection to the 'socialism' advocated by 'the Boys'.¹¹ Throughout the novel, the emphasis is less on the official programmatic rhetoric of these tendencies than on their concrete manifestations in popular consciousness and behaviour. The common thread that binds together Sivanandan's critique of these tendencies is a revolutionary socialist vision that animates the politics of "When Memory Dies"; a vision best expressed by Vijay.

The answer was quite simply that the people themselves should take power... ordinary people, and in Sri Lanka that meant ~workers, peasants, fisherfolk, market women, artisans. But for them to wait to do that, each of them, each of these groups had to be shown how the new society could improve their own lives while improving the lives of others. (271).¹²

Colonialism and Anti-colonial Resistance: Origins of Communalism

The growth of communalism and racism in Sri Lanka and the ethnicisation of the state and polity in later years cannot be explained without an understanding of the impact of colonial rule. Perhaps the most evocative and lyrical sections of *When Memory Dies* are to be found precisely in its descriptions of the impact of colonialism and modernisation on the Sri Lankan countryside. Sivanandan succeeds in giving us a sense of the upheaval this caused without, however, romanticising the pre-colonial past. Sahadevan's father, Pandyan, is a peasant who is coming to terms with this transition:

Respect and security... As a young man he had rejected them both. He had fought and accepted and revelled in the recurring drought and the untimely rain. He had wept when the crops failed him and rejoiced when they broke through the barren land against all the dictates of heaven. And he had celebrated his own strength at having brought them through against the will of the gods before whom only a moment before he had lain an abject supplicant. Up one moment, down the next, an endless love affair with the land and sky, without a progression or an end, and yet moving in a spiral upwards through a revolution of time.

Now the land had been taken from him. His rhythm was broken. Time had become one-dimensional, unilinear. He was at outs with the world.(11)

Yet, the process of modernisation and urbanisation was never 'complete'. In the colonial context, it developed according to the needs of colonial capital and not of the native population. 'The type of capitalism that developed in Sri Lanka under the British', writes Sivanandan elsewhere, had a differential impact on the different social formations and made capitalism's uneven development more uneven still. And what it could not cohere through organic capitalist development, it unified through administrative diktat.¹³ This uneven and contradictory process is most clearly seen in the introduction of railways and roads that connected distant parts of the country to one another. Early in the novel, S tries to explain this to a naive Sahadevan: 'Once we were the granary of the East, now all we have to eat is tea, and rubber.' He continues:

I am not saying that everything [the British] did is

bad. But we must ask ourselves why they did it, we cannot just believe what they say. They say they are bringing civilisation to us, with railways and roads, when what they are really doing is transporting the wealth out of the country. I am not saying that railways are a bad thing; after all, I am a railwayman myself, but we would have come to it in our own time, at our own speed. (38)

Crucially, S W does not deny the importance of modernisation and industry; rather, he points to the fact that this development only served to more efficiently exploit the island's resources for the benefit of the colonisers.

The British withdrew from Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) in 1948 and left behind a system of government that had already been marked by the incipient communalism that would, within a decade, transform this South Asian island country into a cauldron of ethnic strife. The communal lines had been drawn by the colonial authorities in their attempt to foster linguistic and 'racial' divisions amongst the subject population. From communal representation on the Legislative Council to the classification and categorisation of various sections of the native population into different 'races', colonial policies reified and institutionalised particular cultural, linguistic and customary differences.¹⁴ At the same time, colonialism brought the entire island under one centralised government for the first time in its history. As Sivanandan put it, the colonial government 'divided in order to rule what it integrated in order to exploit'.¹⁵

The backdrop to Book One is the resistance to colonial rule that was forged in the course of various working-class struggles, as well as the weaknesses of that resistance. Elsewhere, Sivanandan has pointed out that colonial capitalism in Sri Lanka produced neither a confident bourgeoisie nor a proletariat schooled in the strategies of class struggle.¹⁶ Neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class, then, was able to build a mass-based, secular, national liberation movement, unlike in India, where this task had been undertaken by the Indian National Congress. As Rajan comments in Book Two of the novel,

the struggle for freedom was associated with Gandhi and Nehru and the Indian National Congress. Our leaders stood on the sidelines awaiting the outcome, offering up prayers and petitions to Her Majesty's Government the while. The Ceylon National Congress had sold out, my father said, all they were interested in was to hold on to their lands and privileges. They did not care about ordinary people, and the people in turn did not have a say in their country's independence: it was all being done somewhere above their heads. (146)

But the novel is sensitive, nevertheless, to various forms of resistance to colonialism that did occur. S W recounts, for example, the theological debates that took place between Buddhist monks and the Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. In the first section of *When Memory Dies*, however, Sivanandan's emphasis is on the unity and solidarity - amongst the lower classes and across 'ethnic' and linguistic boundaries - that existed despite the divisive policies of colonial rule. Sahadevan, a Tamil, is befriended by the Sinhalese Tissa and subsequently adopted by the Wijepalas.

The bonds that develop between Saha and Tissa and between Saha and his foster-parents are perhaps the most convincing ones in the novel. In part, this is due to the attention that Sivanandan pays to the differences in food, custom, language and dress that mark the two communities. Tissa's love-affair with Soonoo, a Muslim, and his taking her brother Sultan under his wing, point to the easy intermingling that was possible before religion and language became politicised.

We are presented here with essentially two models of emancipatory politics. On the one hand, there is the union militancy and syndicalism of S W, while, on the other, there is the Labourite gradualism represented by A F Goonesinha. Where Saha, the central character of this section of the novel, grows close to S W and comes to understand his politics and principles. Tissa grows steadily closer to Goonesinha (the 'Chief' as Tissa calls him). S W is the more organic of the two leaders: a rank-and-file rail worker himself, he has led strikes in the past and sees workers' self-activity as the path to liberation. Indeed, it is his experience as a union militant that has led him to this conclusion. Reminiscing about a striker who had been jailed, he says:

'What was important was that by standing up to an unjust law. He taught others to stand up too. Just that one act is enough to remember him by. So many other acts flowed from that, so many strikes from that printers' strike laundrymen, builders, cycle workers, carters. People were becoming more confident in their own power to change things. And they saw that when they stood together, they had nothing to fear. (55)

S W constantly draws attention to this self-activity of the exploited, reminding Saha of their unremembered histories: 'There were rebellions [against the British] going on all the time... But your school history books wouldn't tell you that, would they? After all, they are written by the English. Soon no one will know the true story of our country'. And again, he argues that the real heroes were the strike leaders 'and the people, the ordinary people, who suffered a lot of hardship in helping the strikers. It is their sacrifices that made things better for the rest of us.' (56)

Tissa's mentor, A E Goonesinha, the self-styled leader of the Ceylon Labour Union, is initially given to militant speeches that impress even S W - indeed, he calls for and leads a general strike but soon gets taken in by the politics of the British Labour Party. The move towards parliamentarism is rightly seen as opportunistic by the more politically conscious characters. On hearing that Goonesinha had accepted an invitation by the Labour Party to attend the Commonwealth Labour Party Conference, Para remarks, 'If that isn't riding two horses - in opposite directions - I don't know what is.' (84) Tissa, enamoured of Goonesinha's 'pragmatism' (Tissa's term), adopts a mechanical, stageist approach to liberation: 'It's all a part of the strategy', he tells Saha,

'First we get the workers into unions, like our Labour Union; then we get the unions into a federation, like the TUC; then we get the vote, and then, and then' - Tissa leant forward on his chair counting out the stages on his fingers - 'they vote for their party, the Labour Party; and then the Party has the power to help them'. (105)

We clearly see here Tissa and Goonesinha's slavish adherence to the practices of the British Labour Party. S W is thus harshly critical of Goonesinha: 'I don't know whether I trust him or not... All I know is that he is not a worker. And he is trying to organise the workers. From the outside in.' (56) Lal echoes these words later in the novel when, ashamed of the Marxist LSSP¹⁷ to which he once belonged, he writes in a letter to Rajan: 'unless we throw up our own leaders, not borrow them from the upper classes, we will never have a revolutionary party.' (230) At the same time, however, S W's abstention from politics is not quite convincing as an alternative either. He takes a stand against the general strike called by Goonesinha on the grounds that 'the workers were not ready for it', and this alienates him from his potential allies. One might even argue that his abstention from political struggle (despite his principled commitment to economic struggles) is precisely what leaves the door open for Goonesinha's opportunism. By the end of the novel, not only is S W forgotten, but there is little that remains of his political legacy. At the end of Book One, Tissa's illusions in Goonesinha's leadership and strategy are shattered. Goonesinha is beaten up by the police and when workers stage a demonstration to protest the attack, the police open fire, killing Sultan. Tissa looks up to see 'his Chief standing on the top step above him, beside a white man in a white suit' and comes to understand the price to be paid for the compromises that Goonesinha has made. The somewhat melodramatic tragedy of Sultan's death, and Tissa's and Saha's grief over it, further reinforce the potential for inter-ethnic unity that existed before independence.

Failure of the Left and the Rise of Communalism

Book Two of *When Memory Dies* shows the development of communal consciousness not only among the elites but among the petty-bourgeois and lower classes as well. Rajan, the narrator of the novel, is the principal character of this section. Politically naive, He comes into contact with Lal, an S W-type figure who is a member of the LSSP. We come to know of the mistakes made by the Ceylonese Left through Lal rather than Rajan. Rajan thus serves as a foil to Lal's and Lali's political commitment.

In 1956, the LSSP and the Communist Party (CP), both of which had dominated the Tamil vote a decade earlier begin to retreat in the face of the growth of S W R D. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), a virulently anti-Tamil party. Lal recognises the right-wing populism of the SLFP when, in an argument with his friend Dr Fonseka, he says: 'You know your trouble, don't you? You are confusing race and class, like your whole bloody party, so that you can keep your class while shouting race.' (202) With the SLFP promising to impose Sinhala-only legislation, the LSSP, competing in the electoral arena and giving up all pretence of being a revolutionary party, jumped onto the bandwagon of communalism. Lal ascribes this to the LSSP's move towards parliamentarism. 'Once we start playing parliamentary games we are finished he tells Rajan. 'Tactics become goals. Elections, from being a vehicle for politicising the masses so that they can take power, (185) become a way of manipulating them so that the leaders can take power.' Although the Left now denounced the imposition of Sinhala-only, its 'critical

support' of the SLFP had lost it its credibility. The correct course for the Left would have been to fight against the racism of the SLFP and its proto-fascist supporters on the basis of class solidarity across religious and linguistic lines, and to remain an independent revolutionary force. Its capitulation to communalism, however, signalled the death of my genuine alternative to the incipient fascism that would result in massive anti-Tamil pogroms in the coming years.

The struggle - or the absence of it over Sinhala-only legislation reveals the process by which actions taken by the state dialectically relate to the ethnicisation of popular consciousness. As Lal points out to a sceptical Rajan, in the combination of language and religion. 'Banda [Bandaranaike] has found the perfect formula for a ready-made majority'. (204) Soon after this conversation takes place, we are taken on to the streets to witness the first few anti-Tamil actions. Even at this stage however, the novel draws attention to the contradictions that continue to exist, despite the hegemony that communal politics has gained at the top of society. Rajan encounters a Sinhalese who addresses him in Tamil, and leaves him with 'Don't give up hope, *thambi* [brother], the fight is just beginning'. (205)

While Lal despairs of his party's capitulation to communalism, it is his sister, Lali, who gains an intimate understanding of the realities of life among the Tamil population. Thus Lal, increasingly cut off from the people, thinks that 'this Sinhala-Tamil business' will 'blow over'. Lali, on the other hand, understands Uncle Para's argument that their society is heading towards 'communal war'. (221) It is people like Uncle Para that she sees as the hope for the future: 'They were the real backbone of the country. They were the real custodians of our history and our culture, and they were everywhere. There was hope for the country yet.' (217) Later in the novel, we find the grounds for such optimism gradually withering away, as older characters like Para have fewer and fewer links with a younger generation of activists and progressively function more as critics and commentators than as actors on the stage of history.

Notwithstanding Lali's optimism, then, *When Memory Dies* presents us with no miracle solutions, and the harsh reality of the anti-Tamil pogroms of 1956 and 1958 comes home to the reader at the end of Book Two, when Lali is gang-raped and murdered by a group of Sinhalese men. This is the most poignant moment in the book and highlights the horrors as well as the fallacies of Sinhalese nationalism. When confronted with the thugs, Rajan is initially able to fool them into thinking that he is either Sinhalese or Muslim. Their inability to categorise him accurately points again to the fluidity of identity in a multiethnic society, and the only way for them to be sure is to challenge him to recite a Buddhist *gatha*. His Tamil name is, of course, the final giveaway. The violence of the thugs, which is at first directed against Rajan, in a bitter twist of irony turns upon his Sinhalese wife, Lali, who is raped and mutilated.

This horrific conclusion to Book Two leaves us with little hope for the future. But we are also left with a feeling that things could have been different. The betrayals of the Left come in for severe criticism in the novel; further, it is against the backdrop of these betrayals that Book Three depicts the rise of mass anti-Tamil hysteria, on the one hand, and mili-

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tant Tamil nationalism, on the other.

Tamil Response: From Liberation to Terror

Vijay is presented here as a last hope for a united Sinhala-Tamil struggle for socialism and liberation. Early in his life, he comes under the influence of Padma, a member of the clandestine People's Liberation Front (PLF).¹⁸ Although Sivanandan curiously does not spend much time in the novel on the politics of the PLF or of the failed insurrection led by it in 1971, its impact on Vijay's political development is delineated quite carefully.¹⁹ It certainly radicalises his understanding of Sri Lankan politics. Of the political parties, 'One lot feeds us on American flour', Padma tells him, 'the other lot on patriotism. And the socialists feed us every five years with revolution to get elected. And now... the patriots and the socialists are getting together to feed us patriotic socialism.' Moreover, the intellectuals and academics who had supported or participated in the insurrection are now a demoralised lot, completely cut off from popular struggle. Vijay's visit to the University of Peradeniya serves as an occasion for Sivanandan to provide a blistering critique of armchair radicalism.

Vijay's search for alternatives leads him to an organisation called Rights and Justice which recognises that the growing polarisation in Sri Lankan society requires new strategies of organising. They decide to send Vijay to meet with 'the Boys', the new Tamil guerrillas in the north. Just as the PLF had been an organisation with a degree of popular support ('The group's name was on everybody's lips, and people marvelled that it should be their children who were taking up the fight', so also 'the Boys' at first inspired the people around them. The rise of the Tamil New Tigers (who would later become the LTTE) in the 1970's was a response to the savage attacks against the Tamils that were being carried out by the Sinhalese state and fascist goon squads on the ground. It followed, then, that these rebels were at first welcomed by the Tamil community:

Yes, Para had been proud of them, then, proud of the way they had brought back legend to a people starved of heroes and fed on fear, and prouder still of the practical way they had gone about relieving people's hardships with food redistribution centres and medical supplies and nurseries. (394)

Progressively, however, the politics of the guerrilla groups began to unravel. *When Memory Dies* is thus clearly sympathetic to the Tamil cause, and has a definitely partisan tone, but it is not blind to the errors of 'the Boys' either. Whereas in Book Two, the potential for working-class unity is squandered and in fact sabotaged - by the Marxist Left, in Book Three, it is Tamil nationalism that comes in for criticism.

Although the events of this section of the novel unfold against the backdrop of increasing anti-Tamil violence perpetrated by both the Sinhalese state and fascist goon squads, Sinhalese activists like Vijay, Dhanapala, Sarath and Damayanthi are shown in a favourable light as they attempt to build the bridges that would be necessary for united working-class resistance. At first 'the Boys' are receptive. But the increasingly vicious anti-Tamil pogroms, culminating in the burning of the Jaffna library in 1981, make such bridge building increasingly dif-

ficult. The militarism of 'the Boys' gets sharpened in the wake of the pogroms and with the militarism comes factionalism and, in its wake, terrorism. As Sarath, a member of the group Vijay is working with, says the Tamil youth militants:

are not fighting out of theory, but of necessity... They have nothing and they have grown up having nothing, a whole generation of them. And they see even the little they have to make something of their lives with, like education, being taken away from them... That is when they pick up the gun. (305)

Uncle Para, too, turns away from 'the Boys', for:

they had begun to fight each other over who could serve the people better, which faction, which dogma, till the people mattered no more... and the army came back... and the war had to be fought all over again... only this time there were no people in it, only armies and warlords and fiefs and kingdoms... and the redistribution centres became places of ransom, medicines ceased to arrive and the nurseries grew into nurseries of war. (394)

Para's death, and then Vijay's, magnify the tragedy of the novel. The memories of working-class unity have by now been all but erased. A conversation between Para and Vijay gets to the heart of the matter: 'When memory dies, a people die', says Uncle Para. 'What if we make up false memories?' asks Vijay, to which Para replies, 'That is worse, that is murder.' (335) The inexorable process of ethnicisation that had begun a few decades ago now seems to have a life of its own:

Language, race and religion were becoming so intricately woven into each other that in touching one you set off the others. Each in its own right, it was true, connected man to himself, to his fellows and to the hereafter, but in symbiosis they locked him up again in a righteousness of the self and the arrogance of nation, and collapsed the hereafter into the now. And it was from such closed circuits of passion that fascism drew its power. The Tamils were merely the first to be caught up in its forcefield. Their turn would come. (311)

Thus, while Sivanandan clearly sympathises with the Tamil cause, he is also harshly critical of their aims and methods, and recognises that, being caught up in this 'forcefield,' a liberation movement could easily succumb to the same indiscriminate violence that it is fighting against.

In particular, he draws attention to the top-down vision of 'socialism' that the Tamil guerrilla fighters advocate. Yogi is a member of the militant (and ironically named) Liberation Fighters for Eelam (LIFE), which clearly stands in for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), cyanide capsules and all. In an exchange between Yogi and Vijay, the latter asks, 'Do you think you can take power on behalf of the people and then hand it over to them?' He goes on to explain: It never happens like that, you know, Yogi. That way socialism never comes. Those who take power don't give it'. When Yogi claims that socialism will bloody well have to wait... till after the liberation', Vijay responds, 'That way liberation never comes, and you know it. Socialism is the path to liberation, not just its end.' (406) Vijay's argument gets to the heart of Sivanandan's critique of the LTTE. Its proclaimed goal is socialism but its top-down strategy and terrorist tac-

tics are at odds with this goal. Back in 1984, Sivanandan had argued in the pages of this journal that whatever the goal [of the Tamil fighters] in view, their immediate and inevitable task is to continue their unrelenting war against the fascist state.²⁰ In *When Memory Dies*, however, he seems to have developed a sharper critique of their politics while remaining sympathetic to their cause. Thus, in contrast to the heavy-handed and exclusivist militarism of the guerrillas, the arguments of Lal and Lali, Para and Vijay, allow a vision of 'socialism from below' to run like a refrain through the novel. But the realisation of this vision is contingent upon the unity and solidarity across ethnic and linguistic lines that, not so long ago, did in fact exist.

S W Perera, in a review of the novel, has drawn attention to the fact that two principal characters, Para and Vijay, are portrayed as bastards:

Para, Saha's half-brother, is the product of Pandyan and the midwife, and Saha's 'son' [Vijay] is not his own but Lali's child by Sena... Such a strategy allows the author to challenge the notion of a pure race and to focus on the intersections among races rather than the binary opposition favoured by those who wish to maintain differences between them; in other words, Sivanandan... gives hybridity a positive value.²¹

It is significant, then, that in Book Three we witness the deaths of both these characters. While Para's is a natural death (and

perhaps symbolises the passing away of an older, secular cultural ethos), 'Vijay is shot and killed by his cousin, Ravi, the self-styled Commander of LIFE. Yogi's taking over from Ravi in the wake of the killing comes as little comfort for the readers or for Meena, who tells Ravi, 'You have killed the only decent thing left in this land... We'll never be whole again.' (411) This is indeed a bleak ending for a novel of resistance. A novel that so honestly confronts the realities of fascism and the egregious errors of those who could have prevented its rise, might well have succumbed to a sense of helplessness in the face of the larger processes of history. The supreme achievement of *When Memory Dies*, however, lies in its effective resurrection of the memory of past struggles and of a pre-communist history. Thus, in all its tragedy, it reminds us of Marx's famous passage from the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.²²

If it was human agency, then, that so critically failed to present an alternative to the barbarism of the present, revisiting the past to unearth the errors and failures is a necessary first step towards reconstructing a truly liberatory socialist politics for the future. In this project of representing history, *When Memory Dies* plays an indispensable role.

References:

¹ A Sivanandan, 'Sri Lanka: racism and the politics of underdevelopment', *Race and Class* (Vol 26 no. 1, 1984) p.1.

² S J Tambiah, 'Ethnic fratricide in Sri Lanka: an update', in Remo Guidieri et al, eds., *Ethnicities and Nations* (Houston 1988), p.297.

³ Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty* (New Delhi, 1994), p.86.

⁴ These are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, Eelam's People's Revolutionary Liberation Front and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front respectively.

⁵ Sumantra Bose, op.cit., p.88 n.8.

⁶ S J Tambiah, op.cit., p.296.

⁷ See Elizabeth Nissan and R L Stirrat, 'The generation of communal identities' in Jonathan Spencer, ed., *Sri Lanka: history and the roots of conflict* (London and New York, 1990), p.26.

⁸ Tim Brennan makes the same comparison in his review of the novel in *The Nation* (1 June 1998).

⁹ S W Perera, 'Attempting the Sri Lankan novel of resistance and reconciliation: A Sivanandan's "When Memory Dies"', *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* (Vol.23. nos. 1-2, 1997).

¹⁰ 'Communalism' itself is a much debated term. Sivanandan points out, for instance, that the term does not allow for an adequately historical understanding of the kinds of anti-Tamil pogroms that are carried out by the Sri Lankan state (op. cit., p. 26). It would be desirable to provide a critique of the usage of this term, but this is beyond my scope here. I therefore use the term 'communalism' throughout this paper with imaginary quotation marks.

¹¹ Respectively, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Lanka Sama Samaj Party and People's Liberation Front. ie, Janatha Vimukti Peramuna or JVP.

¹² To avoid excessive endnotes, all page references to "When Memory Dies" are given in parentheses within the main text. References

are to the Arcadia Books edition (London, 1997).

¹³ A Sivanandan, op.cit., p.2.

¹⁴ See Elizabeth Nissan and R L Stirrat, op.cit., pp.26-30.

¹⁵ A Sivanandan, op.cit., p.2.

¹⁶ A Sivanandan, op.cit., p.2.

¹⁷ The Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaj Party, which in 1956 shamelessly joined with Bandaranaike's Sinhala nationalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) on the grounds that, as Sivanandan puts it, 'if the SLFP was not quite socialist, the UNP was certainly capitalist'! (op.cit., p.12). This misidentification of the SLFP's right wing populism as some sort of left-of-centre anti-capitalism seems quite common in the literature on Sri Lankan politics to this day. See, for instance, R Hoole et al. *The Broken Palmyra* (California, 1990), p.27 where the authors list the SLFP as one of the 'parties of the Left' that the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) had discussions with.

¹⁸ The Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP).

¹⁹ Perhaps this has to do with the complicated politics of the JVP. An account of the insurrection can be found in Fred Halliday, 'The Ceylonese Insurrection', *New Left Review* (No. 59, September-October 1971). Sivanandan rightly calls this account 'acute, but in hindsight optimistic'. Sumantra Bose argues, for instance, that the JVP's "ideology" consisted primarily of an exceptionally virulent and xenophobic Sinhalese chauvinism, which its leaders combined with a totally garbled and incoherent "Marxism" into a particularly sour cocktail (op.cit. p.6, n.14). And yet it is clear that the 1971 insurrection did in fact tap into the anger of tens of thousands of unemployed and disillusioned youth both Sinhala and Tamil. In "When Memory Dies" we see the newly politicised Tamil guerrillas trying to learn from Vijay's experiences in the JVP insurrection.

²⁰ A Sivanandan, op.cit.p.36.

²¹ S W Perera, op.cit.p.19.

²² Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York, 1966), p.15.

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WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Sritharan son of Mrs. V. Ariyaratnam of 30/36, C 3/1, Charles Apt, De Silva Cross Road, Kalubowila, Sri Lanka and late Mr. Ariyaratnam and Seimani daughter of Mrs. E. Thirugnanasampandar of 9A Charlemont Road, Wellawatte, Colombo 6 and late Mr. Thirugnanasampandar on 17.6.2000 at Orchard Building Wedding Hall, Wellawatte, Colombo 6.

Sharmini daughter of Mr. E.K.

& Mrs. Ragini Rajagopal of 39 Moffat Road, Tooting, London SW17 7EZ and Thevathas son of Mr. & Mrs. S.Rajaratnam of 56 Copeland House, 760 Garratt Lane, London SW17 0NG on 2.7.2000 at Richard Challoner School Hall, New Malden, Surrey.

Dhakshini daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Sundaralingam of 97 Hamilton Road, Golders Green, London NW11 9EE and Viren son of Mr. & Mrs. Natubhai Patel of 157 Hillcross Avenue, Morden, Surrey SM4 4AZ on 15th July 2000 at The Decorium, Woodgreen, London N22.

Shankar son of Mrs. N. Maheswaran of 109 Fussell's Lane, Wellawatte, Colombo 6 and the late Mr. Maheswaran and Pathumini daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kanthapillai of 49 Haverford Way, Edgware, Middx. HA8 6DJ on 12th July 2000 at Eastman's Hall, Harrow View, Harrow, Middx.

OBITUARIES



**Mrs. Annammah Thillaiampalam, beloved wife of the late Mr. S. Thillaiampalam; daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. Sabapathy; loving mother of the late Mrs. Rohini Wijeyadevendram, Pavani Manickasingham, Sivaramalingam, late Mrs. Manonmani Vyra-
vanadan, Kanthimathy Balasingham, Srikanthan, Sripathy, Sritharan, Senthimany Channugam and Sriganathan (all of Boston); mother-in-law of late Mr. C.D. Wijeyadeven-**

**dram, late Mr. E. Manickasingham, Sakunthala, late Mr. P. Vyra-
vanadan, late Mr. Balasingham, Ranjit, Sudha, Meena and Channugam; grandmother of Suren (UK), Subathra (Boston), Dr. Ravindran (New Jersey), Vasundara, Harichandran, Yasodara (all of California), Tilly, Archunan, (both of UK), Muruges, Kaushalya, Indra (all of Boston), Janahan (California), Haran, Shivanthy, Menaka, Deepa, Viji, Muhunthan, and Mythili (all of Boston) passed away on 25th April 2000, in Somerville, Massachusetts, USA.**

The members of her family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them during the period of bereavement. - T. Sripathy, 31 Albamont Road, Winchester, MA 01890, USA. Tel: 781 729 0968.

Appreciation on page 32.



Saravanamuthu Appathurai, J.P., Retired Teacher, Arundaya College, Alaveddy, Jaffna; beloved husband of the late Mrs. Kanageswari Appathurai; loving father of Ganeshamoorthy (Periathamby) (Sri Lanka) and Suntharamoorthy (Baby) (UK); grandfather of Dinesh, Kokularaj (both of Sri Lanka), Kesavan, Divakari, Kokulan, Suthakar (all of UK); father-in-law of Irasamalar and Sarathdevi son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Saravanamuthu of Alaveddy; son-in-law of the late Mr. & Mrs. Sinnadurai of Kanderodai; brother of the late Messers Thuraiappah, Ponudurai and Iyadurai; brother-in-law of Kandiah (UK), Rajadurai, Kanagarajah (both of Canada), Mrs. Parameswari Pathmanathan (Australia) and Mrs. Logeswari Kunarasa (Sri Lanka) passed away in

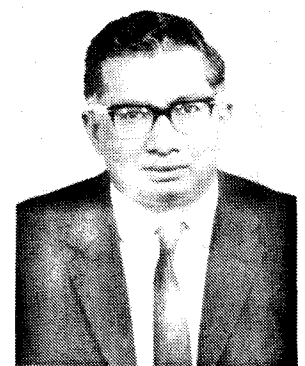
Alaveddy, Sri Lanka on 4th July 2000 and was cremated on 5th July. - A. Suntharamoorthy, 95 Holyroad Avenue, South Harrow, Middx HA2 8UD. Tel: 020 8423 1628.



Mr. Arunasalam Navaratnam Jeyatheva, (Retired Financial Accountant, Sydney Transport) son of late Mr. A. Navaratnam of Shaw Road, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and late Mrs. Sivapakiam Navaratnam; beloved husband of Sarojini Devi; loving father of Shyamala Balakrishnan and Revathy Rajasingham; brother of Anandavalli Shanmugaraja, (Yellow Knife, Canada), Sugunatheva (UK) and Vimalatheva (Colombo) passed away on Thursday morning, 13th July 2000 after a long illness. The funeral took place on 15th July in Sydney.

The members of the family thank all friends and relations who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted them during the period of bereavement. - N. Sugunatheva, 17 The Drive, Northwood, Middx HA6 1HQ. Tel: 01923 825219.

IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of Mr. S. Bala, on the first anniversary of his passing away on 28th
Continued on page 31

Continued from page 30

July 1989.

Remembered with love and affection by his beloved wife Thanam; loving daughters Susie and Kumutha; sons-in-law and grandchildren.

Sadly missed by close relations and friends. We treasure the memories, love and care.

May God bless and keep him in eternal peace.

Susie Nandapalan
Wilmslow.

Fifth Death Anniversary



In ever loving memory of **Gnanam (Sivagnanavathy)** on the fifth anniversary of her passing away on 15th July 1995.

Fondly remembered by husband C. Sachithananthan, son Sureshan, daughter Poorany, daughter-in-law Devika, son-in-law Surendra William; grand-daughters Pallavi, Sruthi, and Kurinji Melanie - 22 Gangaianman Koil Street, Bharathinagar, Chennai 6000041, South India.



In loving memory of **Mrs. Mankay Sivasampu** on the tenth anniversary of her passing away on 2.8.90.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her two sons. - 15 Wolsey Road, Chessington, Surrey KT9 1XG

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Aug 1 Feast of St. Alphonsus Liguori.

Aug 2 Aadi Pooram.

Aug 3 Sathurthi.

Aug 5 Shasti; South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in Tel: 020 8542 3285.

Aug 6 Feast of the Transformation of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Aug 8 Feast of St. Dominic.

Aug 10 Sukkla Eekathasi; Feast of St. Lawrence.

Aug 11 Varalakshmy Viratham; Feast of St. Clare.

Aug 12 Pirathosam.

Aug 13 Feast of St. Pontian.

Aug 14 Full Moon.

Aug 15 Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Aug 16 Feast of St. Stephen.

Aug 18 Sankadhara Sathurthi.

Aug 19/20 SLTWG Trip. Tel: 020 8542 3285.

Aug 20 Feast of St. Bernard.

Aug 21 Feast of St. Pius.

Aug 22 Karthigai.

Aug 23 Shri Krishna Jayanthi.

Aug 24 Feast of St. Bartholomew.

Aug 25 Krishna Eekathasi.

Aug 26 Pirathosam; SLTWG Women's Front meets. Tel: 020 8542 3285.

Aug 27 Feast of St. Monica.

Aug 28 Amavasai; Feast of St. Augustine.

At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London

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Aug 4 7.45pm Hindustani Vocal Concert by Herneng Mehta.

Aug 5 6.30pm Kathak by Saswati Sen.

Aug 11 7.45pm Carnatic Vocal by Rajam Iyer.

Aug 17 6.30pm Indian Independence Day Celebrations. Speeches, Singing, Dancing & Exhibition of Paintings & Jewellery.

Aug 23 7.30pm Sri Krishna Janmashtami. Bhajan, Puja & Prasad.

Aug 28 6.00 to 8.30pm Philosophy Discourses by H.H. Ganapati Sacchidananda Swami. All welcome.

Putney Church Celebrates 28th Anniversary

In May 1972, a small group of Tamil Christians living in London took advantage of the presence in London of a retired Sri Lankan Tamil Methodist minister - the late Rev. S.W. Arasaratnam, to experiment with the holding of a formal Christian worship in Tamil at the Putney Methodist Church, Gwendolene Avenue, London SW15. This became a reality in course of time and was popularly known among Tamils around the world as **Putney Church**. The 28th anniversary of this event was celebrated on 28th May 2000 at Rivercourt Methodist Church, King Street, Hammer-smith, London W6.

The anniversary service had an added dimension to it, in that it was combined with a thanksgiving service for the life and work of the late **Rev. S. M. Jacob**, a Methodist Minister, who had served among the UK Tamil Christians in two separate stints from 1975 to 1981 and 1984 to 1990 and went to Sri Lanka. He came back in 1995 on his retirement and was the Honorary Minister-Emeritus at the time of his death in March 2000. Mr. David Jayarajah referred to the various senior positions, he had held in the Church establishment both in UK and in Sri Lanka, where he was the secretary of the Methodist Conference. A letter from Rev. Wes-

ley Ariarajah of the World Council of Churches, Geneva characterising Rev. Jacob as a 'Tireless Pilgrim' and a poem in Tamil by Mrs Thabes Kanagaratnam were read at this meeting as a tribute to him

The main theme of the Anniversary service centred around growth and vision for the future. Mr. Rajan Rajaratnam, the President of the London Tamil Christian Congregation having made a brief reference to the happenings during the past 28 years as a proof of God's plan and purpose for the Congregation, shed some light on the three stages of the church's vision for the future. He said that Stage I on the formation of a Prayer Fellowship has been achieved and Stage 2 regarding the holding of an additional monthly service in Tamil is about to be achieved with the proposed holding of the inaugural service at South Harrow Methodist Church on 11th June 2000. Rev. Barnabas Alexander, Minister 'Putney Church' who conducted the service, fortified and inspired by a text from the scriptures, Joshua Chapter 1, which was a reference to God's promise to Joshua at the time of Mose's death, implored the congregation to look at the future with vigour and hope.

The hall was filled to capacity, a happy state of affairs which most English churches would be happy to settle for at their Sunday morning worships.

Perin Raj.

The Sri Lanka Railway Past Employees Welfare Association

The fifth Annual General Meeting of the above association was held on 28th May 2000 and the following were elected office-bearers for 2000/2001.

President: Mr. C. Kannuthurai, **Vice President:** Mr. A. Gnananandan, **Secretary:** Mr. M. Selvanayagam, **Assistant Secretary:** Mr. M. Ramasamy, **Treasurer:** Mr. K. Paramanathan, **Patrons:** Mr. E. Rasakulasooriyar & Mr. A. Manikkam, **Committee:** Mr. K.G. Alwis, Mr. S. Arumugam, Mrs. T. Thambyrajah, Mrs. P. Arulampalam and Mrs. Mariyadas, **Editor:** Mr. S. Ponnudurai.

Prof. Canthaboo Awarded Gold Medal



Above Prof. Anton Jayasuriya (L) Prof Canthaboo (C) and Prof. Usha Ravi (R)

Professor Maruthu Canthaboo of UK has been awarded a

Continued on page 32

Continued from page 31

Gold Medal for his work on Cerebro-Neural Technique (CNT) at the 38th World Congress on Natural Medicine held in India recently. The Congress was jointly organised by the International University of Complementary Medicine and Indo-European Institute of natural Medicine and was presided over by the Health Minister of Pondichery State, Hon. E. Valsaraj. Professor. Anton Jayasuriya was the Chief Guest and Professor Usha Ravi and Dr. A. Ravi of Cudalore were the organisers of the event. Professor Canthaboo is of Sri Lankan origin and is at present Dean of the International College of Multi-Therapists, UK and is visiting Professor of International University for Complementary Medicine, Institute of Acupuncture of Medicina Alternativa, Kalubowila Teaching Hospital, Colombo.

Aloy Ratnasingham Presented Outstanding Achievement Award



Mr. Aloy Ratnasingham of Scarborough, Canada was the recipient of the prestigious **Outstanding Achievement Award** for the year 2000 presented to a handful of volunteer workers in the Province of Ontario at a colourful ceremony held on 5th June 2000 at Delta Hotel, Scarborough.

Aloy has been a member of the Ontario Seniors Tamil Centre since 1985 and has been President and member of the Board of Management. He has been an advocate of seniors' issues including assistance to refugees and had organised 55 outings of seniors to places of educational interest. He was selected to assist and advise Metro Counsellors on combating racism and had successfully organised seminars on settlement and anti-racism strategy.

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Mrs Annammah Thillaiampalam 16.8.1903 - 25.04.2000

Yet another sad loss in our lives – the loss of Mrs Annammah Thillaiampalam, Ammamah to most of us, who passed away at 96 on April 25, 2000. We truly miss her and fondly remember and cherish deeply the memories of her and her image. Up until January 1998, she was in very steady health not suffering from any ailment. It was only very recently, she was admitted to hospital for acute respiratory problems and as her condition was not improving to expectations, we thought she may depart from us for ever. Miraculously, she bounced back, came home doing her daily chores, but her energy level was somewhat low, even though she was not handicapped or bedridden. She was however aided by the support system and ultimately passed away despite all the medical and personal care given to the best. Everyone was hoping that she would live to become a 'Centurion', but it was not meant to be so. Ammamah was a remarkable person in the sense that by the time she reached the age of 43, she had given birth to ten children. In 1948, when she was only 45 she lost her husband in Malaysia with the ten children to care for at that young age. One by one from the long list of five boys and five girls, they started getting settled, either in job or in marriage. She was able to take on her family with the money received from her husband's pension, the rubber estate and the earnings of the eldest son Jeganathan, who took up employment to help the family. They were a close-knit family, who were all there, through thick and thin, in times of adversity as well as joy, as one solid fortress. This iron cast bond, which many marvel gave ammamah a great feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction. She excelled to educate herself, becoming a 'Pala Pandithar' – a Tamil Junior Scholar, her intellectual knowledge confirmed by her timely presentation of phrases, verses and sayings at opportune moments.

With the advent of her adventurous son Srikanthan, leaving the shores of Sri Lanka to USA, that is the time our 'Colombus' discovered America for the Thillaiampalam family. With his setting foot on the land of many opportunities, the rest of the clan starting arriving in USA one by one. Ammamah was one of them and was very much at ease in her new surroundings and Somerville became her area of domicile. She never lost her roots, made inquiries about her relatives and friends in Thirunelveli and was supportive of the local temples there. With all the children around her with their families, some unforeseen events took place. The first was the unexpected death of her eldest son-in-law, Mr. Wijeyadevdran in 1980 at the age of 62. When the news reached ammamah, her first reaction was, so to say that when all the ripe old leaves are hanging on, the young fresh leaves are prematurely falling away. This was fol-

lowed by the demise of her sons-in-law Balasingam in 1986 and Manickasingham in 1987. These losses took a toll of her, but she never lost her focus in life. After twelve years came the next and most devastating blow when she lost her eldest daughter Rohini to cancer in August 1999. Almost a month afterwards came the most unexpected and untimely death of her daughter Manonmani, who was living in the same household, available to her at all times and a tower of strength to her. Then came the loss of Manonmani's husband Vyraavanadan in December 1999. It may be that the time had come, when she could not take it any more.

With her demise, we have reached a stage when those who were kept happy and busy by her, feel her absence badly. They are the daughters Pavani, Senthimani and Kanthimathy who took turns to do the necessary daily chores for her; sons Srikanthan who judiciously took every effort to sit with her explaining the political and other news; Jeganathan, the frequent flyer from other continents always there in times of need; Sriharan who was readily available at times of need; Sripathy with his lunch time visits and last but not least Kannan who resided in the same premises and kept her in good humour. There is a long list of others whose lives revolved around her to make things easy for her and a few of them are Muruges, Kaushi, Jamuna and Haran.

It was meant to be that she had to depart in a timely fashion, making sure that all those near and dear to her were there at their domicile, before departing from us for ever.

They will miss her immensely and only time can take away their sorrow.

May her soul rest in peace

A Memorable Evening With Divine Music



It was indeed a memorable evening for many who witnessed the carnatic music concert performed by three young talented artistes at the St. Margaret Church Hall, Ilford, UK on 27th May 2000 organised by Mrs. Susila and Dr. T.G. Krishnamurthy featuring Sow. Aishwarya (10 years) vocal. Chi Parthiban Nagarajah (17 years) Violin and Chi Myuresh Skanthabalan (13 years)

Continued on page 33

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Mridangam. They were applauded by a very appreciative audience, which included eminent personalities from different fields with musical interest and knowledge.

Sow. Aishwarya was initiated into carnatic music at the tender age of three by her father. At present she is receiving training from Guru Smt, Indra Ranganathan of Calcutta. Chi. Parthiban started learning violin at the age of eight from Dr. Lakshi Jayan, London. He is also talented on the Piano, Western Violin and Mridangam. Chi. Myuresh started learning Mridangam at the age of six and is a disciple of Sri Muthu Sivarajah and had his arangetram recently.

The concert commenced with Varnam in Thodi Ragam rendered flawlessly. It was followed by a Devarnama in Raga Rasikapriya in Khanda Chapu Thala. The brief alapana in Kambhoji followed by the song Kuladeivame with Niraval brought memories of late K.B. Sundarambal. The alapana in Kharaharapriya followed by Thyagaraja's Chakkani Raja was rendered with full devotion and perfection. The Thani Avartanam was very pleasing to the ear with perfect rhythm, Vandemaataram of Subramania Bharati, in Ragamalika, aroused the feeling of patriotism in many. The violin accompaniment was apt and excellent.

No doubt Aishwarya is a child prodigy with good self confidence, knowledge, showmanship and perfect pronunciation of words in different languages. She sings from her heart, and has a god gifted voice with inborn talent.

The three young artistes provided an enjoyable evening. Let us hope that the almighty will shower his blessings for an bright future for them.

Daasan

Australian Newsletter

Tamil Senior Citizen's Association, Sydney celebrated Thai Pongal on 14th January 2000. Among the highlights of the celebrations were a dance performance by the students of Mrs. Krishna Segaram, a vocal recital by Mrs. Kala Gnanaratnam and Poothathamby Nadagam presented by T. Kalamani. The Nadagam was well appreciated by the audience. This was followed by the serving of 'Sakkara Satham' and Kadalai to all present.

The President of the association, Col. V. Ramanathan received the Premier's Award for outstanding service to the community on 22nd March 2000. It was presented by the Hon. Paul Whelan, Minister for Police and Member for Strathfield.

Sydney Tamil Resource Centre, established on 16.08.1991 to cater to the needs of the Tamil reading public in Sydney as a non-profit, non-political establishment has a great success story. Both individuals as well as Tamil institutions in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka have donated books and as a result it is now a flourishing library with over 4000 books, Donations and member-

ship subscriptions are the main source of funds.

On 21.5.2000, the resource centre held a function at the Homebush Public School Hall, attended by several distinguished guests, who spoke about its role and the richness of the Tamil literary tradition. Prof. Palavarayan of Tamil Nadu, who is on a visit to Sydney spoke eloquently in Tamil on Tamil education and Saiva religion. Mr. V. Navaratnam's book on 'Fall & Rise of the Tamil Nation' was reviewed and launched. Dozens of donated copies were sold to the members of the audience. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of a special film documentary of the Jaffna Public Library. The film showed pictures of the library before and after it was burnt in 1981 on the tenth anniversary of its establishment. The show was accompanied by a narrative of the history of the library and many in the audience were moved to tears by one of the greatest tragedies that befell the Tamils. The evening ended with music and dance items followed by dinner. Mr. E. Vijayaratham, the president of the resource centre and the members of his committee organised this successful function.

The Vembadi Old Girls' Association held their Annual Dinner Dance on 26.2.2000 at the Ryde Civic Centre in Sydney. There was an excellent turn-out of old girls and their spouses and friends. The evening began with the singing of the College Song and a welcome speech by the President Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam. Soon the guests were dancing away to the exciting sounds of the Sri Lankan band. Dinner was served at 8.30 and the dancing continued. At 10.30 there was the raffle draw with many attractive prizes. Many enjoyed themselves till midnight and promised to meet again next year.

Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) NSW held a forum chaired by Rev. John Jegasothy at Homebush Boys' School Hall on 26.2.2000 to discuss the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. Mr. Jorge Aroche, the Executive Director was the chief speaker. He was followed by four speakers from the organisation and one from the NSW Refugee Health Service. It was decided to provide the appropriate service to those suffering from torture and trauma experienced in Sri Lanka. STARTTS administrators said that information provided by clients would be kept confidential. They wished to have more information about Tamil culture as that knowledge would make counselling easier. This was followed by group discussion.

Tamil Day at Homebush Public School Hall was organised by the Tamil Parents and Citizens Action Group at the Homebush Public School Hall on 18th May 2000. After the formal welcoming of guests, there was an exhibition of Tamil Martial Arts, Killi Thattu a traditional game and Kolam drawing. A group of students

sang a 'Song of Praise' in Tamil and the Australian National Anthem. Welcoming speeches were made in Tamil by Mr. P. Sivasubramaniam and in Chinese by Mr. Ling Lin.

Cultural programmes followed. Veena, Nadaswaram, Thavil, Flute, Miruthangam recitals and dance performances including 'Kolladam' and 'Nattukoothu' were appreciated by the audience.

The Principal of the school Mr. Ron Williamson and the Chief Guest Dr. Mananidran spoke and awards were distributed. The evening concluded with a vote of thanks by Yathugiri Logathan and a closing message from the Tamil Parents and Citizens Action Group.

Victory Celebrations: The historic victory of the LTTE over the Sri Lankan army at Elephant Pass was celebrated by the Sydney Tamils on 30th April 2000 at the Ukrainian Hall, Lidcombe. Leaders from several Tamil organisations praised the heroism of the Tamil fighters. A two-minute silence was observed to honour the memory of the fighters and the civilians who had lost their lives in the war.

Australian Federation of University Tamil Students, an umbrella organisation of Tamil University Students from six universities in Australia had their inaugural meeting in Sydney on 15th January 2000. It was felt that this excellent example of Tamil unity set by the University students could be followed by other Tamil organisations in Sydney.

Jaffna College Old Students Association held a 'Hopper Night' at Homebush Boys' High School Hall on 24th June 2000. The function was well attended and proceedings began with the singing of the College Song. Welcoming speeches were made by the President Dr. S. Satkunarajah and Vice-President Dr. A. Balasubramaniam. Elections were held to elect the new Executive Committee and Mr. Victor Duraisamy was elected the new President. Dr. Satkunarajah and Dr. Balasubramaniam were elected Life Patrons. The guests were then served egg hoppers, plain hoppers and sumptuous curries as well as dessert.

A Musical Evening with a difference - Ragam Sugaragam - was organised by the Eelam Tamil Association on 15th April 2000 in Sydney. It was a great exhibition of the talents of the well-known South Indian artistes Mohan and Rajesh Vaidha.

The hall was packed with around 1000 rasikas and many had to be turned away. Rajesh Vaidhya mesmerised the audience with his performance on the Veena. He played the Tabla top Veena for the first time and sang cinema songs with his brother and other singers. Mohan Vaidhya compered the show excellently, keeping the momentum of the music flowing and the interest of the audience never flagged. He sang a mix of carnatic ragas and film songs accompanied by local singers. The concert raised \$12,500 for the Tamil Emergency Medical Fund.

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