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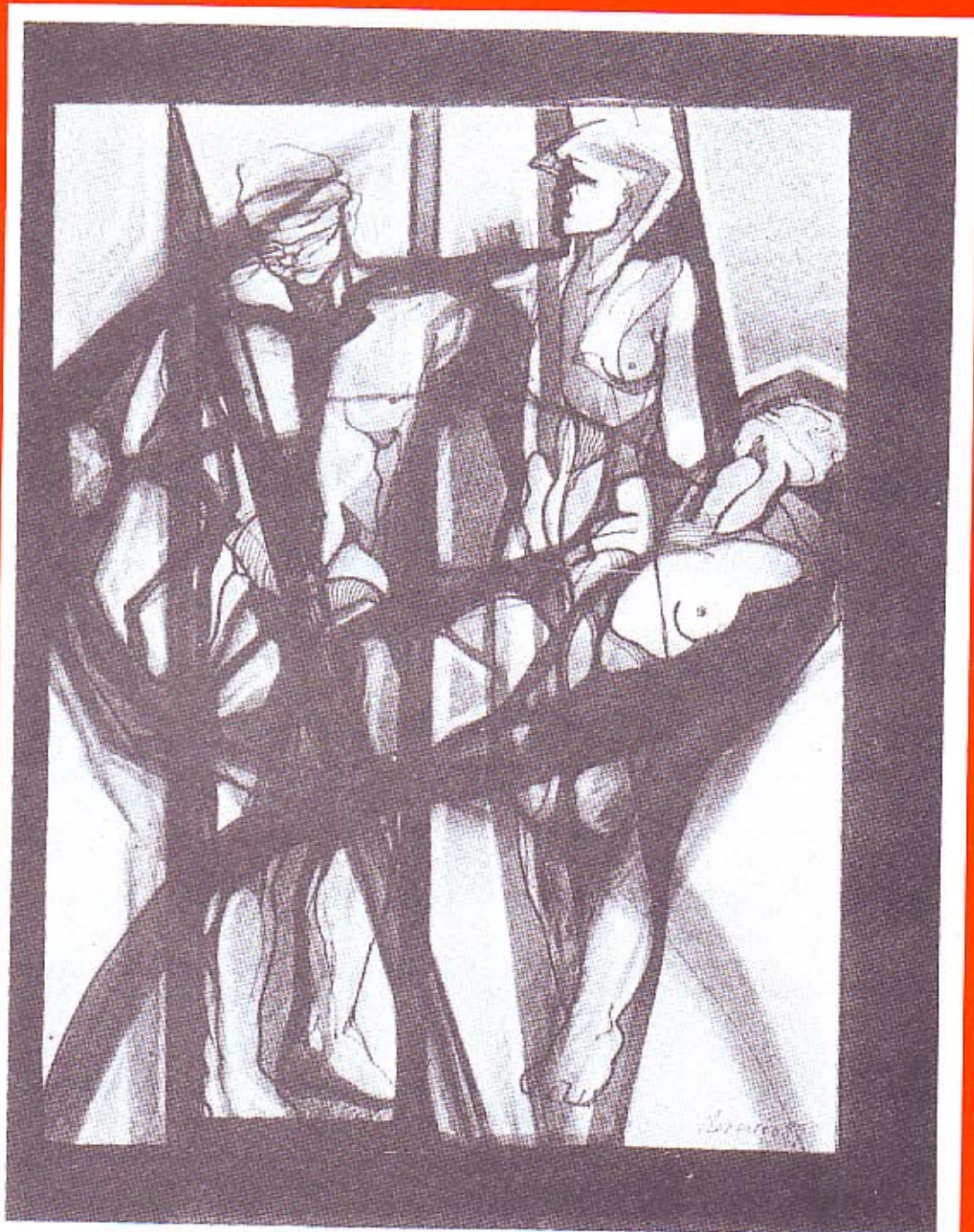
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பெட்டிகளிலிருந்து முழு அளவிலான தனிப்பட்ட பொருள்கள் வரை. ★ கார், மற்றும்
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right to say it."

-Voltaire

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CORRECTION:

There was an error in the caption
note accompanying the picture of
M Muralitharan in the September is-
sue. The correct position is that he
took 7 and 9 wickets in the first and
second innings respectively.

Glorying in Death

Sri Lanka was once regarded as the pearl of the Indian ocean. Since the late 1970s, the shine on the pearl became blurred as the ethnic conflict escalated accompanied by unprecedented violence. The island began to earn notoriety as the killing fields of Asia. Now the ethnic war has turned the country into a slaughterhouse for humans.

Within just four days beginning 27 September when the LTTE launched its "Unceasing Waves 2" against the security forces to regain control of the northern town of Kilinochchi, over 1700 combatants were killed with an equal number wounded. Of these, almost two-thirds come from the security forces and the rest from the LTTE. Kilinochchi and its military complex was overrun by the Tamil Tigers. The military which has been laying siege to LTTE controlled Mankulam for nearly nine months recaptured the town with some Tiger cadres surrendering to the security forces.

If even a fraction of this number of human beings had been killed in any other part of the world, that would have made screaming headlines in the international media, and world's political leaders would have expressed serious concern and would have wanted to initiate some form of action to prevent recurrence of incidents of carnage of such magnitude. But no such luck for Sri Lanka and its people for the world and its leaders have become oblivious and immune to such incidents because they have occurred so often and so routinely in the course of the ongoing self-inflicted tragedy to which the island and its people have become accustomed. It does not even create a sense of outrage within the island. One has not seen or heard any statements of anguish at the scale of the death toll from politicians, academics or religious leaders. On the contrary, there have been flag-hoisting ceremonies by both parties to the conflict celebrating their respective victories in speeches and statements eulogising the valour and bravery of those who perished without a choice. When glorying in death is the response within Sri Lanka to the frequent slaughters that take place in the name of war, peace and liberation, why should the rest of the world worry?

It is not surprising that, to avoid the horrors of this suicidal and self-destructive war, literally thousands of soldiers are deserting their ranks, but the authorities are engaged in capturing the deserters to send them back to the front to face inevitable death. On the Tamil side, there are reports of a vigorous campaign to intensify recruitment of teenage boys and girls, particularly in the eastern parts of the island where parents are said to be panic-stricken, to replace the numbers that have been lost in recent battles. That they too will become cannon-fodder is inevitable in the battles that have been promised.

The same week also witnessed the unprecedented tragedy of a civilian aircraft being shot down with all its 48 passengers - all Tamil civilians travelling from Jaffna to Colombo - and the six-man crew perishing in the crash. One is expected to accept that this outrageous act was also carried out in the cause of war, peace and liberation. Again one has not seen or heard a condemnation of this act of unvarnished criminality from any northern churchmen who on other occasions would not have been so eloquent by their silence. Presumably they are praying in silence for the souls of dead. Truly, their concern for their own flock is really touching!

Over 1700 Die As Tigers Regain Kilinochchi and Mankulam Falls to Army

D B S Jeyaraj

The propaganda mills of the Government and the LTTE are working overtime right now. Following the battles of Kilinochchi and Mankulam, despite the enormous casualties on either side, both parties are claiming victories. The Tigers captured control of the Kilinochchi during the early 1990s during Eelam War 2, but the military recaptured it last year following the launching of Operation Jayasikuru. Now the Tigers have regained control of Kilinochchi inflicting a heavy defeat and damage upon the military. Mankulam and the army camp there fell to the Tigers again in the early 1990s, but the military has now retaken it.

As for the Tigers, now the projection is all about their victory in the battle for Kilinochchi. All kudos for the feat is being attributed to the Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran who according to LTTE publicists planned and executed Oyatha Alaigal -2 or Unceasing Waves-2. He is also supposed to have entered Kilinochchi in a triumphant cavalcade and raised the LTTE flag ceremonially. While all the hype is around Kilinochchi there is practically no mention about another place in the Wannamanni namely Mankulam. Suddenly Mankulam has seemingly ceased to exist in the LTTE scheme of things. The past eleven months however saw the LTTE media, constantly harp on Mankulam and its supposed invincibility.

The fact that the army was trying for more than ten months to enter Mankulam and in that context its perceived inability to do so created an aura around the word Mankulam. The LTTE exploited this fact to the maximum. But suddenly with the army entering Mankulam that bubble broke. So the LTTE simply ignores Mankulam and focuses instead on what could be termed its achievement in Kilinochchi. Had the LTTE not won Kilinochchi it would have lost a lot of prestige over the loss of Mankulam. It is even possible that the LTTE va-

cated its tenuous position in Mankulam in the aftermath of Kilinochchi because it could then justify the loss of one by the gain of the other.

If Tiger propagandists are crowing about Kilinochchi and maintaining a deafening silence on Mankulam the government propagandists in Sri Lanka are acting as mirror images of them. Here the emphasis is about the capture of Mankulam. The debacle at Kilinochchi is being glossed over. The government propaganda machinery is straining itself to promote the victory of Mankulam. The hoisting of the lion flag in the vicinity of the Mankulam railway station, a view of the post office, some shops and the quadrangular junction etc have been telecast. This has helped dispel the doubts of clouting Thomases whether the army had indeed taken Mankulam.

Sri Lankans also had the pleasure of seeing Anuruddha Ratwatte mounting a tank while addressing the soldiers at Mankulam. That sight was refreshingly different to the earlier one of seeing him astride his steed like Lochinwar. With all due respect to the army the reasons for the scepticism was because the news about Mankulam falling was virtually manna from heaven to the government. It has been possible for the government to tide over the loss of Kilinochchi because of the capture of Mankulam.

It was of an immense damage control value. It was only some time ago that the government postponed Provincial council elections on the ground. That the war was entering a crucial phase and decisive stage. Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe himself referred to this in a roundabout way and indirectly queried whether this was the critical stage in his statement on the Kilinochchi situation. Wickremasinghe could not be brutally blunt on the issue as he could not risk estranging the armed forces. Again in fairness to the army it was not that institution which said the war had entered a critical stage. But the

bombastic pronouncements of Ratwatte affect the army by extension. At the same time Ratwatte gets away with many things because people respect the sacrifices of the soldiers and do not want to hurt them because of Ratwatte's actions. In that context no one could be faulted about not believing government claims that Mankulam had been captured because it came in the heels of the Kilinochchi debacle. The government too is maximising on that development. As is usual the state controlled media is really going to town on that. In the process the element of overkill is very much visible.

When Jaffna was taken in 1995 the flag hoisting ceremony took place. The modalities of that event were orchestrated in a spirit of conquest rather than a spirit of reconciliation. The impression created was not that of re-taking one's own territory but capturing alien territory. But there was some attempt at assuaging Tamil sentiment by getting a retired government servant Ramalingam to hoist the Nandhi or crouched bull flag. The Nandhi was the flag of the Jaffna kingdom of Sankili. It was also the district emblem. But Ramalingam himself paid the supreme penalty for this act and was shot dead not long after by the Tigers.

In spite of the Nandhi hoisting ceremony what took place next was particularly hurtful to Tamils. A medieval type of ritual was enacted where Ratwatte presented a deed in casket to Kumaratunga signifying that "Yapa Patuna" had been captured. Instead of using the word Jaffna or Yarlpanam or Yapanaya currently in use in English, Tamil and Sinhalese respectively, the word in vogue during the time of Senbaka Perumal or Sapumal Kumaraaya was used to denote Jaffna. The whole exercise was meaningless except for "ego massaging" people imagining themselves to be warrior heroes eulogised in history.

It was Sapumal with Malabar ancestry from India who conquered the Wannamanni first and Jaffna next. Later he reigned in Nallur and Kotte as Buwanekabhahu. A Swedish academic Peter Schalk propounded an interesting theory about the Sapumal Kumaraaya consciousness in contemporary Sri Lanka. Sometime later "Operation Edibala" was launched and the stretch of road between Vavuniya and

Mannar was captured by the armed forces. A key junction village on this road was Parayanalankulam. A Police station was set up here and Ratwatte himself conducted the opening ceremony. A larger than life sized cardboard cut out figure of Ratwatte was seen outside the station. At the same time Tamil opinion was shocked by the re-naming of Parayanalankulam as Sapumalpura. After a lot of agitation it was announced that there was no change of Parayanalankulam as Sapumalpura. Ratwatte himself said that he was not aware of the name being changed in the first place. All these attempts at staging medieval type "conquest" ceremonies and changing names are symptomatic of a mindset that thought nothing of offending Tamil sentiment. It also displayed a dangerous arrogance that bode no good for harmonious ethnic relations let alone reconciliation in the future.

One tactic by the LTTE in appealing to Tamil sentiment was to portray the Sri Lankan army as an alien oppressive force bent on conquering and suppressing the Tamils. The ill-advised attempts at conducting ceremonies and changing place names was akin to playing straight into LTTE hands. With all the hype about Jaffna in 1995-96 the situation there is pretty bleak. As a visiting US State Department delegation pointed out the government missed a golden opportunity in making a showcase out of Jaffna and demonstrating its bona fide intentions to the Tamil people. Then the local authority elections in Jaffna provided another opportunity. Again the PA Government failed to capitalise on the situation. Nothing constructive in meaningful terms was achieved.

On a national scale the devolution package was published. The government gained politically on a national and international scale as a result of it. There was also operation Jayasikurui aimed at weakening and marginalising the LTTE to a point of ineffectiveness. Contrary to government expectations the Tigers displayed amazing resilience and put up a very stiff fight. The Operation Jayasikuru that began in May 1997 kept dragging on. Every place gained by the army like Omanthai, Puliyankulam, Nedunkerny, Periyamadhu, Kanagarayan kulam, Olumadhu etc. were, pro-

jected as places of strategic importance and value. Mankulam too was portrayed in the same vein.

But Mankulam however was not that simple to take. The LTTE put up determined resistance that enabled it to hold on to it for nearly a year. The army fighting to deadlines set up according to political timetables was under great pressure. Both the armed forces as well as the LTTE suffered many casualties and the A-9 highway itself became known as the highway of death. As time went on Mankulam itself became a symbol. To the LTTE it was a symbol of resistance and defiance. To the army it was a challenge and a mission. As human sacrifices kept mounting on either side the value attached to Mankulam increased. In the process Mankulam itself became mythologised. In that sense the capture of Mankulam is certainly of great symbolic value to the army. Although it is being touted as being of great strategic value that itself is an exaggeration unless and until the army captures, consolidates and controls all access roads connected to Mankulam in particular and the Jaffna - Kandy road in general.

Given the past history of the Jaffna triumph it is important to assess what lies in the immediate future instead of whipping up a frenzy about the real and imaginary advantages accruing to the armed forces as a result of the fall of Mankulam. What is happening now however is that the people of this country are once again being lulled into a sense of false consciousness about the importance of Mankulam. The loss of Kilinochchi is being glossed over temporarily. Earlier when Kilinochchi was captured after Operation Sathjaya the country was regaled with analyses of how important Kilinochchi was. If and when the armed forces re-capture Kilinochchi then once again we will all be enlightened about the strategic importance of Kilinochchi. Presently however a lot of hot air is going to be blown about Mankulam.

The ongoing censorship inhibits a free and frank analysis of the real military situation prevailing in the north. If it were possible to write in detail about what exactly happened in Paranthan and Kilinochchi during the LTTE's Operation Unceasing Waves II, it would illuminate the people living in the South and help them

arrive at rational choices about resolving the ethnic crisis.

Although central Mankulam which in effect is the town has been captured there are some other areas north of the point where the flag was hoisted that have to be captured. Official press releases have stated that the Tigers are keeping up a barrage of artillery fire. This indicates the quality of resistance to be proffered by the LTTE in the future. The LTTE has also constructed a chain of defence posts from Oddusuddan in the east to Vavunikulam in the West. This defence "fence" is around 40 kilometres in length and comprises bunkers, trenches and pill boxes etc. There is also the special artillery squad named after Kittu that is manning this defence line under former Mannar and Jaffna commander Bhanu. Moreover the stretch of Jungle between Mankulam and Murigandy to the north is also very dense and conducive to the type of warfare practised by the Tigers between Puliyankulam and Mankulam. Thus it is important for the people of the island to know the reality of the situation and not be carried away by fanciful expectations of an easy victory because the mythical Mankulam has fallen. Also it is useful to realise that Mankulam has perhaps turned out to be the most valuable piece of real estate anywhere in the world. The PA government has spent nearly 60 billion rupees for the war this year if one takes into account the supplementary estimates and 800 million raised by the defence levy. The only territorial gain made in the war so far this year is Mankulam thereby enhancing its value as a piece of real estate.

The more important fact to be aware of by all those who are likely to hear increased hyperbole about Mankulam is to learn the lesson of Kilinochchi. That operation has shown that even if the entire A-9 highway is captured by the army the possibility of another Kilinochchi debacle is quite likely. In fact the greater the territory captured the greater the vulnerability of military institutions with diluted strength. So it is better for the nation to learn how to de-mystify itself of the Mankulam myth and gear itself up to face some more dismal prospects in the future.

There are those LTTE supporters,

(continued on next page)

NEWS REVIEW

Overview

September 1998 saw one of the worst confrontations between the LTTE and Sri Lankan security forces in recent times. Estimates of lives lost on both sides during the clashes in the Paranthan area could total 2,000, while the repercussions in terms of the ongoing military offensive by Sri Lankan government troops could be extended over a much longer period of time.

The censorship of news relating to the war meant that there was no official acknowledgement of the extent of the losses sustained by the government forces during this clash for a few days after the attack. In turn, this meant that speculation and rumour about the situation on the war front abounded, to the point that the Free Media Movement was driven to issue a statement calling for journalists to defy the censorship regulations and publish information about the situation as the news flowed in. In addition to the loss of lives, the most distressing news to reach the

(continued from page 5)

both within and outside the island, who suffer under the illusion that the promised land of "Tamil Eelam" is around the corner with the victory at Kilinochchi. Jaffna which was regarded as the epicentre of Tamil Tiger power for nearly ten years fell to the army in late 1995. At Mullaitivu, the Tigers inflicted upon the military one of its worst defeats killing over 1200 soldiers - almost a similar number as in Kilinochchi debacle. That did not bring Eelam any closer. Now Mankulam, the power-base of the Tigers in the Vanni for the last several years has been surrendered. These supporters also must realise that just as previously, Kilinochchi may again fall to the army.

It would seem that the realisation of the dream of Eelam is as distant as is the fallacy of the repeated assertions of politicians and prelates in the South of the imminent demise of the Tamil Tiger. ●

south was about the lack of adequate medical attention for wounded soldiers and the lack of adequate facilities to identify and return bodies to families in the south.

People living in the north and east of the island continued to face innumerable problems in carrying on with their lives, as a result of the conflict but also as a result of being deprived of basic amenities and public services. A cholera outbreak affected large areas of the Polonnaruwa District and over 20 deaths were reported from hospitals in the area within a two week period. Trouble was also brewing between the maverick Governor of the North-East Province, film actor, Gamini Fonseka, and the President. Mr Fonseka went on record saying that he would resign if the President did not grant him an appointment and clarify to him the rationale behind her reinstating a public official transferred by Mr Fonseka.

As in the past months, both the government and the opposition remain committed to non-negotiable positions regarding the ethnic conflict in the country. The UNP proposed unconditional talks with the LTTE, a move guaranteed to draw denials from the PA and to arouse Sinhala nationalist forces to declare their resistance to such a move. A visit to Sri Lanka by Professor Thomas Grant Fraser, the Irish political scientist who was closely involved in the process of negotiations between the British government and the Irish groups, paved the way for some public discussions regarding possible methods and methodologies of resolving the ethnic conflict through negotiations. While in Sri Lanka, Professor Fraser met with government officials as well as with the Leader of the Opposition, and also held several public seminars. However, at the end of September, it seemed clear that the government remained committed to its militaristic approach to the conflict, while the UNP was embroiled in internal

controversies which accelerated following the return to Sri Lanka of former Premadasa confidante Sirisena Cooray.

An All Party Conference was called by the UNP on 14 September as a consultation on free and fair elections and on the depoliticisation of key public institutions. While several mainstream political parties did not attend, the consultation drew the attention of several key non-governmental organisations who are involved in working for free and fair elections and for respect for democratic principles in public institutions.

The LTTE too has remained silent regarding any possibilities of bringing an end to the conflict. On 6 September, the SUNDAY LEADER carried an interview with the leader of the LTTE's political wing, Thamilchelvam. In that he reiterated that 'the normal living pattern of the northern and eastern Tamil masses must be restored' prior to resumption of any negotiations. On 19 September, however, the LTTE agreed to hold fire in order to enable the health authorities and UNICEF to carry out an immunisation campaign for children in the north and east.

During September, President Kumaratunga made two key visits abroad. One was to the twelfth Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which opened ceremonially in Durban, South Africa on 2 September. President Kumaratunga was one of the leaders selected to address the opening sessions, as the representative of the Asian region. Outgoing Chairman, Colombian President Pastrana and his successor, the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela also addressed the opening sessions.

In her speech, President Kumaratunga made a strong appeal for joint endeavours to eliminate the global scourge of terrorism, and called upon all NAM states to become parties to the UN Convention on Suppression of Terrorist Bombings. This she said, would be a clear signal that no State is prepared to condone terrorism, nor provide safe haven for terrorists, nor permit fund raising within its borders to sustain terrorist activities in another State." She repeated this call in several interviews she gave the national and international press while in Durban.

On 21 September, President Kumaratunga addressed the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly in New York on its opening day. Speaking before lea-

ders of 185 states, the President reiterated her appeal to the NAM states to assist in the eradication of terrorism. In her speech, she expressed the hope that all States will take steps to implement the necessary domestic legislation, aimed at giving effect to the commitments made in the UN Convention on the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings earlier this year, in order to ensure that terrorists are neither provided safe haven nor permitted to raise funds, within the borders of one State to sustain terrorist activities in another State. A delegation comprising the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar and several senior officials accompanied the President.

On 8 September, in a now rare show of consensus between the government and the opposition, Parliament unanimously passed the Child Protection Authority Act which will set in place a number of mechanisms aimed at protecting child rights and in particular protecting children from exploitation and abuse. The Act was the outcome of deliberations by the Presidential Task Force mandated to formulate such a piece of legislation, and many organisations and agencies working on issues of children's rights were involved in the process. There has been a concerted public campaign against child sexual abuse and the employment of children as domestic workers, as well as a promotion of literacy among children carried out by both state and non-state agencies in the past few months.

In spite of the fact that voices against the war are largely silent in the present context, there still continue to be a few expressions of a desire for peace. A Citizens' Fact-Finding Commission on the situation of civilians of all ethnic and religious communities living in the areas identified as 'border villages' in the north and east began sittings in a remote northernmost corner of the Anuradhapura District in the last weekend of September. The Commission is due to have sittings on every weekend until December, covering 8 Districts in the north and east. On a lighter vein, a group of artists calling themselves Artists against the War held an open-air exhibition of their anti-war work outside the Fort Railway station in Colombo in September.

The Ministry of Health aroused

sharp reactions following a statement that they were considering introducing legislation to liberalise existing laws on abortion. In 1995, Justice Minister Professor Peiris had already said that this legislation would be introduced under Health Ministry aegis. Several key agencies such as the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka as well as Ministers Fernando and Wanniarachchi have gone on record as saying they would support proposals to liberalise abortion laws with regard to certain specific instances such as rape, incest and foetal abnormality. However, press reports have quoted various religious leaders as being fundamentally opposed to such proposals.

On the War Front

The military conflict in the north and east of the island continued throughout September, with minor skirmishes being reported at different points in the Eastern Province and in the Jaffna peninsula. Operation Jayasikuru troops continued to move forward along their route to Mankulam. At the end of September, the LTTE launched a major attack on the Forward Defence Lines of the Sri Lankan army at Paranthan, and the resulting clash saw one of the highest rates of death and injury in recent times.

In the first week of September, troops launched Operation 'Ranahanda' (War Cry) in the Sampoor area in the Trincomalee District. Defence Ministry sources said that during the Operation, troops destroyed several major LTTE Camps hidden in the jungles of the area; these camps had been used by the LTTE to house tailoring sections, bakeries and police posts. The LTTE cadre in the camps had fled shortly after the army attack commenced.

By 8 September, the commanders of Operation Jayasikuru in the Vanni said they had progressed 42 kilometres from Vavuniya to Kanakarayan-kulam in the 16 months that have elapsed since the launching of the Operation. In the process, they had captured the main road and cleared some of the area surrounding it. Troops were involved in building bunkers in order to consolidate their hold on these areas. Injuries caused by anti-personnel mines laid by the LTTE in these areas continued to be a major concern.

On 22 September, Navy patrol boats attacked several high speed boats travelling towards Mullaitivu. A Naval statement later said 4 LTTE cadres, including one identified as a leader of the Sea Tigers, 'Aruna', had been killed when one of four boats transporting items from India was destroyed during this attack.

On Sunday 27 September, hundreds of LTTE troops launched a simultaneous attack on several sectors of the Forward Defence Lines in Paranthan, approaching Paranthan Junction from the Murasumodai area on the Mullaitivu road, from Pooneryn and several other areas. An LTTE announcement broadcast in the Vanni areas said that the attack was launched in commemoration of the 11th death anniversary of Dileepan, former political organiser of the LTTE.

The military in the bunkers from which the Paranthan area had been controlled seemed to have been caught unawares. Observers speculate that the losses from this confrontation may well be the worst in the entire 16 month period of Operation Jayasikuru, with over 1,000 Sri Lankan troops feared dead and a great deal of equipment including arms and ammunition missing.

On 30 September, the LTTE handed over 600 bodies of Sri Lankan military personnel killed in the Paranthan attack to the ICRC in Vavuniya. From there, the bodies were brought to Anuradhapura. Reports said that only about 200 bodies could be identified. The other bodies were buried in a mass grave at the public cemetery in Anuradhapura, following military honours. In the meanwhile, the LTTE issued a statement saying that there were many more bodies which were in an advanced state of decomposition and so could not be returned.

They said that these bodies had been cremated with full military honours in Paranthan.

The LTTE has accepted that over 300 of their cadres, including several top-ranking fighters, were killed in the course of this attack. A large number of LTTE cadre were also wounded in this battle and were succumbing to their injuries due to lack of medical treatment.

In the meanwhile, security forces had entered the strategically important town of Mankulam, and were

busy establishing their positions there. Troops engaged in clearing operations in the Paranthan area continued to meet with stiff resistance from the LTTE.

Civilian Life in the North Assassination of Jaffna Mayor

A bomb blast that ripped through the main meeting room at the Jaffna Municipal Council on 12 September claimed the lives of 13 persons, including Jaffna Mayor, Pon Sivapalan, Jaffna Brigade Commander Susantha Mendis and Jaffna SSP Chandra Perera.

The last rites of the Jaffna Mayor, Ponnuthurai Sivapalan took place at the Kombayan Cemetery, Jaffna with full state honours. A large number of mourners paid their last respects to the Mayor at his home at Sithankerni. His remains also lay in state at the office of the TULF in Stanley Road, Jaffna, prior to the cremation. A day of mourning was observed throughout the Jaffna town on the day of the funeral.

Following the bomb blast at the Municipal Council, all newly repaired or newly built government buildings in and around Jaffna town were to be subjected to a thorough examination. This is due to suspicions that the claymore-type bomb that exploded killing the Mayor and 12 other persons had been placed in the ceiling of the building during repairs.

Investigators into the bomb blast questioned the contractor who had effected the repairs and all those who worked under him in an attempt to uncover those responsible for the explosion. Speculation was rife that a high official of the Jaffna Municipal Council who had been involved in the blast had already fled the country. This information was elicited from the Municipal worker arrested by the CID as the suspect who had activated the bomb with a remote control device. The fact that the LTTE was able to place such a bomb in a part of Jaffna town that has very tight security has once again raised fears about the level of infiltration in the peninsula and intelligence failures on the part of the state security networks.

Although the TULF announced that its Jaffna Organiser Raviraj would take over as the next Mayor, in fact the bomb seems to have generated a genuine desire to reconsider the

whole situation in the peninsula within not only the TULF but within all other Tamil parties. The LTTE has issued a further statement calling on all members of local government bodies to resign, and the bomb explosion was seen as a warning to those who had not heeded this call.

Lionair Crash

On 29 September, a Lionair flight which took off from Jaffna with 48 passengers and 6 crew members on board 'disappeared' off the radar. The plane was a Russian built AN24 type, and the pilot and the co-pilot were Russian nationals. Up to the end of September there was no official announcement as to the actual cause of the crash; it was either attributed to technical faults or to an attack by the LTTE. Following this incident, Lionair suspended all flights to Jaffna. Monara, the other private airline which was operating daily flights to Jaffna had already suspended their flights on 17 September, after receiving threats from the LTTE about not carrying army personnel. Lionair too had received similar threats in the previous weeks.

The suspension of the flights to Jaffna have created untold problems for persons wanting to travel between Colombo and Jaffna. Several hundred persons who had been booked to fly in the week following the suspension of flights have been stranded at both ends, with no relief in sight.

Return of Displaced Persons

In September, the ship Lanka Muditha made several trips to Jaffna from Trincomalee, carrying persons who had been earlier displaced from Jaffna and now wanted to return to the peninsula. On 3 September, the first batch of 1,100 persons arrived in Jaffna; on 5 September, a further 1,025 made the trip, and on 14 September, 1,425 reached Jaffna. By the end of October, this mode of transport will come to a temporary halt due to the onset of the monsoon.

Price Rises

Prices of all goods including essential food items are reported to have increased due to transport difficulties. The number of sea-going vessels coming into the Jaffna ports has been reduced since the destruction of the Mv Princess Kash in August.

The suspension of private air travel to the peninsula has compounded the problems faced by consumers and producers both, consumers because prices have gone up, producers because they can no longer get their produce to the southern markets in time. Reports from Jaffna also indicate that due to inadequate unloading and storage facilities, large quantities of foodstuff are unfit for human consumption by the time they reach the marketplace. The recent destruction of about 4,000 bags of rice sent by ship due to sea water seepage is one example.

Food relief

In September, the issue of dry rations to displaced persons in the Jaffna District returned to pre-July figures. With this, the Commissioner General of Essential Services said they would be sending food relief to 1,331,000 persons. This is an increase of 81,000 and would entail a cost of Rs 102 min.

NGO's in Jaffna

The Defence Ministry has announced that it would permit peninsula-based NGO's to engage themselves in development activities in the North once again. Local NGO's had been barred from functioning in the North for the last ten years on account of fears of the Defence authorities that their activities would benefit the LTTE. All local NGO's willing to operate in the Jaffna District have been requested to register themselves with the Northern Province Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority. Every development project undertaken by them in the Jaffna District should also have the approval of the Authority.

Confrontation between PLOTE and Army

On 22 September, PLOTE members in Chavakachcheri were involved in a clash with members of the military. During the course of this confrontation, one soldier was killed and another injured. A passer-by was also killed.

Following this incident, PLOTE officials said that the Chairman of the Chavakachcheri Pradeshiya Sabha P Anton and five others who are all members of PLOTE were missing. Five members of the organisation had also been taken into custody by the secu-

city forces. A PLOTE delegation met army officials in Jaffna in this connection with a detailed account of the incident. The delegation is believed to have been assured that appropriate action would be taken to prevent a recurrence of such an unfortunate incident in the future. In the meanwhile, reports from Chavakachcheri say that the PLOTE office has been commandeered by the armed forces and no members of the PLOTE are in it.

Chemmani Graves

Concern continued to be voiced both in Sri Lanka and abroad about the situation of the investigations of the mass grave site said to be located at the Chemmani checkpoint in Jaffna.

Although the National Human Rights Commission was mandated to conduct this inquiry, human rights observers report that the HRC seems to be engaged in delaying the investigation rather than facilitating it. The HRC has gone on record as stating that further technicalities, such as obtaining permission not only from the Ministry of Defence but also from the Jaffna Magistrate, should be attended to prior to the commencement of any investigation.

Parents and family members of persons who have 'disappeared' within the peninsula in the last two years have mounted an almost continuous vigil at the offices of the HRC in Jaffna. The demonstrators, who have numbered over 100 on some occasions, are calling on the government to expedite the examination of the site. Although some officials of the HRC have given a patient hearing to these distraught persons, on the last occasion, it is reported that the HRC authorities sought the help of the military to drive away the demonstrators from outside the office of the HRC.

Following a statement made by the HRC that a case should be filed in Jaffna Magistrate's Courts in connection with the mass grave site by parents on behalf of missing persons or by the CID on behalf of the Attorney General, an anxious father came forward to do exactly this. P Selvarasa, the father of S Prabakaran whose whereabouts are not known since his arrest on 31 July 1996 at the Chemmani checkpoint filed a Habeas Corpus application at the Jaffna Mag-

istrate's Court. This is the first HC application filed in Jaffna Magistrate's Courts. Several more such applications are also expected to be filed soon. The family members, who are organised under the banner of the Association for the Welfare of Missing Persons, say that one of their main concerns is that the onset of the monsoon in the months ahead would flood the gravesite which is in a low lying area and make it impossible to reopen the graves.

In the meantime, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Mary Robinson, has said that her office is prepared to assist in this matter, if the government would request such assistance.

On 11 September, the body of a youth taken into custody by the army on 9 September was handed over to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, saying that he had committed suicide by jumping out of the window of a building while being interrogated. The young man, G Anton Gunasekeran (26) was the owner of a video shop in Gurunagar. Following a complaint by the boy's father that he suspected foul play, Additional Magistrate Jaffna ordered that a Captain and Lieutenant serving at the Sinnakade army checkpoint be arrested and remanded in connection with this death. He also issued an order for the exhumation of the body and a forensic examination of the remains.

Security Situation

Following the bomb explosion which killed the Mayor and other key government officials, the security forces tightened security throughout the peninsula. On 24 September, 5 villages in the Chankanai Divisional Secretariat area were cordoned off and subjected to intense search by security personnel. About 5,000 persons of both sexes and all age groups were grilled at the Kalayadi American Mission School. Some of those taken for questioning were released within a short period, but others were detained for further investigation.

Mine-clearing Programme

The UN programme to clear landmines in the Jaffna peninsula has yet to get off the ground, despite the highly publicised inauguration of the programme in June this year. The UNDP representative in Colombo said

that they were planning to ship new radio equipment that has been cleared by the government up to Jaffna. The equipment would then be tested and following that the persons actually involved in mine clearing would be taken to Jaffna. Delay in government approval for the communication equipment which is an essential part of any mine-clearing programme had been one of the bottlenecks that hindered the implementation of this programme.

In the Vanni

In the Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi Districts, demonstrators continued to picket the Divisional Secretariat offices, agitating against the 32% cut in dry rations that has affected them since July this year. Following protests, the decision with respect to Jaffna and Mannar Districts had been reviewed, but the cuts remained in place in the rest of the north-east.

The demonstrators have developed a system of rotational picketing which has involved thousands of people for the past several weeks. From Tuesday 1 September, the campaign spread to the Grama Seva Offices as well. As a consequence, government administration is on the verge of coming to a grinding halt in the Vanni, since the picket has effectively closed down most of the offices.

The government directive that sanctioned the cut in rations said that food relief would only be issued to residents of state-run Welfare Centres. This effectively excluded all those displaced persons living in rented accommodation, or with friends and relatives, from having access to the food relief allocated by the state for displaced persons. In addition, Defence Ministry instructions called on the GA's of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi to send displaced families from Jaffna who are now living with friends and relations in the vicinity of Welfare Centres in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi to areas under the control of the armed forces in Mannar. This too served to heighten the tensions in the area.

The issue of food relief has been a bone of contention between the Defence Ministry and the government officials of these two Districts for several months. While the GA's and other officials insist that many displaced persons in these areas have reached

the point of starvation due to denial of food relief, the Defence Ministry contends that figures of persons eligible to receive relief have been inflated or falsified for a number of reasons.

The agitation has led to an increased focus on the situation of displaced civilians in the Vanni. Many representations have been made to various government officials including the Commissioner of Essential Services in this regard. The Bishops of Jaffna and Mannar visited the areas in response to many appeals from their congregations regarding the deteriorating situation in the Vanni. Following this visit, they addressed a joint appeal to the President, calling on her to restore the issue of dry rations to the Vanni people if the government really wants to save them from death due to starvation.

As a response to this situation, on 10 September, the office of the Commissioner General of Essential Services announced that it would resume the issue of dry rations to all displaced persons in the areas under the control of the armed forces from 1 September. Instructions in writing to this effect had been sent to the relevant District Secretaries. This action had been taken on the orders of President Kumaratunga, according to a statement made by Additional Secretary Rafeek.

UNP MP Dr Jayalath Jayawardene got embroiled in controversy yet again in September, when the CID questioned him regarding a visit he had made to the Vanni in May 1998, during which visit he was supposed to have had a meeting with the leader of the LTTE's political wing, Tamilchelvam. The North-East coordinator of the Sri Lanka Red Cross, who had arranged this trip for Dr Jayawardene, and the driver of the vehicle which took Dr Jayawardene on this trip were also questioned by the CID in this connection.

On 31 August, a youth manacled hand and foot entered the premises of St Anthony's Church at Rambaikulam in Vavuniya and appealed to the priest who was conducting a special service at the time to save his life. It transpired that the young man, later identified as Pararajasingham Kuganathan (25), had escaped from a building in Vavuniya which was being used by a Tamil militant group oper-

ating in that area as a torture chamber. An armed gang pursuing him tried to take him back but was prevented from doing so by the priest and some other members of the congregation. The priest sent a message to the Police who arrived at the church premises and took the young man to the police station.

There had been a number of complaints made about the existence of such torture chambers during previous months, and in September Amnesty International, in a letter to the President, appealed to her to take immediate steps to halt this practise.

LTTE releases Five Members of SEP

Following repeated appeals from a wide range of human rights defenders and political activists from Sri Lanka and from abroad, on 13 September the LTTE released 3 members of the Socialist Equality Party who had been taken into custody by them in July and August 1998. The other two members of this group were released a few days later. There had been grave concerns voiced at many levels about the safety of these 5 persons - T Sambandan, K Naguleswaran, R Sudarshan, A Rasaratnam and F Nayavel - who were taken into custody while putting up posters in Kilinochchi. Although the LTTE had accepted that they were in LTTE custody, the denial of access to these persons while in detention even to the ICRC had generated fears as to their safety.

In the East

In the Eastern Province too, many persons who have been displaced as a result of military operations have as yet not been able to return to their homes. The cut in the distribution of dry rations in the Batticaloa District has not yet been reviewed and as a result nearly 8,500 persons have been deprived of food relief.

The day to day life of people living in areas outside the control of the armed forces in Batticaloa is disrupted due to the continued shelling of these areas. Several civilians have been killed as a consequence of sniper fire and shelling. Two infants, for example, were reported to have been killed during shelling of Palukamam area on 2 September. The authorities have taken no action even though the

Batticaloa District MP's made several complaints regarding this.

The LTTE has increased one of its moneymaking ventures, which involves taking away vehicles including bicycles and bullock carts from civilians in the area and claiming a ransom for their return. This is causing great inconvenience to the people of the semi-cleared areas in the Batticaloa District.

In Trincomalee, several hundred displaced persons who had been transferred there from the Pesalai Camp in Mannar were stranded at the 3rd Mile Post Camp in Uppuveli, awaiting transport to Jaffna. There were over 2,500 others at Pesalai waiting to join them.

The continued closure of the Municipal Market in Trincomalee continues to be the focal point of a great deal of tension between different groups of traders in the town. The opening of the new building to house the Municipal Market which was scheduled to take place in September 1997 was put off due to intervention by the army. On 18 September, 1998, traders in the town organised a peaceful protest to commemorate that event.

Anti-Harassment Committee

The continuing harassment of Tamil civilians living in Colombo and its suburbs was brought to the attention of the Anti-Harassment Committee on several occasions during September 1998. The problems of indiscriminate arrest and detention remain the worst, and several instances of the arbitrary arrest of Tamils, irrespective of age or sex, in situations which constitute a flagrant violation of their human rights have been brought to the notice of the authorities by human rights groups, Tamil politicians and media organisations. However, the authorities have not yet been able to resolve the need for tightening security measures with the need to safeguard the human rights of Tamil civilians.

Following repeated complaints in this regard, the Anti-Harassment Committee issued instructions to the Police laying out guidelines to be followed in the case of search operations leading to arrest and detention. The Committee, including Ministers, Batty Weerakoon and Professor G I Peiris, met with senior Police officers in

charge of the 15 Police Stations in the Colombo District on 22 September, in order to clarify these guidelines. Co-ordinating officers of the army, Navy and Air Force as well as other officials participated in this meeting. Among the instructions given to Police officials was that a certificate confirming the arrest should be immediately issued to a relative whenever a person is arrested by the armed forces in Colombo or its suburbs. In addition, the Attorney General, Sarath N Silva informed the Committee that he has advised the armed forces to refrain from conducting large-scale 'cordon and search' operations at night. Professor Peiris also personally met with Tamil citizens in the Colombo 4 (Bambalapitiya) and Colombo 6 (Wellawatta) areas to discuss matters pertaining to their security.

Action is being taken to build up a database at police stations in order to prevent the same Tamil person being arrested and detained several times in succession, which is a common incident in Colombo. To begin with, this system would be introduced at the Wellawatta, Kotahena and Maradana Police Stations. Justice Minister Peiris, who announced this decision said that he had discussed this matter with the Attorney General as well as the IGP.

Following a number of discussions regarding its mandate, the Committee decided to change its name to the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment. The Committee has already launched inquiries against 4 Policemen against whom allegations of harassment have been made.

Prospects for Peace

As the war continues and the polarisation between the different communities and political groupings intensifies, discussions about a negotiated political solution and about the process of Constitutional reforms remain marginalised.

Within the PA itself, there seems to be no consensus on the 'war for peace'. While speaking at international gatherings in Durban and New York, the President continually identified the LTTE as terrorists and murderers, making any talk of negotiations with the LTTE extremely remote. In contrast, at a press conference in Tamilnadu, India, Minister of Consti-

tutional Affairs, Professor G L Peiris went on record as saying that the government was willing to talk to the LTTE. On that occasion, Professor Peiris focused on the fact that the government of Sri Lanka considers a political consensus among the majority community, the Sinhalese, a precondition to finding a solution to the ethnic issue through talks with the LTTE. Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle also made a clear commitment to negotiations with the LTTE in an interview with the Tamil newspaper VIRAKESARI. The newspaper quoted him as saying: I will not hesitate to talk to the Tigers in order to find a solution to the ethnic issue. I am always prepared to proceed to Madhu and have talks with representatives of the Tigers if the President permits.

The UNP in the meanwhile continued to maintain its position that the government should seek 'unconditional' negotiations with the LTTE. During September, President Kumaratunga attended several District Conventions of the SLFP, including those in Kandy and in Kurunegala. In her speeches she responded to the statements by UNP leader Wickremasinghe calling for unconditional negotiations with the LTTE, declaring that she would never agree to such a scenario.

On the other end of the spectrum, political parties representing the minority communities, as well as the left parties, say they have pressed the Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Professor G L Peiris to present the government's proposals for a political solution to the ethnic issue in Parliament unmindful of all obstacles. At a meeting with Professor Peiris, these parties urged him to present the proposals in Parliament first, and thereafter consider suitable action to overcome any obstacles arising in the passage of the bill in Parliament with the required two-thirds majority.

The National Movement against Terrorism has launched a very widespread public campaign against proposals to return to negotiation. On 21 September, they organised a demonstration in Colombo, and several of their key spokespersons have appeared on the television programmes, calling for the 'eradication' of Tamil terrorism.

In another development UNP MP

and former Foreign Minister Hameed issued an open letter on 20 September, saying that Muslims residing in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mannar Districts will be adversely affected if a separate South-East Unit is created within the integrated North East Province. He called on the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress to reconsider its proposal for a South-East Unit in the greater interest of the Muslims residing in these districts.

Increase of Ethnic Tensions

Peace activists have expressed concern regarding the ease with which conflicts that have erupted between individuals in the past months have been quickly transformed into ethnic outbursts. Among the most disturbing reports for September are:

On 7 September, a dispute between two individuals, one Sinhala and one Muslim, in Kumbukgatey, Kurunegala, erupted into a clash between groups of Sinhalese and Muslims in the area. Muslim shops were attacked and burned, and posters came up in the town calling for a boycott of Muslim shops.

On 8 September, two Sinhala men - Chandrasena and Kumara - were killed on an estate in Ramapura as part of a private dispute. On the nights of the 8th and 9th, gangs raided several estates in the area Alupola and Agerland in Ratnapura, and Rasagalla in Balangoda - and torched over 300 line rooms, rendering almost 1,000 people homeless. Some of these persons sought refuge in the factories of their plantation. Many of them remained uncompensated and with no permanent residence at the end of September. The government has put in place a scheme for reconstruction of their homes, but obviously this is not an overnight solution.

On 26 September, in Kochchikade, in the Negombo District, a conflict between a Tamil trader and some neighbours about the erection of a wall flared up into a Sinhala-Tamil conflict. Two Tamil shops were burned down, and several other incidents of arson and violence were reported in the aftermath of this incident.

In the wake of this chain of events, human rights observers are expressing grave concern about the tendency of any private conflict or dispute being speedily transformed into a dispute between different ethnic or

religious communities. This points to a heightening of ethnic tensions in society, to the point that anti-Tamil or anti-Muslim riots could well become a part of future scenarios. In particular, the very public and well-orchestrated campaigns against Muslim traders in certain areas of the island should be seen as a reflection of a dangerous trend in society.

Observers point to a number of incidents that have taken place over the past 6 months in Welimada, Galagedera, Puttlam, Matale and Kiribathgoda to validate these fears. In Kiribathgoda, a suburban town about 15 km from Colombo on the Kandy Road, a bomb explosion in June destroyed a newly built communications centre. This was later identified as part of a campaign against Muslim and Tamil traders in that town. Residents say that today, no shop in the bazaar area is permitted to display a Tamil signboard.

In the same vein, reports that 1,400 English teachers would be recruited for schools in the north-east led, it is reported, that there are 1,400 vacan-

cies for English Teachers in schools in the North-East. A request has been made to the authorities to appoint the 100 English Diploma holders who have passed out from the Trincomalee University College in 1996 and are unemployed to fill some of the vacancies. A memorandum signed by these entire 100 English Diploma holders have been sent to the Minister of Education and Higher Education.

Crisis Within the Legal Profession

On the night of 12 September, Colombo High Court Judge, Mahanama Tilakaratne was arrested by the CID on a warrant issued by the Kesbewa Magistrate for having allegedly badly assaulted an Army Sergeant, identified as Somachandra. Several others including Mr Tilakaratna's son are also charged in this case, which has been described as 'attempted murder'.

Controversy erupted almost immediately, since Mr Tilakaratna had in fact gone before the Magistrate earlier that same day and obtained bail. His arrest therefore was in total contravention of the law. The arrest was

carried out by Mr Bandula Wickremasinghe, Director of the CID, who in turn said he was acting on the orders of the Attorney General, Mr Sarath Silva. Wickremasinghe was transferred a few days later, on the instructions of the President, who had informed the IGP that it is compulsory to inform her, as Defence Minister, when a member of the judiciary is arrested.

For several days from the day of the arrest onwards, many lawyers practising in the Colombo Magistrates' Courts and High Court launched a protest against the arrest. On 11 September, they marched from the premises of the Magistrates' Courts in Colombo to the office of the Attorney General, carrying placards with slogans such as: 'Is the independence of the judiciary going to be decided by the CID?' and 'Attorney General, please tender your resignation'. On 17 September, action was filed against Mr Tilakaratne and three others in the Kesbewa Magistrate's Court, for alleged assault and attempted murder. This case was called again on 22 Sep-



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tember and the accused were released on bail.

The Attorney General, who is facing criticism for having ordered the CID to go ahead with the arrest of Mr Tilakaratna, has said that he had not been informed about the withdrawal of the warrant by the Kesbewa Magistrate. Responding to a query as to whether there were sufficient charges to warrant the arrest of the Judge, the AG replied that this decision had been taken on the basis of a report submitted by the CID. This statement caused resentment among the CID officers involved in the investigation of this matter. They are of opinion the statement was not fair since the entire procedure of arresting the High Court Judge was in fact an exercise done under the direction of the Attorney General. Some observers pointed out that there may have been some pre-existing animosity towards Mr Tilakaratna by the CID since in a judgement favouring UNP MP Dr Rajitha Senaratna, Mr Tilakaratna went on record as stating that the evidence produced in Court had been fabricated by the CID.

On 22 September, the Kesbewa Magistrate also allowed bail for former CID Director 'Wickremasinghe, who appeared in court in connection with the arrest of Mr Tilakaratne. The Magistrate also ordered Mr Wickremasinghe to appear in the Appeal Court whenever notified and to surrender his passport to the courts.

A few days later, a bomb was found on the doorstep of Mr Tilakaratne's Counsel M L M Ameen, PC. The police also recovered a letter found together with this bomb. The letter reportedly referred to Mr Ameen as the Counsel defending those accused of assaulting army Sergeant Somachandra" and was marked on behalf of soldiers fighting in the North.

Political Violence

On 9 September, a supporter of PA MP for Puttlam, Dissanayake, was shot in the head three times. This assassination was carried out by an unidentified gang and is reportedly linked to political rivalries in the area. On 18 September, a group of UNP supporters who were erecting a stage to hold a protest rally against the postponement of PC elections in Anamadua were attacked. PA supporters

are suspected of being involved in this attack.

On 25 September, Kingsley Hemachandra, member of the PA and Chairman of the Arachchikattuwa Pradeshiya Sabha, was shot dead at point blank range while standing outside his home. Following this assassination, gangs who maintain a reign of terror in the area ordered the closure of all shops in the area. Owners of shops said they had been threatened with arson by these gangs if their orders were defied. A number of families who are politically opposed to the PA have reportedly fled the area under threat and intimidation from these gangs. The house belonging to the Leader of the Opposition in the Arachchikattuwa Pradeshiya Sabha was burned down, along with three other houses, on the night after the funeral of Mr Hemachandra. The houses were completely gutted but there were no casualties, since the occupants had fled before a gang of around 200 set the houses ablaze.

Human Rights Violations

In September, several cases in which members of the Police and armed forces had taken legal proceedings against superior officers for unfair treatment came up for consideration in the Courts.

In one such case, the Supreme Court found Defence officials including Defence Secretary Chandrananda de Silva and former IGP Rajaguru culpable of the illegal arrest and detention of 11 Police officers. The police officers, in fundamental rights petitions, said that they had been arrested and detained on grounds that they were making preparations to commit acts of violence against the members of the Commission, appointed to inquire into the establishment of a torture chamber at Batalanda and conspiring to disrupt the sittings of the said Commission. The Supreme Court declared infringement of Articles 13(1) and 13(2) of the Constitution, said that the fundamental rights of the petitioners had been violated, and ordered that each petitioner be paid Rs 50,000 as compensation and Rs 5,000 as costs by the State. The petitioners in this case were: Sergeant Jayaratna, ASP Marasinghe, ASP Atapattu, Sergeant Dias, Driver Jayasekera, Sergeant Ratnayake, Sub-Inspector Pathmini, Chief Inspector

Wickremasinghe Sergeant Kappagoda, Sergeant Hewage and Sergeant Ranatunga.

In another case, on 24 September, the Court of Appeal issued a stay order for the Army Commander to desist from holding a Court Martial against Major N Chandrasena, holder of several gallantry awards until 13 October. Major Chandrasena alleges that he was accused of using foul language in the Officers Mess and brought before a Preliminary Inquiry Board in September 1994. The decision of the Board had been that this matter should not be pursued.

Two Senior Superintendents of Police - H G Wickremasinghe and W Mahanayake and one Superintendent - H Chandrasena - who had been sent on compulsory leave over the Batalanda Commission Report also filed against their penalisation in this manner. Their petitions say that they had not testified before the Commission nor had any explanations being called for from them prior to being served with letters sending them on leave.

Senior DIG M Gunaratna has also filed a writ application before the Court of Appeal against his being sent on compulsory leave on 17 August, as a result of the Batalanda Commission Report.

Mr Maximus Danny filed a case against the Dankotuwa Police for unlawful arrest. He and his female companion were arrested along with several other men and women when the Police raided a guest-house in July.

S Murugesu, a businessman who had shipped cargo to Jaffna on the Mv. Princess Kash which was destroyed by Sri Lankan security forces, has filed a case alleging unlawful arrest.

Media Freedom

The Free Media Movement on 29 September issued a statement condemning the government's use of censorship to prevent the free flow of information about the losses of service personnel in the Kilinochchi attack. It called on all free media personnel to defy the government's attempts to curb the flow of news and information by publishing stories not directly related to national security issues without submitting them to the censor. ●

Where Have All the Flowers Gone ...?

Dr. Oswald B. Firth OMI

Director, Centre for Society and Religion

Signs of an Aging Nation

It has been rumoured that at the rate Sri Lanka is losing her youth, by the year 2010 over 50 per cent of her population would have entered conditions of decrepitude, and senility would become a dominant feature of a nation fading into oblivion. The fact that the nation's major races are gradually moving towards extinction is a frightening prognostic to all those who persist in sacrificing our youth at the altar of war. It does raise concerns as to whether these nostradamic predictions and this self-extinction countdown to doomsday cannot be averted. All depends on whether the present belligerents of a seventeen-year war can be parleyed into arresting the massacre of our youth, the blossoming hope of the next millennium.

In 1981, our defence budget was a relatively paltry Rs.1 billion. In 1987 it rose to Rs. 11.3 billion and in 1995, it recorded a massive quantum leap to Rs. 35 billion. In 1998, the budget requisite for defence was Rs. 44 billion. No one grudged, at least not in the public forum. After all, an Army fighting a war needs heavy artillery guns, battle tanks and state of the art equipment; an Air Force needs helicopter gunships and unmanned aerial vehicles; a fighting Navy needed attack craft, sonar devices if they were to rout and outwit their adversary. We silently acquiesced when we were asked to pay 4 per cent on all our purchases and services to strengthen and accelerate the war effort. Then, on the 23rd of September 1998, with hardly a sign of regret or whimper, the Defence Minister tabled in Parliament a request for a staggering Rs. 12.2 billion over and above what Parliament had approved for the fiscal year. Not a voice was raised and not a sound was heard when a massive portion of the national revenue was siphoned off raising the country's defence costs to a dizzy Rs. 57.2 billion for the year 1998. It appeared that no one wanted to tell Hans Anderson's emperor that he was stark naked! And all this, when

we were told that 98 per cent of the war was over and what remained was a mere mopping up of just 2500 "terrorists", many of them perhaps gun-totting boys in their teens!

The mandate given to this government in 1994/95 was to arrive at a political solution to the prolonged crisis and to restore peace to this country and accelerate the process of development, thereby eliminating poverty and improving the quality of life particularly for the disfavoured. No lesser authority than Lee Kuan Yew is purported to have said that Sri Lanka could have overtaken Singapore by 1990 if only the ethnic conflict could have been resolved. But what we see today is a massive increase in defence expenditure and a dwindling economy that has in real terms heaped greater burdens on the millions of poor who have reached the point of desperation. And the crisis still remains unresolved.

Youth without a Future

It has been touted from the roof tops that our rate of unemployment has been reduced from 17 percent to 10 or 11 per cent despite the war. Quite obviously, these figures preclude information from the North and conveniently ignore those youth who have migrated either as refugees or have left our shores in search of greener economic pastures abroad, often at great risk to their own lives. It is no more a matter of legend to hear of youth who have attempted to cross boarders into foreign lands using forged passports, or on motor boats that could hardly withstand the torrential storms of the sea, or even in sealed iced containers, in search of menial work. And all these daring exploits simply because prospects for their future in this paradise of ours have been found to be bleak. It is indeed surprising that these feats of adventure have not found a place in the famed Guinness Book of Records!

Besides, unless one has been subject to a bout of amnesia, it would

be impossible to forget the tens of thousands of young men and women from our rural homesteads who see their destiny as a tryst with the battlefield, all because no other option was found available to them. Fortune had not permitted them to cross the threshold of the mighty centres of learning, nor were their fathers, simple men of the soil or the sea, rich enough to parcel them off to a foreign university with a fat scholarship. The only modicum of hope that remained hidden in their sub-consciousness was that if they were to die, their families would be provided financially for the rest of their lives. Transformed into canon fodder, so cheap have become the lives of our precious youth for whom a bright future is but a distant dream. If all this is what Rs. 57.2 billion (over one third of our national budget) has achieved, then there is little doubt that our professionals, intellectuals, politicians and even our religious leaders have taken leave of their senses and our leading our country towards the precipice of destruction.

In a study conducted by the Margate Institute for the National Peace Council there was a poignant message: In 1995, the government had engaged a team of consultants to estimate costs of a reconstruction programme covering those areas affected by the war. Detailed estimates of costs were prepared to repair the damage caused to physical assets in the public and private sectors. Total estimates amounted to Rs. 49 billion. This included funds for irrigation Rs. 9.5 billion; industry Rs. 7.7 billion; public transport, roads, bridges and railway Rs. 5.5 billion; telecommunication Rs. 7.8 billion and fisheries 3.2 billion. Repairs and reconstruction of the boarder villages formed a part of the estimated costs. Today, these estimates have been relegated to the dustbin of history. What a wastage then to burn up Rs. 57.2 billion when these monies could have been utilized to reconstruct our country and open up avenues of employment for our youth!

Fighting Someone Else's War

The youth of today are aware that they are fighting someone else's war. This is the message about 80 youths, 25 from the Batticaloa District and the rest from the South had to say when

they met at Wattala for a three-day session to discuss the future of the country and the devolution of power as spelt out in the proposed new Constitution (vide their joint statement Youth for Peace published on page 13 in this issue). They have had enough, they categorically stated, of those politicians and religious pundits who had turned this war into a caricature of naked nationalism. They were weary of those who never went into battle but ordered our tender siblings into the valley of death. They were acutely critical of those who had metamorphosed this war into the proverbial "beggar's wound" for their own comfort. They had come to realize that the "War for Peace" strategy, based on military might to facilitate acceptance of a political and constitutional settlement at the present moment had been fatally derailed. The time had come then for our youth to make their voice reverberate that they needed the freedom to map out their own future for mutual exchange and harmonious living. The future, we need to be reminded, is their prerogative and not the monopoly of those in power or those who aspire to capture it in the future. It is indeed a crying shame that even after 50 years of Independence our leaders have failed to provide the framework for our youth to collaborate harmoniously and in a meaningful way in nation building.

Today, our country has become the 'Shattered Pearl of the Indian Ocean'. Unbridled violence in the form of a long drawn war has built walls of suspicion and enmity between the major ethnic communities (the Sinhalese, the Tamils and the Muslims). Violence, often in its most brutal forms, has not been restricted to the war zones. Bomb blasts, mass murders in villages, personal vendettas, thuggery, extortion and intimidation have become so widespread that the whole country appears to be sliding back into the dark era of pre-civilization. Religious and cultural values that promoted and sustained respect for all forms of life (based on the Buddhist principle of Maitriya or compassion) have receded into oblivion. The same should be said of mutual support and solidarity prevalent in extended forms of family life in the villages, the inherent respect for elders, women and children, and other unwritten customs and virtues signifi-

cant of perennial civilizations that guided us the moment we set foot on this earth. Instead, the Darwinian and Hobbesian principal of the 'survival of the fittest' has taken over destiny's steering helm in contemporary times. Unfulfilled aspirations, frustrated hopes, shattered dreams and downright injustice have been the forerunners of what has now come to be known as an ethnic war and a struggle for self-determination.

The Main Culprits

The main culprits of the current destructive debacle have been none other than the two principal parties, the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. It is they who held the reins of power since Independence.

The minority parties, determined to safeguard the rights of their ethnic communities through political bargaining, became the cutting edge in any electoral victory. In the absence of clear Constitutional guarantees of the rights of these minorities, political bargaining at election time became the decisive factor.

But today, certain segments of society, irrespective of the ethnic group to which they may belong, are becoming alienated and direct or indirect victims of a war which is nothing but a power struggle for supremacy between the government security forces and the LTTE. The victims, whether they are Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims, are our unfortunate youth, women and children who find themselves sandwiched between the two forces engaged in a merciless war leading to mutual destruction.

The social cost of this terrible war has been incalculable. Apart from driving out nearly 200,000 Tamils from the country, and creating nearly 1.5 million refugees in ill-fed refugee camps, it had passed a death sentence on Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim farmers living in the boarder villages. This is because this war has given rise to a new offshoot, namely, a narrow tribalism with ethno-religious overtones that is gradually becoming widespread. All those farmers who do not belong to this category are being made religio-cultural outcasts. Their paddy and other produce of those who do not belong to this category are not being purchased. This war is now being twisted into a

racist debacle that will threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who want to live in peace and harmony and share the benefits of development with members of all communities. If we are to avoid mutual destruction of these communities, the cry for peace, harmony and development for all will have to be overwhelmingly more powerful than the slogan "War now, Peace later". If this slogan were to prevail at the frightful rate the war is being fought at present, we may soon have a mass of dead bodies and the peace of the cemetery.

Maimed Bodies and Warped Minds

The psychological costs of this inhuman war have still to be assessed. We have still not come to terms with the brutal effects of this war on the psyche of our people. It is hard to believe that the alleged mass graves at Chemmani and the equally gruesome massacres of village folk whose mangled bodies some of us have seen and to which we bear witnessed, will not have the telltale effect on those who perpetrated such dastardly acts on innocent human beings. The superhuman Rambo's fall-out of the Vietnam War, Steven Spielberg's Private Ryan and news clippings of soldiers gone berserk provide ample proof of the breakdown of the psychological adaptive mechanisms within the human being, resulting in withdrawal from social activities.

We ourselves have witnessed the trauma on the faces of those living in the "border villages". Children who go through temporary mental derangement caused by excessive tension and fear. Recent writings (eg. Daya Somasundaram's Scarred Minds - The Psychological Impact of War on Sri Lanka Tamils) clearly show how those with clear links to wars and victims of its belligerency have been drawn towards alcohol or become dependent on drugs as a means of overcoming psychological pressure. Even if the war were to end tomorrow, the psychological scars caused by it will take generations to heal.

After all, has anyone attempted to measure the level of hatred and anguish that swells up in the deep recesses of a young man or woman who is now forced to live sans limbs for the rest of his/her life? What hope does the future hold for the flower of our youth that are withering away in the heat and thunder of the fratricidal war?

(The writer is also the Editor of "Social Justice", the monthly journal published by the Centre for Society and Religion)

The Tragedy of Flight 602 from Jaffna Crossing the Bar into the Twilight of Silence

[Special Report by The University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR -Jaffna), Sri Lanka]

Summary of Findings

1. The available evidence points conclusively to Lionair flight 602 of September 29 having been shot down by the LTTE near Iranativu.
2. This is supported by independent testimony coming from the people of the area.
3. Perhaps the immediate cause of this entire tragedy is that passenger aircraft had regularly deviated from the safe route, flying instead by the shorter route nearer the northern coast. This was known to Flight Control at Palaly and the Defence Ministry had been directly told about it. But no effective action was taken.
4. The LTTE's warning to the airlines not to charter aircraft to the security forces had largely been suppressed by the Government and the airlines, the public was not apprised of the seriousness of the situation, and for more than a month, no measures were taken to enforce adherence to secure routes.

Doubts and Certainties

In the wake of the bloody military confrontation in Killinochchi, alarm began to spread late on Tuesday September 29 afternoon that Lionair Flight 602 from Jaffna which left at 1.40 p.m. and was due to land in Colombo at 2.40 p.m., was missing. It had on board 48 passengers and 7 crew. For a few days thereafter mystery surrounded the disappearance of the Russian built AN-24 aircraft.

A Daily news report on October 1 said that the security forces at 1.50 p.m. on 29.9.98 had intercepted an LTTE radio message from 'jubilant' sounding cadre who reported the aircraft crashing into the sea off the Mannar coast. But the public remained sceptical. On the same day the Jaffna daily Uthayan quoting officials in the Mannar Kachcheri said that fishermen from Pesalai who were in the area had reported seeing an aircraft fall into the sea near of Iranativu, which is 15 miles north of Mannar Island. It further said that at the request of the parents of two passengers from Vankalai, their parish priest Fr. Thevasahayampillai, was going to the LTTE controlled area to find out what had happened. The two passengers were young women, one of whom was studying in the University of Jaffna. The same paper contained a PLOTE statement pointing the finger at the LTTE.

The following day (Friday 2nd October) the result of Fr. Thevasahayampillai's visit appeared in the Uthayan (a Tamil language daily published in Jaffna), and he was interviewed over BBC (Tamil Service) late in the evening. He had talked to fisherfolk and a government official. Two of them had seen the aircraft on fire, nose-diving into the sea near Iranativu, and had at first run, thinking it was a bomber. Other fishermen too had seen the aircraft coming down. In all six bodies had been recovered in a state of decay around Valappadu north-east of Iranativu, and had been buried. They also handed over to the priest the identity card of Commarasamy Ragunathan, a passenger resident in Negombo. Still, how the aircraft had come down re-

mained a mystery.

A leaflet attributed to the Political Wing of the LTTE, sans letterhead, had been in circulation in Jaffna a few days before the incident. Based on this and the history of threats to the airlines, the EPRLF released a statement charging the LTTE with shooting down the passenger aircraft.

From a translation of its Colombo correspondent's dispatch, the BBC broadcast the following over its Tamil Service on the 3rd evening: "Two Tamil parties which support the Government have blamed the LTTE of shooting down the aircraft. They have also said that the airlines had been sent letters by the LTTE to halt their services. There is no evidence for what they say. The LTTE, which had Jaffna under its control until 1990, have tried to destabilise the Government's attempts to restore normal life there. But they have never conducted any attack of this kind. These airlines have carried 400 passengers daily. If air transport is stopped important functions like the restoration of domestic water supply and the removal of land mines will be stalled ..."

Evidently, claims by EPRLF and PLOTE were regarded as biased and lacking in credibility. More importantly, a foreigner found it difficult to believe that, as much as the LTTE tried to undermine the Government's authority in Jaffna, it would go so far as to shoot down a plane carrying innocent people it claimed to liberate. However the strongest indictment against the LTTE came from quarters most unexpected.

The Uthayan of October 4 carried its editorial under the title "The Unexpected Blow". It dwelt on sentiments common among the people: for a people who have suffered in the extreme for many years, the Iranativu incident would wear them down even further. As regards the cause of the tragedy the editor sounded ambiguous: "The cause of the aircraft falling down and sinking into the sea has so far not been found out. It may be the result of a technical fault or the aeroplane must have been shot down". The writer then pulls himself back a little saying that it is, however, not easy to find out the cause for the incident and who was responsible. He added that even after many years, the cause of the Antonov belonging to the Air Force going down into the sea off Negombo has not been discovered.

But then towards the end the writer goes into a crescendo, as though he could not stop his pen, reflecting even more bluntly the common sentiment in Jaffna: "Air travel being the only form of transport from the Jaffna peninsula, the people had no choice but to utilise it. Even though there were rumours that passenger flights may be stopped, no one expected such an atrocity." Whatever the cause of the Iranativu incident, and whoever was responsible, they would surely earn the enmity of the people. They would also become deserving of condemnation."

The writer's mind is clear. He had considered two possible alternatives: either a technical failure or it was shot down. A technical fault would have owned to material breakdown or to involuntary human error. It is not deserving of such expressions as 'enmity', 'atrocious' and 'condemnation'. The editorial has a revealing human story behind it.

According to individuals close to the Uthayan, the editorial writer had been agonising over what he was to write. He said, "Bringing down a plane with innocent civilians is unacceptable. I have to say something about it. "Not being able to decide on how to proceed, he finally said, "I will let my pen go, and take me where it may." The editorial above was the result.

From mid-1986 in particular the Uthayan had to contend with the watchful eye of the LTTE. It had learn to play very safe and his, as with nearly all Tamils, was habit forming. To break out was to cross an almost insuperable barrier. To again avoid saying what he felt or knew about the aircraft tragedy was tugging at the tenuous strands of his self-respect. Against his better judgement, the writer found himself entering territory hitherto regarded as forbidden.

Here again we encounter the difference between the judgement of a Westerner who found 'no evidence' and that of an insider attuned to the psychology of a force that has so tragically dominated the lives of Tamils. To begin with, although hoping that the LTTE would not go so far as to shoot down a plane carrying its own people, the Tamils also knew fully well from experience that it was capable of it. The strangest thing however about the Iranativu aircraft tragedy was the silence of the main parties who owed it to the civilians to give them reassurance. It was as though both the Government and the LTTE had something to hide.

The Sequence

August 9, 1998 (approximately): we understand that both airlines flying to Jaffna, Lionair and Monara, received letters purportedly from the LTTE to stop chartering their aircraft of ferry security forces personnel to and from Jaffna. No action is known to have been taken.

September 13: A letter dated September 4 on a letterhead bearing the title 'Tamillelam Administrative Service' and signed by S. Thooyavan (the name of the Jaffna LTTE leader) was delivered to the desk of the Lionair manager in Jaffna. The subject heading was 'Notice of Attack'. It said, "We have already sent you a letter regarding the conduct of the airlines. You have not taken any action so far - on the contrary you have continued to co-operate with the armed forces, therefore as soon as you see this letter, please contact your management and ask them to temporarily halt the services until further notice. If instead you continue the air service, and an aircraft is attacked, resulting in danger to the lives of Tamil people, you must take full responsibility and would also have to take the due punishment administered by ourselves. Any aircraft flying after the 15th (of September) would be subject to our attack. While informing you of this with a heavy heart, we are also informing the people through leaflets."

September 17: Monara airlines suspended flights. In response to the threat issued earlier (13.9.98 above) the EPRLF issued a statement (Uthayan 18.9.98) saying that those who claimed to be liberators have no right to issue a threat of this nature. The air service, they said, was essential for educational needs, urgent medical attention, maintaining services and for family contact and social engagements. "The argument that the air services should be stopped because they are also useful to the Army", they said, "cannot be accepted. It is the essential needs for the life of the people that will be imperilled."

September 23: The Lionair manager in Jaffna received a letter, believed to be from the LTTE, asking him to quit. This he did.

September 24: A warning on the subject to the airlines and to avoid flying titled 'A request to the people', was sent for publication to the Uthayan. This was signed by 'P. Manimaran, the political wing of the LTTE'. This was not published.

About the same day a notice on the subject titled 'A warning to the common people' was handwritten and pasted at the entrance to Hindu College, Sangathanai, Chavakachcheri. Letters warning against air-travel are also said to have been sent to the Traders' Association and the University of Jaffna. (No member of the TA travelled on the fatal flight).

September 29. 20 pupils from John Bosco primary school were due to travel to Colombo on 30.9.98 so as to participate in a function in Trincomalee. The school is said to have been warned either by letter or word of mouth. Their bookings on Lionair were cancelled at 12.30 p.m. on 29.9.98. The flight that took off at 1.40 p.m. on this day was the one that came down.

A leaflet in Tamil titled 'A request to the people of the Jaffna peninsula who are subject to military oppression' claiming to be from the political wing of the LTTE, had already been in circulation in Jaffna. The following paragraph appeared in the notice: "In the guise of opening a road to Jaffna for the people, or of providing transportation for them, the Army is doing things to maximise its own interests. On the pretence of running an air service for the people of the peninsula it is not only squeezing a great deal of money out of them, but is using these services to fulfil its military aims.... For this reason banning air travel and taking action against those defying this ban has become unavoidable. Therefore we inform those who travel by air that it would be safer for them in coming times to avoid air travel and travel by sea...."

To many people in Jaffna who were aware of these threats, the knowledge of what was behind the air tragedy approached certainty. The news from the Mannar Kachcheri and Fr. Thevasahayampillai's testimony only tended to support these conclusions. What remained was to scrutinise known facts and to look for others that might suggest that the LTTE was not involved in bringing down in the aeroplane. In the event that we are unable to find good reasons to rule out the LTTE's involvement, a strong conclusion becomes inevitable.

The LTTE's Silence

The news of the falling aircraft was brought to the Kacheheri on Mannar Island by fishermen from Pesalai, who were also from the Government controlled island. Father Thevasahayampillai went to the Iranativu area at the request of parents in Vankalai, which is on the part of the mainland under Government control. As informative as was his testimony on BBC (TS), there was also a silence on a key aspect of his journey which stood out. He went into LTTE controlled territory and his every move would have been closely watched by the LTTE. If they or their spies were not actually present, they would have later sent agents to the fishermen and the government administrator the father had spoken to, and have found out what exactly they told the father.

The father himself would almost certainly have talked to the LTTE, but never once mentioned them. As a priest he would surely have asked the LTTE about facilitating relatives of the victims coming there to identify bodies washed ashore and perform the last rites. The importance of this relatives was stressed in the Uthayan editorial quoted: "The agony and tears of family members who were even unable to have a last look at their dear ones who drowned with the falling aircraft, have even caused hearts of stone to tremble."

Even if the father did not wish to say anything in public, he would have told his Bishop about the LTTE's response to the families wanting to go there. But nothing came out. On the other hand the LTTE was watching everything from the time the aircraft came down in flames. What the fishermen told the father about the plane coming down corroborates the reported Army interception of the LTTE radio communication. This also strongly

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suggests that the LTTE were at least eye witnesses to the event, but apparently neither told the father anything nor offered any help to the relatives.

Further reports said that one body was washed ashore in Jaffna and another 20 or so near Kalmunai Point, a promontory along the coast just before Jaffna lagoon and the peninsula. This testimony which came through the fishermen's grapevine is credible, given the fact that the coast faces the west and the wind is north-easterly (ie the tail-end of the South-West monsoon). It was further said that all the bodies reaching the mainland shore were buried with the knowledge of the LTTE. The LTTE moreover made no effort to contact the ICRC to whom it regularly hands over bodies of army personnel killed. This further lack of any courtesy or concern for its own civilians killed in an air disaster under its very nose is striking. Stranger still, even as the people living in the Vanni were finding out about the tragedy by word of mouth, the LTTE's radio broadcasts said not a word on the matter.

Seen against this backdrop, the cryptic statement in the last leaflet quoted above carried a clear message for discerning Jaffna folk. To them 'taking action against those defying the ban on air travel having become unavoidable', was an oblique admission of intent - not to foreigners looking for forensic clues, but to the people who understand the LTTE well.

Reported Facts of the Disaster

The aeroplane took off from Palaly, Jaffna, at 1.40 p.m. and the pilot requested permission from Control to climb to 15,000 feet. About 2.00 p.m. according to the Sunday Times report (4/10/98), the pilot reported a decompression problem and the Palaly Control asked the pilot to return to Palaly. The aircraft then disappeared from the radar screen. We know further from Fr. Thevasahayampillai's testimony on BBC(TS) that the aircraft was on fire while it nose-dived into the sea near Iranativu.

We may largely rule out sabotage by the maintenance crew. They are drawn from the former Soviet Union along with the flight crew, and over the last two years the safety record has been good. If decompression had resulted from failure of the compressor alone, this as we understand would not have been a major problem. The body of the aircraft is said to be able to retain the pressure for more than half an hour. This gave the pilot enough time to return to Palaly, and if it came to the worst, make a smooth emergency landing in the sea. Compression is crucial to the aircraft because they fly at a high altitude over the North. The thinking was apparently that at this height they were beyond the range of missiles known to have been possessed by the LTTE.

If decompression resulted from a hole in the aircraft, this would have meant an additional thrust on its body as the result of a jet of air blowing through the hole from the high pressure interior to the low pressure exterior. This would, depending on its seriousness, have caused a control problem. For a hole to have been created on the body of the aircraft, it could have been hit by a missile, or some explosive device in the baggage may have gone off. The aircraft having been on fire strongly suggests that one of these two possibilities had in fact been the case.

Before the passengers board the aircraft security checks by Air Force personnel are very strict. Bags are emptied and items are checked one by one. Electrical items in which explosives can be hidden are, not allowed as a rule. Body checks are also done on passengers. Suppose that a suicide cadre managed to board the aircraft with an explosive device in his bag, which some how escaped detection. The baggage compartment in the AN 24 is just behind the cockpit. Had there been an explosion on board the pilot could hardly have been ignorant of it. He would not then have merely said over the radio that he had a decompres-

sion problem. It perhaps took him a little while to realise what was amiss. It is also likely that the full gist of the pilot's conversation has not been made public.

According to our sources Lionair has ruled out alternative possibilities, although a hijack was initially thought possible.

Local Testimony on the Tragedy

While the last words of this report being written, we received further testimony regarding what was behind the air disaster. This story initially came out two days after the disaster along with other rumours. Its appearance here owes to dedicated activists who traced the sources and checked it out. LTTE cadre were seen in Iranativu, where they erected a platform near the church on North Island. This happened about two days before the incident. The LTTE were thereafter sighted in the area.

Iranativu, or Twin Island, lies out at sea about 7 miles west of Nachchikudah. It comprises a larger North Island (Peruntivu) and south east of it, a smaller South Island (Sirutivu). Fisherfolk usually go there when need and camp out in temporary huts, known as Wadis. For the use of these folk and the residents, there are two churches - 'Samiyo Mayuror' at Peruntivu and St. Sebastian's at Sirutivu. The LTTE go there when necessary from their Sea Tiger base at Nachchikudah - Sirutivu being the nearer to it.

A few families permanently reside in Sirutivu. But Peeruntivu, the bigger, has no more than 50 families residing in government built houses, besides migrant fisherfolk. On the afternoon of 29th September, fishermen were in the sea close to Peruntivu. Their first intimation of the disaster was the aircraft on fire plunging into the sea about a mile away from them in water which they knew to be about 12 to 15 feet deep. As the aircraft plunged, they saw paper or foil-like material coming out of it.

They were further surprised to see two Sea Tiger speed boats rushing to that area within a short time and circling the place where the aircraft had fallen. The fishermen who had been frightened by the experience, went to the shore of Peruntivu and watched what was going on. The Tigers then came to them and ordered them to leave the place.

The LTTE boys who were about simply did not understand the consequences of what they had been amidst. They appeared elated and talkative when returning to Nachchikudah. Fishermen whom they passed listened in fearful silence. This agrees with the reported Army radio intercept.

The fisherfolk of the area are in no doubt that the aircraft was brought down by the LTTE. This they later connected with the platform built near the church. It is also notable that the LTTE said not a word about the incident and offered no help to the relatives. It was by chance that two girls from Vankalai had been in the flight, which gave the people an added interest in finding out what had happened. A close relative of one of the victims after making inquiries through people with LTTE links blurted out, "These accursed fellows; it was a boy of 17 years who shot down the plane!". The people of the area have identified 'Arul' who is in charge of the Sea Tiger base at Nachchikudah as having executed the order to bring down the aircraft.

Why did the LTTE boys choose to do the job from the side of a church? They were about it for two days or more. According to our informants, building a platform for missile and waiting it out in the open would have risked their being spotted by air patrols, while the church provided some concealment.

Against this testimony it is very likely correct, as has been confirmed by a former Air Force Chief, that in flying at 15,000 feet the aircraft was outside the reach of shoulder-fired missiles which the LTTE had earlier used and could be fired from boats.

The airlines and the Defence Ministry had overlooked the possibility of a more powerful missile requiring a fixed structure for launching being fired from land.

The LTTE's erratic behaviour and unreasonable demands just before the breakdown of negotiations with the present government in 1995 left outsiders puzzled. Peace groups were coming out with excuses for the LTTE which did not convince even themselves. To many shrewd observers in Jaffna, the matter was very simple: The LTTE had during the peace talks acquired shoulder-fired missiles and was keen to use them. Within twelve days of the breach of the ceasefire, two Air Force AVROs had been shot down with the loss of about 90 men - the second because the first aircraft having been brought down by a missile was not taken seriously.

It is also remarkable in retrospect that the LTTE began raising the issue of the airlines chartering planes to the security forces only last August - although it had been going on for up to two years previously.

The testimony from fisherfolk who saw the culprits also throws light on Fr. Theavasahayampillai's testimony - particularly his silence about the LTTE. He must have heard much more than a person living in Vankalai could disclose publicly. Yet he told us a great deal by testifying that the plunging aircraft was on fire. The 'Uthayan' report of 2.10.98 published before the BBC(TS) broadcast of Fr. Theavasahayampillai's testimony, was again based on the Father's report to the Mannar kachcheri. But Uthayan had not mentioned the crucial fact of the plane being on fire. Was it judicious self-censorship by Uthayan or suppression by Kachcheri officials playing safe? That is life in the North-East!

This brings us to the final point. Iranativu was the first instance where a south-bound flight on the shorter route passed close to or over land mass under LTTE control. But the LTTE could also have intercepted the flight further south when it flew near Thiruketheeswaram on the mainland under LTTE control, or south of the Vavuniya Road under army control, all the way down to Mullikulam and Wilpattu. These areas though for the most part are not under army control are readily accessible to the army and the LTTE presence south of the Vavuniya road is weak.

Logistically, north of the road would have suited the LTTE better. We now come to the most important advantage the LTTE had in Iranativu. The aircraft fell into the sea in the LTTE controlled zone. The relative isolation of Iranativu also ensured secrecy, and confusion about the incident lasted several days - long enough to deflate media interest.

Also important is the local reaction. Had the plane been intercepted further south, it would have come down on the mainland. Many civilians on land or those fishing along the coast nearby would have seen it, and since the army is also around, the news would have come out very fast. The rural folk of the area are also an emotional people who on the spur of the moment would have shown their anger against the LTTE. The army too could have flown down foreign correspondents and taken them to the crash site for them to photograph the wreckage and the mangled bodies. There would have been plenty of evidence.

In the present case just a few knew what had happened and where the plane had crashed. But because they were few, they were also afraid. The relatives of the two girls from Vankalai who were victims came to know exactly what happened in about 3 days time. But that was long enough for fear to take over and mute any public demonstration of anger. The parents of the two girls would have found that they had little support for any public expression of protest. The LTTE phenomenon has very successfully created a society where people are forced to say

the opposite of what they believe. Then there are enough voices within the society to spread confusion and defuse the anger.

One story floated was that the LTTE had meant to hit the Lionair cargo plane coming the same day with wounded soldiers, but hit the passenger plane by mistake (eg. EPDP's 'Thinamurasu' and a hint of it in the Uthayan (Sanjeevy) of 3rd October). But this is hardly credible. The series of LTTE warnings we have adverted to have a very clear message to the civilians. Moreover, the LTTE leaflets distributed in Jaffna under one pseudonym or another after the shooting have given no hint of regret that a mistake was made. It is also very unlikely that flight ferrying army personnel under contract to the Defence Ministry would have taken that route. The Tigers would have known that.

The LTTE can depend on leading sections of Tamil society and some of the political parties to play the confusion game to its benefit. Again, when the Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the precincts of the Navaly church in July 1995, then under LTTE control, killing 120 refugees, the Church was very active and the ICRC got all the testimony it wanted. The ICRC very rightly issued a statement to alert the world to the atrocity. The Government's response was ungracious to say the least. Journalists were not allowed to go to Jaffna until the May following. Only one Tamil speaking Indian journalist got into Jaffna using a forged identity card. In the end the Government could hide nothing, even if it had thought it could.

As for this aircraft being shot down, the Church was well placed to know all the facts in a short time. But the Church is silent. The LTTE too would have made sure than in this case the ICRC got next to no information. The LTTE have created the necessary conditions through terror and are past masters at the game of silence and confusion.

Why the LTTE's Silence?

There are just a few occasions in the last few decades where civilian aircraft have been shot down from the air. Instances come to mind of the Korean Airlines flight shot down over the Soviet Union and Iranian Airways flight shot down over the Gulf by the US Air Force. These which took place in the 80s involved parties who were foreign to each other, and the incidents are said to have occurred because of misunderstanding, miscommunication or misidentification, as inexcusable as the shootings were. There was also, in around 1969, an instance of an ICRC plane being shot down by the Nigerian Air Force while shipping in urgent civilian supplies to the beleaguered Biafrans. Here there was a secessionist civil war. There was starvation in Biafra and the Nigerian Government of General Yakubu Gowon had earlier warned the ICRC against shipping in humanitarian supplies which the ICRC had decided to ignore. Thanks to sustained international pressure and good sense in the South, starving out a rebel enclave has been ruled out in Sri Lanka.

The Lionair disaster is unprecedented. This would be the first time a secessionist group or state power had shot down deliberately and calculatedly its own civilians from the air. Shooting down a civilian aircraft becomes big news because it is abhorrent. The victims are totally helpless, bereft of any means to save themselves.

Let us take a look at some of the civilian victims whom the leaflets quoted had condemned as being worthy of death.

* Mrs. Tharmanayaki Subramaniam who went down with Flight 602 was flying to Colombo to join her husband in celebrating her 70th birthday. Their golden wedding anniversary was due in 3 years time.

* Two girls, Vanaja and Selvarani, were students from the University of Jaffna. Arummani has accompanied her friend Selvarani, both being from Vankalai.

* Mrs. Puspam Selvarajah from Pt. Pedro was a widow in her 60s. She had lived for sometime with her son who had emigrated to Canada. Finding life there meaningless she returned two years ago to live with her cousin, Queenie Thevarajah, to whom and to her children she had always been very close. One of the children was booked to fly abroad. Mrs. Selvarajah had boarded the plane to spend a few days with her nephew before his departure.

* Sasi Krishnamoorthy was secretary to the Palymrah Development Board, in Colombo, and was well known in the world of Tamil letters. His wife who was sickly with a hole-in-the-heart and his two daughters, the elder being in the O-Level class, were residing in Jaffna. Sasi felt that his presence was badly needed at home and had been asking for a transfer to Jaffna. He had decided to submit his resignation and return to Jaffna if his transfer was not forthcoming.

Sasi's presence in Jaffna was edifying and invaluable. From his undergraduate days at Peradeniya in the 70s he had involved himself in humanitarian causes and was a warm human being. Being in Jaffna during the worst periods of LTTE repression, he remained unshaken in his convictions, which he could express only in private, and uncompromising in his high ethical standards. He had experienced a personal blow when in 1996 the army detained his nephew, who then joined the ranks of the "disappeared".

* There were also two medical doctors among the victims. Dr. Elango had recently passed out of Jaffna University. Dr. Paramasivam, the only homeopathic practitioner in Jaffna, was travelling to Colombo for a professional conference.

There is little doubt that all the remaining victims had similar stories. Their reasons for travelling were as pressing as they were non-political. Their plaintive request to the powers that be, whoever they were, has always been: "We are vulnerable and we need to travel, please keep your play away from us." Among those who went down with Flight 602 were 19 women and a child.....

Silence by Government and the Press

From the beginning the Defence Ministry seems to have been convinced that the Lionair flight had been shot down by the LTTE. Yet, given the horrifying nature of the crime, there was no word of sympathy for the victims from any leading member of the Government. No serious attempt to locate the plane and the missing persons has materialised. There was a lack of seriousness about the whole affair. The Daily News of October 1 carried a front page headline 'All 48 passengers on ill-fated Lionair flight were Tamils.' The people of this country have got used to such headlines. It took a foreigner to feel depressed by it. To her it sounded like meaning '48 people from another country have died, it is not our problem!'

It now turns out that the nature of the LTTE's warning to the airlines had been suppressed. Inquiries from knowledgeable persons strongly suggest that the airlines had been told not to carry security personnel. A further letter cited above stated that flights after 15.9.98 are liable to being shot down, and asked flights to be stopped until further notice. The EPRLF statement in the Uthayan of 18.9.98 has indicated that initially the problem raised by the LTTE was about the airlines flying security personnel (by charter arrangement).

But this was not reflected in the English press in Colombo, until in the Weekend Express of 26.9.98. Reports in all other papers quoting security and airline officials merely suggested that the LTTE wanted flights stopped altogether. Taken at face value, the demand from a civilian airline not to fly security personnel is not unreasonable in the context of war.

By not taking the matter seriously the Government and the

airlines gave the passengers the impression that they were in control of the situation. It was made out that airline managers in Jaffna had resigned for personal reasons. Those reading the English papers would have found little reason to cancel their flights. In the press as a whole there was a lack of investigation, a lack of information and a lack of concern.

The Weekend Express of 26.9.98 said that the ICRC was asked to inquire into the authenticity of the warnings. Given that intense fighting began the next day, the ICRC would probably have had too little time to come back with a response. But that was not necessary. The Lionair manager in Colombo had maintained that they were checking out the authenticity of the warning, apparently suspecting that a rival was involved (eg. Monara?). But if the initial warning had to do with chartering flights to the military, there was little to check even if the warnings did not come with LTTE letterheads. It was generally known that the LTTE had been acquiring weaponry for an attack in the North, and it was not impossible for them to acquire more sophisticated missiles in the present anarchic and highly commercialised world order.

The responsible course of action by the airlines in consideration of the safety of their passengers was to stop the flights and reconsider the situation. The airlines after all have their own channels of communication with the LTTE. The PLOTE's military wing leader has said that he had warned the Defence Ministry that flight route which was close to the shore was vulnerable on 25.9.98. This has not been denied.

A number of witnesses confirmed that many flights take the route southward after climbing to 15000 feet, passing Iranativu, touching the mainland near Thiruketheswaram, then close to the coast passing Mullikulam and Wilpattu, then by Puttalam Lagoon with Kalpitiya on the right, after which the aircraft reduces height. The only rationale seems to have been that in flying high over the North, the aircraft were safe from shoulder-fired missiles. The prospect of more powerful missiles was not taken into account even after the warnings.

What is even worse, passenger aircraft have been regularly flying along the route close to the coast, which is not the one authorised by the Defence Ministry. The approved route is further westwards into the sea. Passengers who had flown Lionair along the approved route recently told us that they passed Iranativu an estimated 10 miles to the east and Mannar Island also to the east. The unapproved route also saved around 10 minutes of flying time and hence costs, perhaps the immediate cause of this entire tragedy.

This was no doubt known to the Defence Ministry since the regular breach of the safe route was known to Palaly Control who observed it on radar. This has been confirmed for us by journalistic sources. It is notable that the Defence Ministry did not stop this practice even after the danger was pointed out by the PLOTE military wing leader four days before the incident. The airlines strike one as a cosy club arrangement between the Defence Ministry and the private operators. Why was the Defence Ministry so indifferent to the safety of the civilian passengers and crews while apparently conniving with unsafe practices by the operators to maximise profits? Is this the reason for their deafening silence?

Both the Government and the airlines must answer the charges of suppressing the real nature of the issue and sending civilians and crews into danger. Is it partly because the Government did not want to lose face by acceding to an LTTE demand not to fly security personnel in these planes? Were the foreign airline crews unfamiliar with local conditions told that there was a warning or were they too kept in the dark and asked to fly an unsafe route? The whole affair strikes of insensitivity on the part of both the Government and the airlines of the need to have

a clear-cut separation between military and civilian functions as demanded by international codes and conventions governing the rules of war.

Even curiously, when a journalist raised the question of flight routes at a recent weekly Cabinet Press Briefing, the Defence Ministry spokesman said that there was no flight route prescribed by the Defence Ministry. The airlines, he said, were asked to choose the route they deemed safe.

This is like admitting that here is a government that does not take any responsibility for the safety of civilians so essential in wartime travel. No self-respecting government could admit that it does not exercise regulatory and supervisory functions that are routine in good governance, or that it is one which allows civilian safety that is so crucial in air travel to be jeopardised for private profit. It is altogether a very fishy business.

The fares were about doubled in August 1996 without adequate explanation when Lionair took over passenger flights from the Air Force. The flights are evidently highly profitable. A return flight to Jaffna which is 250 miles away costs Rs. 5300 or 6000 depending on whether one starts from Colombo or Jaffna. On international airlines which are subject to stricter controls in every respect, one could get a return flight to Singapore (2000 miles or 8 times the distance away) for about 4 times the cost to Jaffna.

There are now more willing operators than are being accommodated. Where the public is concerned the demand for clear separation between military and civil functions has not been an issue, but has rather been for more flights. This surfaced at the meeting of the Anti-Harassment Committee convened in late August. The Committee comprises several eminent ministers and MPs. The question of separation as we understand, did not arise. Rather, a Defence Ministry official explained to the Committee why more flights could not be accommodated.

Lionair first had a monopoly. Monara entered the field some months ago after some delays - attributed to string pulling by rival parties. Even after the recent disaster there is evidently no sensitivity among the airlines to the need for clear separation between military and civil functions. In an interview given to the Sunday Island (4.10.98) by the General Manager of Monara Airlines one could sense, reading behind the lies, the tug of competition between the two airlines - Lionair presently having the lead. The GM was quoted as saying: "The government should start making use of us soon. If the safe route or the sea corridor is used there is no way the Tigers can touch us... I wish the government would resume flights to Jaffna in the interest of innocent Tamils... We have agreed to transport troops, food-stuffs and personal cargo when the government requires our service. We do this on a charter basis. We have to help our country in times of need."

Three things surface here. The GM appears to take it for granted that the Lionair flight was shot down, the route was unsafe, and indicates that despite the alarm no move was made to avoid it. Apart from the lack of sensitivity to separation between military and civil matters on the part of the GM, even the senior pressman questioning him avoided it.

The military could easily have done without using transport meant for civilian uses. The increase in cost would have been very marginal. If additional transport was needed to transport injured soldiers as during the Kilinochchi battle, the proper thing to have done is to stop civilian flights, commandeer the aircraft, and have them flown by Air Force crews. There should be no call on airline managers to 'help their country' in such matters, as sympathetic as they ought to be.

In this highly profitable and competitive business, what do the civilians get in return for their money? There are no doubt several questions to be answered. The following regarding aviation insurance is taken from the Encyclopedia Britannica: "Policies generally exclude losses incurred when the aircraft is being

used for unlawful purposes, or outside the geographical limits specified in the policy, or by someone other than an authorized pilot, or for purposes other than those authorised in the policy or in violation of an airworthiness condition or civil air regulations. Also excluded are losses resulting from war, strike, riot..."

In setting geographical limits, a normal insurer is unlikely to have agreed to the route taken. An authorised purpose would not have included carrying security personnel. Had the managers gone to a proper insurer, they would surely have been made sensitive to the need for strict separation of military and civil functions. Where do the families of the victims stand now?

There is a good deal for which the Government, particularly those in charge of defence, and the airlines, must answer. Silence only makes matters worse. Even now a word of sympathy from the President for the families of victims would be appropriate.

The Case of Tamil Civilians

As to why the Tamil civilians did not demand a separation between military and civil functions in the operation of airlines has a long history. From the mid-1980s successive governments and militant groups, particularly the LTTE, had taught them to live as though they had no rights. The LTTE in particular explicitly stated (e.g. Mahattaya in June 1990) that any rights they had were subject to the military needs of the freedom struggle. In fighting the LTTE, governments rejected any accountability for death and injury to civilians, however deliberate or unjustifiable. Even the present government too has instituted no serious inquiry into violations.

Despite the issue of separation being raised on some occasions again and again there is a lack of sensitivity to it on the part of the defence establishment. The question of the STF in the east using forced civilian labour and travelling in civilian buses had been raised since 1995. The use of forced civilian labour by the army in rural Jaffna has also been known. Most revealing is the frequent practice in Mannar. The buses leaving Mannar for Colombo are driven to the Thallady Army Camp.

The civilians had been asked to get down from their bus and get into an army bus. Then the convoy proceeds with the passengers mixed up with security personnel. At Cheddikkulam the passengers return to their bus. Leading citizens in Mannar have made representations to those in charge. He promised to look into it, but so far there has been no substantive change. The thinking here seems to be that the Tamils are asking for too much and that if the LTTE shoots Tamils, it is not their problem. Both sides have used civilians as shields.

In the story of civilian travel, a classic incident was the massacre by the Navy of more than 35 civilians crossing the Jaffna Lagoon on 2nd January 1993. The official claim was that the Navy had demolished Tiger boats - a typical Defence Ministry reaction. We stated in our preface to Report No.10 (15/1/93): "The Navy's act of piracy in the Jaffna Lagoon which left more than 35 dead or missing, reinforced some of the worst fears (among civilians). It must be said here that the Tigers too must be blamed for not allowing the development of any structure to safeguard the interests of civilian travellers, and forcing them to travel under contrived provocative conditions."

This problem continued until the Tigers were evicted from Jaffna in 1996. The logic of the LTTE was very clear. They wanted the Jaffna Lagoon kept open for their military transport. To this end they used the civilians as a shield, giving them no alternative travel arrangements. The civilians learnt to accept it and in the course of it reinforced a mindset peculiar to the Tamils. They developed a horror of confronting the LTTE, but at the same time passively accepted all the risks the LTTE imposed on them to prosecute its 'freedom struggle'. The civilians had to cross the Lagoon to go anywhere. The LTTE too played on this. Sometimes the travellers waited anxiously for days. The anxiety rose to such a pitch that they jumped into the

first boat available without any further thought. They had no alternative but to hope that international pressure and fear of the Tigers would keep the Navy away.

Indeed after the incident of 2.1.93 the Navy was for the most part restrained. There were no further incidents on this scale. The Tigers won. It is in their very nature to go for what they want regardless of the human cost. Today they have done the same to stop the air service. The occasional charter of the aircraft for military use was after all of very marginal military value compared with the essential nature of the service provided for the civilians. This was how the civilians saw it.

Following the Lagoon tragedy above, every effort of international organisations to open a safe route through Elephant Pass or Pooneryn for the civilians was dashed by the LTTE just when a breakthrough was expected - e.g. the negotiations with UNHCR in 1993.

The only time the LTTE talked about a safe route for the civilians was during negotiations with the present Government in early 1995. That again was only as a pretext for asking the Government to remove the Pooneryn army camp. As with the downing of Flight 602, the military reasons it gave were largely nonsensical compared with the urgent civilian interests at stake - the de-mining of Jaffna for example which the LTTE's overseas propaganda (e.g. Hot Spring) claims is being obstructed by the Government.

The case of the civilians against the LTTE, in short, is this: "In making us travel through the Jaffna Lagoon, you used us for your military ends. We obeyed you and took the consequences because we had no choice. Today the airlines give us the opportunity to travel with much more dignity. To us the airlines occasionally chartering out flights to the military was not an issue. You told us that we had no rights. It was you who after all taught us not to ask questions and to take what was given. Should you not now be good enough to let us fly and attend to our private matters in peace? If you would let us behave as though we had rights, we would fight for them - against you, the Government and anyone else."

The LTTE's concern about the airlines making money would strike Jaffna folk as a joke. The LTTE was second to none in squeezing money out of the people. Overall it had made people spend nearly Rs. 2000 on a return trip to Colombo which used to cost Rs. 200. Its systematic extortion during the Exodus period was beyond belief. The LTTE has driven itself into such a state of subjectivity that its anger against ordinary civilians has attained an uncomprehending insanity.

The people boarding flights even after the LTTE warnings is a left-over from the Kilaly boat days. When they were told that this would be the last boat for a couple of days, they got in regardless of the consequences. Similarly when rumours got about that the flights would be stopped, they simply took what came. So poorly had the LTTE been understood after all this experience, that neither the people nor the airline officials dreamt that the LTTE would shoot down a passenger flight.

The Question of Proof

As the organisation's positions and demands became increasingly impossible, it developed its characteristic approach. Its slogan of the 1970s that 'Tigers claim their armed actions' is today observed mostly in breach. To the people of Jaffna the import of its threats and warnings is clear, although these are given out with calculated ambiguity. So there is no final proof. Take the warnings about flying. They came on letterheads of the Tamil Eelam Administrative Service, with no Tiger emblem but claiming to come from the political wing of the LTTE, or from Well Wishers of the People of Tamil Eelam and so on. A leaflet appeared in Jaffna on 10.10.98 from 'Jaffna University students' which said among other things that the Government must take responsibility for the lives lost in the airline tragedy.

There always remains an element of doubt about the source of the warnings. Those desperate to travel would have optimistically hoped that these messages were forgeries. The airline officials too entertained that possibility. Now foreigners looking at the affair would find no proof of the LTTE's complicity.

Even as we were preparing this report, we had to suddenly sit up and ask ourselves questions such as whether Fr. Thevasahayampillai was the victim of an elaborate hoax. He only brought an identity card and had seen no bodies. Could the aircraft have been hijacked and forced to land in the Vanni? We then had to rule this out. Fr. Thevasahayampillai would have directly gone to fellow parish priests and to people he knew. What he brought back were unquestionable, authentic reports current among the people there. A plane being forced to land could not be hidden, and people travel daily to and from the LTTE controlled area. The fishermen's and traders' networks cannot be so easily manipulated by the LTTE in matters of this kind. The whole truth would soon come out.

To the people of Jaffna themselves the LTTE has made it very clear that they shot down the aircraft. They would try hard to avoid admitting or denying it. If they deny it people would fly. If they admit it, they would be condemned worldwide. This way of functioning has helped them to manipulate the media and NGOs in their favour - there being no forensic evidence to pin down most of the LTTE's crimes.

The question is how long can we afford to be in confusion about such a force which manipulates the confusion of others without being itself confused? The manner in which the Government is handling the aircraft disaster inquiry too would work to the LTTE's benefit. Wherever there was the potential for an inquiry to embarrass the Government, there has also been tardiness and lack of seriousness.

The people could in such matters generally expect disappointment and undue delay, such as after the initial fanfare and pledges over investigating the Chemmani graves. With the missing aircraft too the pattern is similar. It is also similar to the administrative clumsiness over the long delayed mine clearing operations in the North, which were finally due to begin when the aircraft went down.

For an event of this nature which stands high in the category of crimes, an investigation by an Assistant Director of the Civil Aviation Authority, as announced, may be necessary for internal purposes, but cannot constitute a bona fide inquiry. It is necessary to get together an unquestionably impartial body, preferably including foreign experts, to go into the matter. If the Government is faulted as it is bound to be, it should be big enough to take it. If not, there is little hope.

The names of those killed in Flight 602 are:

Passengers : Mrs.D Sivapragasam, I Ragunathan, V B Senthivelu, B Manoranjithan, B Selvakumar, Mrs. Mallika Devi, V M Sabesh, G Ponnu, G Ramesh Kumar, I Kirupakaran, I Paththaran, T Kumarasamy, Mrs.K Sinnathangachchi, K Pradeepan, A T Kunage, A T Fernando, T Sivanathan, S Ilango, P Joseph, R Parupathi, M Naguleswaran, Mrs. S F Pushpam, A N Sathradas, T Rodrigo, K Ragunathan, Mrs C Ragunathan, S Krishnamurthy, Mrs. S Nalayini, K Srikanthan, Mrs.T Thangavelu, D Vallipuram, V Balasubramaniam, N Sivakumar, Mrs. S Yogamani, Mrs.A Sivapalan, S Sivapalan, T Paramasivam, R Somasundaram, N Sabaratnam, J Benedict, Mrs A Saraswathie, V Panchacharam, S Thevarajah, S Sinnathambi, Mrs. P Rajaratnam, R Raji, R Pakkiyasami, Ms B Mahalakshmi.
Cockpit Crew: Matochko Anatoli (Captain), Lsaivanov Siarhei (Co-Pilot), Kozlov Sergei (Navigator), Anapryienka Siarhei (Flight Engineer).
Cabin Crew: Dharshini Gunasekera (Chief Stewardess), Chrishan Nelson (Steward), Vijitha (Lionair staff - labourer).



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WILL SALMAN RUSHDIE BE FREE AT LAST? AND WHAT ABOUT ALL OF US?

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

The sudden agreement reached between the British and Iranian governments on September 24 ensured the lifting of the nine-year-old death sentence on arguably the greatest of English writers today, Salman Rushdie. The sentence, passed as a fatwa by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini from his death bed, was in the wake of the publication of Satanic Verses, Rushdie's third novel in his subcontinental quartet. The Ayatollah clearly held the novel to be a great blasphemy against the Holy Qoran. And 15th of Khordad foundation, a semi-official Iranian agency run by religious clerics, had offered a staggering 2.5 million US dollars for anyone assassinating the bearded, bald and soft-spoken India-born English writer.

In the intervening years, the fatwa has come to haunt writers and artists from all across the world. Writers in such diverse countries as Turkey and Nigeria were able to identify their own situations of oppression, by their respective governments and fanatical organisations, with that of Rushdie.

Rushdie's destiny, however, turned out even more bizarre. After the fatwa, Rushdie immediately went to hiding, kept switching beds every night, led a bizarre life of protection from British security guards, endured divorce from his American author-wife Marianne Wiggings, made an a futile attempt to convert to Islam, found his Norwegian publisher murdered and his Japanese publisher attacked, got married again, became a father and discovered that he could walk free in a street only in distant Argentina.

Rushdie himself would like to believe that it is all over now. Iran's eagerness to get closer to the Western powers perhaps stems from its bid to halt the onward march of Taliban and the latter's ruthless suppression of Shi'ite Muslims in Afghanistan. Iran is too keen to normalise its ties with the emerging European Union, if not with the United States with whom it nevertheless played a World Cup football match in France earlier this year. However, it will never be clear whether Rushdie is free from fanatic individuals and fringe groups operating in the West. His exile is over, yet the kingdom has not arrived. He is, as ever, in-between.

Yet, Rushdie made something great out of his exile which could never be termed one since his was truly a Kafkaesque situation of living with the guards as in the great Czech-German writer's novel *The Trial*. Rushdie wrote and wrote well during his exile. His short story collection, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, appeared first, taking him back to the miracle of story-telling which was evident in his first novel *Grimus*, published way back in 1975. The novel's title is an anagram of Simurg, the great mythical Persian bird which flies towards the East, crossing the Gobi desert to a utopia in China, never to return. It is clear that Rushdie identifies himself in the Islamic story-telling tradition of Scherazade, the legendary princess of *The Thousand and One Nights*. And sure, he ended up with a perpetual death threat from the Ayatollahs. He had to tell more stories to keep alive, which he did with such humour and depth.

Rushdie came out with *East/West*, another short story collection, in which he dwells upon the European obsession with the East commencing in the late 15th century. Especially, the story about the relationship between the mad Columbus who sets out west to find India and the Spanish queen Isabella, his sponsor. Rushdie concludes that love, and more so failed love, forms the basis for great adventures, both abortive and successful. Rushdie explores this theme further in his novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the last of the subcontinental quartet. The novel traces a genealogical and geographical journey, operating with signposts in time - from the expulsion of Jews from the sword-making town of Toledo in Spain in 1492 to the Bombay serial blasts of 1993 in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition and subsequent communal riots. The novel goes on to explore the basis of hate, and of mutual hatred, which is prevalent among communities of the subcontinent.

In the meantime, Rushdie's experience with the subcontinental powers turned out weird. Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was the first head of government to announce the ban on Satanic Verses, after Islamic youth died in police firing during agitations burning the book.

Rushdie was denied an Indian visa to attend court hearing in a dispute relating to his ancestral property in Shimla. A BBC team wanted to film his second epoch-making novel, *Midnight's Children*, in India. And the Indian government promptly turned down the team's visa plea. The publishers of *The Moor's Last Sigh* had a running battle for a few months with the some Congress ministers in the then Delhi government. Copies of the novel were taken off the bookshelves after it was found that the Nehru dynasty was unhappy about the portrayal of India's first prime minister in the novel. Copies of the novel went out of Mumbai's bookshelves too since Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray could not stomach Rushdie describing him as a frog. Even now, Rushdie's books hardly find a place in India's many libraries including those run by the British Council.

The case of 37-year-old Taslima Nasreen, a professional doctor of Bangla Desh, has many similarities and differences. Her newspaper columns and novel *Lajja*, published in 1994, had attacked male chauvinism and fanaticism. The English translation of her novel's title, *Shame*, is the same as that of Rushdie's novel on Pakistan, but the comparison ends there.

Whereas Rushdie had written a brilliant myth meditating on the state-of-affairs in an imaginary country Q similar to the real Pakistan, *Lajja* was a straightforward attempt by a mediocre writer to portray the life of minorities in Bangla Desh. In any case, Islamic fanatics turned angry saying that the novel was blasphemous. The Islamic media watched in horror as a gleeful Bharatiya Janata Party got the copies of *Shame* distributed in India. The Islamic media grew more furious when she criticised the Qoran in an interview lapped up by the Calcutta-based daily, *Statesman*. Hence, Taslima had no option but to secretly flee the country in the wake of some groups demanding a death sentence against her.

It was stated that the then Khaleda Zia regime had let her flee with the help of some Western embassies.

Having spent the good part of her exile in Sweden, Germany and the United States, Taslima initially gave lectures, but was soon condemned to a life of obscurity, since she failed to write anymore or improve her writing style. She was forced to return home on September 14 by a Bangla Desh Biman flight under the name "Nasreen T Miss". Her mother, who had been living with her at New York, was suffering from cancer and Taslima made the return trip for her mother's sake. Some fellow passengers including the editor of a Dhaka-based newspaper had chatted

with her. Ironically, Taslima used a burkha (veil), the sign of oppression of women in the Islamic society, to get past the immigration authorities at the Dhaka airport!

The legal position vis-a-vis Taslima is very complicated. She had been hiding ever since her return, but the Dhaka district magistrate court issued an arrest warrant against her on September 24 and ordered attachment of her property. These orders may force Taslima to either face trial in the blasphemy case or leave the country again. The Islamic fanatics perceive her return as a defeat for their rigid ideology and are crying for her blood, egged on by fundamentalist newspapers. Exile has taken its toll on Taslima. She no longer writes but has the simple urge to live with her parents in her homeland, but the fundamentalists wouldn't let her do it. Though the Bangla Desh government takes the official position that she is free to live in the country, it is not clear whether it would come to her rescue. Very few organisations have defended her case and asked the government to take action against the rabble-rousing fundamentalists. And the ruling Awami League of Sheikh Hasina and the opposition Bangladesh National Party of Khaleda Zia have nothing to state on the sad affair.

Freedom of expression, of whatever kind, is one's birthright and it goes along with the interior commitment to stand up against all odds.

Nevertheless, this expression has to be creative in form and content as well, in order to sustain itself through space and time. It is here that Rushdie excels, despite his abortive attempt to come to reconciliation.

And it is here that Taslima has failed, despite her strong commitment to fight fanaticism.

In any case, the question arises as to what kind of reconciliation is on. It is to be seen whether the British-Iranian agreement would provide the much-needed space for Rushdie to conduct his affairs as anyone else. It is also to be seen whether Taslima makes yet another attempt to flee Bangla Desh and write something deeper than her sensational first novel; or whether she stays back and comes to any kind of agreement with the Bangla Desh government in exchange for the latter's control of the fanatics.

We have two following cases of failed reconciliations from the subcontinent for our consideration and choice:

The Bombay-based painter Huss-ein has been targetted by the Shiv Sena and

Sangh Parivar organisations like the Bajrang Dal for his depiction of a nude Sita in a painting which he had done two decades ago. The Sangh Parivar has been gunning for the painter because he is a Muslim by birth.

Hussein resisted for a while, and despite support from a lot of groups and parties including the Left, succumbed to a reconciliation with the ruling Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. This is because he wants to make a film with Madhuri Dixit, his favourite actress, and the entire filmdom is at the beck and call of the Shiv Sena chief, Bal Thackeray. The result is that the genuine artists who still support Hussein find him embarrassing!

All this is straight from Rushdie's novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh!*

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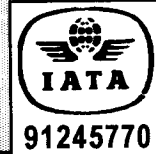
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Jayalalitha Isolated from Allies

T.N.Gopalan

The Vajpayee government at the Centre has survived yet another crisis. AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha has retired to the sidelines without delivering the much threatened knock-out blow.

The coalition looks more precariously perched than ever, but ironically so is Jayalalitha herself. If observers do not expect the BJP front to last beyond say the next six months, they also believe the 47-year-old Jayalalitha Jayaram has become more vulnerable. She could indeed succeed in toppling Vajpayee, after all, at the very least she has 19 MPs by her side and the Congress could be tempted to take her help too, however hazardous such a proposition could prove for it in the long run.

But a fresh coalition would prove even more short-lived than that of the BJP's and mid-term elections would become inevitable. And in such an eventuality Jayalalitha's own career could be in peril, for she now stands completely isolated. The Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) and even Vazhapadi K.Ramamurthy leading a party with little base, called the Thamizhaga Rajiv Congress (TRC), have unequivocally declared that whatever Jayalalitha's own preferences or compulsions might be, they would back the BJP Government unconditionally.

In the words of the lackey-turned-rebel Vazhapadi Ramamurthy who holds the lucrative Petroleum ministry in the Vajpayee cabinet, "The people will not forgive those who topple the BJP Government. Whatever the contingencies, we should ensure that it runs its full term of five years."

Barring that totally discredited Subramaniam Swamy, Jayalalitha is all alone in state politics. Back to square one again like when two years ago when she had been disgraced in the general elections and left to lick her wounds all alone in her Poes Garden residence. Nowhere was her total isolation more tellingly stressed than during the 90th birth anniversary of the DMK's founder Anna. The MDMK organised a huge rally in the state capital on Sep.15 and in which most leaders of the BJP alliance including Prime Minister Vajpayee, Home Minister Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes, Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and

Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal took part. And not just them even those from Tamil Nadu including PMK leader Dr.Ramdoss and Vazhapadi Ramamurthy risked her wrath to attend the public meeting on the sands of the marina. The only conspicuous and pathetic absentee was Jayalalitha who went off to Trichy to have her own show in a fit of pique.

To quote a Tamil proverb, hiding a comb does not prevent a marriage from taking place. And Jaya's absence would not quell the enthusiasm of those assembled. Though Vazhapadi and Ramdos paid obeisance to her, calling her leader of the front in the state and George Fernandes said it was sad that she could not make it, others did not seem to mind.

And worse Vajpayee and Advani thundered there was no way the Centre was going to be coerced into dismissing any state Government under pressure - that they did a somersault in the case of Bihar barely a couple of weeks later is a different story. Turning a knife in the imperious Jaya's wound, Vajpayee announced in due deference to the MDMK's request, he would sanction the much delayed Sethusamudram project.

At the very same time, away in Trichy, away from the national media glare, Jayalalitha was cursing Advani for suffering from "selective amnesia" (in failing to fulfill his "electoral promise" to dismiss the state Government) and threatening her allies with nemesis for using the AIADMK as a ladder only to kick it away after they achieved their objectives. But she cut short her stay there and rushed back to Chennai. She reportedly sent desperate messages to Vajpayee to come over to the Poes Garden for a breakfast the next morning. But the Prime Minister would not oblige and deputed George Fernandes instead. That proved a very sobering exercise for her. When subsequently the Union Cabinet decided to recommend to the president the imposition of the President's Rule in Bihar she addressed a press conference merely to reiterate her demand for an encore in Tamil Nadu and studiously refrained from striking any provocative postures.

At the same time when reminded of her caustic remarks against Sonia Gandhi, she chided the media for trying to divert her attention away from the issue

before her and even denied having made any nasty comments against the Congress President. That was perhaps yet another indication she was keeping her options open still. A week later the self-proclaimed emissary of Sonia, Mani Shankara Iyer did confirm that he had indeed been privileged to have had an audience with the Poes Garden queen, though he would not divulge any details. That apart it was clear that she had decided to swallow the humble pie and not to rock the boat in her own interest.

The MDMK rally itself had come in the backdrop of the fiasco on the cauvery front for her.

With the Supreme Court's warning against any further adjournment on a case filed by Tamil Nadu demanding implementation of the interim award of the Tribunal set up to adjudicate on the issue of sharing the Cauvery water, the Centre succeeded in prevailing upon Karnataka to accept the award of 205 TMC of water and agree to the setting up of an authority to oversee the implementation of the award and a committee of officials to monitor the water release.

Now while there is nothing historic about the accord as made out by the BJP lobby, it does represent a step forward in that Karnataka which had all along been steadfastly rejecting the interim award has come round to accepting it, at least on paper. And this gives some hope that the final award from the Tribunal which could hike the quantum of water for Tamil Nadu to some extent would also be accepted though after some sabre-rattling and breast-beating.

But how could Jayalalitha keep quiet when Vajpayee and Karunanidhi walk away with all the kudos for the accord? She promptly issued a statement along with her allies rejecting the award, complaining that Tamil Nadu has been let down and that there is no effective mechanism to work out remedial measures if Karnataka fails to honour the weekly water release schedule - as laid down by the Tribunal - which is crucial for the short-term Kuruvai crop. The main Samba crop is generally taken care of by the North East monsoon.

While what she says is right in a way, the fact also remains that under the circumstances nothing better could be expected. Certainly it could prove counter-productive to arm-twist Karnataka too very much. The chauvinist lobby over there is becoming more and more volatile, aggressive and violent by the day. One cannot forget the atrocities unleashed on the Tamils there in 1992 when the Centre gazetted the interim award.

But such things do not matter to a

short-sighted Jayalalitha who felt cheated off that Karunanidhi had been allowed to go one up on her. When she has already been chafing under the BJP's refusal to countenance her demand for the dismissal of the Karunanidhi, his 'victory' on Cauvery made her angrier still.

She warned the Centre of "disastrous consequences" if it did not notify an earlier scheme which had proposed to empower the Cauvery River Authority with sweeping powers instead of the diluted compromise version. While her allies saw no harm in playing ball in order to score some points against Karunanidhi, they told her point blank that they would not be with her if she chooses to withdraw her support to the Centre. The latter could not concede Jayalalitha's demand and went ahead with the revised formulation. Disappointed that her allies were letting her down, she was willing to swallow the "insult" provided the BJP came up with some placatory gestures. There were talks and talks to ease the situation and her lieutenants hinted that the withdrawal idea was being put in the backburner yet again.

Realising that their five-month performance has been nothing much to speak of and a Congress under Sonia could do much better now in any mid-term elections, the BJP high command decided to swallow all the humiliations heaped by their truculent ally and continue to accept her support. What concessions they have offered in return is not clear, though it is known that the Income Tax investigations against her have slowed down.

Many wonder, "What is she up to? What does she want? Is she not in danger of losing her popularity by forcing unwanted crises on an already suffering nation again and again? How much more of her does she think will the BJP stand and the Tamil electorate before calling her bluff and put an end to the charade?" On the face of it there cannot be any rational explanation for her outrageous behaviour. When she and her allies scored a surprise victory in the Lok Sabha polls, it was a chance of a life-time for her to rehabilitate her devastated image and consolidate her base by doing the right thing for Tamil Nadu, by judiciously using her clout over the Centre, one would have thought.

But she has been racing against time to squander whatever goodwill is left for her and destroy for good the golden opportunities that come her way.

There are indeed two dominant, if slightly contradictory, traits in her character. On the one hand she could be atrociously mercurial, doing the most unexpected thing at the most unexpected time, in a fit of whimsy or sheer arrogance. But

on the other she could be forbiddingly dogged, never giving up till she achieves what she wants.

If because of her unpredictable temper, vaulting ambitions, all-or-nothing demands, she had alienated MGR towards the end of his life, she could still position herself at the head of his dead body when it was lying in state and thus manage to be seen as the most important person in the late leader's life.

If success went to her head and she ruined it all in 1996, she could still bend over backwards and forge an alliance with her severest critics and turn the tables on the DMK-TMC combine 20 months later.

There is perhaps a method in her madness. When she is in danger of toppling over, she checks herself, takes whatever corrective measures appeal to her instincts and comes on top of the situation. And once back in command, she indulges herself to her heart's content till the next crisis. Through it all she is guided by a firm belief in her hold over her cadres, on that score she does seem to be right.

MGR had succeeded in whipping up and maintaining a strong aversion to his friend-turned-foe Karunanidhi among a significant section of the electorate - all Jayalalitha's fulminations against the DMK and over the Cauvery should be seen as an attempt to emulate her mentor in this regard.

Besides she also wants a role in the decision-making process at the centre, some public acknowledgement that she is respected as the most important ally of the BJP. Her entire political career hinges on her image as the most sought after and most feared leader. She is yet to realise that she had played her aces too very early in the game, even before it started in fact, and that when Vajpayee asked her to get lost on the issue of the induction of Subramaniam Swamy the message was clear - the BJP won't allow itself to be pushed beyond a point.

Perhaps she does realise it too well and it is the bitterness caused by the humiliating awareness that these days even for small crumbs she has to cry hoarse that makes her blow hot and cold all the time.

Of course once the fall-back option, a new government, becomes a possibility, she would withdraw her support since dislodging Karunanidhi and forcing fresh assembly elections remain her top priority. Though her allies seem to demur, except of course that rootless wonder Subramaniam Swamy, scared as they are what would happen in the next elections, more so, if they are seen as being caused by Jayalalitha herself.

An indication of the confusion in their minds is that their repeated assertion that they continue to remain with the AIADMK front even though for their own reasons they have decided not to withdraw support to the BJP. But where will they go if dumped by Jayalalitha? Going it alone would be disastrous for both the PMK and the MDMK, not to speak of Vazhapadi Ramamurthy. Not that prospects are any better for Jayalalitha herself. Even if an alliance between the AIADMK and the Congress does come about, that might not mean much for her. Like in the case of the BJP, her other allies and she have to swim or sink together.

But ask Sedapatti R. Muthiah, leader of the AIADMK Parliamentary group, on how the party feels about it all. "Amma is party and her mood is party's mood. We all implicitly trust that whatever she does will be in the interest of the party. Period."

In patronage politics moving upwards is what matters, whether in power or out of it. Ideology is virtually non-existent. Anyone who rakes in votes tends to be seen as the saviour whatever his or her personal qualities. And through all her constant muscle-flexing she is precisely seeking to ensure that she keeps raking in votes by overawing both her cadres and the people, what with Fernandeses and Mahajans rushing to her residence and cameramen milling around to freeze the scene for posterity. "Amma is powerful, she cannot be taken for granted," such are the comments one hears from the volunteers hanging around. Whether people too are similarly impressed it will take a while to see.

In 1996 she laid too much store by the image politics and came a cropper. Her victory two years later came after she had humbled herself a lot. What will happen now with all the current ruckus? She could go grievously wrong yet again, and this time round there might be no recovery at all.

Meantime the massive crowds that the DMK mobilised for its convention in Tirunelveli in September, much more than what the MDMK had for its Chennai rally or the AIADMK itself at Tirunelveli on the eve of the elections, went to show that easily it was the biggest party in the state. Besides Karunanidhi set at rest all speculations that he could cast his lot with the BJP if Jayalalitha opted out by firmly stating that as a secular Dravidian party there was no way it could do so. A few days later he even seemed to opt for a third front as opposed to the Congress and the BJP and would not even mind backing a Congress-led coalition in the larger interests of secularism. ●

DR W ROBERT HOLMES

Dr W Robert Holmes, missionary, educator, sportsman and author departed from his mortal sojourn Thursday 3 September, following a stroke he suffered a few days earlier in Lake George, New York. During the years 1947-60, apart for two years at Wheaton College, he was a missionary attached to Jaffna College, Vaddukoddai, Sri Lanka. He also served in various capacities in the US and as director of the India Programme for the University of Wisconsin and later headed the Fulbright Foundation for India for four years. In July, he celebrated his 82nd birthday.

On his retirement from the Schenectady Community College in 1978, he returned to Sri Lanka for two years to write JAFFNA 1980, a significant and momentous book on the Tamils as they were for decades, if not centuries, until the terrible tragedy of 1983. Jaffna will never ever be the same and Dr Holmes' contribution captured in time the life of the peninsular people, their habits, age-old customs, complexities, fears, prejudices, priorities and aspirations. No other person has done a study of this nature with such unique intimacy, love and considerable concern for this community.

In JAFFNA 1980 with his penchant for details and a positive attitude to life in which peace and friendship were determinant factors in whatever he decided and embarked on, Bob Holmes portrayed the Tamil community as he saw it for posterity. Generations to come, wherever they are, will appreciate and value this study.

Bob Holmes has been keeping regularly in touch with his many friends from

various parts of the world and among his passionate concerns in recent years was Sri Lanka's ethnic nightmare. Committed to responsible citizenship, genuine love, ethical values and his spiritual convictions, violence of any kind was anathema to him.

He drew his enormous hope, strength and inspiration from the message of the gospels and his unshaken faith and convictions. His outreach was empathetic and responsive.

There were no half measures in whatever he undertook whether in his own Lake George Assembly Point neighbourhood or with his Glens Falls congregation and the various boards and committees he served. He was fully targeted on peace, progress and understanding and saw his hope for humanity in the leadership of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. His spiritual life was nourished by grace, a force he believed was so amazing that no human power can hold it in bondage.

He never hesitated to help and guide his dear ones and friends from various cultures and all walks of life whenever they needed his help and counselling or even in the sharing of views and ideas. A man of great wisdom, his observations and opinions came readily and spontaneously with the added bonus of his tremendous wit and mirthful and meaningful anecdotes.

There was ease and effortlessness in his expressions and depth and foresight in his leadership. Specially privileged in this respect, apart from his own family and those he worked or interacted with in the United States and India, were the alumni of Jaffna College and the mem-

bers of Sri Lanka's Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India.

He was the last and certainly among the best of the American missionaries who went to Sri Lanka since 1816. On completion of his assignment in Sri Lanka, Bob Holmes became a powerful link between Jaffna College in Sri Lanka and the Jaffna College Board of Trustees in the USA. He understood the Jaffnese as no other individual in modern times; he loved them, cared for them and considered himself very much part of them.

He was, to the very end of his life, convinced that peace with dignity and honour among all peoples in Sri Lanka was well within reach and this was very much part of his global vision of peace and non-violence among peoples and nations.

I feel very privileged to offer this testimony to Bob Holmes. He was my guru and friend for almost fifty years and to whom I have rushed often, at times like a son to his father. He has never failed me. In consequence, my life is richer; there are many like me who have been touched by the faith and convictions of Dr Walter Robert Holmes.

In expressing these sentiments, I must acknowledge my gratitude to his family for sharing one so dear to them with me, my family, my school, my church and my community, an appreciation that would be responded and re-echoed wholeheartedly by the hundreds who have known him through the years. He was a very dear friend.

Victor Karunairajan

[Richards "Victor" Karunairajan, an active alumnus of Jaffna College and parents leader of the school during the 1970s, served on the Jaffna College Board of Directors as the Alumni Representative before fleeing Sri Lanka with his children in 1983.]

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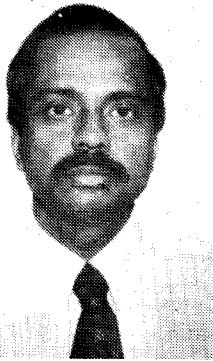
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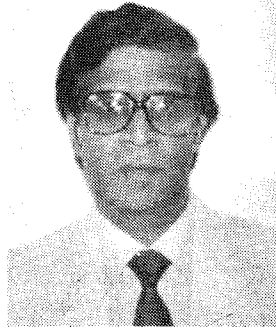
Mr. Pararajasinghan Vasanthakumar (48) FCA (Sri Lanka), CPA (USA), formerly of Kanesalingam & Co., (Sri Lanka), Rothmans (Zambia) and Auditor-General (Papua New Guinea); dearly beloved husband of Savitri; loving father of Prasanthi (McMaster University, Canada) and Ashwini (Turner Fenton Secondary School); son of the late Mr. & Mrs. T.C. Pararajasingham (Alaveddy South); son-in-law of Dr. P. and Mrs. S. Sivasothy (UK); brother of Thirugnanasampanther (UK) Thambipillai (Botswana), late Ramanathan (New Zealand), Natkunasigam (Sri Lanka), Saraswathy (Zambia), Sivapathasundram (Sri Lanka), Sivakumar (USA) and Ramani (UK) passed away peacefully in Canada on 24.09.98 and was cremated on 26.09.98.

His family wishes to thank all those who helped them during his illness, attended the funeral, paid floral tributes, sent messages of condolence and

shared in their grief. - 5038 Heritage Hills Blvd, Mississauga, Ontario L5R 1V5, Canada. Telephone 905 712 1583.

IN MEMORIAM

First Death Anniversary



Born: 23.5.43 Called to Rest: 18.10.97

In loving memory of **Dr. Rasi-ah Dharmaindra**, General Practitioner in New Cross, London and Medical Officer at Lewisham.

He was an extremely kind and competent doctor, who worked all over the south-east

and whose diagnostic skills were legendary. He was a popular medical practitioner due to his unequivocal devotion and commitment to all his patients.

As an Asian general practitioner who experienced prejudice in every area of life including his occupation, he was always very keen to help those who were vulnerable and less fortunate, such as the immigrant community in New Cross.

He was a dedicated husband and father and went to great lengths to ensure that his children had the best education possible and was always keen to emphasise the importance of a good education.

He had very little spare time for hobbies but he loved tennis and never missed Wimbledon. He also enjoyed reading and loved gardening and made it a point every year to visit Kew and Wisley. He will be greatly missed by anyone who was fortunate enough to meet him, his friends, his patients and most of all his wife Beatrice, his son Bernard and his daughter Angeline. - 1 Nightingale Road, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1BG.

IN MEMORIAM

First Death Anniversary of



Mrs. Thayaladevi Paramapathy who passed away on 20th October 1997.

We Thank & Praise God, for our mother who was a Precious & a Perfect gift to all of us.

Remembered with Love and Affection by
Her children

Arunthathy, Ajitkumar, Ajanthakumar & Sushithra
Sons-in-law Gnanarajan & Sugunarajan
Daughters-in-law Anushya & Dhakshini
Grandchildren Anuja, Arjun, Sujeyka & Tanya.

Mrs. A.S. Sugunaraja.

IN MEMORIAM

Lovingly Remembered on the 9th Anniversary of the Passing Away of



Daniel Selvarajah Sanders, Ph.D., ACSW,
Sept. 28, 1928 - Oct. 14, 1989

Internationally known as a leader in efforts to achieve world peace, human rights and social justice. Daniel S. Sanders was Dean, Professor and Director of International Programs University of Hawaii School of Social Work, Honolulu, Hawaii USA, from 1971-1986; Dean, Professor and Director of the Center for Study of International Social Welfare Policies and Services, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work USA from 1986-1989.

A founder and First President, Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development USA from 1980-1989.

The Eighth Annual Daniel Selvarajah Sanders Peace, Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture - Mrs. LaDonna Harris, Founder and President (Native American Indians) Americans for Indian Opportunity, New Mexico, gave the memorial lecture on April 14, 1998 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. Her subject was **TRIBAL AMERICA AT THE CROSSROADS: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL AUTONOMY WITHIN LARGER GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS.**

The Fifth Biennial Daniel Selvarajah Sanders Peace, Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture was given at the Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development (IUCISD) Biennial Conference in Giza, Egypt on July 2, 1998. The speaker was Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Vice President, Special Programs, The World Bank, Washington D.C., USA. He delivered the lecture based on **POVERTY, NGOs and DEVELOPMENT: Global Dimensions and New Directions.**

The University of Hawaii School of Social Work awarded the first Daniel Selvarajah Sanders Doctoral Award for International Social Work to Kyoko Heberle from Japan August 3, 1998, for her second year of study in the Ph.D. program in International Social Work at the University of Hawaii, USA.

With our love to Rajan.

Chelvathy Sanders, Sanders/Niles families - Selvaranee, Chandraranee, Chandran and Mangai, Balan and Susila; Ariam & Sushila, Alagan and Thavayogam; Augusta, nieces and nephews. - 1807 Vancouver Place, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822 USA.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 25 5.30pm. Tamil Orphans Trust presents Music Concert by Innisai Maamani Nithyasree Mahadevan from Tamil Nadu at Winston Churchill Hall, Pinn Way, Ruislip, Middx. Tel: 0181 908 1101/767 3445.

Oct. 31 6.45pm above at Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middx.

Oct. 31 6.30pm SCOT presents Karthigai Theepangal - a recital of popular film songs by singers Kanacuyil Bharathi, Anarida Manoharan, & Sripathy and Rainbow singers at Copland Community School Hall, Cecil Ave., Wembley, Tel: 0181 868 2517/904 9227.

Nov. 1 7.30pm Michael Ondaatje, Booker Prize Co-winner; Author, 'English Patient' (on which the film with the same name is based) reads from his poetry, Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall. There are three others reading from their poetry. Tel: 0171 960 4242; Pirathosam; Feast of Solemnity - All Saints.

Nov. 3 Full Moon.

Nov. 5 Karthikai.

Nov 6 Iypasi Velli (3).

Nov. 7 5.00pm Skanda Varodaya Old Students Association AGM, Dinner & Variety Entertainment. (Please see advertisement); Sankadakara Chathurthi; South London Tamil Welfare Groups (SLTWG) Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Nov. 10 Feast of St. Leo The

Great.

Nov. 11 Feast of St. Martin.

Nov. 13 Iypasi Velli (last).

Nov. 14 Krishna Ekathasi; SLTWG Refugee Week Celebrations. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Nov. 16 Pirathosam; Feast of St. Margaret of Scotland.

Nov. 17 Feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

Nov. 18 Amavasai.

Nov. 21 6.30pm Shruthi Laya Shangham presents Vocal Recital by Sri T.N. Seshagopalan from India at Walthamstow Assembly Hall, Forest Road, London E17. Tel: 0181 778 0633/903 3468/505 4725; Feast of Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Nov. 22 Chathurthi; Feast of Solemnity of Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Nov. 23 Karthikai Somavaram (1).

Nov. 24 Sashti.

Nov. 29 Ekathasi; First Sunday of Advent.

Nov. 30 Karthikai Somavaram (2).

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

Nov. 21 6.30pm Tamil Performing Arts Society celebrating its 20th Anniversary presents 'Nadaga Vizha'. Tel: 0181 459 4335/470 7883.

Nov. 28 6.00pm Bharatanatyam by Nina Rajarani & Gita Bhatia.

Educational Fund For Jaffnese in Malaysia

The T. Kandiah M.B.E. Educational Fund to help needy students of the Jaffnese community in Malaysia was launched recently. The 108,000 Malaysian dollar fund which will be managed by the prestigious Jaffnese Co-operative Society (JCS) received a further donation of 38,000 Malayan dollars from the Kandiah family at a ceremony at the Sri Sithi Vinayagar Temple in Petalin Jaya. The members of the family propose to swell the fund and help deserving children to pursue higher studies. The applicants who must be JCS members or their children are eligible to receive 3000 Malaysian dollars a year for a maximum of three years. At the same ceremony, 12 students who had achieved high grades in the UPSR, PMR and SPM examinations held last year received cash prizes.

The benefactor Kandiah after whom the fund is named went to Malaysia from Jaffna in 1916, when he was 16, completed his education in Kuala Lumpur, joined government service in 1919 and retired in 1955 after rising up to the post of a financial assistant. In 1954 he was made an M.B.E. in recognition of his meritorious service with the government. He passed away in 1982 after rendering long and altruistic services to the community.

S.C.O.T. Services to the Community - September 97 to August 98

The Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking People has provided the following funds for relief and rehabilitation in North and East Sri Lanka.

	£
1. Jeevajothy Childrens' Home, Batticaloa - Cultural Classes & Electric Motor	850
2. Vipulananda Students' Orphanage, Akkaraipattu - Rice for 30 children for a year and construction of toilet	750
3. Lilies of The Field - Jesuits, Batticaloa - Vocational training in welding, motor mechanism, sewing, handicrafts	500
4. Vivekananda Welfare Organisation, Thiruppallugamam - Purchase of water pump for cultivation	800
5. Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Batticaloa - Maintenance of 216 children in 3 homes for a year	1500
6. Thirugnanasampanthar Kurukulam, Kaluwancikudy - Construction of 4 lavatories for 30 orphans	900
Total for Batticaloa Region	5,300
7. Sri Ramakrishna Sarada Seva Ashram, Pt. Pedro - Maintenance of 100 children and literacy drive in over 30 schools	1500
8. Jaffna General Hospital Development Association - Allowance for 2 medical students for 2 years to ease heavy workload	1200
9. People's Welfare Organisation, Kopay - Vocational training in typing, shorthand, sewing etc	800
10. Grace Home for Children, Chettikulam - care of 10 orphans	500
11. Sri Durga Devi Devasthanam, Tellippallai - Betterment of destitute women	1000
12. Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, Jaffna - Primary Health Care in 7 villages co-funded with League of Friends of University of Jaffna	2500
13. Annai Illam, Kilinochchi - Psychological support and counselling for war victims	1000
14. Centre for Women & Development, Vannarponnai - Nutritional programme for pregnant mothers and children under 5	500
15. Jaffna University Welfare Association - Welfare of Students in general	1000
16. Jaffna University Scholarship Fund - Donation made by Mrs. Kumaraguru of Canada in memory of her brother late Mr. C. Balachandran	1000
Total for Jaffna Region	11,000
17. Hindu Samaya Abhivritti Sabha, Trincomalee - Vocational Training in masonry, carpentry, sewing, educational tools, repair of schools & libraries etc	3100
18. Sri Shanmuga Trust, Trincomalee - Running of Boys' & Girls' Homes	1000
19. Trincomalee District Development Fund, Trincomalee - Urgent medical relief	500
20. Sri Lanka Federation of Young Men's Hindu Association, Trincomalee - Urgent medical relief in Kalmunai	750
21. Trincomalee District Young Men's Hindu Association, - Allowance for 31 pre-school teachers for 1 year	900
22. Eastern Rehabilitation Organisation, Trincomalee - Urgent relief	500
23. Trincomalee District Refugee Welfare Organisation - Uniforms and books for 19 students from O/L upwards	1000
Total for Trincomalee Region	7750
Grant Total for North & East Sri Lanka for 1997/98	24,050

Many other organisations have appealed for assistance and the General Council could not support them due to lack of funds. The Council monitors the performance of the beneficiaries at regular intervals. SCOT seeks the assistance of its members, supporters and well wishers to meet the additional demands on its funds. For further details please contact The Project Officer, SCOT, 107 Coleman Court, Kimber Road, London SW18 4PB. Tel: 0181 870 9897 or Internet : www.bigfoot.com/~scot.tamil or e-mail : scot.tamil@bigfoot.com.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Tamil Senior Citizens' Association: The Seventh Annual General Meeting of the association was held on 29.8.98 at the St. Dominic Church Hall, in Flemington in Sydney. Over 200 members attended the meeting and the following office-bearers were elected. **President:** Col. V. Ramanathan, **Vice-President:** Mr. A.N. Jeyadeva, **Secretary:** Mr. L.S.C. Canagasingam, **Asst. Secretary:** Mr. S. Vadivethpillai, **Treasurer:** Mr. A. Venkataraman, **Asst. Treasurer:** Mr. K. Sivagnanam, **Executive Committee:** Messrs V. Gunaratnam, N. Murugesu, S. Piravanathan, Dr. P. Poologasingam, Mr. K. Puvanapooshanam, Mrs. Satkunananda, Mr. S. Tharmapalan and

Mrs. K. Velsamy.

The association has a membership of 454, all of whom are over 55 years of age. It has a Tamil Senior Citizens' Housing Co-operative under its auspices to house older persons. A housing complex to suit senior citizens has been constructed in Enfield to accommodate seven households. The association meets every Thursday and a larger meeting is held every fourth Thursday, at which arrangements are made for a guest speaker in Tamil followed by a fellowship lunch.

The association celebrates all the important Hindu and Christian festivals. Australia Day is celebrated with a stall at Strathfield Park, serving Tamil food items prepared by the members. Regular day excursions are offered to members and a newsletter is

published quarterly and circulated among all the members.

Indian Classical Dance Concert: The Eelam Tamil Association of Sydney presented an evening of Indian Classical Dances on 12.09.98. The dancers were pupils of Mrs. Shanti Rajendran, Director of The Nrithakshetra School of Indian Classical Dance of Melbourne. The dancers delighted the packed house and the audience showed their appreciation with loud applause. The concert was in aid of the Tamil Rehabilitation Projects in Sri Lanka.

Navarathiri Concert: The Students of Smt Jeyalaxmy Kandiah of The Natanalaya School of Dance presented a concert on 3.10.98 at Bankstown Town

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Continued from page 32

Hall, Sydney to celebrate Navarathiri. The Chief Guest, Dr. Balasubramaniam complimented Smt Kandiah on the yeoman service rendered by her to promote Indian Dance in Sydney since her arrival there in 1990. He wished her students the very best in the future.

The first dance item was dedicated to Lord Ganapathy. This was followed by Pushpanjali, Alarippu, Natesha Kauthavam, Jateeswaram, Sabdam, Varnam, Thillana and finally Navarasa Nayaki depicting the nine emotions. The concert which was enjoyed by all ended with a vote of thanks by Dharani Meenakshisundaram and Mangalam. The other musicians who took part in the concert were Smt Gayathri Kumaraswamy (Vocal), Smt Ketheeswary Paheerathan (Vocal), Sri Balasri Rasiyah (miruthangam), Sri Kopathidas Narayanadas (Violin), Smt Poornima Nagaraj (Veena) and Sri Kishan Jeyendran. Nattuvangam was by Smt Jayalaxmy Kandiah.

Jaffna Central College Old Students' Association Annual Dinner Dance was held on 4.10.98 at North Rocks Community Centre, Sydney. The proceedings began with the singing of the college song. The president of the association Dr. B. Balakrishnan welcomed the guests and thanked the committee for the excellent arrangements made. He recounted the achievements of Centalites.

Mr. T. Kanagarajah presented his poem 'A Prayer for Peace'. This was followed by a dance by Naden Nadeswaran. The gathering was entertained to a recital of Tamil songs by a group of old boys led by Mr. N. Narendran. This was greatly appreciated by the audience.

The sumptuous dinner was followed by a vote of thanks by Dr. E.S. Seelan. Soon afterwards the dance music began to the great joy of the younger people present and dancing continued till late in the night.

Sale of Christmas Cards to Help Refugees

Fully coloured Christmas cards in five different designs are already on sale by the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation. A pack of ten cards comprising two of each design costs only £2.50. The cards are well crafted and although reasonably large, attract a world wide overseas postage of only 43 pence. The cards include a reproduction of the world famous painting - The Adoration of the Magi by Hugo van der Goes (c1440-82). The themes stressed are those of peace, harmony and goodwill. Also emphasised is the December exodus from the peninsula and the difficulties experienced by the people as they live their lives in the jungles under the trees or in tiny makeshift hovels. The pack is a good buy and a number of agents all over the UK and overseas are handling the sales. It may also be obtained from T.R.O. at 79 Hoe Street, Walthamstow, London E17

4SA. Tel: 0181 520 5876.

Vembadi Old Girls Association (UK)

Our greetings to our old girls, well wishers and friends. Although the active members are few in number, we work hard and keep our college flag flying. We had a very successful Dinner-Dance on 18th April 1998, but could not get enough players to take part, as in the past, in the Tamil Schools Net Ball Tournament held in August 98. We are however planning to hold the Annual Christmas Dinner-Dance on 12th December at Manor Park Hall, Malden Road, New Malden, Surrey. We hope that all Vembadiites, well wishers and friends will make an all out effort to make this function, a well attended event. Those interested please telephone 0181 770 1067 (Arasy), 01777 708727 (Sivambhi) or 0181 398 6078 (myself).

Vimala Thyagarajah,
President.

Sherene's Brilliant Violin Arangetram



Guru Smt Rudrani Balakrishnan presented her ninth Arangetram on 12th September 1998 at the Bourne Hall, Ewell, Surrey. This time it was Sherene, thirteen year old daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Thananjayarajasingam of Downlands Road, Purley, Surrey and student at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple, Wimbledon.

It was a brilliant arangetram and Sherene kept the audience spell bound from beginning to end. The programme commenced with the Varnam, Viribhoni in Bhairavi raga followed by Sri maha ganapathy, Entharo mahanu bavulu, Darini telusukonti, Himagiri to mention a few. The guests of honour Sangeetha Vidwans Saraswathy Packiarajah, Smt Padmini Gunaseelan and Isai Vani Nageswari Brahmananda praised the guru Smt Rudrani for her excellent teaching and the sishya Sherene for her flawless performance. They commented that the thirteen year old played the violin with bhava, understanding the intricacies of the ragas which is very commendable for a child growing up in a different

cultural background. The ragam-thanam-pallavi in kambhoji raga set to kanda thiriputa tala was the highlight of Sherene's arangetram. Sherene wove into the various ragas with ease bringing out their characteristic bhavas. Her sense of rhythm was impeccable. Violin is a very difficult instrument to handle: to perfect the technique and achieve a high standard at thirteen is very remarkable. Congratulations to the guru and her sishya for the wonderful performance.

The accompanists were Sri Muttu Sivarajah on the Mridangam, Sri Gananathan on the Ghatam and Sri Sithamparanathan on Morsing.

Kalpana.

Kokuvil Hindu College Old Students' Association (UK) Branch

The 6th Annual General meeting of the Kokuvil Hindu College Old Students' Association (UK Branch) took place on 27.9.98 at Coston Primary School Hall, Greenford. The Chief Guest was Dr. (Mrs.) Citra Velaudapillai who graced the occasion with her husband Dr. E. Velauthapillai. The following office-bearers were elected for the ensuing year.

President: Mr. K. Kanagasundaram, **Vice-Presidents:** Mr. K. Kanthapillai, Dr. P. Arumugarasah, Mr. S. Sivagnanasegeram, **Secretary:** Mr. S. Selvaratnam, **Asst. Secretary:** Mr. V. Tharmarajah, **Treasurer:** Mr. P. Anandasivadas, **Asst. Treasurer:** Mr. K. Nithiyanthan, **Sports Secretary:** Mr. A. Prabharan, **Asst. Sports Secretary:** Mrs. S. Pushparajah, **Committee Members:** Messers N. Nanthagopan, K. Kugathanan, R. Ratnakumar, V. Velthasan, Charles, G. Manoharan, S. Srirajan, Mrs. P. Thevarajah and Mrs. G. Balasubramaniam. **Auditor:** Mr. S. K. Chetti.

The event concluded with a veena recital by Selvi Karthiga Gengatharan and Selvan Haribrndavan Sivanesan accompanied by Selvan Pirashanna Thevarajan on mirthangam and Selvan Pryatharshen Thevarajan on Gengira.

Past Copies of Tamil Times

Past copies of Tamil Times are available for sale in 16 volumes, the present series being volume 17. The price of each volume is £25 by surface mail. The price for each volume in other currencies is US\$45/Can\$50/Aus\$55. Australian dollar cheques should be drawn on Australian Banks only. Those interested are requested to send a cheque/draft/money order in favour of Tamil Times Ltd to:

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Skanda Varodaya College Old Students Association (UK) Branch

13th Annual Reunion Dinner, A.G.M. and Variety Entertainment

North England Tamil Friends will present scintillating light songs, "Rammiya Ragangal" and delight the audience with the main entertainment.

Croydon Tamil Drama Group will present the hilarious comedy "Ponnu Parka Maappillai Vanthar" and draw roars of laughter.

On Saturday 7th November 1998 at 5p.m.
at Wembley High School Hall, East Lane,
Wembley, Middx.

Tickets: **Family** (2 Adults and 2 children under 12) - £12
Adult - £5 **Children** under 12 - £2

The Annual General Meeting will be held at 5pm sharp and the variety entertainment and dinner will follow.

We look forward to the presence of all past students, their families, friends and all well-wishers of the College on this important annual occasion.

A. Ragumoorthy
Secretary
Tel: 0181 660 1522

S. Kanagasabai
President
Tel: 01923 663 424

R. Vimalendran
Treasurer
Tel: 0181 651 6129

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