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BIFURCATION OF THE NORTH - EAST

BY HOOK ○ RBY CROOK?

So President D.B.Wijetunga, flushed with "victory" over the pseudo-elections in the Eastern Province, has now started harping on the theme of a referendum in the Eastern Province on the merger question. It is evident that the Government and the Sinhala polity is committed to de-linking the presently merged North-East by hook or by crook - with or without a referendum!

It is more than a mere coincidence that a circular was sent out on 9th March by Austin Fernando, the Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Public Administration and Provincial Councils, stating that some of the powers of the Divisional Secretaries will revert back to the Government Agents. What is curious, however, is that this arrangement is to be on an **experimental basis for a period of one year and would apply only to the Eastern Districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai.**

It may be recalled that the system of Divisional Secretaries was introduced by the late President Premadasa as a direct appendage of the Presidential Secretariat and as a means of circumventing the Provincial Councils System. And it served him and his designs well!

However, with the completion of the recent polls in the Eastern Province, a contradiction has emerged which the Government may not have anticipated and now has to deal with. Namely, that the hegemony of the UNP can no longer be assumed at the level of the local government - particularly in the

Tamil areas. So, what better way of handling this contradiction than to restore to the Government Agent the powers that had earlier rested with that office, hence making the Divisional Secretaries immune to pressures from the grass-roots? This so-called administrative restructuring is, therefore, clearly linked to the decision of the Government to effect its plans of de-merging the North-East.

Now let us take the question of referendum which is claimed by the Government and the Sinhala polity, including some of our secular-minded friends, as the only democratic way of ascertaining the "will of the People".

In our opinion, however, the holding of a referendum in the Eastern Province on the question of merger is **undemocratic, unrepresentative and irrational** for the following reasons:

★ The holding of a referendum in the Eastern Province **alone** ignores the collective opinion of the Tamil-speaking People of the North-East as a whole. As such, the holding of a referendum, only in the Eastern Province, is **unrepresentative**;

★ A duly elected Provincial Council for the North-East was in existence for just about 1 1/2 years. The past 3 years has witnessed a "Governors Rule" from the Center, with a steady erosion of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in relation to the "devolution package". As such, the proposed referendum is **irrational**, since hardly any time and opportunity has been given to the People of the Eastern Province to

ascertain for themselves as to whether a duly elected Provincial Council for the presently merged North-East represents their interests or not;

★ Thousands of Tamil-speaking People who have been displaced and dislocated, as a result of the on-going hostilities between the LTTE and the Security Forces, have yet to return to their original places of domicile. In addition, the proliferation of State-aided Sinhala settlements in the Eastern Province with the intention of "demographic engineering" cannot be taken lightly. As such, to conduct any form of elections prior to the total resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees in their original places of domicile and a mutually acceptable agreement on the question of the electoral register, is **undemocratic** and shall be nothing more than a pre-determined ritual.

It must be clearly understood by the Sinhala polity that the demand by the Tamil polity that the temporary merger be made permanent does not stem from purely irredentist and romantic notions about the glories of the past. On the contrary, the question of merger impinges directly on contemporary realities where the identity and security of the Tamil-speaking People continues to remain threatened.

Under these conditions, to unilaterally impose a referendum is tantamount to the negation of the process of a negotiated settlement to the Ethnic Question. As regards the repercussions - the People of Sri Lanka have experienced it long enough for us to elaborate.

□



REFLECTIONS



The **London Economist**, in its March 5-11 issue, stated that "to many people's surprise, the elections on March 1st, 1994 went off fairly peacefully and the results are reckoned to be a triumph for President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga. For the first time in a decade, the Government can claim that there is some kind of civil administration in an area that has been controlled by the Army."

It is, indeed curious, that the **London Economist** should arrive at these conclusions which seem to be based more on wishful thinking than concrete ground realities. If at all anyone is surprised by the outcome of the polls, it is certainly not the People - since they directly witnessed and experienced the charade that took place in the name of democracy.

The TULF and EPRLF, which boycotted the polls, have already indicated in no uncertain terms the fraudulent nature of the polls, particularly in the Eastern Province. The so-called high turn-out of voters, they claimed, was due to impersonations and the stuffing of ballot boxes. This is not surprising since the entire electoral process in the Eastern Province itself was militarized to start with.

Even if one were to dismiss the claims of EPRLF and TULF as being "politically motivated", it is somewhat difficult to take lightly the charges made by the SLMC which contested the polls with much enthusiasm. As, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress commented in a recent interview, "It was a nightmare. In addition to the other parties contesting us we had to contend with the Sri Lanka Police Party which took a very personal interest in the election."

The **London Economist** correspondent has also rather conveniently forgotten to explain the high percentage of invalid votes or to draw a correlation between this and the call by the EPRLF and TULF to the voters to invalidate their votes as a mark of protest.

Further, when the Provincial Council System itself remains ineffective due to the resistance on the part of Colombo to devolve real powers to the Provinces, it is absurd to argue that the Government can "claim some kind of civil administration" by citing the functioning of the cosmetic Municipal Councils and the Pradeshiya Sabhas in the Eastern Province.

The truth of the matter is that no conclusions can be derived from the outcome of the polls in the Eastern Province - since it was a sham from beginning to end. However, it appears that the designs of the Government, effected through the Security Forces, to hoodwink international opinion may have succeeded - as evidenced by the gullibility of the **London Economist**. Ofcourse, there are others who might argue that articles such as the one which appeared in the **London Economist** is part of the process of hoodwinking international opinion!

But, as to whether the international opinion has been hoodwinked or not, the Election Commissioner knows precisely what happened. Mr.Chandrananda de Silva is reported to have told the **Island** that, "What had happened in Eravur and Kattankuddy at the March 1 local government polls must not takke place in the south."(The Island, 15 March).

While the above remark of the Election Commissioner is a refreshing self-criticism, it also makes one wonder whether one rule applies to the North-East and another rule for the rest of the country!

TAMIL- MUSLIM PARTIES

STRESS

ON UNITY AND MERGER OF NORTH-EAST !

The 12th Convention of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress held in Kalmunai in the Eastern District of Amparai on Saturday the 2nd of April, witnessed an appeal for unity amongst the Tamil and Muslim national minorities by the leaders of Tamil-Muslim political parties who spoke at the Convention. The Convention was attended by a massive crowd.

In addition to M.H.M. Ashraff, the leader of SLMC, other prominent figures, representing the Tamil polity, who made a stirring appeal for unity and the permanent merger of the Tamil linguistic region of the North-East, included Mr.Suresh Premachandran, the Secretary-General of EPRLF, Mr.M.Sivasithamparam, the President of TULF, Mr.S.Thondaman, leader of CWC and Mr.Kumar Ponnambalam, the leader of ACTC.

In his Presidential Address, M.H.M. Asshaff, issued a warning that the proposed bifurcation of the North-East would be against the common interests of the Tamil and Muslim communities and would inflict immense sufferings on them. "If the presently merged North-East Province is de-linked, we will not be able to face and confront the forces of chauvinism and the on-going illegal State-sponsored Sinhalese settlements in the Eastern Province", he declared.

On the issue of merger, the SLMC leader clarified that his Part had not changed its opposition to an unconditional merger. However, he believed that it was of paramount importance that the permanent merger of the North-East be effected in such a manner that the legitimate aspirations of the Muslim people are not ignored. In this regard, he had initiated discussions with the leaders of the Tamil Parties in an attempt at ensuring the conditional

merger of the North-East that would also reflect the interests of the Muslim community.

The leader of EPRLF, Suresh Premachandran, in his address characterised the Kalmunai Convention of the SLMC as a historic event that would pave the way for the unity of the Tamil-Muslim minority nationality. He held the Sinhala chauvinist State and the Fascist LTTE responsible for the inter-ethnic cycle of violence that had rocked the North-East in recent times.

On the one hand, the State consciously effected a policy aimed at creating a Tamil-Muslim divide in the Eastern Province. On the other hand, the LTTE systematically and brutally carried out a policy of "ethnic cleansing" against the Muslim People. The end result was spiralling violence which threatened Tamil-Muslim unity and brought havoc and destruction in their respective areas of domicile. In this, certain armed Tamil and Muslim groups also have to share the responsibility for this sad and tragic events of the recent past.

"The Tamil and Muslims of the Eastern Province are bound by not only a common language and a traditional place of domicile - but also by a common problem which is Sinhala chauvinism. Our homes, where we reside, and our fields, where we labour, adjoin each other. As a minority we also face similar aspirations", declared Premachandran. He ended his speech by warning that if Tamil-Muslim unity is not forged against the forces of chauvinism and parochialism, then the Eastern Province shall be condemned to become another Bosnia.

The CWC leader, S.Thondaman, appealed to the Tamil and the Muslim

People to forget the bitter past and to co-exist with mutual respect and dignity. He observed that although it was said that Sri Lanka is a democratic country, in reality there was no democracy. "This is our country. The minorities need not live in fear or be submissive to any other force. But in order to ensure this, Tamil-Muslim unity is vital".

The President of the TULF, M.Sivasithamparam, in his address highlighted the dangers of continuing State-sponsored Sinhala colonization which was threatening to reduce the Tamils and Muslims to the status of minorities in their traditional homeland. At a time when the Head of State perceived himself to be the leader of the Sinhalese majority, the Tamil and Muslim Peoples have no option, but to unite and safeguard their own interests.

The TULF leader also chastised armed youths for exacerbating the Tamil-Muslim divide and said that he felt ashamed to call himself a Jaffna Tamil, given the manner in which the Jaffna Muslims were brutally driven out of their homes. He further stressed that his Party firmly believed that the security and identity of the Muslims should be fostered and safeguarded.

The ACTC supremo, Kumar Ponnambalam, raised the call for a joint struggle against the conspiracy to bifurcate the North-East. He said that the time had come for the national minorities to stand up and make it clear that they are not mere creepers that twine around trees. He called on the Muslim Congress to support the merger of the North-East, since without it the identity of the Muslim People itself would be destroyed. □

Field
Report



THE TAMIL REFUGEE QUESTION A GAME OF FOOTBALL?

— Special Correspondent —

The Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction recently sent out a circular to all Divisional Secretaries and Government Agents indicating that all relief support to refugees, living in refugee camps or with relatives, will cease by March 31, if they refuse to be rehabilitated in "cleared areas" in the Districts of Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Amparai, Trincomalee and Mannar.

Before we proceed to look into the implications of this policy decision, let us begin with a brief overview of the quantitative elements of the refugee problem.

The anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 started the avalanche. Thousands fled Sri Lanka and sought asylum in India, Europe and North America. The largest single concentration of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees was in India, exceeding 2 lakhs at the time of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. By end of 1991, the total number of refugees in India had reached 210,000.

The figure for Europe, North America and Australia, at the time of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was in the vicinity of 75,000.

It is now estimated that 25,000 are seeking asylum in the West each year. The total number of refugees in the West now appears to have surpassed 225,000.

If one were to take the internal refugees or the internally displaced persons, the total number of persons living in refugee camps (euphemistically called "welfare centers") in the Districts of Batticaloa, Amparai, Trincomalee, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar add-up to approximately 130,000 persons. This excludes another 133,000 persons who are entirely dependent on refugee relief assistance

and are living outside the refugee camps with friends and relatives.

In Jaffna District, the total number of displaced persons has been estimated at 243,000 with approximately 68,000 persons living in refugee camps. If one takes into account displaced persons outside the North-East, the total number of internal refugees add up to approximately 6 lakhs. (See Table for break-down by Districts)

In the context of this sheer magni-

Gandhi by the LTTE. The repatriation itself was by no stretch of imagination a case of forced deportation - as claimed by some NGOs. By the same token, it cannot be denied that shabby pressure tactics were employed by the Indian authorities to produce a "push effect". Various restriction were imposed. These ranged from physical restrictions on the movement of refugees outside their camps and curtailment of supportive services from NGOs.

The "push effect" of this policy is clearly reflected in a Report filed by V.Jayanth, the *The Hindu* Correspondent based in Colombo. Commenting on the recent returnees numbering 1016 who reached Talaimannar on February 1, Jayanth observed that, "Most of the refugees to whom this correspondent spoke were 'happy and relieved' to come back 'home'. Some were worried about the 'uncertain future' ahead, but still preferred to fight it out on home soil than in India amid restrictions." In his article, he further quoted a refugee of saying, "After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, it became clear that we were not wanted and it was time to return to our homes, even

if there was none." (*The Hindu*, 2 February).

The second trend that we wish to focus on is what is happening in the West. The agreement reached between Switzerland and Sri Lanka, pertaining to the deportation of refugees, could well be a case study to be emulated by the other countries of the West where Sri Lankan Tamils have sought refuge.

DISPLACED PERSONS IN SRI LANKA 8/31/93

District	No of Centers	Persons in Centers	Persons Outside Centers	Total
Jaffna	233	667,649	175,771	243,420
Mannar	8	32,441	19,703	52,144
K'nochechi	10	28,564	12,325	40,889
Vavuniya	7	7,401	8,591	15,992
Trincomalee	27	18,870	15,379	34,249
Batticaloa	22	7,421	58,351	65,772
Amparai	22	15,603	7,583	23,186
Mullaitivu	18	19,405	10,358	29,763
Colombo	10	1,944	10,984	12,928
Anuradhapura	50	14,610	6,154	20,764
Polonnaruwa	13	4,522	1,882	6,404
Puttalam	62	32,427	-	32,427
Others	40	4,319	22,473	26,792
Total	522	255,176	349,554	604,730

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF RECONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION & SOCIAL WELFARE

tude of the refugee problem, three trends are discernible - none of which seem to be in the interests of the refugees.

Firstly, the decision by the Government of India, to expedite the return of refugees from Tamil Nadu. Although repatriation of refugees had commenced earlier, it was intensified following the assassination of Shri Rajiv

While India has been concentrating on heaping disincentives on the refugees, in a bid to make them leave, the policy of the West is more direct - **forced deportation!**

Finally, what needs to be looked into more carefully is the plight of the returnees in Sri Lanka - one which they share with the pre-existing internal refugees.

The immediate problem that face the internal refugees, and the refugee-returnees, are the conditions prevailing in the transit refugee camps. Inadequate sanitation, inhabitable housing conditions, water-borne diseases, lack of privacy and mental trauma are some of them. These are compounded by corruption relating to building contracts, reflected in sub-standard housing facilities.

In sum, the deteriorating conditions in the "welfare centers" are the combined effects of mismanagement of resources, and an orchestrated "push effect" aimed at driving the refugees to be "resettled".

That brings up the next problem - the problem of "resettlement". The relief assistance which were offered as an incentive for refugees to move out of the refugee camps to be "resettled" in their places of domicile has now been replaced by "strong-arm" tactics aimed at forcing People out of the so-called "welfare centers". While earlier, the ego of the security forces would not permit the refugees to be resettled in "uncleared areas", it now appears that the divide between "cleared" and "uncleared" areas is no longer that clear!

And in the meantime, reports indicate that state-sponsored Sinhala colonizations are taking place on a grand scale in the Eastern Province.

To sum up, then, the Tamil refugee problem, whether it takes the form of "asylum seekers" or "internal displaced persons", is, both, a human as well as a political problem. Unfortunately and tragically (or is it typically?), while the human component is conveniently forgotten, the political component tends to acquire exaggerated dimensions.

DEPORTATION OF REFUGEES FROM SWITZERLAND ?

Swiss delegation comprising of Markus Loosli of the **Swiss Refugee Council**, Hans Beat Moser of the **Swiss Red Cross** and Geert Van Dok of **Caritas**, assisted by Walter Keller, a reputed journalist and human rights activist from Germany, arrived in Sri Lanka in early March.

The purpose of their visit was to assess the implications of the agreement signed by the Governments of Switzerland and Sri Lanka on 12th January pertaining to the repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees. The repatriation would take the form of forced deportation, if the refugees did not cooperate. The **United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)**, which was actively involved in facilitating this agreement, has been entrusted with the task of laising "between the returnees and the two parties and assist in meeting particular problems encumbered by the returnees."

The agreement also provides for the setting-up of "transit refugee houses" in the suburbs of Colombo where the returnee-refugees would be allowed to stay for a period of time till they find other accommodations.

The Swiss delegation met an EPRLF delegation, headed by its Secretary-General, Suresh Premachandran, in order to ascertain their views. The members of the Swiss Delegation took much pains in explaining the position of their Government as arising out of the growth of right-wing political parties and anti-immigrant movements in Switzerland.

Suresh Premachandran explained to the Swiss delegation that the Refugee Question had, unfortunately, become politicized and the humanitarian component was totally lacking. He explained that while it was necessary for the Sri Lankan Government to demonstrate to the Aid Consortium that "normalcy" prevails in the South, the Swiss Government sees this as an opportunity to solve their own internal problems by exporting their own. Hence, there was a congruence of in-

terests between the two Governments - with the refugees being assigned the role of guinea pigs.

The current wave of arrests in Colombo and the suburbs, the arrest of senior government servants (who have been residing in Colombo in some cases for more than twenty years), continuous detention and torture of persons (in some cases of more than three years) with out filing any indictments against them for lack of information or other reasons and other forms of violations of basic human rights was explained at length.

The obnoxious method of forcing only Tamils to register with the local Police stations and the method used by the Police to obtain money (in some cases as much two lakhs of Rupees) in order to release Tamil youth and the very fact that refugees, who returned from countries like Switzerland, were more vulnerable to this type of extortion was made clear.

Suresh Premachandran also highlighted the conditions prevailing in the North-East, which constitutes the original place of domicile for the majority of the refugees to be deported. In addition to the war situation, manifesting itself in death, destruction and deprivation, the scope for engaging in meaningful economic activities particularly in the sphere of agriculture and fishing was minimal. This was due to the ban on fishing, periodic shelling by the security forces, as well as extortion and expropriation of assets and earnings by the LTTE.

The EPRLF delegation called on the Swiss delegation to impress on their Government the repercussions that their policy would have on the other Western nations where large number of Tamil refugees reside. It was also mentioned that it was ironic that Switzerland, the traditional custodian of human rights, should adopt a policy of forced deportation. In addition, it was irrational and inequitable that Sri Lankans should be selected as the first guinea pigs in this unfortunate and inhumane experimentation. □

MEDIA FOCUS

Dixit On Sri Lanka's Ethnic Question And India's Options

The cycle of violence continues with rising and falling intensity depending on the situation on the ground. Compounding this is the ambiguous attitude of the Sri Lankan Government on the one hand in dealing with the Tamils' aspirations and the LTTE determination to stand by its aspirations through all possible means on the other.

How is India reacting to these developments? Analysing recent events, Indian reactions can be compartmentalised into three time-frames. From 1983 to 1987, India was an active, even intrusive mediator. Its efforts culminated in the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of 1987 and the induction of the IPKF.

From 1987 to 1990, India became an accidental and one must acknowledge, as events developed, unacceptable manager of Sri Lanka politics in the larger sense of the term. In 1990 the government of V.P.Singh took surgical action to disengage India from the Sri Lankan situation and from March 1990, when the IPKF withdrew, to date India remains a detached but interested observer.

Though India remains detached, it

cannot neglect...trends and developments. There are large numbers of Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu. There are fairly reliable reports of the LTTE continuing its activities in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and parts of Kerala. The LTTE still uses parts of India as a base for logistical support. This in turn attracts punitive action and reprisals from the Sri Lankan military and naval authorities.

Had this process been a limited conflict between the Sri Lankan Gov-

The article entitled "The Stake in Sri Lanka" by J.N.Dixit, former Indian Foreign Secretary was published in **The Hindu of March 8, 1994.**

We publish excerpts from it.

ernment and the LTTE, as protagonists, the impact on India would not be immediate and tangible. This is not the case. Sri Lankan naval and military activity vitally affects the livelihood of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu and the southern edge of Kerala. The LTTE's activities in India though diminished remain a matter of concern.

In terms of India's larger political interests a peaceful, united and stable Sri Lanka is essential for good bilateral relations and effective regional cooperation.

During the last two and a half years, India has managed to stabilise its relations with Sri Lanka. It continues to hold the view that Sri Lanka's long-term interests as well as positive bilateral relations can be ensured only if the legitimate aspirations of Sri Lankan Tamils of all categories are fully met.

President Wijetunga seems to be reassuming the stance which the Sri Lankan Government had between 1983 and 1986 of giving lip service to the need for a political solution while in substantive policy assuming an assertive military and political stance against the Tamils...This approach is not likely to succeed.

Despite all the criticisms levelled against the 1987 Agreement between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardena, it provides the terms of reference to refashion Sri Lanka polity in a manner where the island's unity will be ensured as a plural, democratic, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society. There should not be any doubt in any quarter that India has a commitment to this objective because the only alternative would be a fragmentation of Sri Lanka.

India's endeavour therefore should be to continue to persuade Sri Lankan authorities to give a fair deal to their Tamil citizens. Meanwhile, India should convey to the Tamils that while committed to their aspirations it urges Tamil public opinion to generate political trends, which would initially abate and ultimately abjure violence and terrorism. Contacts with the Tamil population, even the LTTE would have to be re-established to bring them back to the path of reason and negotiations. □

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OUR TRIBUTE

To 'Orator' Subramaniam

To Comrade "V.P"

Since the untimely demise of "Orator" Subramaniam, many tributes and appreciations have appeared in the media. Most have focused on his role and contributions as an educationalist. Unfortunately, not much has been written about his role as a social reformer and a visionary on the processes of nation-building.

As our tribute to "Orator" Subramaniam, we publish an extract from his 1958 Prize Day Report delivered in his capacity as the Principal of Skanda Varodaya, following the anti-Tamil pogrom precipitated by the language issue.

"A plea for National Unity is, we hope not out of place at this juncture. Recently ugly and uncivilised events have made it inevitable that there should be sanity in the whole approach to the problems of the nation. The whole question should be considered at a higher level free from the hurly burly of parliamentary election and political hustings. A just and wise political solution satisfying the needs of one and all must soon be arrived at, so that we may leave behind petty squabbles and concentrate all our energies on the more pressing problems of the country.

The language question is only a part of the whole and total problem facing the nation. At a time when the country is at the crossroads between a united and a divided Sri Lanka it is imperative that we take a right decision here and now. It is incorrect for the Government to assume that by the passing of the Sinhala Only Act and subsequent enactment of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act which statutorily places the stamp of perpetual inferiority on the Tamil-speaking people, the victory is theirs; and the affiliated minorities to think that they should be resigned to their fate.

Let our leaders realize the truth of Mahatma's words: 'The service of the country means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of every great man should be to wipe every tear from every eye.'

To repeat what I said last year, when the former Minister of Health of India, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, visited Switzerland some years back, she was welcomed with the slogan,

Four Languages one People

Four Languages one Voice

Cannot this be our slogan too? Cannot two languages and two cultures which have been living together for centuries in amity and goodwill continue to live so without any fear of assimilation or domination? Cannot we also cry out in joy

Two Languages one People

Two Languages one Voice

Should we not think of emotional and psychological integration before we think of political, social and economic integration?" □

V. Ponnambalam, known as "V.P" to his comrades and foes alike, devoted his early life to realizing his vision of socialism. He joined the Ceylon Communist Party since he felt that it constituted the vanguard of the struggle for fundamental social transformation.

In addition to his political commitments, V.P. excelled in translating the speeches of his comrades from the South into chaste Tamil whenever they visited the Tamil areas. His simplicity, sincerity and wealth of knowledge made him stand out amongst his peers and contemporaries.

V.P. was known for his fierce opposition to untouchability and the oppressive caste system. He also actively participated in the numerous struggles waged by the exploited workers and peasants of Jaffna.

Although V.P. contested the Parliamentary elections against Tamil nationalist personalities like "Thanthai Chelva" and Dharmalingam of the TULF, he did not allow it to develop into a personality clash. At the same time, he was not prepared to compromise on fundamental principles.

It was his firm commitment to principles which compelled him to part ways with the Communist Party over its stand on the Ethnic Question. Soon after, in the late 70s, he formed the Red Tamil Movement. In an article entitled, "We shall become Red Tamils", V.P. pointed out that as an individual, with certain ideals and visions, he stood for a united Sri Lanka. But, at the same time, he declared that he could not reject the demand for a separate, sovereign state for the Tamil People since he as a Tamil was also a victim of national oppression and racism. His subsequent decision to join the TULF and involve himself in the Tamil national movement was, therefore, in a way a logical.

When he went to Zambia to take up a teaching post, his earlier internationalist perspective and his newly acquired Tamil nationalist outlook made him emotionally involved with the struggle for national liberation by the Namibian People. On his return to Jaffna from Zambia, he gave a series of discourses at the University of Jaffna and in other study circles on national liberation struggles in Africa.

His demise last month in Toronto, soon after attending a Memorial Meeting for "Orator" Subramaniam, is a great loss to all those who had known him and heard about him.

We extend our condolence to his family and dear ones.

*We Wish Our Readers
Peace And Tranquility For
The Tamil-Sinhala New
Year!*

**SOUTHERN
PROVINCIAL
COUNCIL
ELECTIONS**

A DEFEAT FOR ETHNO-POPULISM

The outcome of the polls for the Southern Provincial Council is a clear message from the Sinhala masses to President D.B. Wijetunga that chauvinism and jingoism can no longer be used to mobilize the People.

It was clear from the beginning of the election campaign that the main plank of the UNP centered around ethno-populism. In his last message to the People of the South, on the eve of the elections, President D.B. Wijetunga made a pointed appeal. To quote: "When you vote, please take into consideration the fact that the country is facing a threat to its unitary status. Northern terrorists are demanding the separation of the country. The constitution has guaranteed Lankan citizens the right to live anywhere in the country. Then why are they clamouring for separation? This is a big hoax."

This fervent appeal was preceded by a series of public meetings addressed by the Head of State, where the main theme ranged from the negation of the Ethnic Question and the negation of all the legitimate aspirations and griev-

ances of the Tamil-speaking people. And, when one takes the "tree and the vine" syndrome to its logical conclusion, it is tantamount to the negation of the very existence of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society based on equality and co-existence.

What is interesting is that all political parties representing the minority nationalities share a common perception as regards the outcome of the polls.

The EPRLF in a statement congratulated the People of the South for having voted correctly and courageously. EPRLF's Politbureau Member, L. Ketheeswaran expressed hope that "the verdict given by the People of the South would have a sobering effect on the Government and compel it to abandon its adventurist policy of pursuing the military option, as well as its intentions to de-link the presently merged North-East." The EPRLF also urged the Government to give serious consideration to initiating a negotiated settlement to the Ethnic Question that would ensure a just and durable Peace.

M. Sivasithamparam, TULF President, while congratulating the

voters from the South for exercising their franchise with wisdom and foresight claimed that "these results provide proof that the people of this country as a whole, do not have confidence in the UNP and feel that the UNP is incapable of resolving grave problems facing the country."

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, H.M. Ashraff observed that "the entire government machinery went ahead with communal propaganda thinking that the Sinhala people of the South will fall prey to Sinhala chauvinism, but they have very clearly shown that such political-based chauvinism is no longer accepted."

In addition to the views expressed by the Tamil-Sinhala polity on the failure of ethno-populism, it is also clear that the experience of the people of the South with pauperization and state-sponsored violence had the expected fall-out. This does not in any way erode the credit that is due to the People's Alliance for having waged a hard and an organized campaign, under the able leadership of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranatunga. □

SPEAKER'S TRIP TO JAFFNA - A CASE OF "ON AGAIN, OFF AGAIN"!

The long-awaited visit to Jaffna by the Speaker, Mr. M.H. Mohammad, has once again come a cropper. His scheduled visit on, of all days the 1st April, was called off at the last moment on Presidential "ADVICE". That the Speaker was annoyed by this turn of events is evident from the statement that he rushed to the Press on the eve of his aborted trip.

In addition, the Speaker is quoted of telling some journalists that he had decided to give the Government some time to reconsider its stand on such peace missions. He further added that, "if the Government cannot make the arrangements, I am prepared to go on my own"

In the meantime, despite reports of the scheduled trip to Jaffna being finalized between Speaker Mohammad and LTTE's Thilagar in Paris, agency reports have quoted Thilagar of denying any contacts between the two in Paris. However, it is clear that the LTTE leadership and the People of Jaffna were eagerly awaiting the visit - the People, because they yearn for Peace, and the LTTE leadership, for the usual propaganda mileage.

In the midst of all this confusion, the President stepped in to clarify matters by announcing that no Minister or Member of Parliament may undertake any visit that entails any contact with the LTTE leadership without prior permission from His Excellency!

So much for peace moves.