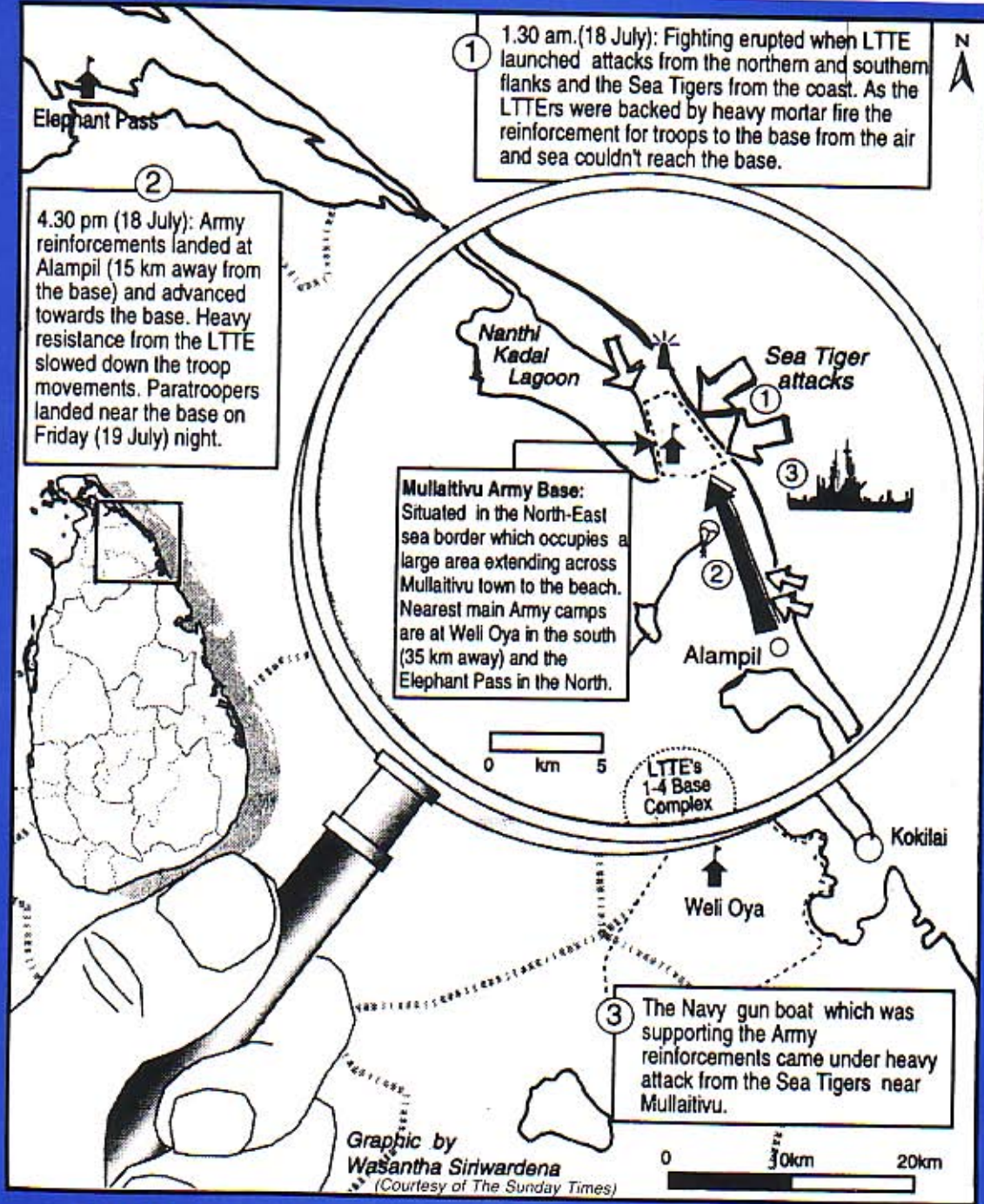


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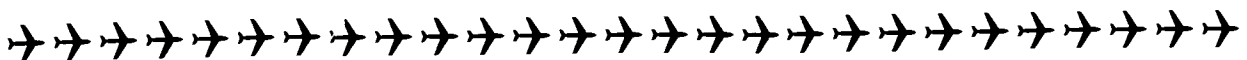
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I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it.
- Voltaire.

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Military D b cle at Mullaitivu

1200 Soldiers Killed, Says LTTE

The LTTE took complete control of the Mullaitivu army camp in northeastern Sri Lanka and killed 1208 soldiers and officers, according to a statement issued from its London office on 22 July. The battle for the camp commenced with a pre-dawn amphibious and land assault by the Tigers on 18 July and continued for four days. The army's attempt to send in reinforcements to recapture the camp would appear to have ended in failure, and the Tigers claim that they have surrounded and inflicted heavy casualties upon reinforcements.

All the indications are that government troops have suffered massive losses and a humiliating defeat at Mullaitivu at the hands of the Tigers who are reported to have launched an attack backed by over 2000 of its cadres. The LTTE admitted that 241 of its cadres were killed in the battle, but denied unconfirmed reports that its leader Pirabhakaran, who was personally supervising the operation, was injured.

After evading for days to accept the enormity of the losses suffered by the troops, senior army officers seem to have come to accept the fate that befell over 1200 troops that manned the camp. "The situation is not good at all. What we can see from the air and what we on radio indicates that there is no one there at the camp. We don't know what has happened to the troops who were there," a senior army officer is quoted as saying.

However, the military is continuing to send in reinforcements with the aim of preventing the Tigers from consolidating at the camp and holding it permanently.

"After two days of fierce battles, the LTTE fighter units have overrun the military complex at Mullaitivu and brought the camp area under their control last night," a Tiger statement issued on 21 July from London said.

"So far 800 bodies of soldiers have been recovered from the ruins of the battle and the casualty figure might rise as more troops are being killed from small pockets of resistance outside the camp perimeter," it said.

"In the meantime, the reinforce-

ment troops airlifted by helicopters at Alampil, 10 km (six miles) from Mullaitivu, have suffered severe casualties and face virtual annihilation by the LTTE forces," the LTTE statement said.

The Tiger radio said the battle between government reinforcements and the rebels had set off an exodus of residents from neighbouring towns which had come under heavy shelling. It was not clear who was doing the shelling.

The radio said the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had moved its offices in the Kilinochchi town some 30 km (18 miles) from Mullaitivu to a safer area following continued bombardment since 18 July. It said the guerrillas had agreed to hand over the bodies of the soldiers to the ICRC. The Tigers also said they had made arrangements with the ICRC to hand over 500 dead bodies of soldiers and the rest would be cremated within the camp as the bodies have decomposed to be able to be transported.

None of the LTTE statements claimed that they were holding prisoners from the camp. Military analysts are of the view that if the LTTE was able to capture the camp and kill so many troops, they also would be holding captured soldiers, particularly senior officers.

Military officials, newspaper correspondents and news analysts are unanimous in their description the LTTE offensive against Mullaitivu camp as the one of the biggest battles of the country's thirteen year civil war.

Military analysts are comparing the latest Tiger attack to an earlier devastating raid carried out on another military base, at Pooneryn, in 1993. Then, the Tigers smashed all communication links before killing more than 750 government troops, and at the same time lost at least about 400 of their own cadres.

The scale of the Tiger offensive and humiliating d b cle suffered by the military put paid to the claim made by the Commander of the Sri Lankan Army, Lt. Gen. Rohan Daluwatte that they were no longer capable of mass attacks after losing large numbers of

fighters in recent army offensives in the north of the island and following capture of Jaafna from the Tigers. He said the Tigers had lost important areas and a number of middle-rung leaders, their strength had been reduced to about 5,000 armed fighters from around 16,000, and that they were no longer capable of massed attacks like overrunning a big army base. Daluwatte also said the Tigers were also losing "twos and threes" each day in army special operations in the east from where troops were pulled out to be redeployed for the Jaffna offensives adding, "For a small organisation to have that type of casualties, the loss is all the more for them." The Tigers would appear have proved within just a month the sheer falsity of the Army Commander's claim by massing thousands of cadres in the attack against the Mullaitivu camp.

The military débâcle at Mullaitivu coming in the wake of large number of attacks by the Tigers on the security forces both in the north and east, and particularly in the military-controlled Jaffna peninsula indicate that the government's assumptions that the LTTE has been seriously weakened, both in manpower and weapons terms, and it was only a matter of time before the government forces would be able to subdue the Tigers if not totally but substantially, were seriously flawed.

The government hoped that with the capture of Jaffna that the war was nearing its end, and what was needed was money for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the war-ravaged areas of the north-east.

The latest developments on the military front threw into question the willingness of foreign aid donors to pump money into Jaffna's reconstruction in response to an appeal by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Even before the Mullaitivu military defeat, following the suicide bomb attack on the Housing Minister during his visit to Jaffna earlier in the month, a western diplomat was reported as saying, "It is troubling that a minister's security has been penetrated. The government has called on the diplomatic community to help fund Jaffna's redevelopment. Now potential donors may want to think twice." In the context of the Mullaitivu military defeat, the reluctance on the part of potential donors is likely to be greater.

As the battle for the camp was launched, a Reuter report datelined 18 July filed from Colombo quoted a mili-

tary official as saying, "The situation is very bad. Terrorists attacked in strength and have occupied much of the camp, including the main radio room. They are hammering our people."

The military officials also claimed that troops in the besieged camp were able to regroup in two locations inside the compound of the camp and were attempting to put up an effective resistance.

Air force planes flying over the area of the battle reported firing on rebel boats and trucks that were carrying off pieces of the vast arsenal stored at Mullaitivu. The planned to drop airborne troops by the authorities would appear to have been thwarted by intense rebel fire from the camp and the sea coast which appeared to be in total control of the LTTE. A military official said that the Tigers were presumably using the powerful long range weapons they had captured from the camp to fire at military planes, gunboats and naval craft.

Government statements have continued to assert that the camp had not been completely overrun and sections of the troops their have been defending the camp. The authorities have refuted the claim of the Tigers as to the number of soldiers killed, but at the same time have been unable to produce their own figures as to casualties on the military side on the basis that communications with the camp have been disrupted. But inexplicably, they were able to claim that over 300 Tigers have been killed.

On the day following the commencement of the LTTE attack, the military said a large force of Tigers had surrounded the camp at Mullaitivu and were pounding the camp with mortar, machinegun and small arms fire. Navy officials said gunboats had been sent to provide fire support when the base came under attack shortly after midnight. Air force helicopters were unable to land at the camp to evacuate the wounded, military officials said. Helicopter gunships and bombers were attacking the rebels and destroyed some of their boats," an air force officer said.

Within few hours after the attack commenced, the Tigers claimed they had overrun army camp and to have killed more than 150 troops to the loss of 34 of their cadres, according to Tiger radio traffic monitored by army signals intelligence. However on the second day (19 July), the Tigers officially announced that 500 soldiers had

been killed. An LTTE statement on said: "The LTTE forces after taking control of the central military complex, have removed three armoured vehicles and large quantities of heavy weapons including two 122 mm artillery." "Sri Lankan armed forces suffered heavy casualties and a large number of them have died," the statement said adding that 120 Tigers had been killed in the encounter. In a statement issued on 20 July, the Tigers claimed that 800 soldiers had been killed and the ICRC was being asked to make arrangements for the delivery of the dead bodies.

"Terrorists have captured two 122 mm artillery weapons, vehicles and other equipment," the army officer is reported to have confirmed. The navy rushed eight Dvora-class gunboats to the Mullaitivu area for back-up from the eastern port of Trincomalee, the Navy said.

It was quite clear that the military was unable to send in reinforcements to relieve the beleaguered garrison, because the only way to reinforce the camp was by air or sea as it was in Tiger-held territory. Mullaitivu base is 20 km (13 miles) north of a major Tiger jungle base complex.

A Tiger suicide squad rammed its explosive-laden motorboat into a Lankan naval ship carrying more than 40 sailors on 19 July, setting the craft afire. The 120-foot Ranaviru was reported sinking, but the fate of the crew was not known, military officials said. The suicide boat carrying an unknown number of Tigers slipped through heavy gunfire from the naval patrol boat, which was trying to fend off about a dozen rebel boats.

On shore, the rebels pinned down a commando unit sent to break the rebel siege and killed the commander of the elite force. About 100 soldiers - more than half of the counter-attack force - were evacuated under fire from the Tigers. Sixty were wounded, including the Mullaitivu base Commander, Brigadier Lawrence Fernando.

The Tigers, in a statement released from their political office in London, said they had surrounded the reinforcements near Alampil village, a few miles from the military camp.

A helicopter gunship that tried to land commandos on 19 July was damaged by rebel fire but managed to return to its base today, officials said. Two helicopters were damaged on the previous day. The Tigers also have beaten back naval gunboats that rushed to the area. ●

NEWS REVIEW

Minister Narrowly Escapes

At least 17 people were killed and at least 50 people, including a Sri Lankan minister and civilians who had gathered, were severely wounded in a Tamil Tiger suicide bomb attack by the northern Jaffna peninsula on 4 July.

Housing Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva, visiting Jaffna to assess reconstruction needs, narrowly escaped death suffering slight injuries to his forehead. An army brigadier and five soldiers, including 11 members of the minister's visiting party were among those killed in the bomb blast, reported to have been triggered by a female suicide bomber whose severed head was found nearby. The suicide bomber with explosives strapped to her body is reported to have leapt at a government minister's motorcade at Stanley Road in Jaffna city which is under military control.

The military officer in charge of northern Jaffna city, Brig. Ananda Hamangoda, died in the blast. Also killed were the chairman of the state-owned Lanka Cement Ltd., two police constables, a retired police superintendent working for the minister, four soldiers, other government officials and 10 civilians.

"The attack in Jaffna was predictable in that there would have been infiltration (into the army controlled area) and they will have to get used to this happening in the future," said political analyst Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu. He said the LTTE's aim was to make the army's control of Jaffna, heart of their dream homeland in the north and east, "as expensive and intolerable as possible" and to show that they were still a potent military and political force. They certainly retain the capability to harass and be more than just nuisance value."

The assassination attempt on the Minister occurred on the eve of the annual "Black Tiger" day (5 July) on which the Tamil Tigers celebrate their

fallen suicide cadres with a procession, public meeting and speeches by their top leaders.

"The Tamil Eelam national flag will be raised and oil lamps will be lit in memory of the Black Tigers who gave their lives for democracy, justice and the liberation of the motherland," the LTTE said in a statement from its London headquarters.

Photographs of young Tamil men and women killed in the suicide attacks adorned with garlands of flowers, are reported to have been positioned throughout territory in northern Sri Lanka still under LTTE control. All those who have died in their year fight for an independent state are accorded great military honours by the LTTE's leader. But these they say are shrines to the black tigers: youngsters who have deliberately and willingly sacrificed their lives in attacks against military or civilian targets.

In an address to the Tamil people, reported on the LTTE's clandestine radio - Voice of the Tigers - the LTTE leader, Vellupillai Pirabhakaran urged Tamils around the world to remember their sacrifice. The first black tiger suicide mission was carried out on July 5th, 1987, when a black tiger known as "Miller" drove a truckload of explosives into an army camp killing scores of soldiers.

LTTE Ban Condemned

The extension of the ban on the LTTE for a further period of two years by India has been condemned by Mr.P.Nedumaran of the Tamil National Movement in south India. In his statement Mr.Nedumaran said that the Tamil Tigers had never acted against the security and integrity of India. The charge that they were responsible for the murder of Rajiv Gandhi is yet to be proved in court. Therefore the ban on the LTTE was discriminatory and unjust. The new United Front Government under Deva Gowda was making the same grave error that the old Congress government made in initially banning the Tamil Tigers.

In the meantime, a special court sitting in the south Indian city of Vishakapatnam ordered the release of nine persons suspected to be connected with the Tamil Tigers who were taken into custody in 1993 by the Indian Navy and charged under the provisions of anti-terrorism law.

In its order, the court said that the charges against the accused had not been proved beyond doubt. The nine accused were on a ship which was intercepted by the Indian Navy about 440 nautical miles off Madras. The inmates refused to surrender and were reported to have blown up the vessel which was allegedly carrying explosives and weapons. A prominent leader of the LTTE, Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu, was among those who committed suicide by exploding the vessel. The nine person who were before the court jumped off the vessel and survived and were picked by the Indian Navy.

In acquitting the nine accused persons, the court ordered that they be handed over to the government of Honduras as the vessel in which they travelled was registered in Honduras to see whether they had violated any laws of that country

Tamil Parties Opposed to Unitary State

Leaders of six of Sri Lanka's Tamil political parties based in Colombo are reported to have told President Chandrika Kumaratunga that they were opposed to the unitary character of the state, as proposed in her package of devolution. They told the President at recent talks with her that they had always been for a separate state of Tamil Eelam but now they had settled for a political solution based on federalism.

The choice was between a federal state and an unitary state. Any reference to a unitary state in the Constitution would entail a situation where the Supreme Court would be in favour of the central government in the event of a constitutional dispute. The leaders said this would make the process of devolution meaningless. The President pointed out that a two-third majority was required in Parliament to have the legislation passed and the main Opposition United National Party was insisting on a unitary state.

The Tamil party leaders insisted that if they all stood together on the government's original stand of pro-

posing to do away with the unitary state, the opposition would relent and support the legislation.

The Tamil parties which met the President were the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), People Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam People Democratic Party (EPDP), Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO).

LTTE Welcomes 'Peace with Justice'

"We welcome the constructive views expressed at the 'Peace with Justice' two day International Conference held at the Edmund Barton Centre, in Canberra, Australia on 27-28 June 1996 on the conflict in Sri Lanka. The Conference concluded with a Statement calling for negotiations under international facilitation and observation," Mr. Lawrence Thilakar, the Paris-based international spokesman for and Central Committee member of the LTTE said in a statement dated 28 June.

The Conference was organised under the auspices of the Australian Human Rights Foundation and Australian Federation of Tamil Associations.

The statement of Mr. Thilakar added, "We see this effort by the international community towards resolving the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka as a very positive one. We are also heartened that the Conference statement duly recognized and endorsed the fact that :

- * Tamils are a people (Nation);
- * the governance of the Tamil people must be vested in the Tamil people themselves (self determination), and
- * the Tamil people as well as Sinhala people have their own traditional homelands.

"The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and respects the views expressed that an early cease fire and de escalation of the war is necessary while negotiations are proceeding.

"While we respect the desire of the Conference that immediate negotiations must commence, the necessary conducive conditions must be created by the Sri Lankan government by withdrawing its troops from the oc-

cupied areas."

\$140m for Education from World Bank

The World Bank has approved \$140 million for teacher education training and private sector infrastructure development in Sri Lanka. A sum of \$64.1 million has been allocated for teacher education training and \$77 million for support to the Private Sector Infrastructure Development Company (PSIDC), said a World Bank release.

"The main objective of the education project is to enhance the quality of education services in Sri Lanka by improving teacher education and training and strengthening teacher hiring and deployment practices," it said.

The PSIDC will use the funds to provide long-term subordinated debt at market-based rates to private investors in high-priority infrastructure projects. The two credits will be provided by the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's concessionary lending arm.

"The credits carry no interest and are to be repaid over a period of forty years including a grace period of ten years," the release said.

Lanka Seeking Foreign Help for Reconstruction

Late last month President Chandrika Kumaratunga told foreign diplomats they would soon be able to fly to war-torn northern Jaffna to assess the damage there. Kumaratunga, speaking to diplomats on 28 June, said the government could not wait for "total peace" between the armed forces and the LTTE before it started rehabilitation work in the area. "Therefore... the government would press on with the process of restoring normalcy in the north in the shortest possible time," the President said. Kumaratunga met the diplomats to discuss her appeal for help earlier this month for a \$274 million reconstruction and rehabilitation plan for Jaffna.

Kumaratunga said about 450,000 people had returned to Jaffna since the government wrested control of the peninsula from the LTTE in April. Kumaratunga set the stage for meeting earlier with a 29-page document to U.N. aid agencies and foreign missions. It called for the relocation of 100,000 families, preparing 5,000

hectares (12,350 acres) of arable land and building 490 km (305 miles) of roads and 200 schools. It also sought help in rebuilding the Jaffna Teaching Hospital and installing generators to provide electricity pending reconnection to the national grid.

Foreign donors emerged from the meeting with the President with many doubts about her request for aid for the nation's war-torn north dispelled, a senior aid official said. The government made no demand for pledges but instead gave several reassurances and sought comments on the government's document outlining reconstruction and rehabilitation plan for the Jaffna peninsula.

Some donors promised aid and technical assistance for the project. Germany promised immediate technical assistance in the reintegration of displaced persons, the international aid official said. It also promised commodity aid, such as agricultural supplies.

India promised food aid. Japan, the Netherlands and the United States all mentioned the importance of involvement of the United Nations and non-governmental organisations, and Japan expressed worries about security.

Britain said it wanted to provide five mobile generators as existing generating equipment in Jaffna was beyond repair.

Leading donors and lenders to Sri Lanka include Japan, the United States, Germany, Britain, Canada, Australia, Norway, the Netherlands, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

A Bomb With Flowers

A time-bomb hidden in a flower tray brought as an offering to a Buddhist shrine in northeastern Sri Lanka was defused by an army bomb disposal squad on 10 July, according to reports from Colombo.

The bomb was timed to go off when a group of policemen was due to attend a religious ceremony at the Jayanthipura Buddhist Centre in Polonnaruwa. The bomb was detected by a police informant who had been deployed among the crowds of devotees on the lookout for Tamil Tigers rebels. The informant noticed a thin wire protruding from one of the flowers in the trays, the report said.

INCREASED TIGER ATTACKS POSE MILITARY PROBLEMS IN JAFFNA

By D P Sivaram, Colombo

The LTTE set off a land mine at Karaveddi in the Jaffna peninsula on 9 July killing four soldiers and wounding seven. The soldiers were escorting a Police party which was transporting question papers for the GCE(OL) examination. The incident somewhat illustrates the government's predicament in the peninsula after the completion of Operation Riviresa 3. It has to engage a substantial number of the troops which has been deployed in the peninsula to resuscitate and run the civil administration there. The task, as the Karaveddi incident shows, is tough.

The suicide bombing in the heart of the Jaffna town has, among other things, increased the pressure of the army's holding and clearing operations in the Valikamam sector. The security of the town is paramount. In defending and consolidating the strategic territorial gains of Riviresa 1, 2 and 3, the government faces dilemmas. To consolidate the territorial gains, the civil administration has to be firmly in place and should be run effectively so that reconstruction and rehabilitation work can take place. The civilian authorities need enhanced protection from the military for this. The bureaucracy in the peninsula is scared to co-operate because the manner in which the army has established its presence in the peninsula is such that there are significant areas from which the Tigers are able to operate and gain access to the Jaffna town.

The army's territorial 'control' of the town extends, to the west, up to the Nachchimar Kovil junction on the KKS road. On the Palaly Road, the army's eight foot wall is only a few metres south from Urumpirai junction by the road to Maruthanamadam. Three main roads in the peninsula are under military control. They are - the Palaly Road, the Kandy Road from the town to Chavakcheri, the Point Pedro Road from the town to Atchuvely. These connect, in some places precariously, three defended zones in the pe-

ninsula which the army is trying to consolidate; and for the protection of which eight foot high bunds have been constructed at strategic points, extending several miles in some areas. (These 'walls' have been made with sand, mud and the debris of houses and buildings destroyed in the artillery barrages which took place during the Riviresa operations.) The first zone comprises the Jaffna town and its environs. The second one covers the coastal part of Vadamaradchi, and part of Nelliady. To the south, this zone begins, according to some residents, at Patella near Pt Pedro and to the north west is linked to the Idaikadu-Thondamanar FDL which was the eastern defence of the Palaly base before Operation Riviresa 1.

The landmine attack by the LTTE on the army on 9 July took place inside this defended zone, corroborating the point made by some military analysts in Colombo - that the system of defended zones established by the army in the peninsula has created a situation where the army will have to expend resources on screening and flushing out Tiger informants, snipers, suicide bombers and even ambush parties as well as on defending the zones at the perimeter bunds in addition to carrying out special operations into the areas outside the 'walls'. And yet, these analysts say, the army will find the LTTE both inside and outside the defended zones whereas before the Riviresa Operations the Tigers posed a problem only beyond the Forward Defence Lines of the army's bases in the peninsula.

The LTTE, since the capture of the peninsula by the army, has organised its military wing in the peninsula into several area commands which, according to some sources, are co-ordinated and directed by Pottu Amman. A government official who came down to Colombo from Jaffna a week after the suicide bomb attack on Stanley Road said that his colleagues who have to sometimes go beyond the defence perimeter bund at Nachchimar Kovil

junction can carry out their duties only with the approval of the LTTE area commander. This is making rehabilitation work difficult, he said. The official also mentioned that the army knows about their predicament because some of his colleagues have duly informed the military of this particular difficulty to avoid problems. But the army is able to do little about this state of affairs in the peninsula because it has to soon find enough troops to enter the Wannu and hold most major towns there which is the government's wish. Some operations were conducted recently in the Thavady and Manipay areas which are under the influence of an LTTE area command. Here, as in Batticaloa the Tiger attack group operating in the area simply avoids confrontation in order to retain the element of surprise which is key to the long term success of the mode of fighting that the LTTE seems to have adopted in the peninsula.

On the ground the situation in Jaffna resembled that which obtains in most parts of the east - and Batticaloa in particular. The army controls some key access roads and strategically important population centres. The Tigers rule the roost everywhere else, regularly threatening and mounting military pressure on the access routes and thereby on the population centres. This strains the resources and morale of the forces which, as a result, gradually tend to lose their grip on the civilians.

The current predicament of the STF in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts is a case in point. Now, this is quite similar to the kind of military balance which obtains in the peninsula. But the army enjoys certain geographical advantages in Batticaloa such as the lagoon which surrounds the town and which separates the politically important population belt along the districts' coast from the hinterland dominated by the LTTE. The geography of Batticaloa poses serious tactical and logistical problems to the LTTE. Hence, by the method of sustaining the government's grip on the district by controlling three key access routes and a few important towns and villages on the coastal population belt works in Batticaloa, though quite precariously at times. This method helps the government mainly to hold on to the district with a minimum number of

troops - a semblance of control for less expense. This system is feasible in Batticaloa primarily because of the singular geographical advantage which the district offers to the army of a state - an advantage which was also well exploited by the colonial rulers. But can this method succeed in the peninsula in the years to come?

The government has only the army to stand between its machinery in the defended zones and the areas outside where the Tigers operate. The drawbacks of the defence system which the army has applied to a terrain which has non-particular physical features as in Batticaloa to enhance its effectiveness are already evident - particularly in the matter of keeping a firm grip on civilian morale. For example, on 6 July the Tigers shot dead in broad daylight Mr Thambu Ramalingam, a retired Assistant Government Agent of Jaffna who hoisted the Nanthi (seated bull) flag along with the Lion flag at the victory celebration following the fall of Jaffna town after the conclusion of Operation Riviresa 1 last year. The Tigers killed him at his residence in Ariyalai which is inside a defended zone.

The suicide bombing and the killing of Mr Ramalingam have somewhat rattled the naive complacency of the politicians in the south. The Tamil bureaucracy in the peninsula is of course quite alarmed by this state of affairs. There is only one way in which the government can hope to manage the problem immediately - recruit more soldiers! The government announced an ambitious recruitment drive to take in at least ten thousand youths (education up to grade five being the basic criterion) soon after the conclusion of Operation Riviresa 2 mainly for the purpose of opening a Main Supply Route through the Wannu to the peninsula which was and still remains, a pressing need for the sustenance of the civil and military systems in Jaffna. The recruitment program is almost into its third month. About three thousand youths have joined. Some mainstream Sinhala papers have deplored the poor response from the Sinhala youths. The army has also reiterated its position that all deserters are free to come back to service and need not face any disciplinary measures. The deserters, however, are not returning in large numbers. Instead they have become a bloody menace to civil society in the south. Seven members of a family were recently chopped to death with swords by a

gang led by army deserters. This incident in Akmeemana shocked the country and the government immediately appointed a special police team to locate and bring to book the thousands of deserters who are at large and are engaged in murder and arson.

The Akmeemana massacre was the climax to a spate of robberies and gory killings which have plagued the south since Eelam War Two began in earnest in 1990. The police have generally pointed its finger at the growing number of deserters who roam the south - sometimes armed with assault rifles and handguns stolen from their units.

On the political front matters have reached a veritable dead end. The United National Party stated categorically that it will not in any way agree to the modification of Article 76 of the Constitution on the basis that it will destroy the unitary character of the State.

This has simply closed the door on a possible Parliamentary consensus on some form of devolution acceptable to the Tamil parties. The UNP has basically scuttled the PA's strategy of sending the Tamil parties to the UNP's doorstep seeking a change in its stand on the devolution proposals.

All the Tamil parties are quite despondent and crestfallen. They all know that the PA's devolution process is dead. They are scared to write its epitaph for it would spell an end to their position and any claim for legitimacy. Any they are further saddened by the knowledge that Chandrika, whose popularity in the south has hit rock bottom since she assumed office due to the rapidly rising cost of living and growing unemployment, cannot, as she herself implied at one of her recent meetings with them, cut the Gordian Knot by seeking a mandate from the Sinhalese for her devolution package at a referendum.

The probable fiasco of the PA's peace package, however, has not assuaged the passions of the Sinhala nationalists who have frequently flayed the 'package', fanned by zealous editorialists in sections of the mainstream press. The venom of such Sinhala 'Buddhist' passions was directed recently at the US ambassador who had said a few things to encourage the devolution process, while calling on the Mahanayake of the Malwatte chapter. The ambassador, Peter Burleigh told the Mahanayake during the meeting that most learned people in most countries of the world

have said that devolution brings good to the people. The Mahanayake Thera, however, informed him that whatever may be the case in other countries he (the Thera) did not think that devolution "will do any good in Sri Lanka". The President of The Organisation to Save the Sinhalese took umbrage at this. He lashed out at the US ambassador while addressing the 47th convention of the All Ceylon Buddhist Ladies Conference in Colombo on 29 June, saying "I was deeply concerned when I saw a news item in the Divaina newspaper on 27 June. The American Ambassador has said that devolution will bring good to the people. The Mahanayake has, however, told him that it won't do our country any good. The ambassador's statement that a majority of the learned people in the world accept the (devolution) proposals makes it clear that the Malwatte Mahanayake was not learned. Humiliating the Mahanayake Thera of Malwatte who is venerated by all, including the President of this country, is a matter of concern. I have no politics. I have a feeling for the country, the people and the religion. We cannot just watch when Beef-eating whites like him come and humiliate us. I am, therefore, of the view that this foolish intellectual, the American ambassador, who humiliated us should be sent back immediately." The situation seems to have gone back to square one.

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DEVOLUTION PACKAGE UNP's Opposition Based on Prejudice, Distortion and Ignorance

By Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu

The UNP held a press conference this week that indicated it would not support the Government's legal draft of the devolution package. This effectively kills off the prospects for a select committee consensus and two-third majority support in Parliament for these proposals.

In effect, it also brings down the curtain on devolution as a political solution to the ethnic conflict and halts the constitutional reform process in its tracks. This of course means - if anyone thought otherwise - that the executive precedence will not be abolished and the provincial council system will be retained.

The current challenge for the Government is not so much a question of what it can do to make things better, but what it should not do to make things worse. The UNP's objection to the substance of the Government's devolution proposals is based upon a combination of rank prejudice, deliberate distortion and/or ignorance. Their position is that the proposals lie outside the unitary framework and therefore are unacceptable. The unitary state is sacrosanct and has to be defended at all costs. As for federalism or anything that even remotely resembles it, the logic of the UNP is that it would facilitate rather than contain secession.

The Government has at no point projected its legal draft as a federal document. In fact, Professor Pieris has been at pains to emphasise that the draft intends and constitutes a 'redefinition' of the unitary state.

Moreover, it is clear from reading it what whilst it is more closely federal than the Thirteenth Amendment, it is far from genuinely federal in its scope and content. Furthermore, the legal draft provides the Sri Lanka state all the powers necessary to protect and defend the territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty of the indissoluble Union of Regions envisaged.

There are significant omissions as well in the legal draft that go far in substantiating the thesis that it is not federal. Principal amongst them is the

absence of a second chamber which will express the stake of the regions at the centre - the essence of federalism being partnership and interdependence. The legal draft is silent as well on a mechanism to settle disputes between the centre and the regions and does not enshrine the supremacy of the constitution - two further essential features of a federal constitution. Judicial review of legislation which will give expression to the supremacy of the constitution, is limited to fundamental rights and that too for a period of two years only.

To all of this must be added the further entrenchment of majoritarianism represented by the Supreme Council and the provisions relating to the centre's powers of dissolution vis-a-vis a regional council. It should be noted that on this last point, the Thirteenth Amendment provides better safeguards against the arbitrary abuse of power by the centre.

Under the Thirteenth Amendment, the President has no power to dissolve a provincial council. The UNP seems hell bent on overlooking all of this and more. Contemporary history shows, if nothing else, that ethnic conflict has been exacerbated by the concentration of power at the centre rather than by any attempt to devolve it.

Perhaps the UNP's ideological blinkers with regard to the character and contents of the legal draft have been tightened by the President's perverse modus operandi for achieving a consensus on it. To the UNP's prejudice must be added pique. Ranil Wickremesinghe in his press conference shed light on this when he cast doubt on the President's commitment to devolution and constitutional reform. That she has turned every opportunity into an occasion on which to castigate the UNP and even personally attack the Leader of the Opposition, and all this at a time when she needs their co-operation and support to arrive at a political solution to the overarching national crisis, lends credence to Wickremesinghe's contention.

The corollary to its is equally significant - the President has done everything possible to alienate the UNP because, if there was a consensus on devolution it would pave the way for constitutional reform, including the abolition of the executive presidency. Both sides seem to be playing politics with a political solution to the ethnic conflict and bad politics at that. Would it not have been politically shrewder for the UNP to have supported the legal draft and called the Government's bluff on constitutional reform and the abolition of the executive Presidency?

Even the Choksy stratagem to retain Article 2 enshrining the unitary state and amend Article 76 to allow Parliament to delegate its legislative powers to another body, is being orphaned at the point at which the government appears interested in adopting it, at least for form's sake. It will be presented to the committee in legal draft. Apparently Choksy asked a question rather than provided an answer. One wonders whether it was all that spontaneous.

In any event, motive notwithstanding, if the UNP is to fall back upon the Thirteenth Amendment and the provincial council system, there is no need to amend anything. The status quo on woefully inadequate devolution will be retained. There is no escaping the imperative of a political solution to the ethnic conflict as a necessary condition for peace and prosperity.

Yet, neither side seems mature enough to grasp the full implications of this. They are more concerned with petty partisan pre-occupations and in apportioning blame for failure rather than in sharing responsibility for success. The Government will blame the UNP for sabotaging the legal draft and will point to the draft as demonstrable proof of its commitment to devolution. The UNP will claim to have saved the unitary state and with reference to its continued subscription to the Thirteenth Amendment, assert that it has not turned its back on devolution either.

There is a sense of *deja vu* about all this. It is not unlike the Mangala Moonesinghe Committee. There too a lot of hope was invested only to be dissipated. Machiavelli wrote about *Virtu* and *Fortuna*. Our politicians would do well to read him well, rather than merely professing to the former whilst desperately relying upon the latter.

(Courtesy "Sunday Leader" - 7.7.96)

Getting Out of the Morass of Violence in Sinhala - Tamil Politics

by Dr.S.Narapalasingam

The people of Sri Lanka over the past four decades have remained politically divided between a clear majority of Sinhalese (74%) and a substantial minority of Lankan Tamils (13%). The latter have their roots in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka - though many of them resided outside these provinces - where they remained the predominant ethnic group except in certain parts of the Eastern Province.

The LTTE has been waging a war over the past 13 years with the declared aim of establishing an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the North-East. Without going into the pros and cons of this move, it is useful at the present critical time to consider the repercussions of the actions of this group and its supporters, particularly those among the Tamil diaspora, as far as the present and future of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

It should be clear to any rational person familiar with the recent happenings in Sri Lanka and the stand and measures taken by the leadership of the LTTE during the several phases of the war for Eelam, particularly after it broke the ceasefire agreement and resumed hostilities in April 1995, that the primary aim of continuing the war, regardless of its human and other costs as well as its consequences to the political future of the Tamils living in a multi-ethnic country, is to take possession of the land considered to traditionally belong to the Tamils.

In fact, the phrase "war for land" was used in its statement issued in July 1995 in an apparent justification for the killing of Sinhalese villagers in the border areas of the North-East region, as they were considered by the LTTE to be part of the Sri Lankan Government's "war for land" in the North-East. As for the LTTE's aim, the fact that nearly a half of Lankan Tamils (the up-country Tamils are also Sri Lankans as their citizenship rights have been restored but for the purpose of the discussions here, they are not included in this group) live in ethnically mixed areas seems irrelevant.

Hence others, whether they are Tamils or not, who strive to win the legitimate rights of the Tamils living in a multi-ethnic country, based on the principles of equality and power-sharing between different ethnic groups are considered to be disloyal, and therefore "traitors" to the "Tamil cause".

Tamil diaspora

The migration of Tamils to foreign countries surged dramatically after the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom and it is still continuing as the ethnic war continues unabated. A considerable number of them have already acquired citizenship rights or permanent residence and developed vested interests mostly in countries like Great Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Canada, Australia and the U.S.A., and hence seem to have found a permanent home for the present for themselves and for their progeny in the future in these countries. The others are engaged in a feverish attempt to acquire the same. Already, even substantial number of elderly fathers, mothers, fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law have become part of the Tamil diaspora, and the attempts to bring such elderly people into these countries to join their kith and kin still continue.

According to some reports about 20 per cent of the Lankan Tamils presently live abroad. Of these, the overwhelming majority are from the North, particularly from Jaffna. Apart from those Tamils who are doing very well in Sri Lanka, or for other reasons - political or economic - who do not want to migrate, all the indications are that there is a now a craving among Tamils to somehow leave the country, whether they are living in the war-torn north-east or have moved to the south and living in Colombo and adjoining areas. It would seem that the only problem that has prevented the migration of most of the Tamils now in Sri Lanka to foreign countries is firstly the exorbitant cost involved in paying "agents", and sec-

ondly the tightening of immigration laws in foreign countries to which there has been previously an influx of Tamil refugees.

The Tamils living abroad regardless of their residential status have some links with Sri Lanka, as some of their close relatives still live there. Besides, they (especially the older generation) have an emotional attachment to their respective towns and villages in Sri Lanka in which they and their parents have lived before. The concern they have for the safety, security and legitimate rights of the Tamils living in Sri Lanka is therefore not in question. However, among them are some vocal sections who by their uncompromising stand with regard to the resolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and display of crude chauvinism - it must be realised that chauvinism is not always a monopoly of the numerical majority - and whose actions have the effect of being counter-productive to the ultimate aim of assuring the security and future well-being of fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka. Their attitude is apparently induced not largely by love for their fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka, but more by their anger and vindictiveness against the Sinhalese emanating from their own bitter experiences with the past governments or from losing their family members, relatives, friends and assets in the anti-Tamil pogroms.

Secure in their newly found havens and leading a life of relative luxury compared to those back at home, and living in circumstances where normal democratic and human rights are guaranteed, some of these expatriate Tamils are seen, sadly in the name of the "Tamil cause", to rationalise and justify the most appalling outrages and brutalities committed against not only the Sinhalese and Muslims, but also against fellow Tamils who hold a different point of view. The dreadful consequences of continuing such a vindictive attitude to the long-term welfare of the Tamils seem to have not yet been fully grasped by these sections in these expatriate circles.

The expatriate Tamil must realise that any actions that result in the creation of a situation in Sri Lanka that compel the remaining Tamils there to flee to foreign lands or to the south of the island will only further weaken the case for a Tamil homeland. In that eventuality, it will be hardly justifi-

able for insisting that the North-East region must just in case the Tamils settled abroad decide to return in the future.

The "responsible" Lankan Tamils living abroad must recognize these realities and refrain from misleading and giving false hopes to those unfortunate ones trapped in the ongoing self-destructive war. In fact, the utterances of some (the emphasis to be noted) Tamil expatriates give rise to serious doubts about their motives, as these tend to imply a desire to perpetuate the state of war in Sri Lanka. In particular, some Tamils settled permanently abroad with their families, seem to be advocating the creation of a separate state in Sri Lanka for egotistic and nostalgic reasons. They also have stereotyped explanations, motivated by racial pride and prejudice to justify every single action of the rebels, regardless of its adverse effect on the Tamils in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, their sceptical opinion on the proposals of the Sri Lankan Government to settle the conflict through constitutional reforms has the sympathy of many moderate Tamils. However, mere chauvinistic posturing without exploring a practical way to get out of the dilemma, other than giving false hope of success through the military option, will not help the Tamils to end their protracted suffering and assure a better future. It is high time that they reconcile their idealism with realism. **In conflict resolution some compromises by both sides are inevitable but these cannot be construed by either party as complete surrender of the position each has taken in the past.** This important point is emphasized in case anyone mistakenly thinks that the suggestion is being made here to wave the "white flag" now!

Living Under Illusions

A pragmatic solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, that will have universal support and serve the interests of all the ethnic groups there has to be within the framework of a meaningful decentralised democratic system, with adequate safeguards to prevent the abuse of powers by the centre that would undermine the principles of devolution and power-sharing.

Some expatriates are still under the illusion that by canvassing British MPs or the US Senators and Con-

gressmen, diplomatic pressures can be exerted on the Sri Lankan Government for it to settle the conflict by acceding to the demands of the Tamil rebels. It is astonishing how they can expect these politicians to take a different line from that is currently being pursued steadfastly by their own governments with regard to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The common position of the governments of the U.K., U.S.A. and Ireland is that, **the IRA should first reinstate the ceasefire** and subsequently along with all paramilitary groups it should decommission its weapons in order to assist in achieving a final political settlement of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Its political wing, the Sinn Fein has not been allowed to attend the peace talks because the first condition has not yet been met. The wisdom of excluding Sinn Fein in the context of the aim to achieve lasting peace in Northern Ireland is another matter. Sinn Fein's credibility even among the republicans south of the border has come under increased pressure after the recent bomb blast by the IRA in the centre of Manchester, England.

World opinion

The bombing of the Central Bank building in Colombo not long after the Oklahoma bombing incident was perceived by many Americans, who were unaware of the circumstances that started the conflict in Sri Lanka in the first place, as a similar terrorist act by an extremist group. The sympathy of the foreigners towards the Tamils in the perception that being a powerless minority community in Sri Lanka, they have been treated unfairly, subjugated and denied equal rights by the powerful governments dominated by the majority Sinhalese has waned considerably in recent years.

Considerable harm has been done to the Tamil cause itself after the militants started targeting Sinhalese and Muslim civilians, killing hundreds in surprise attacks. Sinhalese peasants in the border villages have been brutally killed including innocent women and children. The latest such incident occurred in the early hours of 11 June '96 in the border village of Lunuoya in Elavankulam (Aruwakkaru, Puttalam district) in which 14 men, women and children were "shot and hacked" to death. In this connection, Amnesty International once again

expressed its concern that "Sinhalese civilians appear to have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed solely on the basis of their ethnicity."

"Terrorism" is despised in many advanced countries, including those providing refuge to Lankan Tamils in recent years. The international community as a whole is now increasingly apprehensive of terrorism in whatever form. Many foreign governments are now taking a hard line against the LTTE considering the nature of its militant activities. In this connection, the perception and attitude of the US government is revealed in the the US State Department Report on "Patterns of Global Terrorism - 1995".

Racial Hatred

The distrust between the Sinhalese and Tamils was initially confined primarily to the domain of politics. The grievance of the Tamils was against the various governments that treated them as second class citizens and denied their legitimate rights. Even the several anti-Tamil riots that took place since 1958 were encouraged or not quelled promptly by the State. Many Sinhalese gave protection to the Tamils in their homes during those difficult days and were also sympathetic to the legitimate rights of the Tamils. After the Tamil-"liberation" struggle took a different turn and the killings extended to include innocent people either for revenge or to provoke the government and the military, resulting in retaliatory collective punishment and indiscriminate attacks by the security forces in which the victims were mainly Tamil civilians, the ill-feeling between the Sinhalese and the Tamils began to increase.

This may be a deliberate move by the rebels to convey the message to the outside world that the two communities cannot live peacefully in one country. But how this will help the Tamils to live peacefully even in a separate region with the Sinhalese as neighbours in the adjacent regions is incomprehensible. This is also unhelpful to reach an amicable settlement of the conflict through constitutional reform, which requires trust between the two communities. In fact, the brutal killing of civilians including women and children would have only hardened attitudes even among the moderate Sinhalese, which the Tamils living in Colombo and other

towns outside the North-East know quite well.

It would appear that the Tamil rebels and their backers think by intensifying racial hatred, destroying life and property, destabilizing the elected governments and by other disruptive actions, the separate independent state of Tamil Eelam will ultimately emerge in Sri Lanka. Given the present realities, this is like expecting the resurrection of the dead after the crucifixion.

There has never been any serious open discussions within the Tamil community in recent times on the political goals, their attainability and their long-term implications for the welfare of the entire society in the context of evolving political and economic changes in the modern world, the strategies to win wide support for achieving realistic goals, etc. Conferences and seminars are held in foreign capitals solely to communicate predetermined stances and the organizers invariably expect the participants to praise and support their positions and actions.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu in an interview said very emphatically; "without forgiveness and reconciliation, there cannot be real peace even if the war has ended."

The leaders of various Tamil groups must give precedence to the interest of the Tamil people over their own political ambitions at this crucial time. This is not the time for engaging in vindictive acts or in power struggles. The last thing the traumatised people in the North-East want now is another round of internecine warfare there that will disrupt again their lives. Arbitrary killings of civilians either by the armed forces or by the Tamil militants of any group should not be condoned by the Government and the people.

In this regard, the urgency for reinstating and strengthening the civil administration that is credible and capable of restoring the rule of law and executing the rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the war-torn regions cannot be over-emphasised. The risk that the resources and energies spent in these areas would turn out to be futile, without a viable political solution to the vexed ethnic problem should not be under-estimated.

Intrusion of Violence

The issues addressed and views expressed so far focused mainly on the actions and attitude of those Tamils, which tend to perpetuate the state of conflict in Sri Lanka. The discussions under this important subject will be incomplete without dwelling on the shortcomings of the other warring side that need concerted efforts in order to instil trust in the minds of the Tamil people; the lack of this as observed at the very outset has contributed significantly to the belligerent attitude of some Tamils.

It is ludicrous for anyone to think that violence has intruded only into the Tamil culture. Violence has encroached into national politics; the extent of this intrusion is becoming clearer with the disclosures made by concerned persons before the various Presidential Commissions. Thus, the culture of violence has intruded into Sinhala society. It is naive to assume that the two intrusions are independent; in fact they are not mutually exclusive in promoting the hostile attitude and intolerance towards other ethnic, religious and political groups. This retrogression has marred the confidence of the people particularly in the way governments function in their "democratic and socialist" country. The credibility of governments has become dubious even among the Sinhalese people.

Political parties in opposition are very vocal in condemning the immoral and corrupt practices of ruling parties but often these principles are ignored when they occupy the seats of power. The violent climate that prevailed during the JVP uprising, was seized to get rid of "troublesome" people and blame the killings on the JVP. Similarly it became convenient later to blame the "Tigers" for the killings of some prominent Sinhalese. The revelations of important witnesses before the Presidential Commissions indicate the assassination of Mr. Athulathmudali and Lt. General Denzil Kobbekaduwa to be the work of insiders and not that of the LTTE!

Buddhism advocates and preaches non-violence and peace as its universal message and does not approve of any kind of violence or destruction of life. These are in harmony with the precepts of other major religions espoused by Sri Lankans. Religious edu-

cation is emphasized in the school curriculum. All the major holy days of the Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims are public holidays in Sri Lanka. The attendance at temples, churches, mosques and prayer meetings has not decreased. How then the violent culture intruded into the daily lives of the peace loving people of the blessed island? There is only one unequivocal answer. The political and religious leaders did not practise what they preached or in some instances advocated violence contrary to the basic principles of their own religion and civilised codes of conduct. It was either power itself that they wielded over the people or the greed for it that made them to ignore the very principles that they expected others to follow faithfully.

The Sri Lankan "Women for Peace" movement in a recent statement drew attention to the fact that "the government in particular has a moral duty towards the people in creating a climate free of fear and terror, instill in people mutual trust and understanding, build faith and confidence which is an essential prerequisite to the long term achievement of unity and ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka." Hopefully, the men will not ignore this as mere expression of sentimentality by the "weaker" sex! In fact, in order to win the peace not physical but mental strength is needed. As often pointed out by this writer, it was the lack of political courage that deterred the leaders from taking the ethically right decisions at the right time. Had they not succumbed to divisive politics, the unity of the people would not have been shattered and the present distrust of the minority Tamils in the unitary system of government that bestows overall controlling powers to the majority Sinhalese could not have arisen.

Besides the imperative to find urgently a political solution acceptable to people on both sides of the ethnic divide, the Sri Lankan society as a whole needs the restoration of its traditional cultural and moral values for lasting peace, stability and social and economic progress. Prayers alone are not sufficient, determined efforts of conscientious Sri Lankans are needed to pull the society out of the morass it had got stuck into following blindly the wrong path shown by those leaders, who put their interests and of their parties before that of the nation. ●

THE UNITARY STATE AND DEVOLUTION

By Batty Weerakoon

In the current discussion on the subject of devolution of power in Sri Lanka the position has been advanced that there can be no substantial devolution in a Unitary State. The assumption in this appears to be that devolution of power is a device related to a federal arrangement and that the unitary state is too restrictive for its meaningful realisation.

This position, advanced by a group of respected academics who have shown a long time commitment to devolution as a solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis, passes off for a self evident truth. Closer examination, however, exposes its fallaciousness. To allow it to pass unchallenged is dangerous. The obverse of it is that devolution of power if effected substantially in a unitary state will change the unitary nature of that state. This position can therefore feed the "nationalist" at both the Sinhala and Tamil extremes. The word "nationalist" is preferred here because it reaches beyond the besotted that answer to the term communalist.

Classification

The constitutional law which may be resorted to in the task of making a constitution has no ready to hand classification of criteria that relate to 'unitary' and 'federal'. The brahmins of the Indian Constitution have added confusion too to this situation. Of them some view that constitution as unitary with a federal potential while others see it as federal with strong unitary features.

The constitutional law that has had predominance in Sri Lanka relates almost wholly to the British constitution. All else is seen very much from the outside. In relation to the flexibility claimed for the unwritten British constitution there is the description 'rigid' applied to, for instance, the constitution of the USA which is admittedly federal in character. Its rigidity may however be open to question

considering the manner it has been worked by that country's executive Presidents and the Supreme Court. It may be said that it has not rigidly remained the federal constitution which the federating states may understandably have wanted it to be.

Multi-cultural Polity

Britain in the 1920's did consider administering a large dose of what it described as 'federal devolution' to its admittedly unitary state. In June 1919 the House of Commons appointed a 'Speaker's Conference on Devolution' to consider and report upon 'a measure of federal devolution' for the administration of its four components - England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

The 'federal devolution' mentioned here is not defined. But it cannot be said that post-war Britain of the 20's was considering a change in the unitary character of its state and constitution/. It was looking for solutions from available constitutional law and practice for the political problems of a multi-cultural polity. That such a solution had a federal flavour was seen as no reason to reject it.

The academics mentioned above appear to rely on the Supreme Court's determination on the 13th Amendment for their position on the limitations of the unitary state vis a vis devolution.

What the Supreme Court had to determine on that Amendment was as to whether it had to be approved by the People at a Referendum before it became law. A Referendum is required where entrenched provisions in the Constitution are amended. The 13th Amendment did not remove any of these provisions and they remained for all purposes intact.

Particular mention may be made of the fact that Article 2, which declares that the Republic of Sri Lanka is a Unitary State, is among the entrenched. One principal question that

had to be determined, as seen by Court, was as to whether Article 76 was affected. This Article stated that Parliament shall not abdicate or in any manner alienate its legislative power, and shall not set up any authority with any legislative power. Although this Article was not entrenched it was argued that it characterised the unitary state contemplated in Article 2 and that therefore the setting up of Provincial Councils with legislative power affected it.

There is, one would think, a very simple answer to this. That is the fact that despite the Republic being declared Unitary State it became necessary to make the express provision of Article 76 precisely because the Unitary State contemplated in the Constitution, if left without this prohibition, could allow parliament to set up legislative bodies outside of itself. Court, however, did not resort to this answer. Instead, the majority opinion written by Sharvananda J, held, as among its findings relevant to the matter in issue, that Parliament has reserved to itself the right to legislate on 'National Policy' even on devolved subjects and that therefore there was no infringement of Article 76. The minority opinion, written by Wanasundera J, held otherwise. The thesis here was that there is a certain pattern of political and legal relations within which the Unitary State created in the Constitution had to function and that any alteration of that pattern affected the unitariness declared in Article 2.

Supreme Court's Determination

Neither opinion attempted to evaluate the matters in issue in the context of any theory of the unitary state. This may have been for the very good reason that there was no such generally accepted theory. Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam, MP, in a recent contribution on Devolution recalled that, 'Dr Colvin R de Silva used to say that there is nothing called a unitary constitution which is locked up in some mythical vault in heaven with which one could compare a constitution and say whether it is unitary or not.'

Sharvananda, J, adopted the text book distinction between the constitutional concepts 'unitary' and 'federal'. He observed that the gist of the federal principle is that through co-ordinate authorities, which are in-

dependent of each other, the federal and state governments exercise sovereignty in their respective fields but that in a unitary state sovereignty rests with the central government.

Where the majority opinion in the SC determination on the 13th Amendment contended itself with the distribution of sovereignty as what distinguished the federal from the unitary state the minority opinion assumed that devolution of power is a mechanism through which regional or provincial units of devolution can be made so autonomous as could change the unitary character within which the devolution is made. It goes on to state that the devolution of power effected by the 13th Amendment gives to the Sri Lanka state a federal character.

Delegation v Devolution

It must be remembered that the principle that is operative in the exercise of power distribution within a federal arrangement is not devolution but delegation. The American states delegated certain powers to a mutually accepted national centre and enumerated them. The balance was kept with the states as residual powers. The na-

ture of the latter was such that a state, if it opted to do so, could repossess the powers it had delegated and even taken the extreme step of secession. The fact that this has not happened in the USA and will certainly not happen is no reason to deny the basic nature of the relationship. We saw it asserting itself in the break up of the USSR. The fact is that from the very commencement of the 200 year history of the American federation the individual states saw no pressing reason to go back on their delegation of powers or to continue to maintain strictly their individual unitariness. They had the political will and the mutual confidence to reach compromises. It was these factors that were found wanting in the federalism of the USSR. The republics were able to resume their dormant unitariness. If what they had in their federalism was mere autonomy this would not have been possible no matter how enhanced it was.

The SC determination on the 13th Amendment cannot thus be taken as authoritative on the possibilities of devolution within a unitary state. Nor was it called upon to pronounce on

that. This is not to say that the SC's minority opinion did not go on to state what it considered as the dangers of devolution. This however is basically the expression of political preference and can have no place in the examination of legal relations and capacities. In fact the discussion on devolution of power in the Sri Lanka context has been dominated by political preference for or against the unitary state with scant regard being paid to the manner devolution can be exercised as an intelligent device within the unitary state it is not surprising that this should be reflected in the SC determination too.

Indian Constitution

As noted above what happens in federalism is the delegation of powers by the federating states to the centre which these states establish for themselves collectively. The centre comes into existence only through this delegation. Devolution of power on the other hand, can have meaning and purpose only as a device that is resorted to for reordering of legal relations within an existing state structure. This invariably is the unitary state. The federal element in the In-



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dian Constitution comes basically from the fact that the national centre it projects is a creation of the Constitution to serve the purpose of already existing units. What has operated in that context in respect of power is not its devolution but its delegation. The "Unitary" element in it issues principally from the responsibility the Constitution casts on the centre in the refashioning of the units in accordance with the post-colonial challenges, and in the holding of these units together. It is a serious mistake to assume that the political restructuring a post-independent India was the transformation of relations in a unitary state.

In Sri Lanka we are faced today with a completely different exercise which is the restructuring of an existing and functioning unitary state. A restructuring that is adequate to cope with the compelling political needs of the country has to effect a substantial distribution of power to the periphery while maintaining the political and territorial unity and integrity of the country. Devolution of power has been adopted as the method for accomplishing this.

Autonomy

The autonomy that can be given to the province or region through devolution of power has two distinct aspects to it. One has a bearing on the political relationship between the national centre and the autonomous unit. Its outside limit is determined by what is necessary to ensure the country's political and territorial integrity. The right of what is known as 'external self-determination' and its related 'secession' which are at least nationally basic to the federal arrangement are excluded in this relationship.

The other aspect of autonomy is the legal capacity of the units to manage their own affairs within this relationship. This will necessarily include the powers vested in a unit over state land and other assets within its boundaries, maintenance of law and order, welfare, the administration of justice, the provision of services and facilities needed for the economic and social life of the community, and the collection of revenue.

The 13th Amendment has given to the devolved units a very high degree of autonomy on the devolved sub-

jects which extend from state land and its utilisation to the maintenance of law and order.

Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam has expressed his 'strong conviction that in a unitary constitution the centre has the power of overriding either legislative or executive authority of the devolved unit.' The right reserved in the centre to legislate on the devolved subjects in respect of 'national policy' he sees as a means of encroachment. The extreme dependence on the centre for the finances of the province is also seen as hampering autonomy. These however are not matters that cannot be rectified without affecting the basic relations within a unitary system.

Draft Amendment

The draft Constitution amendment now before the Parliamentary Select Committee addresses these problems. The centre's reserve power over 'National Policy on all Subjects and Functions' has been given up. The removal of the 'Concurrent list' is also a positive addition to autonomy.

The draft vests exclusively in the Regional Council's legislative power over the devolved subjects. It also states in the section on sovereignty that Regional Councils are a means through which legislative power that is sourced in the sovereignty of the people is exercised. The exercise of legislative power with this amplitude is not possible under the present Constitution not because of its unitariness but for the reason that Article 73, mentioned above, prohibits it. Executive power too, to the extent that it is required for the management of the Region, is exercised by the authorities in the Region as a function of the sovereignty of the people. The link of the Region's Governor to the President has been removed and he is made responsible to the Regional administration. The government at the centre would need to intervene only in the event of serious disorder which threatens the unity and security of the country, and provision has been made for this.

Sovereignty

What may be described as divided between the centre and the units in the draft in regard to legislative and executive functions is not sovereignty but the powers flowing from it. The

1972 Republican Constitution recognised sovereignty as vested in the People and that it is inalienable. There was no alienation of that sovereignty even to what was recognised as the 'Supreme Instrument of State Power of the Republic' - The National State Assembly. What was vested exclusively in the National State Assembly was State Power and it was this that was amenable to division and distribution. The 1978 Constitution adhered to the same distinction between sovereignty and the State Power that issued from it. The present draft maintains this distinction.

There is nothing sacrosanct about the form of a state being unitary or federal. Either form is adopted according to the needs of a given polity and not as the ideal all peoples must aspire to. It is a way of reconciling divergent and perhaps even competing interests. Neither form has characteristics which cannot be adapted to the purposes of the other.

Devolution of power can be the means by which the unitary state can reach out, through the concept of autonomy to the relative independence with which a state in a federation manages its affairs. Such mutual enrichment is possible and Constitutions develop means to face the challenges of times through means. This is what makes it ill advised for a Constitution to formally describe itself as either 'unitary' or 'federal' as done both in 1972 and 1978. The consequence of this is the importing of theory into the interpretation of the constitution on matters touching this characterisation when, as seen in the SC determination on the 13th Amendment there exists no adequate and authoritative theory or view on it.

The unitary state in countries of the so called Third World purportedly bound for N/C status in year 2000 have shown in the last two decades a strong move to authoritarian government. The Executive Presidential System that has been set up by the Constitution of 1978 has taken Sri Lanka on that path. It is difficult for this system to reconcile itself to the devolution of power which is essentially a democratic process. Misgivings on this score are not misplaced. The Constitutional draft that is now under discussion has exercised the Executive Presidential System.3 ●

KEEPING THEOLOGY IMMACULATE

By Margaret Hebblethwaite

Are there genuine grounds for questioning Tissa Balasuriya's orthodoxy? What does his book *Mary and Human Liberation* actually say? Are attempts to discipline him an authentic case of ridding the Church of heresy? Or are the issues more political than theological?

The book was published by Balasuriya's own Centre for Society and Religion in 1990 as a double issue of the review *Logos*. Its overriding message is that the liberating Mary of the scriptures, a "strong, working-

class" woman who looked to the overthrow of the powerful from their thrones, has been obscured by a "dehydrated Mary", an "obedient, faithful, docile virgin mother". Tradition has domesticated Mary into "the comforter of the disturbed" instead of the Magnificat's "disturber of the comfortable".

Balasuriya is a liberation theologian of a distinctly Asian sort. Like most liberation theologians he draws on the work of writers from both third

and first worlds - with references to Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Raymond Brown of the United States as well as to Ivone Gebara of Brazil and Albert Nolan of South Africa - but the particular contribution he has to make as an Asian is to the interfaith question. While the Latin Americans theologise in a setting that takes Catholicism predominantly for granted, Balasuriya is constantly challenged "to rethink the key dogmas of the Christian tradition" in the light of Hinduism and Buddhism: "In Asia we have

ON THE EDGE OF CONDEMNATION

Fr Tissa Balasuriya is poised to take civil action against his country's bishops for distortion against his country's bishops for distortion of his views, writes Robert Cruz in Sri Lanka and Margaret Hebblethwaite in London.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has asked Fr Balasuriya to pronounce before witnesses a Profession of Faith. If he refuses, he is threatened with being declared publicly to be no longer a Catholic theologian, and with disciplinary action under Canon 1364 (which deals with the automatic excommunication of heretics and dismissal from the clerical state).

In July 1994 Fr Balasuriya received a list of "Observations" from the CDF pointing out his book's alleged errors. He replied with 58 instances of what he believed to be misrepresentations. In November last year the CDF said his reply was "unsatisfactory" and enclosed the Profession of Faith, with warnings of the consequences if he did not sign. Pope John Paul has given his approval to the decision.

Fr Balasuriya said: "Frankly I doubt whether the Holy Father or Cardinal Ratzinger... would sign it in its present form and publish it as the faith of the Catholic Church today." He suggests that the treat of excommunication is "applied inequitably by the CDF to me from Asia and to European theologians writing on similar issues, as in the London Tablet of recent months."

*Fr Balasuriya's book, *Mary and Human Liberation* was first published in Sri Lanka, in English, in 1990 and sold for nearly three years without opposition.*

But Fr Balasuriya was then asked to meet the Bishops in January 1993. Bishop Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige

Don read from a document based on the report of an ad hoc theological commission. It recommended that Fr Balasuriya should be warned against translations and future reprints, and that there should be "disciplinary measures to stop him from engaging in irresponsible and immature theologising". Fr Balasuriya claims that the document distorts his book. Bishop Ranjith claims that "it contains the views expressed by all the members" of the theological commission. But one has protested that Bishop Ranjith "failed to catch the acuity of points made... and presented them in a simplistic manner," with a result that was "slipshod"

In June 1994 the Bishop published a statement in the weekly Catholic newspaper they control, the Catholic Messenger, claiming that Fr Balasuriya had misrepresented the doctrine of original sin, and cast serious doubts on the divinity of Christ, his role as redeemer, and on the privileged position of Mary.

Fr Balasuriya's complaint that he was not given the right of reply to the Bishop's statement, and that one particular misrepresentation be legally challenged.

Fr Aloysius Pieris SJ, one of Sri Lanka's most eminent theologians, says: "It was I who persuaded Fr Tissa to resort to civil action as the only solution available after every other means has failed. He resisted this idea for a long time because he loved the Church."

A public petition is calling for mediation, and the Conference of Major Superiors of Sri Lanka has produced a list of possible members of such a panel. "We are deeply hurt", says the CMRS president in a letter to Fr Balasuriya, that a dialogue "has not been conceded up to now."

to question the bases of theology that has been hurting our people for centuries”.

It is here that his theology becomes most tricky, as he queries the doctrines of original sin and of the necessity of Christ's redemption. He says that Christianity's idea of “humanity being born alienated from the creator”. With its overarching sense of our helplessness, such that Mary had to be preserved from the common human lot by an Immaculate Conception, is repugnant to other faiths. (Ironically, Fr Balasuriya is a member of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate.) Equally offensive to them he says, is the belief that “whole generations of other continents lived and died with a lesser chance of salvation”. It led to an exaggerated missionary zeal to baptise, in the attempt to save souls from hell.

Balasuriya's work is open to selective quotation of an alarmist kind, but it is unfair to pluck soundbites out of context. He criticises the idea of Jesus as “unique, universal and necessary redeemer”. Yet he also says that “the concept of the divine grace understood as flowing from Christ need not be a problem for dialogue with persons of other theistic religions provided this grace is seen as graciously available to all human beings.” he questions “theology based on the Christology of the Councils (such as Nicaea, Chalcedon and Trent)”. Yet though his language is imprecise it seems he is rejecting the conciliar Christological doctrines as such, but rather theological aberrations that ignore “Jesus as a full conscious human being capable of suffering, being angry and even tempted”. In much the same way, he criticises theology that makes Mary “more of a heavenly being (conversing with angels) than a pedestrian woman of the people.”

In a lot of what he says, Balasuriya is aware of “treading on ground that is delicate”, even though his “intention is not to dilute Marian devotion but to help make it more meaningful and truly fulfilling for all”. And there are comments on other subjects that might well be predicted to rile the Vatican: He says secularism and Marxism “can have a healthy impact for the purification of religions”; he calls Mary “the first Priest of the New Testament along with Jesus” because of her participation in his sacrifice; and

he calls for a retirement age “to limit the life-long tenure of the papacy”.

But the most fundamental challenge of Balasuriya is a political one. Traditional Marian piety “helped to legitimise the class and status distinctions between Lord and self, Lady and ordinary woman”. The practice of reciting the rosary repetitively and unthinkingly “may give it a particular slant of saving souls from perdition without much reference to integral human liberation.” The Immaculate Conception apparition at Lourdes “does not say anything about the conditions of the working class in France of the day.” still less “hint at the enormous harm being done in Africa by the French military and economic expansion”. Yet when Mary is presented to Sri Lankans she is called “Lady of Victories” in the battle of Christians against Turks in the battle of Lepanto. And so, despite rare exceptions like Our Lady of Guadalupe or Czestochowa, “this traditional Mary is a Mary of the capitalist, patriarchal, colonialist, first world of Christendom”.

That this language should cause some annoyance is not surprising, but there are not issues of heresy. We are left wondering whether particular points of doctrine have become a cloak for what is essentially a political dispute. When Balasuriya's detailed attempts to answer the theological charges against him appear to have been spurned - met with delays of over a year, or with the single word “unsatisfactory” - such suspicions can only be fuelled.

So much for the first leg of this dispute - the scrutiny of Mary and human Liberation. Now comes the second leg, in which the eyes of the theological world turn rather to the two-page Profession of Faith produced by the congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which Balasuriya has been asked to affirm. This is a selection from conciliar documents, Paul VI's Credo and the Congregation's own document against women priests, combining elements of the Chalcedonian formula, the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, papal infallibility, original sin, the necessity of baptism and the impossibility of ordaining women.

It is a document written in lan-

guage few people speak or wish to speak, let alone to use for solemn oaths about their most deeply held beliefs. Language apart, it forces home the most difficult passages from Vatican I on papal authority operating independently of any “reception by the faithful, as well as demanding Balasuriya should assent to those much-disputed words: “the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women.”

What is presented as a doctrinal procedure may have more political than theological intent. A detailed analysis of this Profession of Faith has been made by an Indian Jesuit, Samuel Rayan, who questions the entire literary form of the exercise as self-contradictory. “A joyful confession of faith”, he said, “can be rich like a flowering forest”. It is an “act of freedom which people choose to make, or may be invited to make, but cannot and may not be imposed. Imposed, it ceases to be an act of faith”.

Some of the paragraphs, as here expressed, are ridden with serious historical, theological and scriptural problems. To propose them as matters of faith binding on believers takes a lot of brashness and religious insensitivity. But to seek to impose them as punishment is downright insolence. What we have is “the voice of the Inquisition of shameful memory, rather than the voice of the Good Shepherd” declares Rayan.

It now looks almost inevitable that the net will close around Tissa Balasuriya. For three years he has struggled to reply with integrity to his accusers, seeking confidential advice from other theologians around the world, keeping as calm as is possible, answering objections painstakingly, doing all he can to keep the case out of the mass media.

But the time of secret struggle is now over. The Sri Lankan Sunday Times published an article on Easter Sunday, the coming issue of the Pakistan journal focus is editorialising on the subject, a petition is circulating in Sri Lanka, and Balasuriya's friends internationally have simultaneously sensed that the story has broken. If Tissa Balasuriya is about to be stripped of his status as a Catholic theologian by the Vatican, the world will soon know of it. ●

TREND TOWARDS BETTER RELATIONS AMONG NEIGHBOURS

By G Ramesh

All said and done, Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party was the best choice for the Indian Prime Ministership that the Pakistani could have hoped for resumption of talks! This might sound strange given the BJP's Hindutva, but Vajpayee was easily the most popular Indian Foreign Minister ever to have visited Pakistan. He went to Islamabad in 1978 and brought off diplomatic coups by resolving several pending problems by talking to Gen Zia Ul Haq's men set to change Pakistan to an Islamic regime. It may be that they understand each other's language well!

So, when Deve Gowda replaced Vajpayee at the helm of affairs in Delhi, he and the new External Affairs Minister Indar Kumar Gujral outdid Vajpayee by welcoming Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's offer of comprehensive talks, including the vexed Kashmir issue. Pat came Bhutto's positive response! After all, the two countries had to start trade talks, given the new economic situation in the subcontinent. Within a month, Delhi was issuing more visas and the length of the queue before the Pakistani High Commission near Delhi's Niti Marg came down. And the Wagha border between Amritsar, the biggest trading and pilgrimage centre in the region before Partition, and Lahore was opened for more trade. Stunned BBC correspondents were filming bearded Sardars welcoming it, since the move would enable their wheat to be sold in Pakistan. This also signals the possible end of any Pakistani covert support to militancy in the Punjab.

The most contentious issues between these neighbours are the Kashmir issue and rising defence expenditures. The Lok Sabha elections held in Kashmir invited criticism that voters were forced into booths, but the Indian establishment is going ahead with preparations for state assembly polls there. Pakistan, on its part, had just held assembly polls in its side of the valley and Bhutto's Pakistan Peo-

ple's Party was returned to power displacing the Muslim Conference, which levelled complaints of massive rigging against Bhutto's officials.

It is thus clear that both sides are being forced to go in for some kind of "democratic legitimation" in areas under their respective control in the valley. This development is due to the fact that the United States and other Western powers are putting pressure on both countries to do this as a prelude to talks, which India would like to commence after holding assembly polls in the valley. A number of Kashmiri militant groups as well as Farooq Abdullah's National Conference are not expected to boycott the assembly polls. With their participation in the elections, India hopes, the

call for liberation of Kashmir would become redundant. This is evident from the new Home Minister and Communist Party of India General Secretary Indrajit Gupta's assertion that it would be left to the new elected assembly in Jammu and Kashmir to decide on the quantum and nature of autonomy.

That, India is fast building bridges with Bangladesh is clear from Deve Gowda's greetings sent to newly-elected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed. Having spent several years in exile in India in the early eighties, she is known to be very cordial to Indian diplomats. The contentious issues with Bangladesh include the sharing of Ganga-Padma river waters at the Farakka barrage and the vexed issue of settlers from Bangladesh whom the BJP likes to dub as foreign infiltrators. It remains to be seen how Deve Gowda is going to deal with the three neighbours, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, all led by women politicians in this crucial period in the history of the sub-continent. But the trend seems to be in the right direction of improved relations.

IT'S UP TO SHEIKH HASINA TO SALVAGE OR DESTROY HER FATHER'S LEGACY

By Sankar Ghosh

For over two decades Begum Hasina Wajed has waited patiently to avenge the murder most foul of her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, liberator of Bangladesh. Not only the Sheikh, but also his wife, sons, daughters-in-law, nephews, their wives, children of the family and some family friends were all gunned down by a handful of junior army officers on that night of ghastly massacre. Entire family of the country's President and his close relatives were wiped out. There were no survivors, as they say often in the case of plane disasters.

The coup was staged on the night of 14-15 August 1975. The date is significant, for 14 August is the Independence Day of Pakistan from which Bangladesh had seceded to emerge as an independent country. The day had lost all its significance and glory after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's revolution. He gave his country a different date to celebrate. Those who murdered him chose 14 August for their

black deed obviously to stress their preference for the overthrown regime and their revulsion against Mujib's revolution. He gave his country a different date to celebrate. Those who murdered him chose 14 August for their black deed obviously to stress their preference for the overthrown regime and their revulsion against Mujib's revolution. Their aim was to undo the liberation of Bangladesh. The murderers did not spare even the children of the family lest the spirit of the liberation should reassert itself centring on a member of Mujib's family. Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister escaped the murderers' sten gun because they were abroad at the time.

Although the ringleaders of the coup were not more than half-dozen junior army officers, they had an unknown number of supporters and sympathisers in the administration and the army. It is strange that the armoured cars were intercepted by none when they trundled along the streets of

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Dhaka to converge on the presidential residence at Dhanmudi. Some of these patrons in the army and the civil administration came out in their true colours in the post-Mujib era and occupied high positions in the country.

Allegations of the CIA's hand in the assassination of the Bangladesh President and his family have been widespread. Nobody knows for certain what goes inside the company, what dirty tricks the CIA plays on Third World countries to bring round recal-

citant regimes to subserve American interests. Books have been written, not only by Bangladeshis but also by Americans alleging CIA's involvement in the Dhanmudi massacre.

After Mujib's assassination, Mrs Indira Gandhi had disclosed that she had warned him against conspiracies being hatched in the countries of the subcontinent to subvert the existing regimes and had advised him to be careful about his own security. Mujib had laughed away the suggestion. He

was reported to have said that the people of Bangladesh were like his children and from them no harm could come to him. Within a few weeks the world came to know how misplaced this trust was. All the assassins were known to him personally and at least one of the ringleaders was like a son of the family. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was tragically right. His assassination resembled patricide.

America's inordinate interest at that time in the affairs of Pakistan and

BANGLADESH - A HISTORY STREWN WITH POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND MURDER

January 10, 1972 - Independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rehman comes home after nine months in jail in what was West Pakistan, and becomes Bangladesh's first President.

March 17 1973 - Indian troops start withdrawing.

March 7 1973 - Bangladesh holds first general election. Mujib's Awami League wins 294 of 300 seats in Parliament. Mujib becomes Prime Minister.

1974 - Bangladesh hit by famine in which thousands die. Resultant economic crisis tarnishes Mujib's image.

January 25 1975 - Constitution amended to revert Bangladesh to presidential system of government from Parliamentary system.

August 15 1975 - President Mujib is killed, along with most members of his family, in a coup led by young army officers. Martial law promulgated by Mujib's successor, Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmed, a minister in Mujib's government.

September 26 1975 - Mushtaque promulgates ordinance to protect Mujib's killers from trial.

November 3 1975 - The president of the exiled Bangladesh government during the independence war (March-December 1971). Syed Nazrul Islam, his Prime minister, Tajuddin Ahmed and two key ministers, Mohammad Kamanuzzaman and Mansur Ali are assassinated inside Dhaka central jail by army officers.

November 5 1975 - President Mushtaque ousted by army Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf, a senior commander in the 1971 independence war.

November 6 1975 - Mosharraf is killed by supporters of Deputy Chief of Army, Major General Ziaur Rahman.

November 7 1975 - Zia becomes Chief Martial Law Administrator.

April 21 1977 - Zia becomes President.

May 30 1977 - Referendum confirms legitimacy of Zia presidency. Official results show 95% voted "Yes".

June 3 1978 - Zia elected President.

September 1 1978 - Zia launches Bangladesh National Party.

February 18 1979 - BNP wins Parliament election with 207 seats. Awami League led by Mujib's daughter Sheikh Hasina, gets 39 of Parliament's 300 seats. Voter turnout just over 50%.

April 6 1979 - Zia amends Constitution to make indemnity ordinance promulgated by ex-President Mushtaque into a law.

May 30 1981 - Zia assassinated in abortive army coup in port city of Chittagong. Vice President Justice Abdus Sattar succeeds him.

November 15 1981 - Abdus Sattar elected President.

March 24 1982 - Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant - General Hossain Mohammad Ershad ousts Sattar in bloodless coup.

February 14 1983 - Ershad crushes first challenge to his power by Dhaka University students. About a dozen students killed.

January 1 1984 - Ershad launches Jatiya Party.

March 21 1985 - Ershad wins 94.11 percent vote in referendum to reaffirm his rule as President.

May 7 1984 - Ershad's Jatiya Party wins 153 of 300 seats in Parliamentary elections and Awami League 76. BNP boycotts poll.

October 15 1986 - Ershad re-elected President.

August 1987 - Bangladesh hit by devastating floods. More than 7,000 people died, millions homeless.

November 1987 - Severe tornado batters coast near Sundarban forests, killing at least 3,000 people.

March 3 1988 - All major opposition parties boycott Parliamentary elections. Ershad's ruling Jatiya Party gets 251 seats and Combined Opposition Party (COP), an alliance of light-weight parties, 19. Voter turnout just over 46%.

June 7 1988 - Ershad amends Constitution to proclaim Islam state religion. His move is considered mainly a political gimmick since nearly 90% of Bangladesh population are Muslims.

December 6 1990 - Ershad toppled in popular uprising, led by Khaleda Zia, widow of slain President Ziaur Rahman, and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Mujib. Ershad hands power to Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and is jailed.

February 27 1991 - Khaleda's BNP wins 146 Parliamentary seats in elections billed as country's first free poll. Awami League wins 86 seats, Jatiya Party 35. Voter turnout 54.85%. BNP forms government with support of Jamaat-e-Islami (18 seats).

April 29 1991 - Bangladesh hit by its worst cyclone and tidal surge. More than 138,000 killed.

August 6 1991 - Constitution amended to bring back Parliamentary presidential system.

March 1 1994 - Opposition walks out over alleged insulting remarks by Information Minister Nazmul Huda and never returns.

October 13 - November 21 1994 - Commonwealth envoy, Sir Ninian Stephen unsuccessfully tries for government opposition compromise on new elections.

December 11 1994 - High Court declares opposition Parliamentary boycott illegal.

December 28 1994 - Opposition resigns en masse from Parliament.

July 30 1995 - Speaker formally vacates opposition seats.

November 24 1995 - President Abdur Rahman Biswas dissolves Parliament.

February 15 1996 - Parliamentary elections boycotted by all major political parties except BNP, headed by Prime Minister, Khaleda. Opposition steps up long running campaign of strikes.

March 30 1996 - President Biswas dissolves Parliament and Khaleda resigns. Caretaker government headed by former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman takes over until next elections, set for June 12.

May 20 1996 - President Biswas sacks army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Abu Saleh Mohammed Nasim for alleged breach of military discipline and attempted revolt.

the liberation of Bangladesh is no secret. After 25 years of the most significant political development of this subcontinent since partition, the Nixon administration's infamous "tilt" towards Pakistan during those fateful years bears recounting. The contribution of Pakistan's military ruler at the time, General Yahya Khan, towards the solution of his country's deepest crisis was to raise his daily ration of scotch from one to two bottles. At heart he might not have been a bad man for he was the only general of his time who, having ordered a general election, lost it. He had a soldier's dislike of politics and was keen to return to the barracks and his bottles.

It was that wily but unlucky politician of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was the real power behind Yahya's throne. Left to himself, the general might have honoured the verdict of the people of undivided Pakistan and agreed to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman becoming Pakistan's Prime Minister. But Bhutto would have none of it for he had set his heart on that supreme position. He was in Dhaka at the time of Yahya's crucial negotiations with Mujib. He saw to it that the talks failed and the failure was followed by a military crackdown. "Thank God, Pakistan has been saved." was said to have been Bhutto's comment when he left Dhaka after the crackdown. He left the other half of the sentence unuttered, but Bangladesh had been lost.

Mujib was so confident of himself and his charismatic hold on the people of Bangladesh that unlike other leaders of his party, the Awami League, he did not flee his country. He was arrested from his house in Dhaka and taken captive to Islamabad. Other military rulers would have put such formidable an adversary to an immediate death. But the bottle-happy general considered it sufficient punishment to keep him away from politics and mischief.

When Pakistan was running headlong towards disintegration, the Nixon-Kissinger administration of the United States took upon itself the responsibility for keeping Pakistan's unity unimpaired. The exact nature of the formula the United States was hawking as a political solution is not known. It was certainly different from Indira Gandhi's political solution which culminated in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign country.

The Awami League leaders who

had fled the country had set up a government in exile in Calcutta. The US administration had managed to find moles in this government. Of course, they were not called moles. Henry Kissinger has described them as "our contacts" in his memoirs, who acted as a conduit for American proposals for a political settlement. The American efforts were in vain and Pakistan was divided finally between the two rival leaders, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, both of whom came to a sad end. Mujib was slain in a simulated coup. Bhutto was sent to the gallows by his own hand-picked army chief.

Kissinger has not disclosed the identity of "our contacts" in the fugitive government of Bangladesh. But it was widely suspected at that time that Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed, foreign minister of the fugitive government, was the key man in the chain of contacts established by the United States, Kissinger has disclosed that the United States had contacted the Bangladesh "foreign minister" to tell him of Yahya Khan's willingness to engage in "secret talks." The American initiative did not succeed and Pakistan was dismembered. It was to this Khondakar Mostaque Ahmed that the killer colonels ran immediately after the assassination of Mujibur Rahman and requested him to assume the country's presidency. He agreed readily.

Many political assassinations, military coups and abortive coups after, control of Bangladesh passed on to the then army chief, Ziaur Rahman, who became the President and chief martial law administrator of the country. Ziaur Rahman sought to project himself as the real liberator of Bangladesh for it was he who had broadcast through Chittagong radio Mujib's declaration of Bangladesh Independence immediately after the Pakistani crackdown. He mixed his politics with a strong dose of anti-Indianism and launched the Bangladesh National Party to legitimise his regime. Understandably, the regime had strong army links and when civilian rule was restored, the party's candidate Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of General Zia became the country's Prime Minister.

In many of the Third World countries, leaders of liberation struggles have met with violent ends immediately after their struggles have come to fruition. What is strange about Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination is that the self-confessed murderers of the country's President and his

family were not only allowed to go scot-free but also to boast publicly about their black deed. The fig leaf was dispensed with during General Zia's regime and the killers of the country's President were absolved of their crime by a state decree. Some of them were rewarded with sinecures in the foreign service and were posted abroad. Sure of state support, a few of the ringleaders returned to Bangladesh and launched political parties of their own.

Bangladesh remained out of bounds to Sheikh Hasina for years after her father's assassination. The killers were at large; they still are. It required great courage for her to return to Bangladesh and greater courage to resume political activities and to avenge the vile murder of her father, mother, brothers and other dear ones. She spent the greater part of her forced exile in New Delhi but lost no time in returning to her country when she felt she could resume the task that awaited her there. Much is being heard of the defiant courage of another daughter of this part of the world. Aung San Su Kyi. And rightly. Sheikh Hasina also deserves an honourable mention among those who have fought valiantly for the redemption of botched ideals and won.

Sheikh Hasina's first task as Prime Minister of Bangladesh will be to bring to book her father's assassination and rescind the amnesty granted to them by an accomplice regime. She had made her debut in politics with that promise and now she has the opportunity to redeem it. Her father has sought to base the state he created on the four pillars of democracy, nationalism, socialism and secularism. It was these pillars which had prompted Kissinger to reach the hasty conclusion that Mujib's Bangladesh was drawn into Indian and Soviet orbits. Sheikh Hasina's sojourn in India went against her in the previous election. In her dealing with India she may be hamstrung by the natural fear at home of a small country of its much bigger neighbour. It may not be possible for her to return to her father's secularism either, for Bangladesh was made an Islamic republic during the regime of General Hussain Muhammad Ershad whose Jatiya Party has promised unconditional support to the Awami League. Bangladesh is, however, a soft theocracy which will be softer with the total rout of the fundamentalist parties in the just concluded

(Continued on page 23)

It is indeed amazing that the liberals of India, lurching from nowhere to nowhere for nearly five decades now, should be hoping against hope that a reasonably decent and responsive government would turn up some day.

But then hope does spring eternal from the human breast and the sorry track-record of the politicians down the years does not kill all the hopes in the minds of the incorrigible.

When the BJP government fell, the liberals and the progressives rejoiced. And when the United Front comprising more than a dozen big and small secular outfits, supported from the outside by the Congress, managed a smooth hassle-free election of Mr Deve Gowda as the leader of the UF, there was even more rejoicing. And when a common minimum programme was thrashed out, basically endorsing the liberalisation measures of the previous Manmohan regime but ensuring some protection to the native industry and workers, besides making a commitment to more autonomy to states and for secular values, the cup of joy was almost complete.

But they had celebrated too soon. They had failed to take into account the suicidal instincts inherent in a party like the Janata Dal, the all too weak moral fibre of most of the leaders of this country, cutting across party lines, which makes for the most opportunistic course at the most unexpected time as also the serious conflict of interests among the constituents of the United Front.

Ramakrishna Hegde, a founding leader of the JD, has been thrown out of the party most unceremoniously. Maneka Gandhi, widow of the late Sanjay Gandhi (the controversial son of Mrs Indira Gandhi) a noted environmentalist and elected to the Lok Sabha from the Uttar Pradesh also suffered a similar fate.

Apparently as a price for the continued support of the Rao-led Congress, the Gowda government is ensuring that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) does not proceed too fast in its inquiry into the Rs 133 crore urea 'import' scam in which a star figure is Narasimha Rao's son, Prabhakar Rao.

The National Fertilizer Ltd, a government of India undertaking, paid a

GOWDA REGIME'S DEPRESSING START

By T N Gopalan

non-existent Turkish firm Rs 133 crore in foreign exchange, avowedly for import of two lakh tonnes of urea. While the entire amount was, hold your breath, paid in advance, not a single grain has reached the Indian shores until now, nine months after the deal was clinched. The key-accused has confessed to pay-offs amounting to over four million US dollars, Prabhakar Rao, being one of the beneficiaries.

While quite a few have already been detained in connection with the monstrous swindle, the CBI claims that not enough evidence has been obtained against the former prime minister's son. In fact there are some indicators which make one feel that this affair, a hundred times more scandalous and outrageous than the much-talked about Bofors deal, might be given a quiet burial unless the courts intervene.

That the non-Congress non-BJP opposition which had been most vociferous in denouncing the corrupt Rao government should now seek to play down the urea scam and allow Rao's progeny to get away with it is a telling commentary on the character of the new government.

The thrust of the new finance minister P Chidambaram, an unabashed votary of the 'supply-siders', has predictably aroused strong resentment among the UF constituents. When he announced a Rs 3,000-crore austerity package which would hurt the interests of the workers most, all hell broke loose, trade unions threatening countrywide agitations. Also the across-the-board steep hike in the prices of petroleum products has touched many a raw nerve. None of the constituents had been consulted over such decisions and one could see fireworks in the forthcoming budget session of the parliament.

Easily the most destabilising and most indefensible act committed by the leadership of the Janata Dal, prime constituent of the UF, is the expulsion of senior leader, Ramakrishna Hegde from the party.

Hegde, the soft-spoken politician from Karnataka, well known since the days of the Janata party, the previous avatar of the JD, has been one of the tall leaders of the non-Congress secular opposition.

Though he too has faced corruption charges during his stewardship of Karnataka, he has managed to retain the image of a politician who still has some values left in him, who is above the rough and tumble of the plan occupied by the lesser mortals and who is a "thinking leader".

Aptly did Mr Lalloo Prasad Yadav, that every-inch-a-rustic chief minister of Bihar and the president of the all-India unit of the JD, remark, "Hegde has always been part of the party's think-tank and I am against think-tanks!"

But then it was not Lalloo who did the thinking act on the Hegde affair. It was thought of and decided upon by PM Gowda himself as a fitting retribution to his bete noire who had succeeded in getting a supporter of his own installed as Gowda's successor in Karnataka.

Besides Hegde, evidently piqued at Gowda's election by-passing his own claims, has been carping at the "opportunistic alliance" with the Congress and cast serious doubts over the stability of the UF government.

Hegde could not reconcile himself to the fact that the uncouth Gowda, sans any kind of savvy or any other political grace, should have beaten him to the top job, the very same man who had almost been marginalised in the state politics but whose career was resurrected courtesy of Hegde.

Hence indeed he went about shooting off his mouth embarrassing the UF no end. There were even suspicions among the UF leaders that Hegde could be working for a split in the JD and ascend the gaddi (the chair) himself with the support of Rao.

But he the preemptory manner in which he was expelled by the party president - acting as he was on the dictates of the PM without being given a chance to defend himself, has sent shock waves everywhere. Though his potential to create troubles is limited he could pose a long-term danger to the survival of the UF government.

Many of his erstwhile followers, supporters and sympathisers in the JD

including Mr J H Patel, the new Chief Minister of Karnataka, have decided to clam up for fear of losing whatever perks they are currently enjoying and could enjoy in the days to come if the UF government continued in power. But there has been a rousing reception for Hegde in many places in his state and he has now floated an avowedly non-political organisation of his own. He has been receiving feelers both from the Congress and the BJP, it is said, even Maneka Gandhi has publicly challenged Mr Deve Gowda on a variety of environmental issues, accusing him and his colleagues of corruption, thus inviting suspension from the party, only as a precursor to her joining hands with Hegde. Besides an energetic opposition has discovered that the Minister of State for Home, Mr Taslimuddin Mohammed is a history-sheeter, meaning he has been arraigned by the police for a variety of crimes. The man from Bihar is a hand-picked nominee of Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav and the top leadership is caught with a lot of egg on its face. They are all said to be desperately trying to wriggle out of the mess.

If the aforementioned instances seem to have done some irreparable damage to the JD's image, the apparent slackening of the pace of the probe into the urea scam has made many UF partners squirm over the way Deve Gowda is bending over backwards to please Mr Narasimha Rao.

Praksh Chandra Yadav, a playboy-come-thug type son of former minister in the Rao cabinet, Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav, had pressurised the National Fertilizer Ltd into signing the deal with the Turkish firm Karsan. Documentary evidence proving that his New York-based front company had received two hundred thousand US dollars has been unearthed. He is already behind bars. [Incidentally his father was in charge of Fertilizers in the Rao cabinet.]

So is Sanjeeva Rao, a brother-in-law of Mr P V Rajeshwar Rao, another son of the former PM. He too was found to have received Rs 32 hundred thousand from the Karsans. Though the high-flying Prabhakar Rao, the third son of Narasimha Rao is known to have had close dealings with Sanjeeva Rao, the CBI is wary of arresting him, pleading of course lack of enough corroborative evidence.

However, many strongly believe that the wily former PM is extracting his price for the Congress support to the UF regime. The most scandalous

part of it all, more even than the scam itself, is that none of the JD leadership who never miss an opportunity to rant and rave, talk high and mighty of the need for probity in public life at the slightest opportunity, would say one word on the stinking NFL deal. All that Deve Gowda could marshal to say is, "Law will take its own course." Ironically that was a favourable line of his predecessor.

Not even that angel of virtue, the other former PM Mr V P Singh, or even the left parties like the CPI and the CPM would demand speedy or stern action or the arrest of Prabhakar Rao. They are all keen that they should not say or do anything that could upset the apple cart and provoke Narasimha Rao into withdrawing his support for the UF.

Incidentally every once in a while Rao has been declaring that the Congress's support could not be taken for granted and a Congress spokesman has even demanded the removal of the controversial Taslimuddin from the union cabinet.

Another flash point is the eco-

nomie agenda of Mr Chidambaram. In the face of stiff opposition from his UF partners to his austerity package, he had to beat a hasty retreat and promise that there would be no retrenchment or wage freeze. Even the inevitable hike in the prices of petroleum products, sure to hit the middle classes badly, has been roundly condemned as anti-people and too draconian. The hike is certain to have a spin-off effect on transport and other sectors too, kicking up the inflation rate.

One begins to have an uncomfortable feeling of *deja vu*, for no one seems to be in control of anything, nor is there any co-ordination, each acting to further his or her own interests. Apart from his mean, vindictive action against Hegde, Deve Gowda does not give the impression of being a strong leader - surviving there only because it suits the interests of his other partners.

No one is willing to give the Gowda regime a chance to survive beyond a year or year-and-a-half. If the government collapses, only the BJP will be the beneficiary. ●

DMK AND THE LANKA TAMIL ISSUE CAUTION OR INDIFFERENCE?

By G Ramesh, Madras

DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M Karunanidhi can well be charged with being indifferent to the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils suffering from war. But he knows he would be treading an uncharted political course if he dabbled in Lankan Tamil politics like he did in 1989-91 when he was holding the reins of power last time. Hence, his approach to the issue is one of extreme caution bordering on indifference. The DMK was very much behind the statewide bandh on 30 November last in protest against the latest Lankan military offensive. Also, in its Tiruchirapalli Conference in February last before the elections, the DMK did pass a resolution demanding peaceful and political resolution to guarantee the Tamils' rights in Lanka. The elections have been the DMK being catapulted to power in the State as well as becoming an important part of the new United Front government at the centre. However, it is yet to be seen what action the DMK is going to take to translate it into action given the tenu-

ous hold of the new UF government.

Even as Mr Deve Gowda was testing his strength on the floor of the new Parliament at Delhi, the wily DMK chief shot off a government order restoring the higher education facilities given to Lankan refugees prior to the fateful year of 1991. As is well known, Lankan Tamil society accords topmost priority to higher education. Apart from admission rights, Lankan refugees, since 1983, had a few seats reserved for them in medical, engineering and polytechnic courses in Tamil Nadu. Ms Jayalalitha, after assuming power, has listed several conditions for admitting Lankan students, practically suspending these facilities for the last five years.

This gesture might give a hint about what Karunanidhi thinks of the Lankan issue now: refugees - yes, militant groups - no. Karunanidhi has tried to steer clear of any attempt by political organisations of Lankan Tamils to represent their case back home. The only organisation he would meet was OFERR led by S C Chandrasekaran

working for Lankan refugees here. This correspondent came to know that several non-LTTE leaders were desperately trying to meet Karunanidhi after his election victory. However, he has denied all this and insisted that none of the five organisations - TULF, EPRLF, EPDP, TELO and EROS - made any attempt, either jointly or separately to meet him after he assumed office. Yes, the five organisations did send him a congratulatory message. TULF leader Sivasithamparam had rang his office up for an appointment. There was no call later. That was about it, he said, while talking to newsmen last month.

Obviously, Karunanidhi has to bide his time if he decides to help Tamils across the shores at all. As of now, he is extremely reluctant to meet Tamil political organisations from across the Palk straits. The LTTE, as well as other militant groups, remain enigmatic to him till date. He just cannot understand the extent of fratricidal warfare among them. After all, in 1990, when Indian troops started withdrawing from Lanka, Karunanidhi was talking to them here, with the permission of the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh. Even as he was detailing the nature of the talks to BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Delhi, LTTE suspects massacred EPRLF Secretary-General K Padmanabha and 13 others in the heart of Madras. The net closed in on Karunanidhi after V P Singh himself was voted out in November that year. Karunanidhi has described his eventual dismissal in January 1991 as the price the DMK had to pay for lending political support to the

(Continued from page 20)

election.

As a student leader of Calcutta, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had fought under his political mentor, H S Suhrawardy, for a united sovereign Bengal to prevent partition of this part of the country. Shortly after the creation of Bangladesh, I had an opportunity of interviewing Mujib in Dhaka in the course of which I asked him if he still dreamt of a greater Bengal he had fought for as a student of Calcutta's Islamia, now Maulana Azad, College. Mujib's reply was brief. "I have given you a country and a national language. It is up to you to decide what to make of them." That decision now rests with his daughter. ●

(Courtesy "Asian Age")

Lankan Tamils' cause and V P Singh's reservation order, much against the wishes of the Delhi establishment. Of course, the price the DMK had paid for the Rajiv Gandhi assassination must be warning him before he makes any move in the tangled issue.

The ban on the LTTE in India has been extended for two more years. This came just before Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar visited New Delhi to ensure that the UF government does not clandestinely back any of the Lankan Tamil groups, especially the LTTE. The visit has been a success, if diplomatic circles have to be believed. Sri Lanka is usually the first country to knock on the doors of Delhi after every political change here. Kadirgamar recalled Chandrika Kumaratunga's stay in the Indian capital as a "guest scholar" in the late eighties. And External Affairs Minister I K Gujral, a former diplomat himself, made a declaration of "non-interference" might mean, after an Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, signed on an agreement guaranteeing the rights of the Tamil minority of the island-nation). Gujral accepted Kadirgamar's suggestion that he chair the meeting of the Joint Commission on Trade, Commerce and Co-operation at Colombo on 28 October next. Kadirgamar also invited Mr Deve Gowda, who has never been known to be sympathetic to armed militancy including leftist guerilla activity, to come to Colombo.

Among others Kadirgamar met to fulfill his objectives are Karunanidhi's nephew and Union Industries Minister Murasoli Maran and Ms Sonia Gandhi, who wields considerable influence over the Congress policy on Lanka. Sensing that India is fast moving to a federal system, Kadirgamar also spoke of future plans to visit all four southern Indian states including Tamil Nadu and meet chief ministers to muster goodwill for "whatever" is being done by the Sri Lankan government, God knows whether to resolve or further complicate, the vexed ethnic issue!

Karunanidhi is certainly in the horns of a dilemma. When he talked to newsmen at the airport here after returning from Delhi, he said he did not discuss the ethnic issue with Deve Gowda. This implied that Kadirgamar has had his way with the new Prime Minister. Also, Karunanidhi is under constant pressure from several quarters to tackle the LTTE. The Tamil Maanila Congress of Mr G K

Moopanar and the Congress(I) are known to be hostile to militant activity. The Indian Express has come out with reports of smuggling activities between the LTTE and fishermen of Rameswaram, Jayalalitha lashed out at him. Karunanidhi has responded by sending a senior police official to warn fishermen at Rameswaram; he also held a meeting of defence and intelligence officials to discuss the LTTE's "mischief potential" in the coastline. On the other hand, he is bound to draw flak from smaller parties like the Marumalarchi DMK and the PMK if he decides to listen to Kadirgamar on the ethnic issue.

That the LTTE faces a number of cases in India has also complicated matters for Karunanidhi. The Rajiv Gandhi assassination trial is yet to gather momentum. Tindivanam G Venkatraman, the DMK's lawyer before the M C Jain Commission of Inquiry probing the wider conspiracy behind the assassination, is now in the Union cabinet. The DMK itself has decided to appear before the Commission after Boycotting it for three years. DMK leader Subbulakshmi Jagadeesan is an accused in the Padmanabha murder case and is yet to be made minister in the new Tamil Nadu cabinet. A number of Dravidar Kazhagam activists are being interrogated for helping LTTE prisoners escape from the Vellore Fort prison in August last.

The only instance in which the LTTE has been cleared is the M V Ahat ship case. It may be recalled that the ship, transporting LTTE leader Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu and eighteen others, suspected to be LTTE cadres, was surrounded by the Indian Coast Guard in January 1993 in the high seas and brought near Madras following which there was a gun battle and Kittu and nine others allegedly committed suicide.

On 28 June last, acquitted the nine persons of any terrorist activity after listening to the prosecution argument that the ship had been captured 440 nautical miles off the Indian coast. He ruled that the Coast Guard was not justified in capturing the ship in international waters. The judge also ordered the Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner to take steps to hand over the ship and the nine persons to the government of Honduras - as the ship had been registered in that tiny country in Central America known to be the abode of Nicaraguan Contras supported by the United States in the eighties! ●

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CHICKENS ARE COMING HOME TO ROOST

T N Gopalan

Barely a month after she led the AIADMK to its worst electoral disaster, Jayalalitha, the recently ousted chief minister of Tamil Nadu, finds herself virtually under a siege - the one person she is closest to on this earth, her very "dear friend and sister-like" Sasikala has been arrested for violation of a whole host of the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA), and denied bail time and again. She is languishing in prison for over a month now. So also the 73-year old former Minister S D Somasundaram, a very senior AIADMK leader and once considered close both to her and Sasikala, is spending time behind bars, charged as he is, with having played a very active role in master-minding the attack on advocate K M Vijayan two years ago, he too unable to obtain bail even at the level of the High Court. Acting on a complaint from her friend-turned-foe, Dr Subramnyam Swamy, a sessions judge has ordered an inquiry into the wealth accumulated by Jayalalitha during her five year reign. The party itself is plunged into a serious crisis with many senior leaders and as also cadres demanding that the suprema distance herself from the much discredited Sasikala.

Jayalalitha's cup of woes is indeed filled to the brim - but when worse things befall her, one would be left with at a loss for an appropriate metaphor at that stage, except to say that the cup is overflowing.

The fact remains though that Sasikala's current predicament should be hurting the once imperious queen of Tamil Nadu most acutely - after all ever since 1984 when she came in touch with the former, she became almost inextricably bound to that lady, wife of a lowly official in the public relations department of the government of Tamil Nadu, and their friendship has withstood the innumerable trials and tribulations Jayalalitha has had to go through all these years, even the boot given to Mr Natarjan, Sasikala's husband, in 1990 itself.

And all through the five years of her tenure as Chief Minister, the air

was thick with rumours that it was Sasikala who was lording the show, that she was almost the shadow CM and that and their clan were fattening themselves at the cost of the state exchequer. However, Jayalalitha contemptuously shrugged off all her detractors and chose to retain Sasikala in the Poes Garden household.

By adopting the latter's nephew as her foster-son and celebrating the marriage of the boy with some outrageous pomp and pageantry, Jayalalitha seemed to have cemented the ties further and told the world at large to get lost. And ever since the débâcle, there has been a growing clamour for Sasikala's expulsion from the Poes Garden, but Jaya would not listen.

What makes her so desperately cling to Sasikala, nobody has been able to explain adequately or convincingly. It may be remembered that in early 1992 she had threatened to call it quits and retire from politics when Sasikala stormed out of the Poes Garden following a three-way quarrel involving the two friends and Sasikala's husband Natarajan. It was then the State Governor, Bhishma Narain Singh who had talked her out of any such precipitous move. And so what she will do now is anybody's guess. She called on her dear friend in the jail twice in the very first week of her incarceration - but with her high-profile visits creating problems for the jail administration, she has been bluntly told not to do so too often. She is sulking now, griping and cribbing to whoever cares to listen that her friend is a victim of a political vendetta.

Briefly Sasikala has been arrested for the FERA violations committed by the JJ TV owned by her clan. The private channel started only last year and widely touted as Jaya's answer to the Sun TV, owned by the DMK's ruling family, had hired a transponder and arranged for uplinking facilities through the US-based firms and also imported spares, paying in all over a million dollars, without obtaining the necessary permission from the Reserve Bank of India as is mandatory under the FERA.

(Incidentally the catch here is that when one goes through the RBI, one will also have to explain the sources of money for which the foreign exchange equivalent is sought.) Plus Rs 3.29 crores, a non-resident Indian had remitted to the Madras Branch of a nationalised bank most of the money was subsequently withdrawn and lent to a hotel firm with which Sasikala is associated.

At the end of a series of complicated manoeuvres, the clan bought up a sprawling tea-estate at a cost of over Rs 7.6 crores.

Sasikala's defence has been very evasive and unconvincing. Incidentally Sasikala's nephew Bhaskaran, Managing Director of the JJ TV, has already been arrested on the same charges and let out on bail.

Anticipating nervously a similar fate is Jaya's adopted son Sudhakaran, another director on the Board.

The JJ TV unable to cope with the all-out attack on its operations and hamstrung by a severe financial crunch was wound up, even though avowedly for the nonce, thus bringing the curtains down on yet another notorious Jaya-Sasi show.

In a related development, a sessions judge of Madras has ordered an inquiry under the Prevention of Corruption Act into the wealth amassed by Jaya. As per her wealth-tax returns, her wealth had shot up by a whopping Rs 37 cores in a matter of five years - a mind-boggling jump considering the fact that as the chief minister she was drawing a token salary of only one rupee.

Former minister S D Soamsundaram being behind bars for assault on a lawyer who had challenged the AIADMK government's reservation policy (for jobs and seats in educational institutions) is another blow to her image. The incident took place in July 1994 and it was the Central Bureau of Intelligence which brought to light the AIADMK's role in the sordid episode.

The Party is now wrung by continuing dissensions and many are crying for the blood of Sasikala. Some even suggest that Jayalalitha herself step down and hand over the reins to some other leader like former minister, Thirunavukkarasu. She is trying to brave it out, coming out with hard-hitting statements against Karunanidhi's alleged omissions and commissions and by holding a series

(Continued on page 28)

Are US Green Berets Training Sri Lankan Soldiers ?

Are US Green Berets helping to train soldiers, and is U.S.A. quietly expanding its role in Sri Lanka opening paths for military presence there ?

According to a report published in *The Dallas Morning News*, 30 June 1996 by Mark Kaufman (Philadelphia Inquirer), on an air base at Wirawila in the south of Sri Lanka, a team of 12 Green Beret specialists is training Sri Lankan soldiers in combat medi-vac techniques, radio work and field engineering. Live fire exercises are next. Since the beginning of June, the special forces team

has paved the way for an expanding US military and economic presence in a nation that normally attracts Americans for its beaches, wild elephant herds and ancient Buddhist ruins.

The report adds that, unannounced, and unreported, the US military activity in Sri Lanka involves considerable security and political risks. When the Green Berets leave their base, the go under armed guard.

Unlike most joint military exercises, the Pentagon has not publicized the Sri Lanka mission. It has not been mentioned in Sri Lankan newspapers, which are heavily censored by a government sensitive about human-rights abuses laid at the feet of its military.

The training comes nearly six years after Sri Lanka was the only Asian nation to offer refuelling bases for US warplanes during the Persian Gulf war. The mission also comes at a time when the United States is more willing to sell Sri Lanka sensitive "lethal" military equipment, and when construction is underway there for one of the worlds biggest Voice of America Stations.

Until now, the United States has had a small apparent role in the countries war - a bitter ethnic struggle pitting Tamil militants fighting for a separate homeland in the north against the Sinhalese majority of the south, who want to keep Sri Lanka whole.

"We have no dog in this fight" said the American military attaché to Sri Lanka, Col. Carl Kockrum, who helped bring the Green Berets over for a mission code named "operation bal-

anced style".

But the small - yet increasingly frequent - presence of US military advisors over the last two years suggest that formulation may be changing.

So does the State Departments official determination last year that the main Tamil group fighting for independence - The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or Tamil Tigers-is a "terrorist group".

And so does the recent finding by US human-right monitors that the Sri Lankan government is seriously addressing its unhappy history of harbouring quasi-official death squads. That positive State Department conclusion - which some human-rights groups in Sri Lanka say grossly overstates the governments progress - allows the United States to move even closer to Sri Lanka.

For its part, the Sri Lankan government, which has long included anti-American socialists, is acting like a friend of the United States. Last year, the new government broke a campaign promise to reject to reject plans for a Voice of America transmitter.

And although an official ban on selling US lethal equipment to Sri Lanka remains in place because of the governments human-rights record, the United States recently sold six patrol boats to Sri Lanka and, sources said, its discussing the sale of guns to arm them, along with military helicopters. Sri Lankan inquiries about night-vision equipment also have been made.

Although Sri Lankan requests for US satellite imaging technology were turned down, US officials guided the Sri Lankans to Israeli suppliers of advanced surveillance technology.

All these steps, US officials say are possible because of the dramatic improvement in Sri Lanka's human-rights record.

Both US and Sri Lankan officials in Colombo say there are good strategic reasons to be deepening ties. The American military is attracted to the islands prime location between the Middle East and the Far East and near China. And Sri Lanka is seeking a political counterbalance to its giant neighbour India.

But both sides also say they have

good reason to keep their arrangements low-key. International and political affairs can be perilous business here. Consider the experience of the Indian Army. Saying it was on a peace keeping mission to help solve the Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic war, India sent fifty thousand troops there in 1987, with the apparent approval of all parties. Three years later, and after 1500 soldiers were killed, India left Sri Lanka in a Vietnam-style defeat.

Then in 1991, Sri Lankan Tamil militants assassinated Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime minister who sent Indian troops to their country. Tamil militants have also assassinated a Sri Lankan President, several defense ministers, and a long list of other top Sri Lankan politicians and officials.

Late last year, the Sri Lankan military stormed the Tamil north and routed the Tamil Tigers (and many civilians) from their long time stronghold. The Tigers, however, still control hundreds of miles of Sri Lankan jungle and periodically send out teams to attack patrols, villages and some heavily populated sites in Colombo.

The Tigers have their own US connections. Well-to-do Tamils living in the United States sent considerable sums of money to the rebels.

With a blood history like this, it is not surprising that the Green Beret team arrived unannounced. In a recent interview, the Sri Lankan foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar denied that any American soldiers were on active duty in his country. None the less, a second round of joint exercises is scheduled for the fall.

This studied silence is quite a change from the fanfare that usually accompanies similar joint military exercises held by the US commander in chief, Pacific (CINPAC) in Thailand, India, Indonesia and other Asian countries.

Indeed, the policy goal that drives the Joint Command Exercise and Training Program is one of peacetime "engagement" with "sister militaries". In theory, the local military receives valuable training while the US military gains knowledge - for possible future use - about how that foreign military works. The program is also supposed to create an aura of good feeling between both sides.

But in those other countries in the joint training program, the local soldiers learning from Americans are not headed off to fight in a civil war.

The commander of the Special Forces team, Capt. George McDonald

is spending June teaching Sri Lankan junior officers, among other things, how to set up a proper helicopter landing and how to make up a precise pickup.

Captain McDonald and his team enjoy the exotic surroundings - "I never dreamed there would be peacocks wondering the air base" the Captain said - but they also know that this is no place for easy going R&R.

As for the Sri Lankan soldiers Capt. McDonalds team is training at the Wirawila air base, many will be soon leaving the peacocks behind and heading for the Tamil battle zone in the north.

American human-rights monitors and others generally report that Sri Lankan human-rights practices began to improve in 1993 just before the ruling party for the last 17 years was voted out of office. The victorious new government of Chandrika Kumaratunga campaigned on a platform of respecting human-rights and punishing those who had not.

In addition to setting up several commissions to investigate death squads, the new government also offered to negotiate with the Tamil minority - twenty percent of Sri Lanka's 18 million people. The Tamil militants entered into negotiations last year but later resumed attacks on the Sri Lankan army and civilians. The war continues today.

Some human-rights monitors are not convinced that conditions has significantly improved. "Yes, there has been some improvements for the early 1990's, but young Tamils and other people are still 'disappearing' all the time", said Sherine Xavier, an activist for a largely Tamil human-rights group in Colombo. "And the government has yet to punish a single death-squads perpetrator."

Other human-rights officials confirm that although trials alleged death-squads participants are on the way, nobody has been convicted. Some Sri Lankan officers accused of death-squad crimes remain on active duty.

"This talk of great progress is all really wishful thinking on the part of governments like the United States, which want to get more involved in Sri Lanka and has now found a way to do it," Ms Xavier said. "Terrible human-right habits don't change overnight".

Ms Xavier also said the arrival of American military advisors - word of which, she said, was circulating

around Colombo despite newspaper censorship - was a risky step.

"The message to Tamil people in particular is that the US supports the government side," she said. "It will be a big thing - that's surely why they don't want to let it out."

Should the news become widely known in Sri Lanka, protest might follow. There were noisy demonstrations in 1994 over a plan to build the Voice of America relay station on 400 acres alongside the Indian ocean, 30 miles north of Colombo airport.

The protests were led by a local Catholic Bishop, and taken up by a major political party, and featured many marches on the VOA site. Dur-

ing one protest, police killed one protester and wounded others.

A leader of the 1994 protest was Fernando Newton of the Center for Society and Religion, a church-sponsored group in Colombo. He said that rumours in Colombo that US military may be training Sri Lankan soldiers suggest "that all our initial fears about the VOA situation are coming true."

"Definitely, I think there is something sinister going on with the US and Sri Lanka," Mr. Newton said. "I hope it is not true, but if we learn there are American soldiers here in Sri Lanka, then we would have to protest. It is a form of intervention in our internal affairs." ●

TAMILS in EXILE and CREATIVE WRITING

by Rajes Balasubramaniam

Once Upon A Time I met one of my favourite writers by accident on one of the busiest streets in Jaffna Town.

I had read almost all of his writing at the time of my meeting. He was one of the influences on my writing career.

Through his writing he has enabled me to understand the cruel mentality of the high caste Tamils and the lives of ordinary, poor untouchable Tamils in Jaffna.

When I met him I recognised him immediately as I had seen his photograph many times in the papers: his piercing eyes, smiling face, with an intellectual expression, slim figure and friendly manner made me introduce myself to him without hesitation.

"What are you doing at this time of day staring up at the sky?" I asked naively, as it was so hot that most people walking by had umbrellas. He looked at me deeply and replied in a soft tone "I am thinking in order to construct my next story."

"Well, I never stared at the sky to construct my stories; am I missing something?" I thought. I have thought about it many times since, and I don't think Kamber or Kalithas stared at the sky before they commenced their epics.

I am saying that we do not have to have a certain rule or style to construct, narrate, or formulate our thoughts and put them into writing a novel, painting a picture, carving a sculpture or directing a drama. Writers do not have teachers but are often inspired or influenced by others in the way that I have been influenced by Edna O'Brien, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Wolf, Rajam Krishnan or Jeyakanthan. Creative writing is the ex-

pression of one's own thoughts which is often the reflection of the society within which one lives.

Most of us learn and modify our behaviour, language, attitudes and creative talents according to the social, political and economic circumstances we live in or are forced to face up to. The ethos of a writer depends on his or her own understanding of the subject about which they write.

Art Critics

Creative writing in our Tamil society in Europe is not as developed as it should be compared to the levels achieved in other area of the arts.

The number of dancers in London may reach over a hundred or more; the number of instrumental and vocal artists is increasing by the day. The number of organisations who promote popular cinema songs is expanding.

Most of these "arts" activities are profit based, and promoting their 'talent' in various media is vital to their earnings. To do this promotion there are plenty of writers who write reviews of these performances. They portray them as the most brilliant shows on earth, or the artists as gifted and destined to become part of the Treasure of the Tamil culture. A good cook should know the ingredients to make a tasty meal: an intelligent critic must have at least the basic knowledge of art and its history. Reviewing an art performance as excellent, brilliant, superb, impressive, splendid, grand and so on is acceptable as long as the critic also reviews the other factors in the performance. Are they analysing the art intellectually or emotionally, as most of the performing artists are female and critics are always male? or is it a kind of voyeurism?

Why do we not encourage females artists who know their subjects to become critics ?

We all know that art cannot be bought. The beauty of art is reflected through the artist's knowledge of the subject and the way she interweaves her understanding into the performance. A dancer's talent of expressing *Bhava*, *Thala*, *Lalitham* cannot be explained through empty words. The expression of art through symbolic language should be studied and analysed within a constructive framework.

"Paddy Mantram"

These days there is another trend: that of organising "Paddy Mantram" debates based on the epic stories and mythology which mainly emphasises the subordinate role of women and justifies inequality, creating the myth of an "individual" into an "avatharam". These "Paddy Mantrams" are very popular among young people who want to study leaning about their roots, past history and cultural heritage. The format of "Paddy Mantram" is a very good format to bring out new ideas, skills, and social and psychological development of the younger generation. Good Luck! to "Paddy Mantram", but will they include modern ideas for their debates and allow women to take part in them?

Creative Writing

Compared to all these activities creative writing has very little chance of gaining a large leadership, making a profit, or receiving appropriate recognition by the majority of Tamils in Europe, as most Tamils do not regard creative writing as an important matter for their cultural development. They boast about their passion for the Tamil language and literature, but not very many of them read any literary magazine; they read only commercial magazines. To promote creative writing in Europe we should give a greater respect to Tamil writers rather than undermine their talent and commitment.

Tamil writers, whether in Sri Lanka or Europe group themselves into different factions; there are two main factions currently in existence, one faction is the 'traditionalists' and the other is the

(Continued from page 25)

of discussions with party functionaries at various levels. She has started talking to the Press too more often these days and seems to give out an impression that she is determined to stay put and fight back and not slink away as has frequently been speculated. But one thing seems clear - the chickens are coming home to roost, thick and fast, for Jayalalitha and the Sasikala clan. ●

'progressive' faction. I should say, however, that there is another group of writers who never get into the major literary forum and remain unrecognised because of their gender.

Tamil writers have a tradition of either insulting each other or promoting their friends and relations, regardless of the quality of their writing in terms of style, political beliefs, social observation or cultural understanding. Unless one belongs to a certain faction of writers, gaining a name as a good writer is not easy in our community. We are good at eliminating people if we are not happy with their political views, the region they come from, their different social status to ourselves, or they simply because they do not belong to a certain faction. Some of us are good with guns: some are brilliant with our pens.

Often these factions behave like exclusive Gentlemen's Clubs where they promote people who have similar interests to themselves, a sort of "literary freemasonry". The chance to join such factions is not open to the majority of writers, particularly women. Many writers in Europe are at present struggling for recognition and respect, but this is denied to them by the "literary pundits" who think their writing is not worthy enough to be given true consideration.

Exile literature has been the subject of some criticism by some "experts" who believe that exile literature has no value as "true literature". Who are we to justify what is "true literature"? People promote various kinds of literature as being of value according to the political situation, religious domination, economic power and class interest prevailing at the time. So called popular literature is written mainly by men, about men and their love, lust and power, and not about ordinary people or social change.

Writing for escapism through some kind of melodrama or cinema style love stories is not true literature. To me writing from exile more clearly reflects "true feeling" than the literature from Sri Lanka or South India as writers here in Europe have more freedom of speech. I think it is very wrong for us to undermine someone else's work with our own prejudices based on envy, or political, gender or social class differences. Tamil writers in Exile are often criticised for their nostalgia. Our minds are filled with past memories: our own memories cannot be erased so quickly, nor can we forget the past and do something completely different. These writers are bringing different dimensions to their creative writing as they have different experiences, a different outlook, and freedom. Our style of writing and the subject matter will inevitably be different. Therefore comparing exiled writers with Sri Lankan or South Indian writers is not relevant. Criticism should be in context if it is to have any meaning or impact.

Four collections of short stories by exiled writers have been published in recent years. These writers must be recognised for their work as their writings are a prime source of information to others about the struggle for freedom in Sri Lanka. These collections were organised mainly by Indian scholars such as Dr Indra Parthasarathy and Mr S.V.Rajadurai and the magazine "India Today". The support for Sri Lankan Tamil writers by the late Mr Komal Swaminathan was marvellous. The recognition by the literary magazine "Kaniyazli" shows that exile literature is taking an important place in South India. I think it is time for Tamil writers to be united and have a constructive plan through which to promote creative writing rather than picking on each other like little children who have few social or communication skills.

Young generation Tamils are learning Tamil at Weekend Tamil Schools (22 in London alone I believe). Will any of them become a Tamil writer in future? How can we help them? Why do Tamil newspapers and magazines not have short story competitions, sponsored by people who are interested in our language and literature? Why do we not have regular seminars or debates on Contemporary Tamil Literature? Why not have a "Paddy Mantram" on modern art and literature? Most Tamil writers are independent, but some belong to a political group: that doesn't matter, if we, as writers, only talk about literature in terms of quality and style. When are we going to learn to tolerate and respect other people's point of view?

I hope this small article may create a healthy debate on Contemporary Tamil Literature, rather than commence a battle with people who enjoy insulting others. Computerising the Tamil language through the number of fonts or otherwise commercialising Tamil will not develop the language unless we also use the language in a constructive way at all levels of action.

Obituary

Mrs. Maheswary Chelliah of Punnalakadduvan, Jaffna, aged 69, mother of Sivasubramaniam, Krishnadasan, Theiveegarani; Sister of Nagalingam, Shanmuganathan, Sellathurai, Visuvalingam, Parameswary and Seevaratnam; mother-in-law of Susila, Vasanthi, and Sivanathan; and grandmother of Majuran, Kajanana, Sinthu, Hariharan, Sivaharan, Kamini and Kanthini passed away on 16 July 1996 in Colombo. Funeral took place on 21 July 1996 at Kanatte in Colombo. Inserted by C. Krishnadasan (0181 289 9608)

REMEMBERING RITA

By Cherian George

When a colleague from the Indian High Commission rang me on 25 March to say that Rita was ill, seriously ill, I tried to get in touch with her on telephone, hardly expecting that I would succeed, international telecommunications being what they sometimes are. By a fluke of luck, I spoke to her on the afternoon of the 28th.

I was startled by how low she sounded. "I feel hugely tired," she said. A satellite echo and a long silence intervened. "Hugely tired, Pray for me, that is all I ask. Good-bye," There seemed to be an eerie, echoing finality about her good-bye. I had never know her to speak like this. Illness was not a subject that she readily discussed. I had the premonition that something was very wrong.

29 March, the next day she was gone. One of her friends who had watched over her during the last hours said that it was as sudden as if she had been kidnapped by the rough hand of fate, leaving those who knew her to mourn the vacancy in their lives.

My wife and I first came to know Rita in the late seventies when she was Editor of the old Sunday Times. She was doing a difficult job in difficult times. "An Editor works under a searchlight," she told me once. "Everything about him or her is discussed. And it is worse when it is a her." She said that her politics were speculated on. On which side of the fence was she on this question or that? Even fellow journalists rarely do to a journalist as they themselves would like to be done by! Though she was hurt by unkindness, more often than not, all that she would bring herself to say was that 'gossip is just an indoor sport with some of us in Colombo.' This was typical of her. She had a great capacity for dignified, reticent silence.

The old Sunday Times was not in the best of financial health and there were daily rumours of its imminent demise, rumours that were not always contradicted. The Sunday Times is setting, she used to joke. But, hard times or not, I was struck by how hugely professional she was. She was from all accounts over-worked and not exactly over-paid, but she soldiered on. Soldiered on, is the phrase that inevitably comes to you when you think of Rita.

Even after her illness, she refused to spare herself. Often, she went the extra mile quite literally to get her journalistic stories. She was not willing to settle for second or third hand reports. She said that unless she had every story 'clamped down with bolts of verified fact' her journalistic conscience would never be happy.

With an idiosyncratic courage typical of her, she went to Jaffna in early 1995, even when she knew that her health was less than good. She argued that a journalist has to be plumb in the centre of things, not slough about away from it all in safe armchairs. With some amusement, she used to mention names of those who chose to belong to the latter school!

Her description of the crossing of the Kilali lagoon for the Indian Express was full of a strong feel for what was to be for her both an electrifying as well as a numbing experience. In private she confessed she was terrified when her boat had bucked and heaved about in the lagoon like some cockleshell thing. She said that as she stood in the boat peering through the night and the sea spray, hoping to God that the boat would stay afloat an nothing amiss like a loose shell would strike it, she felt the utter futility of this war of Sri Lanka against Sri Lanka. "War seemed such an idiot game," she said, adding that a great sadness, half-sea sickness, half war weariness, seemed to grip, almost overwhelm her during the crossing. To her the lagoon was almost a sad metaphor for the North-South divide.

On her return journey, she was terribly sea-sick. The black skies rumbled with thunder. Or was it the echo of guns? She couldn't be sure. She said that personal fear apart, what she remembered most was the terrified eyes of a small girl shook with fear. But there were no tears. The girl's terror had passed the easy relief of tears. Rita said that the animal terror in the girl's wide open eyes, summed up for her the moral devastation of the war. Both sides in a family quarrel are wounded by the same stroke.

To many in the south, the war was only bombing, body counts and military stalemates, but Rita could not write about the war without a sense of bitter gloom and involvement. Blood she said was thicker than mere journalistic ink.

Many of her friends, my wife and I included, used to remonstrate with her that may be she shouldn't be handling all the work she was doing, stringerships with an Indian newspaper, a Japanese news agency and an international news agency; a weekly column in a Colombo Tamil newspaper written confidentially under a pseudonym; a column in the Tamil Times of London, not to speak of work for Radio Netherlands and the BBC. Besides, she worked intermittently, far too intermittently she often lamented, on her short stories and novels.

But Rita was not afraid to burn the

candle at both ends and a lot in the middle too. That was how she wanted to live... and die.

Rita had a remarkable capacity for friendship. Her friends, I used to joke, were an international cast. I know how close Klaus Franke, the then German Ambassador and his wife, Christiane, were to her. During the height of the JVP terror, when there were disappearances by the score, threats were held out against Rita for her over-independent style of reporting. Given the poisonous atmosphere in which anything could happen to anyone, such threats could be unnerving. Unprompted by Rita, Ambassador Franks took up the matter with the authorities, without mincing his words in any way and holding nothing back about his fears and suspicions. Much later in early 1995, at Rita's farewell dinner for the Frankses, we could afford to laugh over it all. However, Rita remarked at the dinner in words I remember still, "I wonder what would have happened if I too had abruptly vanished." In retrospect, Rita's oddly prescient words have acquired a great sadness.

Rita used to say that though she had friends in all the right places, they were friends first and last, and not to be cheapened into journalistic sources. She asked nothing of her friends except friendship. As a hard-worked journalist with more than a couple of deadlines a day to keep, she didn't care to be interrupted in the middle of a story she was writing. But very often she used to say that she preferred to catch up with the latest about her friends than catch up with her work, and then she would settle down to a long chat.

Her style in her short stories and novellas was formed by her journalism. It was spare, clear and strong. She disliked pointless stylistic games. Her 'Night of the Devil Bird' and 'A Father for My Son', show her at her best. Books she said should grow of themselves, not be fabricated like some manufactured product. The strong narrative drive, the characters and situations that seem to breathe into the page, the heart-break of lives ruined by racial conflict, make her writings some of the most painfully honest things to come out of Sri Lanka. Very often they are charged with personal meaning. Everything she wrote had her emotional fingerprints so to speak on it.

Rita disliked empty phrase-making. Let us say then that her friends will grieve her but that we will also feel grateful that we knew her. And this sense of gratitude will stem some part of the tide of sadness that we all feel so very keenly. We will all of us feel the presence of her absence. However, there is some thin consolation in the thought that a full life is often God's compensation for a relatively short life.

(The author is the present Indian High Commissioner in Botswana, and formerly Deputy HC in Colombo)

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional, ambitious, outgoing bride, 25+ for Master's qualified engineer son, 32, employed in US, horoscope immaterial. Details, photo please. M 856 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek educated homely bride, 22-28, for engineer, M.Sc. son, 28, holding responsible position in America. Send photo details. M 856 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu family seek professional, independent, fun loving bride, 25+ for computer engineer, Masters degree son, 28, working in US. Send details, photograph M 857 c/o Tamil Times.

Tamil Hindu British citizen, 42, in good employment and Canadian resident status seeks educated male partner. Send horoscope, details. M 858 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek partner for daughter, 38, attractive British citizen, B.Sc. Hons., working as biomedical scientist. Tel: 0171 498 6347 (UK).

Jaffna Hindu aunt seeks educated partner for nephew, CIMA accountant in good UK employment, 34, Mars afflicted, UK permanent resident. Send horoscope, details. M 860 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek partner for son, 27, 5'8", computer engineering graduate in good employment in UK. Send horoscope, details. M 861 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Branavan son of Mr. & Mrs. Viyakesparan of 787B Kenton Lane, Middx., HA3 6AH and **Ramanthi** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Pathmanathan of 14 Grafton Close, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7JY on 27.5.96 at Runnymede Suite, Kempton Park, Middx.

Somakanthan son of the late Mr. S. Sockanathan and Mrs. M. Sockanathan of Navaly North, Jaffna and **Chithra Ananthi** daughter of late Mr. C.

Candyah and Mrs. P. Candyah of Vannarpannai, Jaffna on 19th May 1996 at Shri Shiva Vishnu Temple, Carrum Downs, Victoria, Australia.

OBITUARIES



Regis, Anton, dearly beloved husband of Loretta; loving father of Roshini, Anojan and Niranjan passed away on 4th July 1996, after a long battle with cancer. Funeral took place on 10th July at St. Anthony's Church, Edgware, Middx. - 1 Oakleigh Gardens, Edgware, Middx. HA8 8EA. Tel: 0181 958 9434.



Mrs. Saraswathy Pushpadevi Selvaratnam, born 16.4.26, retired teacher of St. Clares, Colombo; beloved wife of Muthia Selvaratnam (Dept. of Food Supplies, Colombo) of 13/11 Alexandra Road, Wellawatte, Colombo 6; daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. Arulampalam Gunaratnam; daughter-in-law of Mr. & Mrs. Veluppillai Muthia of Vaddukoddai; loving mother of Varapirasathan, Senthan

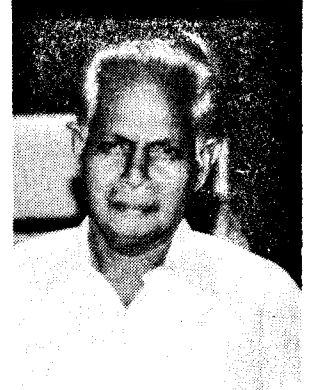
and Seyon; sister of Jeyasingham (UK), late Balasingham (UK), Mrs Mahildevi Paramalingam (Canada), late Tharamarajah (Transkei, South Africa), Shanmuganathan (UK) and Rajamohan (Colombo) expired on 17th June 1996. The funeral took place at her residence in Colombo on 19th June.

The members of the family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and flowers and generally helped in the funeral arrangements. - G.J. Gunasekaram, 99 Landseer Avenue, Manor Park, London E12 6HS. Tel: 0181 478 3785.



Dr. Vythialingam Thangarajasingam, (Retired Medical Practitioner, UK), born 30.4.1925, beloved son of late Kanthappar Vythialingam J.P. and late Thilliamma Vythialingam of WARD & DAVY, Navalur Kottam, Jaffna; beloved husband of Punithavathy, daughter of late Kanagasabai J.P. and Mrs. Nagammah Kanagasabai of Jaffna; loving father of Kaw-sar (Civil Engineer), Kiruba, Dr. Vakees, Kethees and Sibi; father-in-law of V. Sri Shanmuganathan (Solicitor), Dr. K. Mohanarathi, Dr. V. Sasithara and K. Sivasothy; grandfather of Vishnu, Anusuya, Aingaran, Aumi and Eshwari; brother of late Muttucumaraswamy (Retd. Principal), late Sivasubramanium (Proctor), late Sivajoti (Engineer), and Anandanadarajah (Retd. Principal) of UK; Seethaluxmi, Kamalanayahi (Ranee), Pathmavathi (Baba) of Australia; brother-in-law of late A.E. Sinnadurai (Overseer) Jaffna, S. Param Thillirajah (Retd. Principal) and Dr. K. Balasingam of Australia, K. Kathirkamanathan (U.K.), and K. Gopalanathan (France); brother-in-law of Mrs. Thangaratnam Muthucumaraswamy,

Mrs. Thanaluxmi Sivasubramanium, Mrs. Logeswary Sivajoti and late Mrs. Kamalawathy Anandanadarajah of UK, passed away peacefully in Wimbledon, London on 11.7.1996. The members of the family thank all friends and relatives for their messages of sympathy and support during the period of grief. - 73 Kingston Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 1JN. Tel: 0181 715 4588.



Sabapathy Gunaratnam (75) of Illavalai, Retired Census & Statistics Officer; beloved husband of Rajeswary; father of Sivagunenthiran (Canada); father-in-law of Anubama (Canada) passed away peacefully on 30.04.1996 and was cremated at Kanatte, Colombo on 1st May.

The family thank all relatives and friends who sent messages of sympathy and support during the period of great sorrow. - Mrs. R. Gunaratnam, 29 Deansstone Place, Colombo 3. Tel: 573964 (Sri Lanka).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

August 1 Feast of Transfiguration of Lord Jesus Christ.

Aug. 3 Shruthi Laya Shangam & Saiva Munnetta Sangam (UK) present Vocal Recital by Padmashree K.J. Yesudas at Royal Festival Hall, Belvedere Road, London SE1. Tel: 0181 399 7848/767 2229.

Aug. 6 Aadi Sevvai 4.

Aug. 7 Kaarthikai.

Aug. 8 Feast of St. Dominic.

Aug. 9 Ekathasi.

Aug. 10 Feast of St. Lawrence.

Aug. 11 Pirathosam; 10.00am London Sri Murugan Temple, 78 Church Road, Manor Park, London E12 6AF. **Car Festival.**

Aug. 13 Aadi Amavasai; Aadi Sevvai 5.

Aug. 15 Feast of Assumption of Virgin Mary.

Aug. 17 6.00pm Norway Tamil Sangham Presents Tamil Dra-

mas 'Thunpak Kerniyile' and 'Idai Veli' at Samfunnhuset, Oslo, Norway. The plays are directed by Mr. K. Balendra of The Tamil Performing Arts Society, London.

Aug. 18 Chathurthi.

Aug. 23 Varalakshmi Viratham.

Aug. 24 Feast of St. Bartholomew.

Aug. 25 Ekathasi.

Aug. 26 Pirathosam; 9.00am J.S.S.A. (UK) Cricket & Netball Festival 1996 at Warren Farm Sports Centre, Southall, Middx. Tel: 0181 743 8289/399 7848/361 7359.

Aug. 27 Aavani Onam; Feast of St. Monica.

Aug. 28 Full Moon; Feast of St. Augustus.

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castle-town Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/4608.

July 21 to Aug. 14 Bhawan's

Summer School 96 with teachers from India.

Aug. 12 7.00pm Final Show of Music & Dance.

Aug. 13 7.00pm Final Show of Music & Dance.

Aug. 14 6.30pm India's Independence Day Celebrations. All welcome.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

The Sydney Tamil Manram held its annual competition in Tamil poetry, drama, quiz, elocution etc for Tamil children of all ages to award three prizes in each category. The prizes were distributed on 22nd June when the Manram presented an evening of cultural programmes. The items included Mimicry by Prakash Subramaniam, a Dance Drama performed by Mohini Basu, a cine and TV artiste from India, a dance recital by Sneha Rao and Dances by the junior children of the Manram.

Admission was free and the Manram proposes to organise cultural evenings in August and November 1996.

Book Launch: The book in Tamil 'Mupporul Unmai Villakam' Part 1, authored by Mr. M. Elayatamby was launched jointly by the Tamil Senior Citizens' Association and the Saiva Manram Inc. on 30th June at the Homebush Primary School Hall, in the presence of a large gathering. Mr. M. Arjunamani while welcoming the audience spoke about the services rendered by the author.

Smt Balam Lakshmanan, a well known Tamil scholar, reviewed the book and lauded the knowledge of Saivism displayed by the author. Dr. Venkhanar Elango and Mr. N. Mahesan also spoke. Dr. A. Balasubramaniam was presented the first copy and other distinguished guests present were presented with copies. The book then went for sale.

Mr. Elayatamby thanked the associations that sponsored the launch. He was Deputy Principal of Karainagar Hindu College.

Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam Visits Australia: Mr. Kumar Ponnampalam, leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress visited Australia in June and addressed meetings in most of the State capitals.

The Sydney meeting took place on June 23rd at the Homebush Primary School Hall. Mr. Ana Pararajasingam of the Eelam Tamil Association of New South Wales introduced Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam and the other distinguished speakers from Sri Lanka - Mr. Vasantha Rajah, former head of Rupavahini and author of the book 'The Tamil Exodus and Beyond' and Dr. Sunil Ratnapriya of the NSSP.

Mr. Vasantha Rajah delivered a stinging attack on the Sri Lankan government and its president and recounted his experiences as head of Rupavahini. He traced the history of the Tamil struggle and outlined the present dilemma of the Tamils. Dr. Sunil Ratnapriya set out his

party's policy on the Tamil question and said that it had always taken a strong stand on the right of the Tamils to determine their own future. His party was ready to support the Tamils in their struggle for autonomy within a unitary state, but if they wanted separation or secession they would support their demands. Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam addressing the audience in Tamil condemned not only the Sri Lankan government but also the Tamil parties in Colombo. He appealed for unity among the expatriate Tamil population whom he considered 'the cream of the nation' and emphasised that Tamils both inside and outside Sri Lanka had no alternative but to support the LTTE in these dark days.

At the end of the speeches there was a lively question and answer session.

Gayatri's Violin Debut



'I started to learn to play the violin at the age of FOUR and began to perform full kacheri when I was EIGHT'.

So said the well known violin maestro Prof. T.N. Krishnan of Madras, presiding as Chief Guest at the Violin Arangetram of **Gayatri Kathirkamanathan** at Beck Theatre, Hayes, on 18th May. It is nothing remarkable for one born into a musical family and grew up in an environment breathing Karnatic music. Such an advantage cannot be even dreamed of by our children in this foreign land. Yet for young Gayatri, eight years of weekly lessons (sans holidays) and a dedicated Guru in the form of Sangeetha Vidwan Kalaivani Indrakumar came as a boon to exhibit her musical talent on the violin. Every piece in the repertoire was rendered with authenticity, and more importantly, full understanding and feeling. Tyagaraja's throbbing Pancharatnam, Shyama Sastri's meandering Marivere and the ever youthful Kilikkanni flowed superbly. The immediate presence of Kalaivani's own Guru Prof. Krishnan and his approving head shakes added strength to the artiste.

The accompanying percussion artistes Muthu Sivaraja, Bhaskaran and Chithambaranathan gave unique support to the violinist and received a word of praise from the chief guest Prof. Krishnan.

Violin as a solo instrument is popular no doubt, but in Karnatic concerts it claims pride of place as the main accompaniment. Hence at the Arangetram stage itself the student must be made to show his or her ability to follow the singer's style and nuances. It is hoped instrumental trainees would follow this practice while training itself. Another sad state of affairs is the attitude of the 'graduated' candidates in being satisfied that their job is done and lock up their instruments and anklets safely. Let us hope for their return to the stage and enjoy the art.

- Sivapatha Sundaram.

A Dancer of Promise



Smt. Menaka Raviraj, an alumna of Jaffna's Ramanathan Academy, presented her second successful student **Jane Tharani Raslah** at Bharata Natya Arangetram at Ashcroft Theatre in Central Croydon on Sunday, 5th May.

Jane is a student of South London Tamil School, Croydon, and was under the tutelage of Menaka, who is a resident teacher, for four years. Endowed with a supple body and expressive face, Jane was able to absorb the arduous training and executed a full fledged repertoire of dance numbers at her debut. Guru Menaka seems to have organised her jathi korvais in such a way to suit the artiste's physical capacity. Jane executed the aadavus and

korvais in full range and her real asset is the abhinaya skill. Her short stay in Madras with a Kalakshetra member reflected a little.

Though Guru Menaka restricted the length of the Varnam a little, the dancer showed slight loss of strength. This was more evident in the Thandava Karana poses. The musical support was given by Ambika Thamoatham, the evergreen vocalist who has been giving a helpful hand to a number of youngsters. Muthu Sivarajah with his team mates executed their support admirably. On the whole Menaka successfully presented her second disciple (the first being Brinda Selvarajasingam, also from the same South London Tamil School).

Dr. Navaratnam in his speech as Chief Guest dealt with the theory of dance as described in Bharata's Natya Sastra. Dr. Sivakumar did a good job as compere, one of the handful available in this delicate art.

— Sivapatha Sundaram.

Mrs. Leela Ilnkanathan: An Appreciation

So much has been said and written of the late Mrs. Leela Ilnkanathan, that my effort to say more would be like attempting to paint the lily. Yet I cannot resist the urge to pen these few lines on our dear departed friend who passed away on 28.04.1996. Among the many friends that my wife — who knew Leela from their days together at Ramanathan College, Jaffna — and I are fortunate to have had from various walks of life, Leela was truly a very special kind of person. I first met Leela in 1955 when my wife and I spent our first holiday after our marriage, at Leela's beautiful home, set amidst the picturesque environs of Nuwara Eliya, that was the beginning of a close friendship between our two families that lasted over four decades.

We soon realised, over the years, that we were but one among countless other families who were fortunate to have been at the receiving end of her never failing kindness, her warm hospitality and her endless good cheer, friendliness and bon homie. Leela is best remembered as one whom God had gifted not only with joyous spirit but also invested her with the rare capacity to spread that joy to all who came in contact with her. Her conviviality was truly infectious, so much so that even those who had something to grieve or worry over, soon forgot their problems when they encountered Leela. Life's burdens, a universal human experience, sat lightly on her shoulders and she soon lightened the burden of countless others.

It is difficult to write about Leela — affectionately known to my children and those of the younger generation as Kutty Mami — in isolation, without referring to her late husband, Kutty Mama! It was indeed Leela's good fortune that in her pursuit of enjoying the simple joys of life, she was gifted with an equally generous warm, charming and cheerful husband. Together they made an ideal couple who were as devoted and dedicated to each other as

they were to their friends and relatives. To have an open home was their greatest delight as hospitality was second nature to them.

Two years ago they came together to settle down and enjoy their retirement in UK with their only daughter Urmila. But Fate had willed otherwise! We were all deeply saddened when Kutty Mama suddenly passed away only two months after their arrival in UK. The loss of her husband tore away at her heartstrings and undoubtedly contributed to her early demise. Although Leela is no more with us — and we are the poorer by her parting — her spirit will continue to live with us in the ever-smiling ever-cheerful Urmila to whom the loss of a dear mother will indeed be an irreparable one. We hope her deep anguish and pain of mind will at least be somewhat diminished by the thought that her grief will be shared by innumerable families spread across continents and countries who will mourn the passing away of a truly remarkable lady. May the Almighty guide her in her journey to 'moksham' which she truly deserves.

T. Pathmanathan.

Record Levels of Charity Help to Sri Lankan Tamils

A U.K. based Sri Lankan Tamil charity has announced record levels of support for relief and rehabilitation projects in Sri Lanka. The Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking People (S.C.O.T.) has provided over £15,000 worth of funds in the last ten months for a range of projects aimed at assisting the plight of Tamil-speaking people.

The charity formed in 1977 raises its funds through regular donations from its members and through organising social and cultural events in the London area. It issued an appeal to its members and their friends in December due to the worsening refugee crisis in the North of Sri Lanka and was inundated with support. The Committee has well established links with a large number of local and international charities carrying out work on the ground in Sri Lanka and was able to channel money through some of these groups when many others were unable to do so.

Fifteen separate groups have received SCOT's funds and it is estimated that thousands of people have benefited directly from this assistance. For example, £2,000 was donated to CAFOD the International Catholic charity and £2,000 to the British Red Cross for immediate relief work in Killinochi, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Negombo. £1,000 was sent to the Jesuit Service in Batticaloa to help with the running costs of their orphanage, and £4,000 was forwarded to the Hindu Council of Jaffna for urgent help in the North.

The Committee gets regular requests for assistance and has developed a rigorous yet speedy approach to vetting and establishing the credentials for each project before determining whether and how much to support it.

Mr. T.V. Arumugam, President of SCOT said:

'The events in Sri Lanka have led to previously unheard of levels of loss of life and livelihood amongst our people. As a registered charity, our role is to lend a helping hand in overcoming people's welfare needs and improving their life chances. I am pleased that the last few months have seen a wave of support from our members and friends, and that the Committee have put considerable effort into ensuring that the money collected got to those who needed it most.

We do not have any paid officers so virtually everything that is collected is passed directly to the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. Our Committee of men and women spanning three generations has a long track record in offering this help, but we could do with more help, more members and of course more funds.

I am aware that in the UK the Tamil community has grown in recent years and there are large numbers of people who may not have heard of SCOT and our work. It you would like to become involved or just want to find out more, please do get in touch with us'.

SCOT can be contacted through any of the following people:

Mr. T.V. Arumugam, tel: 0181 907 9486.

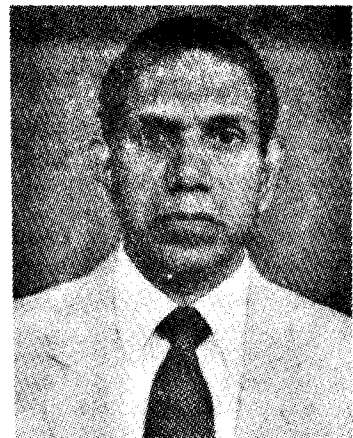
Ms. Pathmaseni, tel: 0181 870 9897.

Mr. Ariaratnam, tel: 0181 952 7249.

Dr. Balakrishnan, tel: 0181 952 0983.

The address for correspondence is: **The Secretary, S.C.O.T., 107 Coleman Court, Kimber Road, London SW18 4PB.**

Award for Jaffna Tamil Writer



Appadurai Muttulingam was recently judged the best overseas Tamil writer by the 'Lilly Thevasikamani' award committee of Kovai in South India. The judgment by a panel of eminent Tamil writers was for his collection of short stories published in 1995 under the title 'Thikadachakkaram'.

Muttulingam, a Chartered Accountant and a Computer Programme Specialist hails from Jaffna in Sri Lanka and is at present working with United Nations Afghanistan Rural Rehabilitation Programme based in Pakistan. Earlier he had been

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Muttulingam's stories make extensive use of his experiences in the various countries, the innumerable characters he had come across and the incidents he had astutely observed. His style of writing is seen as setting a new trend in Tamil short story writing. Each story is a composite picture spanning time and space and invites readers' contemplation well beyond the last line.

His interest in writing was evident during his childhood days with a hand written 'magazine' titled 'Chori Amuthu' which passed from hand to hand among his class-mates and contributions for publication in the school magazine.

In late 1960s his stories were regularly published in a Sunday Newspaper in Colombo. His first collection of short stories was published in 1964 under the title 'Akka'. After joining the World Bank in early seventies he needed time for his professional and family life. As a result his creative writing was in abeyance for quite a few years. Those duties having been almost fully attended to, he has re-entered the writing arena and it is expected that more literary creations would follow in the years to come. Another collection of short stories under the title 'Vamsa Vruthi' is to be published in Madras in the latter part of July 1996.

Bharatha Natya Arangeetram In Norway



The Bharatha Natya Arangeetram of Selvi Thushya Amerasingam and Selvi Kalyani Sivagnanam, disciples of Smt Malathi Yogendran of 'Shivanjali Narthanalaya' took place at the prestigious Konserthus Hall in Oslo, Norway on 29th June 1996. Thushya and Kalyani are the first students

of Shivanjali Narthanalaya to perform the arangeetram. The Guru Smt Malathi Yogendran had been a lecturer in Dance at the Vipulananda Music and Art College, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka before moving to Norway.

Thushya and Kalyani together performed the main items Pushpanjali, Jathiswaram, Varnam and Thillana and the Pathams were executed solo. Kalyani's facial expressions and Bhava excelled in the Javali 'Keliyai' in Behag ragam, while Thushya excelled in the Sivan Kirthanam 'Nadanam' in Ketharagowla ragam with intricate foot movements to varied percussion Solkattus.

The Chief Guest Smt Pathmini Gunaseelan complimented the young dancers and their Guru for the excellent performance and wished them well. The programme was compered by Sri Wimal Sockanathan. It was a well attended function and was well received by the audience as it was a rare occurrence in Oslo.

The accompanying artistes were Smt Malathi Yogendran (Oslo) - Nattuvangam, Smt Ambika Thamotheram (UK) - Vocal, Sri Pon Subash Chandran (Oslo) - Vocal, Sri K. Sundaramoorthy (Oslo) - Mirdangam, Smt Sivashanthi Sachithananthan (Oslo) - Violin, Smt Sivatharani Sahadevan (UK) - Veena, Sri Muthu Sivaraja (UK) - Tabla, Sri K. Sithamparanathan (UK) - Sendai Morsing.

Library Hosts Tamil Bazaar & Bookfayre

The Ealing Road Library in Coroner Parade, Wembley hosted a Tamil Bazaar, Book Fayre and variety entertainment on 23.6.96 and attracted over 2000 visitors not only from Brent but also from East London, Hertfordshire and far away Wales. It was also planned to enable the library staff to meet their customers and attract new ones.

The bazaar featured Tamil food, books, saris, travel information, music instruments, videos and computer software which helps in the teaching of the Tamil language. It was opened by the Guest of Honour, Dr. Nagerswamy, the distinguished archaeologist and historian of Kanchi University in Tamil Nadu, South India and the other guests were Councillor Lata Patel, Brent's Mayor, other councillors and officers of the Ealing Council.

During the afternoon, a programme of dance and music by the Brent Asian Academy and Brent Tamil School, who put on an orchestral recital of Veena, Violin, Flute and Miruthangam was featured. Mrs. Gnanapackiam Balasubramaniam gave a Tamil cookery demonstration and Mrs. Surabi Visvanathan of Tamil bridal wear. The grand finale was a Veena recital by Vathani Varatharajan accompanied on the Miruthangam by the renowned musician Karaikudi Krishnamurthy.

Full marks go to Yamuna Tharmendiran, the popular Customer Services Manager of the library who organised this hugely successful function.

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