

Tamil TIMES

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Remembering Neelan Trichelvam - page 20



President Chandrika Kumaratunga



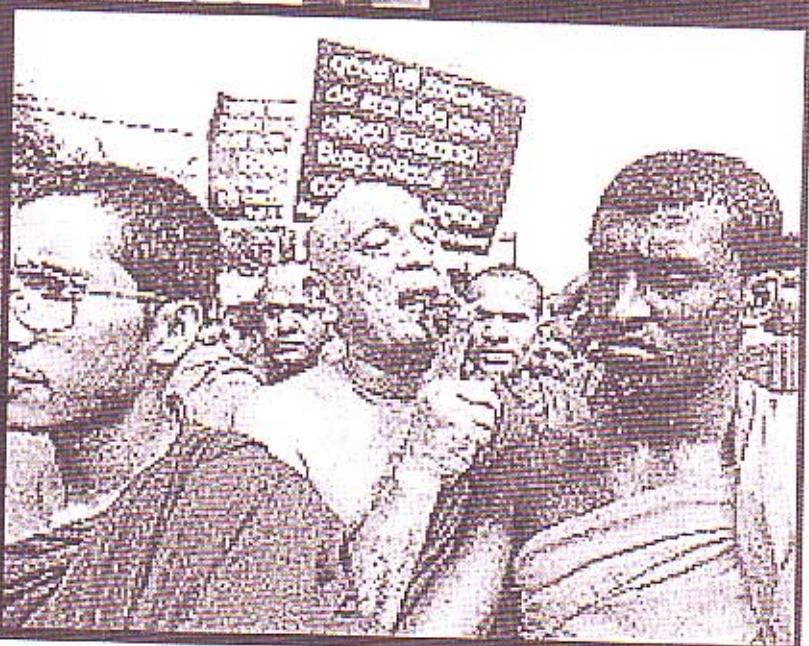
UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe



Rally in support of government's constitutional proposals (top left)

Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike who resigned recently as Prime Minister (above)

The fiery Buddhist monk, Madduluwawe Sobitha Thero speaking at an anti-government rally (right)





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of what you say, but I'll
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right to say it."*

-Voltaire

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Into the Electoral Fray

Parliament was dissolved with effect from midnight on 18 August. Parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka will take place on October 10. Nominations will be received by the Commissioner of Elections from August 20 to September 4.

The election is being held in the wake of the unsuccessful attempt by the government to get its new Constitution Bill passed through parliament. The government was forced to suspend the debate on it when it became certain that it would not obtain its required two-third majority following the last-minute withdrawal of support for the measure from the UNP.

The main battle in this election is between the ruling Peoples Alliance and the opposition United National Party. However, the emergence of a third front comprised of mainly Sinhala-Buddhist ultra-nationalist organisations entering the electoral arena has given rise to the prospect of a three-cornered contest. Already there are indications that this third front making inroads into the traditional vote-banks of both the main parties making the outcome quite unpredictable.

By fixing the election for October 10, the government has given just 8 weeks for the election campaign. Many believe that the minimum time period given for the campaign place the minor opposition parties at a disadvantage. The hope in government circles presumably is that the short period given will benefit the ruling party to win a majority as against a divided opposition.

In announcing the election, President Kumaratunga declared that she was seeking a mandate from the people to turn the newly elected Parliament into a Constituent Assembly so as to enable her to adopt a new Constitution. Whether she will get a majority of seats sufficient enough for it to be regarded as a mandate from the people is not guaranteed. But there are other forces which are equally determined to defeat her government. Ranged against her are the UNP, the ultra-nationalist forces which have promised to fight tooth and nail against her attempt to bring back the

Constitution Bill before parliament, and the privately owned press which has displayed its unrestrained hostility against her day in day out. On the other side, the LTTE has time and again, by words and action, demonstrated its hatred of the President.

The governing party's allies, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party have already announced that they would contest under the PA banner. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) General Secretary Rauf Hakeem said his party was "committed to back the President's efforts to end the ongoing conflict". "We will definitely help them to achieve victory and form a PA Government."

The UNP goes into the election campaign not as a united party. Ranil's leadership has been under a cloud for some time now. Since he became leader, he has presided over successive defeats in provincial, parliamentary and presidential elections. A number of its members, including some leading figures, have defected to the government. One time leading and powerful personalities like Sirisena Cooray have left the party and formed their own and are likely to put up candidates in the election.

The UNP, in the name of bipartisan consensus, forced the government to accept its own amendments and signed up to almost all the provisions of the draft new Constitution, except on some minor issues. Having done that the UNP will find it hard to denounce it as a sell-out. In a sense, it could be said the UNP and the PA are the co-authors of the draft Constitution which the UNP refused to support at the eleventh hour. The only reason it gave for withdrawing its support was the government's failure to consult the LTTE and the Maha Sangha before it was tabled in Parliament for debate.

The UNP leader has said that if his party was elected he would seek a "national consensus" for the Constitution. But he has not spelt out how he will manage to reconcile the positions of the ultra-nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist sec-

tions, which are hostile to any further "concessions" to the Tamils and who want to crush the LTTE, and the LTTE which is fighting for self determination and a traditional homeland for the Tamils in the north and east of the country.

It has been commented that when the campaign for the general election kicks off in right earnest, the UNP leadership will have some serious explaining to do to the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka for having opposed the government's new Constitution. The Tamils living in the central highlands of the island form an ethnic category separate and different from the Tamils of the northeast. They mainly live and work in the tea estates. This distinct ethnic minority stood to gain immensely from the proposed new Constitution, which addressed one of its long-standing grievances on the issue of their citizenship.

In the government's Constitutional Bill, Clause 6 of the chapter relating to citizenship provided that any person who has been a permanent and lawful resident of the Republic from October 30, 1964 and who was not a citizen of any country on that date, or any person being a permanent and lawful resident of the Republic at the commencement of the Constitution, is a descendant of any person

who was a permanent and lawful resident of the Republic on October 30, 1964 and who was not a citizen of any country on that date would be entitled to full citizenship rights. This provision would have enabled each and every person who has up to now been regarded as a "stateless" person to automatically be treated as a citizen.

But the UNP's opposition to the Constitution Bill, which led the Government to pull it back, by extension, means that these Tamils have another long wait ahead before being granted a basic human right.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), the dominant party representing the Indian Tamils, which is in partnership with the ruling People's Alliance (PA), will definitely take this up as a big issue for propaganda against the UNP. The UNP which had been quite success-

ful in obtaining a significant segment of votes from the Tamils of Indian origin during past elections may end up paying a heavy price for having scuttled the government's constitutional proposals.

The UNP leader succeeded in weaning away significant number Tamil votes in his favour during the presidential election held in December last year. But many believe that this time round, the UNP has alienated the Sri Lankan Tamils also by, first having forced the government to dilute the provisions of the draft Constitution to the detriment of the Tamils, then scuttling the whole exercise by refusing to support it in Parliament.

It is said that the UNP leadership is expecting support from some ultra-nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist sections in



A Buddhist monk on death fast against gov't's draft constitution

return for the party's refusal to support the government's new Constitution. However, parties like the newly formed Sihala Urumaya are determined to deny that support accusing UNP of double-dealing. A statement issued by the Sihala Urumaya stated, "We also note the not-so-subtle move by the UNP to create the impression in the public mind that they are responsible for preventing the constitutional bill from becoming law. But the people are quite conscious of the fact that the bill was jointly formulated by the PA and UNP and that both are equally responsible for its contents. However the people gratefully acknowledge the vital role played by the Maha Sangha and other patriotic organizations that led the agitational movement against the bill and thus prevented it from passing into law, at least for the present."

The Southern province organiser for

the Sihala Urumaya, Malinga Gunaratne, state, Ranil Wickremasinghe and Chandrika shook hands and participated at what they called a historic occasion where the two parties had agreed on the constitutional proposal. How can the UNP now try to disclaim liability from this attempt to break up our country. The UNP is a great party, but the leadership today is doing everything possible to woo only the minority votes sacrificing the majority of those who put them to power."

The recently formed Sihala Urumaya, with the active participation of some influential sections of Buddhist clergy, is seeking to lead a third front of like-minded ultra-nationalist groups. The Sinhala Urumaya is stridently nationalistic and is opposed to any form of

power-sharing arrangement to resolve the ethnic conflict. It has accused both the government and the UNP of betraying the Sinhala-Buddhists of the island and of being prepared to grant too much to the minorities in exchange for cheap votes. It wants the war against the LTTE to be prosecuted with more vigour until it is crushed. The Sihala Urumaya and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) are reported to be already conducting joint discussions with the

aim of forming an alliance. Tilak Karunaratne, General Secretary for the Sihala Urumaya said the move was initiated after both parties in one voice opposed the recent new constitutional draft. A joining of forces, Mr. Karunaratne said, will help bring together Sinhala Buddhists and form a strong united front together with the Buddhist priests who have been leading the campaign against the government's proposals for devolution of powers.

This front is seeking to challenge both the main political parties, the PA and the UNP by mobilising all forces which have always opposed a political solution based on power-sharing. If it succeeds in efforts to a significant extent, there is the prospect that, unlike in the past when the contest has been a straight fight between the UNP and the PA, this time round there may be a three-

cornered contest.

The non-LTTE Tamil parties like the TULF, PLOTE, EPRLF and TELO are likely to put up candidates in the north and east of the country. Tamil United Liberation Front Senior Vice President V. Anandasangari said that his party would contest the election in the predominantly Tamil Northeast. He called for a 'free and fair election' devoid of political intimidation from armed groups. "There were allegations of mass scale impersonations and rigging during the last election in the North. People feared for their lives due to threats from armed militant groups. We are requesting the Government to ensure that this kind of incidents do not occur again, so that people in these areas will be able to exercise their democratic right without fear and intimidation," he said.

It is reported that A. Varatharaja Perumal, the Chief Minister of Sri Lanka's short-lived North-Eastern Provincial Council, has decided to contest from Jaffna in the October 10 general election. Perumal, who leads a dissident group within the Eelam People's Liberation Front, said his group would contest the election independently in Jaffna and the Vanni, and in alliance with friendly parties in the three other electoral districts of the Tamil-dominated north-east. Perumal was Chief Minister of the 1988-1990 NEPC, and thereafter took refuge in India for nearly nine years before returning to the island last year. After cooling his heels for over a year, Mr. Perumal hopes the general elections will enable his re-entry into the Tamil political scene. At the national level, he and his group would support the People's Alliance, he told The Hindu correspondent.

What role the LTTE would play during the election is not yet known. It has never participated in any election. In some it had asked the Tamils to boycott issuing menacing threats of dire consequences. It is also likely that it will be hostile to any participation in the election by ex-militant Tamil groups.

LTTE's basic position is that the Tamils should have nothing to with elections conducted by the "Sinhala State". But the LTTE, without ever contesting,

has often used elections to further its agenda by trying to indirectly influence the outcome through a combination of military and political strategies as well as terror tactics. In the 1994 elections, the LTTE, then in total control of the

Jaffna peninsula, mocked at the whole process by ensuring that only 2.97% of the nearly 600,000 electorate in the district, turned out on election day. Though Jaffna has since slipped out of its hands, it controls large chunks of territory in the Wannai and east of the country, and they are by and large no-go areas for the others. In the presidential election held last December, reports from eastern Sri Lanka said that the LTTE had asked the people to vote for the UNP candidate, Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Fears are also being expressed among Colombo circles that the LTTE

munal tension and prevent a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict.

Commenting on this development, Dr Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council says the "UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe is presently seen by

those who supported the draft constitution as a villain in the unfolding scenario. But until the breakdown of the bipartisan process, much praise was directed towards him for his non-communal leadership....For a political leader who had seen his party slide to nine successive local, provincial and national level defeats, Ranil Wickremasinghe demonstrated a rare strength of character in refusing to use the ethnic issue to attack the government. During six years of his leadership of the UNP he restrained his party from taking the line of communal politics, which all opposition leaders before him had done.

"But today the six years of restraint practised by the UNP under Ranil Wickremasinghe's leadership seems threatened. First came the shock of the UNP's last minute withdrawal from the bipartisan constitutional reform process. The constitutional draft had 256 articles of which the UNP apparently disagreed with only 4. There is no doubt that, had it chosen to, the UNP could have negotiated a mutually acceptable compromise on each of these areas of dispute."

Lamenting about threat of the UNP lurching back into communal politics, Dr Perera states:

"At a mass rally held by the UNP in Colombo last week the government's draft constitution was denounced as a harbinger of division of the country. This rally was an inevitable follow up to the UNP's earlier decision to withdraw from the bipartisan constitutional reform process. What was less inevitable was the association of the UNP with the Mawbima Surakeema Viyaparaya (Motherland Defence Front), a nationalist Sinhalese grouping headed by a fiery Buddhist monk. The joint rally is indicative of the UNP's trajectory in the direction of communal politics in the period prior to the general elections which have been fixed for October." ●



Picketing Buddhist priests

might instigate some violent incidents, including suicide attacks in the south during the election campaign. President Kumaratunga was the target of a suicide attack on the last day of her presidential election campaign last December, and ever since, she has confined herself to her official residence, Temple Trees, mainly from fear of further attempts on her life. The LTTE may also escalate its military campaign in the north, especially in the Jaffna peninsula in the runup to the election.

What is worrying many political activists and those belonging to the peace constituency is the emergence and growing influence of extra-parliamentary ultra-nationalist forces like the Sihala Urumaya and militant Buddhist monks like Maduluweva Sobitha Thero whose activities are bound to exacerbate com-

Sri Lanka: Constitutional Comedy, Political Tragedy

Rajan Philips

If you are not part of the act, constitution making can be quite an unscripted comedy. Behind the hoary, old written constitutions of the world, are the unflattering tales of heavy drinking, brutal back stabbing, unholy alliances, and blatant opportunism of many of the founding fathers. But the founders were always sharp and sober enough to protect the interests of social power blocs and keep the "swinish multitude" safely at bay. Nonetheless, these constitutions have been worked on over time and allowed to evolve into living frameworks for the governance of society. Constitutions, like nation building, not to mention family life, are never ending work-in-progress. You do not throw out a constitution, even a bad one, for the heck of it, or change it on the pretence of a revolution. You leave it alone for the most part, side-step it when you can, and amend it when you have to.

Comedy in Kotte

As constitutions go, Sri Lanka has had three constitutions in thirty years (in 1948-78), and amended its third constitution sixteen times in sixteen years (1978-94). Since 1994, there have been on-again, off-again attempts to tailor a fourth constitution that will finally hold the island from falling apart. The culmination of these attempts turned into a farce and lowbrow comedy in the first week of August, in the House that Geoffrey Bawa, the famed architect, had built for King Jayewardene of Kotte. The drama was so unscripted that even the fall of the curtain was fittingly unexpected. Bawa is famous for the grand design and its minute detailing. But with the constitutional architects of the People's Alliance, the design was faulty and flabby, and, worse, the detailing and the preparation were sloppy and unskilled. To stretch the comparison, Bawa designed the House as a monument to one man's vanity, but the PA con-architects tried

to erect a multi-purpose, all-things-to-all-people babel tower: satisfy the Tamils; reassure the Sinhalese; include the Muslims; spread power to the regions, but fatten the centre at the same time; abolish the presidential system, but let the incumbent president go on for five years; and so on. Just to make the show curiously complicating, the con-architects first introduced a bill to repeal and replace the existing constitution, and then threw in another bill to amend, for the seventeenth time, the same constitution they were trying to repeal.

There was a method in their madness, but the method was patently crooked and designed to lure MPs to vote for the bills by assuring them a seat in Parliament after the election. The 17th Amendment Bill tried to add 78 seats to the current 225 seat strong Parliament (more than one third increase), and multiply the modes of election: first past the post, the district list and the national list. The message was clear: screw the voters, we will get you in as an MP, if you vote with us in Parliament. Reminiscent of the State Council days, bribery, cajolery, confinement and excursions all appear to have been tried, not just by one side but by both the major parties in Parliament. Parliament has surely become a lesser place after 1977, and there is no one around, like N.M. Perera, to expose the thieves and drive them out of politics.

It is not uncommon or unseemly to logroll, pork barrel, horse deal and arm twist to ensure passage of necessary but controversial legislation. American President Lyndon Johnson swore, bluffed, bullied and browbeat reluctant Southern legislators to navigate the Civil Rights Bill through Congress. But Johnson would have never dreamt of extending his tenure, or increasing the size of the Congress, even for the laudable goal of getting the Civil Rights Bill passed. In any political system, there are certain things that should not

be tampered with, no matter what the circumstances are. But there is nothing that has not been monkeyed with in the Sri Lankan political system.

Political Tragedy

Things were expected to change for the better with the election of the PA government in 1994. Having coasted to victory without a clear position on the Tamil issue, the PA leadership soon came under enormous popular pressure to find a peaceful way out of the military mess that the country was in. The pressure was popular enough for the PA to use it as its reason to live with the presidential system that it had vowed to abolish, and work on constitutional changes focused on restructuring the state and devolving power. But in a bizarre contradiction, the PA tried to write a new constitution that would go beyond the 13th Amendment, while doing nothing to streamline the operation of the Provincial Council system created by the 13th Amendment, and make that system meaningful and acceptable to the people. In fact, for petty political reasons, it did a number of things to undermine the PC system.

Nonetheless, there was a groundswell of support and genuine enthusiasm for far reaching constitutional changes. For five years, hundreds of dedicated volunteers stormed southern Sri Lanka taking the message of peace and devolution to ordinary people. The NGO intelligentsia overworked itself researching, writing, debating and publicizing the purpose, scope and modalities of devolution. All their efforts and enthusiasm have been brought to naught by the way the constitutional bill was finalized, presented in Parliament and then withdrawn. They deserved better from their Parliamentarians rather, they should have known better about their Parliamentarians. The setback to their efforts is a political tragedy, made worse by the reawakening of the communal Cerberus that everyone thought had been weakened and silenced.

In all this, it is not just the PA government that failed, but the UNP opposition also failed, just as badly and even more shamefully. The UNP is trying to ride several horses at the same time. Last November, on the eve of the pres-

(continued on next page)

Daring the UNP and the Prelates

By our Colombo Correspondent

● Parliamentary Game

Parliament is the name of the new game secondary school student now play with enthusiasm. It is not their invention but an adaptation of the actual parliamentary sessions of August 3, 7 and 8. The elderly boy of the group sits on an elevated chair shouting "Order! Order! Order please" while a girl on his right speak at the top of or her voice to make herself heard above the din created by those on his left. They say they are training themselves to be the worthy inheritors of the mantle of those now sitting in parliament.

Radio and television broadcast of the parliamentary proceedings of the three days, August 3, the day on which the Constitutional Reform Bill was presented and August 7 and 8, the days on which it was debated had generated an unprecedented interest in parliamentary debates and strategies among the future leaders of the country.

On the first day, a Thursday, Presi-

(Continued from page 6)

dential election, its leader made the stunning proposal that the northeast provinces should be placed under an LTTE led interim administration. It was stunning only because it came from Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe. Now, one year after that kite-flying proposal, and with Parliamentary elections coming up shortly, the UNP has sandwiched itself between the Mahanayakes and the Sinhala Urumaya in opposition to the government's much lesser devolution proposals.

How is the UNP going to explain its opposition to the Tamil Parliamentary parties with whom it had co-habited before and whom it might need after the elections? The Tamil parties know that it was the UNP that made the PA government water down the original package as a condition for supporting it, and to the point of making it unacceptable to the Tamil parties. In

dent Chandrika Bandaranaike walked into the chamber of parliament, flashing her famous smile, at the auspicious 9.40 a.m., to an enthusiastic applause from government benches. Dressed in a simple beige saree she carried a large leather brief case. Taking her seat next to Leader of the House Ratnasiri Wickramanayake she leaned across and shook hands with seasoned defector Ronnie de Mel who proudly claims the record of being elected to parliament twice as an SLFPer and thrice as a UNPer and of crossing the floor of the House four times. He was occupying the government front row seat of Aviation and Tourism Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake who died of heart attack in July.

Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris then formally presented the Constitutional Reform Bill to repeal the current 1978 Constitution and replace it with the new and gave way to the President to open the

the end, the UNP refused to vote for even for the diluted package because it was tacked on to the transitional provision to let Mrs Kumaratunga complete her second tenure. The UNP could have suggested amendments rather than rejecting it outright. It could have run to the diplomatic community, as it usually does, to mediate with the government. Now it has to explain its about turn to the western diplomats and donors after cultivating its own image as a more disciplined governing party and a better manager of the economy and the ethnic conflict. That was the image that the UNP successfully sold to the urban business groups and the Tamils during the presidential election and won a higher proportion of their votes than did the PA. What is going to be the UNP's message to the Tamil voters in the Parliamentary election? That it can play Norway between the Mahanayakes and the LTTE? ●

debate for the government on the Second Reading of the bill. UNP's Mahinda Samarasinghe raising a point of order queried whether the debate would commence that day itself contrary to the earlier agreement that it would be debated on August 7, 8 and 9.

Ratnasiri Wickramanayake: The President will open the debate and then we adjourn for August 7 as agreed.

After that little procedural snag was cleared the President got up again to deliver her speech. Hardly had she uttered a word the UNPers shouted that there should have been a proper public debate and began thumping their tables with books, order papers and files. Then they started jeering, yelling and howling.

For a moment the President was flabbergasted. She stopped mid-sentence and looked at the unruly spectacle pathetically.

President: (To the Speaker): They are howling like jackals,

Speaker: (To the President): I told you they will start this nonsense.

The Speaker then called on the President to continue her speech. Mustering her entire vocal resources at her disposal, President Kumaratunga shouted her speech.

● Tearing and Burning

Up jumped UNP's A. H. M. Azwer with a fresh point of order which the Speaker ignored. Azwer would not give in. He took the copy of the new bill before him, shredded it and threw the pieces into the air over the well of the House. Many UNP MPs did the same and pieces of paper were strewn all over the floor of the House.

UNP MPs then gathered in groups and shouted slogans, hurled abuse and kicked the sides of the table with their feet.

"What happened to the gas?" shouted one.

"Sold to the Shell Company," chanted the rest.

"What happened to the promise to abolish the Executive Presidential system?"

"It will be retained for another six years," was the chorus.

Undeterred and undaunted the president shouted her speech. She laid the entire blame on the UNP for the current war. She argued that in a coun-

try where a quarter of the population belong to other races, languages, religions and cultures their rights should be acknowledged and respected. She admitted that the minority communities had been discriminated. When Tamils agitated peacefully for their just rights they were spurned and attacked. She blamed the UNP for the repeated riots, assaults and the burning of the Jaffna Library. She repeatedly referred to the torture and death meted out to Tamil civilians under the UNP regime. She blamed the UNP for the 1983 riots.

"We are taking this firm step to remedy the injustice meted out to the Tamils during the Black July of 1983 by the UNP that stated the war," she said emphatically.

She allayed the fear of the Buddhist monks saying that as a devout Buddhist she would never think of doing away with the foremost position given to Buddhism in the present and previous constitutions. She also assured the people that she would never permit the break up of the country into two.

She said war is costly and could not be afforded by a poor country like Sri Lanka. It would not provide a final solution to the ethnic problem. The effective way to end the war is to draw the Tamil people away from the stranglehold of the LTTE by giving to the Tamil people their legitimate rights. That is how the support of the 700,000 expatriate Tamils now backing the LTTE could be denied to it.

The proposals, she added, was aimed to do just that. Powers would be devolved to enable the provinces to look after their affairs without endangering the unity and integrity of the nation. She cited Canada, Germany, United States, China and Switzerland as examples of countries where sufficient power is devolved to the regions.

"All countries that faced such problems solved them by sharing power with the minority communities," she said.

She added some of the major provisions in the constitutional draft were the contribution of the UNP and appealed to the UNP to help pass the new constitution.

The UNPers were not listening to any of her pleas. They continued their slogan shouting and heckling

"Gas gas sold to Shell"

"World Bank dictates your economic policies"

"You have sold the country to the World Bank"

"You promised to bring down cost of living

But raised to reach the sky"

"What happened to your promise to do away with the Executive Presidency?"

UNP leader sat with a smile of amusement. Twice he turned back and tried to restrain his flock. They did not listen. But with a wave of her hands the President controlled her followers when they tried to react.

At one stage President noticed that UNP's former minister Renuka Herath looking at the SLFP manifesto and commented: You seem to be interested in my face. Isn't it beautiful?"

Renuka Herath shouted back: Beautiful face is the only thing left. You have not honoured any of your election pledges. You have not solved any of the country's problems.

The President ignored that remark and the burning of the copy of the constitutional bill by Kurunegala district MP D. M. Bandaranayake. She ended the speech in a confident note saying that she would receive the necessary two-thirds majority on August 9.

• Priestly Opposition

But that was not to be. The UNP and leading members of the Buddhist clergy had other plans.

Buddhist priests, specially the Mahanayakas of the influential Malwate and Asgriya Chapters were angry that the President and her government had ignored their repeated plea not to proceed with the new constitution. They had voiced their opposition to any devolution of power to the regions as a tool to solve the escalating ethnic strife. They wanted Sri Lanka to be preserved as a Buddhist country.

The Ven. Rambukwela Sri Vipassi Mahanayake Thero of the Malwate Chapter and Ven. Udugama Sri Ratnapala Buddhakkitha Mahanayake Thera issued an order on July 30 imploring Sinhala Buddhist MPs not to vote for the new constitution. The President and her MPs ignored the order and summoned a special meeting of parliament for August 3 to present the Constitution Reform Bill. The

President flew to Kandy on August 1 to present the prelates with the copies of the Bill and obtain their blessings. The two Mahanayakas declined to give appointments for the meeting, the first time a Head of State was refused such a meeting. She returned to Colombo handing over the task to Minister Anurutha Ratwatte who threatened to break open the gate if it was bolted for him. He was received by Malwate Mahanayake but the Asgriya prelate avoided him.

• The UNP Baktracks

The UNP succumbed to their pressure. Its leader Ranil Wickremesinghe who announced in his letter to the President in January his willingness to give the government the required two-third majority to enact a new constitution and offered to work out a consensual solution to the ethnic problem retracted from that undertaking on August 2 and announced his party's decision to vote against the bill. This despite the 18 joint meetings they held over a period of four months and the government amending many of its vital proposals with which moderate Tamil political parties were in agreement.

On the controversial issues like the nature of the state and state land the government's 1997 October proposals were more favourable to the Tamils. The government proposal on the nature of the State read: Sri Lanka is one, Sovereign and Independent Republic, being an indissoluble union of regions and shall be known as the Republic of Sri Lanka. On UNP's insistence the phrase 'union of regions' which introduced the federal character was dropped and the unitary character of the state surreptitiously reintroduced. It said parliament and regional councils enjoyed legislative, executive and judicial power. To this the government agreed despite the opposition of the Tamil parties in its anxiety to reach a national consensus.

The government was prepared to vest the state land within the region to the regional council with the right of the Centre to take over the land required for its use but on the insistence of the UNP state land was vested in the Centre. In fact, UNP's constitutional expert K. N. Choksy, defending the leadership's decision to participate in the joint Chandrika-Ranil meetings, reported:

the UNP Working Committee that they were able to get the government to amend its stand because of their participation.

On the other contentious issue of north-east merger the UNP was instrumental in getting a proposal more favourable to the Tamils. It wanted the current temporary merger to continue for another five years with the provision that the referendum to determine the wishes of the people of the eastern province at the end of that period. The government wanted to merge a portion of the eastern province - Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts- and create a Muslim majority South-East Council for the Muslim majority area.

The UNP- Buddhist clergy tie-up came to light during the cross-over drama of August 7. The UNP parliamentarians continued with their heckling when the debate on the second reading resumed that morning. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Minister M. H. M. Ashraff was on his feet when government backbenchers shouted "Jaya Wewa" (Victory to Us). They conducted Chilaw district UNP MP Harendra Corea to a government bench second row seat. UNP MPs shouted back in anger and one of their leaders John Amaratunga screamed: "How many millions did you accept for this dirty work?"

UNP leadership decided to retaliate immediately. They had already done the ground work to draw a disgruntled government parliamentarian to come to their side. Colombo district MP Dixon J. Perera had had a running battle with the President over the importance she had given to a businessman Chandana Kaththirarachchi who was eyeing Perera's Kesbewa constituency. When he was appointed to fill the vacancy created by the death of Dharmasiri Senanayake Perera contacted Tyrone Fernando, a former UNP minister, and asked for a secret meeting where he offered to crossover if the UNP agreed to nominate him for the Colombo district. UNP leadership agreed for this and instructed Perera to be with the government group which was accommodated at the five star Taj Hotel till they inform him of the timing of the cross over. Perera was taken

out by UNP leaders to meet Ven. Madige Panjaseeha Thero who blessed him for helping the UNP. Panjaseeha Thero maintains that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country and that all minority communities must acknowledge that fact if they are to continue living in this country.

He was led by a group of UNP parliamentarians to the opposition benches while their leader Ranil Wickremesinghe was on his feet. The first day ended with one all for both sides. Ranil Wickremesinghe said the government had presented the Bill in a hurry before some of the issues were settled.

● Forced Singapore Sojourn

The UNP had already made preparations to prevent more crossover from their side to the government. The UNP leadership had told the suspected defectors that a UNP group would be visiting Singapore in mid-August and had collected their passports and other documents for flight booking. They were all invited by UNP's Ravi Karunanayake for a dinner on August 2 and were told to take the Monday morning flight.

One such MP who was asked to fly next morning was Gampaha district's Uppatissa de Silva. On receiving the ticket he said he would go to Singapore but not the next morning but on a day convenient to him.

"You must go tomorrow. All the arrangements have been made," he was told.

"But I prefer to be here to vote on the constitutional bill," he insisted.

The UNP put him under strict surveillance. De Silva did not cross. But another de Silva did it. He is Hambantota district MP Mervin de Silva.

Of the ten suspected defectors packed off to Singapore two were Tamils: V. Puthrasigamany and Rajamanohari Pulendran. Both had told the Working Committee meeting that the UNP should support the Bill. Puthrasigamany had praised the government decision to include the Tamil translation of the National Anthem in the constitution. "Naturally, I would relish to sing the national anthem in Tamil," he said. The two Muslims, Farook and Cader, too had raised their voices in support of the

government bill. Others were Sinhalese.

The Maha Sanga issued two threats to the Sinhala Buddhist MPs. The first was that no Buddhist bhikku would be permitted to perform the last rites of the MPs who vote for the Bill. The other was the issue of a second letter reminding the MPs of the letter the Sangha issued on July 30 banning them from voting for the Bill.

Demonstrations outside the Parliament were also intensified and a 29-year old monk, Hdfigalle Wimalasara, started a fast unto death at the busy Pettah junction. A leading monk issued a threat that they would go on a house to house campaign against the bill if a referendum is held.

The government decided on August 7 morning to defer indefinitely a vote on the Bill and thus defused the situation. What influenced its decision was the flight of the UNP MPs on whom it banked to obtain the two- third majority. Even those who were not sent abroad were kept under strict surveillance by the UNP leadership.

● A Defiant President

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, backed by the powerful international community, is defiant. She declared on August 11, in a lengthy interview to the state-run television, Rupavahini, that she would enact the Constitutional Reform Bill within two months of her government returning to power at the forthcoming general elections. "There is no question of our abandoning it," she said.

Saying, "We must not say there is no hope. There is hope," she spelt out two options before her. The first is the obtaining of two third majority. If, under the proportional representation system that were not possible she would convert the new parliament into a Constituent Assembly and pass the Bill with a simple majority.

She revealed that she was contemplating on the second method, suggested to her by reputed international constitutional authorities, when the UNP offered to give her 16 voted she needed to get the two-third majority and a national consensus. She charged the UNP of deceiving her and the country.

The UNP kept on delaying till the very end and let her down, she said.

Answering the Buddhist prelates and other who want a military solution she said she needed 20,000 men and huge amount of money to win the war. She revealed that to kill 10 LTTERs the army has to lose 1000 soldiers.

"When we buy sophisticated arms the LTTE matches it," she said and asked the supporters of a military solution whether they would agree if she reduce the salary of all persons by half. She asked them whether their sons or relatives are in the army. She challenged them to join the army and promised to lead them to the battlefield.

She said killing Pirapakaran would not bring the conflict to an end. Rohana Wijeweera was killed. But the JVP is still there she said.

President Kumaratunga is preparing for the polls likely to be held in November. So is the UNP. Both are trying to exploit the Constitutional Reform fiasco.

The Jaffna war, meanwhile, is likely to escalate. The LTTE is biding time till the GCE Advanced Level examination now on is over. LTTE is sticking to the tradition of not disturbing the examination.

● Sirima Steps Down

To strengthen hand in the runup to the election President Kumaratunga had persuaded her ailing mother Sirima Bandaranaike, world's first woman prime minister, to step down from that post. She appointed Ratnasiri Wickramanayake to that post

Sirima in her resignation letter sent to her daughter had given her illness as the reason for her resignation. But she was sick for quite some time. The 84-year lady had refused to resign when polite suggestions were made to her about the advisability of taking rest. She was longing that her son, Anura, would mend fences with her sister and return to the SLFP and step into her shoes. More than that she did not want her cousin Anurutha Ratwatte to succeed her.

Srima, though President Kumaratunga puts the entire blame on the UNP for the ethnic conflict, was responsible for the emergence of the armed conflict. Her introduction of the media-wise standardization of marks for entry to the university and the enactment of the 1972 constitution which declared Sri Lanka a unitary state and gave Buddhism the foremost place in the country was the last straw that broke Tamil democratic approach to find solution to the Tamil problem.

She seems to have realized her folly. She told her daughter last week that she would vote with both hands in support of the Constitutional Reform Bill which dropped the Article that declared Sri Lanka a unitary state.

She was wheeled into the chamber to listen to her daughter's August 3 speech and was prepared to attend parliament to cast her vote. She had publicly voiced her dissatisfaction that her daughter's attempt to find out a solution had been thwarted by the Buddhist clergy and the UNP.

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The Case for a Commission of Inquiry into July '83

Izeth Hussain

A symposium on Violence and terror during Civil Strife held last month by the Council for Liberal Democracy under the Chairmanship of Dr. Rajiva Wijesinghe, in remembrance of the events of July 1983, turned out to be one of the most memorable of innumerable such meetings that I have been attending for over a decade. Part of the reason, at least for me, is that the meeting concluded with a most interesting discussion on whether or not there should be moves towards the appointment of a commission to inquire into what happened in July 1983.

Another part of the reason why the meeting was so memorable was that it seemed to me that there was a new note of urgency about it, which I relate to the impasse on the ethnic front. It is a situation in which there is a case for doing some rethinking about the fundamentals of our ethnic problem and reaching out towards a paradigm shift to unblock the impasse.

The purpose of this article is to suggest that the appointment of an Inquiry Commission on July '83 is necessary for the paradigm shift, that is a new conceptual framework within which to understand our ethnic problem.

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be the slightest prospect of a solution as of now, because neither the Government nor the Tamil representatives seem to be prepared for the flexibility required for an exploratory and creative approach, which alone can lead to a solution. The Government wants to push through a new Constitution irrespective of whether or not the LTTE, or even the Tamil moderate, agree to the devolution package.

The apparent problem is that the Government and the UNP believes that the Sinhalese people are not prepared to make any further concessions by way of devolution. I happen to be involved in a grass-roots movement promoting

ethnic harmony, the leading spirit in which is Rev. Yohan Devananda. Its ranks include a very appreciable number of Buddhist monks, it has been active for ten years, and its findings are that the Sinhalese people at the grass-roots level are amenable to reason and are prepared to be more accommodative to the Tamil than is imagined at higher levels. Is the problem Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism or is it that our two major parties, are as always only prepared to give too little too late? As Rauf Hakeem of the SLMC put it in a recent interview, "They are so tight-fisted about parting with power."

On the Tamil side the LTTE summarily rejected the devolution offer, and shortly after so did Tamil moderates. What, then is the difference between those groups of Tamils? In many ways the differences are enormous, but not when it comes to a solution based on devolution. This suggests that it is simplistic to argue that the LTTE is only a terrorist movement, and therefore the ethnic problem has to be solved together with the other Tamil parties and apart from the LTTE.

But it might be argued that the TULF and the other moderates have in fact chosen to abdicate their responsibilities and leave matters to the LTTE because they are in a state of blue funk about meeting Neelan's fate. It is useful to recall that it was only an accident to one of his sons that prevented Neelan attending the meeting at which Amirthalingam was assassinated. Thereafter Neelan, and so many other Tamils, continued to affirm a Tamil moderate position undeterred by LTTE murderousness. The explanation for their rejection of the devolution offer has to be sought at a deeper level.

The explanation is that the Tamils, whether extremist or moderate, want a unit in which they can be fully autonomous, and above all a unit in which they

can feel secure, a viable unit in the North East to which all Tamils can gravitate should their security be seriously threatened. This, I hold, is the result of the State terrorism to which they were subjected after 1977, and which rose to a genocidal crescendo in July '83.

It seems to me that the present impasse is due to fundamentally opposed conceptions, on the part of the PA and the UNP on the one hand and the Tamils on the other, about what is legitimately due to minorities. Here a distinction, a crucially important one, must be made between two types of minorities. One type, like our Muslims, cannot claim a homeland in the sense of being indigenous to a territory. Their aspirations can be accommodated through reasonably fair and equal treatment. The other, like our Tamils, can claim a homeland with some show of cogency, and the widely accepted strategy to counter their separatist aspirations is to allow them a considerable degree of devolution.

Both of our major parties have insisted, in effect, on dealing with our minorities as all of the same ilk. Theoretically they have conceded that there are areas of traditional Tamil habitation, but in practice they have been allergic up to now to allowing genuine devolution or full autonomy. This is understandable to some extent because, after all, in a world consisting of nation states the term "majority" is usually regarded as privileged over the term "minority". What is not understandable is why the Sinhalese political elite has been so allergic to allowing genuine devolution, unlike the elites of so many other majorities, and that too at a terrible cost to the Sinhalese people. But that is not part of our inquiry here.

Many an observer trying to be impartial could feel exasperated by the Tamil side also, specifically by the propensity to make maximalist demands.

This goes to the extent of making a demand that seems to be of no more than theoretical importance. I have in mind the insistence that the validity of the Thimpu principles be acknowledged. It will mean acknowledging that the Tamils are a nation, as they have insisted from pre-Independence times,

that they can legitimately claim a homeland in the North and part of the East, and that they are entitled to self-determination.

What all that means in practical terms is that the Tamils as a national minority and not just another minority can claim full autonomy or a considerable amount of devolution in their homeland territory. If that is allowed in practice why insist on the Thimpu principles? It seems pointlessly fussy.

However, there is an underlying logic that makes that insistence understandable. The problem really lies with the principle of self determination. Anton Balasingham has made it clear that the Tamils can opt for something less than a separate state. True, but acceptance of the validity of the self-determination principle implies an acceptance of a Tamil right to separate at a later stage, should they wish to do so.

Why is that option so important for the Tamils? The obvious answer seems to be that the Tamils claim bhumi putra status in this island just as much as the Sinhalese, though in a lesser part of the

territory. Our ethnic problem might be understood in terms of a conflict between two lots of bhumi putras within a tiny island. I am not entirely satisfied with that answer for several reasons.

When that lovable and eccentric maths genius Professor Suntheralingam advocated Eelam in the 'forties and 'fifties, no one took him seriously. The TULF adopted its Vaddukoddai resolution on Eelam as late as 1976, that is 28 years after independence. The struggle for Eelam really got going after 1984, that is 36 years after independence. It is not as if our Tamils have been burning with a desire for Eelam over a long period.

The sequence of developments clearly shows that the notion of Eelam was taken really seriously after 1983, that is only after State terrorism against the Tamils had mounted to its maniacal crescendo. I have presented the case on State terrorism in earlier articles, and space constraints preclude my recapitulating my arguments here even briefly. But it is worth emphasizing that if not for that State terrorism, the grievances

of the Tamils could have been removed without much difficulty, and the ethnic problem solved. Certainly it would not have assumed its present militant and intractable form.

Those views may be disputed. What is beyond dispute is that post-1977 State terrorism, more particularly July '83, has left a deep scar on the Tamil psyche, which continues to shape Tamil perceptions about the ethnic problem.

At the symposium to which I referred above Kethesh Loganathan detailed a whole series of developments which possibly point towards yet another July '83.

A paradigm shift can be effected by appointing a Commission to inquire into July '83, to be followed by the punishment of miscreants or an apology from the Sinhalese side. That can help the Tamils accept an autonomous unit which ensures their security without going too far towards Eelam, and the Sinhalese to accept the Tamil claim to such a unit on the ground of security, if not of history.

(The Weekend Express, 5-6 August 2000)

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Constitutional Reform For Peace – Another Opportunity Lost

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

The ethnic problem that intensified into a protracted bloody war after the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom remains unresolved for several intricate reasons. These have come to the fore once again with the presentation of the draft new constitution by President Chandrika Kumaratunga on August 3. The statement issued jointly by 15 religious dignitaries and 30 civil society leaders on August 7 urging the UNP not to withdraw from the Constitutional Reform process, pointed out: "It holds out the promise of a new stage in the country's search for a political solution to the ethnic conflict and an end to bloodshed." Despite similar appeals by other civil society leaders and political parties, the UNP decided to withdraw from this process in the midst of protests against the new Constitution by extremist groups and a section of the Buddhist clergy.

The draft Constitution has been in a process of preparation since a set of draft devolution proposals was presented to the country on August 3, 1995. It is well known that the late Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, a respected leader of the TULF, helped in drafting it. This was later watered down in 1997 following deliberations in the Parliamentary Select Committee. This too was unacceptable to the UNP and the present draft constitution includes the package agreed jointly by the two main political parties, the SLFP and the UNP, after nearly five months of discussions. The opposition to the new draft constitution is for varied reasons but for the present, the discussions mainly centre on those aspects that seek to address issues relating to the ethnic conflict.

President Kumaratunga was the first Sinhalese leader who sought the aid of the people in a general election to settle the ethnic conflict by constitutional means having publicly conceded that the Tamils have genuine grievances and their aspirations have been ignored by previous governments.

The majority of the people of all communities not only gave her the mandate but also the Sinhala people routed the extremists at the 1994 polls. Subsequent events show the failure to take advantage then of this favourable climate to settle the conflict early has been a grave mistake. Its consequences have been felt in many forms culminating in the present dilemma.

The most unfortunate and agonising aspect of the fierce war that followed the abrupt collapse of the 1995 peace talks is not only the enormous losses and suffering incurred by the people, but also the change in the climate that enabled influential leaders within and outside the Parliament to take the uncompromising positions which have become strident in the recent past.

The expectation of the PA government and many others is that once the conditions for the fulfillment of the Tamil aspirations are established, for which suitable changes to the present constitution are essential, the war will end as its continuation cannot be justified. This conclusion hinges on the meaning assigned to 'Tamil aspirations'. Different parties and groups in the Sinhalese and Muslim communities also tend to view 'Tamil aspirations' from the standpoint of their own interests. The dichotomy gets acute when the 'Tamil aspirations' are linked to the Thimpu principles that are what the extremists have done.

Aspirations of a group as a whole are generally those of the majority facing the tribulations and uncertainties resulting from living in a particular environment. It is possible for the people to modify their aspirations for various reasons related to the changes in their living conditions and to the realisation of the necessity to accommodate the aspirations of other groups in the society with whom they have to live in harmony. The former depends not only on social and economic factors but also on

the prevailing system of administration, whether legal or otherwise.

Power seekers and others keen to project themselves as saviours of their race and religion claim their aspirations are also those of the groups they belong to and use them to achieve their own aims. This stratagem only helps to sustain the divisions in the society. Aspirations of the people as defined by sincere civic leaders whose concerns focus on human and democratic rights and the general welfare of the members are likely to be realistic and reasonable. Reconciliation and peace are what the people at the grass-roots level in the East, North, South and West aspire right now, even if this necessitates arriving at compromises in respect of their aspirations.

The LTTE is engaged in fierce struggle for creating a separate state while at times it maintains that the aspirations of the Tamils are embodied in the Thimpu principles of July 1985. There are also other Tamil political parties, including the TULF, which stress on the Thimpu principles as the basis for a solution. According to TULF MP, Joseph Pararajasingham even the original 1995 devolution proposals did not conform fully to the Thimpu principles and therefore his party did not accept them totally (Interview published in the Sunday Leader of 23 July 2000). But the TULF and other non-LTTE Tamil parties and groups had accepted the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord that led to the establishment of the Provincial Councils with much more limited powers compared with those to have been devolved under the proposed scheme in the new Constitution placed before Parliament.

Apparently, at the Thimpu talks the Tamil delegation dominated by the militant groups had deliberately refused to put forward a detail set of concrete proposals that would satisfy the interests of the Tamils. "The delegation had clearly shown their preference for the adherence to abstract principles thus avoiding discussion on the concrete demands of the Tamil people". (Circle Digest July 31, 2000) Thus, it would seem that the Thimpu principles were formulated as a stratagem to avoid a discussion and any possible agreement "on the concrete demands of the Tamils people."

The LTTE continues to adhere to the 'Thimpu stratagem' and does not want to get cornered into a situation

is accepted.

It is, therefore, important to distinguish between the aspiration for separation and support for the LTTE. Some of the reasons for the latter are: the heroism and sacrifice of the cadre towards the resistance; the retrieval of Tamil dignity; protectors of the Tamils against the (Sinhala) army; useful agent for taking revenge against the Sinhala polity for personal humiliations and deprivations suffered in the past; the Sinhalese parties will not grant the rights of the Tamils; and not least the desire to associate with the group whose leader has been raised to a cult figure.

The present wish of the Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu (group 3) is to return to their motherland and lead a normal life, for which they want the hostilities to end soon and peace restored. Living in a united Sri Lanka under normal conditions with a hopeful future is preferable than languishing in the refugee camps without basic amenities and freedom. S.C. Chandrasaran, son of late Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam the founding father of the Federal Party, who presently heads the Organisation for

Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation located in Chennai, which is said to be the biggest organisation in the world that refugees have formed for their welfare in an interview with George Iype (A Homeland Denied - Part 2 'The LTTE has been callous and counterproductive all these years') said: "Tamils are the indigenous people of Sri Lanka. Our only request is, give us equal opportunity.... Our ultimate aim is to go back. When will that happen? We are longing for that day."

He also said: "We have been trying to work out settlements within the framework of Ceylon. The Sinhalese often come to agreements with us, but they go back on their word. They do not want to share power. They use the police and army against us. It is now a 100 per cent Sinhala army in Sri Lanka.

"In the current battle for Jaffna (this was in May after the capture of the Elephant Pass army complex and some areas in Jaffna), the LTTE is at an advantage. But many of us believe in non-violence. We do not believe in the killings perpetuated by the LTTE. LTTE tackles any dissent by destruction. More Tamil political leaders have been killed by the LTTE than by the Sinhalese government and the army.

"We feel that unless Tamils get a

democratic setup in Sri Lanka, the world is not going to accept the LTTE even if it seizes Jaffna. What the LTTE is doing is harmful to the Tamils and their aspirations. The LTTE has been callous and counterproductive all these years."

Talking directly with people who have come out of Jaffna or those who get first hand information through their close relatives, the real aspirations of the Tamils (this include the farmers, fishermen and others who have no choice other than to remain in the war-torn areas) living in the north and east can be discerned. Their main aspiration is the restoration of the conditions conducive for peaceful livelihood, educate their children, opportunities for them to prosper, free movement without restrictions and harassment, freedom from intimidation and extortion, availability of food, medicine and other essentials and the means to obtain them, security and equal rights as citizens of Sri Lanka and as members of multi-racial society. They all want political freedom and basic rights and these need not necessarily be under a separate Tamil state.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga believed constitutional reforms that, inter alia, include devolution of powers to the NorthEast region, substantially more than what was given under the 13th Amendment would allay the fears and concerns of the Tamils, grant their legitimate rights and meet their aspirations. It was with this conviction that the 1995 devolution proposals were presented. These were acclaimed by impartial observers all over the world as remarkable not comparable with the powers devolved under many federal constitutions. But the LTTE rejected them as inadequate to meet their aspirations which its leadership claimed to be those of the Tamil people.

Devolution planned under the July 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was more than in the 'Annexure C Plan' drawn by India following the July 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom but far less than proposed by the Sri Lanka government in 1995. Not only the Indian government but also many others keen for an early settlement of the ethnic conflict and the restoration of peace in north-east Sri Lanka had considered the 1987 Accord as a satisfactory compromise. Importantly, Sri Lanka had accepted India as the guarantor of the agreed arrangements. Implicit in the Accord was also

the acceptance of the concept of a single unit of administration for the merged the North-East region and the recognition of the North and East as areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking population.

These were significant outcomes of this Accord. The LTTE refused to consider the Provincial Council scheme even as an interim arrangement.

It is also useful to note the comment of Achin Vanaik in his article - States of Determination - published in The Telegraph (India) of 8 August 2000. To quote: "The guiding principle in assessing the legitimacy of a demand for independence, provided it is voiced by a large section of people in a given area, is whether or not it advances the cause of democracy." Vanaik then goes on to say "the leading forces demanding secession in Kashmir and in Jaffna are such that by their very nature they make it difficult to justify independence in the name of democracy. This is because the Islamic fundamentalist groups which dominate the resistance movement in Kashmir and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Jaffna are themselves strongly militarist, exclusivist and authoritarian forces and therefore would themselves be deeply undemocratic. Had there been genuinely secular and democratic parties leading the resistance movements, their demands for Azadi and Eelam would have been more powerful and convincing."

"As things stand, the search for some form of institutionalized autonomous status for Jaffna and Kashmir, acceptable to both the peoples in question and to the two governments respectively, would clearly appear to be the most democratic framework in which to strive for some kind of political resolution."

Like the UNP, the LTTE too was not in any readiness to seek a political solution though not for the same reason. When the Norwegian government was actively engaged in helping to restart the talks between the government and the LTTE (and this was before the draft Constitution was prepared), their special envoy Erik Solheim announced that the LTTE would consider talking with the government only after capturing Jaffna. Nevertheless, the government (no sensible person can expect it to oblige and wait for such a time) indicated that it would present the constitutional reforms to the LTTE after

these have been approved by the Parliament, which required the support of the UNP and other parties. It is significant to note here that the reforms have sought to broaden the democratic foundations of the State and democratic pluralism has been the cornerstone. In urging the politicians and the people to support the constitutional reform process initiated by the government, leading academics attached to the University of Colombo and prominent members of the Social Scientists' Association in a joint statement issued on August 7 hoped the reform process would continue to enhance the provisions "that have a direct bearing on democratization and devolution."

The UNP had dragged the discussions on constitutional reforms in the Parliamentary Select Committee for nearly two years raising various objections and asking for extended time at each stage to consider the revisions to different parts of the proposed reforms. The UNP in the end refused to endorse the 1997 draft too and it remained in limbo until February, several weeks after the December 1999 Presidential election. Earlier, the business leaders

anxious to settle the conflict and end the war also devoted their valuable time mediating to bring about a bipartisan consensus on the national question but they too failed. By this time the so-called Fox initiative which was broked by Dr. Liam Fox, former under secretary in the British Conservative government (presently the Shadow Health Secretary) and agreed by both the President and the opposition leader had been thrown to the winds.

The LTTE and the TULF in particular among other Tamil parties continued to insist that a bipartisan consensus on the reform was a prerequisite for a negotiated settlement. The broad consensus reached by the two main political parties on July 7 was hailed as historic by the leaders in the annals of post-independence politics in Sri Lanka. According to the President "90 per cent of the UNP proposals" were incorporated in the revised draft. At the eleventh hour, the UNP jettisoned it saying that even what was agreed had not been submitted to the Maha Sangha and the LTTE for their consideration and response.

One of the proposals cited by the

opposition leader in the statement he read in Parliament on August 7 as being contrary to what was agreed in the joint draft is the period of the temporary merger of the North and the East. He charged that the waiting time allowed for conducting the referendum had been increased from five to ten years. This was done after the minority parties had conveyed their views. There were strong objections by the Tamil parties to the temporary merger.

The two provinces have remained as one provincial unit for the past 12 years and what the UNP wants is the abrogation of the underlying concept in the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord. As for the TULF which had earlier accepted the temporary merger under the 1987 Accord limited to just a year to be followed by a referendum, its Batticaloa MP Joseph Pararajasingham considered even the increased ten-year period offered by the government as unacceptable suggesting insincerity on the part of the President instead of suggesting amendments! (Interview, Sunday Leader August 6, 2000).

The newly formed ultra-nationalist Sihala Urumaya Party, supported by



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a powerful section of the Buddhist clergy, JVP and Sinhala nationalist organisations such as the National Joint Committee, National Movement Against Terrorism, National Sangha Council and Sinhala Veera Vidahana rejected the draft proposals outright. Some even 'found' the joint proposals of the PA government and the UNP opposition conforming to the Thimpu principles!

As in the saying, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, the same is true in the case of the rights of the Tamils. The Sinhala extremists seem to think that the aspirations of the Tamils articulated by their leaders focus on the destruction of Buddhism and the annihilation of the Sinhalese. This perceived fear is so intense that even mentioning the word, devolution, drives them crazy as it is considered synonymous with federalism, which itself is a dirty word for them, leading to the inevitable division of the country. On the other hand, Tamil nationalist position is that the proposals contained the draft do not meet Tamil aspirations, although for example the Tamil language has been given parity of status as an official language along with Sinhala throughout the island.

Once the orchestrated opposition from a powerful section of the Maha Sangha became manifest, the UNP quite opportunistically distanced itself from the draft Constitution. The tragedy of Sri Lankan politics is that the political leaders have established the practice of consulting the Buddhist prelates on worldly matters on which they are not competent and should not get involved in the first place. This was done not from a principled conviction but to use them for their narrow political benefit. The priests exploited the influential status given to them by the political leaders fully and have now even become advisers on military matters as to assert who should be in charge of military operations in the Jaffna sector! The Jathika Sangha Sabha had even sought the Speaker's permission for a Mahanayake to address Parliament although there is no constitutional provision for such an exercise.

At first the protest campaign began with the allegation that Buddhism had not been given the foremost place in the draft Constitution. Not only this status is enshrined in the draft Constitution, but also the State has been assigned the responsibility to protect and

foster the Buddha Sasana at all times. It is the belief and the observance of the principles by the people that preserve a religion more than any thing else. The preachers with their deep knowledge on the Buddhist precepts have the duty to spread the message and also extol the virtue of living according to these principles. Nevertheless, if by giving Buddhism the foremost place their tasks would be made easy so be it. It is rather odd that in the twenty-first century the Buddhist leaders in Sri Lanka need legal safeguards to protect Buddhism that no group, religious or racial, wants to destroy or weaken it.

The attempt to move towards establishing an acceptable constitutional framework for settling the conflict through negotiations was wrecked by hard-liners and opportunists from both sides. The victims of this setback are the people and the country.

To give extra fervour to the campaign of the vociferous section of the Maha Sangha, Sihala Urumaya and the JVP against the new draft constitution, Ven. Hadigalle Wimalasara Thero (30 years) began his 'fast-unto-death' in front of a Bo tree. What part he played in the August 8 decision to postpone indefinitely the parliamentary debate and the vote on the reforms is not important but the fact that a priest was ready to die so that many thousands of ordinary fellow beings must suffer and die through a protracted war should distress all conscientious leaders.

The concerns of the members of civil and legal organisations such as the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Institute for Human Rights, Marga Institute, Civil Rights Movement, Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality and the Law and Society Trust are real. The Bar Association too has drawn attention to possible improvements in the provisions concerning the judicial review of legislation and others of concern to the legal profession.

Slandering the UNP and Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe at a crucial time for his alleged connection with a LTTE supporter was imprudent, notwithstanding the forthcoming electoral battle. At the heart of the problem has been the pride of each leader that has stood in the way to compromise for the sake of reconciliation, peace and unity of the country. The interest of the people as a whole was considered secondary in the power struggle. There are useful lessons for those interested in

pursuing the constitutional reform process initiated by the PA government.

The turmoil during the first week in August this year has revealed clearly the legal and other practical difficulties that exist in reforming the 1978 constitution, especially in accommodating the aspirations and interests of minority groups. As matters are the future is bleak for the majority of Sri Lankans unless some outside help as in 1987 comes early.

In his statement announcing the decision not to participate in the parliamentary debate and in the vote on the new constitution bill, the UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe suggested restarting the endeavour again to reach a national consensus which can then be enshrined in the new constitution. He also said that this process would take time but surely in the interim, people need some arrangement, at least, to hope for lasting peace and better future for their children.

President Kumaratunga has declared that she is determined to bring back the constitutional reform proposals before parliament. It may be her wish, but the prospects are bleak. But what is clear is that another opportunity has been lost.

In his memorial to commemorate the first death anniversary (July 29) of Neelan Tiruchelvam, L. Perera quite aptly describes the present situation as one where rationality, logic and common sense has failed to prevail. "The commemoration of Neelan's death is also a stark reminder of a hopeless situation marked by what seems to be a non-ending war, widespread human suffering, misguided policies, and in general, a country at war with itself with the only sure possibility of burying its future even before it is born."

Mr. Perera is quite right in that the tragedy in Sri Lanka can no longer be defined simply as inter-ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils. "It has become a power play between armed actors where issues of human rights, liberation and democracy are mere buzz words with no credibility or essence." Looking at the developments that have taken place after Neelan was assassinated cruelly, his loss becomes all the more immense and grievous. Those who are aware of his ability to handle contentious constitutional issues and find feasible solutions will understand how badly his absence is missed now. ●

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Dear Periya Annah,

Thank you very much for your telephone call. Ammah relished it and sister is busy broadcasting

her thrill to everyone. I was thrilled too to hear your voice after about six months. Sri Lanka Telecom had reconnected Jaffna to the world via digital microwave radio links directly from Colombo. Now it is possible for us to dial anywhere in Sri Lanka through the 2500 telephones available here and to any part of the globe with the IDD facility available in about 500 of them. Telephone service was disrupted in April when the telecommunication tower at the Elephant Pass Repeater Station was damaged during LTTE's onslaught.

Travelling to Colombo too has become possible and is relatively comfortable. The Commissioner General of Essential Services had hired City of Trinco, a passenger ship with seating capacity for 350 persons. Weekly service is now available with Red Cross protection. The security forces and the LTTE have agreed not to attack the ship.

These are the brighter side of things. But generally life here is becoming more and more difficult as the security forces and the Tigers are bracing themselves for a fresh bout. It may start anytime after the GCE Advanced Level exam now on is over in August third week. We thought that President Chandrika Kumaratunga's effort to enact the new constitution would bring us solace. But it is not to be. We are destined to suffer. The suffering we may have to undergo during the next round of fighting would be cruel. With Ukraine-built Mig 27s streaking across Jaffna's clear blue sky and Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers spewing rockets now and then we shudder to think of the next round.

Tension is already in the air. A new wave of displacement has commenced as artillery and mortar pelting at each other's positions has grown more frequent and intense. We discern some fun in these displacements. Our neighbours in Nallur moved further north and those living closer to the war theatre moved into their houses. We intend sticking to where we are.

Essential goods are becoming scarce. My friends joke at the speed with

A Letter from Jaffna

which they have gone hiding. That seems faster than the Mig 27s which travel twice the speed of sound. This is specially so with wheat flour and kerosene. The GA and Manager of the Jaffna Branch of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) aver that they have three month-stocks. But scarcity there is and a black market flourish. The current going in the black market is: kerosene - Rs. 75 a litre, petrol- Rs. 150 a litre and diesel Rs. 60 a litre.

The issue of two litres of kerosene per week through the co-operative stores is totally inadequate but the CPC blames the shortage of bowsers for its difficulty to distribute adequate stocks. CPC possessed six bowsers, four of 13,500-litre capacity and two of 5,500-litre capacity. In April, after the fall of Elephant Pass, army had snatched the four big ones and told civil authorities to manage with the two small ones. "Whom are we to complain?" moans the Jaffna CPC manager.

Jaffna GA and his Food Department officials have no distribution problem. Yet there is a black market in wheat flour. Bread and kothambai roddy are the cheapest and popular breakfast items in Jaffna. The demand is therefore high and supply fail to meet the demand. Added to this officially created black market bakers too exploit the situation to their benefit. They sell short weight and bad quality bread.

Besides these problems is the creeping sense of insecurity among the public, especially among students. Three events that occurred in mid-July had disturbed the minds of the student and teaching communities. The first was the July 13 shooting of Jaffna Hindu College student Sanjeevan Somasundaram. The 18-year-old GCE Advanced Level student was returning home after soccer practice when a motor cycle patrol stopped him and assaulted him, eyewitness account says. Then he was shot and the body handed over to the police by the military saying he was an LTTE cadre and was asked not to release the body to the parents without obtaining a statement that that the boy was a Tiger cadre.

The ruffled student community boycotted school and organized a massive funeral procession on July 17. The military stopped the funeral procession while on its way to Jaffna Hindu College and diverted it through a by-lane to the Thikkam cemetery where the body was buried on the order of the Jaffna Magistrate. The school boycott continued the rest of that week and Jaffna Commander Major General Sarath Fonseka summoned a meeting of school principals and army and police officers of the area. Education Director Dr. N, Thanigalampillai, Jaffna District Principal's Association S. Rajadurai, Hindu College principal A. Srikumar and Jaffna Hindu College Old Boys Association representative Vidyatharan participated. Sarath Fonseka read out the report submitted to him by army officers. It stated that Sanjeevan was with two LTTE leaders and when they tried to arrest them Sanjeevan tried to escape and was shot. A grenade was found in his possession. Srikumar vehemently contested the military report and said he stood by the eyewitness account, Sarath Fonseka promised an impartial inquiry but that was the end of the matter. Fonseka had been transferred out of Jaffna and now in Vanni.

The second incident occurred on July 16 at Nellyyadi in Vadamarachchi where two soldiers at a checkpoint forcibly detained a 16-year old girl on her way to her school and raped her. The offenders had been arrested by the police and the Point Pedro Magistrate has remanded them. The other was the shooting of St; Patrick's College student Niroshan.

With reports of increased infiltration by the LTTE in the Jaffna peninsula, army's cordon and search operations have multiplied. Fortunately, schools are now closed for August holidays but parents are scared to permit their children to go out. Yet I find a lot of youngsters at the Nallur Kandasamy Temple festival which is attracting a large number of devotees.

Expecting another telephone call soon.

Younger brother
Anthony
10 August 2000

Remembering Neelan Tiruchelvam

The Sanctity of Life

Cat's Eye

Saturday, July 29, 2000, marked the one year death anniversary of Neelan Tiruchelvam. Neelan was killed by a suicide bomber on the corner of Kynsey Road and Rosmead Place, just metres from his office. The site of the tragedy has been transformed throughout the year as a public space for mourning and remembrance.

Immediately after Neelan was killed untold numbers of the public came to the corner to leave flowers, candles, religious icons, and other remembrances.

Throughout the past year, flowers have been kept at the spot on the 29th of each month. The corner of Kynsey Road/Rosmead Place/Kynsey Terrace has become an important site in the quest for peace, non-violence, healing and reconciliation. It was only appropriate that it once again was a site that brought friends, family and colleagues of Neelan's together on Saturday morning to remember Neelan.

Artists for Peace made the occasion particularly moving with the opening of their new flag exhibition. This exhibition was a joint effort by 22 Sri Lankan artists. The exhibition was comprised of almost 50 original flags and were displayed along Kynsey Road. The exhibition highlighted Neelan's vision of and commitment to a vibrant civil society in which the arts play a prominent role, not only as a means of expression, but also in the quest for peace, justice and reconciliation.

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies, the Law and Society Trust and Tiruchelvam Associates, with support from the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, organized a series of events to mark July 29th and to commemorate Neelan.

National Reconciliation: What Kids are Saying

The Law and Society Trust, with the support of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, organized an island-wide essay

competition for the age group 15-19 to commemorate the one-year death anniversary of Neelan. The essay competition was held in Sinhala, Tamil and English, with prizes given for the top essay in language.

The organizers of the competition were encouraged by the response. The response was truly islandwide, with some coming from the conflict areas. In fact the winning essay in the Tamil language was by Thoufeek Thasneem Bhanu of Kinniya Muslim Girls' Mahavidyalaya, Kinniya, Trincomalee. The winning essay in Sinhala was written by Gaya Dinushi Wijesuriya of Saint Joseph's Balika Vidyalaya, Nugegoda. The winning essay in English was written by Gayathri Daniel of Ladies College, Colombo. All three top prizes were won by girls. Each winning essay will be published in the newspapers and additionally, the organizers hope to make the top essays, which included so many more than merely the top three, widely available.

While politicians seem to get sidetracked by petty partisan politics, reactionary communalism and competing agendas, the students have a very practical and uncomplicated approach to peace and reconciliation. The students all seemed to agree that peace should begin at school, which the students believe should be de-communalized. Schools are the best places to foster reconciliation and ethnic harmony. All children should have the opportunity to mix with and be friends with children from other communities. They should have the opportunity to learn the languages of the other communities, and they should be encouraged, if not compelled as some suggested, to do so. This, the students agreed, would engender reconciliation between and across cultures in Sri Lanka.

The awards ceremony was a celebration of diversity and featured artists from the different communities, including Ms. Nilukshi Jayaveera-

singham, the renowned dancer, Khema, the young and talented Taji Dias and the popular theatre group "Malithi Batithi Lama Vedasatahan Ekakaya". The keynote speech was given by the Chief Guest, the Minister of Justice, Constitutional Affairs and National Integration, Prof. G. L. Pieris who spoke about Neelan Tiruchelvam's important contributions to the promotion of peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Prizes were given by the four Guests of Honour, former cricketer Sidath Wettimuny; Head of UNHCR Janet Limm; former Secretary-General of Amnesty International and the former head of UN transitional operations in East Timor, Ian Martin, and Country Director of the winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, Medicines Sans Frontieres, Isabelle Simpson. The awards ceremony was attended by students from all over the country.

Memorial Lecture

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies hosted the Neelan Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture, which was delivered by Ian Martin, a long time human rights practitioner. Martin has a distinguished background working in post-conflict situations. He has most recently served as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the East Timor Popular Consultation and Head of the UN Mission in East Timor in 1999.

The lecture was entitled "Human Rights, Political Conflict and Compromise". Mr. Martin made no pretensions about offering easy solutions to Sri Lanka's ongoing political conflict. Instead, he drew from his many years of experience in East Timor, Rwanda, Haiti and Bosnia and Herzegovina and provided examples of strategies of compromise that have been utilized - and in some cases abused - in seeking peace and reconciliation. Although the message for Sri Lanka was not overt, it was nonetheless clear - peace building is long and arduous process. Peace has not come easily to any of these countries. It will not come easy to Sri Lanka.

According to Mr. Martin, "human rights violations are rarely gratuitous." They arise out of specific and very real conflicts over resources and power. These conflicts and contestations, as well as the violations of human rights, must be addressed through processes

of peace building and reconciliation. In so doing, he highlighted three common dilemmas. The first dilemma occurs at the point of conflict resolution. In order to end conflict, it may be necessary and/or desirable to compromise principles of accountability in order to end conflict. The question, though, becomes to what extent can principles of accountability be sacrificed? In some cases, such as in Haiti, amnesties have been instituted that are in clear violation of international law. In addressing accountability, it is imperative that principles of international humanitarian and human rights law be upheld.

The second dilemma arises once the conflict has ended. During this post-conflict era, the question must be asked, to what extent may it be necessary and/or desirable to compromise accountability for the sake of reconciliation. The South African example is perhaps, the most illustrative. South Africa carefully crafted an arrangement that encourage reconciliation through the truth-telling process without fully compromising justice. Thus, amnesty was given to human right violators who voluntarily came forward and fully disclosed the abuses they were involved in. However, prosecutions are underway for those who refused to reveal the abuses.

The third dilemma also may arise during the period of transition to peace. What happens if, in the aftermath of conflict, certain human rights are found to be in conflict with each other. After the genocide was allowed to occur in Rwanda, for example, the application of human rights principles became virtually impossible due to the magnitude of the violations and the number of violators. In crafting a solution and bal-

ancing the need for accountability with the rights of the accused, it is the "least unacceptable compromise" that must be sought.

In raising these dilemmas, Mr. Martin sought to highlight the complexities of conflict resolution and peace building. In seeking solutions legal, moral and practical considerations must play a role. Although he did not presume to come with solutions for Sri Lanka's conflict, in posing these questions Mr. Martin raised important warning signals. Peace is not easy. Neither is justice. Nor reconciliation. The examples of Haiti, Rwanda, Chile, and Sierra Leone raise important questions that need to be addressed in any peace-building exercise, including in Sri Lanka.

Ian Martin is currently a visiting fellow of the International Peace Academy, New York. He has had a long and prestigious career with the United Nations. In addition to being Head of the UN Mission in East Timor in 1999, he was Deputy High Representative for Human Rights in the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Road Painting Movement

Unbeknown to the original painters, August 29, 1999 would come to mark the beginning of a quiet little movement for peace and non-violence that has grown immeasurably since then. On that day, a flower of a different kind bloomed brightly on Kynsey Road. In the middle of the road a huge five petalled flower had been painted; each petal containing a different word Peace. Human Rights. Justice. Love. Hope. These were the simple messages. On October 29th, 1999 - the three

month death anniversary- a more elaborate design and message appeared.

The message, "secure the sanctity of life" reportedly comes from Neelan Tiruchelvam's final speech in parliament. The message is written in all three languages, surrounded by elaborate images of peace doves, flowers, and butterflies. The mural has been there ever since.

In March of this year, one week after the tragedy at Aruveydic Junction during which more than 20 innocent civilians who were trapped in rush hour traffic were caught in the cross fire of a reportedly botched LTTE attack, another mural appeared. The symbols and the message was the same. "Secure the sanctity of life." "Jeevithaye Shreshthathvaya Rakaganimu." "Vaalvin Punithathai Urithipaduththuka." In the last few months, paintings have continued to appear - in Ratmalana, Wattala, Town Hall, and Flower Road.

No one organization has taken credit for the painting. When asked by the press, the response has been that they are a group of "peace loving people" and some "peace loving artists". The group is constantly growing and includes people from the areas where the bombings took place. The painters admit that their objectives are simple. The painting is to protest against the violent loss of life. It is to reclaim public space - space in which people have been killed - in a non-violent way. It is an effort to encourage a non-vindictive memory that allows for grieving and expressions of pain and mourning. In so doing, the group hopes, in some small way, to encourage reconciliation. An effort which would have had Neelan's approval and encouragement. ●

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The Autonomy Tangle In Kashmir

T N Gopalan

"People of Kashmir had made a decision of their own choice to throw in their lot with the people of India in furtherance of their common ideals. This abiding kinship could not subsist merely on territorial links or commercial considerations, but on unswerving faith in the ideal for which we here and the millions of people in India have struggled for over three decades. Our relationship is not that of a master and a slave, but it is a free and voluntary association of partners in the joint stock, which bestows common and equal advantages on both."

That was Sheikh Abdullah thundering way back in 1952. Twenty eight years later, such sentiments sound as empty rhetoric. The Kashmiris are hopelessly alienated from the rest of the Indian Union. Crushed as they are under the jackboots of the Indian army, there have little love or respect for the government in the far-away New Delhi.

Witnessing the furore raised by the autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly in June last and its summary rejection by the Centre followed by the pathetic attempts by Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah to mobilise support for his resolution, one had an uneasy sense of *deja vu*.

The unfortunate people of Kashmir, trapped as they are between a brutal and insensitive army on the one side and a fanatical and murderous militants on the other, have nothing much to look forward to.

The unilateral cease-fire announced by one of the militant groups, Hizbul Mujahideen, perhaps the only all-Kashmiri outfit, did come as some pleasant surprise. But other Pakistan-based groups dismissed the gesture as of no consequence and vowed to continue the *jihad*.

The autonomy resolution itself is a desperate gamble on the part of the discredited Farooq Abdullah. He has been there in power for four years now, but

there is nothing much to show for it. Endemic corruption, maladministration, economic stagnation, security forces running amok, these and other factors have made the lives of the Kashmiris miserable. In such a bleak environment, Farooq will have to face them next year in the Assembly polls.

Now elections being rigged, or at any rate hardly 20 per cent of the Kashmiris caring to cast their votes, he may not have much to fear. But there are some signs that some new outfits could be throwing their hats into the ring, and any one of them could easily rout Farooq Abdullah's National Conference, simply by invoking the Kashmiriyat (Kashmiri identity and pride).

Hoping to forestall such a possibility perhaps, Farooq has got his MLAs pass a resolution in the guise of adopting the recommendations of the State Autonomy Commission. The SAC report recommended that the state be restored all subjects for governance except defence, foreign affairs, currency and communication. The "patriotic" media sounded horrified at Kashmir's audacity. The RSS wanted Farooq's *govt.* dismissed. The BJP lashed out at the "anti-national" Farooq Abdullah's "manoeuvres to divert the attention of his people away from his own misrule." The other constituents of the National Democratic Alliance preferred to keep silent on the issue. Prime Minister Vajpayee at first seemed to be suggesting that there was nothing unconstitutional about the resolution and that it could be given some consideration. Home Minister Advani, considered a hard-liner, said breezily that the resolution could be tabled in parliament, "where of course it would be thrown out..."

But once the RSS high command reacted angrily, calling for the dismissal of the Farooq regime and reiterating its demand for the scrapping of Art.370 of

the Constitution (which guarantees a large measure of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir), the NDA government promptly fell in line, and the resolution was rejected by the Union Cabinet.

Farooq initially seemed to make some noise, threatening to make it an issue and mobilise public opinion behind the resolution. There were even speculations that the National Conference (NC) could be pulling out of the NDA government. Even as the Working Committee of the NC was said to be furiously debating the next course of action, Farooq's mother passed away, and the discussions were abruptly suspended.

Vajpayee and others flew in, and "overcome" by their commiseration, the Chief Minister chose not to precipitate matters any further. He followed the caravan to New Delhi avowedly to present his case before them all. Like the Pandavas of yore, he was whittling down his demands by the hour. "No, we are not demanding restoration of pre-1953 status... No we are not insisting on the implementation of the SAC report in full... Why don't you just appoint a ministerial committee to examine our resolution in depth?" Clearly he was looking for a face-saver. But it was all in vain. He could be all too ready to oblige the Centre and go all out to ensure that he does not embarrass the rulers. But the latter are simply not interested in baling him out. "We have our constituency to take care of..." Such was their response.

Still unfazed, Farooq tried a different tack. He started calling on his notional allies and opposition leaders, to mobilise their support for the autonomy resolution. They all gave a patient hearing, but refused to commit themselves. Presently he is back in Sri Nagar, licking his wounds.

He does not seem to be inclined to cross swords with the Centre, not ready to pull out his son, Omar Abdullah, from the union cabinet. "We are not for any confrontation," he keeps iterating, blissfully indifferent to the possible resentment that could be building up among the Kashmiris consequent on his unashamed supineness.

But this is not the first time that this son of Sheikh Abdullah, the Lion of Kashmir, is compromising so outrageously, to his own peril. Way back in

1984, his government was toppled by Mrs. Gandhi and the opposition rallied behind him. After a short stint in the opposition camp, Farooq crossed over to the Congress after the sweeping victory scored by it in the General Elections after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination.

"We can't afford to antagonise the Centre. The people's own sentiments do not matter too very much," he has been quoted as saying. According to many observers, Kashmir's remorseless march towards insurgency could be said to have begun with that cowardly decision of Farooq.

And when he chose to join hands with the BJP which has always been strongly opposed to any autonomy for the state, his credibility took another nose-dive. With the present rejection of the resolution and his unwillingness to force the issue, the emperor stands stark naked.

But the greater tragedy is that Indians at large do not seem to be aware of some basic facts. That what the Kashmir Assembly is demanding is nothing more than the restoration of the rights and privileges promised to Kashmir at the time of the province's accession to India way back in 1947, as guaranteed by Art. 370 of the Constitution - the rights the state was denuded of steadily since the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah in 1953.

The Kashmir Maharaja might have dithered at the time of India's partition, not knowing which of the two new entities, India or Pakistan, would allow him to have a grand time of it even after accession. But the people themselves, led by the charismatic Sheikh Abdullah, seemed disinclined to become part of Pakistan - despite the fact the overwhelming proportion of the Kashmir valley population were Muslims. They had been weaned on the Sufi tradition which drew from various other faiths even while retaining the Islamic core.

We belong to the same parents.

Then why this difference?

*Let Hindus and Muslims (together)
Worship God alone.*

We came to this world like partners.

*We should have shared our joys
and sorrows together."*

When Sheikh Nooruddin, a famous Sufi saint of the 14th century wrote

those lines, there should have been some provocation after all. The Hindu-Muslim divide has been there down the ages, true. But the man who made such passionate pleas came to be venerated as a saint, and thousands of pilgrims, both Hindu and Muslim used to visit his tomb at Charar-e-Sharif, only 15 km from Srinagar. The tomb was a standing testimony to Hindu-Muslim amity.

If the Kashmir Muslims had any lingering doubts as to whether to cast their lot with Pakistan, the issue was decided when an impatient Jinnha government sent in the Pathan tribals and its own soldiers to capture Jammu and Kashmir by force.

As Sheikh Abdullah recounted it in anguish, "Invaders struck us like lightning. They scorched our land, ruined our homes, destroyed and devastated hundreds of villages and despoiled the honour of women. Busy towns like Muzaffarabad, Uri, Baramulla and Pattan centres of our trade on the highway to our Capital, are only heaps of smoking rubble with nothing left. They are traitors of Islam."

Like the very Sri Lankan Tamils who welcomed the IPKF personnel with unbounded enthusiasm only to be embittered in the aftermath of the war on the LTTE, the Kashmiris who greeted with genuine affection and warmth the Indian soldiers "who arrived to repel the marauding Pak forces," are now so cheesed off that they would do anything to have them off their backs, even if it means landing up in Pakistan's lap.

When the Pakistan-based mercenaries blasted the Charar-e-Sharif tomb during the Narasimha Rao regime, many Kashmiris were believed to have been upset. But few came out in the open to protest the outrage. That was perhaps a water-shed in the relationship between the two communities in the Kashmir valley. And the exodus of the Kashmir pandits a few years earlier was perhaps another.

Since then with successive governments in New Delhi failing to respect the Kashmiriyat, the people have been ever more alienated. It may be recalled here that it was the mindless agitations of the previous incarnations of the Sangh Parivaar which had resulted in the overthrow of the first Sheikh Abdullah government, setting in motion a

never-ending chain of disaster. And hence it would be ridiculous on the part of any one to expect the present government led by the BJP to be any better and negotiate its way to lasting peace.

It was this very same government which had exploded nuclear bombs, prompting Pakistan to do the same, thus making the mad mullahs and their collaborators even more intractable.

Incidentally the Ladakh region in the state has rejected the autonomy resolution. The predominant Buddhist population would not trust the Kashmir Muslims to be fair to them. The killing of a monk who made some irreverent remarks against Prophet Mohammed has added to the tensions in the area.

The large Hindu population of Jammu, egged on by the BJP, is also against autonomy. There are now some suggestions for trifurcation of the state and even further subdivision of districts along religious lines, raising fears of another partition-type holocaust.

Well, the people themselves might be resigned to their lot, as the Lankan Tamils seem to be in the face of the forbidding power of the gun.

Both when the Hizbul Mujahideen announced cease-fire and when the All Party Hurriyat Conference, an avowed co-ordination committee of pro-Pakistan militant groups rejected the call as "hasty," the people seemed indifferent. Farooqs and Vajpayees of this world are not a solution to their decades-long ordeal, they know.

A word on the attitude of the so-called Tamil nationalist parties would be in order. None of them cared to come out in support of the autonomy demand. Vai.Ko. invited Farooq Abdullah to his party meet in Erode, flew to Srinagar to participate in a seminar on autonomy, but would not endorse the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly resolution. "Well I'm for autonomy. But the Kashmir case is different. They should not insist on the restoration of the pre-1953 status...", he said.

The other fire-spouting politician, Dr. Ramadas, has little time for Kashmir, he is busy taking on Vazhapadi Ramamurthy. While generally welcoming the Centre's decision to reject the autonomy resolution, he has not offered any specific comments so far.

Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi staged yet another of his flip-flops. When Farooq Abdullah called on him, he seemed to be suggesting a conference of state Chief Ministers to discuss the resolution, but the very next day he distanced himself from his reported suggestion, saying he said it was for the Prime Minister to decide on such matters and hence he would leave it to Vajpayee to take the necessary initiative.

When Farooq Abdullah told newsmen, after a meeting with Karunanidhi, that the latter had suggested a conference of state Chief Ministers to deliberate on the autonomy resolution, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister was not by his side. But in a brief interview to an agency later, he recalled that it was under his stewardship the state Assembly had passed a resolution on autonomy in 1974 itself and hoped that the Centre would take the necessary steps to have the Kashmir Assembly resolution deliberated at length. According to reports when the correspondent concerned asked him whether the steps he was suggesting included a conference of the Chief Ministers, Karunanidhi did say "yes."

But the very next day he was at pains to disassociate himself from even such a mild suggestion. When pressed whether he would take any initiative for a CMs' conference, he snapped, "It's the Prime Minister's responsibility. We'll leave the matter to him."

Did he at least agree with Farooq on the need for state autonomy? he was asked. "Well, the DMK too has been demanding state autonomy. I'm in agreement with all state Chief Ministers on this issue, particularly with Farooq Abdullah. But then Kashmir is a special case..."

Clearly Karunanidhi is particular that he is not seen as creating any kind of problem for the Centre on this issue. On any issue for that matter. He is only too willing to beat a hasty retreat if any of his remarks are found offensive by his detractors or by the "pan-Indian" nationalists.

Like when he suggested a Czech-type peaceful division of Lanka if the two major ethnic groups there could not live together in peace. There was a cho-

A Pattern of Attacks on Christians in India

Robert Marquand

It began slowly in 1998. The attacks seemed isolated; no one had heard of such a thing. A church altar destroyed in one town. Nuns raped in another. Bibles burned. But today, attacks against Christians in India appear part of a systematic, and often violent campaign against a mostly peaceful and relatively powerless minority - just 2 percent of India's population.

The violence began after the 1998 accession to power of an Indian government whose ideological underpinnings include anti-minority teachings, writings, and theories. The result is a new and uncharacteristic climate of fear among Christians - in a nation long famed for its tolerance.

Today, despite a mixture of official denials and what often seem oblique and reluctant official censures, the incidents are occurring almost weekly - with Hindu radical groups one day gloating in the press over killings of Christian believers, and the next denying any part in them. Some 35 attacks against Christian targets are recorded by the Delhi-based United Christian Forum for Human Rights (UCFHR), between January and June.

In June, matters got worse. On June 7, a Catholic priest, George Kuzhikandam, was killed while sleeping in a

church compound in a town called Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. A week later, four churches in different parts of India were bombed. The morning after the bombings, a young evangelical preacher from Punjab, Ashish Prabhsh, who worked for India Campus Crusade for Christ, was found stabbed to death in his bed, and partially burned. A week later, church grave sites in Andhra Pradesh were desecrated. Three days ago the sanctuary of a church in Maharashtra was ransacked after threats severe enough to cause the terrified head priest to run away without filing a police report. In areas where attacks take place, Christians describe a pervasive atmosphere of hate against them that is created by Hindu radical groups. They describe a neglect or even acquiescence to the crimes by local authorities. In the Mathura killing of Brother George, as he is known, the police brought in the church cook, Vijay Ekka, for "interrogation."

Mr. Ekka had slept near the slain priest and reported the murder. A week later, while in police custody, Ekka died. The police first said he committed suicide; but an autopsy indicates he was strangled. Theories about the custodial killing of Ekka have circulated - some blaming him for complicity, and others suggesting he knew who committed the murder. In any event, the cook is no longer around to tell his story, one local Christian points out. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, has largely adopted a position of silence and official perplexity. Until yesterday (28 June), the government had not explicitly acknowledged violence against Christians per se. Mr. Vajpayee's spokesman, Brijesh Mishra, said in Italy this week the attacks are "isolated" and "aberrational" and have no pattern. Often they are attributed to a law-and-order

rus of protest from the anti-DMK sections, and he retracted saying that his was only a suggestion thrown at the Sri Lankan government and not aimed at pressuring the Centre on the issue.

This very same Karunanidhi had organised conferences in mid-seventies demanding autonomy and his cadres openly hailed him as the Mujibur Rehman of the South. In fact the books he presented to Farooq were all on the DMK's initiatives on state autonomy including the Rajamannar Commission's exhaustive report on autonomy. ●

problem, a local issue like a land dispute or a love triangle.

But yesterday (28 June), in a meeting of state officials, Home Minister L.K. Advani said the Christian attacks need to be addressed, possibly in a meeting of state chief ministers in August. Mr. Advani suggested that terrorists and foreign agents from Pakistan were the chief culprits. Still, a growing chorus of Indian voices say that the attacks have come after the rise of a Hindu nationalist government in New Delhi, whose affiliated organizations of radical foot soldiers now openly speak of "driving Christians from India."

"There is a definite pattern of attacks, and I think it is now clear there is a corollary between these attacks and the election of the BJP," states social activist C. Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mohandas Gandhi, regarded as the father of India. "The silence is unfortunate. One longs to see the central government clearly oppose these attacks. This is a major development in this country, a dangerous one, and if it is not stopped, it will get worse."

On June 12, a delegation of the United Christians for Human Rights (UCFHR), representing India's 18 million Catholics and 6 million Protestants, requested a meeting with the prime minister. Led by the most popular figure in Indian Christendom, the late Delhi Archbishop Alan de Lastic (who died in a car accident in Poland on June 20), they asked Mr. Vajpayee to condemn the attacks. Vajpayee stated that Christians are safe in India, but did agree to investigate attacks and the hate literature.

Such an investigation might start in the Delhi bookshop of Vajpayee's own BJP party. "Bunch of Thoughts," a book by M.S. Golwalker, mid-century leader of the RSS, the parent organization of the BJP, is on sale there for about \$4. It identifies Muslims, Christians, and communists as the three enemies of India. Mr. Golwalker states that "Wherever [Jesus' followers] have gone, they proved to be not blood-givers, but blood suckers." Another states that if Christians don't "offer their first loyalty to the land of their birth, they will remain here as hostiles and will have to be treated as such."

Historians point out that the church does have much to answer for in its colonial days. But the attitude and entire social context of Christians has changed dramatically in India since then. Today, the Christian community in India is known mainly for charitable organizations and rigorous, excellent schools.

Other than Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress Party, there are not many high-profile Christians in India's political elite. Christians have, however, made some inroads into the military: Admiral Sushil Kumar, head of the Indian Navy, a former Army Chief of Staff S. F. Rodriguez; the No. 2 in command of the Army in Kashmir, John Mukherjee.

Still, pamphlets, handbills, reprints, and other literature denoting Christians as hostile to India are easy to find in the streets. Experts say it is clear an ideology and a rationale for hate have been fed to ordinary Hindu masses in many mid-size cities and rural areas. A leaflet dated May 25 states: "Warning: Put a stop to the evil deeds of the Roman Catholic devils."

The attacks are not viewed as an overarching Hindu-Christian clash of civilizations, say those monitoring them. Rather, they are an example of "manufactured hatred," says one. In his last interview, the late Archbishop de Lastic said, "I will never accept the general statement that it is the Hindus who are attacking Christians. A few fanatics are destroying the age-old religious tradition of peace that is characteristic of India."

Christians provide a "soft target" for growing Hindu nationalist forces. Unlike the Muslims, Christians have no history of fighting back, since their numbers are small and there has been little history of violence against them. (Also, Muslims have an important 15 percent voting bloc.) Ardent Hindus object to efforts to convert lower-caste Hindus and the 8 percent tribal community in India. Christian missionary schools often educate tribals who learn to read, save money, buy land, and get better jobs - which creates resentment.

"If you attack Christians, you get mileage by being seen as antiforeign, since Christians are presented as part

of the hated colonial legacy," says Pramod Kumar, a social-science researcher in Chandigarh. Attacks on Christians began systematically after the spring 1998 election of the BJP. Churches in Gujarat were attacked and Bibles burned in the summer; that fall, four nuns in Madhya Pradesh were raped. But not until the January 1999 murder of Australian Protestant Graham Staines, who worked with lepers in a rural eastern state, did the issue receive much attention. Mr. Staines and his two young sons were burned alive in a jeep while sleeping.

"When the government says there is no pattern to these crimes, I feel complete exasperation," says John Dayal, national convener of the UCFHR. "There is not just violence, but there is also a hate campaign. Each hateful statement is signed - so there is no ambiguity about it. The right-wing groups are condemned by their statements."

One such statement made to a Times of India reporter last Thursday is an example. Dharmendra Sharma, a local leader of the Bajrang Dal, one of a network of Hindu radical groups operating near Mathura, where Brother George was killed, stated that Christians were "bigger enemies" than the Muslims, and said, "We are prepared to use violence. There is no limit."

Speaking of the death of Staines, Mr. Sharma added that, "The two boys should not have been killed, and the way Staines was killed was not good. We should be prepared for any eventuality. But I think a good beating is sufficient to do the job."

This week, following headlines and a letter from the National Human Rights Commission of India, a Bajrang Dal leader denied his group was anti-Christian. He admitted that firearm training of Hindu militant groups had started in northern India. But in a qualification, he said the training was being done "with air guns."

In Western societies that have had bitter ethnic and sectarian violence, anti-minority violence is officially condemned - even if incidents continue, experts point out. Today, for example, attacks on Jews in the United States are met with official censure and prosecution.

(continued on next page)

Mideast Peace Prospects: Before and After Camp David

Rajan Philips

Former Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, is said to have remarked that the Palestinians "have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity". And for both the Americans and the Israelis, Chairman Arafat does not make a decision before its time has come. For Arafat, who was the most reluctant partner in the Camp David negotiation dance, the time for a final agreement had not come. All along he had been hesitant about going prematurely into a full blooded summit, without doing the necessary groundwork first. At Camp David, he was also bound by the long standing Palestinian position, reaffirmed by the Palestinian Central Council on the eve of the Camp David talks, that the Palestinians will not countenance an interim agreement on what are called the Permanent Status issues: control over East Jerusalem, Palestinian Refugees outside Israel, Jewish Settlers in territories occupied after 1967, and Borders defining Israeli and Palestinian jurisdictions.

The Camp David talks opened up the Permanent Status issues for summit level talks for the first time since the 1993 Oslo Accords. The talks made considerable

(Continued from page 25)

During the spate of black church burnings in the American South in 1997, President Clinton held national seminars. Even in Europe, which largely tolerated a four-year aggression by Serbs against the multi-ethnic Bosnian state in the mid-1990s, elected leaders jointly condemned the pro-Nazi hate rhetoric of Austrian right-wing politician Joerg Haider.

Last week, in an unusually frank statement to the Foreign Correspondents Club in New Delhi, American ambassador to India Richard Celeste said the attacks on Christians raised a "very discordant note" in the country. Ambassador Celeste praised the newly warm relations between India and the United States. He also admitted the attacks send "a contrary message" regarding "India's commitment to secularism and tolerance."

Christian Science Monitor
June 29, 2000

movement on Refugees, Settlers and Borders, but foundered on the issue of East Jerusalem which Israel had captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six Day War. The status of Jerusalem and the resolution of the refugee problem have symbolic and substantive implications for Arab leaders and peoples other than Yasir Arafat and the Palestinians, and Arafat could not sign away deals as the Americans and the Israelis wanted him to at Camp David. At the end of the talks, President Clinton praised Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak for making concessions on all fronts, and stopped short of condemning Arafat for failing to make a deal on Jerusalem. But Israeli concessions at Camp David and earlier talks are somewhat of a distraction that hides the reality of Israeli power in any negotiation and the fate of the Palestinians to accept as gains only a small part of what they have been losing materially and morally from the 1948 UN partition, through the Six Day War of 1967, and right up to the Oslo Accords of 1993.

Powerless and Homeless

From the beginning of the Arab-Israeli problem fifty two years ago, the hapless Palestinians have been caught between external forces that they neither created nor controlled. First they encountered the belligerent determination of migrant Jews to create and preserve a permanent home in the land of their Biblical forefathers. Then came the West's eventual acceptance and support of a new state as a continuing reparation to the Jews for the holocaust and the pogroms they suffered in Germany and eastern Europe. Never mind that the Palestinians had nothing to do with the Jewish diaspora or the holocaust, but they were also reduced to being minor players in responding to what was a clear usurpation of their lands by Jews. The response, one of total opposition to the creation of Israel, was organized by the Arab League and spearheaded by the front line Arab states of Egypt, Syria and Jordan who vowed to destroy the new state.

Israel was born in 1948, following the UN partition of what had been a British mandate since the first World War. The partition gave 56% of the territory to the

new state of migrant Jews who had numbered just over 100,000 at the turn of the century, and 44% to the indigenous Palestinians. Unjust though the partition was to the Palestinians, they and the Jews never had an opportunity to adjust to the post-partition reality of sharing the old British mandate and living as neighbours. Fighting broke out immediately after the partition, but Israel beat back the Arab armies and annexed large tracts of land designated to the Palestinians. Israel's territory went up from the original 56% to 76%, while the rest of the land was held by Egypt (the Gaza Strip) and Jordan (the West Bank). The western part of Jerusalem fell to Israel and Jordan held on to East Jerusalem. The Arab leaders told the Palestinians to leave their land promising that before long Israel will be defeated and the Palestinians can return home in triumph. 700,000 Palestinians either fled believing the Arab leaders or were forced out of their homes by the conquering Israeli soldiers. After 52 years, the number of Palestinian refugees has swelled to 3.2 million, concentrated mainly in Jordan and scattered in other Arab countries.

In the Six Day War of 1967, Israel doubled its original area by capturing the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. The Holy City was now under total Israeli control, and an estimated 300,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes. Following its 1967 victory, the Israelis began to establish Jewish settlements in the newly occupied Palestinian areas. The future of these settlements, now totalling 200,000, is one of the Permanent Status issues.

Powerless and homeless, the Palestinians were also caught up in the 1956 fight over Suez Canal, the ever present politics of oil and Arab nationalism, and the cold war competition between the US and the Soviet Union. They found no alternative but to rely on Soviet and Arab support and target Israel and Jewish interests with guerilla attacks. In 1964, 422 Palestinian national figures met in East Jerusalem and founded the Palestinian Liberation Organization as an umbrella organization committed to the destruction of Israel and the liberation Palestine. Five years later, in 1969, Yasser Arafat and his Fatah group took control of the PLO. Driven out of Jerusalem in 1967, and out of Lebanon in 1982, Arafat and the PLO set up headquarters in Tunis and continued their operations against Israel. Arafat established himself as the undisputed

leader of the Palestinians, while the PLO won UN recognition and a great deal of international sympathy for their cause, carried out violent attacks against Israel, and even ran training camps for liberation guerillas from other parts of the world. But despite all this, there was hardly any movement in resolving any of the problems of Palestinian people scattered all over Middle East..

The prolonged stalemate began to break the solidarity of the front line Arab states and the PLO. The first crack developed when Egypt's Anwar Sadat decided to have bilateral talks with Israel under US auspices. The Israelis too were looking for peaceful alternatives to a national life of constant security alert and its enormous costs. Prominent Israelis who had proved their mettle in defense strategy and war, like Shimon Peres (an early advocate of Jewish settlements in captured territories), Yitzhak Rabin (the winner of the Six Day war) and Ehud Barak (the most decorated soldier in Israeli history), became strong advocates of peace. There were also Israelis of conscience, who were troubled by the plight of the Palestinians in Israel and began to agitate for a peaceful settlement.

The first Camp David talks between Egypt and Israel, now a historic milestone, were held in 1978. As always, it was Israel who negotiated from a position of strength, handing back the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, agreeing on mutual peace and recognition, and agreeing to establish a format for Palestinian autonomy in Gaza and the West Bank. Ten years later, in Geneva, Arafat declared that the PLO was renouncing violence and recognizing Israel's right to exist as a state. However, Arafat made a costly error in siding with Iraq in the 1991 Gulf war over Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, which alienated the oil rich Gulf states who cut off their funding support to the PLO.

Oslo Accords

The Gulf war also enhanced American influence in the Middle East even as the Soviet Union was imploding and losing its super power status in the world. The upshot for the Middle East was the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, jointly summoned by President Bush and Premier Gorbachev. The conference opened up multiple peace tracks including bilateral talks between Israel and the Arab states, direct talks between Israel and the PLO, and multi-lateral talks on regional issues of Jerusalem and the refugees. The new status as the world's sole superpower also forced the US to play a more neu-

tral role in Middle East affairs. Already in 1988, following Arafat's Geneva declaration and despite Israel's displeasure, President Reagan had authorized US officials to open a dialogue with the PLO. After the Gulf War, Arafat was isolated, had few friends and shrinking bank balances. His only option was to seek a settlement with Israel.

These were the circumstances in which Norway opened and organized secret diplomatic contacts between PLO and Israeli officials that led to the famous Oslo Accords of 1993. The Oslo Accords, signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasir Arafat, achieved (1) a Mutual Recognition Agreement by which the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist as a state and Israel recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people; and (2) a Declaration of Principles that set the frameworks for an Interim Agreement on Palestinian Self-Government within Israel and to negotiate a future agreement on four Permanent Status Issues relating to the Borders of Palestinian Self-Rule Territory, Israeli Settlers in Occupied Territories, Palestinian Refugees outside of Israel and the Status of (East) Jerusalem. Between the signing of the Declaration of Principles on September 13, 1993, and the last Camp David Talks, the two sides have had talks and reached agreement on the details of implementing Palestinian Self-Rule. Palestinian Self-Rule began with an elected Palestinian Council having specified powers in the areas of Education and Culture, Health, Social Welfare, Taxation and Tourism. The jurisdiction of the Council was initially limited to 60% of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. A Palestinian Police Force was also established to take responsibility for law and order in the Palestinian areas in parallel with a phased redeployment of Israeli troops. With the nucleus of a Palestinian Authority in place, the two sides continued discussions over expanding the territorial and jurisdictional scope of that Authority. Areas in the West Bank were brought under the Authority, and a separate negotiation track was created to generate proposals for the Permanent Status issues. Israel also allowed Palestinians living in Jerusalem to vote in the Palestinian elections, even though the issue of Jerusalem had not been resolved.

The peace process suffered a major setback when Israeli Prime Minister Rabin was killed on 4 November, 1995. Worse, the Labour Party was voted out

in the elections that followed and the Likud Party won power on the slogan of "Peace with Security". The new Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, representing the most extreme Jewish opinion, virtually sank the peace process with his hawkish stand-offs and niggardly concessions. In the end, the Israelis had enough of him and voted him out of power in the elections of May 1999. The new Prime Minister, Ehud Barak of the Labour Party, won a solid mandate as Rabin's political successor to reactivate the peace process. But Barak, showing himself to be less daring as politician than as a soldier, failed to act decisively when the going was good and let the right wing Israeli opposition regroup itself before anything substantial could be achieved. He delayed too long with the Palestinians, too long with the Syrians on the Golan Heights issue, and achieved no significant agreement on either front. Knowledgeable observers have also blamed the US for not egging Barak on from the outset of his mandate, and for waiting too long before calling a summit.

Camp David 2000

More than an year of good time was lost between Barak's election as Prime Minister and his trip to the Camp David summit. His coalition had begun to unravel and Barak had to face a no confidence motion in the Knesset before leaving for Camp David. At Camp David, he was again the brave soldier but fighting for peace rather than a war. He surprised the Palestinians by going farther than any other Jewish leader before him in meeting their demands, but showed poor political judgement in not understanding Arafat's constraints to agreeing to a deal on Jerusalem. He also gambled hoping to reverse his political fortunes at home by taking a comprehensive peace deal from the summit. Although inconclusive, the summit achieved consensus that (1) the area of Palestinian self-rule will cover 90% of the West Bank and all of the Gaza Strip; and (2) the most densely populated Jewish settlements in the West Bank will be annexed by Israel. In regard to refugees, Israel offered to allow 100,000 Palestinians to return to Israel under a family reunification scheme, and to contribute to international fund that will compensate the non-returnees. Arafat made it clear that this was an acceptable starting point, while his request for an Israeli apology for creating the refugee problem was turned down by Barak. On the deal breaking issue of Jerusalem, Barak offered, based

on a US proposal, Palestinian municipal control over certain parts of East Jerusalem and an underground access to the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. Arafat insisted, citing longstanding UN resolutions, on Palestinian jurisdiction over the whole of East Jerusalem, except for Jewish holy sites.

After the summit, Arafat went to a hero's welcome among the Palestinians and Barak took a professional return trip to Tel Aviv. Worse was to follow: First was the shocking loss of (former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister) Shimon Peres to an upstart right-wing opponent, Moshe Katsav, in the Knesset's election of Israel's eighth President, a largely ceremonial post. On 31 July, Barak faced down a second no confidence motion in, but the vote was by means a ringing endorsement of his peace moves. The day after, Barak's Foreign Minister, David Levy, resigned in protest over Barak's concessions on Jerusalem. There have been encouraging signs as well. Yossi Beilin, who, in 1992, first as an opposition Labour MP and then as Deputy Foreign Minister, was the first Israeli contact for the Norwegians and remained a permanent player in the entire Oslo process, is now Barak's Justice Minister.

Beilin is openly pushing for a practical and symbolic solution on Jerusalem based on the day to day realities of the City and its Jewish, Islamic and Christian holy sites. Barak has always believed that the hardliners and opponents of peace do not have the support of the majority of the Israelis, but they are better organized and more aggressive in exploiting the democratic system to disrupt the peace process. Now he has won more time to show some political savvy and mobilize the Israelis behind his initiatives.

Arafat's stand among the Palestinians, continues to be favourable, while the total support for extremist groups like Hamas has not exceeded 20% in the last five years. Arafat's and the PLO's support among the Palestinians is almost entirely due to the introduction of Palestinian Self-Rule and a Palestinian Police Force in the hitherto Israel-occupied territories. This has been the greatest achievement of the Oslo peace track, and credit is due to the Israeli administrative and institutional machinery in implementing the agreement. Fortunately, Israel did not have to go through any elaborate process of amending its constitution. Israel has an unbundled approach to con-

stitutional governance, having wisely avoided the laboured distraction of enacting a comprehensive constitution, but opting, instead, for the sensible path of enacting a series of Basic Laws on key areas of governance. Since 1958, eleven Basic Laws have been enacted with the expectation that eventually they will be bundled together to be the country's constitution. The post-Oslo agreements have been simply ratified by the Knesset and passed into law.

What the Palestinians have got so far is a reasonably good foundation to build on. They have for the most part accepted that they cannot regain what they had at the time of the UN partition of the British mandate, if not even earlier. Although the Camp David summit ended inconclusively, it has created a new framework to carry further the Oslo initiatives. America's role will be crucial in the weeks and months to come. As former President Jimmy Carter eloquently argued, in an op-ed page contribution to the Sunday New York Times, America should and should appear to maintain a position of neutrality as a facilitator of future talks. After Camp David, the US was understandably keen to enhance Barak's po-

(continued on next page)

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Feizal Samath

In the stillness of the dawn, a hearse carrying the body of a soldier killed by Sri Lankan Tamil Tiger rebels wends its way along a village path toward the home of the slain young man.

A joyful sister runs out of a wood-and-mud-wall hut on hearing the toot of a horn, in the mistaken belief that her brother has returned for a long-awaited vacation from the battle front. She stops in her tracks, stunned on seeing the hearse, and runs away with tears streaming down her face.

This scene is enacted almost everyday in one or more of the thousands of villages across Sri Lanka's north-central region. This part of the Indian Ocean island nation is the home of many of the government troops battling a 17-year-old, violent campaign by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are demanding an independent home for Sri Lanka's minority Tamil people.

But late in July, the government thought it fit to stop the screening of a film on this theme by internationally-acclaimed young Sri Lankan filmmaker, Prasanna Vithanage. The government said the film's screening would hamper the ongoing war with the LTTE.

'Purahanda Kaluwara', which translates as 'death on a full moon day', was withdrawn a week before its release as a film suitable for all types of audiences. This was done even though it had earlier

been cleared by the government-appointed censor board, which also has two representatives from the army.

The 75-minute film tells the story of a blind father - brilliantly portrayed by veteran actor Joe Abeywickrema - who refuses to believe that his soldier-son had died at the war front and has returned home in a coffin.

More than 50,000 government soldiers, rebels and civilians have died in the secessionist violence. The body parts of soldiers blown to bits by rebel mines are not sent to the parents, who instead receive a symbolic, sealed coffin bearing the name of the dead soldier. The climax of the film, which is set in a village near the north-central town of Medawachchiya, shows the father's belief proved right when the sealed coffin is finally opened and found to contain only tree stumps.

'Purahanda Kaluwara' has won many international awards. Abeywickrema, as the blind man, won the best actor's award at the Singapore Film Festival in 1999. Also last year, the film won the Grand Prix prize at the Amiens International Film Festival in France and the International Film Critics Award at the 13th Frisbourg International Film Festival in Switzerland.

Its world premiere was held in 1997 in Japan. It has since been shown in international film festivals in India, Pakistan, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Britain and other nations. The film was funded by Japan's NHK television agency.

Sri Lanka's film industry, academics, media watchdogs and even journalists in state-owned newspapers have protested the decision to stop the film's screening. "Any argument that justifies the hiding of some truths regarding the war in the north and the east from the people of this country, constitutes a violation of rights and a blatant display of political opportunism," says the Free Media Movement (FMM).

Vithanage, 38, says the 'deferment' is worse than a ban. "A ban at least could

be lifted but we have been living with this war for almost the past two decades and I have my doubts about the security situation improving in the real sense," he says. "If this is the case, as long as the war lasts, my film might never be released in Sri Lanka."

The film has been shown in Sri Lanka only on three occasions, all for private viewing. It was banned by government censors in May, when the country was placed on high war alert after a series of Tamil Tiger successes. The ban was lifted when the country's apex court ruled against the movie's censorship in June. However, Sarath Amunugama, the minister in charge of the National Film Corporation (NFC), ordered the NFC to hold the film's release because the country is still on a war footing. "The producer of the film may be informed that this film will be exhibited as soon as the security situation improves," Amunugama explained in a letter to NFC Chairman Tissa Abeysekera, who was among those in the industry who praised the film.

According to Sunila Abeysekera, a UN award-winning human rights activist, the film is a sarcastic comment on the war and its destructive nature. "It would have a devastating impact on the people, showing them the ground realities of the war. It clearly depicts how the war is sapping all our energies, our resources," she said. "How can one make a judgement on a film without seeing it?" she asked, responding to the government's view that screening the film may create unrest.

The film has very little dialogue and no songs, but has spectacular shots of the Sri Lankan countryside. "I have not known any other film that is composed of image and sound so silent and suppressed," said Vithanage's co-producer, Makoto Ueda of NHK television.

"It is a stunning film...It gives a totally different perspective of the war from the way it is portrayed by the media and by the politicians," says Ravindra Randeniya, a veteran actor and president of the Sri Lanka's Film Actors' Guild. He says there is simply no rationale for the government to stop the film from being released. "If there is no rationale for banning the movie, then is there a political motive?" he wonders.

(Asia Times, August 10, 2000)

(Continued from page 28)

political fortunes in Israel, but President Clinton's announcement that he might decide to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was not something that the Palestinians and the Arab world wanted to hear. Relocating the Embassy would be a reversal of the previous stand of the US and other countries not to recognize (West) Jerusalem as the Israeli capital before resolving the status of East Jerusalem. It will also enrage Arab fundamentalist opinion in the region, especially in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.



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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional bride for graduate son, 28, market manager in prestigious firm. Send horoscope, details. M 1181 c/o Tamil Times.

Sri Lankan Hindu Tamil, 31, 5'4", British citizen, Electronic Engineer in US employment seeks graduate bride in her twenties willing to settle down in US. Send horoscope, details to Email: Gymas5@aol.com or P.O. Box 190968, Dallas, TX 75219, USA.

Jaffna Tamil Hindu parents resident New Zealand, seek groom for good looking daughter, 32, Lawyer in Government Service. Please send horoscope, full background. M 1188 c/o Tamil Times.

Hindu mother seeks professional bride for British born son, 32, Management Accountant in UK firm. Send photo, details. M 1189 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parent seeks fair, preferably professional bride for British born graduate son, 38, managing his own, well established, professional, auditing practice, over ten years in North London. Send details and photo. M 1190 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Venugopal son of Mr. & Mrs. Kulasringam of C25 - 1/1 Soysapura HS, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka and Shanthakumari daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Thambirajah of 19 Bobcat Street, Brampton, Ontario L6R 1C9, Canada on 2.7.2000 at Canons High School Hall, Edgware, Middx., UK.

Vanita daughter of Mr. S.P. & Mrs. Uma Moorthy of 36 New Park Avenue, London N13 5NB and Mitesh son of Mr. B.D. & Mrs. Bhanumati Khakhar of 19 Park Field

Close, Gossops Green, Crawley, West Sussex RH11 8RS on 29.7.2000 at The Compton School Hall, Summers Lane, London N12 0QG.

Divaharan son of Mr. & Mrs. Kanarajah of 2584 Rugby Road Apt. 510, Mississauga, Ontario L5B 4B4, Canada and Gnanodini daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nalliah of K 4/2 Govt. Flats, Colombo 4 on 18.8.2000 at New Kathiresan Hall, Colombo 4.

Anjana daughter of Dr. & Dr. (Mrs.) N. Sivananthan of 17 The Glade, Welshwood Park, Colchester CO4 3JD, UK and

Hasita son of Mr. & Mrs. Dudley Fernando of 30/62 Longden Place, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka on 19.8.2000 at The Lanka Oberoi, Colombo 3.

Chitra daughter of Mr. & Mrs. M. Arumugam of 'Gala Knowe', 8 Ardrossan Road, West Kilbride, Ayrshire KA23 9LR, Scotland and Giri son of Mrs. P. Wijayasingam of 183/2 Galli Road, Dehiwela, Sri Lanka and the late Mr T. Hyayasingam on 27.8.2000 at Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple, India.

OBITUARIES



Mrs. Jeyaladchumi Jeyasingham (Rasar), born 27.06.25, beloved wife of Jeyasingham (Retired Administrative Staff, Jaffna College); daughter of the late Mr. Muttiah and Mrs. Theivanaipillai Muttiah; loving mother of Gunasekaram, Gunaseelan and Gunathilahan (UK), Gunathayalan, Gunaratnam

(Canada) and Gunasankar (Australia); mother-in-law of Ranjini, Geetha, Suthahari (UK), Rane, Mathavi (Canada) and Gowri (Australia); sister of late Seevaratnam, Selvaratnam and Pathmavathy, Ponmalar and Sathianathan; sister-in-law of late Balasingham, Sarasvathydevi, Tharmarajah and Shanmuganathan, Mahiladevi and Rajamohan; grandmother of Archana, Thuseelan, Theepi-

ga, Sanjana, Lakshana and Brinda passed away on 27th July 2000 and was cremated on 2nd August in London.

The members of the family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - Mr. G. Jeyasingham, 99 Landseer Avenue, London E12 6HS. Tel: 020 8478 3785.

IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of **Mr. Edward Soma Ponniah** on the second anniversary of his

demise on the 11th of August 1998.

When the One Great Scorer comes

To write against your name
He writes not that you won or lost

But 'How you played the Game'

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife **Nellita (Bubby)**, loving children and precious grand-children. - Sender **Mrs N. Ponniah**, 79 Sydney Road, Sutton, Surrey SM1 2QJ, UK.

IN MEMORIAM



Mrs. Rohini Wijeyadevendran
June 19, 1925 - August 4, 1999

'God saw you were getting tired
And a cure was not to be,
So he put his arms around you
And whispered, "Come to me"

With tearful eyes we watched you
And saw you pass away.
Although we loved you dearly,
We could not make you stay.

A golden heart stopped beating,
Hard working hands at rest.
God broke our hearts to prove to us,
He only takes the best.'

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by her loving children, **Suren, Subathra, Ravi, Vasundra, Harry and Yaso** and their families and all her loving brothers and sisters and in-laws.

Tenth Death Anniversary

In loving memory of **Mr. Apputhurai Gunaratnam**, formerly Divisional Superintendent of Post Offices, Sri Lanka, of Point Pedro on the Tenth Anniversary of his passing away on 28th August 1990.

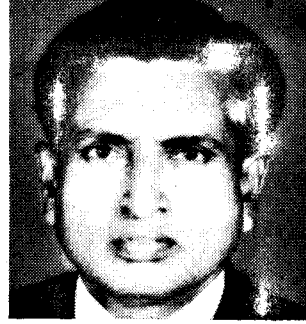
Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife Rani; children Thirukumaran (Australia), Vasuki (Sri Lanka), Devaki (Australia), Sutharsan (UK), Saratha Devi (Australia); sons-in-law Ravindran, Radhakrishnan and Sashikanth; daughter-in-law Vasanthi; grandchildren Ashvini, Yathurshini, Prushoth, Mayurikka and Mayuran. - 67B St Anns Road, London N15 6NJ. Tel: 020 8802 5601.

Fourth Death Anniversary

Mr. Selvarajab Kiritharan, Engineer, London of 'Notary Walawu', Thunnalai North, Karaveddy, Sri Lanka passed away suddenly on 22nd August 1996 and the **Fourth** anniversary of his passing away falls on 22nd August 2000.

'We miss you Kiri for ever'

Affectionately remembered by his loving parents, **Mr. Naganather Selvarajah** and **Mrs Kamalakumari Selvarajah** of London; loving brother **Muraleedaran** and sister-in-law **Dr. (Mrs) Sukaniya** of 5 Cezamne Crescent, Wheelers Hill, Victoria 3150, Australia; loving sisters and brothers-in-law **Dr. (Mrs) Subathini Ramesh** and **K. Ramesh**, University of Jaffna; **Mrs. Shanthini Shanmuganathan** and **S. Shanmuganathan** of 1238 Greenford Road, Greenford, Middx., UB6 OHH, UK; loving sister **Miss Shamini**, Law Faculty, University of Colombo, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, other relatives and friends. - 28 Bridgewater Road, Alper-ton, Wembley, Middx HAO IAJ. Tel: 020 8422 4627.



Mr Mayilvaganam Velummayilum J.P., U.M., Attorney-at-law and former Chairman, Urban Council, Point Pedro, Sri Lanka passed away on 31.8.89 and the eleventh anniversary of his demise falls on 31.8.2000.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife; children Thayanandarajah (UK), Nithianandarajah (New Zealand), Mayilvaganarajah (UK), Chitra (Colombo), Anandarajah, Krishnarajah and Jayanthi (all of Madras); grandsons Camern, Ewan and Atharson;

son-in-law **Kamaleswaran** (Colombo); daughters-in-law **Sumitra** (UK), **Devi** (New Zealand), relatives, friends and a host of grateful constituents. - 'Hillcroft', 14 Howards Wood Drive, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 7HN.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- Sept 1** Vinayagar Chaturthi.
Sept 2 South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in. Tel: 020 8542 3285.
Sept 3 Shashti; Feast of Saint George, the Great.
Sept 8 Feast of the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Sept 9 Sukkla Eekathasi; SLTWG Women's Front Meets. Tel: 020 8542 3285.
Sept 10 Pirathosam.
Sept 13 Full Moon.
Sept 14 Feast of the Triumph of the Cross.
Sept 15 Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows.
Sept 16 Feast of St. Cornelius.

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Sept 17 Chathurthi.

Sept 18 Karthigai.

Sept 21 Feast of St. Mathew.

Sept 23 Eekathasi; Purattasi Sani (1); SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 020 8542 3285.

Sept 25 Pirathosam.

Sept 27 Amavasai.

Sept 28 Navaraththiri commences.

Sept 29 Karthigai.

Sept 30 Purattasi Sani (2); Feast of St. Jerome; SLTWG celebrates Navaraththiri.

At Bhavan Centre, 4A

Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 020 7381 3086/4608

Sept 1 6.30 p.m. Sri Ganesh Puja. Bhajans, Puja and Prasad. All welcome.

Sept 3 5 p.m. Lecture on Diseases - A new Concept by

Prof. B. M. Hedge. All welcome.

Sept 23 5p.m. Lecture on Indian Theatre by Tarla Mehta. All welcome

Sept 30 & Oct 1 2 to 4p.m. Vedanta Discourses by Swami Veda Bharati. All welcome

Anjana's Arangetram Pleases



To a capacity audience of over 700 people, Anjana Pathmarajah's debut performance on July 1st at the Lancaster Performing Arts Centre, was a delightful one. She exhibited confidence and an agility that was remarkable.

The teenager is a student of Kalyani Shanmugarajah and Bhaghavatalu Seeta Rama Sanna. Anjana began her recital with a Ganeshanjali followed by Mahesha Tandava. The piece dwelt on the creation of the basic syllabus on rhythm - that, dhith, thom, nam.

The dancer then performed two keeratanams. One was dedicated to Raja Rajeswari and the other to Lord Siva. The central Varnam was focused on the beauty of Lord Muruga. The piece 'Swami ne manamirangi' was in ragam Sriranjani. Ten out of the 31 verses of the famed composition of Adi Sankara, 'Bhaja Govindam' was then performed. This specially choreographed piece by Seetarama Sarma was done full justice by Anjana. After the dance of the ardhanaris, the next item was an ashtapathi to the popular 'Chandana Charchita'. The tillana that concluded the recital showcased the dancer's dexterity and strength with the aspect of nritta.

Swami Ishwarananda of the Chinmaya Mission was the Chief Guest. The decorations on the stage also added to the quality of the program. Temple backdrops on the wings and in the back of the stage were

offset by a beautiful altar to the gods in front. Musical accompaniment was provided by Seetarama Sarma and Sankari Senthilkumar: Vocal, Kalyani Shanmugarajah: Nattuvangam, G. Vijayaraghavan: Mrdangam, B. Muttukumar: Flute and T. Mithradeva: Violin.

Anjana is the granddaughter of late Mrs. Rohini and Mr. Chelvadurai Duke Wijeyadevendram and late Mr. & Mrs. C. Canagaratnam of Kanderamadam, Jaffna. She is the daughter of Dr. Pathmarajah and Vasundra.

Nimmie Ragunathan - Staff Reporter, India Journal, California

Maha Kumbabishekam in Edmonton, Canada

July 3rd - 7th was the commemoration period of the Kumbabishekam of Maha Ganapati Temple in Edmonton, Canada. A 1 million dollar project temple was completed with Jaffna Agama tradition. The highlight of the cultural day on 7th July was a classical Bharatha Natya Ballet, 'Vision of Nallur', choreographed and presented by Dr. Kanchana Sivalingam on the life of Maharishi Yogaswami and his divinity transformed to Sri Subramuniya Swami of Hawaii. Sri Subramuniya Swami personally presided over this programme. It was a scintillating performance by 12 dancers and 3 actors, one of its kind to present the life of a Sri Lankan Maharishi, who has been in the hearts of many Sri Lankan Hindus.

The President of Sivathonda Nilayam of Toronto referred to it as a beauty of a task brought into classical Pure Bharatha Natyam. Speaking further he said that that he least expected Swami's songs to be presented so beautifully in a dance form.



Above are the three principal dancers from left to right Narmatha Thanigasalam, Dr. Kanchana Sivalingam and Nalayini Maheswaran. Kanchana, a practising Physician in Alberta, had the Bharatha Natya Arangetram in London of two of her

students, prior to migrating to Edmonton, Canada, where she runs her Shivalaya Performing Arts School in Dance.

Jeyavaney's Bharatha Natya Arangetram



The Bharatha Natya Arangetram of Jeyavaney, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. K. Jeyapalan, disciple of Mrs. Rajini Shuresh Kumar of 'Institute of Kalabharath', Hounslow, UK and student of Lampton School under the distinguished patronage of Hon. D.M. Swaminathan, Attorney-at-law and former Governor of Western Province, Sri Lanka took place at the Elphinstone Theatre, Maradana, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka on 20th August 2000. The Arangetram was organised by Kalasuri Mrs. Gowreeswari Rajappan, Principal of the Music Society of Sri Lanka.

Australian Newsletter

Radiothon by Tamil Radio in Sydney - Inpa Tamil Oli under the leadership of Mr. Bala Prabhakaran launched a Radiothon after the Elephant Pass victory to collect money for the Emergency Tamil Medical Fund. Hundreds of listeners rang in to offer donations and after a few days the grand sum of \$ 265,000 was collected. During the Radiothon there was a link up with the Tamil Radio Station in Toronto, Canada and listeners from there were highly emotional.

The first of a series of workshops on the future needs of the Tamil Diaspora was conducted on 27th May 2000 at the Lidcombe Community Centre in Sydney. The Australian Federation of Tamil continued on page 33

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Associations and other Tamil organisations initiated the workshops. The main topics discussed were (a) The plight of the civilians in the Tamil areas (b) The role of India and Tamil Nadu in particular. (c) Lobbying the international community. (d) The inevitable emergence of a Tamil state.

The meeting was advised that the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation and Tamil Medical Aid were active in helping to overcome the hardships faced by the Tamil people in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

The second workshop was held on 10th June at the Auburn Community Centre in Sydney. There was a detailed discussion of the current situation in the Tamil areas and the role of India, Norway and the US. The workshop ended with group discussions and Dinner.

Chinnannal nabbed by Kandy costhas

When one travels from north Sri Lanka to Kandy via Polgahawela Junction taking the Yal Devi that leaves Kankasanturai just after midday, arrival in a connecting train from Colombo at the hill station would be midnight. Chinnannai, the lovable singing saint from the Christa Seva Ashram in Maruthanamadam, who counts on friends in every nook and corner of the island and even beyond, normally took this train whenever he had to go to the University of Peredeniya. Apart from many friends there, he also had a relative, a dean.

But as is typical of Chinnannai he never caused any inconvenience to anybody, even to his relative by expecting to be met at the Kandy station or even reaching any doorstep at an ungodly hour. Dedicated to a frugal lifestyle and willing to adjust to circumstances beyond most mortals, Chinnannai found a place to pass the night in supine slumber and in exceptional company. He found the chapel in the town's graveyard quite apt to meet his nocturnal need.

On one such occasion there happened to be a child-kidnapping scare in the hill town. The police were on the lookout for the loathsome culprit; their nightly vigils were most intense. Unfortunately for the ashram padre, a past midnight patrol or police posse passing by the graveyard noticed a saffron-robed man preparing himself to sleep on a concrete slab near the entrance to the chapel.

The excited police duo, known as costhas in slang dialect, alerted nearby night patrols and together swooped on Chinnannai who spoke no Sinhalese and arrested him as the 'billo' (childnapper). The costhas hardly spoke Tamil and virtually no English. Despite protests, he was taken to the Kandy Police Station where the Officer in Charge was able to communicate with him in some English.

But he did not believe his story. When

Chinnannai said that he knew a number of lecturers and even a dean at the university hardly three miles away, the police concluded that he was not only a childnapper but also an all-crazed-up-cuckoo.

Amidst this harrowing situation, Chinnannai's typical smile never deserted him. Haughty and confident they had grabbed the degraded demon of the dark, and pitiless to the feelings of the evening's victim, the police began to ridicule him as a stark staring screwball. Chinnannai insisted they telephone his dean relative and gave them the telephone number; by now it was an hour after midnight.

Making cynical remarks and jabbing the simple saffron-clad priest with verbal jeers in his insensitive 'Singlish' vulgarity, the OIC dialed the number. When it was answered, he stood up all attention and salutations and said very apologetically that he was sorry to disturb him at such a time with his terrible dilemma.

When the dean asked him why and what was it about, the OIC said: 'Sir, this Tamil guy here says he, your relative sir; but sir, he sleeping in Kandy cemetery. I think sir this guy catching children. Kidnapping sir; we charge him for it sir.'

The shocked dean asked the OIC for a description of the suspect and the moment he said that he was dressed in saffron, grins and looked a crackpot, the dean told him he would be in the station in five minutes. He said nothing more.

The five minutes looked like five days for the town's policemen. As for Chinnannai he sat on a stool and happily but softly sang a hymn of praise.

When the dean arrived he took the OIC aside for two minutes and when they got back to the duty room, the officer went on his knees and paid obeisance to this wonderful man from Jaffna; his staff followed suit. He was none other than the inimitable Sevak Yesusagayam who was affectionately Chinnannai to everybody who knew him and the ashram community.

Nirvana can be attained in strange circumstances even in a Sri Lankan police station and the enlightened one could be a Tamil. Ask the Kandy police!

When he said goodbye to them, Chinnannai thanked the OIC for calling the dean on the telephone and the costhas for doing their job and wished they would soon catch the real culprit of the hill capital. One wonders whether they ever did!

As they left the police station, a couple of walls away, Rajah the lead elephant of the Sacred Temple of Tooth, awakened from his sleep gave a low trumpet. The policemen thought, it was a good omen for a new day. Kandy's prestigious status as a centre of Buddhist culture is all about awakening to the truth; that morning to the policemen at Kandy, Chinnannai, was perhaps a Bodhisavattva who came among them.

Richards Karunairajan

NEWS IN BRIEF

Lanka to Raise \$319 million Additional Loan

Sri Lanka raised the government's limit on borrowings on 17 August by another 25 billion rupees (319 million dollars) as the defence budget shot up unexpectedly by over 50 percent.

The parliament voted to hurriedly amend the annual budget to accommodate the additional defence expenditure, triggered by a ferocious offensive launched by Tamil Tiger guerrillas in April.

The government's loan limit was raised from 189,023 to 214,023 million rupees, a bill approved in parliament showed.

In the previous week, parliament voted for an additional \$356 million for the war effort. The legislature approved the supplementary estimates without a debate one week ago, as the money was urgently needed to pay for military hardware, aircraft, naval craft and increased wages.

The money balloons the country's defence budget, which was originally estimated at 52.43 billion rupees – but shattered by the ferocious Tamil offensive.

The government has substantially raised taxes on tobacco and alcohol and increased the national defence levy from 5.5 percent 6.5 percent to raise revenue for its war effort.

Aid Agreement With US

The United States of America has entered into two aid agreements with Sri Lanka, according to officials in Colombo. Under the first agreement the U.S. will make available five million U.S. dollars this year in very low interest loans to allow Sri Lanka to import nearly 40,000 tons of high quality U.S. wheat. According to a U.S. Embassy press release the interest rate is only 3 to 4 percent which is far below commercial rates.

Under the second agreement, the United States, through its Agency for International Development, will grant two million dollars for a program to benefit the industrial sectors of Sri Lanka with increased productivity and improved strategies and business models.

EU to Report on Lanka Polls

A four-member, high-level team of officials from the European Commission headquarters in Brussels is presently preparing a fact-finding report on the need for election monitors in the forthcoming Parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka. Organised in collaboration with the European Union office in Colombo, the team has conducted detailed talks with members of all political parties including the opposition, UNP and various non-governmental organisations to prepare a detailed report on the impending general elections.

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