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(Top) Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen flanked by Minister G L Peiris (L) and LTTE Chief Negotiator Anton Balasingham (R); G L Peiris shaking hands with Anton Balasingham



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

-Voltaire

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Thailand Peace Talks

The first round of face-to-face talks in Thailand between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have concluded with both parties claiming reasonable success. That there was a remarkable degree of cordiality and meeting of minds between both parties was manifest during the talks and at the media conferences that followed.

The important contribution made by the Norwegian facilitating team in bringing both parties to the negotiating table cannot be overstated. Setting the tone and more importantly the purpose of and the need for the talks to succeed, the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen said that "the rewards of peace are great and amount to far more than the absence of war. Peace is about restoring normalcy in people's daily lives. Peace is about upholding human rights and human dignity, not least for women and children who suffer the most from war."

Besides asserting their commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka, both parties in their opening statements tried hard to give the positive impression of them being partners in a historic common endeavour to bring peace to the country and its people. At the same time, they also made it apparent the gap that exists between the positions held by each side. To emphasise the point that the issue of a separate state was not a matter for negotiations, the head of the government delegation Prof. Gamini Peiris said, "We stand unwaveringly for the amplest degree of devolution and for the establishment and strengthening of institutions designed to achieve this purpose. But these reforms must necessarily be effected within the framework of a State whose unity and territorial integrity is ensured in fact and in law by the envisioned structures." For his part, the LTTE's chief negotiator Dr. Anton Balasingham said, "The LTTE is the legitimate and authentic representative of the Tamil people.... The deepest aspiration of our people is peace, a peace with justice and freedom; a permanent peace in which our people enjoy their right to self-determination and co-exist with others." At the press conference that followed the talks, Balasingham clarifying the LTTE's position said, "the Tamil struggle for self-determination in their homeland does not mean that they are fighting for a separate state of Eelam. This thinking is totally misplaced. The LTTE does not operate with the concept of a separate state. We operate within a concepts of a homeland and self-determination," adding that if substantial autonomy was not granted the LTTE would as a last resort be compelled to fight for political independence and statehood.

Another welcome development to be noted is that the interests of the Muslim community in the island will be separately represented in future talks. Rauf Hakeem, who was present as a member of the Government delegation, would in due course participate in the talks in his capacity as the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the Head of a Muslim delegation.

As for the concrete outcome of the talks, the parties agreed to establish promptly a Joint Committee consisting of senior representatives of both sides, including military personnel, to deal with issues relating to High Security Zones, with the aim of enabling the return of larger numbers of displaced persons to their areas of origin, thereby facilitating the restoration of normalcy.

Prior to the talks the LTTE had announced that it would press for the setting up of an interim administration for the northern and eastern provinces presumably under its control. But at the talks, the parties agreed to establish a Joint Task Force for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Activities (JTF). This body, whose mandate and structure are to be finalised rapidly, is to be a partnership between the government and the LTTE and will have responsibility for the identification, financing and monitoring of urgent humanitarian and reconstruction activities in the north and east, its immediate priorities being stepping up of de-mining operations and accelerating resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons.

It seems clear that until a formal interim administrations is set up, the JTF will function as such in a de facto sense. However, what has not been made clear is as to how the interim arrangements will be governed by the principles of democratic representation, accountability, transparency and financial probity. One expects that with the taking shape of these interim arrangements, the practice of arbitrary imposition of so-called taxes and other forms of draconian demands to which people are subjected will cease.

If peace is about upholding human rights and human dignity as the head of the Norwegian facilitation team rightly asserted, it is regrettable that the issue of the obligations of the parties to observe human and fundamental rights of the people has been completely ignored. One hopes that the parties and the facilitators will turn their minds to this important element at the next round of talks.

What is important to note is that negotiations did in fact take place in the context of a ceasefire agreement that has held since February this year, the beneficial effects of which are already demonstrably clear. The fact that the parties have decided on further three rounds of talks scheduled to take place in the coming months would indicate that both parties are serious about taking the peace process forward.

The people have suffered enough and more. Their plea is for the parties to forswear forever the path of violence and keep talking until peace is achieved, for the rewards of peace are great.

Govt-LTTE Peace Talks in Thailand

The much publicised and long awaited first face-to-face meeting between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commenced as scheduled at 3 pm at the Ambassador City Jomtien Hotel, in the Sattahip Naval Base at Chonburi Province in Thailand. They were preceded by the formal opening ceremony at 10.30 am presided by Thailand Permanent Secretary Mr. Tei Bunnang. The entire diplomatic corps based in Thailand had been invited for the opening ceremony, including America, Britain, India and the European Union. More than 200 reporters from the world media were present to cover the event.

Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris led the Sri Lankan Government contingent that included Ministers Rauf Hakeem, Milinda Moragoda and Secretary General of the Government's Peace Secretariat Bernard Gunatileka. LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham led the LTTE team that included US-based lawyer Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran, Australia-based Development expert Dr. Jay Maheswaran and sociologist Adele Balasingham who functioned as the secretary to the delegation.

The formal talks began with the statement by the Thai Government's Foreign Ministry Secretary Tej Bunnang, followed by statements by the Sri Lankan delegation head, Prof. Peiris and the LTTE delegation leader Anton Balasingham.

There was much praise from all parties for the assistance provided by the Thai government in hosting the talks. Eric Solheim, the Norwegian special peace envoy said, "The Thai government I must say has attached the greatest importance and is helping us in every possible way to help make this landmark discussion a success."

The afternoon talks started with delegates from both sides sitting face to face across the table while the members of the Norwegian facilitation team, Minister Helgessen, Ambassador Westborg and Mr. Solheim sat at the other two sides of the table with other Norwegian back up staff available in the background.

The talks between the parties lasted three days, 16 to 18 September. The time table for the talks was as follows: Monday September 16: 10.30 am: Opening

Ceremony (press invited); 3.00 - 6:00 pm: First negotiating session; Tuesday September 17: 9.00 am - 12:00 pm: Second negotiating session; 2:00 - 5:30 pm: third negotiating session; 7:00 pm: Delegates' dinner; Wednesday September 18: 9.00 am - 12.00 pm: Fourth negotiating session; 2.00 - 2:45 pm: Press conference: Ambassador City Jomtien Hotel.

In the run-up to the talks and during the talks, both parties appeared to display a manifest commitment to the peace process and strike quite a conciliatory note in their comments and opening statements. The relationship between the delegations appeared to be very cordial. "The positive relationship between Peiris and Balasingham is what struck me. They were both trying to convince their respective constituencies and the world that they were for peace," said Jehan Perera, a political analyst and Media Director of the National Peace Council. "If the spirit demonstrated at the press conference was reflected in the confidential talks as well, then the outlook for the peace process was very positive," he added.

Government statement

The leader of the government delegation, Prof. G.L. Peiris, on the eve of his departure for talks in Thailand, promised, "We will assure the country that we will leave no stone unturned to bring peace to the country - peace with honour, peace that respects rights and aspirations of all the people of this country."

In his opening statement, emphasising the need for trust and confidence between the parties for the peace talks to succeed, Peiris said, "We are convinced that no process of negotiation could aspire to be fruitful in its outcome in the absence of a threshold of trust and confidence between the parties. It is the sacred duty of all our people, and in particular of all those - whatever their political complexion - on whom the mantle of leadership has fallen at this decisive moment, to consign to oblivion the wounds of the past, to rise above the lingering memory of injustice, pain and worse, to disavow the heritage of vengeance and retribution and to draw upon the reserves of wisdom, generosity and large-heartedness with which our cultural traditions have bountifully endowed us."

Adverting to the destruction and suffering that the people have had to endure during the many years of war, Peiris said, "Together we repudiate today a legacy of rancour and hatred, which has torn asunder the fabric of our nation for decades... It is Sri Lanka's collective calamity that this wholesome state of things yielded place in recent times to the emergence of narrow and sectarian attitudes which, as night must follow day, have wrought acrimony, disintegration and destruction. The straws had been in the wind for half a century, and the inexorable sequence of events, debilitating in their influence on every sphere of national life, culminated in a war, unique in its ferocity and the ensuing ravage in terms of human life and the depth of anguish and suffering. We turn our backs on war as an instrument for realising the dream of a nation. This is a matter of empirical experience. The intensity of pain and deprivation, which pervaded the armed conflict of eighteen long years, has banished from our minds - in perpetuity - the appeal of sabre-rattling."

Referring to beneficial effects of the ceasefire between the government and the LTTE that came into effect in February this year, Peiris said, "Above all, the fear which stalked a whole generation has become a thing of the past, heralding in its stead the spirit of freedom and contentment, much in evidence in the countenance of the tens of thousands, who in the company of their family and friends, whether on business, on pilgrimage or on holiday, have rediscovered for themselves whole regions of their country, which had been all but inaccessible to them in recent times. It is inconceivable to us that a people, hovering on the threshold of such exhilarating possibilities, should decide to jettison it all in order to return, of their own accord, to the travails of war."

Referring to the previous attempts made at peace making, Peiris said, "President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, soon after her election for the first time eight years ago, committed her government to the goal of a negotiated peace. It is the endeavour of our government at this time, with malice towards none and goodwill towards all, to consolidate and build on all positive elements buttressing previous attempts at different times and yet, in all humility, to learn from the mistakes of the past, not to impute blame but simply to avoid their repetition and perpetuation. As we renounce war and embrace negotiation, as the key to our Island's future, far be it from us to deny or even unwittingly to make light of, the challenges and hazards that confront us. A reservoir of suspicion and an-

tipathy, which has filled to the brim over extended periods, can scarcely be wished away overnight. Assuredly, no quick fix is feasible. Unmistakably indicated are the qualities of patience, perseverance and dedication."

Describing the process of peace talks as not a zero sum exercise or a winners-take-all game, and paying tribute to the LTTE and its leader, Peiris said, "Nothing is clearer, in the interest of national survival, let alone national prosperity, than that this is the time for a fresh point of departure. We, for our part, as the government of our country, are equal to this challenge. We pay tribute, at the same time, to the foresight of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and their leader, Mr Velupillai Pirabakaran, in embarking on the transformation of their movement into a political organisation responsive to the changing nuances of contemporary priorities..... We declare, with all the vehemence at our command that the negotiations, which we are about to commence, are not in our view, by any means, a zero sum exercise. It is not a question of the winner taking all. Indeed, it is plain for all to see, at this watershed in the meandering course of a fratricidal conflict, that there are no winners and no losers. These negotiations cannot be pursued on the basis that gain accruing to one party, involves reciprocal loss to the other. We emphatically reject that premise. We acknowledge that we both have a problem, destructive of the pulsating heart of our nation, which it is in our mutual interest to resolve together. This is very much the spirit in which we conceive of, and will carry through, our role in the ensuing discussions."

Noting the need to ensure the safety, security and identity of all communities in the island, and drawing specific attention to the presence of the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauf Hakeem at the talks, Peiris said, "We note that it is envisaged that the Hon. Rauf Hakeem, who is present as a member of the Government delegation, will in due course participate in the talks in his capacity as the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the Head of a Muslim delegation. This arrangement would, no doubt, ensure the continuance of a constructive and meaningful dialogue.

We are mindful that any substantive structural and institutional arrangements that may be evolved should provide for the rights of all communities. In this context, we have taken note of the apprehensions expressed by the Sinhala and Muslim communities living in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. All parties should take cognisance of the need to ensure the

safety, security and identity of these communities as well, and the protection and advancement of their political, social, economic and cultural rights. We should ensure that their concerns are totally addressed."

Stating that the government's stand that it stood for the widest possible autonomy within the unity and territorial integrity of the country, Peiris said, "in determining the parameters of the talks, there are some elements - rudimentary in quality - which cannot but be constant. These represent the irreducible foundations of what we care for and believe in. We stand unwaveringly for the amplest degree of devolution and for the establishment and strengthening of institutions designed to achieve this purpose. But these reforms must necessarily be effected within the framework of a State whose unity and territorial integrity is ensured in fact and in law by the envisioned structures."

LTTE Statement

The leader of the LTTE's negotiating team, Dr Anton Balasingham, in his opening statement asserting that the Tamil Tigers were seriously and sincerely committed to peace and expressing confidence that the peace talks would progress successfully said, "The task of building a permanent peace and reaching a final settlement to the ethnic conflict may be difficult, challenging and time consuming. Nevertheless, we are confident that with the able assistance of the Norwegian facilitators there is a possibility for the peace process to succeed. We are optimistic that the peace talks will succeed because both Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, the leader of the Liberation Tigers, and Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, have a genuine will and a firm determination to resolve the conflict through the process of dialogue. As far as the Liberation Tigers are concerned, I can assure you that we are seriously and sincerely committed to peace and that we will strive our utmost to ensure the success of the negotiations. We are well aware that there are powerful political forces in southern Sri Lanka who are irrationally opposed to peace and ethnic reconciliation. Nevertheless, we are confident that the talks will progress successfully because of the fact that the principal parties in the conflict as well as the overwhelming majority of the people of the island want peace and peaceful resolution of the conflict."

Criticising the previous governments for resorting to military means to address the ethnic problem, and referring to the radical changes that have taken place

since the ceasefire agreement in February this year, Balasingham said, "The intransigence of the previous government could only be attributed to its incredible military theory that war begets peace and political solutions can only be realised by military means. By practicing such an absurd notion the last government of Sri Lanka plunged the entire country into the abyss of social and economic disaster. The situation has radically changed with the assumption to power of the new government with the overwhelming popular mandate for peace and negotiated political settlement. The new government reciprocated positively to the unilateral cease-fire declared by our liberation organisation at the end of last year. It was at that stage the Norwegian facilitators were able to intervene constructively and work out a comprehensive cease-fire agreement. A mutually agreed cease-fire agreement with international monitors from Nordic and Scandinavian countries came into effect in February this year. The most encouraging aspect of the current situation is that the cease-fire has held for the last seven months, without any serious violations."

Stating that normalcy was slowly returning to what he described as "the homeland of the Tamils and Muslims, Balasingham said, "Peace and stability are being restored in the island for the first time after two decades of sustained and relentless war that has torn the country apart. This positive atmosphere of peace has brought a sense of relief, hope and confidence to all major communities living in the island: the Tamils, the Sinhalese and the Muslims. A firm foundation has been laid for peace negotiations between the principal parties in conflict. Normalcy of civilian life is slowly and systematically returning to the northeast of Sri Lanka, the homeland of the Tamils and Muslims, the region that has faced the brunt of the armed conflict."

Describing in detail the hardships the people of the northeast and the extreme poverty and severe deprivation to which they have been subjected to, Balasingham said, "There is an urgent need for relief and assistance to the war affected people. Immediate steps should be undertaken without delay, to embark on a comprehensive program of resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction. This monumental task cannot be undertaken without the help and assistance of the international community. The concerned international governments, who have been supporting a negotiated settlement to the Tamil national question, should contribute generously for the reconstruction of the war-damaged economy of the

northeast. Improving the conditions of existence of the war affected people and effecting normalcy, congenial for their economic revival, has become a necessary and crucial element in advancing and consolidating the peace process."

Describing the Tamil Tigers as the legitimate and authentic representative of the Tamil, and calling upon the government to embrace the Tamil Tigers as equal partners in its effort for the economic development of the country, Balasingham said, "The leaders of the Sri Lanka government have expressed a desire to transform the island into a successful Tiger economy. We appreciate their aspiration. Such an aspiration can best be realised by embracing the Tamil Tigers as their equal partners in the task of economic reconstruction of the country. The LTTE is the legitimate and authentic representative of the Tamil people. We have lived, fought and suffered with and for our people throughout the turbulent times of the war. We have a comprehensive knowledge of the socio-economic needs confronting the Tamil people. We have built an effective administrative structure for more than ten years which has sustained the social cohesion and law and order. Therefore, it is crucial that the LTTE should play a leading and pivotal role in administration as well as the economic development of the Northeast.

The deepest aspiration of our people is peace, a peace with justice and freedom; a permanent peace in which our people enjoy their right to self-determination and co-exist with others. Peace, stability and ethnic harmony are the foundations upon which the economic prosperity of the island can be built. Let us strive, genuinely, with hope and confidence, to consolidate these foundations at this forum to bring a peaceful and prosperous life to all peoples in the island."

Norwegian statement

The Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgessen in his opening statement made a passionate plea to both parties to commit themselves to negotiations to achieve peace and to the international community to support Sri Lanka materially to enable it and its people to achieve peace. There is no path to peace - peace is the path, he said quoting the great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, adding, "The international community should take these words of wisdom as an appeal not to wait for peace to happen tomorrow, but to start investing in peace today. There exists today a state of relative peace in Sri Lanka, built on the ceasefire agreement in force since February. This relative peace indicates that ultimately a

political settlement of the ethnic conflict can be found."

Making it clear that the path to peace is not an easy task, and peace is about upholding human rights and human dignity, Helgessen said, "The parties will confront problems that can only be solved through painstaking effort and painful compromise. Close to twenty years of armed conflict cannot be resolved overnight. Coming from a very difficult past, Sri Lanka has no easy way forward. It is likely there will be setbacks, "hickups", walkouts and breakdowns. However, such incidents should not be seen as signs of failure. On the contrary, it should be seen as a success for both parties each time they settle their differences by heated discussions and not by the heat of the gun. ... Locked in a room for hours and days, there is always the risk of getting lost in the details of draft texts. When such situations arise, it is imperative that we try to look beyond the negotiating table and imagine the horizon of a peaceful and prosperous future for Sri Lanka. For the rewards of peace are great and amount to far more than the absence of war. Peace is about restoring normalcy in people's daily lives. Peace is about upholding human rights and human dignity, not least for women and children who suffer the most from war."

Paying tribute to the Sri Lankan political leaders for choosing the path of peace, Helgessen said, "Courage and leadership will be needed by leaders on both sides in order to meet these aspirations of the people. Such courage and leadership was already shown in the past. In the midst of difficult times in 1994-95 Her Excellency the President demonstrated this, by promoting the idea of negotiations as a solution to the conflict. Similarly in 1998-99 she and the leader of LTTE, Mr. Pirabakharan, agreed to explore the possibility of negotiations. Leadership and political courage was again demonstrated when the present Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and Pirabakharan in late 2001 revitalized the process towards negotiations by responding to each other's initiatives, leading to a formalized ceasefire in February this year. The two sides have shown continued leadership in implementing and sustaining the ceasefire, working constructively together, as well as with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, to resolve problems along the way."

Calling upon the international community come on board to assist Sri Lanka in its hour of need, Helgessen said, "However, the need of the hour is to make peace a reality in the daily lives of people, and thereby building peace from below while

negotiating peace at the top. It is in the interest of the world community at large to see Sri Lanka succeed, and therefore it is in our common interest to provide immediate funding for practical peace building on the ground. The Government of Norway feels privileged to have the opportunity of facilitating these negotiations, thereby assisting the parties in their quest for peace."

Issue of separate state

Commentators have found much significance in the statement by Balasingham to journalists in regard to the stand of the LTTE on the subject of a separate state of Tamil Eelam for which the Tamil Tigers have been waging a war with the government for over two decades. Responding to questions from journalists on the first day of the talks, Balasingham said, "the Tamil struggle for self-determination in their homeland does not mean that they are fighting for a separate state of Eelam. This thinking is totally misplaced." "The LTTE does not operate with the concept of a separate state. We operate within a concept of a homeland and self-determination," said Balasingham. "Homeland does not mean separate state as such but the place where Tamils and Muslims live," said Balasingham adding, however, that if substantial autonomy was not granted the LTTE would as a last resort be compelled to fight for political independence and statehood.

Asked about the LTTE demand for an interim administration in a merged North-East province Balasingham said that there was nothing wrong with that and it was a misconception to think that once an interim administration was set up the LTTE would run away from the peace process.

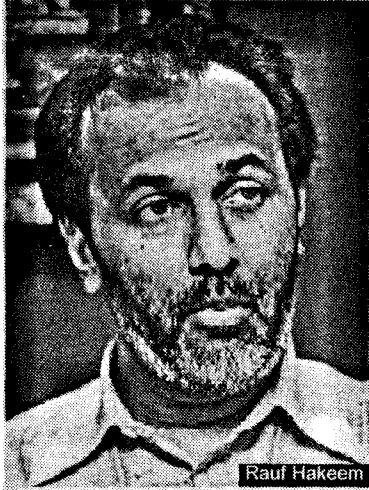
"Our objective is not to establish Eelam. An interim administration will not be an end in itself, but a part of the organic process. Do not forget that we already have a massive administrative structure in the areas under our control for which we are seeking international recognition. After all our cadres should be given a chance to run the administration which they have set up over many years," Balasingham said.

Some political analysts have noted in Balasingham's remarks a substantial shift in the LTTE's position on the issue of a separate state. "This was a significant shift in explaining their position on a separate state. This time he cleared the ambiguity about what self-determination and homeland meant. He clearly said that this meant regional autonomy and self government," said Jehan Perera, said.

However, other commentators noted

that while Prof. Peiris mentioned the need for a political and constitutional solution, Balasingham by-passed this aspect totally and spoke only about the setting up of an interim administration in which the Tigers would play a pivotal role for which he said the Tigers were seeking international recognition.

The issue of the Muslims



Rauf Hakeem, who was present as a member of the Government delegation, will be participating in future talks in his capacity as the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the Head of a Muslim delegation. The presence of the SLMC leader Rauf Hakeem at the talks also provided an opportunity for talks between him and the LTTE delegation. Mr. Balasingham acknowledged recognition of the Muslims as a key factor and noted that the island's north-east was also the "traditional homeland" of the community. Some analysts feel that this acknowledgement would go a long way in repairing the fractured relationship between the Muslims and the LTTE. In the recent past, particularly in eastern Sri Lanka, there have been several incidents in which the Tamil Tigers have been accused of harassing and intimidating Muslims and demanding ransom in some instances. These incidents have resulted in a much suspicion among the Muslims as to the LTTE's intentions. Now Rauf Hakeem has been invited by the LTTE for a separate meeting with its top leadership to hammer out outstanding issues. Prior to the Thailand talks, LTTE's chief negotiator and Rauf Hakeem met in London with Norwegian facilitation which resulted in the LTTE agreeing that Hakeem could attend the peace talks representing Muslim interests.

"Muslims must be on board for the talks to succeed and give it credibility. There should be guarantees in the form of structure and organisation for the Muslims in any settlement to the North East problem," Mr. Hakeem said before he sat down as a member of the government delegation to talk peace with the LTTE.

He said for the first time all the stakeholders in terms of communities are represented at talks unlike previous occasions where the leaders of government handpicked those close to them for personal reasons.

Addressing a press conference after the conclusion of the three-day peace talks, Anton Balasingham said, "The LTTE is very happy with the proceedings and we have taken a few decisions. We were in touch with our leader regarding every aspect of the proceedings here. He is very happy with the process."

Answering a question about the role of the few Tamil groups, which are not with the LTTE, Anton Balasingham said that those minor groups too could take part in any electoral process under the proposed interim administration in the Northeast. "The Muslims will play an important role because the Tamil homeland is also their territory," he said.

In response to questions about the LTTE's commitment to the peace process Mr. Balasingham said: "I do not agree with the critics when they blame the LTTE was not concerned or interested in the peace process. The LTTE has been participating in the peace process on several occasions from 1985 until the present time. On several occasions we have expressed our willingness to negotiate with the government of Sri Lanka. We are now confident that the present peace process is going to advance and succeed because of the main reason that this is the first time a third party is involved and is guiding the peace process between the parties in conflict. Secondly a stable foundation for peace is established. The ceasefire is holding for the last seven months. A stable ceasefire is very crucial for the concerted effort to lay a stable foundation. The third factor is that there is an international monitoring mission comprising Nordic and Scandinavian countries supervising the ceasefire.

"The international community for the first time is focusing on the dialogue of peace process between the government and the LTTE. Fifthly we have a team. I appreciate that this time the Sri Lankan government has produced a team with men of calibre and understanding; and we can relate to them and we can discuss with them. We have discussed many complicated issues from core issues, substantive issues and peripheral issues. We were able to proceed positively. I am very much confident that the present peace process will succeed".

Answering a question whether the disarming the LTTE was discussed, Mr. Balasingham said: "There is no question of disarmament at this early stage of the discussion. You know very well both parties - the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE have two standing armies, two navies and this is the first time a stable ceasefire has been established. Your question of disarming and decommissioning the LTTE will not arise until we

reach a permanent settlement that will satisfy the aspirations of Tamil people."

Interim administration

Answering questions from journalists, Balasingham said that preliminary steps towards an interim administration for the Tamil areas of the island had agreed between the parties. "We have also discussed the setting up of an interim administration in the course of the coming sessions," he said.

On the same subject, Prof. G. L. Peiris said "He has not gone into details of the composition or structure (of the interim administration) but we have prepared the ground for it. We have taken the preliminary steps necessary to create the conditions conducive [for it]. We have agreed amongst ourselves on how to take this forward."

When asked about protests in southern Sri Lanka that the interim administration would lead to a permanent division of the country, Mr. Peiris replied: "The interim administration is exactly what it's name connotes: it is a step on the way. It has to be seen as part of a process. It does not stop there. Apprehensions on that score are entirely unfounded."

"There is a misconception in Colombo that the interim administration is going to be an end in itself. The interim administration will be part of an organic process of reaching a final settlement," Balasingham said.

"But [the interim administration] is a useful mechanism," Mr. Peiris said. "Far from doing any damage, it is necessary - amongst other things - to accelerate the economic development of those areas. It will provide a coherent structure within which development programs can be undertaken."

"There will be proper fiscal responsibility. You will know who are the officials entrusted with particular functions. You need a formal structure like that to undertake the kind of development on the scale needed at present," he said further.

Asked by a reporter if the interim administration "would be handed over to the LTTE," Mr. Peiris responded: "I think the phrase 'handing over' is very unfortunate. I think that is the wrong way to look at problems of this kind. What we are thinking of structures which will enable a partnership. Parties have to work with each other. They have to be involved in matters. Participation is indispensable if there is to be a political solution. Of there is no question of excluding anyone. These structures have to be all inclusive, they have to reflect ethnic diversity and cater for aspirations of all sections of our people," he said.

"It is premature to comment on the nature, structure and function of the envisaged interim set up," Mr. Balasingham said. "I think that as Professor Peiris has correctly said, we would be exploring these possibilities and work out an amicable framework that would satisfy the

aspirations of our people as well as the Muslim people and also the Sinhalese people living in the north east."

Mr. Balasingham rejected the suggestion that the LTTE was seeking an interim administration as a halfway stage to a separate state. "You must remember that the LTTE already has a permanent administration in our controlled areas. In actual fact what we are seeking is international legitimacy for administrative structure where we can coordinate and work with the government of Sri Lanka," he said.

Outcome of Talks

"The talks have been frank and constructive and were held in a relaxed atmosphere, where the parties have shown understanding and mutual respect for each other's concerns," the Norwegian facilitators said in a statement following the second day of talks.

The statement added that the two parties discussed the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, humanitarian challenges and further cooperation to improve economic development and normalisation. The statement said the structure and framework for future meetings and the way forward were also discussed by the two parties in nearly nine hours of official talks and other informal talks concluded over two days at the Sattahip naval base.

It is understood that the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between the government and LTTE entered into in February was the first subject discussed in detail by the two parties during the first day of talks. Complaints from both sides about the noncompliance with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement were gone into with government suggestions that the LTTE avoid incidents such as the abduction of SLMM monitors.

It is said that a LTTE request for repealing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act under which Tamil suspects were been detained for years was turned down by the government and it also refused to give the greenlight to allow a separate LTTE run-judicial system in the North and East.

The two parties agreed to set up a joint committee to oversee the development of the war-ravaged North-East under the first phase of a project involving the reconstruction of permanent houses, rehabilitation of schools occupied by the army, improvement to the health sector, and resettlement of displaced families.

The total reconstruction and rehabilitation of the North East and the resettlement of more than one million displaced people has been estimated at 500 million US dollars and is expected to take place over a period of five years.

Under the project, repairs to power lines and redistribution of power, rehabilitation of major and medium tanks and reconstruction and rehabilitation work involving agriculture, livestock and fisher-

ies are to be undertaken.

The entire project is estimated at nearly 2,000 million rupees while UN agencies and the government has jointly estimated that some 25 million US dollars will be required for demining, food, agriculture, employment, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and education services.

Norwegian Foreign Ministry in a statement issued on 19 September stated:

The first round of formal peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was held in Sattahip, Thailand, between 16 and 18 September 2002. The negotiations were facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government.

The parties agreed that in their determination to bring the peace process forward, they are responding to the overwhelming call of the peoples of Sri Lanka to bring an end to the ethnic conflict, and create the conditions for lasting peace, prosperity, and respect for human rights.

Both parties expressed their resolve to address the full range of issues pertaining to a lasting political settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, fully realizing that this can best be achieved by pursuing a step-by-step approach to the negotiation process. This approach has proven successful in the establishment and implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement already in force since February. The parties recognized the need for sustaining the Ceasefire Agreement, with

the continued assistance of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, which the parties commended for its impartial conduct in the fulfillment of its important mandate.

The parties affirmed their determination to continue upholding the Ceasefire Agreement and expanding the range of confidence-building measures over the period ahead. Building on the achievements of the Ceasefire Agreement, the parties agreed to establish promptly a Joint Committee to deal with the issues relating to High Security Zones, with the aim of enabling the return of larger numbers of displaced persons to their areas of origin, thereby facilitating the restoration of normalcy. This Joint Committee will consist of senior representatives of both sides, including military personnel.

The parties discussed in depth the urgent need to address the difficult humanitarian situation in the north and east of Sri Lanka. To this effect, the parties agreed to establish a Joint Task Force for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Activities. The Joint Task Force will constitute a partnership between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, and will have responsibility for the identification, financing and monitoring of urgent humanitarian and reconstruction activities in the north and east. The task force will operate with due participation of Muslims, and its work will benefit all ethnic communities of the North and East. The details relating to the mandate and structure of the Joint Task Force will rapidly be finalized between the parties with the assistance of the Norwegian facilitators. The two immediate priorities of the parties are (1) stepping up humanitarian mine action, and (2) accelerating resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons.

The parties expressed their gratitude for the extensive goodwill of the international community toward the peace process. They urged donors to provide immediate funding for humanitarian priorities. This will enhance public confidence in the peace process and thus contribute to the further progress in the quest for peace in Sri Lanka.

The parties agreed that the establishment of the Joint Task Force is a sign of the increasing level of trust between the parties, and of their willingness to work together towards the establishment of a provisional administrative structure for the north and east.

Recognizing that the way forward is a long and demanding one, the parties agreed to continuing rounds of negotiations. The next three rounds of negotiations will take place on the following dates: 31 October - 3 November 2002; 2 - 5 December 2002; 6 - 9 January 2003.

The parties as well as the Norwegian facilitators reiterated their appreciation to the Royal Thai Government for their kindness in providing the venue for the negotiations as well as the generous hospitality shown to the delegations." □

Identity of a man

*God appeared in my dream,
Opened the doors of
Heaven and Hell*

'Who are you?'

God asked me

'I am a man' I said

'What's your name?'

he asked again

'Man' I replied

He inquired after my ethnicity

I said 'humanity'

'What's your religion?'

God asked me finally

'Humanism' I replied

God said with a smile

'Yes, you can enter Heaven now'

Alas!

When my dream was over

I found myself

In Hell.

M A Nuhman -1988

“There is no path to peace, peace is the path”

- Vidar Helgesen

The following is the full text of the opening statement by State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Vidar Helgesen, leader of the Norwegian facilitation team, at the inaugural session of the peace talks in Sattahip, Thailand Monday 16th September 2002:

The international community has its eyes on the peoples of Sri Lanka and their leaders. The presence of so many distinguished observers here at the opening of this first round of formal negotiations between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam demonstrates the widespread support to the parties in their determination to bring Sri Lanka's war to an end.

This political support of the international community is much needed. But in the daily lives of the peoples of Sri Lanka, our moral and political support means little if not accompanied by tangible support to the rebuilding of their society. A remarkable example of such tangible support is set by the Royal Thai Government, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. Permanent Secretary, for all the efforts of your government.

Your generosity in providing the venue for these discussions should inspire other governments to significantly step up their support for Sri Lanka. The great leader Mahatma Gandhi once said, there is no path to peace - peace is the path. The international community should take these words of wisdom as an appeal not to wait for peace to happen tomorrow, but to start investing in peace today. There exists today a state of relative peace in Sri Lanka, built on the ceasefire agreement in force since February. This relative peace indicates that ultimately a political settlement of the ethnic conflict can be found. In this quest, the parties cannot be left alone. Neither can the accompaniment of the Norwegian Government suffice. They need to be accompanied by the entire international community.

It has been a long and, at times, thorny process to get this far. No less difficult times are ahead. The parties will confront problems that can only be solved through painstaking effort and painful compromise. Close to twenty



years of armed conflict cannot be resolved overnight. Coming from a very difficult past, Sri Lanka has no easy way forward. It is likely there will be setbacks, “hiccups”, walkouts and breakdowns. However, such incidents should not be seen as signs of failure. On the contrary, it should be seen as a success for both parties each time they settle their differences by heated discussions and not by the heat of the gun.

No peace process seeks to achieve a society rid of conflict, because there is no society rid of conflict. What the parties to this process are seeking, is a different way of settling conflicts, namely through peaceful and democratic means. Experience of other peace processes has taught us that the parties assembled at the table, as well as their constituencies back home, will at times allow minor issues to blur the major ones. Locked in a room for hours and days, there is always the risk of getting lost in the details of draft texts. When such situations arise, it is imperative that we try to look beyond the negotiating table and imagine the horizon of a peaceful and prosperous future for Sri Lanka. For the rewards of peace are great and amount to far more than the absence of war. Peace is about restoring normalcy in people's daily lives. Peace is about upholding human rights and human dignity, not least for women and children who suffer the most from war.

Peace is about securing people a democratic right to influence the running of their community and their country. These rights apply to all citizens, be they Muslim, Tamil, Singhalese, Burgher or Malay. Peace is an aim in itself. But peace is also a means. A means for the betterment of human life. The main responsibility for achieving this rests with the parties. As leaders for their peoples they stand accountable to those individuals they represent and whose wishes for peace are evident: The parents whose priority in life is to ensure proper schooling for their son and daughter. The doctor who wants to attend to basic health services rather than having to heal the wounds of combatants. The displaced farmer who wants to resettle and feed his family without fear of losing his limbs by landmines. The soldier who could put his abilities to reconstruct buildings rather than bomb them. Courage and leadership will be needed by leaders on both sides in order to meet these aspirations of the people. Such courage and leadership was already shown in the past. In the midst of difficult times in 1994-95 Her Excellency the President demonstrated this, by promoting the idea of negotiations as a solution to the conflict. Similarly in 1998-99 she and the leader of LTTE, Mr. Pirabakaran, agreed to explore the possibility of negotiations.

Leadership and political courage was again demonstrated when the present Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and Pirabakaran in late 2001 revitalized the process towards negotiations by responding to each other's initiatives, leading to a formalized ceasefire in February this year. The two sides have shown continued leadership in implementing and sustaining the ceasefire, working constructively together, as well as with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, to resolve problems along the way.

The days and months and years ahead will present new and mounting challenges for both leaders and their delegations. But standing behind them are some formidable forces for peace. Recent opinion polls indicate that more than 80% of the population shares the parties' desire to find a negotiated solution to the conflict. This is to no little extent a result of the impressive activism of the civil society and the business community. In too many conflicts around the world, we see economic

forces fuelling violent conflict. In Sri Lanka today, business leaders are in the forefront of the popular support for peace, recognizing that the path to peace and the path to prosperity is one and the same.

The peace advocacy of NGOs and business leaders will become even more important in the months and years ahead. If the parties are to succeed, popular support for peace must be sustained. When setbacks come – and they will – the parties will need the patience and persistence of the advocates for peace, to prevent public opinion from succumbing to what Freud called the “narcissism of minor differences.” Vital support has also come and continues to come from abroad. India – with its leadership role in the region – has been instrumental in encouraging both sides to seek another solution to the conflict than that of war. Significant support has also been provided by the United States of America, Japan, and members of the European Union. When I again feel compelled to reiterate the need for tangible financial support from the international community, this must not be misunderstood as not recognizing the vital support already provided. However, the need of the hour is to make peace a reality in the daily lives of people, and thereby building peace from below while negotiating peace at the top.

It is in the interest of the world community at large to see Sri Lanka succeed, and therefore it is in our common interest to provide immediate funding for practical peace-building on the ground. The Government of Norway feels privileged to have the opportunity of facilitating these negotiations, thereby assisting the parties in their quest for peace.

We feel privileged to witness at close range the leadership the parties provide as members themselves of the international community. Trying to bring a long and bitter war to an end through peaceful means, they are sending a powerful message to us. At a time when the world is facing a magnitude of armed conflicts and violent threats, and at a time when the use of armed force is too often predicated as a primary means to address such threats, the parties in Sri Lanka are setting an example for the world. □

“We turn our backs on war”

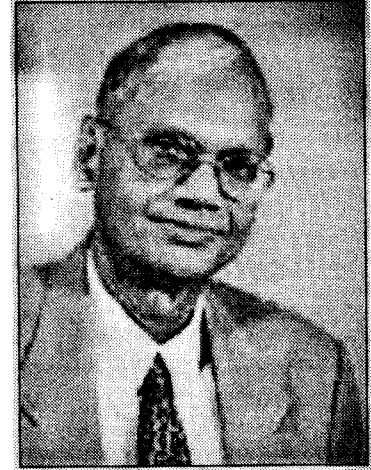
- G L Peiris

The following is the full text of the opening statement by Prof G L Peiris, leader of the government delegation, at the inaugural session of the peace talks in Sattahip, Thailand Monday 16th September 2002:

There are moments in history, few and far between, which have the potential to change beyond recognition the course of events and to impact profoundly on the destiny of a nation. It is to moments such as these that one of the greatest writers of all time referred, when he said: “There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.” The government of Sri Lanka is mindful that, as we gather here in the congenial surroundings of Sattahip in the Kingdom of Thailand to embark on a historic task, we have arrived at such a moment in the history of our country.

Together we repudiate today a legacy of rancour and hatred, which has torn asunder the fabric of our nation for decades. This devastation is all the more tragic, since our beloved Island, which the ancient Greeks named ‘Serendib’, has over the centuries been home to a community whose culture, at its very core, has been inspired by compassion, fraternity and understanding. This inner serenity, nurtured and sustained by the four great religions illuminating the course of human civilisation - all of which have made their indelible imprint on the story of our nation - was the bedrock on which we built a society founded on mutual respect and fulfillment.

It is Sri Lanka’s collective calamity is that this wholesome state of things yielded place in recent times to the emergence of narrow and sectarian attitudes which, as night must follow day, have wrought acrimony, disintegration and destruction. The straws had been in the wind for half a century, and the inexorable sequence of events, debilitating in their influence on every sphere of national life, culminated in a war, unique in its ferocity and the ensuing ravage in terms of human life and the



depth of anguish and suffering.

This is now behind us.

Our nation has resolved, with a firmness of conviction that has served us well at the most critical moments in our long and eventful history, that a sea change is necessary, now that the tempests have abated. Nothing is as evident in all substantial shades of public opinion in our country today as the unquenchable thirst for peace, dignity and opportunity for all our people. The wellsprings of a cultural tradition that derives from abiding and spontaneous respect for diversity and pluralism in their ramifications throughout society fortify us as we prepare to make pivotal decisions, for ourselves and for generations to come, at the crossroads of history.

We turn our backs on war as an instrument for realising the dream of a nation. This is a matter of empirical experience. The intensity of pain and deprivation, which pervaded the armed conflict of eighteen long years, has banished from our minds - in perpetuity - the appeal of sabre-rattling.

Human aspirations are anchored in legitimate expectation. During the last few months our people, whatever their



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ethnic identity, have savoured deeply the fruits of peace and grasped, within the contours of their daily lives, the infinite vistas of opportunity that peace will bring in its wake. A beginning, promising albeit modest, has been made in respect of the provision, interrupted for so long, of goods and services - access to which is the inalienable right of every citizen— to the people of the areas directly affected by the conflict. The formidable task of reconstruction and rehabilitation has commenced in earnest. The benefits flowing from these developments, in terms of enhanced investment in many vital sectors of the economy including tourism, trade and infrastructure, have percolated to every segment of the community and amply enriched their lives.

Above all, the fear which stalked a whole generation has become a thing of the past, heralding in its stead the spirit of freedom and contentment, much in evidence in the countenance of the tens of thousands, who in the company of their family and friends, whether on business, on pilgrimage or on holiday, have rediscovered for them-

selves whole regions of their country, which had been all but inaccessible to them in recent times. It is inconceivable to us that a people, hovering on the threshold of such exhilarating possibilities, should decide to jettison it all in order to return, of their own accord, to the travails of war.

Changes of this magnitude in the mindset of a people do not occur fortuitously. They are the product not of coincidence but of mature, far-sighted deliberation and pragmatic action. Pre-eminent among the circumstances which have made this achievement possible is the role of leadership characterised by consistency, courage and dynamism. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, through vicissitudes calculated to break the most indomitable spirit, held fast to his course of national reunification with a degree of tenacity born of depth of conviction.

His policy, persuasively articulated and realistically implemented, of one step at a time, an initiative abjuring the mire of threshold conditions—the bane of numerous attempts in the past—and opting instead for a series of practical

measures, which have engendered a climate of confidence sufficiently durable to support a viable negotiating process, has fired the imagination of a beleaguered nation. This has made possible, as the inauguration of these historic proceedings bears witness today, the beginning of an epoch making exercise in healing and rapprochement, which has eluded us for so long.

Despite the colour and drama of this event, however, it behoves us to remember that the unfolding panorama of history represents a continuum. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, soon after her election for the first time eight years ago, committed her government to the goal of a negotiated peace. It is the endeavour of our government at this time, with malice towards none and goodwill towards all, to consolidate and build on all positive elements buttressing previous attempts at different times and yet, in all humility, to learn from the mistakes of the past, not to impute blame but simply to avoid their repetition and perpetuation.

At this critical hour of national renewal we call on all our people, irres-

ective of ethnic identity, cultural background or party affiliation, to join with us in ensuring fulfillment of the abundant promise of our beloved land.

As we renounce war and embrace negotiation as the key to our Island's future, far be it from us to deny, or even unwittingly to make light of, the challenges and hazards that confront us. A reservoir of suspicion and antipathy, which has filled to the brim over extended periods, can scarcely be wished away overnight. Assuredly, no quick fix is feasible. Unmistakably indicated are the qualities of patience, perseverance and dedication.

At this point in time we cannot foretell, with certainty or precision, what the future holds. Nevertheless, there are several truths, as we perceive them, which stand out starkly and vividly in our minds.

We are convinced that no process of negotiation could aspire to be fruitful in its outcome in the absence of a threshold of trust and confidence between the parties. It is the sacred duty of all our people, and in particular of all those - whatever their political complexion—on whom the mantle of leadership has fallen at this decisive moment, to consign to oblivion the wounds of the past, to rise above the lingering memory of injustice, pain and worse, to disavow the heritage of vengeance and retribution and to draw upon the reserves of wisdom, generosity and large-heartedness with which our cultural traditions have bountifully endowed us.

Nothing is clearer, in the interest of national survival, let alone national prosperity, than that this is the time for a fresh point of departure. We, for our part, as the government of our country, are equal to this challenge. We pay tribute, at the same time, to the foresight of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and their leader, Mr Velupillai Pirabakaran, in embarking on the transformation of their movement into a political organisation responsive to the changing nuances of contemporary priorities.

We declare, with all the vehemence at our command that the negotiations, which we are about to commence, are not in our view, by any means, a zero sum exercise. It is not a question of the winner taking all. Indeed, it is plain for all to see, at this watershed in the me-

andering course of a fratricidal conflict, that there are no winners and no losers. These negotiations cannot be pursued on the basis that gain accruing to one party, involves reciprocal loss to the other. We emphatically reject that premise. We acknowledge that we both have a problem, destructive of the pulsating heart of our nation, which it is in our mutual interest to resolve together. This is very much the spirit in which we conceive of, and will carry through, our role in the ensuing discussions.

The natural corollary is that, an adversarial or confrontational approach is singularly inappropriate. Sincerity, openness and candour, which will be reflected in the sharing of perspectives, insights and information, including technical information relating to legal and constitutional issues, will supply the underpinnings of our attitude to the work that lies before us. It is our hope and expectation that this will be unhesitatingly reciprocated.

It is the government's fervent desire that the discussions should commence and go forward in an atmosphere untrammelled by inhibitions of any kind. We believe that broad horizons and resilience of mind are indispensable. And yet, in determining the parameters of the talks, there are some elements -rudimentary in quality- which cannot but be constant. These represent the irreducible foundations of what we care for and believe in.

We stand unwaveringly for the amplest degree of devolution and for the establishment and strengthening of institutions designed to achieve this purpose. But these reforms must necessarily be effected within the framework of a State whose unity and territorial integrity is ensured in fact and in law by the envisioned structures.

As we turn to the task before us, we are encouraged by the knowledge that all sections of our people, and the international community, give us unqualified support every step of the way.

We note that it is envisaged that the Hon. Rauf Hakeem, who is present as a member of the Government delegation, will in due course participate in the talks in his capacity as the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the Head of a Muslim delegation. This arrangement would, no doubt, ensure the continuance of a constructive and

meaningful dialogue.

We are mindful that any substantive structural and institutional arrangements that may be evolved should provide for the rights of all communities. In this context, we have taken note of the apprehensions expressed by the Sinhala and Muslim communities living in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. All parties should take cognisance of the need to ensure the safety, security and identity of these communities as well, and the protection and advancement of their political, social, economic and cultural rights. We should ensure that their concerns are totally addressed.

In order to arrive at durable peace, it is imperative that steps be taken for the resettlement, rehabilitation and reintegration of all displaced persons in their original areas with honour, dignity, assurance of personal safety and adequate reparation. Such measures would demonstrate our commitment to pluralism and mutual accommodation.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge and to express appreciation of the yeoman service rendered with regard to all aspects of the peace process by the Royal Norwegian Government. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and other members of his government have stated in the Parliament of Sri Lanka and elsewhere that the peace process is unlikely to have reached its current positive phase without the finesse, professionalism, tact and hard work, which the representatives of that government - in particular, Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, Special Envoy Erik Solheim and Ambassador Jon Westborg - have steadfastly brought to bear on their work as facilitators. Their continuing involvement in that capacity is a source of inestimable comfort.

We thank the Royal Thai Government warmly for the readiness, with which they placed at the disposal of the negotiating teams, the excellent facilities available to us here in Sattahip, as we enjoy the legendary hospitality of Thai people.

We cordially welcome representatives of other governments, non-governmental organisations and the Sri Lankan and international media, and we thank them for their goodwill and support as we prepare to keep our tryst with destiny. □

“LTTE is Committed to Peace”

- Anton Balasingham

The following is the full text of Mr. Balasingham's opening statement at the inaugural session of the peace talks in Sattahip naval base in Thailand, Monday 16 September, 2002:



Please permit me to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Thailand on behalf of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka, for offering your beautiful country as the venue for this historic peace-making event. We appreciate the gracious hospitality and wonderful conference arrangements provided here. We are happy and confident to engage in a constructive peace dialogue in this serene environment.

May I also express my sincere compliments and congratulations to the Government of Norway for its success in accomplishing the difficult task of bringing the principal protagonists - the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Government of Sri Lanka - to the negotiating table. The Tamil people are grateful to the Norwegian peace envoys for their dedicated and persistent endeavor to bring an end to the armed hostilities and for creating a congenial atmosphere of peace and normalcy in the island. The task of building a permanent peace and reaching a final settlement to the ethnic conflict may be difficult, challenging and time consuming. Nevertheless, we are confident that with the able assistance of the Norwegian facilitators there is a possibility for the peace process to succeed. We are optimistic that the peace talks will succeed because both Mr. Velupillai Pira-

paharan, the leader of the Liberation Tigers, and Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, have a genuine will and a firm determination to resolve the conflict through the process of dialogue. As far as the Liberation Tigers are concerned, I can assure you that we are seriously and sincerely committed to peace and that we will strive our utmost to ensure the success of the negotiations. We are well aware that there are powerful political forces in southern Sri Lanka who are irrationally opposed to peace and ethnic reconciliation. Nevertheless, we are confident that the talks will progress successfully because of the fact that the principal parties in the conflict as well as the overwhelming majority of the people of the island want peace and peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Since we are required, at this inaugural function, to keep our statements brief, I do not wish to dwell in detail or in depth on the historical evolution of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The Tamil struggle for self-determination has a lengthy and complex history, the last two decades of which were characterised by a brutal and savage war. All previous attempts to seek a peaceful negotiated settlement to this intractable conflict ended in fiasco. Though the leadership of the LTTE had, on several occasions, opted for cessation of hostilities and peace talks, the previous government rejected our conciliatory gestures and intensified the conditions of war that caused heavy loss of life and monumental destruction of Tamil property. The intransigence of the previous government could only be attributed to its incredible military theory that war begets peace and political solutions can only be realised by military means. By practicing such an absurd notion the last government of Sri Lanka plunged the entire country into the abyss of so-

cial and economic disaster.

The situation has radically changed with the assumption to power of the new government with the overwhelming popular mandate for peace and negotiated political settlement. The new government reciprocated positively to the unilateral cease-fire declared by our liberation organisation at the end of last year. It was at that stage the Norwegian facilitators were able to intervene constructively and work out a comprehensive cease-fire agreement. A mutually agreed cease-fire agreement with international monitors from Nordic and Scandinavian countries came into effect in February this year.

The most encouraging aspect of the current situation is that the cease-fire has held for the last seven months, without any serious violations. In this context I wish to compliment the foreign representatives of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission for their dedication, commitment and impartiality in ensuring the smooth implementation of the truce agreement.

Peace and stability are being restored in the island for the first time after two decades of sustained and relentless war that has torn the country apart. This positive atmosphere of peace has brought a sense of relief, hope and confidence to all major communities living in the island: the Tamils, the Sinhalese and the Muslims. A firm foundation has been laid for peace negotiations between the principal parties in conflict.

Normalcy of civilian life is slowly and systematically returning to the northeast of Sri Lanka, the homeland of the Tamils and Muslims, the region that has faced the brunt of the armed conflict. The north has suffered the most horrendous impact of the war, where the entire civilian infrastructure has been destroyed, where thousands of civilians have lost their lives, where one million people are internally displaced. The economic embargo imposed on the Tamil people for the last one decade has had a devastating effect on their social and economic life. This economic strangulation subjected our people to extreme poverty and severe deprivation. There is an urgent need for relief and assistance to the war affected people. Immediate steps should be undertaken without delay, to embark on a

comprehensive program of resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction. This monumental task cannot be undertaken without the help and assistance of the international community. The concerned international governments, who have been supporting a negotiated settlement to the Tamil national question, should contribute generously for the reconstruction of the war-damaged economy of the northeast. Improving the conditions of existence of the war affected people and effecting normalcy, congenial for their economic revival, has become a necessary and crucial element in advancing and consolidating the peace process.

Over and above the intricate questions of conflict resolution and power sharing, the people expect a peace dividend; they require immediate relief to resolve their urgent, existential problems. Therefore, the peace process cannot be undertaken in isolation without taking parallel steps towards the economic recovery of the suffering population. The leaders of the Sri Lanka government have expressed a desire to transform the island into a successful Tiger economy. We appreciate their aspiration. Such an aspiration can best be realised by embracing the Tamil Tigers as their equal partners in the task of economic reconstruction of the country.

The LTTE is the legitimate and authentic representative of the Tamil people. We have lived, fought and suffered with and for our people throughout the turbulent times of the war. We have a comprehensive knowledge of the socio-economic needs confronting the Tamil people. We have built an effective administrative structure for more than ten years which has sustained the social cohesion and law and order. Therefore, it is crucial that the LTTE should play a leading and pivotal role in administration as well as the economic development of the Northeast.

The deepest aspiration of our people is peace, a peace with justice and freedom; a permanent peace in which our people enjoy their right to self-determination and co-exist with others. Peace, stability and ethnic harmony are the foundations upon which the economic prosperity of the island can be built. Let us strive, genuinely, with hope and confidence, to consolidate these foundations at this forum to bring a peaceful and prosperous life to all peoples in the island. □

An Open Letter to the Govt. & LTTE

The Peace Support Group (PSG) enthusiastically welcomes the forthcoming talks in Thailand between the GoSL and the LTTE and assisted by the government of Norway.

The commencement of the talks reinforces the widespread belief that there has to be a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and the firm conviction that there is no military solution to it.

After twenty years of civil war, it is very clear that military victory is unattainable for either side and that successive military campaigns have caused enormous human suffering. The recognition that there is no military solution to the current ethnic conflict is the founding assumption of any negotiated peace process.

The Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and the role and mandate of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM)

The PSG recognises that the signing of the CFA in February 2002 and the setting up of the SLMM represented a major step forward and was a necessary prelude to the commencement of peace talks.

In spite of violations of the CFA, and allegations of violations, the ceasefire has held, lives have been saved and the process of reconstruction has begun. The present ceasefire has allowed for the longest respite from armed hostilities that our island has seen since 1983.

The CFA however, remains essentially an agreement between the GoSL and the LTTE and does not address civilian concerns. This was particularly borne out in the incidents in Valaichchenai in June 2002. In Valaichchenai and some other parts of the Eastern Province, a clash between Muslim and Tamil civilians could not be controlled for several days. SLMM members felt constrained from intervening directly to reduce tensions.

In addition, in cases of extortion, abduction and other abuse of civilians reported from the North and East the SLMM has been unable to make an effective intervention.

The lacunae with regard to law enforcement in the North and East and the inability of the SLMM to act in certain instances, has eroded confidence in the ceasefire agreement.

Therefore, one of the first items on

the agenda of the peace talks should be the development of more appropriate modalities to deal with civilian concerns during this initial period. If not the civilian population of the north and east will remain unprotected from criminal acts and human rights violations.

These abuses cannot be tolerated and furthermore, will undermine popular support for the peace process.

Return to Normalcy

The peace talks in Thailand must ensure a speedy return to normalcy in the areas of the North and the East that have experienced the devastation of war during the last few decades.

Ironically, the removal of the army camps from public places in accordance with the CFA and their relocation, have resulted in increased visibility and intrusiveness in the daily lives of ordinary citizens in the Jaffna peninsula in particular.

The re-settlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin, expediting the de-mining of the north and east, the right to engage in fishing without impediment or harassment, and the free movement of people throughout the island are essential components of a return to normalcy and should receive immediate attention during the initial round of peace talks.

The commitment of the GoSL and the LTTE to a successful peace process must also entail a commitment by them to de-mining and renunciation of landmines as a weapon of war. Immediate steps need to be initiated to undertake stockpile destruction in a coordinated and parallel manner in GoSL and LTTE held areas as a mutual demonstration of commitment in this regard.

Ensure human rights guarantees and the rule of law

While the PSG realises that the ultimate framework for the protection of human rights can only emerge out of substantive political deliberations, we need to ensure the protection of human rights during this initial period. In other contexts such as El Salvador, this has taken place within the framework of a Human Rights Agreement between the parties, based on international standards and monitored by an international

monitoring mechanism. We urge the negotiators in Thailand to consider adopting a memorandum of understanding on human rights.

Furthermore the entirety of any arrangements or agreements between the two parties needs to be concerned with human rights and contain internationally recognized safeguards for their protection.

One of the most urgent measures that requires the attention of the peace talks is the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). It must be recognised that the PTA allows for prolonged custody and therefore the possibility of torture. It makes a wide range of offences punishable, permits confessions made to Police officers, often under duress, admissible as evidence in Courts of law and allows low-ranking Police and military personnel to detain anyone, confiscate any property and search any premises on mere suspicion. International and national human rights organizations and jurists have repeatedly called the PTA a draconian piece of legislation that requires repeal. We therefore urge the negotiators to place the repeal of the PTA on their agenda as a matter of priority. In addition, those detained under the PTA should be either charged under the ordinary law of the land or released forthwith.

Of equal concern is the question of

child conscription by the LTTE. Parents have been asked to 'give' children to the movement and children have also been recruited from schools and LTTE run orphanages. The recruitment of children is not only inhuman but goes against internationally accepted standards including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this context we urge the LTTE to ensure that the recruitment of children ceases and that children held by them be released forthwith. The LTTE must also hand over control of orphanages and children's homes in their possession to appropriate secular and religious organizations.

We also urge the government to invite Olara Otunnu the United Nations Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, to revisit the country and call on the LT. to facilitate his visit to areas under their control.

Both the goal and the LT. must recognize that they have a positive obligation to guarantee the rights of people living in the conflict-affected areas. These include economic and social rights such as the right to education, the right to health and the right to an adequate standard of living and civil and political rights, such as the right to dissent and the right to freedom of expression and opinion.

Human rights in any society can only be protected if there is strict ad-

herence to the rule of law. In this context, the LT. must make a firm commitment to prevent its cadres from committing acts of extortion and abduction. Dismantling arbitrary and extra legal structures of must be a part of this process. The GoSL must also ensure that its security forces act within the rule of law and that all those who have committed human rights violations such as torture and rapes in custody, be prosecuted.

The Interim Arrangement

The PSG understands that pending a final negotiated political solution, an Interim Administration will be set up in the North and East. In this context we urge that the following minimum principles be adopted:

The Principle of Representation: the Interim Administration should reflect the ethnic and political diversity of the north and east;

The Principle of Democracy: the elective principles should be restored as soon as it is possible;

The Principle of Human Rights: mechanisms for the protection of human rights including the rights of local minorities and effective monitoring of these safe guards should be an integral part of any such arrangement.

The Principles of Financial Autonomy and Accountability: the Interim

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Administration must be adequately resourced and its access to resources ensured in any agreement. At the same time it must be required to institute mechanisms and procedures for accountability in this regard.

An Agreement Based on Power-Sharing and Autonomy for the North and East of Sri Lanka

Any agreement resulting from the negotiated process should be based on the concepts of power-sharing and autonomy. The response of successive governments to Tamil aspirations has historically been within the framework of administrative decentralization or at best an apologetic attempt to devolve power. Power sharing and regional representation at the centre have almost been completely ignored.

Increasingly, there is international acknowledgement that the devolution of power is not a privilege but a right of a territorially placed people. The Tamil political leadership considers the Tamils living in the North and the East as a nation having the right to self-determination. Successive Sri Lankan governments continue to regard the Tamils living in the North and East as a minority without substantial rights under international law. However, recent developments, even with regard to the rights of minorities, have pushed for schemes of regional autonomy. The United Nations Declaration on The Rights of Minorities states clearly that minorities should be given effective participation in governance. This includes power-sharing arrangements at the Centre, the right to autonomy of a territorial minority and accountability, transparency and other democratic principles. Therefore, whether one believes that the Tamils are a nation, people or minority, it is clear that they have a right to substantial autonomy with effective participation in the governance of the region and country.

All Tamil political parties from the TULF to the LTTE are united in the belief that the Thimpu principles that recognise Tamil nationality and a traditional Tamil homeland should form

the basis of a final settlement to the ethnic conflict. Whilst the Thimpu Principles may pose problems for some sections of the political mainstream in the south of Sri Lanka because of the ambiguity of many of the terms and concepts contained therein, the recognition of the Tamil community as a people with a distinct language, culture, tradition and identity who have for centuries lived in historically identifiable areas must underpin the negotiating process and a final political settlement.

Any such settlement should also recognise the distinct identity of the Muslim community living in the North and East and also protect the rights of all minorities in the region. The primary cause of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has been majoritarianism. Majoritarianism in a region of the country is, therefore, equally unacceptable.

In light of the above, we believe that a political solution should provide both for self rule and shared rule. A final solution could include features of federalism, assymetrical federalism or confederation depending on the details of the actual negotiations between the parties and the interests of the peoples of the country. A political solution must include necessary safeguards in the North and East for a democratic process, free and fair elections and the right to dissent. In addition, special measures should be taken to guarantee the fundamental rights of local minorities living all over Sri Lanka, in particular to protect them from discrimination and displacement.

Programmes for Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation

Sri Lanka is a war torn society. The devastation and destruction caused by the war calls for large scale programmes for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. While programmes for relief and rehabilitation exist at the moment, they are grossly inadequate and are implemented with little consultation with the affected communities. Further, major reconstruction and developmental activities are yet to com-

mence. It is therefore a matter of urgent necessity to devise a comprehensive and participatory strategy for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the North and East. We are aware that there has been a process of consultation with regard to relief, rehabilitation and reconciliation between the government, donors, UN agencies and NGOs, culminating in the 3 'R' framework. It is vital that its further evolution and implementation must heed the voice of the people of the North and East, the internally displaced, war widows, ex combatants and the war disabled.

In addition, there must be comprehensive plan to deal with the problems of war-related trauma as a matter of high priority. These are important matters. They cannot wait for the conflict to end. Reconstruction of the country does not only involve material reconstruction, there must be a process of reconciliation and healing as well.

Tens of thousands of people have died during this war. We have never collectively mourned these deaths or remembered those who have died. We mourn selectively and in isolation. A sense of community comes primarily from suffering together as a People, irrespective of ethnicity, nationality, religion or gender. It is important to remember the dead because of the sanctity of life as an end in itself. It is also important to remember the dead so that we never forget the past and the terrible consequences of violence. This remembrance should be part of our search for healing and reconciliation. It is this remembrance that will put pressure on those who negotiate the end of this conflict to negotiate in good faith and with good intentions.

Let not another opportunity for peace be lost.

Signatories: Sunila Abeysekera; Sunil Bastian; Radhika Coomaraswamy; Sunanda Deshapriya; Rohan Edrisinha; Ketheshwaran Loganathan; Jehan Perera; Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu; Jeevan Thiagarajah; Joe William; Javid Yusuf. □

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Talk about Talks

Vasuki Nesiah

The analysis of the peace process by the political punditry (both within and without) Sri Lanka has been dominated by the assumptions and frameworks of conflict resolution. Whether it is an analysis of how parties to the negotiation strategize their negotiation steps to maximize their particular ends, or how peace activists assimilate potential spoilers into the peace process, the methodological terms of conflict resolution provide a naturalized political vocabulary. Voices that have sought to express support for the peace process, while drawing critical attention to the ideological assumptions of the conflict resolution paradigm, have been muted at best. This is partly because of the success of the paradigm's practitioners in presenting, explicitly or implicitly, conflict resolution theory as politically content free. Thus although pundits of diverse political stripes and academic disciplines invoke the terms and assumptions of conflict resolution, the political stakes of the paradigm in any particular context is seldom debated.

Yet herein lies the tension. The success of the current modalities of the peace process may in fact lie in the very presentation of the conflict resolution tool kit as a neutral means to model the negotiation process to understand and/or constructively channel conflict. On the one hand, the parties to the negotiation may enter the process not because they are naive enough to conceive the model as neutral but because they think the process (the conflict resolution tool kit) can be channeled to further their particular political agendas; On the other hand, their ability to use the tool kit for their particular political agendas is enhanced by the tool kit's appearance of neutrality. Placing their political agendas behind the shield of "political neutrality" can be used to resist the thrust of accountability and transparency. In this context, those of us who support the peace process despite its limitations have a responsibility to pry away that shield, to push for making the process more accountable and transparent, to expose the specific biases of the tool kit in enhancing particular agendas, and rezone the tool kit (and the agendas it legitimates) in the realm of diverse po-

litical struggles over resources and meanings, structures of power and exclusion.

In this context let me make a rather polemical intervention highlighting just four of the specific political biases of the conflict resolution paradigm as manifest in the Sri Lankan peace process:

1. Privileged players: There is a systematic political bias towards further empowering the political elite to determine the terms of legally legitimate political engagement (the terms of reference for the MOU for example); Far reaching questions of our collective political life are already determined by who is invited to have a seat at the table and those who are not in the privileged political communities of the GOSL and the LTTE are further marginalized by this process. It is striking that when members of the Muslim community seek to ensure that their concerns are taken into consideration in the talks (leave alone whether they have a seat at the table), their efforts have to be channeled through negotiation with the GOSL or LTTE leadership; Muslims who may not see their interests represented by the SLMC (this may include many Muslims in Mannar, many Muslims displaced from Jaffna etc.) are even more marginalized in the current processes.

With conflict resolution processes recognizing only those players who could be 'intelligible' on the basis of rational actor models and the like, there is even less regard to those identities, communities and political dynamics that resist official classifications and fade from the dominant rules of the game. For instance, in a tragic repetition of their disenfranchisement in the negotiations that birthed independence in 1948, today too the Tamils who live and work in the hill country are excluded from the process. Perhaps even more ironically, for many Tamils in the East, their lives and the lives of their children have become more insecure at the very moment where their ostensible representatives have gained an unprecedented recognition and control over the terms of their lives.

2. The politics of process: Relatedly, there is a fundamentally anti-democratic bias where the conflict resolution 'tool kit' seeks to present itself as just that - a method, a process, a model - but not a politics. "Multi-track negotiations", strategies to deal with "spoilers" in the peace process etc. - these are all scientific instruments to surgically repair the body politic with a focus on technocratic expertise best deployed in an antiseptic environment behind closed doors. All official participants in the process are invested in cloaking proceedings in secrecy and claiming a monopoly on judgments regarding the legitimate 'costs' of facilitating the peace process as currently delineated; all channeled into a technology for conflict management rather than democratic dialogue regarding the terms of distribution and recognition in our political community. It is not that purveyors of the conflict resolution framework do not allow for a role for civil society - but rather, it is a role that is domesticated into service of the process; "in-put" already always programmed into a contained variable that can be strategically plugged-in to legitimate the peace process rather than challenge or re-negotiate its terms.

3. The issues at stake: The process has cabined discussion over the agenda of talks to the power sharing arrangement between the GOSL and the LTTE, be it in interim arrangements or long terms constitutional reordering. It is an agenda that does not address the range of issues entailed in the high stakes political struggles over the terms of fairness and pluralism that have constituted the Sri Lankan post-colonial landscape - struggles by human rights activists regarding impunity and accountability, struggles by southern youth over the distribution of resources, struggles entailed in the Muslim community's quest for security and fairness, struggles advanced by the mother's front over the terms of peace and war, struggles about the space for alternative voices within the Tamil community, struggles questioning singular and settled notions of ethnic identity, struggles challenging homologies between identity and interest, leadership and representation, struggles over gender and participation, struggles by workers over power and distribution and the terms of economic life, struggles over citizenship and lines of political community by hill country Tamils, struggles over corruption, patronage networks and the accountability of public officials, struggles by democratic activists over the space for

dissent, struggles over decentralization of governance and administration, struggles over media and the registers of symbolic community, struggles over trilingualism and national culture, struggles over the relationship between religion, secularism and a pluralist polity.... and indeed a range of other issues that have shaped the varied scales and localities of political struggle in Sri Lanka over the last two decades. However, with its singular focus on power sharing between the GOSL and the LTTE, the conflict resolution model does not engage with the substance of these deeply varied struggles over resources and meanings, or the structural and symbolic orders that shape or produce the marginalization that these struggles contest.

Significantly, while these other issues barely register on the conflict resolution radar screen, the conflict resolution model legitimates its own role and approach through the backdrop of the tragedies that have accompanied these struggles over the last few decades. Thus it invokes the spectre of suffering as the 'costs' at stake in talks between the GOSL and the LTTE. Moreover, when

these other issues are raised they are deferred as issues that can be addressed only after the resolution of the 'national' question; for now we are asked to focus on GOSL-LTTE negotiation over the terms of power sharing in the North-East/North and East as if that would not already constrain the terrain of these other struggles. Ironically however, a focus on reconciling these two parties at any cost may further marginalize and compromise the motivating stakes of these 'other' struggles.

4. The regulative ideal: The systematic political bias towards the state and aspirants to state power reflects a fundamental ideological assumption regarding what constitutes a functioning political community and what would constitute a legitimate trajectory of political development. Thus there is a whole package of institutional arrangements associated with the "modern" state that are part of the implicit script to the current negotiations, from markets open to global capital to the 'rule of law' to colonizing the space for violence as an the instrument of governance. There is also implicitly a problematic claim suggest-

ing a generalized dysfunctionality of societies in conflict - thus these are readily classified as deficient cultures, failed states, subsumed by the irrational affiliations to ethnicity and other tribalisms. Concomitantly, in the analysis of countries at peace, identity politics are domesticated into 'normal' politics; they do not emerge as deep challenges to the societies' normative ideologies and institutional arrangements

This is undoubtedly a rather rough and ready polemical flagging of just four registers of the conflict resolution model's political agenda as it has emerged in the Sri Lankan peace process. In fact, various advocates for peace with democracy and human rights have continued to flag these issues in carving out a space that is simultaneously supportive and critical of the peace process. This is not a rejection of the conflict resolution paradigm per se. Rather, it is a push to openly debate its constituent biases in a context where the paradigm is becoming increasingly naturalized as the political vocabulary through which we interpolate our engagement with the peace process. □





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Legislative bullets aimed at Executive gun-hand

Gaston de Rosayro

The constitutional showdown between the Executive and the Government will appear to be a re-run of an old Hollywood Western, where the winner will walk away with a swagger while the defeated adversary will in all probability be nursing a wounded gun-arm.

With the 19th Constitutional Amendment being gazetted on 11 September, political bookmakers are wagering that once the smoke clears by voting time in the legislature next week it would be the powerful presidential gun-hand that will be out of commission.

The amendment, which besides stripping the President of her powers to dissolve parliament will also provide immunity to Opposition MPs who vote for the motion from being taken to task for violating party discipline.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga had over the last week held crisis talks with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe in a bid to avert the confrontation by pledging that there would be no dissolution of Parliament.

The president had objected to the proposed amendment aimed at whittling away some of her powers ad-hoc and suggested that if anything, the office should be abolished altogether. But the Cabinet of Ministers which she has been locking horns with believe that such a move will grant her a reprieve to continue throwing an Executive spanner into the works of governance with perverse consistency.

The Government contends that its every move to effect social and economic reforms and hammer out a national peace accord has been frustrated at every turn by presidential pique.

They assert it is now clear why removing some of the presidential powers is an essential part of dislodging an intolerable constitutional obstruction which could prove politically threatening to their very survival.

They argue convincingly that the office wields monstrous power that could become even more dangerous to the national interest. Besides, everyone appears so preoccupied with the controversy that the conduct of government business is being impeded to a perilous extent. Analysts suppose that the President's wisest and least painful course would have been to co-operate with the Government.

Many of Mrs Kumaratunga's more sensible party members were insistent that the President and the party lock their old opponents in a mutually beneficial embrace. Given the crisis conditions cementing a national alliance with the Government would have been a face-saving compromise both for herself and her factionalised party.

But people in absolute power often see things from an entirely different perspective and can never reconcile themselves to allowing a rival administration to pick-a-back on one's trail-blazing accomplishments, even if such earlier great-hearted efforts had fallen short of expectations.

That is obviously why Mrs. Kumaratunga keeps insisting that it was she who initially set the stage for a durable peace with exhaustive international lobbying which won her government invaluable diplomatic victories. Indeed she never lets up on the argument that she had staked her entire political future on a devolution package that the

present Government is also pursuing.

All this is essentially true.

But that was another time when her career had leapfrogged far ahead of the pace of any other politician and when it seemed as if Mrs. Kumaratunga was the long-awaited messiah the people had been waiting for. She lifted herself off from a provincial political backlot to the top rung at the political centre and then zoomed meteorically to the highest level of government.

That was also a time when there was hardly anyone potentially able to match or compete with her both in popularity and charisma. It is also true that she came to power exactly at a time when civil liberties had come under an onslaught. Until that time what the country had had were irresolute politicians who had been disgorging only an inconsequential accumulation of nationalistic drivel while pandering to a handful of southern bigots.

But you have got to hand it to the lady, who didn't make things easier for herself in those turbulent times. She boldly took the first step, which her dithering precursors would not have even dared dream of taking, in fear that they would have been outcast as apostates by the southern racist lobby.

By doing so, as she rightly reiterates, she had laid her entire political career on the line. That she succeeded in dismissing the extremists while managing to survive politically could be attributed largely to her political pedigree as well as her sensible appeal to an equally tolerant majority community.

And so it was, that Mrs Kumaratunga emerged as the only southern leader in decades possessed with an indefinable allure and the ability to have infused confidence and hope in the Tamil people of the north and east. She did succeed to an astonishing extent in winning the hearts of these people, and making them part of her battle for peace.

Her new found celebrity status at the time as a peace-loving heroine among the Tamil populace led to a sort of cult worship just this side of idolatry. But such an unprecedented wholesome image of a southern leader naturally appeared to have troubled the Tigers. More particularly, it enraged Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, who had

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suddenly become aware that as a result of her new-found renown the sheen had been disappearing from his own demi-god position.

Mrs Kumaratunga, had also been unfairly dubbed a "romantic" liberal by some of her southern chauvinist detractors for attempting to settle with peace what a male-dominated society and armies had failed to sort out with arms. By the time she came to power Mrs Kumaratunga had begun to be pigeon-holed as the only Sinhala political leader who had identified so strongly with the Tamil cause, that it gave some of her own hard-line supporters sleepless nights while campaigning for a parliamentary election.

But the type of courage and pragmatism Mrs. Kumaratunga had displayed then, seems to have been aeons ago and much water has flowed under the Diyawanna bridge since. Over the years, her government had fallen short in terms of integrity, ability, civility, faith, adaptability and openness. When her coalition took power eight years ago, it vowed that it was implacably determined to take some tangible action to revive the machinery of good

and orderly governance.

Both Mrs. Kumaratunga and some of her more supposedly moderate Cabinet Ministers appeared to falter and fight shy when it came to speaking out about corruption, ineptness, misappropriation or the squandering of public funds within their own administration. But inversely, all those admirable policies affiliated to economic reform and efforts to crackdown on corruption, were conveniently overlooked or often shelved by presidential whim.

Many of her former Cabinet Ministers must be admonished and made to share the blame for their half-hearted pursuit of their much-touted progressive reforms and pledges, which eventually led to their party being relegated to political limbo.

Any administration playing the role of apologist or remaining speechless in the face of such obvious corruption and growing political excesses is a prime candidate for political extinction.

But many find it incomprehensible that Mrs. Kumaratunga had been unwilling to make concessions as any responsible national leader should have been expected to do in the present cir-

cumstances. Had she done so, despite her past failings as well as accomplishments, she would undoubtedly have been conceived as free from any prior constraints or prejudices.

Notwithstanding the fact that she represents an opposing party, the people would have expected the president to be the unbiased protector of the national well-being. Such public faith requires that the office should have remained toweringly above any direct embroilment in internal political squabbles.

But the President is no quitter. The daughter of two legendary politicians, she entered politics as a sapling and has matured into a tenacious streetwise leader. Despite all the rhetorical combat there still seems precious little Presidential blood on the carpet.

That is why coming back to the idealistic Western rerun may not be as efficacious as many would have imagined. Analysts are convinced that instead of clipping the Executive gun-hand the Government should have been aiming for either its head or its heart, or possibly both.

(Courtesy: Daily Mirror, Sept.14)

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Aug 20 - The Colombo-Tuticorin passenger ferry service will be launched in three months, the Union Minister of State for Shipping, S. Thirunavukkarasar, said in Chennai. Besides clearances from the Union Ministries of External, Home and Finance, completion of necessary facilities at the Tuticorin port, at a cost of Rs. 65 lakhs, was a pre-requisite for its introduction. He was addressing presspersons on 19 August after handing over the newly-built 285-metre berth to Chennai Container Terminal Limited, the private operator of the terminal at the Chennai port.

President not to dissolve parliament: Aug 20 - In a letter read out by Speaker Joseph Michael Perera in Parliament today, President Chandrika Kumaratunge has said she has no intention of dissolving parliament for the next two years at least unless another party were to form a majority in parliament. Kumaratunge has reiterated that she will use her powers with responsibility and will not resort to dissolving parliament at this moment in time as it would have a serious repercussion on the peace process. In her letter the President said, "I shall not dissolve the present parliament unless the party which presently commands the confidence of the house loses its majority," adding "A general election could cost almost a billion rupees which our country can ill afford ... (and) the dissolution of parliament could have unexpected and unforeseeable effects on the peace process."

19 year old girl kidnapped: Aug 20. Defence sources revealed that the LTTE abducted a 19 year old girl called Emmawathie in Akkaraipattu, while she was going for tuition classes and imprisoned her at the Thirukkovil LTTE camp in eastern Sri Lanka. Her parents have made a formal complaint in this regard to the police.

In a separate incident, a 13 year-old child is reported to have escaped from a Tiger camp somewhere in Batticaloa and surrendered to the Batticaloa police, after he could not bear the harassment meted out by the LTTE any longer. He had allegedly been kept in a Tiger prison for not following the LTTE's instructions properly. Meanwhile, the number of complaints received by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission since the introduction of the ceasefire have now gone up to 745 out of which 579 are against the LTTE and 164 against the defence forces. Out of the 579 complaints against the LTTE, 182 have been lodged by parents, whose children they say were abducted by the Tigers.

Unions against privatisation: Aug 20 - Hundreds of workers from state owned banks, insurance and petroleum corporations and members of trade unions demonstrated against the Government's plans to privatise state enterprises that, according to the government, have become a heavy burden on the island's cash strapped economy. The demonstration at Lipton Circus, a busy intersection in the heart of the city, was organised by the JVP backed All Ceylon Trade Union Federation.

The JVP and its powerful trade unions say that thousands of workers would be jobless if the large state owned corporations are sold to private companies.

A spokesman for the trade union federation charged that the UNF has become the IMF's puppet and "is paving the way for global capital to squeeze the country's wealth out." Meanwhile the JVP dominated Inter University Students' Federation declared the coming week as "protest week."

NE doctors' ultimatum to Govt: Aug 21 - Doctors resident and working in the Northeast province who are members of the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) have categorically told the ministry of health that they would launch a continuous strike after one month if the authorities failed to pay the one-year special mission allowance now being paid to non-resident doctors from other provinces serving in Northeast. The Health Ministry Secretary Dr. Reggie Perera was infor-med of this when visited Trincomalee on 20 August, GMOA sources said.

Northeast resident doctors staged a token strike on the same

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day crippling the medical services in the province. The GMOA branches in the province have accused the health authorities for showing discrimination in paying the special mission allow-

ance.

The GMOA representatives met the Health Ministry Secretary and briefed him about the impending action if the government continued its discriminatory policy. The Health Ministry Secretary had promised that he would take appropriate steps to pay the special mission allowance.

GMOA representatives said they would give one month's time to the Health Ministry to keep its promise.

US Supports Peace Process: Aug 23 - Deputy Secretary Armitage issued the following statement during his visit to Sri Lanka, his first stop in a five-nation tour of South and Southeast Asia. "This is my first visit to Sri Lanka as Deputy Secretary of State. I have come at what is clearly and important moment in Sri Lanka's history. As your know, the United States Government has expressed its strong support for the existing ceasefire agreement and for the recently announced upcoming talks between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).

"During the Prime Minister's recent visit to the United States, President Bush and Secretary Powell applauded his efforts to end Sri Lanka's long civil conflict. As the Sri Lankan government has supported the United States in its struggle against terrorism, we have supported the Sri Lankan Government's policy on ending the war here.

"The upcoming negotiations will be difficult. There will certainly be setbacks. By agreeing to meet in Thailand, however, both parties have indicated an intent - we hope a sincere one - to choose peace over war, reconciliation over division. The people of Sri Lanka - Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslims - as well as the international community expect the government and LTTE to move forward in the negotiations towards a permanent settlement of the conflict that will give Tamils and every other citizen in this country a stake and security in Sri Lanka and keep the country united. We salute the efforts of the Norwegian government in facilitating and advancing this process of national reconciliation.

I was privileged to visit Jaffna earlier today. In the company of minister of Economic Reform Milinda Moragoda, I visited the site where a U.S. demining team is at work and the forward defense lines of the Sri Lankan military; toured Chavakachcheri to see first hand the horrific damage caused by the war; and spoke with Jaffna community leaders on the peace process. Altogether it was an informative experience and I greatly appreciate the Sri Lankan Government's assistance in making the trip possible.

"Earlier today, I also had the opportunity to meet representatives from the People's Alliance, the Tamil National Alliance and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress. I told all of them that the United States wishes to see a peaceful settlement of the civil conflict. We sense that the conditions are favorable for such a desirable outcome.

The relations between Sri Lanka and United States are broad and as strong as they have ever been. Through our mutual efforts they will continue to improve.

16 PTA cases dropped: Aug 23 - The Jaffna High Court discharged seven accused in sixteen cases when the State Counsel withdrew the indictments filed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, on the instruction of the Attorney General. In one case, the accused was enlarged in bail. Three accused - two women and a youth - who had been detained at Kalutara prisons in southern Sri Lanka for more than three years were brought down to Jaffna by air. Later they were produced before the High Court Judge K.P.S. Varatharaja. Of the three youths, Maheswaran Kugathasan who had been indicted in five PTA cases was allowed on bail and the inquiry against him was put off for a latter date. The High Court Judge discharged the other two accused women Nagarasa Gomathi and Amuthalingam Kalaichelvi along with four others already enlarged on

bail when the state counsel informed court that he withdrew all sixteen indictments against them as instructed by the Attorney General. The AG had indicted the discharged accused for aiding and abetting LTTE cadres during the period of arrest, court sources said.

Top LTTE leader treated in Colombo: Aug 26 - LTTE's military wing leader Balaraj underwent a kidney operation at the privately owned Nawaloka hospital in Colombo recently. Balaraj was admitted under a cover name Kulendran and the address was given as University, Jaffna, while his correct address is 17, Kokuvil, Jaffna. He was admitted to Nawaloka at about 8.00 p.m. on July 30 by an official of the Peace Secretariat, a Brigadier and a civilian named Raja Samarasinghe under instructions from defence secretary Austin Fernando. Balaraj stayed at room number 317 and the adjoining rooms were used for security people. Reports said that Balaraj was guarded by 8 army commandos. His bed ticket read BHT 214944. The kidney operation was carried out on 31 at about 4.00 p.m. by two doctors Neville Perera and Channa Ranasinghe. It is not known that the two doctors or the hospital knew who they were operating on since Balaraj was admitted under a cover name. Balaraj's personal aid Sudhakaran stayed in the room with him. A female LTTE's military leader Kamalini visited Balaraj on 31 night Balaraj's hospital bill number is Nawaloka/120599. Reports said that Balaraj returned to LTTE controlled area in a tinted Prado jeep number WP-DP0047 and the commander of Army's 56 division and DIG Wannu received special instructions to let his vehicle pass without being checked. A Colombo newspaper said that a senior minister in the government was behind the treatment deal and more injured LTTE fighters are likely to be treated in Colombo hospitals shortly. The next person is believed to be a LTTE woman cadre.

Special govt. team arrives Kilinochchi: Aug. 26 - A special team of development experts and bank officials flew to Kilinochchi in a special Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter, 26 August to hold talks with the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, government sources said. Mr. Bernard Gunatillake, Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat, which comes under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, led the special team.

The discussion between the government special team and the LTTE leadership was expected to focus on issues that were agreed in the first round of talks held during the previous week between Mr. Bernard Gunatillake and Mr. S.P. Thamichelvan, the Head of the LTTE's political wing. Several matters including allocation of funds to the Northeast development and rehabilitation were discussed during the first round of talks.

LTTE cadres defy security force orders: Aug 26 - Defying orders of the Security Forces, a group of about 15-20 armed and uniform clad LTTE cadres had crossed the Main Supply Route (MSR) from North to South on 25 August in the general area of Meeyankulam, about 5 km west of Valchchenai in eastern Sri Lanka, a media release from the Army stated. It said that security forces personnel who were on duty had informed the LTTE men of the restrictions placed on such movements in accordance with the MOU. However they had defied the Army warning and crossed the MSR. Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in Batticaloa had been informed of this unauthorized movement by the LTTE.

Another youth escapes LTTE custody: Aug 26 - A youth managed to escape from LTTE custody and asked for protection from the police post in the general area of Kanchankuda, south of Akkaraipattu last week. A media release from the Army said the escapee had been identified as Yoganandan Udayakumar of Thirukkivil in east Sri Lanka. According to the victim, two LTTE members had followed him at the time of his surrender to the Police. He had complained that he was abducted by some LTTE cadres and was taken to a LTTE training camp, from where he managed to escape.

The incident had been brought to the notice of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in Ampara by the Police. The release further said that arrangements are being made by the Akkaraipattu Police to hand over the youth to his relatives since his mother is not in the island.

Demining operations in Vanni: Aug 27 - The Humanitarian Demining Unit (HDU), a subsidiary of Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) has begun operations in Vanni with modern protective gear provided by the British demining agency Mine Action Group (MAG), UK with the assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

MAG and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) have been providing training to HDU's deminers to bring their operations up to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). Although the HDU had operated effectively for the past two years clearing mines in the Vanni area, the operations were fraught with risks due to the lack of adequate protective equipment for the deminers. With the training provided by MAG and NPA, the HDU is now operating to international standards and has greater safety measures in place.

Mr Kantharupan, head of the field unit currently demining in the Palai area said, "the training and protective gear recently offered have left us feeling much safer and organised. Although the process itself is much slower than before, the systematic operations will reduce potential injuries and will make it easier to account for all land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the operational area."

HDU alone was responsible for the survey, removal and destruction of more than 82,000 landmines and over 140,000 UXOs in the Kilinochchi area before resettlement took place. The HDU has taken measures to expand its demining activities to other parts of Vanni and beyond by increasing its team of 150 deminers to 600. Separate, newly formed units are being trained for new operations in the Trincomallee and Jaffna districts. It is estimated that more than 1.5 million land mines need clearing in the Vanni area alone.

WHO, ADB to help NE rehabilitation: Aug 27 - The Asian Development Bank (ADB) today announced that it has allocated four thousand million rupees for the rehabilitation of war ravaged Jaffna district. The money will be spent on rehabilitating schools, medical institutions and housing in the peninsula, ADB officials said.

ADB official Mr. M. Thiruchelvam said at a conference held on 27 August at the Jaffna zonal education office that rehabilitation of damaged schools and other facilities will begin immediately at a cost of eighty four million rupees in its first phase. The conference was attended by the North East Provincial Director of Education Mr. I.M. Issadeen, Director of Education (Primary) Mr. Muthu Sivagnanam and several other officials.

Rs. 26.8 million have been allocated to repair the damaged school buildings in the Chavakachcheri zone, and Rs. 23.6 million for Vadamaradchi zone. Rs. 16.5 million will be spent for repairing hospitals at Maruthankerni and Chavakachcheri. A sum of Rs. 2.9 million has been allocated for the repair of Kaithady Home for the Aged, the officials said.

The ADB team, which came to Jaffna Tuesday by road left after inspecting schools at Vasavilan and Tellipalai which are in the high security zone close to the Palaly army main base.

Meanwhile the World Health Organisation (WHO) said that it had prepared a comprehensive report regarding the needs in the sphere of health in the war ravaged Northeast Province. The Sri Lanka resident representative of the WHO said this on 27 August at an event held at the Ministry of Health after donating medical equipments and a stock of medicines to the hospitals in the province. The Minister of Health Mr. P. Dayaratne received the donation, valued at twenty three thousand US dollars. The WHO donated these items with the assistance of the International Development Association (IDA). The WHO resident representative further said that such assistance would be provided to Northeast Province hospitals in future also.

AG to charge police officials for torturing: Aug 28 - The Attorney General (AG) has taken steps to expedite filing indictments against police officers who face charges of torturing arrested suspects. Most of the tortured persons are Tamil youths and have been arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). A special unit has been set up for this purpose with a senior state counsel Mr. Yasantha Kotegoda as its head, AG department sources said.

Seventeen such cases are to be filed against police officials shortly. Among them are one Deputy Inspector General of Police, several Senior Superintendents of Police and Assistant Superintendents of Police. Already two police officials have been indicted in the Colombo High Court for torturing suspects while in custody.

Human rights activists in past complained that filing cases against errant police officials who commit torture on arrested suspects especially under the Prevention of Terrorism Act to obtain their confession were being done at a very slow pace.

The Attorney General department in ninety nine percent of the PTA cases solely depends on confessions purported to have been made by the suspects. In most of the cases the defence had proved that the police obtained confessions from the accused due to torture. However, those police officials who tortured the suspects have not been brought to courts. Instead some them have got promotions, human right activists alleged.

No change in India's position on LTTE: Aug 28 - India today said that its request for the extradition of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, had not been diluted by the Sri Lankan Government's decision to lift the ban on the Tigers before the Thailand peace talks commenced.

The Foreign Office spokeswoman told presspersons this evening that India had no plans to "review" its own decision to brand the Tigers as an illegal organisation. "Our request for extradition remains valid under international law," the spokeswoman said in response to a series of questions on Sri Lanka, the LTTE and Mr. Prabhakaran's extradition at her regular daily briefing in New Delhi. Mr. Prabhakaran, she said, was wanted in the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

Her comments came as the visiting Sri Lankan Economic Reforms Minister, Milinda Moragoda, held discussions with the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha. Mr. Moragoda, who has been negotiating with the LTTE, has been briefing the Indian leadership on the progress made in the peace talks.

She made it clear that there was no change in the Indian Government's position as far as the proscription of the LTTE was concerned. "There is no change in our position... it's between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE," she said when asked whether Colombo's decision would have any impact on New Delhi.

The spokeswoman said India had no intention of getting involved in the Norwegian-facilitated peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Asked if India intended to send an observer to Thailand for the peace talks, she said no such proposal was under the Government's consideration. India wished the peace process in Sri Lanka well, she said and referred to the intensive contacts between the Indian and Sri Lankan political leaderships in recent months. India, she reiterated, was committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

Jaya wants Prabhakaran extradited: Aug. 28 - The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, today sought the extradition of the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran, to face trial in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, in which he had been declared a "proclaimed offender" by a Designated Court in the country. Addressing a press conference, she said that simply because political moves were on in Sri Lanka one could not forget the basic facts that Prabhakaran was an accused and that he should be extradited to face the trial. Asked whether her Government would show leniency to the LTTE in the context of new peace initiatives being taken by the Sri Lankan Government, she said the internal matters of Sri Lanka were different.

On the arrest of the MDMK leader Vaiko for supporting the LTTE cause, she asserted that he had been detained under POTA. Asked whether her Government would wait for six months to file a chargesheet against him, she said it would be filed soon.

Would her Government ban the MDMK? She said: "we are gathering all the evidence and presenting it to the Centre."

More LTTE cadres defy security force orders: Aug 28 - More armed LTTE cadres continue to defy security forces orders and cross the Main Supply Route (MSR) a release from the Army stated today. A group of about 60 armed LTTE cadres wearing black uniforms had crossed the MSR from south towards north yesterday night defying the orders of the Security Forces. The release said that the armed LTTE men who suddenly showed up from the general area on Polonnaruwa/Batticaloa road between 128 and 129 kilometer posts defied orders of the Security Forces and crossed the MSR. Security Forces personnel who were on duty had informed the LTTE cadres of the restrictions placed on such movements in accordance with the MOU but they had defied the warning. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in Batticaloa had been informed of the unauthorized movement.

Thomas Haukland, Spokesman for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) told TNL Radio that the LTTE crossing the Main Supply Route (MSR) in defiance of security forces orders is a very dangerous situation. Haukland said, "We have got complaints about it and it is a very, very dangerous situation. We are going to take it up with the LTTE soon."

Ratwatte's bank safety boxes searched: Aug 29 - The Criminal Investigation Department officials searched several safety deposit boxes belonging to the former Deputy Defence Minister General Anurudhha Ratwatte and his wife held in a leading private bank in Colombo onn 28 August and found cash around five million rupees and several secret documents. The ColomboFort Magistrate had earlier issued search warrant on an application made by CID officials.

General Ratwatte and his two Chanuka and Lohan have been on bail in connection with the Udathalawinne massacre of ten Muslim youths during December general election last Year. They have been indicted in the Colombo High Court along with several others who are on remand in this case.

Corruption: Lanka ninth in Asia-Pacific: Aug 30 - Sri Lanka ranked ninth of the Asia-Pacific region and 52nd overall in an index bottomed by neighbouring Bangladesh on public sector corruption issued by Transparency International on 28 August.

The list which rates 102 countries annually on perceived public sector corruption rated New Zealand as the least corrupt country in the region with a score of 9.5 while Singapore and Australia ranked second and third respectively.

Sri Lanka lagged behind Asian countries like Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia and South Korea to rank the ninth while all other South Asian countries including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were rated under number 10.

Transparency International Chairman Peter Eigen said that while the method of compiling data had changed, other things had not. "There is now even much more serious agreement that Bangladesh is perceived to have exceptionally serious problems with corruption," he said.

The organisation publishing the index charged that corruption is holding back all poverty-stricken countries despite pledges by political leaders to crack down on it and accused politicians of paying lip-service to fight against corruption which is said to be



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high in poor parts of the world." Political elites and their cronies continue to take kickbacks at every opportunity when they must clamp down on corruption to break the vicious cycle of poverty and graft," it said.

Aritha Wickremnayake of Transparency International Sri Lanka charged government of failing to take any legal action what so ever as they say in political slogans. "All political parties that have ruled Sri Lanka whether it be the UNP or the PA say that they will take legal action against those who engage in corruption, but nothing has been done so far," he said.

Wickremnayake pointed out lack of law enforcement as the main reason for the high rate of corruption in Sri Lanka and said it has been proven that machinery in the law to punish such people hardly work in the country. "That is the vast difference between Sri Lanka and countries like Finland and Singapore. Even in Singapore there are corrupt people, but they are properly punished by the law enforcement authorities in Singapore. This works as a deterrent which refrains others from engaging in graft and that is exactly what is lacking in our country," he claimed.

Special court to expedite PTA cases: Aug 31 - The special High Court established in the premises of the Welikada prison to hear cases filed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) is to function from September 15, according to Judicial Service Commission (JSC) sources. This is the first time a special court has been set up to expedite the disposal of PTA cases. However, human rights activists have condemned locating the court in the premises of a prison complex.

Sri Lanka's Law Minister had earlier instructed the Attorney General to expedite all cases against the suspects who have been held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with only their confessions as evidence against them. "It is better for the Attorney General to represent the people instead of the State," said Mr. W.J.M. Lokkubandara in his instruction to the AG's department, adding that "The delay in the Attorney General department has caused immense suffering and misery to those held under detention without any evidence."

President queries release of LTTE detainees: Sep 2 - President Chandrika Kumaratunga has written to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe requesting details regarding the LTTE prisoners identified for release by the government. A press release issued by the Presidents office states her attention has been drawn to media reports that a large number of LTTE prisoners are to be released in exchange for a few security personnel in the custody of the LTTE. The President had learnt that among those who are to be released are LTTE cadres who have been responsible for serious crimes including the assassination of several highly placed politicians in the country and all those responsible for the attacks on the Dalada Maligawa, Central Bank, Town Hall, Prime Ministers office and the Dehiwela train. The statement adds that president requested the Prime Minister to send her a list of LTTE prisoners identified for release before action is taken to release any of them.

Meanwhile, Minister of Defence Tilak Marapana has said that the LTTE suspect arrested on suspicion for throwing bombs at the President would not be included in the list of LTTE suspects to be released by the government in the prisoners of war exchange program.

Attempt to enter Army camp: Sep 03 - A protest campaign held during the morning on 2 September at Point Pedro close to the Brigade Headquarters demanded the passage of civilians in this area unchecked. According to an Army media release the protesters numbering about 50-100 have allegedly instigated the students of Hartley College and Methodist College to join this protest. The release stated that children clad in School uniforms were mobilized to pass through Army check points by force towards the Point Pedro Brigade Headquarters, damaging the sentry posts and road barriers that were placed at these check points along side the road. The protesters had made an abortive attempt to storm and break in to the barracks of the Army soldiers, situated within the Brigade Headquarters in the close proximity of the two schools. According to the initial information two posts manned by Security Forces

had been damaged and destroyed by these protesters who were making their way to the Brigade Headquarters. Police rushed to the scene and was compelled to use tear gas to disperse the unlawful assembly and bring normalcy to the area. The release also stated that on 30 August 2002 in accordance with the MOU the Army moved out from the building of Hartley Collage.

Parents, school authorities and the security forces decided to temporary close Hartley College and Methodist College in Point Pedro taking in to consideration, the safety of the school children. Military Spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne told the press.

The Sri Lanka Monitoring mission (SLMM) said that it would conduct an investigation to find out who was behind yesterdays protest march into the Point Pedro Army Brigade Head Quarters. SLMM spokesman Tomas Hauckland told TNL Radio that the mission did not want to jump to any conclusions as to who was behind the protest, which involved civilians, school children and even fishermen in the region. He said if they found any party involved in the cease-fire was behind the incident, they would definitely treat it as a violation of the MOU signed between the government and the LTTE.

Protest against deproscription: Sep 03 - Thousands of Sinhala nationalists, including hundreds of Buddhist monks took to streets in Capital Colombo today protesting against the government's decision to lift the ban on LTTE. The protestors were blocked by police as they attempted to march towards the Prime Minister's office.

The protest march began in front of Fort Railway station in Colombo. They were blocked by a large number of police at Galle Face green. Parliamentarians and leading members of the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) led the march.

Meanwhile, President Chandrika Kumaratunga requested the United National Front government to furnish her with the names of LTTE members who are to be released in a prisoner swap, before the direct talks between the Government of the LTTE in Thailand on September 16. This request has been made to the Prime Minister in a letter sent by the President, People's Alliance sources said. The President made this request to ensure that no LTTE members who participated in major attacks are released, the sources added.

Hakeem and Balasingham meet in London: Sep 3 - LTTE's chief negotiator, Mr. Anton Balasingham, and the leader of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress, Minister Rauf Hakeem, met today for two hours in London, a press release by the Norwegian government said. It was agreed that Mr. Hakeem will join the Sri Lankan government delegation in the first round of peace talks, the statement said. The "constructive and cordial" meeting, which Norwegian facilitator Erik Solheim also attended, was held at the residence of Oslo's ambassador to UK.

The text of the Norwegian press release follows: "On September 3rd 2002, a meeting was held between the chief negotiator for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton Balasingham, and leader of Sri Lankan Muslim Congress, Minister Rauf Hakeem. Balasingham was accompanied by his wife Adele.

"Mr. Hakeem and Mr. Balasingham discussed matters related to the upcoming talks in Thailand between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. It was agreed that Mr. Hakeem will take part in the first round of talks as a member of the government delegation, in his capacity as being the leader of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress. It was further agreed that Mr. Hakeem will participate in future rounds of talks as the leader of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress as well as the head of a Muslim delegation representing the Muslim community. This is in accordance with the memorandum of understanding between the LTTE and the SLMC signed April 13th.

"The SLMC leader and the LTTE chief negotiator also touched upon matters related to the present situation in the north and east and to the status of the cease-fire agreement. They agreed that a new broader meeting between the LTTE-leadership and the SLMC will be held in the Vanni after the first round of talks in Thailand.

"The meeting was held in a constructive and cordial at-

phere. The session lasted for two hours. The meeting took place at the Norwegian ambassadorial residence in London. Special Advisor Erik Solheim, one of the Norwegian facilitators, was present as observer."

New Indian High Commissioner: Sep 3 - New Indian High Commissioner to Colombo Nirupam Sen, presented his credentials to President Chandrika Kumaratunge today. High Commissioner Sen who joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1969 had his initial posting in Moscow. He served as the deputy High Commissioner in Colombo during 1987/1989. He also served as India's ambassador in Bulgaria. Prior to his assignment in Colombo, he was India's ambassador to Oslo in Norway. High Commissioner Sen has a Masters in history from the prestigious St. Stephen College in New Delhi. He was a star debater in English and a Shakespearean actor.

Rupavahini in North after 15 years: Sep 3 - Sri Lanka's main TV channel Rupavahini went on air in the North from 2 September after a lapse of 15 years. The National Tamil Channel of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) will enable Northern residents to watch programmes beamed from Colombo as well as those specifically tailored for the North. The service was inaugurated by Mass Communications Minister Imitiaz Bakeer Markar at the SLRC studios in Colombo. A parallel ceremony was held in Jaffna under the patronage of Hindu Affairs Minister T. Maheshwaran with the participation of religious leaders, top army officials, government agents and LTTE representatives.

Rupavahini was received in Jaffna until 1987, when the Kokavil transmitting station was destroyed. The Northern coverage was restored in 1996 with three relay stations in Madukanda, Elephant Pass and Palaly but it stopped in 1998 after the Elephant Pass attack.

Minister Markar said this was a fulfilment of a request made by the people of Jaffna during his recent visit to the North. "This new channel will connect the people in North and East with the outside world," he said. The SLRC is now linked to the Palaly TV transponder station (UHF Channel 43) through three microwave links at Madukanda, Mannar and Jaffna Sri Lanka Telecom towers.

Sri Lanka de-proscribes LTTE: Sep 4. The Sri Lankan Defence Minister, Tilak Marapone, today told the Cabinet that he had decided to de-proscribe the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In a Cabinet meeting lasting barely 15 minutes, Mr. Marapone informed his colleagues about his decision to de-proscribe the Tigers, thereby meeting a crucial condition set by the rebels ahead of direct talks to start on September 16. A notification is to be gazetted on the de-proscription later tonight, Defence sources said.

The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, who had struck a note of caution that the lifting of the ban should be linked to progress made in the talks, was not present at the Cabinet meeting.

The LTTE was banned on January 26, 1998 a day after the rebels bombed the Dalada Maligawa (the Temple of the Tooth Relic) in Kandy.

Reacting to the lifting of the ban by Sri Lanka, British Foreign Office Minister, Mike O'Brien, said: "We have noted that the Government of Sri Lanka has lifted its ban on the LTTE. This is entirely a matter for the Government of Sri Lanka and does not directly affect the proscription of the LTTE in the UK. Before the proscription of the LTTE in the UK could be reconsidered by the British Government, the LTTE would have to demonstrate a complete and convincing renunciation of terrorism. We hope that the LTTE will indeed conclude that violence no longer has a part to play in resolving Sri Lanka's problems and that they will renounce terrorism once and for all."

The Minister, however welcoming the proposed peace talks said, "Meanwhile we welcome the decision of the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to commence direct talks in Thailand on

16 September. This is an important step and has our full backing. As the parties prepare for talks it is important to remember that for peace to succeed there must be respect for the rights of all communities, including the Muslim community."

The reaction of the USA was similar to that of UK. The U.S. said today the Tigers would remain on Washington's list as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), until it renounced "terrorism in word and deed." "The U.S. understands and supports the Sri Lankan Government's decision to lift its ban on the Tigers in the context of moving forward with negotiations to end the conflict," the U.S. embassy in Colombo said.

IMF to release 64 million dollars: Sep 4 - The International Monetary Fund announced today in Washington that it would disburse 64 million dollars of a three-year loan to Sri Lanka. The disbursement brings the total loan amount granted under a line of credit that expires on September 19 to 266 million dollars, the Fund said.

"Notwithstanding some policy delays and adverse external shocks, the Sri Lankan authorities have achieved their key goals of halting reserve losses within a flexible exchange rate system, initiating fiscal consolidation and reforms of the tax system and public enterprise operations," the Fund said in a statement.

The Fund encouraged the authorities in Colombo to continue on the path toward structural economic reforms, especially encouraging private investment in state-owned enterprises, improving tax collection and the strengthening the financial sector.

Hartley and Methodist Girls to reopen: Sep 5 - The Sri Lanka Army today agreed to allow Hartley College and Vadamarachchi Methodist Girls High School in Point Pedro to reopen starting from Monday September 9. "These schools were shut down to enable the SLA to rebuild and strengthen the sentry and check points which were damaged by students during the agitation Monday. We have now strengthened our positions around these schools," Jaffna district SLA area commander Major General Sarath Fonseka said at a conference held at the Vadamarachchi Methodist Girls High School. The Major General told principals, teachers and parents who attended the conference that road leading to Hartley College and Vadamarachchi Methodist Girls High school is now open only for students to attend classes. The SLA would consider opening the other roads for students later.

The SLA Monday ordered the closure of these schools until further notice following a serious agitation by students and parents demanding withdrawal of all SLA sentry and checkpoints in the areas. Jaffna SLA area commander further said that students launched their agitation urged on by some elements, who are determined to disrupt the peace process. He complained that the media also supported these activities. "However, the SLA is prepared to face any threat," said Major General Sarath Fonseka.

Teenagers escape from LTTE custody: Sep 6 - Two teenagers who escaped from the custody of the LTTE have arrived at their homes in Batticaloa this week. The teenagers identified as Kana-pathipillai Vijitha (17) and K. Rajeshwary (19) are from Kokkadicholai North and Ambalanthurai, Kalawanchikudy in east Sri Lanka. According to an Army media release the teenagers had escaped from a LTTE training camp in Karaveedi.

Meanwhile a mother, of a 13 year old girl Y. Pugalirani of Unit 2, Poonthottam refugee camp had complained that her daughter had gone missing from the refugee camp since 4 September. Later she had found that her daughter had been taken away by the LTTE. Police in the area is conducting further investigations.

Destroyed courthouses to be repaired: Sep 9 - Officials from Sri Lanka's Judicial Service Commission (JSC) headed by its secretary paid a two day visit to Jaffna peninsula inspecting court houses destroyed in the heavy fighting which raged in the northern penin-

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sula in the past. JSC Secretary Mr. S. W. Jayatilake Monday inspected the Point Pedro magistrate court building, which is presently occupied by the Sri Lanka Army.

The SLA has said the entire Point Pedro area encompassing courthouse, rest house, harbour, co-operative building and two leading schools still remains a high security zone.

Ministry officials later visited the temporary Point Pedro courthouse, located in a private building at Vathiri in the Vadamarachchi. Point Pedro Magistrate Mr. A. Premshankar accompanied ministry officials.

JSC officials visited Mallakam where the permanent court building had been destroyed in the military operations launched by the SLA in 1995. They also inspected the Jaffna court complex destroyed during heavy fighting in 1990. JSC officials held a meeting with the Jaffna magistrate regarding the construction of a new court complex for Jaffna with World Bank assistance.

UNICEF on release child soldiers: Sep 11 - Tamil Tigers are beginning to release child soldiers recruited to help in fighting in Sri Lanka, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on September 11.

More than 85 were released over the past few weeks by the LTTE, UNICEF said "UNICEF is currently developing an action plan for the social reintegration of these children, including assistance returning to school, access to vocational training and other activities," the organisation said in a statement.

UNICEF said it had interviewed more than 20 of the released children and confirmed they had been returned to their families. It said it planned to check all 85 children on the list handed over by S.P. Thamilselvan, the leader of the Tigers' political wing.

Economy at critical juncture - IMF: Sep 12 - Sri Lanka's economy is at a critical juncture and with the recovery there fragile and subject to significant risks, major adjustments are needed, the International Monetary Fund said in Washington.

In its annual assessment of Sri Lanka, the IMF forecast the economy would expand by a modest 3.75-4 percent in 2002 after posting its first contraction since 1948 last year. The lender also said inflation could be contained within the 7-8 percent target and that efforts to cut the government's deficit to 8.5 percent this year should be realised. But despite that optimism, the IMF noted that bloated spending ahead of December, 2001, election, large pension and wage increase and overruns in defence spending left the government with much work to do to keep the economy on track.

"Sri Lanka is at a critical juncture," the IMF report said. "Despite recent improvements, the macroeconomic situation remains fragile, and achieving sustainable high growth requires major adjustments."

Noting that the resolution of the civil conflict there and the scope for generating economic growth were closely intertwined, the lender said there were "significant downside risks" to the outlook. "In particular, there remain risks of drought, and the long-term electricity shortages are still a major concern," the report said. "Directors were also concerned that any resumption of political uncertainties could slow down the peace momentum, and undermine the fiscal position."

The IMF made a raft of suggestions to improve the economic outlook. Among them were containing spending, in particular on wages and defense, reforming the tax system and tax collection, strengthening the banking system, increasing the central bank's oversight of banking, more ambitious privatization of state-owned businesses and labor-market reforms.

The IMF urged the central bank to avoid further significant easing of interest rates until it was clear that fiscal consolidation has taken hold and endorsed the policy of only intervening in currency markets in order to smooth exchange-rate volatility.

19th constitutional amendment gazetted: Sep 12 - The United National Front government on 11 August midnight gazetted its nine-

teenth constitutional amendment, providing for restricting the powers of the Executive President in dissolving parliament after the completion of one year of its existence. The gazette notification was issued after Cabinet approved the draft amendment.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge did not attend the cabinet meeting. The draft amendment is to be tabled in Parliament to be debated shortly.

Meanwhile the Constitutional Affairs Minister Professor G.L. Peiris expressed optimism that the controversial amendment will be passed in parliament with the required two-third majority. **Police harassment of journalist:** Sep 12 - Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières) has called on the Sri Lankan government to swiftly investigate and punish those responsible for the harassment of a journalist who reported the alleged torture in custody of a woman by police officers in the north-western town of Wariyapola.

RSF secretary-general Robert Ménard in a letter to Sri Lanka's Interior Minister John Amararatunga said, "The new government has substantially improved the press freedom situation, with fewer physical attacks on journalists and the abolition of the law on criminal defamation, but the impunity enjoyed by the police in the Wariyapola affair is a worrying step backwards."

The harassment of journalist, Nishanta Kumara, correspondent of the weekly newspaper Ravaya, began on 10 July 2002 when three men, including a supporter of the ruling United National Party (UNP) called Sunil, attacked him in a bus. They threatened him with a knife and one of them asked if he was "the human rights dog who's trying to send my brother-in-law to prison." One of the men was about to stab him when the bus driver saw what was happening and stopped the bus, allowing the journalist to escape.

Mr Kumara continues to fear for his life as he has been followed every day since 19 August by two men on an unmarked red motor-cycle.

The journalist has filed two complaints (on 10 July and 5 September) with the inspector-general of police in Colombo, the police in Kurunegala and the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, but no investigations appear to have been started to date.

Mr Kumara's article reported the plight of a 39-year-old woman, Nandani Herat, who was allegedly tortured by police while she was being held for questioning at the police station in Wariyapola. Other journalists have been subjected to police intimidation while covering the trials of Ms Herat and of the police officers accused of torturing her. A crew of the independent TV station Swarnawahini was barred from the courtroom in Wariyapola. After going outside and filming from their vehicle, and the latter was searched by some of the 25 police officers in civil clothes present in front of the Courts. The journalists were threatened with arrest and were followed by a blue van when they left the scene.

RSF has asked the Minister to ensure the safety and access of journalists to the next hearing of the case.

Ceasefire Violations: Sep 13 - The international Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said that 40% fewer complaints were made against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Government of Sri Lanka in August compared to last July. Violations of the Ceasefire Agreement were also considerably fewer in August compared to July. Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission received a total of 226 complaints against both parties in August compared to 391 complaints in July. During the same period, complaints ruled as violations went down from 98 in July to 71 in August, which is a decrease by 28%. According to Major General Trond Furuhoide, Head of SLMM; "This is a clear sign that restoration of normalcy is underway in Sri Lanka. Both parties are showing considerable restraint and a common responsibility for restoring peace, to the benefit of the public. To know that the complaints of the parties and the people of Sri Lanka have fallen down by almost a half between months is especially encouraging news now at the start of

Peace Talks."

At a meeting in Kilinochchi on Friday (13 September), S.P. Tamilchelvan, head of the Political Wing of LTTE, promised SLMM the support of LTTE in keeping things in the North and East of Sri Lanka under control, so violent public demonstrations like occurred in Point Pedro recently could be avoided. Mr. Tamilchelvan emphasised that freedom of movement and absence of military presence close to schools were important factors in the restoration of normalcy but agreed with the SLMM that all unrest should be avoided at this time. The LTTE Political leadership furthermore stated that recent exercises of Sea Tigers off the coast of Mullaitivu, were in no way meant to be provocative towards the Sri Lanka Navy, and agreed that it would be better if the parties would inform each other of such exercises beforehand.

Recent Positive Developments towards Lasting Peace include the increased traffic on the A9 Highway, which is up from around 6.500 people per day in the month of May to around 13.500 people per day in August.

Also, a meeting was held between Major General Fonseka of the Sri Lanka Army and Colonel Theepan of the LTTE, in the middle of the Zone of Separation in Muhamalai in Jaffna Peninsula, on Thursday (12 September) afternoon. Both commanders cleared some practical issues between them and agreed on developing the direct contact they have initiated with each other. Trond Furuho, Head of SLMM, stated after the meeting that; "The Positive and friendly atmosphere I noticed is a good sign of the commanders building a sound self confidence in this relationship, which I also consider an important part of normalisation. SLMM will now focus on the full implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement. After this two day visit to Jaffna and Kilinochchi I feel that the situation on the ground here in Sri Lanka seems to be in such good order that it will support the parties during their initial talks in Thailand. We

should all wish them good luck."

Mystery death of ex-EPRLF MP: Sep 16 - Former EPRLF Parliamentarian Antony Emmanuel Selvam(42) on September 14, Saturday night met with a tragic death under mysterious circumstances in Vavuniya. His charred body was found on his burned out bed. Up-to-now it had not been ascertained how his bed caught fire or why he did not make any attempt to escape.

The former MP's house is situated close to the Vavuniya railway station. His wife, his cousin and a boy as well as his police body guard had been in the house at the time. Saturday had been his wife's birthday. He had reportedly retired to his bedroom and watched the India - Zimbabwe cricket match on television there.

He had gone to bed at around 10 p.m. About half an hour after midnight, his bed had caught fire and his wife pushed open the door and rushed out hoping her husband too would follow suit but he didn't. His wife, cousin sister and the boy tried to douse the fire and the boy suffered burn injuries in trying to save him. He was later admitted to the Vavuniya hospital.

Mr. Emmanuel was an EPRLF MP from 1989 to 1994. At the last general election he contested under the EPDP ticket and thereafter was engaged in business.

8,000 Sri Lankan in Italy to be deported: Sep 17 - Nearly 8,000 illegal Sri Lankan immigrants in Italy will be forced to return to Sri Lanka, with the Italian government implementing their tough new immigration laws. The Italian government has issued the asylum seekers a 90-day ultimatum and those who do not comply, will be arrested and deported.

Those with valid work permits however will be permitted to remain. Embassy sources stated that the number of Sri Lankans forced to return, take eighth place in comparison to those of other countries.

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Vignettes of Jaffna on the eve of the Talks

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It does not matter to what extent the American policing of the world following the 9/11 tragedy of last year has influenced peace developments in Sri Lanka. For Sri Lankans at large, these developments have come as a boon from heaven. After nearly 20 years of fighting, the new government that was elected in December 2001, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have declared and honoured a ceasefire. They have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which the two parties are honouring and breaching at the same time. With little fuss the government lifted its proscription of the LTTE, and the two parties are poised to begin direct talks in Thailand with Norwegians as facilitators.

One of the major benefits of these developments was the reopening of roadways throughout the country. Barricades and checkpoints have been choking Colombo, while the road and rail access to the Northern and Eastern Provinces was cut off at several points. For more than a decade, the residents of Jaffna have been travelling by land and sea to Colombo, as they did in the 19th century, spending three to four days on a journey that usually takes eight to ten hours by motor vehicle or train. The military-bureaucratic and the LTTE requirements for permits, security clearance and identification which added to the miseries of travel, are being reduced and streamlined after the ceasefire. Transport by road and air has been restored, allowing a sudden influx of people to Jaffna and the North: internally displaced Tamils returnees, Tamils from Colombo and expatriate Tamils visiting homes and families, Sinhalese peace activists and tourists, and Western and Sri Lankan NGO workers. In August, 400,000 Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics and other religious pilgrims from all over the island congregated and prayed for peace at the Church of 'Our Lady of Madhu', in the Mannar forests under LTTE control. The LTTE circulated a newspaper in Sinhla for the benefit of its southern visitors and as a symbol of bridge building. Also in August, expatriate Tamils flew into Jaffna for the annual festival of the revered Nallur Kanthasamy Kovil celebrated in full measure for the first after several interruptions.

Beginning of the End

The ceasefire agreement created an opportunity for this writer to visit Jaffna

after 18 years, which I did, in July, with a group of friends from Kandy and Colombo. Three of us in the group, Rev. Paul Caspersz, Dr. Kumar David and myself had visited Jaffna on a 'fact finding mission', in 1979, when President Jayewardene placed Jaffna under Emergency Rule and sent the army to 'wipe out terrorism'. The first night of terror belonged to the army, as six young activists were spirited away from their homes and brutally murdered. That marked the beginning of the fighting between the Sri Lankan army and the militant Tamil groups. Twenty three years later, we returned to witness what, hopefully, is the beginning of the end. We set out from Kandy on 16 July, and returned on 20 July, not a long stay after having been away for so long but it served its purpose.

After four hours and 150 km on the A-9 Highway, we reached Vavuniya the first Tamil town on the road to Jaffna. Vavuniya is the quintessential border town in the Northern Province and has been a major recipient of displaced people from Jaffna during the last two decades of fighting. The town is under the control of the Sri Lankan army with the district civil administration also in place. Unarmed LTTE cadres have been allowed under the MoU to open 'political offices' in the town. There were no scars of war apparent to the passing eye, unlike what we were to see the rest of our way.

Effects of War

The second half of the journey took twice as long as the first, with delays at the military and LTTE checkpoints, and slow driving on long stretches of what was once a tree-lined roadway but now reduced to a berm of sunbaked dust and rubble. The first sign of devastation was the missing rail road built by the British in 1905, running parallel to the highway all the way from Vavuniya to the northernmost point in the Jaffna Peninsula. Every piece of iron and wood has been scraped away to build bunkers, leaving behind a 175 km long earth bund in place of what was once a well maintained and well used rail road. On the other side of the road, we saw stranded pylons stripped of the high tension electric cables that had once spanned them for transmitting electricity. Road, railway and electricity transmission, the standard hardware of a nation (any nation), lay in ruins undone by human de-

pravity and failed politics.

Kilinochchi town, halfway between Vavuniya and Jaffna, is slowly coming back to life, but the effects of war could be seen everywhere. The town's core buildings, the District Revenue Office, the Police Station, the Courts, the Rest House and the Hospital, the relics of colonial urbanism in the hinterland, stand roofless and shell-shocked. Standing alongside are the new LTTE Police Station and the Tamil Eelam Bank that does business in Sri Lankan currency. Kilinochchi is the main town in the LTTE controlled area called Vanni, the central portion of the contested Tamil homeland, sandwiched between the Jaffna Peninsula in the North and the Eastern Province. The LTTE Head Quarters are said to be located in the Wannai interior, away from the town.

As we travelled along Highway 9, all the way from Kilinochchi to Jaffna, we saw evidence of war and its destructions strewn all over. There is nothing left in Pallai, a small industrial and agricultural town in better times. The state owned chemical factory, built in 1955 as one of four state-run industries to be built in the Tamil areas, has been totally wiped out. We saw similar destruction, north of Pallai, at Elephant Pass, the narrow passage between the mainland and the Jaffna Peninsula. It used to be an active saltern and had a beautiful Rest House overlooking the lagoon. During the war, the Sri Lankan army took over the Rest House and built a huge base to isolate Jaffna from Wannai. The LTTE overran this base in April 2000. As our van crossed the causeway under a blistering afternoon sun, all we could see was a burnt out armoured car hoisted high on a wooden and steel scaffolding.

Inside Jaffna

The scene of devastation continued in town after town, inside the Jaffna Peninsula. The Peninsula is a flat land of over 1000 sq. km, with intersecting lagoons comprising 100 sq.km. The climate is hot, the rainfall is not plentiful, and the main source of water is a network of subterranean streams that are tapped through deep wells sunk in limestone rock. The climate makes the Jaffna woman and man, and hence their legendary spartan culture of conserving water, meticulously cultivating the soil, accurately fencing their properties, and even keeping a census of trees. The Hindu Tamils have also had a strong pedagogic and even pedantic tradition, which in colonial times combined with munificent Christian Missionaries to create an impressive system and of schools libraries in Jaffna. The mainstays of Jaffna society have been intensive agriculture, agro-based small industries, lagoon and

ocean fishing, trading and commercial activities, and the school system that prepares students for the job market or the university. Industrial development has been limited to a state-run cement plant and a few ancillary industries.

The war has ravaged every one of these economic sectors and the groups of people who depended on them for their livelihood. Reckless landmining that did not spare even the farmlands, has driven tens of thousands of farmers out of their livelihood. We saw vast stretches of plantations of coconut and palmyrah trunks with the top halves neatly sheared off by the army to build bunkers. For over ten years, ocean fishing has been banned by the government for security reasons, and the fishing industry that once supplied nearly 30% of the country's demand for fish and also produced for export, is now virtually dead, while 6000 of the 11,000 households who depend on fishing for their income are displaced and destitute. The schools, always the pride of Jaffna, have been bombed, occupied by the army and severely disrupted from their functions. The army's occupation of schools and other public buildings continued even after the MoU.

In the 1980s, at the outbreak of the war, Jaffna's population was about 900,000, and is now stabilizing around 500,000. The fighting has forced several thousands of people to move both within the Peninsula and to outside areas. The people whom we met in Jaffna recalled the horrifying experience of the LTTE-led exodus of nearly 700,000 people on the eve of the occupation of Jaffna by the armed forces in 1995. A majority of them returned to Jaffna after one year, but there are still large numbers of displaced people inside and outside the Peninsula. They eke out a miserable existence in make shift camps, while the homes they abandoned have been occupied and vandalised by the government's armed forces. The army has not spared even temples and schools, the Catholic Seminary in Jaffna, and the Jaffna YMCA where we stayed during our

four days in Jaffna. We learnt that, at the YMCA, the army had used doors and windows for firewood and taken away all the furniture while leaving. The Catholic seminarians in Columbuturai were forced to move four times in and out of their beautiful campus.

The sight of the destruction of the Jaffna City Centre was worse than what I could have ever imagined. While all sides to this senseless fighting should share responsibility for the damage they have caused, the responsibility for the City Centre destruction lies primarily with the Sri Lankan government and its armed forces. In 1981, a bunch of drunken government policemen set fire to the City's grand Public Library. Faced with a barrage of criticism at home and abroad, the government rebuilt the library, but army has gone about shelling and air-bombing every other building near the Library and reducing the whole area to a black moonscape. The majestic Jaffna Town Hall, the beautiful Subramaniam Park in front of it, the imposing St. Peter's Church built in 1823, the historic Court buildings and the Rest House across the Main Street have all disappeared. The buildings of the Jaffna Central College, the Peninsula's oldest school, have been badly damaged, while only the front portal is all that remains of the Regal Theatre. In the midst of it all, the tall Clock Tower stands in lonely eminence as a grieving witness. Further from the City Centre, many houses have been shelled and vacated; the older part of St. Patrick's College, itself 150 years old, where I once studied, is now in virtual ruins.

A Stoic People

These few paragraphs cannot fully portray the extent of the human tragedy that Jaffna has been through. Certainly, the last two decades have been its worst years. Prominent visitors to Jaffna, like the UNHCR officials, have expressed their horror about what they have seen, especially the plight of the mass of displaced people uprooted and cast in camps in their own homeland. We did not travel to every part of the Peninsula, but what struck every member of our group was the stoical calmness that everyone whom we met in Jaffna displayed. For someone who had gone through so much for so long, there was no trace of anger or hatred in their words, their tone, or their eyes. We visited a refugee camp where displaced families from a once prosperous fishing village

have been living for ten years. The children in the camp were full of innocence and smiles; they had not seen any other life.

We were impressed by the institutional discipline, resilience and quiet efficiency that we witnessed at the Jaffna University, the schools, the General Hospital, the Municipal Offices, and in the provision of public transport. The old 'grand bazar' is bustling back to life. There are also blessings in disguise. The drop in population has translated into lesser demands on the City's scarce resources, and there has been no rush into a reckless and unsustainable building boom like in Colombo. Roadblocks and fuel embargo have saved Jaffna from the car mania and the emission pall. They will arrive in due time with enough vengeance, but for the time being Jaffna is neat and orderly, its air clean, and the climate pleasantly mild and not humid. Jaffna is a bicycle town and it was refreshing to see platoons of school children in their white uniforms and adults in assorted clothing peddling their two wheelers on virtually car-free roads.

My friends in Jaffna reminded me that our group was visiting in relatively better times, for life before the ceasefire had been dark and difficult. For several years Jaffna was without electricity, adequate food and essential medical supplies. The Rector of St. Patrick's College painfully recalled that when food was scarce and nourishment low, students playing soccer would tire out at the end of the first half! The new government, after the ceasefire and the signing of the MoU, has restored the power supply and lifted the fuel embargo. With the opening of Highway 9 all supplies can now reach Jaffna, but it will take sometime before Jaffna can start sending its produce out of the Peninsula.

The people of Jaffna have been the victims of politics without having any say in the matter. For the moment, they would prefer to be left alone to rebuild their lives. They welcome the ceasefire and hope that it will last for ever even if there are long delays in the resolution of issues that are among the causes and results of the fighting, and which will be the subject of the talks that are only beginning now. We heard from the Head of the LTTE's Political Office in Jaffna, that the "LTTE hates war", and they would do everything in their power to prevent a return to fighting.

The new government in Colombo appears to be determined as much. The government and the LTTE, unlike their contestants in Kashmir and the Middle East, have been showing not unremarkable capacity and willingness to change for the better and away from their sordid pasts. They both need the watchful support of everyone who is interested in peace and fairness. □

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About People and Events

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.



Kalyani, daughter of Mr. Pax and Mrs Janaki Chinnakone of Bedford Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, UK and **Robin**, son of Mr. Ranjit and Mrs Stella Appathurai of Newland Close, Wembley, Middlesex, UK were married at Rivercourt Methodist Church, Hammer-smith, London UK on the 8th of June 2002.

Rahulan son of Mrs P. Sri Shanmuganathan of 63 Blackoak Drive, Brampton, Ontario L6R 1B9, Canada and of the late Mr. S. Sri Shanmugana-than and **Yalini**, daughter of Mrs T. Kunarasah of 19 Beach Road, Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka and of the late Mr. R. Kunarasah on 15th September 2002 in Sri Raja Rajeswary Amman Temple, Stoneleigh, Surrey, UK.

OBITUARIES

Sinnathamby Sivapiragasam



Sinnathamby Sivapiragasam (Sandilipai), formerly of Irrigation Department, Colombo; beloved husband of late Panchadcharam (known as Kitchi of Urumpirai East); much loved father of Radha, Sivakumarran (Rajan), Rajini (Ruby), Ramani (Bubby), Rohini (Rani) and Renuka; father-in-law of late Sivagnanam, Navamani, Viswanathan (Oman), Dr. Salama (Colombia), Sivagurunathan and Umasuthan; beloved grandfather of Sivaruby & Sivayogi, Krishnakumar & Ahilan, Shireen, Vidya & Menaha, Jenani & Richard; great grandfather of Yalini (all of UK); much loved brother of late Vithyalingham, late Shanmugam, late Maheswari, Poornam, late Saraswathi & Kanmani passed away peacefully in

his sleep on 23rd August 2002. The cremation took place at Breakspere Cemetery, Ruislip, Middlesex on 2nd September 2002.

The family wish to thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted in various ways during bereavement. - 28 Currey Road, Greenford, Middlesex UB6 0BD. Tel: 020 8933 9699.

Mrs Parasathi Thambiappah



Mrs Parasathi Thambiappah, formerly of Palaly Road and Amman Road, Kantharamdam, Jaffna; beloved wife of late Thambiappah; loving mother of late Maheswari, late Ratnam (formerly Sub-Editor, Thinapathy, Colombo), late Thanaluxmy (formerly teacher, Kotagala and Kokuvil) Dr. Balasingham (Hatton), Vijayakumar (Midroc, Kenya; formerly Whittals, Inter-Con and Sheraton Hotels); Krishnakumar (Toronto, formerly ROP, Oman), Sarathadevi (retd. teacher, Colombo) and Shanthakumar (Toronto); mother-in-law of late Elangarajah (Saranavani), Maheswari (Hulsdorf, Colombo), Pathmadevi (Hatton), Manohari (Kenya), Selvaranjitham (Toronto), Sivarajah (Colombo) and Jeyathevi (Toronto); beloved grandmother and great-grandmother of many grandchildren and great-grandchildren passed away peacefully at her home in Hatton on 5th August 2002 and cremation took place at Kuda Oya cemetery on 8th August. The members of the family hereby express their sincere thanks to all relatives and friends who attended the funeral and sent messages of condolences - 1068, Village Market, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-4446838; Fax: 254-2-4440537 (Nairobi); 1-416-750-1020 (Toronto); 1-416-721-9550 and 94-1-501951 (Colombo)

Mr. Kannalingam Selvendran



Mr. Kannalingam Selvendran (Indran) of Lewisham, London, founder and proprietor of Morleys' Fast Food; beloved husband of Rajalakshmi (Nimmi); loving father of Sathyan, Mayuran and Shankaran; son of Mr. Saravanamuthu Kannalingam of Sandilipay (Jaffna, Sri Lanka) and late Mrs Kathiramma Kannalingam; affectionate brother of Mrs Selvarani Balasubramaniam (Colombo), Mr. Mahendran (Trust Travels, London), Mrs Indrani Balasubramaniam (London), Mr. Balendran (Germany), Mrs. Amutharani Selvarajah (London), Mrs. Pushparani Ramalingam (Colombo) and Mr. Rajendran (Canada) and son-in-law of Mr. R.C. and Mrs.M.Sivalingam (Canada) passed away peacefully on Saturday, 24th August 2002 and was cremated on 1st September 2002.

Mr. Selvendran has been a devotee and keen supporter of the London Sivan Kovil of Lewisham and served as a Trustee of the Kovil - 5 Amyruth Poad, London SE4 1HQ. Tel: 020 8690 0556.

In Memoriams

Second Anniversary Remembrance



Mrs Pathmavathy Selvanayagam of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Born: 12.08.1916 Died: 24.09.2000

Dear Mum,
Everyone says you went away two years ago. But to us you

15 SEPTEMBER 2002

continue to live with us everyday. We hear your Loving Kind Musical Voice and see you in our dreams. Death has not parted us, it has brought us closer.

Fondly remembered by your ever loving children, in-laws, grandchildren and great grandchildren. - Mr. & Mrs. M.P. Chelvanayagam, 6 Brook Road, Redhill, Surrey RH1 6DL.

First Anniversary Remembrance
MR. T. BALASUBRAMANIAM



19.02.1925 - 24.09.2001

In ever loving memory of **Mr. Theджanamoorthy Balasubramaniam**, retired teacher on the first anniversary of his passing away on 24th September 2001.

*You are always in our thoughts
And for ever in our hearts.*

With love and affection by his wife Gnanapakiam; children Hamsini, Hareendran, Dharmini, Kirupalini, sons-in-law and grandchildren.

May His Soul Rest in Peace at The Lotus Feet of Baghawan Baba

In Ever Loving Memory of Our Dearly Beloved Daddy
MR. T. J. RAJARATNAM
(Retired High Court Judge)



Called to rest 15.09.81
*Treasured memories
keep you near
As time unfolds
another year
No need for words
except to say
Still loved, still missed in
every way.*

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by your ever loving wife Arul, children Rohini, Renuka, Rajiv; sons-in-law Vijayan, Sriharan; grand-children Vasi, Ravi, Prathi, Jayanthi and Ajit.

Eleventh Anniversary Remembrance
Mr. Devarajan. N



In loving memory of **Mr. Devarajan. N. FSI.**, Licensed Surveyor, Leveller and Valuer of 257 Arasady Road, Kantharomadam, Yalpanam.

Fondly remembered on the eleventh anniversary of his passing away on 11.09.91 by his beloved wife Padma, brother Punjaksharam; sister Mrs Saraswathy Panchadcharam; children Sujithan, Siva Kumaran, Rajam, Jeyaraman, Rengan and Raj Iswari; son-in-law Theventhiran and Nirthanakumaran; daughters-in-law Jayadevi, Suhanya, Thangalogini and Helan; grandchildren Jamuna, Karthika, Bharathan, Uththami, Luxmanan, SriRam, Vaitharani, Vithuran, Devarajan, Poorani, Pavithran and Dhurrka; sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, relatives and friends. - 24 Mansfield Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 3AZ.

MR. PONNUDURAI NARENDRANATHAN,



Most dearly beloved and adoring husband of Gnanambal; dearest loving and proud Appa to your children, Dr Thrinayani Jegathambal, Dr Mrs Sowmya Wijayambal, Mrs Sobhana Meenambal, Dr Mrs Priyadarsani Brahathambal, Adhithya Thrilochanan, Mrs. Vasutharini Girijambal, Agasthya Ponnambalam and Ambika Dhakshayani; father-in-law of Dr P Arulampalam, S Raveendran, T

Ilangoan and R Srikanthan; darling dearest Thatththa to your grandchildren, Abhirami Janani Raveendran, Amarnath Thiruma-dhavan Raveendran, Nirmala Arulampalam, Janaki Saruhasini Srikanthan, Janarathan Ragavan Ilangoan, Dhivya Saraswathy Ilangoan, and Divani Kruthika Narendranathan.

Dear Appa,

Your physical presence may not be here with us anymore, but the legacy you left behind is, and will be there forever guiding us through this life. Always remembered with love and pride, especially on this the eighth anniversary of your passing away on the 24 September 1994.

God Bless.

(Address: 53 Crossways South Croydon Surrey CR2 8JQ).

Can I see another's woe, and not be in sorrow too?

Can I see another's grief, and not seek for kind relief?

Can I see a falling tear, and not feel my sorrow's share?

Can a father see his child weep, not be with sorrow filled?

Can a mother sit and hear, an infant groan, an infant fear?

No, no! Never can it be! Never, never can it be!

He doth give his joy to all; He becomes an infant small;

He becomes a man of woe; He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh, and thy maker is not by;

Think not thou canst weep a tear, and thy maker is not near.

O! He gives to us His joy, that our grief He may destroy;

Till our grief is fled and gone, He doth sit by us and moan.

William Blake 1757 - 1827

Forthcoming Events

Oct 1 Feast of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus

Oct 2 Krishna Eekathasi; Feast of the Guardian Angels

Oct 4 Pirathosam

Oct 5 Puraddasi Sani (Third); South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in. Tel: 020 8542 3285

Oct 6 Amavasai; Feast of St. Bruno

Oct 7 Navarathiri starts; Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

Oct 9 Sathurthi

Oct 11 Shashti

Oct 12 Puraddasi Sani (Fourth); 6.45 p.m. Tamil Orphans Trust presents Grand Vocal Concert by Innisai Mamani Nithyasree Maha-devan at Tolworth Girls' School Hall, Fullers Way North, Surbiton, Surrey. Tel: 020 8908 1101, 020 - 8422 3943

020 - 8949 3012.

Oct 13 5.30 p.m. Tamil Orphans' Trust presents the same artiste above at Winston Churchill Hall, Pinn Way off Bury Street, Ruislip, Middx.

Oct 14 Maha Navami Saraswati Pooja; Feast of St. Callistus

Oct 15 Vijayathasimi; Keethara Gowri Viratham starts

Oct 16 Sukkila Eekathasi

Oct 18 Pirathosam; Feast of St. Luke

Oct 19 SLTWG Navarathiri Celebrations

Oct 20 Fullmoon

Oct 23 Karthigai

Oct 24 Sankadakara Sathurthi;

Feast of St. Antony Mary Clare

Oct 25 Feast of the Forty Martyrs

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Oct 5 12 noon Talks on "The importance of Yajna in Vedic Tradition" by Dr. Usha Chaudhuri; 4.00 to 5 p.m. "The Human Excellence in Indian Tradition" by Dr. Indranath Chaudhuri; 6.30 p.m. Indian Folk Songs & Light Music by Ashit Desai & Group from India

Oct 6 6.00 p.m. Karnatic Vocal by Saralaya Sisters from India.

Oct 13 5 p.m. Sri Durgashtami and Navaratri Celebrations; Puja, Bhajans and Prasad. All welcome.

Oct 20 Tabla Concert by Shib Shankar Ray and students.

Oct 27 12 noon Kriya Yoga Lecture by Swami Vidyadheeshananda, All Welcome.

6.00 p.m. Sitar Concert by Vijay Jagtap and students.

The Vocal Concert of Selvi Sindhuja Shriananda



The Vocal Concert of Selvi Sindhuja Shriananda took place on the 25th of August 2002 at the Harrow Arts Centre, for which I was invited from Chennai, to be the Chief Guest. Her Guru, who is also her mother, is a talented Vocalist and Veena artist, and an MA in Music from Chennai University.

Dedication and Practise are the necessary prerequisites to perform such a complete and full Kachcheri. Having myself performed at the age of 12, I am able to say this. The selection of compositions was perfect.

Following the Slokam, the Varnam was in the Dynamic rāgam 'Nātai' and the Krithi 'Vandhēham' was in rāgam 'Hamsadhvani' which is in praise of Lord Ganesh. Even experienced artistes hesitate to handle the 'Pancharathna Krithis' in concerts. London born Sindhuja rendered 'Enthāromahanu bāvulu' with such perfect pronunciation and inspirational raga bhava that the entire audience was spell bound.

The song 'Enakkenna manakkavalai' blossomed like a fragrant flower in rāga 'Mohanam'. 'Thala Pramanam' in Rāgam Thanam Pallavi set in 'Hindola' rāgam was accurate. The rendition of rāga mālikai kalpana svarās that followed the Pallavi is noteworthy of mention. I strongly feel that with a little more concentration on the Kalpanā Svara aspect of music Sindhuja can easily be considered a mature vocalist.

I have to sincerely appreciate the command with which Selvi Sindhuja handled the accompanying instrumentalists. There is no doubt in my mind that these are the fruits of dedication and practise.

Sruthi perfect, Thalam precise, Sweetness and Joy maintained. This was the hallmark of the concert from beginning to end. With this characteristic Selvi Sindhuja has a bright future in music. "Isai kuyil Sindhuja, you have brought pride and joy to your parents, your Guru and the music lovers at the concert."

Bhayiravi accompanied on the Violin. The Sindhu-Bhayiravi combination was as beautiful as the SindhuBhairavi rāgam. Muthu Sivarajah "the Nadha Laya Rajah" excelled in the Ganjira. Jonathan on the Mridangam has a golden touch. Pirash-

anna's brilliance shone in the thaniyāvartanam. Sindhuja's sister Bhairavi on the thambūra seemed entranced by the music, which I in turn enjoyed.

I listened, I enjoyed, I appreciated and I blessed the entire performance. I am amazed and astonished at the music gnānam, the precise pronunciation and the Bhāva of a western born 11-year-old child. Selvi Sindhuja will surely reach the peaks in the world of music.

VĀLGA ! VALARGA !

The above is a translation of an article by
Smt Saraswathy Ramanathan 7.9.2002

Sudharshan's Violin Arangetram



The flowing waters of the river Thames outside Waltham Hall in St. Paul's School, Barnes enhanced the ambience for the music flowing effortlessly from the Violin of Sudharshan Murugesu, yet another student of Thiruvarur Kothandapani, his fifth, in the debut performance (Arangetram) on 24th August 2002. The hall was filled to capacity.

The proceedings started with a Varnam in Abogi followed by a very fast paced rendition of Vathapi. It was surprising to see the violinist playing the piece, unfalteringly at such a tempo. The raga alapana of Hamsadhvani and the swara prasthra were executed very well. Another piece worth mentioning for the skills exhibited by the debutante was the Thiagaraja Krithi played in Kapinarayani. The way Sudharshan played the piece brought back memories of Madurai Mani Iyer and how he made this piece popular forty or so years ago.

Sudharshan aptly handled the Ragam Thaanam Pallavi in Hemawathie raga, a rarely performed raga in the UK music circuit. The Kalpana swaram was used as a showcase for his ability to handle numerous ragas. Towards the end of the Kalpana swaram he played a different raga and then played them back in reverse order for the finale. This has been a "hallmark" in Sri Kothandapani's Arangetram's. Other pieces played include Muthuswami Dikshidhar's Pahimam Parvatham in Mohana raga, Dudukukala- the Gowlai Pancharathna Keerthanai and Raghuvamsa Sudha in Kathana Kudhuhalam. Following the Ragam Thaanam Pallavi, Sud-

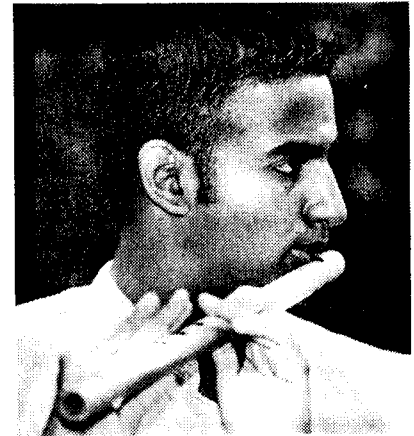
harshan played a selection of Suddhanantha Bharathi, Subramaniya Bharathi and Oothukaadu Venkata Subayer compositions. The concert concluded with Lalgudi's Revathi Thillana and a Thirupugazh in Senchuruti.

Sri Balachandar, Sri Prakash and Sri Sithamparanathan accompanied Sudharshan on the mirudangam, ghatam and morsing respectively. There is no need to mention their ability and skills in following the main musician as they have made their mark in that department time and time again. Their Thani avarthanam was a joy to listen to, as usual.

The selection of pieces was excellent and interesting to listen to. Another positive aspect of this arangetram was that the speeches were short and the general organisation excellent. The fact that the venue was a purpose built music hall added to the pleasure of listening to good music. The parents, Mr and Mrs Murugesu, can be proud of their son's achievement.

- Hindolam

An Apt Offering to Lord Krishna



Like the annual music festival in Chennai, preceding Thai Pongal, the Arangetram season in England is before the onset of autumn. One of the highlights for many this year has been the Flute Arangetram of Kaelas Kuganesan, student of Sri P. Gnanavarathan.

This flute Arangetram was appropriately staged during Krishna Jeyanthi at the Beck Theatre in Hayes. Kaelas commenced the programme with an Ata Thaala Varnam in Kaamboji, followed by Vaathapi in Hamsadhvani. Right from the start, he showed both confidence and competence in handling the instrument, and played in a seemingly relaxed manner. He then proceeded to play Saathinjane, a Pancharathna Krithi in Aarabhi Raga. Before playing the Raagam Thanam Pallavi, he played Sabhaapathiku in Aaboghi and Giri Preeyam in Kathana Kuthuhalam.

Kaelas gave a short Raaga Aalaapana prior to starting each piece. His ability to play Raaga Aalaapana was evident and

the way he played Hemavathi for the Raagam Thaanam Pallavi was further proof of it. With limited facilities to hear good music in London. I was fascinated to hear him playing Hemavathi as if he was quite familiar with the raaga. It was a delight to listen to his singing Pallavi before playing it, as is the tradition at instrumental concerts. The Pallavi was set to Thisra Jaathi Thiripura Thalam, which is once again a great challenge for a debutante. His Kalapana Swaras were free flowing, but with boundaries of the Thaala. The first half of the concert concluded with an upbeat rendition of Nagumomu in Aabheri Raaga.

The second half was in contrast to the tradition of the first half. Here Kaelas played popular Tamil songs, some of which were made popular through cinema. The concert concluded with a Thillana in Dhanasri and the bajan Raghu Pathi Rhaagava.

Sri Kothandapani accompanied Kaelas in a way that encouraged him to play to the best of his ability, providing friendly competition with the Kalpana Swaras. Sri Balachander accompanied on the mirudangam, along with his student Pirashanna Thevarajah on the ghatam. The other artistes were Sri Sithamparanathan on morsing and Sri Nafeez on tabla. The percussion ensemble provided a rhythmic treat, which complemented the flute.

Kaelas is the seventh student of Sri Gnanavarathan to have had Arangetram, but is the first flute student from The Kingston Tamil School. Kaelas is fortunate to have parents who are keen in preserving Tamil culture and music. The Arangetram started and finished promptly which is worthy of note. Overall, the evening was an enjoyable one, and I look forward to more performances from him in the future.

- Revathi

Kannudurais Celebrate Golden Wedding



Mr & Mrs C. Kannudurai of Kingsbury, London celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary on Saturday, 25th May 2002 at Paris Church of Assension, Preston Road, Wembley Park amidst a large gath-

ering of their children, relatives, friends and well-wishers.

Kannudurai and Poopathy Amma married in May 1952 and have seven children of whom two are daughters both resident in Sri Lanka, the five sons in UK and USA. All the children except a daughter took part in the celebrations.

Mr. Kannudurai retired from service in the Ceylon Government Railway, where he was a senior station master and the Kannudurais migrated to UK in 1990. He is the president of the Sri Lanka Railways Past Employees' Welfare Association - UK.

Mr. M. Balasundram, a friend of the family, proposing the toast for the Golden Couple and wished them several more years of very happy and prosperous married life.

Dr. P. Ratnasabapathy An Appreciation

It is nearly four months since Dr. Ratna-sabapathy passed away in Puttappathi. That must have been his fourteenth or fifteenth visit to that holy place. He was going on to his 77th Birthday when his call came.

Born in Malaysia, Rat (as he was affectionately called by his friends) had most of his secondary schooling there. His father Mr. Ponnampalam was an accountant in the public service of the Federated Malay States and when he retired, he was honoured with the title of M.C.H. (Malayan Certificate of Honour). Rat joined Jaffna College in the Matriculation class and continued there till his entry to the Medical College. Rat's father hailed from Moolai, an adjoining village to Tholpurm (my own village). Both our parents were friends and worked in the F.M.S. about the same time. My association with Rat dates from 1944 when we were at Jaffna College. Rat was a good student and took part in most of the extra-mural activities. He was in the College Soccer First Eleven during the years when the team beat most of the other schools. Even at the University Rat was in the Soccer Team which toured India and did well. I had lost touch with Rat for about ten years. I met him again when he was Medical Officer of Health and later as Medical Superintendent of Jaffna General Hospital. It was here Rat earned his name as a fair minded, strict disciplinarian. The story of the doctors' overcoat which the consultants ignored and the ensuing tug-of-war which ended with the Director of Health Services supporting Rat, is well known to many who lived during those times. I had a cousin of mine on the Hospital Committee who said that for once Jaffna Hospital had got an administrator who was not only dedicated to his work but had also the courage to do what was right regardless of how others would react. In 1966 Rat was posted to Anuradhapura as Superintendent of Health Services. I was already there as

Principal of Vivekananda Maha Vidyalaya. Rat in his own characteristic way started to revamp the confused state of affairs in his department. He never believed in allowing files to accumulate on his table. His knowledge of administrative and financial regulations was thorough. He had in incisive yet unbiased mind and he did not hesitate to take decisions and insist on their compliance. The Regional Director of Education whose office was adjoining Rat's, once told me how he admired Rat's capacity and how he always had a clean table. There are numerous instances of how Rat used his initiative to cut through red tape and get things done bearing in mind the maxim "pro bono publico". I am personally aware of the high regard the two NCP ministers (the late Mr. Maithripala Senanayake and Mr. K.B. Ratnayake) had for Rat. In 1969 he was transferred to Vavuniya and it was here Rat had a confrontation with the audit officers. Rat had organised an ideal hospital for the annual Madhu feast, using the limited funds at his disposal and seeking help from the officer commanding the army unit in Mannar for the supply of beds, bunkers, linen etc. For the first time in years the health service was excellent. It was in the midst of this exercise that the audit officers crashed in to carry out their audit. When Rat's pleas for a postponement fell on deaf ears, he got the Police to get them out. The result was an official inquiry at the end of which only an increment was deferred. Rat was unhappy about it and sought premature retirement. He accepted an appointment in Malaysia. After a few years, his mother-in-law was seriously ill and Rat came on leave to Kaithadi and he was marooned during the heavy fighting by the LTTE. He could not return to Malaysia and lost his job. However, he worked in Jaffna for the regional administration for a short while and then went to do private practice. Finally he gave it up and planned to enjoy his retirement when his house came under attack and a shrapnel hit his head. He left for Urumpirai and later to Colombo and Puttappathi where he stayed for four months. It was on his next four month visit to Puttappathi that he died.

Rat had few friends, they were his close friends and he "grappled them to his heart with hoops of steel". He had an irresistible sense of humour and maintained his cool even in the midst of crisis. He had a great love for children and his regret was that he was denied the joy of his own children. He maintained a regular correspondence with me and the last I heard from him was in December after his intention to go to Puttappathi. Knowing him as I do, I am sure he wouldn't desired a better way of passing away than from that sacrosanct spot. He has left behind his beloved wife, Selvam, for whom the loss is both colossal and irreparable. May his soul find eternal peace at the feet of Bhagawan Sathiyai Sai Baba.

K. Jeganathan
Auckland.

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