

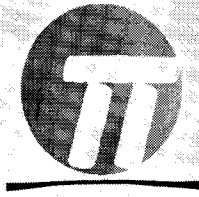
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of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it"*

- Voltaire

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COVER:

At last Abilash better known as
'Baby 81' reunited with her parents
Mr. M Jeyarajah and Mrs Jenita
Jeyarajah. Courtesy of AP

Politics of Confrontation and Violence

Sri Lanka seems to have returned to the bad old days and ways. A national calamity demanded a national response. But the tsunami disaster that struck Sri Lanka destroying the lives and livelihoods hundreds of thousands of people displaced does not seem to have produced any change in the conduct of its political classes. In spite of the massive and positive response from the international community, there is mounting criticism from the affected communities about bungled relief operations by incompetent state institutions. Amidst the vacuous rhetoric of national unity in the face of a national calamity, the bad old days of the politics of confrontation and violence seem to have returned.

There is nothing that happens in Sri Lanka which is not injected with partisan or sectarian considerations. There is no issue, whether political or otherwise, which does not turn out to be confrontational. The governing party and the opposition parties are virtually at war questioning each others motives and good faith. Even within the ranks of the government itself, divisions and quarrels have broken out into the open. In the Northeast of the island, after a brief lull, the ugly spectre of politically motivated killings has returned with a vengeance.

Many blame President Kumaratunga for the level and tone of confrontational politics that characterise the political landscape today. On set-piece ceremonial or official occasions, she does extremely well making the right noises looking truly presidential. However, on other occasions when she seeks to advance her governing party's interests, she reduces herself becoming a mere parish-pump politician peddling naked partisan rivalry and hurling unsubstantiated accusations against Opposition leaders and parties.

For example, at a recent public meeting she said that "certain opposition politicians are trying to take advantage and are playing politics with those who died in the tsunami" and charged that an opposition politician who promised cooperation to the government was instead trying to put pressure on other countries and diplomatic missions to prevent aid coming to the country. The obvious reference was to the Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe who recently went on a visit to European countries, including Norway. She cannot be said to be unaware that such attacks not only will not produce the national consensus and cooperation that she now and then seeks, but also will inevitably exacerbate confrontational politics.

The opposition UNP and its leadership for their part have not behaved any better. Their offer of cooperation to the Government in the context of a national calamity has proved to be temporary, questionable and opportunist. For example the UNP initially remained unopposed to the Government's decision to impose a buffer zone of 100 meters along the coast prohibiting reconstruction of damaged or destroyed homes or buildings. However when its leadership saw that there was popular opposition to this proposal from the affected people, the UNP did an about turn to gain political mileage. It now says that the ban on rebuilding within 100 metres from the sea was unacceptable and the UNP would stand for the people who had lost their dwellings but wanted to rebuild their homes on the property belonging to them. Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe addressing a recent gathering of displaced persons in Hambantota in the south of the island urged coastal residents to defy the Government's 100-metre ban, calling it illegal and told them not to budge from their land.

Even within the Government's own ranks, conflicts abound with the JVP, a significant component of the ruling coalition, taking positions that are quite contrary to those of the President and the rest of the Government. On major issues such as the Government's post-tsunami relief and re-

construction policy and programme, or the resumption of peace talks with the LTTE or on the issue of constituting a joint mechanism with the LTTE to carry out post-tsunami operations in the Northeast, the JVP articulates its differences in public while some of its leaders occupy ministerial portfolios with little regard to collective cabinet collective responsibility. Then we witnessed the recent unedifying spectacle of the President speaking at a public meeting calling upon "any party" that disagreed with her Government's policies to get out leaving no one in doubt as to which party she was referring.

The recent assassination of the LTTE's eastern political leader Mr E Kausalyan and five others in his team presumably by the loyalists of Karuna, the former eastern commander of the LTTE, re-emphasised the fact that the power of the gun predominates the political landscape of the Northeast of the island notwithstanding the Ceasefire Agreement which came into effect in February 2002.

The Ceasefire Agreement prohibited all offensive operations including "firing of direct and indirect weapons, armed raids, ambushes, assassinations, abductions, destruction of civilian or military property, sabotage, suicide missions and activities by deep penetration units". As far as Northeast is concerned, this provi-

sion has been observed more in its breach. Apart from the absence of fighting between the belligerent parties - the government and its military forces and the LTTE - in practical terms the Ceasefire Agreement did not prevent the continuation of the practice of politically motivated killings within the Tamil community.

Human rights organisations have documented over two hundred and fifty such killings after the Ceasefire came into effect. While the victims in this latest incident of political assassination happen to belong to the LTTE, the Tamil Tigers themselves have also been blamed for carrying out politically motivated killings of their Tamil opponents and critics with impunity. And with the defection of Karuna in April last year from the LTTE and its decision to militarily suppress his revolt, the killings have never stopped. What is more disturbing is that the recent killing of such a senior figure of the LTTE, Kausalyan, may lead to a new round of retaliatory killings and counter-killings.

It would seem that in Sri Lanka even the death and destruction wrought by the tsunami disaster has not moved the hearts and minds of those who indulge in the lamentable luxury of confrontational politics at national level and the practitioners of the politics of violence at the regional level in the Northeast. □

● WB welcomes launch of the NEHRP

Feb 16 - World Bank announced today that it welcomed the launch of the North East Housing Reconstruction Program (NEHRP) which will build around 46,000 houses for Sri Lanka's poor, conflict-affected families. Under the loan agreement signed yesterday, cash grants provided for each family was increased from Rs.150,000 (US\$1512) to Rs.250,000 (US\$2520) in the light of post tsunami increased building costs. Grants for partially damaged houses (damage of up to 40% of property) was also increased from Rs.70,000 (US\$706) to Rs.100,000 (US\$ 1008).

"The conflict and tsunami affected people are both very vulnerable groups who have undergone terrible hardships and their needs must be met equitably," said Peter Harrold, World Bank Country Director for Sri Lanka. "The launching of the NEHRP simultaneously with the World Bank's first allocation for Tsunami Emergency Recovery Program provided us an opportunity to review grant allocations for conflict affected families and bring it to be on par with allocations for tsunami affected families," he said.

The World Bank and the Ministry of Finance signed yesterday the legal agreements for the US\$75 million NEHRP. This loan is from the International Development Association, the concessionary arm of the World Bank, and has a 10-year grace period, a maturity of 40 years, zero interest, and a 0.75% service charge on the outstanding amount.

The Bank will shortly announce the full allocation of resources in support of Sri Lanka's tsunami reconstruction and recovery program.

● Joint Govt-LTTE mechanism

Feb 10 - Following an intensive round of closed-door meetings between the LTTE and top-level government officials, reports are emerging that the two parties are "very much close to an agreement" on working out a post-tsunami reconstruction mechanism.

News Review

Initially the LTTE and government officials were said to be against the number of representatives for the apex body which stood at six Tamils, three Muslims and two Sinhalese, as requested by

the LTTE. But later after discussions the figure was changed to five Tamils, three Muslims and two Sinhalese representatives over which both parties are reported have agreed, according to Peace Secretariat Chief S. Pulidevan.

The problem now is not so much about the numbers. It is more or less sorted out. The Norwegians seem to be certain that the two parties will be able to arrive at a consensus on working out a common mechanism, according to knowledgeable sources.

Following the Conference of Donor countries and international aid agencies in Oslo on November 25, 2003, the World Bank announced the setting up the North-East Reconstruction Fund (NERF) and the WB called upon all donor countries and agencies to channel their funds through the NERF. In January 2003 the World Bank was invited to be the custodian of this Fund. The fund was declared open on March 31, 2003 with an initial contribution of \$ 2.7 million from Norway. However, there was disagreement between the then Government and the LTTE on signing a formal agreement. After some time, the LTTE expressed willingness to sign the agreement but the government had concerns about the draft grant agreement. But the government signed the Grant Agreement on May 10, 2003 but the LTTE, by then, had withdrawn from the peace talks.

It is now being said that had the NERF been set up and remained functional with a formal agreement in place, it would have come in handy at a time like this when the government and the LTTE are trying their best to work out a mechanism to channel funding for post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction.

● Baby 81 reunited with parents

Feb 16 - Baby Abilash, popularly known as Baby 81, was handed over to his mother Mrs. Jenita Jeyarajah and father Mr. Jeyarajah in a joyful reunion on 16 February at Kalmunai District Court. Mr. M. S. M. Nazeer, Registrar of the Court, received the barely 4 months old baby from Kalmunai Base Hospital Doctor Gopal Muhunthan. The District Court Magistrate, Mr. M. P. Mohideen read out a 22-page long report containing the results of the DNA test which conclusively proved that the baby 81's parents were none other than Mr and Mrs Jeyarajah.

The family, after praying at the temple close to the hospital and thanking the doctors and the staff at the hospital, visited their native place at Kalmunai-1, Beach Road. The village was completely destroyed by the giant waves of the December 26 Tsunami.

Parents were present at the open court room as relatives were waiting outside the court. Around 50 local and foreign media were covering the event at the court.

Kalmunai Police escorted the Unicef vehicle with the family as people flocked to see the baby outside the court.

The reunited family, after paying a visit to the Tsunami devastated home village, visited their relatives in Pandiruppu, where the parents were residing after Tsunami waves wiped out their home on Boxing Day.

"Our top priority is to provide a good education to our child, to all our children," the parents said. "We want to give Abilash a bright, happy and adventurous future," they said adding that they were heading to the Pillayar temple at Kaluthawalai to attend a special pooja ceremony and break 100 coconuts promising to carry out their vow.

Two minutes silence was observed at the temple to remember those killed and left homeless by the tsunami disaster, following a request by Mr. Jeyarajah, the father of the baby, who broke 100 coconuts at the temple.

● Opposition decries State of Emergency

Feb 11 - President Chandrika Kumaratunga declared a State of Emergency in Tsunami affected Districts of Sri Lanka again. The island's Parliament was informed that Ms Kumaratunge had by Gazette notification published on 3 February re-declared the State of Emergency for a period of 1 month.

The President initially declared a State of Emergency to cover the 12 affected Districts on 4th January. Since she failed to submit it to Parliament within 10 days the State of Emergency lapsed on 18th January.

The promulgation of the state of emergency following a heated debate was passed by a majority of 86 votes in parliament. A total of 106 members voted for the emergency and 20 against it. While the parties comprising the ruling coalition voted in support, the main opposition UNP and SLMC abstained from the vote with the TNA voting against the emergency regulations. The JHU voted with the government in favour of the regulations, which covers 14 administrative districts affected by the tsunami. However, UNP Colombo district MP, T. Maheswaran voted alongside the TNA opposing the emergency, while the vote of Up-country People's Front MP, P. Radakrishnan opposing the proclamation was nullified, as he did not make it from the assigned seat in the house.

The main opposition UNP at its parliamentary group meeting on the previous day decided to vote against the motion for the extension of the state-of-emergency as some regulations could be used to suppress personal freedom and trade union rights. "At the national committee represented by all political parties, matters relating to the enforcement of the emergency law were not taken up for discussion and views were not sought. Regulations to curb personal freedom and trade union rights have been included without the knowledge of even some of the government party leaders,"

the UNP said in a statement after the group meeting.

The party said these regulations would apply to areas not affected by the tsunami and certain national security regulations which had no relevance to the tsunami had also been included.

"Trade union rights of public and corporation sector employees have been curbed by section 18 of the emergency regulations and under section 8 provision has been made for the government to acquire any land, building, property or vehicle. A number of regulations to ban protest campaigns and the distribution of handbills have also been included", the UNP said.

"The UNP is deeply concerned about the emergency regulations to be enforced to prevent protests against the government and if those regulations are not withdrawn the UNP will launch people's protest campaigns and will vote against the the emergency laws," the party said.

During the debate, UNP MP Dr. Rajitha Senaratne accused the government of using the emergency to shield itself against its own inefficiency in tsunami relief programmes. "People are protesting because they haven't received tsunami relief. The regulations give the government the right to suppress demonstrations. So ultimately the regulations will be used against the tsunami victims themselves," said the MP

The TNA said the emergency regulations strikes at the very heart of autonomy and blocks any chance for power sharing. TNA parliamentary group leader R. Sambanthan questioned the necessity of the emergency saying that tsunami relief could be carried out under normal law. He also expressed concern that people in the North and East would be subject to undue harassment by the armed forces. Meanwhile the SLMC leader Rauf Hakeem calling the state of emergency "totally unwarranted" questioned why the government allowed the first declaration of emergency to lapse automatically. "We unequivocally state our opposition to the emergency regulations which grant excessive and unwarranted powers to the government," he said.

The JHU voted for the emergency saying that the current disaster situation in the country called for such measures. However, Ven, Atureliye Ratana Thera criticized the government for not seeking an all-party consensus when making the declaration. "We will vote against the emergency the next time if we feel that it is being used to suppress democracy," he said.

JVP MP R. Chandrasekera said that they would ensure that the emergency is not used to suppress the workers or the Tamil people. "The JVP will not allow the government to use the emergency to stifle democracy," he said, making his speech in Tamil amid constant interruptions from TNA members. JVP MP Jayantha Wijesekera said that the people were afraid of emergency regulations due to the actions of the UNP who used it to suppress the people in the past.

Minister of Public Security, Law and Order and Deputy Minister of Defence, Ratnasiri Wickramanayake said that the state of emergency was needed to provide essential services and ensure public security amid reports of looting, rape and child trafficking. "The government assures that the emergency regulations will be used only for the benefit of the people and not against them. We will never suppress the people, he said.

● Bishop writes to LTTE over shooting at sea

Feb 18 - A group of more than 100 angry fishermen attacked a LTTE political office in Mannar in northern Sri Lanka on Friday (18) and ransacked the place before protesting in the town against the LTTE's alleged shooting of some fishing boats. The fishermen said to be from the coastal village of Pallimunai had then moved to the Mannar town carrying the boat destroyed in the shooting and staged a demonstration shouting anti-LTTE slogans and demanding the release of three fishermen allegedly abducted by the Tigers, according to police sources.

Mannar police said several fishing boats off the shores of Vidathaltheevu were damaged due to the shooting. The LTTE had earlier warned the fishermen in the area to refrain from fishing in the seas off the coast of Vedetteltheivu since sea tiger activities were taking place there.

A spokeswoman for European cease-fire monitors, Helen Olafsdottir, confirmed the fishermen's attack, and said she was awaiting more details. A report in the TamilNet website said, "The political office of the Liberation Tigers in Mannar was attacked by group of persons Friday around 11 a.m. A unit of riot Police that was training in the vicinity arrested some of the attackers but released them soon after, according to neighbours. The group had come from Pallimunai, a coastal suburb of Mannar.

The office was severely damaged, Police said."

A further report on 19 February in the TamilNet website sated, "Mannar Bishop, Rt. Rev. Rayappu Joseph, wrote to the Liberation Tigers Saturday (19) regarding the incident at sea near Vidathaltheevu in which armed persons believed to be Sea Tigers fired on the boats of fishermen from Pallimunai, a coastal suburb of Mannar town, damaging the boats. Angered by the incident, a group of fishermen from Pallimunai attacked and damaged the LTTE's political office in Mannar town Friday (18). "Federation of Mannar Fisheries Societies and Tamil National Alliance MP for Vanni, Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan discussed the issue with Pallimunai fishermen and reached a consensus that steps should be taken forthwith to resolve the dispute through a dialogue with the LTTE.

"Pallimunai fishermen said that they strongly objected to the sea Tigers firing on their boats and damaging their engines.

The sea Tigers had fired on Pallimunai boats in a bid to stop the fishermen from dynamiting fish in the seas off Vidathaltheevu, according to sources close to the LTTE in Mannar. A decision was taken at a meeting held Pallimunai St. Lucias Cathedral Friday on the instruction of the Bishop of Mannar to take up the matter with the LTTE. Mannar Bishop wrote to Mr. S.P. Thamilchelvan Saturday seeking an early appointment to discuss and resolve the problem.

"Mannar Bishop called an urgent meeting following the attack on the LTTE office Friday with representatives of Vidathaltheivu and Pallimunai fisheries societies. It was decided at the meeting that representatives of Pallimunai and Vidathaltheivu fisheries societies should visit Killinochchi and meet the Sea Tigers and political leaders of the LTTE to find an amicable settlement to the dispute."

● Lanka Donors express support in wake of Tsunami

Jan 25 - The Co-Chairs of Tokyo Conference of Sri Lanka Donors after their meeting at Brussels in Belgium on 25 January, in a joint press statement issued by them, "welcomed the ongoing effective response by the GoSL and the LTTE in distributing humanitarian aid" and urged the donors to "ensure (that) the implementation of Tsunami assistance is sensitive to and strengthens the Peace Process."

The full text of the joint statement is as follows:

1. The Sri Lanka donor Co-chairs came together today to express their support to Sri Lanka in the wake of the tsunami disaster and to evaluate how best to build confidence and strengthen the Peace Process.

2. The Co-chairs of the Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka (the United States, the European Union, Japan and Norway) met in Brussels 25 January 2005 to further discuss their support for the Peace Process following the tsunami disaster that hit the North, the East and South coasts of Sri Lanka 26 December.

3. The Co-chairs joined the international community in expressing deep felt sympathy and their support to the reconstruction of the devastated areas in all parts of Sri Lanka. They further

expressed their gratitude to the people of Sri Lanka who unselfishly and regardless of their own suffering caused by the disaster helped rescue many foreign tourists hit by the tidal wave.

4. They welcomed — as a sign of reconciliation — the statements by the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the wake of the tsunami addressing all victims of the disaster regardless of ethnic and religious origin. They welcomed the overall well functioning practical collaboration on the ground between the two parties in the North and the East.

5. Co-chairs welcomed the ongoing effective response by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE in distributing humanitarian aid to people of all ethnic and religious communities and political affiliations. They also welcomed the very effective and impressive local and private response of the Sri Lankan people to assist the victims of the tsunami disaster.

6. The Co-chairs support the Government and the LTTE efforts too strengthen cooperation on assistance for relief, rehabilitation and development in the tsunami affected areas of the North and East.

7. Co-chairs emphasised that in the midst of this tremendous natural disaster, renewed opportunities exist to build confidence and to strengthen the Peace Process.

8. The Co-chairs support donors in their efforts to ensure that the implementation of the tsunami assistance is sensitive to and strengthens the Peace Process.

9. The Co-chairs called on donors and all parties to ensure that tsunami assistance adheres to basic principles of equity, transparency and accountability. It should be focused on objective local needs and priorities. The participation of local and international civil society and all political parties will be crucial.

10. Co-chairs called on international donors and aid organizations to cooperate and coordinate their tsunami assistance with each other and with all relevant parties in Sri Lanka.

11. They called on the government and the LTTE to do their utmost to continue to respect and observe the Ceasefire Agreement as the basis for the Peace Process and were pleased to note that, by and large, the ceasefire has been upheld for almost three years with the very able assistance of the Nordic Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. The ceasefire allows donors to continue to address the needs of the poor and conflict affected people in the whole of the country.

12. The Co-chairs also reassured their continued full confidence in and support to Norway's challenging task as facilitator.

13. The Co-chairs noted again that a peace settlement can only be sustained if it respects the legitimate rights and involvement of all ethnic groups, preserves the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and is based on the principles of democracy and respect of human rights.

14. The Co-chairs agreed to meet again in the coming months to further discuss the advancement of the Peace Process.

● Muslim dimension neglected by Co-Chairs

Feb 9 - The Coordination Centre for Relief and Rehabilitation (CCRR), an umbrella group of over 50 Muslim organisations, has expressed regret that the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development, did not deal with the Muslim dimension of Sri Lanka's post tsunami situation.

While acknowledging the immediate assistance rendered in the aftermath of the tsunami to all communities including Muslims by the international community, state agencies and civil society, the CCRR in a communication to the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Conference, has requested them to be adequately mindful of the needs of the Muslims who have been hardest hit, without in anyway depriving Sinhalese and Tamil victims of their just due.

In a press release the CCRR said, "The Muslim community has

suffered considerable losses with over 50 percent of the total deaths and a similar proportion of properties and livelihood lost. But the co-chairs have failed to reflect, the need to include Muslims too in the relief, rehabilitation and development process.

We urge them to do so in the spirit of the Tokyo declaration which recognized the right of Muslims to be included in the peace process."

The CCRP said it finds disturbing that in responding to the destruction caused by the tsunami, intentionally or otherwise, the authorities have not been equitable. The action taken by state agencies, it said, had not been commensurate to the damage inflicted in the eastern province and more particularly in the Ampara district, which suffered the highest death toll and property loss in the country.

"Debris is still scattered around, while there are many complaints of even relief supplies not reaching transitional camps. The lethargy shown by responsible officials in not visiting affected areas, even weeks after the tragedy, has added to the sense of helplessness among the people," the CCRP said.

● LTTE wants aid thro' INGOs

Jan 29 - The LTTE's supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has asked international donors to disburse their tsunami-related assistance to the Tamil-speaking North East Sri Lanka through their own NGOs, circumventing the Sri Lankan government.

This was revealed by the outfit's political advisor, Anton Balasingham, on 28 February in a speech at a refugee camp in Mullaitivu, an area controlled by the LTTE in North East Sri Lanka.

Balasingham's speech was posted in the website of the LTTE's Peace Secretariat.

According to Balasingham, Prabhakaran told the visiting Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Petersen, that he was not insisting that the international donors give the aid directly to the LTTE. They could use their own NGOs to disburse the aid in the North East, he said. What they should not do, was to channel it through the Sri Lankan government, which had a tendency to discriminate against the Tamils, Prabhakaran had said.

Reflecting the Supremo's stand, Balasingham said that the LTTE would not join any national level body on tsunami relief and reconstruction set up by the Sri Lankan government.

"The government is trying to bring disaster management, including the disbursement of international aid, under one national umbrella. Our experience of such structures is that discrimination of the Tamil region would again creep into this humanitarian equation, resulting in Tamil habitats being left out of the national programme," Balasingham said.

"Our leader has reiterated this point to the facilitators (peace brokers) when he met the Norwegian Foreign Minister and suggested that the international community need not deliver aid directly to the LTTE, but utilise its own NGO mechanism to disburse and monitor aid towards rebuilding the North East," he said.

The LTTE leader's stand, as enunciated by Balasingham, means that the LTTE did not agree with the government's plan to have a national-level multi-ethnic body to receive and disburse aid, a body, which will include the LTTE's representatives.

Clearly, the LTTE does not want to be part of any national body. From the stand taken so far, it is also clear that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which is the LTTE's proxy in the Sri Lankan parliament, will not join the national body. The TNA has so far boycotted all meetings convened at national committees on tsunami related matters.

● Expats pour in Rs. 625m for tsunami relief

Feb 2 - Sri Lankan expatriates and well wishers all over the world have contributed a total of Rs. 625 million for tsunami relief

and rehabilitation efforts. These contributions were channelled through the Sri Lanka Missions which mobilised expatriate Sri Lankans and well wishers, business communities and organisations in their host countries towards the national rebuilding effort following the disaster.

A large number of expatriates and well-wishers also contributed directly to Sri Lanka government agencies, NGOs and other institutions, a Foreign Ministry release said on 2 February.

The appeal for contributions launched by Sri Lanka Diplomatic Missions has received an overwhelming response throughout the world. In some countries locals have started fund raising campaigns. The staff of Sri Lanka Missions abroad and Foreign Ministry in Colombo, have also voluntarily initiated a collection, which stands at Rs. 6 million.

Financial contributions have been complemented with an outpouring of large consignments of relief items and material, including processed food, water purification tablets, blankets, tarpaulin sheets, tents, medicines, kitchen equipment, dry rations etc.

Transport of these items has been facilitated mainly by Sri Lankan Airlines and also through Emirates, Qatar Airways and shipping agents in those countries.

All funds received through Sri Lanka Missions will be utilised for the construction of new housing units for some of the 80,000 families who have lost their dwellings decided by President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar.

The relief items and material sent by the Sri Lanka Missions have been consigned to the Ministries of Healthcare, Nutrition & Uva - Wellassa Development and Women's Empowerment & Social Welfare for distribution to the needy areas.

The Foreign Ministry Seva Vanitha Unit has opened a special account titled Foreign Ministry Seva Vanitha - Tsunami Orphans Fund for contributions towards an SOS village in Komari, in the East, where children who have been orphaned following the tsunami disaster will be provided shelter and care.

● Govt, LTTE asked to focus on relief, not peace process

Feb 6 - The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has blamed the Government and the LTTE for not placing priority in focussing on providing relief to the tsunami affected people. It has objected to mixing the tsunami relief efforts and the peace process. SLMC General Secretary, Hasan Ali specifically says the government must strictly focus on the distribution of aid relief and then the reconstruction and resettlement work in the north and east.

He says at present the government was trying to confuse the public by mixing the relief efforts and the peace process. He charged that the LTTE's proposal to evolve a mechanism comprising an apex body of three persons by including one Sinhalese, one Tamil and one Muslim while also proposing an 11 member regional committee comprising six Tamils, three Muslims and two Sinhalese were all aimed at finding a solution to the ethnic crisis and not to solve the immediate needs of the tsunami victims.

"I feel the government and the LTTE are trying to mix up their priorities. This is not the time to play politics but to seriously think of those people who are hard hit by the tsunami," he told a Colombo Sunday newspaper, Sunday Leader.

He said within the northeast the most affected community was the Muslim community and added so far the government has not involved the Muslims in any of the discussions held in Colombo or elsewhere. "It is the affected people who should be invited to discuss and not officials who know nothing about the suffering of the people at the grassroots," he charged. He says if the people's views are not taken into consideration in rebuilding the nation, it will not be a successful endeavour.

According to him, in Ampara alone 20,980 Muslim families are affected while 5,991 have been killed by the tsunami. Approximately 1,468 have gone missing while 11,980 have been injured.

He says 11,376 houses are completely damaged while 5,970 houses are partly damaged. Twenty three mosques, 20 schools and four hospitals have been damaged in Ampara he said.

In Batticaloa some 4,723 Muslim families have been affected while 105 have been killed. Ninety four have gone missing and 455 have been injured. 2,305 houses are completely damaged while 3,259 houses are partly damaged. Eleven mosques are damaged while six schools and two hospitals have also been damaged.

He says in Trincomalee an estimated 11,096 Muslim families have been affected while 715 have been killed. A total of 142 have gone missing while 905 have been injured. An estimated 2,674 houses are completely damaged while 1,572 houses are partly damaged. Meanwhile 15 mosques, 10 schools and two hospitals are also damaged, he said.

"While the Muslim community has faced enormous damage and injury the government seems to be showing little concern about this community," Ali further said.

● LTTE and Muslims holds talks

Feb 14 - Batticaloa and Ampara based Muslim civilian organisations held lengthy discussions with top LTTE leaders in Kathankudy. The discussion was centred on restoring the 'ancestral Tamil-Muslim affinity and solidarity'.

"Tamils and Muslims, principally by virtue of their mother tongue and historical habitation of the East with togetherness, have a commonality when it comes to sharing power and enjoying freedom with equality in this island and therefore we must make use of this opportunity of restored ancestral Tamil-Muslim affinity and solidarity that has been achieved now to strengthen the ties between the two communities" said Mr. Abdul Jawath, Vice President, Federation of Mosques and Muslim Institutions, said during the meeting.

S.P. Tamilselvan, Head of the LTTE Political Division in response emphasised unity that prevailed between the two communities and regretted that political forces that were interested in power and not peoples' interests, created dissension which resulted in suspicion and fear over each other. "We understand and recognise that the Muslim people do have problems over land and their identity and we trust that the right environment has now been created for both the communities to work in unison respecting each others rights" said Tamilselvan said.

Muslim religious heads and representatives from Muslim Civilian Based Organisations from Oddamavadi, Valaichenai, Eravur, Batticaloa, Kattankudy, Nintavur, Sammanthurai, Kalmunai and Amparai participated in this meeting at the LTTE District Political Office in Kakkatticholai.

The various Mosque federations and Jamiat Ulama's reiterated that the day-to-day problems faced by the Muslim peasantry relates to their lands and that the new LTTE leadership in Batticaloa-Amparai namely Marshall had convinced them that sincere and genuine attempts are being made to settle all disputes through frequent interaction. They also expressed their sense of satisfaction in the manner in which senior LTTE leadership has comprehended the problems and the right approach with which they have moved forward in bringing about amity.

● No bias in tsunami relief distribution

Feb 8 - Colombo : Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister has strongly rejected Tamil Tigers' charges that distribution of tsunami relief in his country was coloured by "ethnicity, race or region".

"We have to recognise the tsunami led to utter devastation in the entire country; in the north, east and the south of Sri Lanka. The tsunami has been no respecter of ethnicity, race or region. There is no question, therefore, of taking any stand except an equitable one in terms of allocation of resources to all the devastated areas," said Lakshman Kadirgamar.

In making out a case that the Tamil people were being discriminated against in relief distribution, the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE), he said, was engaging in the "usual political propaganda to elicit sympathy". Aid has been despatched to all the badly affected areas "without exception", he said. "You cannot give this a political colour, you have to set political considerations aside..." he said, adding however that his own reports indicated the Tigers had taken some government relief material and distributed it in their name.

Striking a conciliatory tone he also said the only way to get reconstruction going is "a cooperative effort", pitching strongly for a joint working arrangement with the Tigers.

On the prickly question of the Tigers receiving funds directly from donor countries he was unambiguous. "Only a sovereign government of Sri Lanka can receive foreign funds. There can be no other recipient but the government." He said funds and relief material from donor countries and NGOs must be routed through a government panel which can then be held accountable for the distribution.

"The arrangements are by no means final, but it is our endeavour to ensure the widest participation of government through the Government Agents, LTTE representatives through the body they have approved, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), Sinhalese representatives, NGOs and donor countries." He called on "the LTTE to be more flexible".

Dispelling reservations by the Tigers of the government's intent he said "while peace talks at this juncture could be protracted and complicated, a working arrangement for reconstruction and development cannot be allowed to become a problem."

Confirming that there would be no peace talks until the victims of the tsunami had been rehabilitated, he said "With the tsunami, that has got to take a back seat."

Asked if the government would accede to the LTTE's demand that the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) to be the only item on the agenda if talks, stalled for some 20 months were to resume, he said "this is unacceptable". The time has come to consider an "overall settlement on the whole question of devolution."

"There is room for discussion on the draft resolution of August 2000 where there is a clear provision for an interim authority to come into play, after an agreement is found on a final solution. The LTTE instead of discussing the options towards finding a final solution wants to begin with a final solution - the ISGA."

He said that in the Oslo agreement reached in 2002, the LTTE and the previous government led by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe "agreed to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the aim of establishing self administration based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka in areas of habitation of the Tamil speaking peoples."

"We have said, as has the previous government that this is acceptable," but since then the LTTE has changed tack by insisting that "the ISGA is the only basis for resumption of talks, seeming to go back on their commitment to a federal structure."

Asked whether Colombo would ever acquiesce to the LTTE's demand for a separate state, Tamil Eelam, he said "absolutely not" The LTTE have not given up their dream of a separate state entirely, he said, and more worryingly, have made several oblique references to it in recent months. "Nobody is clear, least of all the LTTE, on what they want."

● LTTE demands 'paramilitaries' to be disarmed

Feb 14 - LTTE's political strategist and chief negotiator, Mr. Anton Balasingham, told Norwegian facilitators that the Sri Lankan government had to take steps to restore confidence in the peace process, in particular by disarming paramilitaries working alongside its armed forces and establish a joint mechanism with the LTTE for post-tsunami aid, according to report in the TamilNet website.

Mr. Balasingham told a Norwegian delegation comprising Special Envoy Mr. Erik Solheim and Foreign Ministry official Ms. Lisa

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Golden which met him in London on 14 February that "The Sri Lankan government needs to contribute to a conducive and congenial climate for the resumption of peace talks in two specific ways. Firstly, it should disarm the paramilitary forces functioning with the Army or integrate them into its armed forces and station them outside the North-East. The government needs to do this with immediate effect," Mr. Balasingham reportedly said.

"The other aspect of creating a conducive climate for peace talks is that the government should end its intransigence to creating a joint mechanism with the LTTE to distribute post-tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance as soon as possible," Mr. Balasingham said.

The Norwegian officials met with Mr. Balasingham for three hours at his London residence. Their discussions focused on how to resume the stalled negotiations and the urgent need to establish a joint mechanism to distribute the post-tsunami international assistance, the Tamil Net report added.

Mr. Solheim is scheduled to fly to Colombo on February 20 on a five-day official visit, sources in Colombo said.

● Free houses for the displaced

Feb 10 - The government will implement a programme to provide newly built houses free of charge to all persons who are likely to be deprived of their houses due to the introduction of the 100 metre coastal buffer zone, the Presidential Secretariat said in a press release issued on 9 February.

It said, "The government has now taken action to implement programmes to provide with newly built houses free of charge to all persons who will be deprived of the opportunity to construct their own houses on land belonging to them as a result of setting this limit of 100 metres from the coastline. The government which draws the attention of the general public to the massive damage of

life and property caused by the recent Tsunami Tidal Waves, earnestly request the people to refrain from any attempts to construct dwellings on land belonging to them coming within this limit of 100 metres of the coastal belt.

"After the massive damage to life and property that was caused by the tsunami tidal waves of 26 December 2005, the government has decided .to make the coastal belt of Southern Sri Lanka within 100 metres from the coastline and coastal belt of Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka within 200 metres from the coastline a region free of permanent human residence and devoted only to the growing of economic crops.

"Relevant government institutions and organizations like the Coast Conservation Department, the Meteorological Department and the Central Environmental Authority and many groups of citizens possessing 'wide knowledge about the subject including University Professors have agreed to the decision taken by the government. Although in the Coast Conservation Management plans and other documents prepared earlier, varied limits have been prescribed for different stretches of the coastal belt taking into consideration factors such as altitude of the land, and also geographical and climatic factors, the scientific personnel referred to above have expressed the view that setting a distance limit for activity in the coastal belt is essential in view of the geographical changes that have now taken place in the coastline."

● Telecom to expand in Northeast

Feb 11 - Sri Lanka Telecom, the biggest telephone company in the country, has said it will expand and upgrade its network in areas controlled by Tamil Tigers betting that the ceasefire with the government will continue into a fourth year.

The Colombo-based company, 35.2 percent owned by Nippon

Telegraph & Telephone of Japan, plans to expand its cellphone and fixed-line network in the northeast. The company will soon open the biggest microwave-transmission tower on the island in the government-controlled city of Jaffna in the north, the chief executive, Shuhei Anan, said recently.

Though peace talks remain stalled, the ceasefire between the Government and the LTTE is holding and this is providing a chance to upgrade infrastructure that was barely maintained during the civil war, a task that Anan said has become urgent after the Dec. 26 tsunami. The disaster killed more than 31,000 Sri Lankans and damaged many telephone lines.

It is reported that the LTTE which controls certain parts of the northeast, has welcomed the telephone company's expansion, especially since much of the area it controls has no telephone network. "We have had no lines or electricity in Mullativu and other LTTE areas with the exception of Kilinochchi, Trincomalee and Batticaloa," Daya Master, a Tamil Tiger spokesman, is quoted to have said in a telephone interview from Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka. "We have made a request for phone lines and we will allow phone companies to set up towers and offices in our territory in the future."

Sri Lanka Telecom, which is 49.5 percent owned by the island's government, is funding its expansion in part with \$100 million raised last year in the first global bond sale by a Sri Lankan company. "Sri Lanka Telecom's plans to expand north is a good idea but it all hinges on the peace factor," Chitra Sathkumara, chief executive of Unit Trust Management in Colombo is quoted as saying. "Telecom is a company to hold long-term, at least for two years because of its potential to expand its fixed and mobile network," Sathkumara had said.

"There are many opportunities to expand in the northeast," Anan said. He said he did not expect the civil war to resume, adding that the company was not paying taxes or levies to the LTTE.

● The need to refocus

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on peace process

The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka in a press release issued on 11 February said, "The assassination of the LTTE's eastern political leader Kausalyan and the killings of five others, including former TNA parliamentarian Chandra Nehru who was also a member of the North East Secretariat on Human Rights serve as a grim reminder of the flawed and fragile nature of the current ceasefire in which violations of the Ceasefire Agreement and of human rights have proliferated. The recent killings have also shattered the hopes of people that the tsunami tragedy would have brought reconciliation between the conflicting parties. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's condemnation of the killings as a setback to the peace process highlights the gravity of the situation and the concern of the international community.

The National Peace Council condemns the killing of Kausalyan and others in a highly militarised part of the east between Welikanda and Punani. Those who are parties to the Ceasefire Agreement must do their utmost to honour the agreement and to ensure protection to one another. When unarmed LTTE cadre and civilians pass through government-controlled territory the need for tightened security precautions on both sides becomes necessary as indeed required by the Ceasefire Agreement.

The National Peace Council welcomes the government's immediate condemnation of the killings. That there needs to be confidence building and positive action at this time is imperative in view of consistent accusations by the LTTE of alleged military connivance in the activities of the Karuna group. We call on the government to ensure that all unauthorised armed groups are disarmed as required by the Ceasefire Agreement and that the promise made in Parliament to appoint an independent commission of inquiry into this incident is followed up.

The aftermath of the tsunami disaster created humanitarian space that enabled members of the government and LTTE to come together on the ground to resolve the problems of the people. We recognise that their mutual focus was mainly on the provision of relief and the facilitation of relief efforts. However, the killing of Kausalyan and others, and the importance of the position that Kausalyan held serves as a clarion call to all sections of Sri Lankan society to give their primary attention to the speedy resumption of peace talks.

The equitable and efficient provision of relief to the victims of the tsunami cannot be separated from the urgent need re-activate the peace process. The support extended by the international community to Sri Lanka for the setting up of a shared mechanism for the disbursement of tsunami relief provides an opportunity for confidence building for both sides. It is imperative that this opportunity provided by the generosity of the international community be grasped. We appeal to the government and to the LTTE to utilise the goodwill generated by cooperation in the distribution of tsunami relief as a first step to revive the peace process without delay."

● 40 children recruited since tsunami - UNICEF

Jan 26 - Tamil Tigers Lanka had recruited 40 children since the tsunami hit the country a month ago, the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF, said on January 26, describing the practice as unacceptable. UNICEF said it was acting on complaints from families of the children recruited. Most of the 22 boys and 18 girls taken were aged between 15 and 17, it said.

We have 40 verified cases. UNICEF is very concerned about the recruitment," said Martin Dawyes, a UNICEF spokesman in Colombo.

Four cases were from tsunami survivor camps, and the others were recruited after the disaster from LTTE-controlled areas in the island's north and east, Dawyes said.

One of the recruits was 13 years old and the others were 17, he said. He confirmed that his organization had complained to the LTTE leadership a few days earlier over 29 specific cases, but the

Tigers had not yet responded.

UNICEF said most of the villages where the recruitment took place were inland, and were not affected by the tsunami. "We feel that this is not a direct campaign by the LTTE to recruit tsunami survivors, but obviously there is an increase in the recruitment which is totally unacceptable," said Geoffrey Keele, another UNICEF spokesman. UNICEF had hoped that the LTT would have ended this practice, specially at a time like now when everybody had suffered so much," Keele said.

Sri Lankan military officials confirmed the UNICEF report, saying the army also had encountered cases about which they had reported to various child care agencies.

UNICEF was focusing its efforts on providing relief for hundreds of thousands of survivors displaced by the tsunami, but was continuing to monitor alleged cases of child abuse and recruitment by the LTTE, he said.

Only two weeks earlier, UNICEF charged that three children were taken by the Tigers. But two of them, girls ages 11 and 12, were later reunited with their parents. The fate of the third was not known. The LTTE denied any were recruited.

● Steps taken to help Jaffna tsunami victims

Feb 12 - The Jaffna Government Agent said in addition to the provision of normal relief measures, steps were taken to rehabilitate the fisheries industry by providing the necessary equipment as most of the tsunami devastated people in the Jaffna district are fishermen.

Forty eight thousand seven hundred and forty eight (48748) people in the Jaffna district have been affected adversely by the tsunami disaster. Out of them 7,705 persons live in thirteen relief centres. Jaffna GA K. Ganesh said the means of living of the major-

ity of victims in the district are in the fisheries industry and if action is taken first to equip them with facilities to resume work in the fishing industry seventy percent of the problem will be solved.

According to the statistics available, 827 fishing boats had been identified as those which could be put into use after repairs. The possibility of getting them repaired by the fisheries department is being explored.

Under Stage I, a sum of ten million rupees had been provided by the government to obtain boats and fishing equipment and ten new boats had been provided by the Fisheries Department. In addition, non-governmental organisations have provided fifty new boats in addition to assistance to purchase fishing boats and equipment.

Mr. Ganesh further said ninety percent of those affected had already been paid compensation by the government. Compensation of Rs. 15,000 had been paid to the relatives of 932 deceased persons. Payments in respect of 324 deceased persons from LTTE-controlled areas had yet to be made and these payments have been delayed as the Grama Seva Niladharis in the areas concerned had not been able to provide properly the death certificates and documents relating to the identification of dead bodies. He further said that more than ninety percent of the victims had been paid Rs. 2,500 for the purchase of kitchen utensils and added that action was being taken to pay an additional sum of Rs. 5,000 per family through the Bank of Ceylon or the People's Bank.

The GA stated more than 4,000 houses in the Jaffna District had been destroyed completely by the tsunami disaster. Ten schools situated within one hundred metres limit would have to be shifted to different locations. He said the meal allowance of Rs. 40 for an adult and Rs. 30 for a child is not sufficient and that he had requested the Social Services Ministry to increase it.

● A question of helicopter rides

Feb 12 - Reports from Colombo indicate that the Sri Lankan the Air Force is likely to be called upon more frequently to fly key LTTE leaders and cadres within the northern and eastern provinces. This is because of the increased level of danger they might face for their security particularly taking account of the recent ambush on 7 February in which the LTTE's Ampara-Batticaloa political wing leader E. Kaushalyan and four other cadres including former TNA Member of Parliament Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru were waylaid and killed suspected to be by loyalists of the LTTE's renegade commander Karuna.

"There is going to be a sharp increase in their requests," a military official said, adding, "We are in a dilemma. They accuse us of facilitating attacks on them and then they ask us for escorts."

LTTE's senior leaders have now and then relied on the helicopter facility provided by the Sri Lankan Air Force to travel within the Northeast and between Kilinochchi and Colombo. Though the LTTE has blamed the Sri Lankan military for the killings, it should be noted that several of the senior leaders of the LTTE, availed of this facility provided by the Air Force to travel from Kilinochchi to attend the funerals of the slain Koushalyan and others which took place in the east of the island. Some of them had been flown to Sampoor, Trincomalee while the rest, including Thamilchelvan and Ampara-Batticaloa Special Commander Bhanu, had reached Karadiyanaru in the LTTE-held area where they paid their last respects to Kaushalyan.

Trincomalee 'military commander' Sornam and two others had also been flown to Sampoor earlier. They also had to be flown back to the Vanni.

A senior Air Force officer is quoted as saying that while the Air Force would be happy to continue providing this helicopter facility to the LTTE, what they were unhappy about was the unsubstantiated accusations made by LTTE and TNA leaders of a secret link between the military and the Karuna faction in targeting the LTTE cadres. □

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Senior LTTE leader and four others killed in ambush

Feb 7 - Mr. E. Kousalyan, head of the LTTE's political division for Batticaloa-Amparai district was killed in an ambush on the highway to Batticaloa on 7 February, Monday evening around 7.45, Sri Lanka military sources said. Three persons who were travelling with him were also killed and four were injured including two policemen in the attack which took place between Sri Lanka army garrisons at Welikanda and Punanai, northwest of Batticaloa, according to the military. Mr. Kousalyan was travelling with Mr. Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru, former TNA MP for Amparai district, who was seriously injured in the ambush. The incident took place near Welikanda near the Polannaruwa - Batticaloa district border.

Mr. Kousalyan is the most senior LTTE official to be killed after Colombo and Tigers signed a cease fire in February 2002. He was returning from Vanni after discussing the expansion plans for Tsunami rehabilitation in the east, LTTE sources said. The military identified two of the dead as Mathimaran and Kumanan, both members of the LTTE. The injured policemen were providing escort to Mr. Chandra Nehru's vehicle.

The Tigers blamed paramilitary operatives working with the Sri Lankan armed forces for the attack. LTTE officials added that Mr. Kousalyan was accompanied by Vinathan, Puhalan, Senthamil and Nithimaran in his journey from Kilinochchi to Batticaloa.

Meanwhile, the Liberation Tigers cadre who escaped the killing said that the assassins had followed them in a van which overtook their vehicle at a lonely place near a village called Namalgama and blocked the road.

All the assailants were dressed in Sri Lankan military type uniforms and had asked the passengers in Mr. Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru's van to get down. The two police constables who were providing security to the former TNA MP didn't offer any resistance as the assassins were in military fatigues, according to the LTTE cadre who escaped the murder.

Serious Setback - LTTE

Feb 8 - "We fear that these killings

would have a serious impact on the humanitarian relief work undertaken now and for the recommencement of peace talks. The Tamil people world over, humanitarian workers and the international community should now recognise the elements that are working hard to weaken Tamil unity," said the Political Wing of the LTTE in a press release.

Full text of the press release follows:

"Killing of humanitarian workers in the post-tsunami scenario is a serious set-back to relief and rehabilitation efforts and the peace process at large"

Mr. Kousalyan, Head of the LTTE Batticaloa-Amparai political division and his team that was returning to Batticaloa from Kilinochchi after participating in the District level discussions on relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development in the post-tsunami scenario with the leadership, was shot at by an ambush group of military uniformed men last night around 19.45.

Lt.Col. Koushalyan, Major Puhalan, Major Senthamilan and Second Lt. Vithimaran attained Martyrdom in this clandestine attack that took place at a location between the Sri Lankan Military complexes at Welikanda and Punani in the border area of Welikanda- Polannaruwa and Valaichenai- Batticaloa.

Killing of LTTE members engaged in political and humanitarian relief work, travelling across a Government Military controlled area, is a serious violation of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) that provides for the travel of unarmed LTTE members. The location, its proximity to two SL military check - points and the uniformed position of the attackers are indicators to the nexus the assailants have with the military.

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) should take serious note of this attack vis-a-vis the current circumstances and make the international community privy of its findings. We fear that these killings would have a serious impact on the humanitarian relief work undertaken now and for the recommencement of peace talks. The Tamil people world over, humanitarian workers and the international community should now recognise the elements that are working hard

to weaken Tamil unity.

The demise of Mr.Chandranehru Ariyanayagam, former Ampa rai District parliamentarian and Human Rights Activist who was travelling with Mr.Koushalyan, is an irreparable loss to the Tamil people at this time. Being a founder member of the NorthEast Secretariat On Human Rights (NESOHR), Mr. Chandranehru functioned vigilantly in the area of Human Rights violations in his district. His untimely demise is a serious loss to all Human Rights lovers. Considering the valuable services rendered by Mr.Chandranehru Ariyanayagam, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam confers on him post-humously the title of 'Patriotic Citizen' and express condolences to his family members."

Govt condemns killing

The government of Sri Lanka in a statement issued on 8 February condemned the killing six personnel, including Mr. E. Kousalyan, head of the LTTE Batticaloa-Amparai political division and former parliamentarian of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Mr. Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru and said that it was a violation of the ceasefire agreement.

The statement released by the Director, Government Information Department, S.D. Piyadasa, said that "while these killings are the violation of the Ceasefire Agreement, their timing is also clearly calculated to disrupt the positive post-tsunami atmosphere of increasing co-operation between the GOSL and the LTTE on humanitarian issues."

The government statement also called on all concerned to prevent further violations of the ceasefire gravely risking a return to conflict and, instead, support the peace process and move ahead.

The UN Secretary-General condemned the killings of Mr. E. Koushalyan, a senior political leader of the LTTE Eastern Province Division. A spokesman for Kofi Annan said, "The Secretary-General condemns the killings of Mr. E. Koushalyan, a senior political leader of the LTTE Eastern Province Division, and several colleagues traveling with him, when their vehicle came under attack yesterday evening. He extends his sincere condolences and deepest sympathies to the families of all the victims of these callous killings. "The Secretary-General urges all parties to exercise calm and restraint so as to avoid actions that could disrupt the Cease-fire Agreement of February 2002 or the long-term interest of peace in Sri Lanka."

Govt cannot disclaim responsibility

The killings of LTTE Political Head for Batticaloa and Amparai districts, Mr. E. Koushalyan, TNA former parliamentarian Mr. A. Chandra Nehru and four others raise question as to "how such an attack was carried in an area, which has a strong Armed Forces presence. The question also arises as to who could have carried out such an attack without being deterred by the strong presence of Armed Forces. These factors have raised serious questions in the public mind in regard to the role and/or the complicity of the government and its Armed Forces in the attack. This attack is clearly aimed at destabilising the peace process. It is well known that there are some sinister forces in the country that have a vested interest in destabilizing the peace process." said Mr. R. Sampanthan, TNA parliamentary group leader in a statement made in parliament on 9 February.

Koushalyan didn't heed military advice

Feb 9 - Meanwhile the Army said that the 33-year-old Ilayathambi Lingarajah alias Koushalayan, had travelled without protection despite the army having warned him earlier not to travel in government-held areas without a military escort.

Batticaloa divisional commander Vajira Wijegunawardane said the incident might not have happened if Mr. Koushalyan had heeded the military's advice.

Maj. Gen. Wijegunawardane said that on several earlier occasions, Mr. Koushalyan had travelled in Air Force helicopters to the Wannai, but had returned to Batticaloa without informing the army. "At recent SLMM meetings, I requested the LTTE leaders not to travel without an escort due to threats and the SLMM had also asked the LTTE to follow the military advice," he said.

The Major General said he recently deployed army personnel along the road that Mr. Koushalyan generally took on his return from the Wannai around midnight, though he had not asked for such protection adding that Mr. Koushalyan had a better rapport with the military than other LTTE leaders.

Military spokesman Brigadier Daya Ratnayake said the Army could not be blamed as Mr. Koushalyan had not heeded military advice to travel with an escort. "It is clearly mentioned in the ceasefire agreement, that when LTTE cadres travel in government-held areas

they should seek military escort, but the LTTE on several occasions had not complied with the requirement," Brigadier Ratnayake said.

Meanwhile, an SLMM official said yesterday some "other element" could be behind the killings and they were closely monitoring the situation, presumably referring to the Karuna faction.

SLMM spokeswoman Helen Olafsdottir said monitors had rushed to the scene soon after being informed of the killings and investigations were continuing. "The incident could be a result of an internal dispute. That means we cannot interfere in such matters. Yet we will closely monitor the situation. It is possible that some other elements had carried out the attack, but we have no clear lead," she said.

Trinco and Battai shut down

Feb 9 - Trincomalee district was shut down completely as members of all communities responded to the call of general shut down (hartal) condemning the killings of Mr. E. Kousalyan, LTTE Political head for Batticaloa-Amparai district, Mr. Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru former Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian and four others including three LTTE cadres.

Shops, government departments, provincial council offices, offices of local authorities and non-governmental organizations were closed. Schools of all mediums also did not open. State run bus services came to a standstill. Markets did not function. Branches of State banks and private sector banks did not operate. Law courts did not function. Roads were mostly deserted.

Red and yellow flags of the LTTE were seen flying on houses in the town and suburbs. The round about located at the Madathady junction, which is the entrance to the east port town, was seen decorated with LTTE flags. LTTE controlled villages in Muttur also observed the general shut down. LTTE flags were seen all over the buildings.

A total shutdown was observed in the Batticaloa district and the coastal areas of the Amparai district to mourn the death of Mr. Kousalyan. LTTE officials in Batticaloa said that his funeral would take place Thursday, 10 February and that he would be buried at the martyr's memorial in Thandiyadi, about ten kilometers west Batticaloa town.

LTTE leaders visit

Feb 9 - Head of LTTE Political Wing, Mr. S. P. Thamilchelvan, LTTE's Special

Commander for Batticaloa, Col. Banu, Head of LTTE's Finance Division, Mr. S. Thamilenthi, LTTE Senior Member Mr. K. V. Balakumaran, and LTTE military commander Mr. S. Nagesh arrived in Karadiyanaru Maha Vithiyalam grounds in Batticaloa in a Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter and visited Mr. Kousalyan's wife Pushpa in Ampilanthodai, Kokkadicholai and Kousalyan's mother and three sisters in Pandariyaveli in LTTE controlled area. Kousalyan was married in 22 March 2004, and Pushpa is reported to be 7 months pregnant.

This is the first visit to Batticaloa by Thamilchelvan after former commander Karuna split from the LTTE.

The bodies of Kousalyan and his slain colleagues were taken to Kiran, 28 kilometres north of Batticaloa, for the people of the village to pay their last respects. Then the bodies were taken from the Ampara district to Batticaloa town on 10 February for the public to pay their last respects amid tight security by Sri Lankan armed forces. Tamil National Alliance MPs, religious and civil society leaders from the town spoke at the Deivanayagam Hall where the bodies of Mr. Kousalyan, his colleagues and ex-TNA MP Mr. Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru lay. Mr. Chandra Nehru's body was taken to Thirukkivil, his ancestral village 76 kilometres south of Batticaloa. His funeral would be held there, according to his family. The bodies of the slain Tigers were taken from Krian to Thandiyadi Martyr's Memorial later in the afternoon for burial.

Mr. S. P. Thamilchelvan, head of LTTE's political division on 10 February, speaking at the funeral of Mr. E. Kousalyan, at Thandiyadi Martyr's Memorial in Batticaloa, blamed the government for the killing. Senior LTTE leader, Mr. V. Balakumar, Col. T. Ramesh, Ms. Thamilini, head of LTTE Womens wing, TNA MPs and Mr. A.L.A. Abdul Javath, President of the Federation of Mosques in Batticaloa also spoke before Mr. Kousalyan's last rites. LTTE leaders Mr. S. Karikalan, Mr. E. Pararajasingham, head of Tamil Eelam Judiciary and Mr. Thamilenthi, head of LTTE's finance division were present at the last rites. Thousands of mourners thronged the Thandiyadi martyr's memorial for the funeral.

TNF claims responsibility

The Tamil National Force (TNF) - a para-military group under the joint com-

mand of the leader of the Tamil Eela Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), V. Muralitharan ('Col' Karuna) and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) - claimed responsibility for the killing of E. Kousalyan, a regional political wing leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The claim posted on the official website of the TMVP on 9 February said the ambush on Kousalyan was a "direct attack" unlike the killings by the LTTE of some of the supporters of Col. Karuna, who were "shot when they were asleep". The claim was signed by Cheran of the Tamil National Force. Refuting the LTTE's version that the attack was carried out by para-military groups working with the Sri Lanka Army, the TNF blamed the LTTE "under the leadership of" V. Prabhakaran as "the reason for not attaining Tamil Eelam" and warned that "all supporters" of Mr. Prabhakaran "will be considered as traitors of the Tamils."

gDon ft make false allegation that it was the Sri Lanka Army that attacked Kaushalyan and others, h the statement emphasized adding that TNF had no obligation to defend the Sri Lankan Army, but gwish only to put the record

straight h. It also urged the LTTE to try and learn to accept the truth, the report said. It also insinuated that it was the LTTE leaders like gBalasingham, Tamilselvan, Karikalan, Kaushalyan Thamilenthi and others h who had been obtaining help from the Sri Lankan military to travel in its Air Force helicopters.

'Killings highlight weaknesses in Ceasefire'

New York, Feb 11 - The international human rights organisation. Human Rights Watch, said on 11 February that the killings of a senior Tamil Tiger official and a former parliamentarian underscored the need for all sides to address human rights concerns in the Sri Lankan peace process. In its statement, HRW said as follows:

On February 8, E. Kaushalyan, the political head of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the eastern Batticaloa-Amparai region, was killed in an ambush in a government-controlled area while returning from discussions in Kilinochchi on post-tsunami relief and recovery work. Five members of his convoy were also killed, including Chandranehr Ariyanayagam, a former

parliamentarian and a member of the LTTE human rights body, the North East Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR).

While the perpetrators of the killings are not yet known, it is widely believed that they were carried out by forces loyal to Colonel Karuna, who broke away from the LTTE in March. Some in the LTTE have accused government forces of complicity, though no evidence has been offered.

"These killings are particularly disturbing as they may signify a dangerous new round of politically motivated violence," said Brad Adams, Asia director of Human Rights Watch. "This kind of violence and intimidation undermines the ceasefire and hinders the post-tsunami relief and rehabilitation work going on right now."

Political killings have continued in Sri Lanka despite the ceasefire between the government and LTTE that has been in effect since 2002. Frequent political murders and violent clashes between LTTE members and persons loyal to Karuna pose a grave threat to civilian security in eastern Sri Lanka. The LTTE has long carried out politically motivated killings

(continued on next page)

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Peace prospects in post-tsunami Sri Lanka

At the beginning of the tsunami disaster, there was clear sign that both sides in the island's protracted conflict having realised the urgent need to provide relief to the affected people and rebuild the devastated areas had decided, where necessary to work jointly in the coming months. Many welcomed this partnership because it would also help to build mutual trust useful when negotiating a political settlement to the conflict. The feeling of togetherness amongst the people with diverse ethnic and religious affiliations that sprung instantly was remarkable. The newly emerged harmonious environment also gave renewed hope for reconciliation and national unity. Many thought the tragedy had presented a good opportunity for securing permanent peace.

Timely communal help

The Tamil daily *Thinakkural* reported on December 30: "50 lorries loaded with rice, sugar and cooked food arrived from Uhana, Amparai, Kandy, Mahiyangana and Polannaruwa with relief for the Tamil coastal villages north of Kalmunai. Owing to bridges and roads being damaged between Periyaniawanai

and Onthachimadam, Periya Kallar and Kottai Kallar among other areas were isolated. The Sinhalese people carried relief on their heads and shoulders and walked distances as far as 5 miles to succour victims not reached so far." The courage and unselfishness of the Sri Lankan soldiers seen during their efforts to rescue the people of all races from certain death on December 26 have been documented (e.g. UTHR(J) information bulletin No.37 released on January 10, 2005). There have also been instances where LTTE cadres have rescued Sinhalese including soldiers and Muslims.

On December 31, the LTTE agreed to extend their 'fullest' cooperation to the Government, following an invitation by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, where she called upon the LTTE to join the Government in its efforts to bring the country back to normalcy following the tsunami tragedy. LTTE political wing Leader S.P. Thamilselvan said that despite both the Government and the LTTE having many differences of opinions, this was a time to sink all such differences and work together for the benefit of the

human rights of all Sri Lankans. The killing of LTTE leader Kaushalyan. Human Rights Watch said that the government must do more than simply condemn the killing. In light of a possible complicity by government forces, the government should immediately establish a commission of inquiry into the deaths and ensure that proceedings and conclusions are credible and transparent.

Human Rights Watch stated that while LTTE officials were the victims in this case, the Tamil Tigers have also been carrying out politically motivated killings with impunity. Since November there have been numerous murders and attempted murders of LTTE members, as well as assassinations and abductions of the rebel group's opponents and critics.

"For the ceasefire to work, all involved parties, including the international community, must take stronger steps to ensure that human rights protection is a major part of the process," said Adams. □

people. R. Sampanthan, the TNA parliamentary group leader who along with his colleagues in the alliance function as spokespersons of the LTTE said in an interview: "Not only the Government, but even the Sinhalese people are rushing to help us".

Foreign visitors optimism

Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell on January 7 told reporters at the Colombo International Airport before leaving Sri Lanka after a tour of the southern areas by helicopter: "If all Sri Lankans come together to deal with this common catastrophe, this common crisis, and work with each other and cooperate with each other, then perhaps that spirit of cooperation can be elevated and extended into the political dialogue and find a way forward to a political solution to this long-standing crisis between the government and LTTE." (The transcript of Powell's remarks issued by the U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesman Nairobi, Kenya on January 7, 2005).

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the end of his two-day tour of tsunami-ravaged Sri Lanka told a news conference at the Presidential Secretariat he had raised the issue of the peace process and the need to intensify it, during his meetings with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and leaders of other political parties including the Tamil National Alliance. He said: "I witnessed the terrible human tragedy and how the disaster has affected all sections of your people. All the people of this country have come together at this hour of need. I hope the political leaders will also follow the same attitude. If the whole nation comes together in this humanitarian work you will instil a level of confidence that will accelerate the peace process, and the UN will be there to help the peace process."

Apparently the joint effort of the people in a spirit of solidarity, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliations has also impressed many other foreign visitors. This was during the first phase of recovery after the tsunami disaster, when humanitarian assistance was the priority. The people on their own initiative moved in to help the affected people without any selfish motive. The absence of 'powerful' leaders and bureaucrats from the scene was a blessing! The accusations and counter accusations started when the allocation of relief funds and essential supplies began. The initial euphoria that the tsunami that lashed the

(continued from page 14)

in order to strengthen its hold over the north and east of Sri Lanka, and has used violence and intimidation against perceived opponents to its claim that it is the sole representative of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

The February 8 killings may have been a violation of the ceasefire agreement and should be investigated by the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), put in place to monitor the ceasefire. The monitoring mission has publicly stated that these killings do not fall within its remit.

"The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission should urgently investigate these killings and strengthen its human rights monitoring capability," said Adams. "Failure to do so would affect its credibility and engender mistrust from the very population it is meant to protect."

In a welcome if unusual move, the Sri Lankan government has condemned the

island on December 26 causing extensive death and destruction could bring the warring parties together soon began to fade..

Political struggle suspended

The LTTE has shown again its capacity to change strategies instantly according to changing situations without abandoning its political aims. London-based political strategist and LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham announced January 22 that the rebels were putting on hold the struggle for autonomy for the North-East region in order to deal with the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. He also said: "The political struggle will continue but we need to put that away now." Referring to the January 22 talks in Kilinochchi with the Norwegian facilitators, he said though the discussion did not give more emphasis on the current peace process, but the LTTE leader told the Norwegian delegation that reconstruction and rehabilitation programme of the Tsunami destroyed country should be implemented in such a way to build confidence at the national level, thus contributing to the peace building in the future. "Mr Prabhakaran has expressed his disillusionment that the government has not come forward with positive, confidence building measures to create mutual trust and understanding, which is crucial," he told the news conference. "The government has to do more to win the goodwill of the Tamil people." The policy of the LTTE all along has been to obstruct the government trying to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people in the North-East and some compassionate army commanders in the north, who won the admiration of the people, paid the ultimate price with their lives.

"Parochial politics is out of the equation at this hour," Anton Balasingham said on the eve of the meeting in Colombo between the representatives of LTTE and Government Peace Secretariats to consider Government's proposal for a three-tiered structure at district, regional and national level to review and coordinate the post tsunami relief assistance. He explained that a structured common strategy was needed to ensure equitable distribution of the international aid. He also pointed out that this is the time for "struggle for economic emancipation that differs from our political freedom struggle at least for the time being." At the same time, the LTTE ruled out talks on tsunami reconstruction being used to revive the country's peace process. Sri Lanka's foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar in an exclusive interview to

'The Hindu' on January 27 confirmed that the government would not be making any attempt at this point in time to resume the peace talks.

"The Government, the LTTE and the donors by putting their act together of balancing two concepts that funds cannot be given outright to the LTTE, as against the necessity for the LTTE, in its areas, to have a significant hand in the implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects, must first decide on an agreed joint working arrangement in the North-East", the Minister said. He is hoping successful co-implementation of a joint working arrangement will provide a new platform on which the political structure needed to settle the conflict could be built. Paradoxically, this new platform is also what the LTTE will be seeking to put in place its own political structure.

The statements of the Head of the Sea Tiger unit, "Colonel" Soosai indicated a shift towards pragmatism. He acknowledged the need for close co-operation with the government to recover from the onslaught of Mother Nature. He declared that Government support was essential for the reconstruction of the tsunami-hit areas in the North-East, since the LTTE cannot fulfill this task on its own. He told the Daily News in his interview (February 1) in Mullaitivu: "There should be government officials for any committee appointed for the reconstruction of tsunami hit areas in the North-East representing all ethnic groups in each district." Earlier, on January 25 Soosai said: "We will not deny access to any foreign group, including the foreign military to come in and work in our areas. We need the help of the international community. I don't know why the foreign groups are not coming here. May be they are thinking all the Tamils here are LTTE. I urge them to come visit our areas and see the situation". Suddenly, a silver lining appeared on the premise at last pragmatism would play a part, when lasting peace is sought via a balanced political settlement acceptable to all the communities. But some doubts emerged, as the statements of Anton Balasingham and S.P. Thamilselvan did not reflect Soosai's thinking.

Dispute over joint mechanism

In as much as the Government want all-party unity at this calamitous time on its terms, the LTTE too is prepared to co-operate in the rebuilding task only if a joint mechanism is set up on its terms. To the dismay of many anxious persons, the LTTE and Government peace secretariats have not been able to agree on a

joint mechanism for rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the North-East. "The Government of Sri Lanka is still dragging its feet over the establishment of a joint mechanism to take forward the reconstruction and rehabilitation of tsunami destroyed Tamil coastal areas in the northeast province," said S. P. Thamilselvan, addressing a press conference in Kilinochchi following his two hour-talks with Norwegian Ambassador, Hans Brattskar on February 5. Government is "increasingly demonstrating its unwillingness to work with the LTTE in rebuilding the devastated areas," he complained. "Their proposals for a joint mechanism are, in our opinion, impractical and are not worthy of our consideration," he added. The LTTE wants the Government to accept its proposals, which as expected incorporate its long-term interests. The purpose of Ambassador's sudden visit to Kilinochchi was to convince the LTTE of the urgency to reach a compromise on the setting up a joint mechanism.

In as much as the Government is keen that the funds pledged by the donors should not be given directly to the LTTE or its proxies, the LTTE too wants the donors not to channel funds intended for rebuilding the North-East through the Government. The LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, according to his adviser Balasingham, had asked international donors to disburse their tsunami-related assistance to the Tamil-speaking North East Sri Lanka through their own NGOs, circumventing the Sri Lankan government. In this regard, Anton Balasingham's speech on January 27 at a refugee camp in Mullaitivu is pertinent. The LTTE leader Prabhakaran himself did not make any public statement after the meeting with the Norwegian visitors. According to Balasingham, Prabhakaran had told the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Peterson, that he was not insisting that the international donors give the aid directly to the LTTE. They could use their own NGOs to disburse the aid in the North East. What they should not do was to channel it through the Sri Lankan government, which had a tendency to discriminate against the Tamils. Balasingham also said that the LTTE would not join any national level body on tsunami relief and reconstruction set up by the Sri Lankan government for this same reason. It is clear that the LTTE is not prepared to abandon its two nations concept and also disregard the parallel administration it runs in the North-East in any joint effort to rebuild the North-East.

Meanwhile, the JVP said it was against the proposed joint mechanism between the government and the LTTE to handle financial aid and other relief measures in affected areas in the North and East. The key partner in the coalition government said it believed the establishment of such a joint committee was a violation of the country's Constitution!

Donors assessment and recommendations

In a preliminary needs assessment, the Asian Development Bank, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the World Bank have indicated Sri Lanka needs US\$ 1.5 billion to implement effectively a recovery and reconstruction strategy. They also stated US\$ 500 million is needed in foreign funding this year alone. Their assessment differs significantly from the estimate of US\$ 3.5 billion announced earlier by the Sri Lankan government for rebuilding. Importantly, the three major financiers called for a transparent mechanism to monitor the relief and recovery effort and for including the Tamil Tiger rebels in the process.

The donors will be reluctant to finance a national rebuilding plan that lacks the backing of all stakeholders. The President is aware of this dilemma but not the JVP. It does not want any link with the LTTE. The dislike of the two radical groups - the JVP and the LTTE is mutual. The LTTE was behind the ugly incidents in Jaffna during the Prime Minister's visit as his companions were top JVP members. The JVP parliamentarians want to assert their authority disregarding the place and matters being discussed at crucial meetings. A case in point is the barging in of the district JVP parliamentarian at the meeting on January 31 in the Thirukkivil Divisional Secretary's (DS) office (Amparai district) between the local LTTE leaders and Government officials for setting up a committee for assisting Tsunami victims. Angered by this showmanship, the LTTE members walked out 'objecting to the cheap political tactics used in promoting the JVP'. The JVP wants to be seen as the organisation truly helpful to the people at the present difficult time. But its relief work though appreciated by many has also been considered as not entirely altruistic. Incidentally, JVP is not the only party that has tied its own agenda to relief effort. The JVP factor compels the LTTE to be wary of the coalition government and to proceed with its own agenda. The former Sinhalese insurgents are justifying the case for separation with their extreme pro-Sinhala stance.

The co-chairs of the donor conference comprising the United States, Japan, Norway and the European Union in a joint statement issued after the review meeting in Brussels on January 25 have said the multi-million dollar international aid pledged as tsunami relief should be sensitive to and strengthen the peace process in Sri Lanka. They also encouraged reconciliation among the various ethnic groups and especially between the government and the LTTE in distributing the relief aid. They made it very clear that the relief aid should not be used for any political purposes nor should it be used for the increase or advantage of any political interest.

The statement said: "The Co-chairs called on donors and all parties to ensure that tsunami assistance adheres to basic principles of equity, transparency and accountability". They also expect the parties concerned to co-ordinate and work closely to assist the victims of the natural disaster. In addition, the statement called on the international donors and aid organizations to cooperate and coordinate their tsunami assistance with each other and with all relevant parties in Sri Lanka. Thus, it is clear that the donor community has indirectly linked the disaster aid to developments in the peace process, though not in the form it did at the donors meeting held in Tokyo on June 9 and 10, 2003 that pledged \$4.5 billion for reconstruction and development. The aid was later withheld because of lack of progress in the efforts to seek a political settlement. Disregarding the joint statement of the co-chairs, the government has accused the opposition leader of trying to sabotage rebuilding aid by canvassing for tying disaster aid and the peace process! The donors cannot be unaware of the controversy over the ISGA proposals submitted by the LTTE in November 2003. They have not suggested that these should be the basis for reviving the dormant peace process. They are also not imprudent to donate funds for rebuilding when there is the prospect of another round of war with adverse consequences to the rebuilt areas.

Any curbs on the disbursement of pledged funds hurt the recognized governments and not the rebel movements fighting for independence. It was the Sri Lankan government and not the LTTE that lost when the aid pledged at the Tokyo conference was withheld for lack of progress in the peace effort. If the allegation that the LTTE acquired expensive military equipment including small aircrafts useful for aerial attacks (ref. report by Defence columnist, Iqbal Athas

in the Sunday Times February 6) is true, this shows that the suspension of the funds pledged at the Tokyo meeting had no effect on LTTE's financing capacity. Moreover, development of the region was not at the top of its agenda then. But the current situation resulting from the enormous destruction in the North-East caused by the tsunami disaster is different. Not only foreign aid but also the cooperation of the Government and other stakeholders is needed for rebuilding the affected areas. The LTTE is aware of this imperative and hence the willingness to rebuild the tsunami-battered region jointly with other stakeholders. But as noted earlier, the terms must be acceptable to the Tigers, who are overly concerned about safeguarding their powers.

Linking recovery and peace processes

The international community is quite keen to link the tsunami-recovery to peace building. The UN has also made it quite clear that it is keen to use the 'openings' the tsunami has created for re-activating the peace process that remains stalled since April 2003. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan himself emphasised the imperative of peace as a prerequisite for any meaningful and sustainable recovery process during his visit to Sri Lanka.

The LTTE raised its concern soon after tsunami relief aid was promised by the donors to the Government, as the rebels thought the Government would exploit the enhanced fiscal power to exert its authority in the entire North-East. Since the time the Sri Lankan government received pledges of external assistance to provide relief to the distressed persons and rebuild the devastated areas, the LTTE has been jittery of losing its grip on the North-East and even the existing balance of combating power. The preemptive charge that the government was using the relief funds for purchasing arms for its military was made because of this fear. Any arrangement for rebuilding the affected areas in the North-East must not weaken the prospects for securing self rule. On the contrary, the LTTE will readily accept a mechanism that enhances it. If the recovery and peace processes are linked, the Tigers fear that they will find themselves in a tight corner compelled to compromise on their Eelam demand.

TNA's role

When the Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin during his recent visit to Sri Lanka inquired about the nature of the federal structure the Tamils wish to have from the TNA members, they cited coun-

tries such as Canada, Australia and Switzerland that offered models of federalism. They also told him that the Tamil linguistic region in the Northeast, which had been accepted as the areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking people should enjoy sovereign power within its area of competence. The region should enjoy legislative, executive and judicial power in defined areas and have adequate financial autonomy within the framework of a united country. The TNA delegation pointed out; when the LTTE is actively involved in dealing with the post tsunami situation, goodwill and confidence would be increasingly built, and the ensuing positive environment would greatly contribute to the furtherance of the peace process and the evolution of an acceptable negotiated political solution. On the surface, this reasoning is quite convincing but what the TNA did not tell him was the model the LTTE wants is more confederal than federal consistent with two independent nations coexisting in one country. The TNA has so far not suggested a political structure that meets the concerns and legitimate rights of the people.

LTTE's approach to self-rule also assumes a monolithic society in the North-East, the tragic mistake Sri Lanka gov-

ernments made after independence with regard to the entire country. It is this blunder that is responsible for the political, social and economic problems faced over the past several decades. These have kept the country poor, while countries like Singapore have advanced rapidly with their citizens enjoying a high standard of living.

The TNA has elected members representing multi-ethnic districts in the east and should know the consequences of overlooking the ground realities. What the Tamil people must realise is the enduring bitterness of other ethnic groups that will result from the LTTE's approach with dire consequences for the stability and peace in the region. Even if the LTTE succeeds in achieving its political objective, the Tamils will not be able to coexist peacefully with other ethnic communities and prosper in the small multi-ethnic country.

Conclusion

From the above analysis of the difficulties in bringing all parties including the powerful LTTE to agree on a joint mechanism and a work programme for rebuilding the devastated areas, it is apparent that a political settlement acceptable to all the diverse communities in Sri Lanka even after the tsunami tragedy is a

hope than a real possibility. Merely linking the recovery and peace processes without external involvement in pushing both sides to take the same road will not lead to permanent peace. At present there is no agreed 'road map' to peace.

Given the opposing stands of different parties, each having a separate agenda for securing peace, a breakthrough in future negotiations is unlikely unless external pressures are brought to bear equally on both sides. There is also a yawning gap between the rhetoric and decisions of powerful political leaders adding to the uncertainty in securing peace without third party involvement. The civil society lacks the unified force to exert any meaningful pressure to influence the leaders, who are concerned more about their capacity to wield power than making a joint effort to secure permanent peace. Even the influential Buddhist prelates seem to be unable to persuade the powerful political leaders in the south to put behind their political and personal differences and unite for the good of all the people in the country. In the north and east, there are no influential sections or leaders, political or otherwise, to influence the LTTE. There are many ready to oblige the LTTE by adopting an appeasing or subservient role. □



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Kausalyan killed in ambush

D. B. S. Jeyaraj

The time was around 7.45 p.m. on Monday, February 7. The Toyota Hiace van, numbered 57 - 1020 going along the Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa road or A-11 highway slowed down as a vehicle with blinking lights was parked ahead on the right side of the road. With the lights signalling to go ahead, the van driven by Vinayagamoorthy slowly passed the white coloured van parked alongside the road with its motor running.

There were nine people inside the Hiace van. In front, seated next to driver Vinayagamoorthy was former Amparai District Parliamentarian, Ariyanayagam Chandra Nehru. Sitting next to him was a policeman from Thirukkivil, Chandrasekeran. In the middle was the Tiger Political Commissar for Batticaloa and Amparai, Kausalyan, his comrade in arms Pugalan and another constable Nagarajah. Three other LTTE cadres Senthamilan, Nithimaran and Vinothan were seated at the rear.

All hell breaks loose

Even as they passed the parked vehicle the front seat occupants saw two or three men in uniform standing ahead in front of the white van. One of them raised a hand as if hailing them or asking them to stop. The van that was already moving at snail's pace now slowed down further. Suddenly all hell was let loose. Rapid gunfire from behind and to one side of the Toyota ensued. Vinothan seated behind saw the driver and Kausalyan slumping forward.

The two policemen inside the vehicle were boduguards assigned to protect Chandra Nehru. They had a T-56 each. Furthermore, Chandra Nehru had a 9mm pistol in his possession for his personal protection. There was no time for any counter fire. Even as the vehicle and occupants were hit in a hail of gunfire, at least one of the cops jumped out but fell down as gunfire hit him. The five LTTE men were unarmed. Without any retaliation the attack was simply a cold blooded massacre. Within two minutes it was all over and the assassins fled away in their

vehicle.

Five of the men inside - Kausalyan, Pugalan, Nithimaran and Senthamilan and the driver Vinayagamoorthy were dead. The two policemen, Chandra Nehru and LTTE cadre Vinothan were injured. However, Chandrasekeran and Vinothan though bleeding were conscious. Chandra Nehru, Kausalyan and another LTTE cadre had a cellular phone each. But neither of the conscious persons thought of using them. In about 10 minutes after the shooting soldiers from the Welikanda camp, about five km away came to the scene.

The dead and injured persons were taken to Welikanda and then transferred to the Polonnaruwa Hospital. The injured persons were later airlifted to Colombo and admitted to the National Hospital. Emergency surgery was performed on Chandra Nehru who was later placed in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Initially, Nehru showed signs of recovery but started sinking later and died. Thus the death toll in the massacre became six. The condition of both Chandrasekeran and Vinothan improved to an extent where they were able to testify at the inquest and also be interviewed by sections of the media.

The ambush took place on the deserted stretch of road between the 104th and 105th mileposts. It was in the vicinity of a comparatively new Sinhala settlement known as Namalgama. It is suspected that the parked white van was the same vehicle that had been following the ill fated Toyota Hiace after they had passed the 23rd brigade headquarters at Welikanda. It had overtaken them at Pillaiyady between the 103rd and 104th milepost when the driver Vinayagamoorthy and the two policemen had alighted to worship at the shrine dedicated to Lord Ganesh and also put money into the till.

The incident had occurred near the Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa District border. The two nearest military camps on the A-11 highway at Welikanda and Punanai were about 14 km apart. The

attack happened at a spot five km from Welikanda. Furthermore, there were three other army camps in proximate region. Navaladdy and Valaichchenai in Batticaloa District and Minneriya in Polonnaruwa. Yet the assailants seem to have vanished without a trace.

Charges of complicity

The LTTE and their propaganda organs have levelled overt and covert charges of security forces complicity in the massacre. It is not known whether the suspected white van travelled along the A-11 highway after the massacre or not. If so the Punanai and Welikanda army camps must be having some knowledge. There are also other routes through which the vehicle could have reached Minneriya or Thoppigala. Moreover, the areas around the place where the incident occurred are now Sinhala or Muslim inhabited. Twenty five years ago the area was predominantly Tamil. This columnist still remembers the delicious milk sold by Tamil vendors at Welikanda when the buses stopped there.

Lt. Col. Kausalyan, Major Pugalan, Major Senthamilan and 2nd Lt. Nidhimaran were all promoted posthumously. Nidhimaran from Mandoor was only 16 years old. He had been conscripted three years ago just as he entered his teens. Chandra Nehru was given the "Naatuppatraalar" (patriotic citizen) award by the LTTE. This is the second highest civilian award of the LTTE. The greatest loss to the LTTE was of course its Political Wing Head for Batticaloa and Amparai, Kausalyan.

Despite his seniority and experience, 32 year old Kausalyan seems to have acted with rash carelessness. The ceasefire regulations permit security to be provided to senior Tigers when passing through government controlled territory. Kausalyan's boss, the overall LTTE Political Wing Chief, Tamilselvan for example always demands and gets helicopter transport. In Kausalyan's case he seems to have gone to Kilinochchi with recently appointed Eastern Commander, Bhanu.

After some discussions there regarding the post-tsunami rehabilitation work, Kausalyan had returned by road. He and the accompanying cadres were unarmed. They were travelling in a double cab - NP 6886. The LTTE Head of Finance Division, Thamilendhi (nee Ranjith Appa) accompanied him from Puthukudiyiruppu upto Puliyankulam. Thereafter, Thamilendhi turned back.

This, however led to a rumour initially that Thamilendhi too was killed in the attack. The LTTE issued a denial and also sent Thamilendhi to the funeral ceremony in Batticaloa to prove that their 'chancellor of the exchequer' was still alive.

After reaching Polonnaruwa, Kausalyan had changed vehicles. Former Amparai District MP, Chandra Nehru who is now the district representative of the LTTE human rights outfit, North-Eastern Center for Human Rights, had gone in the Toyota Hiace van, 57-1020 to Polonnaruwa. They had according to the LTTE website, Nidharsanam, met at a side road in Polonnaruwa. According to the policeman who survived, Nehru and Kausalyan had been communicating via cellular phone. After switching vehicles Kausalyan had sent the double cab back to the Wannu.

Danger

Kausalyan had checked in with the security forces at the entry and exit point at Omanthai at about 3 pm. He had not requested any security escort and opted to travel alone and unarmed in government controlled territory. Contrary to

some reports, Chandra Nehru had not been travelling with Kausalyan from Kilinochchi. So there was absolutely no security cover as the two injured policemen, 35 year old Chandrasekeran and 36 year old Nagarajah were assigned to Nehru because as a former Eastern Tamil MP, he was in potential danger.

The Tigers had broken journey in Vavuniya, Habarana and Polonnaruwa for refreshments. Chandra Nehru's vehicle had initially passed Kaushalyan at Polonnaruwa. Later Kausalyan had phoned him and the van turned back. Interestingly Chandra Nehru had not told the two policemen of the purpose for travelling. They were told that Chandra Nehru was going to Colombo. It was only after Kausalyan and the comrades entered the vehicle which turned back towards Batticaloa that the cops became aware of their mission.

Likewise, the driver Vinayagamoorthy too was unaware of his destination. He had told his wife that he was going with Nehru to Vavuniya. Incidentally the van was not owned by Chandra Nehru or Vinayagamoorthy. It was a hired vehicle. Vinayagamoorthy had worked for a

long time in Saudi Arabia. After returning to the island he had bought his own van and drove it for hire. Recently he had sold it and worked as a freelance driver. He was a close associate of Nehru and worked diligently for him during the election campaign.

It appears therefore that Kausalyan and Chandra Nehru had a pre-arranged plan to switch vehicles at Polonnaruwa. If Kausalyan had thought this "switch" and the two armed cops were enough security, he had been sadly mistaken. Another cardinal error had been delaying the Wannu departure till afternoon because by the time he passed Polonnaruwa it was dusk rendering him more vulnerable. The switch would have become known when the passenger identity was checked at Welikanda. Moreover, a Tiger website says that switching vehicles at Polonnaruwa was observed by the "enemy".

Risks

Being an active Political Commissar, Kausalyan had often been compelled to work in government controlled areas without security. He had been warned by se-




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curity personnel not to take such risks. Yet Kausalyan persisted, perhaps because he did not want the security forces to keep track of his movements under the pretext of protection. Batticaloa and Amparai LTTE Administrative Head, Dayamohan has explained the reluctance to seek security as being due to delays and red tape by the security forces. Whenever such requests were made there was always inordinate delay in accommodating them, he alleges.

When news of the ambush became known the immediate suspects were the Karuna cadres. If there was any doubt it was dispelled the following day when some of Karuna's operatives began telephoning people in Batticaloa and abroad that the military wing of the newly formed Tamil Eelam Ikkiya Viduthalai Munnani (Tamil Eelam United Liberation Front) was responsible. This was a union between Karuna's party the Tamil Eelam Makkal Viduthalai Puligal and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF), led by Paranthan Rajan.

The military wing of the new outfit is known as the 'Tamil Thesiya Padai' or Tamil National Force (TNF). On Thursday, February 10, a statement was issued in Europe by a person called Cheran. It was openly claimed that the TNF was responsible. By this time the Batticaloa grapevine was humming with the news that five people comprising both ex LTTE and ENDLF cadres were responsible. The actual firing was done by Mangalam Master and Thooyaseelan.

Both were Karuna loyalists. Thooyaseelan had earlier been LTTE chief of the Kaluwankerny area. Mangalam Master was an aide de camp to the former Vinothan Regiment Commander, Bharathidasan who was killed at Vaaharai in the LTTE internecine warfare last April. An AK 47 assault rifle and an HK 33 sub machine gun had been used. The assassins apparently had made their escape along the Maradanwela road.

Curiously the grapevine also had it that the assassins had no knowledge of the victims' identities. It seemed that Mangalam Master had been elated afterwards that they had taken out Kausalyan and rushed to claim credit. The killers had not deliberately disfigured Kausalyan as alleged in some quarters. Though Kausalyan's face was severely damaged it was not due to his being shot at close quarters. It was because he had received bullets which entered the back and exited from the face thereby damaging the face severely.

Hasty operation

The assassins had also not taken away the baggage in the van. Kausalyan's briefcase with important documents was not taken. So too were the two T-56s, Nehru's revolver and the three cell phones. The operation smacked of being in haste. The assassins knew there were Tigers inside and finished them off as quickly as possible. They had then sped away presumably because the security forces would have been at the scene soon.

LTTE and pro-Tiger elements however allege that it was a deliberate operation clearly aimed at Kausalyan. The notion that the security forces were involved to some extent is believed widely. The statement issued by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) insinuates this clearly. It also makes a valid point that the government cannot disclaim responsibility. The Monitoring Mission however opines that the ambush was not a ceasefire violation. This means that the SLMM feels that it was purely an "intra-Tamil" killing without security force participation.

Given the propaganda barrage unleashed by the pro-Tiger sections, few Tamils will believe that the security forces had no role. There is also suspicion that the assassins could have simply taken refuge at a military installation. After the Karuna revolt, the LTTE maintains a stance that it was only a one man show and that there are no Karuna cadres in the east. This is simply not true. Cadres loyal to Karuna are living in areas north of Batticaloa town from Arumugathankudiyiruppu onwards.

The areas between Chenkalladdy and Valaichenai along with areas like Vaaharai, Kirimichai, Omadhiamadhu, Mankerni, Panichankerny, Kalkudah etc., are Karuna strongholds. The jungle areas around Kudumbimalai, Tharavai, Kattumurivu, Vaganeri and Vadamunai are also no go areas to the mainstream LTTE because of a strong pro-Karuna cadre presence. The border areas along Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa too are infested with Karuna's cadres

The mainstream LTTE will simply not acknowledge this. They take up the position that Karuna is no more a factor to reckon with. The charge is that some pro-Karuna remnants along with Tamil para military groups allied to the security forces are engaging in hit and run tactics with the security forces aiding and abetting. The LTTE says that these ele-

ments are either staying in close proximity to military camps or within the camps itself. In any case the LTTE feels that the anti-Tiger violence in the east is not possible without some military connivance. This accusation is not entirely without foundation.

Denial

When the LTTE conveyed these sentiments to President Kumaratunga through the Norwegians she denied any state complicity. She however admitted that some elements in the security forces could be aiding the pro Karuna elements in an unofficial capacity. Cadres fleeing the wrath of Pirapaharan who seek refuge at military camps will be granted sanctuary. Whatever the truth, it has not been the practice for states in any part of the world to admit to such activity. Covert operations are usually "officially sanctioned unofficial action".

The LTTE in its official statements does not refer to Karuna or the existence of his outfit. The reference is to paramilitary forces. The interference is that these are linked to the security forces and enjoy their support. This is due to two reasons. One is that the LTTE considers it infra-dig to admit that Karuna is still a problem and that his cadres can inflict damage to the supposedly "invincible" LTTE. Any damage is possible only because of security force involvement is the LTTE position.

Secondly admitting to an internal squabble will take the offence out of the Monitoring Mission's purview. Who can forget or forgive the Norwegians for washing their hands off the whole Karuna revolt and remaining all off, while a massacre of innocents was perpetrated by Piraba loyalists? Emphasising "paramilitary" involvement makes it a ceasefire offence.

Whatever the outcome of these charges and counter charges, there is no doubt that the Karuna and Paranthan Rajan combine has made a significant hit. Further attacks of this nature are on the cards. It is reported that Karuna is back with a vengeance. The anniversary of his inglorious exit from Batticaloa on April 12 is drawing near. The renegade Colonel has sworn that the Batticaloa situation will be transformed by the April New Year. The LTTE will certainly resist. This means that terrible bloodshed is on the cards. □

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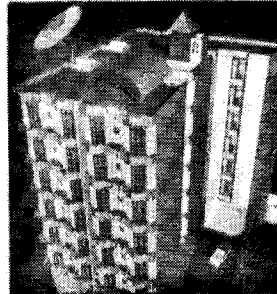
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In pursuit of politics of disaster

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

The December 26 tsunami triggered by a massive underwater earthquake off the Sumatra coast, the largest since 1964 registering 9.0 on the Richter scale devastated many countries in Asia. Indonesia and Sri Lanka were the two countries most severely affected by it with huge loss of lives. Both countries have also been affected by prolonged separatist war in the Aceh province in Indonesia and the North-East province in Sri Lanka. The epicenter of the quake was close to Aceh, whereas Sri Lanka was far away from it but yet the devastation caused by the tsunami waves that thrashed fiercely the island's east and south coasts was colossal. It took away the lives of over 30,000 persons in Sri Lanka (the final death toll is expected to be close to 40,000) of whom a third were children. About 15,000 people were injured and over 800,000 inhabitants left homeless.

More than 117,000 homes in 135 towns and villages were destroyed by the tsunami. 312 schools and 72 hospitals were destroyed. Fishing families were particularly hard hit. It has been reported mid January 7,500 fishermen were killed, 5,600 were still missing and more than 90,000 had been displaced. Some 18,500 fishing boats had been damaged or destroyed. The number of people who have lost income is estimated at 800,000 of which nearly half the number has lost almost all source of income. A sizeable number would require longer or permanent support. The unemployment rate has now risen to 20 per cent.

The north-east province

As many as 27,000 people are either dead or missing in the Northeast. The Amparai coast was the worst affected with 13,000 to 14,000 deaths. Mullaitivu town and the coastal villages in Mullaitivu and Vadamarachchi East had been completely devastated. The death toll in Mullaitivu, the eastern coastal area in the north covered by the Bay of Bengal Sea is reckoned to be higher than the estimate 1932 given by the LTTE peace

secretariat on January 8. According to Ms. Emelda Sukumar, Government Agent of Mullaitivu district, 2765 deaths have been recorded in the district and 558 persons said to be missing a month after the 12/26 tsunami. The LTTE maintains it lost only 6 cadres to the tsunami. The now defunct Centre for National Operations put the casualty figure for Batticaloa at 2,815 dead and 1,086 missing.

According to the report released early February by the Jaffna secretariat 47,195 people from 12,669 families were either displaced or severely affected economically by the tsunami waves in Jaffna peninsula. Out of these 9,663 people from 2,660 families continue to be in refugee camps. A further 30,393 persons belonging to 7,934 families are staying with friends and relatives. 7739 persons belonging to 2,075 families have been affected economically though they have not been displaced. In the 31 Grama Sevaka divisions of Point Pedro and Maruthankerny, 6,680 houses have been completely destroyed. 1256 people have lost their lives and 1,240 people have been listed as missing. (source: TamilNet 10 Feb. 2005).

2862 children have lost either both or one of their parents in the northeast province. The number of children who lost both parents is 737. The district wise breakdown is: Batticaloa-406, Amparai-162, Mullaitivu-94, Jaffna- 39, Trincomalee-35 and Killinochchi-01. The number of children who lost either mother or father is 2125: Amparai-954, Batticaloa-699, Mullaitivu- 393, Jaffna-47 and Trincomalee-32. More than 2,400 school children in the North-East have been killed by the tsunami waves. About 1000 students in the Kalmunai Educational Zone alone have lost their parents in the tragedy. The district wise breakdown of tsunami destroyed and damaged schools in the northeast province is: - Batticaloa- 36, Amparai-40, Trincomalee-23, Mullaitivu -12 and Jaffna-11. Nine educational zones out of a total of 24 in

the North-East have been affected by the tsunami tragedy.

Prompt foreign assistance

The immediate reaction of foreign countries to the tragedy was overwhelming. Nine ships, ten helicopters and eight aircrafts arrived from foreign countries during the first week itself to assist in the relief operations. Despite the severe damage inflicted by the tsunami to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and some coastal areas in Tamil Nadu (the worst hit areas were Nagapattinam and Cuddalore), India was the first country that rushed to assist in the rescue work with personnel and essential supplies. India sent five naval ships and nearly four hundred personnel for the relief and rescue operations. The Indian rescue teams landed in Galle and Trincomalee. A fifty member Indian navy medical team comprising Indian doctors, nurses and other workers who arrived with adequate medicines and medical equipments served at the Kuchchaveli government hospital in the north of Trincomalee district. On completing the mission, the local resident doctors thanked them for their timely assistance at a farewell function at the hospital on January 24 morning. India also made cash contribution, equivalent of US\$22 million. It is an outright grant, which will be used for certain types of reconstruction work to be decided in consultation with the Government of Sri Lanka.

At the end of third week after the tsunami struck there were 1,657 US troops and 2,517 other foreign military personnel in Sri Lanka engaged mainly on clearing and relief operations. 317 US troops were at the Katunayake international airport, 221 in Colombo, 404 in Galle and 39 (medical officers) in Point Pedro (under government control).

LTTE's suspicions

The arrival of US marines to perform urgent relief work in the tsunami struck areas was resented by the LTTE. Its political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan said the people in the North and East needed aid, not the assistance of foreign armies. To the Tigers used to looking everything from a military perspective, even humanitarian assistance provided by persons in uniform seemed dangerous! The visit of US doctors and other medical personnel who were part of the marine contingent to the north was detested. The suspicion

that they were in Jaffna to gather information about their outfit and its activities were the main reason.

Despite the Tigers' objection, many Tamils in Point Pedro went to the Manthikai hospital and sought treatment from the US medical team. The people were not bothered about the nationality or race of the doctors offering treatment. It was only after the Tigers realised that the presence of foreign military personnel did not pose any threat to them the grumbling subsided. Having completed the primary missions, the majority of the US marines left the country end January and the remaining members are scheduled to leave by mid February 2005. The US Embassy's Charge D'Affaires, James Entwistle said: "They have completed the tasks of heavy ground and air lift, debris clearing, medical assistance and transportation of supplies and equipment for which they are best suited. Now we are transitioning to an increased focus on the civilian reconstruction and recovery effort."

A Russian airmobile hospital provided medical aid to injured persons in southern Sri Lanka. The Russian medical team on the way to the Wannai was refused permission to proceed by the LTTE at the Omanthai checkpoint on the grounds of security. On January 2, President Kumaratunga asked the ceasefire monitors (SLMM) to persuade the LTTE to allow the Russian medical relief teams to work in areas under its control in the north. The LTTE refused to yield. Unable to provide medical assistance, the Russians returned home disappointed. One month after the tragedy, the number of foreign military personnel in Sri Lanka was as follows:

US - 568 (Southern coast), Canada - 200 (Amparai district) Pakistan - 170 (Hambantota), India - 80 (Southern coast) Austria - 77 (Galle), Belgium - 69 (Matara) and Russia - 60 (Hambantota).

India has been avoiding direct contact with the LTTE after the outfit was banned following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The LTTE leader is a wanted person for his alleged involvement in the murder. The LTTE leaders regretted that India was not directly involved in the relief work in the north and wanted her to forget the past and assist the people in the region. Several attempts in the past to mend the sour relationship by pleading time and again to forget the past

have all failed. Ironically, the LTTE does not want to forget the past in Sri Lanka and trust the moderate Sinhalese leaders. This has been the main obstacle in negotiating a political settlement with Colombo based on federalism and now in carrying out speedily the much needed rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the North-East jointly with the Government.

Many foreign relief teams opted to work in the south and the worst affected Amparai district in the east. A Cuban medical team comprising 16 physicians, two nurses, two hygiene specialists, three experts from Cuba's biological and pharmaceutical laboratories and an engineer assisted the victims in Galle. The government too was not allowed to perform relief work freely in the north. The south and to a lesser extent the east benefitted as a result of the volatile situation in the north that discouraged foreigners going to the LTTE-controlled areas. The telecasted films of benevolent foreign residents helping the fishermen and the distressed children in the southern coastal areas also revealed the contrasting interest shown by foreigners in helping the affected people in the south as against those in the north. This is not because they were discouraged by the Government to visit the Tamil-dominated north.

Government's bungled operations

The worst hit Amparai with 107,885 displaced persons nearly equal to the total number displaced in the entire southern and western provinces was slow in recovering from the tsunami disaster because of administrative inefficiency and internal political rivalries. The death toll in Amparai was also higher than the combined figure (10,364) of the southern and western provinces. The Government was criticised for not giving adequate emphasis to Amparai where the magnitude of the loss considering together the deaths, displaced and destroyed property was so vast this district should have got greater attention, more relief material and clearing equipment than received by the combined southern and western provinces. But a month after the tragedy even the debris clearing work had been proceeding at snails' pace in Amparai. UNP Amparai District Parliamentarian P. Dayaratne said at a press conference the government officials even after a month of the tragedy have not gone to Amparai to assess the damage to property. Ap-

parently the resident government officials were either busy with other work or just lethargic to visit the battered areas and speed up the clearing work. Exceptionally, in Amparai the LTTE cadres were seen working in many of the relief camps along side the government's Special Task Force (STF). Amparai district has 41.6% Muslims, 39.3% Sinhalese and 18.7% Tamils and the relatively poor performance cannot be attributed to discrimination by the Government against the Tamils.

Among the survivors in the affected areas, there was growing anger over the chaotic and limited character of the government's relief operations. The resentment of the people was vociferous in the south too, although the region received considerable assistance from foreign relief teams. The fishermen who lost their means of livelihood after the tsunami were in desperate need of financial assistance besides accommodation.

On February 2, Tilak Ranavirajah, the head of the Task Force coordinating relief and Commissioner of Essential Services, said he was appalled that only 30 percent of the affected people outside the LTTE-controlled areas had received state help. The reference to state aid includes assistance, which Sri Lanka received from other governments or major foreign organisations. He blamed bureaucratic bungling for the post-tsunami disaster in the relief operations, not ruling out corruption amongst officials. "There is some foul play somewhere down the line," David Muller from the centre for national operations said. He also said that he discovered during his recent visit to Batticaloa, people living in several camps were being given poor quality rice and spoiled lentils to eat. Muller added: "There is definitely some malpractice going on aimed at discrediting the government." According to some media reports, officials have complained in recent weeks that at least four trucks with rice, lentils and sugar bound for minority ethnic Tamil areas in the north were forcibly diverted by majority Sinhalese mobs and low-ranking government officials to predominantly Sinhalese areas.

The haphazard way the post-tsunami work has been carried out is also evident from the confusion over the official casualty figures. A report issued by the Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation

(TAFREN) estimated the fatalities at 40,000. Another 6,000 were listed as missing and one million people as homeless. The public security ministry puts the death toll at 38,195, while the Centre for National Operations (CNO), which is meant to coordinate relief work, has it at 30,956. On February 3, the day after the Commissioner of Essential Services admitted that 70 percent of survivors haven't received anything because of bureaucratic bungling, Government appointed a special task force to ensure aid reaches all tsunami victims. The main disaster management body, the CNO wrapped up its work the same day.

The Government was seen anxious to stamp its label on each policy and programme for rebuilding the country ravaged by the tsunami. The co-operation extended initially to the Government after the tsunami tragedy by the main opposition party appeared tenuous within days, because of this one-upmanship. In a counter move to show its importance, the UNP on January 28 unveiled a 15-point national agenda aimed at introducing an uninterrupted national policy for 15 years, for the development of the nation. "Before us is a nation that was battered by cut throat politics, war and finally the tsunami. The challenge before all of us is to rise from the ruins and rebuild the nation. Let's give a new birth to this nation by pursuing a single policy uninterrupted for 15 years comprising the 15 points which are acceptable to all," opposition and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe said at the unveiling of the National Agenda for a People's Convention. A characteristic feature of the country's political landscape is the condemnation by opposition leaders of past abhorrent practices, which they will embrace when these seem profitable to them or their party. It is not difficult to see why a southern consensus has not been forthcoming to the crisis caused by the N-E conflict, which itself is the outcome of shortsighted competitive party politics.

LTTE's strategy

To the LTTE any apparent weakness in the government administration in the North-East, including those emanating from its own obstructions is useful to support the demand for self-rule. This has been the case, ever since the struggle

for autonomy started. The Tigers have also been citing the weaknesses in the present administrative setup in the North-East for institutionalizing the ISGA considered by them as essential for carrying out speedily and efficiently the reconstruction work. In order to justify the case for permanent self-rule, the claim of discrimination against the North-East province is also sustained. The blunders of past governments that led to the present crisis are also given life to sustain the momentum of the struggle for self-rule.

The LTTE and its proxy the TNA have refused to join any committee set up at the national level to deal with the tsunami problems, as they do not want to give any recognition to the 'one-state' concept. There have been some valid criticisms on the over-centralised approach to rebuilding the country but this is not the reason for the TNA boycotting the joint meetings of all parties convened by the President. In fact, the TNA parliamentarians have not attended any meeting convened by the government in the aftermath of the tsunami opting to condemn the government from outside.

On February 2, Tamil National Alliance boycotted a meeting with the Governor of the Northeast Province, Tyronne Fernando, at the Vavuniya district secretariat in protest against what they described as, "gross discrimination by the Sri Lankan state in delivering Tsunami aid to Tamil and Muslim areas affected by the disaster". The meeting was mostly to provide the Governor information about the current state of post tsunami rehabilitation work in the north. The TNA members could have used the occasion to draw attention to the various shortcomings and press for immediate remedial actions. But this would have been at odds with the LTTE's agenda.

Again on February 7, the TNA boycotted the meeting convened by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to discuss reconstruction of houses in the tsunami affected areas in the Batticaloa district. The TNA parliamentarian from the area, Joseph Prarajasingham said that he was invited to participate in that meeting but he decided not to attend the meeting as the "TNA firmly believes that a separate structure should be established

to handle relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the North-east. Until progress is made in establishing this mechanism, there is little use in TNA participating in any meetings with Ms Kumaratunga." This challenging and confrontational stance shows the relative importance the Tamil representatives are giving to address the urgent needs of the suffering people in the North-East at this most difficult time.

Instead of dealing directly with the Government, the TNA has on every available opportunity rushed to foreign envoys and visiting ministers to complain about their dissatisfaction and even to submit useful suggestions. For example, at the meeting on February 3 with the visiting Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, Bernard Bot the TNA delegation emphasized the importance of creating a mechanism in the Northeast, represented by the Government, the LTTE, and other stakeholders such as the Muslims the Sinhalese and other institutions to handle the post tsunami related activities in the Northeast. They also pointed out that the centralization of such activities was doomed to result in failure, and that this was evident from the fact that almost six weeks after the tsunami disaster, hardly any progress had been achieved in the restoration of the lives of the affected people. The fact is at the time these matters were raised with the Foreign Minister, discussions between the LTTE and the Government peace secretariats on setting up such a mechanism was already underway for a number days, though no agreed mechanism has been found.

The Government's action plan for rebuilding the nation has also been prepared without LTTE's inputs and not surprisingly the latter has rejected it as irrelevant to the North-East. Government has said it will implement the plan after taking into consideration the valuable suggestions and inputs of all stakeholders. In the interest of the people in the North-East affected by the tsunami, the Tamil leaders should put forward their proposals to the Government and press for immediate implementation.. The negative approach to the tsunami problem will only prolong the suffering of the hapless people. It is unfair to exploit their suffering in the power struggle at the present time. □



IOM International Organization for Migration

Are you an asylum seeker or refugee who is considering returning home?
Are you in the UK without legal documentation?
Have you overstayed your visa or have you been smuggled or trafficked into the UK?

If any of the above applies to you, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an independent organization working with migrants worldwide can help you return home.

IOM London can:

- help you get the travel documents you will need
- arrange and pay for the flight to your home country
- meet you at the airport and help you with departure and arrival formalities
- assist with domestic transportation to your final destination









If you are an asylum seeker, IOM London may be able to help you once you get back to your country of origin. This can cover vocational training courses, setting up a small business or access to education. Assistance is provided through IOM offices worldwide, and varies from country to country.

A lady who was assisted by IOM to start a small shop in Sri Lanka

IOM works in partnership with Choices, Options, NERS and Safe Haven Yorkshire, who offer local information, advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees who are considering return home or are exploring options to stay in the UK. This independent, confidential service can help you to make an informed decision whether to stay in the UK or return home.

For more information, please contact IOM free on 0800 783 2332. All enquiries will be treated confidentially and anonymously.

IOM London www.iomlondon.org
Freephone: 0800 783 2332
e-mail: varrp@iomlondon.org

Choices at Refugee Action www.refugee-action.org.uk
London: 0207 654 7700
Manchester: 0161 233 1216
Leeds: 0113 244 5345
Leicester: 0116 261 4846

North of England Refugee Service (NERS) www.refugee.org.uk
Tel: 0191 510 8685
e-mail: sunderland@refugee.org.uk

Options www.ymcaglasgow.org
Tel: 0141 557 2355
e-mail: options@ymcaglasgow.org

Safe Haven Yorkshire
Tel: 0114 256 1033

UN Report on 'Children and Armed Conflict'

Feb 17 - Identifying 54 'offending parties', including the LTTE, as being involved in use and abuse of child soldiers, a report on "Children and Armed Conflict" submitted to the United Nations Security Council by Secretary General Kofi Annan has recommended a sanction regime that includes international travel ban on leaders, exclusion from any future governance structures or amnesties and arms embargoes and military assistance bans and restrictions on the flow of financial resources.

The UN Security Council is expected to debate the report on February 23.

The report notes improvements in protecting children from war recruitment and abuse as important organizations have adopted many of the standards advocated and the estimated number of child soldiers has declined in the past 18 months to 300,000 from 380,000. It notes that the situation for children has notably improved in Afghanistan, Angola, the Balkans, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Timor Leste.

However the report has named the LTTE as one of the 54 offending parties involved in the forced recruitment of under age children and says situations of concern remain in Burundi, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

According to Kofi Annan's report, the major violations would be recruiting children as soldiers, abducting, maiming, or killing them, subjecting them to rape and other sexual violence and attacking schools and hospitals.

The latest UN report came a week amid allegations by the UNICEF that they had recruited at least 40 underage combatants since the island was battered by tsunamis in December last year.

International rights organisations have accused the Tigers of stepping up recruitment of child soldiers since entering into a truce with government forces in February 2002.

Saying that the LTTE had recruited more than 4,700 children, some as young as 11, since 2001, Kofi Annan in his report said, "The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) has often carried out recruitment by force, abducting children while on their way to school or during religious festivities, and beating families and teachers who resisted the seizure of the children." The report said that during 2004 alone, more than 1,000 cases of new recruitment and re-recruitment were reported to UNICEF, a high percentage of them girls. Out of the 4,700 cases of child recruitment since April 2001, more than 2,900 children have returned or been released to their families, including about 1,230 children who were formally released, the report said.

Over 1,660 children went home following fighting in eastern Sri Lanka in April 2004, and the fall of a breakaway faction of the LTTE. In addition, at least 550 children have deserted from the LTTE during this period.

Recruitment of child soldiers is now categorized as a war crime. Despite this the LTTE has brazenly violated not only international law but even the UN agreements signed with Mr. Olaru Otunnu not to recruit children under the age of 18. The LTTE has argued that the children have joined voluntarily. Mr. Annan disagrees with this contention. He told New York reporters: "The LTTE has often carried out recruitment by force, abducting children while on their way to school or during religious festivities, and beating families and teachers who resisted the seizure of the children."

In his report the Secretary General has submitted an action plan to the United Nations Security Council received for the systematic monitoring and reporting of child abuse in situations of armed conflict (CAAC), or in "situations of concern," with a view to triggering a strong international crackdown on offenders.

The UN report states "An international compliance regime would list all offending parties, whether from the gov-

ernment or rebel side, in all situations of concern, whether or not those situations are on the agenda of the Security Council."

Kofi Annan said that he was recommending to UN Security Council to take "targeted and concrete measures where insufficient or no progress has been made" by parties named in his report. The report recommended, "For widespread and unacceptable patterns of violation, the Security Council should take such measures as imposing travel restrictions on leaders, excluding them from future governance structures or amnesties, arms embargoes and military assistance bans and restrictions on the flow of financial resources."

Other "destinations for action" would be the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights, the International Criminal Court, regional organizations and, as the first line of response, the national governments within whose borders the children are endangered, the report says.

Olara Otunnu, Annan's special envoy for children in armed conflict, said the report marked a milestone for children in combat zones as it signaled the United Nations was finally getting serious about ensuring their protection.

The issue has been on the council agenda since 1998, but "atrocities against children and impunity for violators continue largely unabated on the ground," Otunnu said. There are about 300,000 child soldiers around the world today, compared to 380,000 a year and a half ago, he estimated.

Otunnu's office was created as a result of a landmark 1996 report by Graca Machel of Mozambique, now the wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela, who detailed the recruitment and exploitation of children in war zones. But UNICEF has reported cases of those freed being targeted for re-recruitment by the Tigers.

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan of the BBC Tamil Service spoke to Olara Otunnu, UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, on the implications of the recommendation.

Otunnu said that the Tamil Tigers should stop abducting and recruiting child soldiers, immediately come up with an action plan for rehabilitating the child soldiers recruited by them and discuss it

with the UNICEF representative in Sri Lanka. Otunnu said it was up to the UN Security Council to decide on Annan's recommendations of targeted measures, including sanctions, against Tamil Tigers and other organisations in the list. He said this was the second time the Tamil Tigers had figured in the UN list. The UN was concerned that the practice of recruiting has continued despite the ceasefire and despite the Tamil Tigers signing an agreement with the UNICEF in July 2003 to rehabilitate child soldiers.

LTTE rejects UN charges

Feb 18 - The LTTE said a United Nations report saying that the guerrilla movement had recruited more than 4,700 children since 2001 was false.

"We totally reject the accusations levelled against us about recruiting children for war," the LTTE political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan said on the Tamilnitharsanam.com website.

Mr. Thamilselvan said the UN should send a representative to discuss the issue with the LTTE.

"We believe the United Nations would study them (the allegations) and take a fair decision. We are prepared to join and work with any organisation that is acting in a practical manner for the welfare of our children," he said.

Mr. Thamilselvan said if children volunteered for enlistment were underage, they were returned to their parents. "As far as we are concerned, those coming forward to join our ranks, if they are found to be children, are sent back to their parents," he said. His remarks came ahead of a debate next Wednesday in the UN Security Council on Secretary General Kofi Annan's report on children. The LTTE is included in a list of groups that could face sanctions, including a travel ban.

The Tigers have said they have set up a system to verify ages of combatants and release anyone underage.

UNICEF spokesman Geoffrey Keele, said the Tigers have not yet responded to their charge that at least 40 child soldiers were recruited after tsunamis devastated Sri Lanka's coastlines and killed nearly 31,000 people on December 26.

"We're still awaiting a response from the Tigers", Mr. Keele said. "We haven't had any feedback from them yet." □

Why Sri Lanka is special to me

Shane Warne

An Australian cricket star appeals for help in the rebuilding of a country devastated by the tsunami

STANDING in front of the famous old fort at Galle this week, I looked down on to what I remember as one of the most picturesque cricket grounds in the world. I saw a stadium in ruins, an outfield buried underneath rubbish and rubble. The experience will go down as one of the saddest and strangest in my life.

It was here - almost to the exact spot - where I stood last March when the Australia team gathered to sing our team song having won the Test series. For me it was an extra special occasion because I had just taken my 500th wicket. Everything seems great on nights like that. To think what lay ahead.

Sri Lanka has always been a wonderful place to tour. The Test here in 1992 is still my favourite because it was the first time I felt I contributed to the Australia team. That is why I decided I wanted to help as soon as the scale of the tsunami tragedy registered.

The Boxing Day Test match in Melbourne is a highlight of the sporting year back home and there is always a special feeling to be involved. But all of us in the Australia dressing-room felt deflated having seen the pictures in the press and on the television.

I spoke to Muttiah Muralitharan, who was lucky not to be caught up in the disaster himself. We have always been mates through the spinners' union. He thought that simply coming over to meet people would help a lot. In the circumstances, that seemed the least I could do and we started to firm things up during the fundraising game in Melbourne.

The idea of visiting Galle and Colombo has been to put smiles back on a few faces. I wanted to help the children in particular to move on and look forward. I have helped to distribute things like chocolates and biscuits and cricket sets, but the aim has gone deeper than that. I have tried to give the kids hope

that better times lie ahead.

One village near Galle I visited was reduced from 400 houses to just ten. I met tiny children who have lost both parents, all their clothes and toys, but are battling on. They are the real champions of the world. To hear them laugh when we gave out books and crayoning sets, and to be so polite, has been humbling.

I never imagined anything so devastating could happen in an age when technology is so advanced. I suppose I always associated the loss of lives on this scale with the great plagues and the Middle Ages rather than the 21st century. It has been weird to stand where the tsunami hit and imagine the wave coming in at 500 kilometres an hour.

The determination and resilience of people has been inspirational. As a parent, I still struggle to get my head around the tales of mothers and fathers having to let go of the arms of a child to try to save the life of another. I don't know if I could leave two of mine, knowing they would be swept away, to make sure the third survived.

I wanted to visit the hospital in Galle to say "well done" to the doctors and nurses who have worked tirelessly in all this. I came out in conjunction with some surgeons from Melbourne, including the man who operated on my shoulder. They have brought equipment as a donation. I hope the visit will act as a stimulus to raise funds through friends of the Shane Warne Foundation, which was set up initially to help children in need in Australia. We are joining forces with City of Melbourne to try to rebuild the children's library and restore the Galle ground to its former glory. Any help will be appreciated greatly.

[There will be more information on how you can help on the website of the Shane Warne Foundation at www.tswf.com.au (Times on Line, 11 Feb 2005)]

Canadian PM urged to act on child soldier use

Toronto, February 9, 2005 - Prime Minister Paul Martin should publicly call on the Tamil Tigers to end all recruitment of children in Sri Lanka and to release the children currently in their ranks, former Canadian foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy and Human Rights Watch urged in a letter made public today. "Canada provided refuge to thousands of Tamils fleeing human rights abuses by the Sri Lankan government during the war," said Jo Becker, children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch. "It should also address the Tigers' on-going recruitment and use of Tamil children as soldiers."

In addition to Dr. Axworthy, who serves on the international board of directors for Human Rights Watch, other signers of the letter included Jasmine Herlt, director of the Human Rights Watch Toronto Committee, and Noah Novogrodsky, advocacy co-chair of the Toronto Committee and the director of the International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto Law School. The full text of the letter dated 7 February to the Canadian Prime Minister is as follows:

"We are writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch regarding the Canadian government's response to the recruitment of children by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. We appreciate the opportunity to share information on this important subject, and respectfully request a meeting with your office to discuss the recommendations outlined below.

Human Rights Watch welcomed your public statement prior to your recent visit to Sri Lanka that LTTE recruitment of children "is the kind of thing which requires universal condemnation" and your commitment to raise the issue during your meetings with the Tamil National Alliance. We recognize that combating the use of children as soldiers has long been a priority for the government of Canada, as illustrated by its early ratification of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and its leading role in drafting the statute of the International Criminal Court, which

identifies the recruitment and use of children under the age of fifteen as a war crime.

We also note that through CIDA, Canada has provided financial resources for work relating to children affected by Sri Lanka's conflict, including \$2.2 million to support UNICEF's programming related to children affected by armed conflict, including the release and reintegration of child soldiers, and \$4 million to support local non-governmental organizations working to protect and promote the rights of children in vulnerable circumstances.

We believe that as home to the largest Sri Lankan Tamil population in the world outside of Sri Lanka itself, Canada can play a unique and influential role in addressing the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Sri Lanka.

The LTTE's practice of recruiting and using children, including children under the age of fifteen, has been extensively documented. Human Rights Watch conducted an independent investigation of LTTE recruitment and use of children in August of 2004. Our November 2004 report, *Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka*, which we enclose, drew on the accounts of dozens of former child soldiers and described how the LTTE uses intimidation and threats to pressure Tamil families in the North and East to provide their sons and daughters for military service. When families refuse, the LTTE may abduct children from their homes at night or forcibly recruit them while they walk to school.

Prior to the ceasefire, children were routinely used in combat. Studies conducted during the mid-1990's found that 40-60 percent of LTTE soldiers who died in battle were children under the age of eighteen. More recently, an unknown number of children died in conflict in April 2004, when a split in the LTTE resulted in short but fierce fighting between the main "Vanni" LTTE faction and a breakaway-group led by the LTTE's eastern commander.

Human Rights Watch's findings are supported by information collected by the United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF) which maintains an extensive database devoted to child recruitment by the LTTE, and has documented approximately 3,600 cases of LTTE child recruitment from the time the ceasefire took effect in February 2002 through December 31, 2004. Of the child recruitment cases documented by UNICEF in the past three years, 937 involve children under the age of fifteen.

The Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM), the international body led by the Norwegian government to monitor the ceasefire, also documents cases of child recruitment. Between February 1, 2002 and November 30, 2004, the SLMM received 1851 complaints of child recruitment by the LTTE. It ruled 1490 of these complaints as violations of the ceasefire.

Regrettably, the devastating December 26 tsunami has not halted the LTTE's recruitment of children. As of January 26, UNICEF had registered over forty cases of child recruitment by the LTTE since the disaster occurred, including several cases of child recruitment from relief camps established for tsunami survivors. The true number of children recruited to date is probably higher. Local aid workers say that, for now, the presence of international workers may be discouraging child recruitment by the Tamil Tigers. But they worry about an increase in child recruitment once the foreign workers leave.

As you know, Canada's large Tamil population has been a source of both financial and political support for the LTTE, often funneled through "charitable" organizations. The extent of such financial support is extremely difficult to document, with estimates ranging from \$1 million to \$22 million per year. Irrespective of the exact amount, the significant fundraising that takes place within Canada's Tamil community facilitates the LTTE's continued recruitment and use of child soldiers.

One of the major fundraising organizations linked to the LTTE is the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), which functionally serves as the humanitarian arm of the LTTE and is currently seeking charitable status in Canada. During Human Rights Watch's investigation, reliable local sources raised concerns about the close link between the TRO and LTTE, reporting for example, that TRO representatives are often former LTTE soldiers. Credible sources also report that since the tsunami, the TRO, in

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collaboration with the LTTE, has sought to control relief efforts in the East and relocate displaced persons camps to LTTE-controlled areas, in order to facilitate LTTE monitoring and control of vulnerable populations, as well as recruitment.

Our country's relationship with Sri Lanka and large Tamil population provides Canada with a unique opportunity to address the LTTE's continuing recruitment of children. Specifically, we urge you to take the following actions:

1) Issue a public statement calling on the LTTE to end all recruitment and use of children as soldiers and to release all children currently in its ranks. Also call

on the LTTE and its humanitarian arm, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), to end efforts to control all relief efforts, camps and orphanages in Tamil areas, and to allow unhindered operation and access by impartial local and international organizations.

2) Use the occasion of the upcoming United Nations Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict (currently scheduled for February 23) to condemn the LTTE's recruitment of children and demand the release of children in its ranks.

3) Through CIDA-supported projects for vulnerable children, strengthen recruitment prevention and child protection initiatives in areas that

are vulnerable to LTTE recruitment efforts and other abuses, including tsunami-affected areas, relief camps and orphanages.

4) Urge the government of Sri Lanka to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and offer technical assistance in drafting national implementing legislation.

5) Urge both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to ensure basic human rights protections as a core component of any future peace process.

We believe that these actions could have a positive impact on the LTTE's practices and help bring an end to the LTTE's recruitment of children.

Thank you for your consideration."

Two helicopters with tsunami supplies: Jan 22 - Sri Lanka's air force has detained two unassembled helicopters that arrived with tsunami aid supplies, saying they presented a potential threat to national security.

Investigators said that inquiries were underway to find out who had sent the aircraft parts. "We are still checking from what country they came and for what purpose," he said. Until then, they will be held," they said.

Normally the Defense Ministry and Civil Aviation Authority must provide clearance for all military equipment brought into the country.

JVP not for selling water: Jan 24 - The JVP group of parliamentarians, in a press release said they disassociated themselves from any effort by the government to sell water resources and attaching a commercial value to water, as recently stated in certain media reports.

The UPFA was formed on a historic agreement between the SLFP and the JVP reached to reverse the privatization of national assets policy of the previous UNF government and a number of other political parties agreed to the common policy of the UPFA. In its manifesto published before the 2004 general election it was emphasized the UPFA would not allow the privatization of national resources like water to profit certain private bodies, the press release stated.

"Therefore, no one should entertain any fear that the UPFA government has embarked on a policy of privatization of the water resources though we believe the sustained effort to privatize national resources including water has not abated in certain quarters. Still there is no room within the UPFA government to embark on such a policy especially in view of the fact the JVP will within and outside the government work to prevent that policy being implemented. However, at a recent meeting of the Cabinet a decision to appoint a committee to formulate a national policy on water and that decision was misrepresented as an effort to privatize water," the press release said.

NGOs threatening national security Jan 24 - The Patriotic National Movement, in a press statement warned the authorities to be wary of certain NGOs backed by some foreign bodies which were, under the cover of providing humanitarian assistance to tsunami affected areas of the country, importing helicopters, vehicles, heavy machinery and other material to be handed over to LTTE.

The LTTE was known to have possessed a light aircraft even before the tsunami disaster and now the intelligence sources have said the organization possesses two light aircraft. How the LTTE procured these aircraft and why a particular NGO imported two

NEWS TRACK

helicopters has to be viewed as very serious matters affecting the national security of the country and authorities should without taking heed of the liberal views

in some quarters should take stringent measures to stem the tide of aid flow into the LTTE and prevent the danger of the organization making use of the tsunami to pose a stronger threat to national security, the statement said.

UNHCR seeks review of buffer zone plan: Jan 24 - The UN's main refugee agency, UNHCR, called on the government to rethink plans to create a coastal buffer zone, arguing it would swell the ranks of the hundreds of thousands already displaced by last month's tsunami.

The government, in a bid to save lives and property should another tsunami strike our shores, wants no destroyed buildings rebuilt within 100 metres (yards) of the beach and wants those that were partially damaged to be razed. "We believe this will create significant further displacement," UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) External Relations Officer Robyn Groves said. "We are concerned that the principles of voluntary resettlement should be adhered to," she said, adding that the UNHCR had submitted its concerns to the government and was now awaiting a reply.

"We have also called for clarity and transparency in the proposal. Let's see what response we get," Ms. Groves said.

The plan has been widely condemned by fishermen in particular but also by aid agencies, the hotel sector and some government ministers.

According to Coast Conservation Director R.A. Samaranayake, the government wants the buffer zone in north-eastern areas controlled by the LTTE to be 200 metres wide — double that of the other areas, but the LTTE has stated that it would impose a 330 meter ban on new buildings along the coastal areas under its control.

Youth shot, injured in Colombo: Jan 24 - A Tamil youth identified as Jegadeeshwaran aged 32 was been shot and injured near 33rd Lane in Wellawatte, Colombo 6 on 24 January by unknown gunmen, according to police sources who alleged that the LTTE's 'pistol gang' as being responsible for the shooting. According to hospital sources Jegan received two gunshot injuries in his right chest and was undergoing medical treatment in the Intensive Care Unit.

Day of Mourning observed: Jan 26 - Amid cries among those attending the various ceremonies, a highly emotional day of mourning was observed throughout the Northeast Wednesday on the 31st anniversary day of the Tsunami that devastated the North-east on 26th of December. A wall-clock, which stopped at 8.50

a.m. on December 26 at Mullaitivu Kallapaddu Maha Vidiyalayam following the Tsunami disaster was again made to tick into operation at 8.50 a.m. symbolizing the return of life.

Special ceremonial gatherings, meetings and events were held at several locations in the Northeast. Shops were closed and black flags were seen in houses and buildings throughout Northeast. Special ceremonial gatherings, meetings and events were held at several locations in the Northeast.

Tsunami relief fund distribution to be monitored: Jan 27 - PAFREL, a non-governmental organization specialised in monitoring elections is to deploy five thousand volunteers to monitor the distribution of relief supply and foreign aid to Tsunami affected districts in the island. The monitoring will commence on February 1, said PAFREL Chairman Mr.Kingsely Rodrigo at a press briefing held in Colombo.

Mr Rodrigo added that monitoring would continue for six months. PAFREL has decided to monitor the aid and relief distribution following several complaints that irregularities prevail in various schemes implemented by NGOs, civil groups and government agencies.

Meanwhile, Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) is to launch a special programme to monitor the flow of foreign aid into the country following Tsunami disaster, which left about thirty thousand dead, and several thousands rendered homeless and now are sheltered in welfare centres.

HRC to monitor post-tsunami Rights violations: Jan 27 - The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) has established Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit (DRMU) to ensure human rights protection during the post-tsunami reconstruction phase with Mr.Lionel Fernando as its chairman.

Mr Fernando, a veteran public servant, served in past in various top level capacities as Government Agent of Jaffna, Governor of the North East provincial Council, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, Secretary of the Ministry for Media, Tourism and Aviation, Secretary to the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador in the Netherlands. and High Commissioner in Malaysia

Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy, HRCSL Chairperson, said that Mr.Lionel Fernando would work with Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) project of the HRCSL and the Investigation, Inquiries Division of the HRCSL in ensuring protection of human rights.

Opposition Leader leaves for Norway: Jan 29 - Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the opposition and the United National Party (UNP) left for Norway accompanied by Mr.Milinda Morogoda and Mr.T.Maheswaran, former ministers in the then United National Front (UNF).

During his stay in Oslo, Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe is expected to hold talks with Norwegian Prime Minister and other European government leaders regarding rebuilding tsunami devastated Sri Lanka and the prospects of resuming peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE..

893 children lost both parents: Feb 1 - The Children's Desk of the Centre for Operations said that 893 children had lost both parents in the tsunami disaster. Sources of the Children's Desk at the Centre for Operations said that 707 children in the North and East had lost both parents.

Giving a break down, sources of the Children's Desk said that there are 21 children in the Western Province and 165 children in the South who had lost both parents.

They pointed out that 2,089 children from the North and East had lost at least one parent in the disaster which occurred in December, 19 from the Western Province and 896 from the Southern Province had lost one parent to the tsunami waves which hit the coastal belt killing over 30,000 people.

The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), UNICEF, and the Probation and Child Care Department had formed a set of guidelines to protect the affected children.

Tsunami early-warning system from Japan: Feb 1 - The government of Japan, the largest donor country to Sri Lanka, has agreed to a request made by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to provide with the technical assistance to set up a tsunami early-warning system here as soon as possible. Visiting Senior Vice-

Minister Foreign Minister for Japan, Shuzen Tanigawa, revealed this at a press conference held at the Hilton Hotel on Tuesday at the end of his fact finding mission in Sri Lanka. "President Chandrika Kumaratunga has asked for Japanese assistance to set up a tsunami early-warning system. But it depends on the government of Sri Lanka's ability to absorb it," Minister Tanigawa said.

Expressing the Japan's willingness to provide maximum assistance to rebuild tsunami-hit Sri Lanka, he said that country should progress and turn this tragedy to build mutual confidence with the LTTE and to further promote the stalled peace process. **Over Rs. 400 m released to provide relief:** Feb 1 - The Centre for National Operations announced that a sum of Rs. 403 million has been so far disbursed to the District Secretaries of the North and East to provide relief assistance to people who were affected by the recent tsunami.

This money disbursed through Ministry of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation to all District Secretaries of the North East was to meet the funeral expenses of those killed in the devastation and to meet the immediate and short-term needs of the people who were displaced by the tsunami.

Further, dry foods, equipment needed for the welfare centres, beds, mattresses and kitchen utensils were also provided by these money allocated up to 25th of January, states the Government Information Department. The largest amount of Rs. 110 million was allocated to Ampara District. The other district Secretaries who were paid money were Jaffna Rs. 42 million. Kilinochchi Rs. 46 ml, Mullaitivu Rs. 45 ml, Trincomalee Rs. 65 ml and Batticaloa Rs. 95 ml.

In addition to these allocations all districts inclusive of North East which were affected by the tsunami have been issued with sufficient stock of dry rations and infant milk food. Accordingly the Director, Centre for National Operations Dr. Tara de Mel said that so far 6151 MT of rice 43700 MT of Milk Food and 2781 MT of Sugar have been distributed to all districts by the Government in addition to other essentials such as dhal, potatoes biscuits, bread, plastic utensils, etc.

Unemployment soars to 20%: Feb 1 - Sri Lanka's unemployment rate has risen to 20% due to 400,000 people losing their livelihood in the eastern, southern and western provinces of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster, the International Labour Organisation disclosed yesterday.

In a report the ILO said the rise from 9.2% to 20% in such a short period was one of the worst in history.

ILO said the worst affected areas were fisheries, hotels and tourism including eco-tourism, which was beginning to expand, in addition to the informal economy where unemployment has soared. These three sectors were flourishing in the coastal belt of Sri Lanka when the tsunami devastated them. The ILO warned that those rendered unemployed by the tsunami must be found jobs within two years to prevent further social crises and unrest

862 children orphaned in NE: Feb 1 - About 2862 children have been orphaned in the northeast province due to December 26 tsunami, states Ms N.R.Ranjini, Director, Provincial Department of Social Services and Child Care, in a report sent to the Chairman of the National Child Protection Authority. The number of children who lost both parents in Tsunami disaster is 737. Districtwise breakdown is: Batticaloa-406, Amparai-162, Mullaitivu-94, Jaffna- 39, Trincomalee-35 and Killinochchi-01

The number of children who lost either mother or father is 2125: Amparai-954, Batticaloa-699, Mullaitivu- 393, Jaffna- 47 and Trincomalee-32., according to the report.

LTTE releases teenage recruits: Feb 3 - The LTTE handed over 23 underage youths who had enlisted with the LTTE to the NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR) Chairperson Rev.Fr.Karunaratnam on 3 February, according to a report in the LTTE's Peace Secretariat website. The report said that the identification of underage youths was part of a continuing process in the initiative taken by the Special Committee appointed for this purpose by the LTTE's Political Division. Four youths were handed

over to their parents and NESOHR was trying to trace the parents of the other youth, the report said.

CNO terminates relief operations: Feb 4 - The operation of the Centre for National Operations (CNO) established by Sri Lanka President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunge following December 26 tsunami devastation has been terminated and its functions have been handed over to Line Ministries and provincial authorities, said Mr.Dhammika Hewapathirana, Manager of the CNO at a press briefing.

"We are not saying that the CNO is dissolved. CNO has completed its task and the provincial authorities will now take over and carry forward the rest of the work under a different name," said Mr.Hewapathirana.

Muslims protest: Feb 4 - Thousands of Muslims demonstrated in the main coastal towns of the Amparai against the Sri Lankan government for denying them Tsunami aid. Protestors poured out of Mosques in Sainthamaruthu, Maalikaikaddu, Ninthavur and Kalmunaikudi and Maruthamunai after Friday afternoon prayers, carrying placards and shouting slogans against the President Kumaratunga's government.

The demonstrations were organised by local mosque trustee boards. Muslims in densely populated towns along Sri Lanka's southeast coast suffered severely when the Tsunami hit.

LTTE official shot dead in Batticaloa: Feb 4 - An official of the LTTE was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Kiran, 28 kilometres north of Batticaloa. The slain official was identified as Mr. Sinnathurai Thevathas, 28, who was in charge of LTTE's Forest Conservation Division for Batticaloa. He was shot dead with a T-56 assault rifle while riding a motorbike with a colleague near Kiran Vishnu Temple, Police in Valaichenai said. His companion escaped unhurt. The assailants got away, Police said. They suspect that the assailants might have belonged to the LTTE's

breakaway Karuna faction.

LTTE cadre gunned down: Feb 4 - Unidentified gunmen suspected to be Karuna loyalists killed an LTTE cadre at Kiran in Batticaloa district, army sources said. The LTTE cadre identified as Viveshan was gunned down while riding a motorcycle, sources said adding that another man travelling with him escaped without injury.

Suicide attempt LTTE cadre: Feb 5 - A former member of the LTTE allegedly tried to kill himself after the group attempted to re-enlist him against his will, a military spokesman said.

Anthony Arulappan, 23, left the Liberation Tigers last year and was staying at his home in the eastern Batticaloa district when LTTE cadres arrived and took him away at gunpoint on 4 February, said Brig. Daya Ratnayake. "On the way he snatched a gun from one of the guards and shot himself," Ratnayake said. Most of the bullets hit him in the abdomen and lower parts of the body. He is being treated at the Batticaloa hospital, Ratnayake said.

Also in Batticaloa on 4 February, a Tiger cadre identified only as Kalaimaran shot and killed himself after he was denied permission to visit his ailing father, Ratnayake said. The LTTE has not made any mention of the incidents, and telephone messages left at the LTTE office in the northern town of Killinochchi remained unanswered as of Saturday, 5 February.

Colombo dragging feet on joint mechanism: Feb 5 - "The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) is still dragging its feet over the establishment of a joint mechanism to take forward the reconstruction and rehabilitation of tsunami destroyed Tamil coastal areas in the northeast province," said Mr S P Thamilchelvan, Political head of the LTTE addressing a press conference following his two hour- talks with Mr Hans Brattskar, Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka held on 5 February in Killinochchi.

Mr Hans Brattskar with acting Head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) arrived in Killinochchi by a Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter and discussions were held in Killinochchi Peace Secretariat mainly centring on forming a joint mechanism between the GOSL and LTTE.

Mr.Koushalyan, Batticaloa-Amparai district LTTE political head and Pulithevan of the LTTE Peace Secretariat also participated with Mr.Thamilchelvan in the discussion.

"GOSL is increasingly demonstrating its unwillingness to work with the LTTE in rebuilding the devastated areas. GOSL's proposals for a joint mechanism are, in our opinion, impractical and are not worthy of our consideration," Mr.Thamilchelvan said while speaking to journalists. "We have submitted several suggestions and proposals through Norwegian facilitators to the GOSL. We feel that GOSL is not sincere in creating a situation that would enable us to move forward," he said.

"We categorically deny all allegations and propaganda by the GOSL that we are recruiting forcibly children affected by tsunami," said Mr.Thamilchelvan.

"We have taken several steps to rehabilitate children affected by war and now by tsunami. GOSL which failed to provide even basic facilities to children orphaned by the war and natural disaster has no moral authority even to make such allegations," said Mr.Thamilchelvan.

Greek floating hospital in Trinco: Feb 5 - A Greek passenger ship converted into a floating hospital arrived in Trincomalee harbour on Saturday 5 February with a 70 member medical team. The ship will remain in the eastern port town till 31 March, said Mr.Efstathios Lozos, Ambassador of Greece to Sri Lanka, addressing journalists on board.

A Greek shipping firm, Majestic International Cruises Company, offered its one of its passenger vessels OCEAN MONARCH to the Government of Greece free of charge for the humanitarian mission to Sri Lanka, Ambassador Mr.Loços said. The ship left PIRUS Greek port city, a port in Greece about two weeks ago.

Ambassador Mr.Loços and Deputy Provincial Director of Health in the Provincial Ministry Dr.S.Abraham and Dr (Ms) P.K.Gnanagunalan, Medical Superintendent of the Trincomalee

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general hospital received the medical team at the Ashraff Jetty, sources said.

Mr. Lozos said the floating hospital will start its medical services within a week and they will collaborate with the Trincomalee general hospital. The floating hospital comprises an operating theatre, fully equipped laboratory, X-Ray unit, Radiology Unit, and a Pathological unit. It brought 750 tonnes of medicine and an ambulance. Greece Red Cross Society sent eleven-member team to serve during the stay in Trincomalee, sources said. The medical team includes Surgeon, Gynaecologist, Psychiatrist and Paediatrician.

Missing youth found dead: Feb 6 - Mr. Cumaraswamy Thirukumaran (26) of Puttur east in the Achchuveli police division reported missing since January 29 was found dead on Saturday 5 February and his body was recovered from a bush near Kottuthanai. Jaffna Police immediately commenced investigation to find how the youth met his death, sources said.

Achchuveli Police handed over the body to the mortuary of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital for post-mortem examination, sources said. Relatives later identified the body as of Mr. Thirukumaran. A bicycle was also recovered from the scene where the body was lying, police said.

TNA boycotts Tsunami meeting: Feb 7 - The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) boycotted a meeting convened by Sri Lanka's President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunge to discuss the question of Tsunami reconstruction, held today at the Presidential Secretariat.

TNA Parliamentarian, Joseph Prarajasingham said that a meeting to consider the question of reconstruction of houses in the Tsunami affected areas in the Batticaloa District, and that he was invited to participate in that meeting but he decided not to attend the meeting. "TNA firmly believes that a separate structure should be established to handle relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the North-east, and until progress is made in establishing this mechanism there is little use in TNA participating in any meetings with Ms Kumaratunge," Mr Prarajasingham added.

Study spotlights plight of Jaffna widows: Feb 7 - A study conducted by the Federation of NGOs revealed that 26,745 women have become widows due to the two decades of war and other reasons in Jaffna district, and the children growing up in widowed families suffer from severe malnutrition. These families continue to be economically backward, the study further said.

Only 15,700 widows, 59% of the total number, receive even the meagre allowance of Rs 250 or less a week from the state, the study found. 40% of the widows are below the age of 50, and most of them face difficulties in meeting the nutritional and the educational needs of their children.

Meanwhile, although many projects are implemented to improve the well being of the widows and their families by the International and local NGO's, there are criticisms from civil groups that as these projects are not satisfactorily carried through and have not yield satisfactorily results. Civil society groups also have criticised the Government of Sri Lanka not taking action to improve the economic well being of this group which needs urgent support.

Extortion despite ceasefire: Feb 6 - The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), said that despite the ceasefire, instances of extortion cases had been reported from the eastern border villages in the Polonnaruwa district. This was revealed during a fact-finding mission by SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem to Sungavil, Akbarpura, Palliyagodella and Alingipotana in the Polonnaruwa district recently.

Issuing a statement, the party expressed its doubt as to whether the LTTE or its breakaway group, led by Karuna, was responsible for these extortions. "Whoever it was, the fact remains that five villagers were kidnapped and later released for a ransom of Rs. 200,000 in mid January this year", it said.

People in these villages are severely affected by insecurity

and anxiety due to constant threats and violence. The statement also said that a caller on a cellular phone claiming to be Tiger leader Ravindran is reported to have told Adham Bawa, "You will leave the village for about two weeks; then we will carry out a full search and apprehend Karuna's men". However, Mr. Bawa had requested him to send an official letter to the village mosque. This was not complied with; instead Ravindran is reported to have threatened severe consequences if the villagers did not heed his request.

The villagers complained to the SLMC leader that they were not satisfied with the protection provided by the Police and that they were living in fear. They need Army protection instead and another SLMM office in Polonnaruwa to monitor cease-fire violations, the statement added.

EU to gift Rs 1700m to repair N/E roads

Feb 7 - The European Union is to gift Rs. 1700 million to repair rural roads in the North and East of Sri Lanka. This decision was taken at a special meeting of the Union which discussed the programme of financial aid to Sri Lanka, held at the Union Headquarters at Brussels, Belgium, recently.

As revealed by the Secretary to the Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, M.S. Jayasinghe, this is the first instalment of a total of Rs.12000 million that the European Union is contemplating to grant as aid to Sri Lanka, depending on the progress shown in the utilization of aid.

He said that rural roads of Grade "C" and "D" maintained by the North East Provincial Council, extending to 550 kilometres will be repaired using this sum of aid.

Secretary Jayasinghe was optimistic that the social, economic and transport conditions of the people of North and East would improve immensely by properly maintaining these roads which had been neglected over several years.

He further stated that these are outright gifts by the European Union not subject to any interest or repayment, and that their two previous gifts, one of Rs.2000 million and another of Rs. 800 million were utilized by his Ministry to resettle refugees displaced by the North East War. Each of the resettled families under this programme was given Rs. 25000 in cash as resettlement expenses, he reminded.

Sri Lanka is likely to get further assistance by the European Union, out of a total of Rs. 35000 million the Union has allocated to help the Tsunami assailed countries including Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, he added.

Two Tiger hitmen arrested: Feb 7 - Two LTTE cadres, believed to be members of a hit squad, had been arrested, at a joint police-army check point at Urani, Batticaloa, recently. "Two motorbike riding armed cadres of the Wannu faction were arrested on 3 February around midnight," a military official said. They had been identified as Sellathambi Navaseelan (24) of Kiran and Udayan Uruthiran (21) of Kokkadicholai. They had one pistol, two magazines, fifteen rounds of 9 mm ammunition and one cyanide capsule, he said.

Three housing schemes for Batticaloa: Feb 8 - President Chandrika Kumaratunga has directed the housing authority officials to commence construction activities of three projects special housing projects with all urban amenities before the 20th of this month in the Batticaloa district.

The President chaired a special discussion on new housing schemes for the people displaced by tsunami disaster in the Batticaloa district. The President briefed the Ministers, Parliamentarians and officials of the District on three special housing projects with all urban amenities.

The National Housing Authority (NHDA) has already identified the lands required for the construction of all such resettlement schemes in the North-East provinces.

Urban Development Minister Dinesh Gunawardane, Labour Minister Athauda Seneviratne, Batticaloa District Rehabilitation Minister Risad Badiudeen, Rehabilitation Deputy Minister D. M. Dassanayake, Hon. Basheer Segudawood, M. P., Secretary to the President W. J. S. Karunaratne, Urban Development Ministry

Secretary T. Hewage, Chief Secretary of the NEPC S. Rangarajah, Batticaloa Government Agent S. Shanmugam and NHDA Chairman M. N. Junaid also participated in the discussion.

A group of entrepreneurs of the private sector who have pledged to construct houses for the displaced also called upon the President at the President's House this evening. The officials of the Housing Authority made them aware of the identified lands for the construction of the houses undertaken by them. Several foreign institutions have also agreed to sponsor selected villages of those displaced by the tsunami.

Govt to monitor foreign tsunami aid: Feb 9 - The Government has asked local and international aid agencies to disclose their tsunami-relief operations and sources of funding, saying that the information was essential to reduce waste. The Finance Ministry in a statement said it was asking all local and foreign non-governmental organisations working on the island to register with the state and give audited financial statements. It said all such organisations should give details of their tsunami relief and reconstruction plans, sources of funding, annual report and audited accounts and financial statements to the Sri Lankan government.

The ministry did not set a deadline, but said a detailed announcement on the registration procedures would be made shortly. It said the measure was taken in the interest of "transparency and adherence to best practices" and ensure efficient coordination of relief.

The move came two days after the World Bank warned that any move to control foreign money flows to the island would be counter-productive, but said coordination was necessary to ensure that relief was sent to all those in need. "This is an extraordinary situation and any attempt to control foreign money will mean you will not get a cent," World Bank country director Peter Harrold told reporters adding, "But we agree that the work must fit into a broader plan."

Commission to probe tsunami: Feb 9 - Sri Lanka President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has appointed Retired Judge of the Supreme Court H. S. Yapa as the Chairman of the Tsunami Commission and retired Judge of the Court of Appeal P. H. Kulatilake has been appointed as a member of this Commission.

The President appointed the Commission of Inquiry to find out whether any advance warning was received by any relevant State institutions in Sri Lanka relating to the earthquake that originated in the Indian Ocean off Northern Sumatra on December 26th last year and whether there would have been a possible threat of tsunami to any part of Sri Lanka. The Commission will also inquire into whether any State institutions have failed to give advance warning to the people. President directed that the report of this Commission be submitted within three months.

Tsunami Select Committee: Feb 10 - An all-party parliamentary select committee with an Opposition MP as chairman was appointed by the Speaker to recommend ways of minimizing damage from natural disasters similar to the devastation of 26 December last year.

Speaker W.J.M. Lokubandara announced the names of the twenty-one-member body with chief opposition whip Mahinda Samarasinghe as chairman.

The committee has been vested with powers to summon any person before it or obtain the advice of experts to facilitate its investigations. It has also been requested to inquire whether there was any lack of preparedness by the authorities to meet an emergency of the magnitude such as when the tsunami struck the coastal belt.

The tsunami select committee appointed in response to a request made by eight parliamentarians representing all parties in the House is expected to regularly submit interim reports on its findings.

The committee comprises Lakshman Kadirgamar, Tissa Vitharana, Jeyeraj Fernandopulle, Dinesh Gunawardena, Mangala Samaraweera, Maithripala Sirisena, Bimal Ratnayake, Vajira Abeywardena, John Amaratunga, D.E.W. Gunasekera, Ferial Ashraff, Douglas Devananda, Sajith Premadasa, Sagala Ratnayake, Mohommed Mustapha, Ven. Athuraliya Ratana Thera, R. Sambanthan, M.K. Sivajilingam, N. Raviraj and Rauf Hakeem.

Details of Jaffna tsunami damage: Feb 11 - Latest report released by the government's Jaffna Secretariat reveals that 47195 people from 12669 families were either displaced or severely affected economically by the tsunami waves in Jaffna peninsula. Out of these 9663 people from 2660 families still continue to be in refugee camps. A further 30393 persons belonging to 7934 families are staying with friends and relations, the report said.

Statistics in the report also revealed that 7739 persons belonging to 2075 families have been affected economically though they have not displaced.

Further in the 31 Grama Sevaka divisions of Point Pedro and Maruthankerny 6680 houses have been completely destroyed. In Point Pedro 1114 houses have been partially damaged, the report said. 14 schools have been either partially or completely damaged for an estimated loss of 96.1 million rupees.

Until January 31st 1256 people have lost their lives and 1240 people have been listed as missing. 1647 injured had sought treatment for injuries. Only 355 families of the tsunami deceased persons had received payments in part or full for the funeral expenses.

Along the coast under the control of the Sri Lankan forces from Thondamanaru to Kudaththanai in the Vadamardchy east and on the coast under the control of LTTE the losses to the fishing vessels, nets and other tools of trade have been estimated to be 994.24 million rupees.

Duty on Tsunami relief supplies: Feb 12 - Government of Sri Lanka has imposed customs duty at current commercial rates on donated relief supplies including water purification tablets arriving in Colombo addressed to Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO). Only

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"The Ministry of Finance and Planning released instructions to the Director of General Customs claiming disaster management has moved to the reconstruction phase and therefore regulation on importation of items should return to normal procedure under the relevant tax laws," a report posted at the website run by the TRO said. Director of TRO, Mr Reggie, has informed TRO offices in other countries, and expatriate Tamil well-wishers to withhold shipments until the tax issue is resolved..

Grenade attack on LTTE political office: Feb 12 - Two civilians and an LTTE political worker were wounded when unidentified persons lobbed a grenade at the LTTE political office in Mannar town t around 7.45 PM on 12 February. Mannar hospital sources said one civilian identified as M. Callister (32) who was admitted at the Mannar Hospital succumbed to wounds.

The office is located in the town's high security zone. Crowds gathered at the scene upon hearing the explosion. The attackers got away, Police said. An SLMM official, TNA MP for Vanni district Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan and catholic fathers visited the scene. Hospital sources added that there were two other civilians, aged 25 and 40, being treated at the Hospital for injuries.

President challenges JVP to leave: Feb 13 - Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga has warned her main coalition partner that it could leave her government if it continued to obstruct her politically. In a hard hitting speech at the opening of a Multi Purpose Co-operative Society in Attanagalla, her home electorate in Sri Lanka's western province, she warned the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP): "If they want to leave, let them leave. I cannot rule like this. They threaten to leave the government even over paltry issues. They are more interested in getting rid of me than Pirapaharan". "When I try to work on a solution (to the ethnic conflict), they say no. no. They say this word is wrong. That letter is not right. They tell us to add this word or add that letter. It is farcical," she said. She lambasted "some coalition partners" in her government for obstructing her efforts to find a political settlement to the island's ethnic conflict

With thirty nine MPs, the JVP holds the key to her coalition government's survival in power. If the JVP leaves the government, Kumaratunga has to either form a national government with the opposition, or run a shaky minority government or go for fresh elections.

Indian power plant for Sri Lanka: Feb 16 - India's state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) announced recently that it is considering setting up a power plant in Sri Lanka. "We are looking at setting up a 300 MW power plant in Sri Lanka. We have already submitted a proposal to the Sri Lankan government with regard to this," stated C.P. Jain, Chairman and Managing Director of NTPC, according to the Sri Lanka Board of Investment.

The proposed project, which would be implemented in a joint venture with Bharat Heavy Electricals and Ceylon Electricity Board, is estimated to cost around Rs.15 billion. The plant is expected to be run on either coal or gas. "We are looking at both the fuel options but no decision has yet been taken," Jain said. "The project would be run on Built-Own-Operate basis," he further added.

Incorporated in 1975, NTPC is the largest thermal power generating company in India. Within a span of 30 years, NTPC has emerged as a truly national power company, with power generating facilities in all the major regions of the country. According to statistics, it is the 6th largest in terms of thermal power generation and the second most efficient in terms of capacity utilisation amongst the thermal utilities in the world. NTPC's core business is engineering, construction and operation of power generating plants and also providing consultancy to power utilities in India and abroad. The plant is part of the power giant's initiative to become a global company. The generating company has an installed capacity of about 21,000 MW and wants to add another 20,000 MW by the year 2012

Another LTTE cadre killed: Feb 16 - Suspected Karuna faction gunmen shot and killed a top Wannu LTTE intelligence wing cadre identified as Tambunathan Sudeekaran at Batticaloa, on 14 February according to intelligence sources.

The Wannu LTTE cadre, who was travelling on a motor cycle had been followed by his assailants at Kommathurai near Batticaloa before he was shot, sources said. They also said that Tambunathan was accompanied by another LTTE Wannu cadre but his whereabouts or what happened to him was not known.

Clinton and Bush to visit Sri Lanka: Feb 17 - Former U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush will visit Sri Lanka's tsunami-hit southern coast and lead a fund-raising campaign for the victims, the U.S. Embassy said.

The two former presidents will meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga when they arrive on Sunday. Clinton and Bush will visit the USAID-sponsored debris clearing project Monday in the southern Matara district, 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of the capital Colombo, before leaving for the Maldives, the embassy said.

The United States has played a leading role in helping Sri Lanka's tsunami victims by providing money, food donations and deploying U.S. Marines to clear debris.

At least 31,000 Sri Lankans were killed by the Dec. 26 Indian Ocean tsunami, which swept across 11 nations in Asia and Africa. Nearly a million people on the island were made homeless by the disaster.

Non-Tamil students driven out: Feb 18 - Tough ragging by some Tamil students has caused some 10 Sinhala and Muslim medical students at the University of Jaffna, to give up their studies, Jafna according to a news report from Colombo.

It is reported that the University Grants Commission had selected about 10 students to join the Jaffna University's faculty of medicine, for the academic year. The Grants Commission had claimed that it had taken this decision following the ceasefire accord. It added that the affected students had said they were unable to continue studies and wished to withdraw due to the tough ragging as never before, deliberately carried out on them. They said that the violence, the so-called ragging, was a well planned move to drive out non-Tamil students from the Jaffna University.

Students, who were attacked severely by a group have said that an impartial and fair inquiry into the attack should be carried out and justice meted out to them. Currently, the students are endeavouring to raise the issue with the President and top government officials concerned.

Senior Police Officer indicted: Feb 18 - The Attorney General has indicted controversial Police Superintendent Kulasiri Udugampola on 19 charges connected to the questionable police raid on the military safe house at Millennium City in Athurugiriya off Colombo. The raid, in the course of which Senior Army officials and some from the military intelligence were taken into custody and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, exposed the activities and personnel involved the Deep Penetration Unit operated by the Military Intelligence. A Commission headed by a Judge later concluded that the raid general election and the resulting publicity that exposed military intelligence as a "treacherous act".

In the indictment filed before the High Court SP Udugampola is accused of violating the Official Secrets Act and the wrongful confinement and filing a false case against Senior Army officials including former Army Commander Lionel Balagalle.

According to the indictment SP Udugampola had arrested Army personnel on January 2, 2002 despite their claim that they were performing army duties with the approval of the Army Commander. The accused had later brought these army officials including some senior Army Officials to the Narahenpita Military Police station.

At the time of committing the alleged offences, Udugampola

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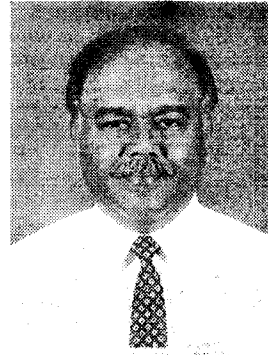
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The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow.

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Nesadurai Thirunesan (Rajee Sankar), Consultant, Cashew Corporation, Sri Lanka; loving son of Nesadurai Potkodi (Urumpirai) and the late Manickam Nesadurai; beloved husband of Nirmala (Rani); loving father of Thirumalnesan,

Rajanie, Niranjane, Aarabee and Saranana; loving brother of Lalitha, Sivanesan, Jayantha, Geetha and Sathiyanesan; brother-in-law of late Dr. Rajanathan, Rohinie, Visakan, Loganathan and Sasigala passed away on 10th January 2005. The funeral according to Hindu rites took place on 14th January and the cremation was at Kanatte, Colombo 5.

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of grief. - 19 2/1 Moor Road,

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IN MEMORIAM**Sixth Death Anniversary
10.2.05****Mrs Regina Rajanayagam**

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her beloved husband Rajanayagam; brothers Ratnam Jesudasan, Anton James and Prince; sister Cecilia Lawrence; brothers-in-law Dr. Arasaratnam and Nadarajah; sisters-in-law Mrs Anula Arasaratnam, Mrs Parames Selvaratnam and Mrs Mahes Sivayoganathan; niece Shamini and Nephew Anton.

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In ever loving memory of
Thanabalasingham Pararajasingham **Sivagamasoundaram Pararajasingham**

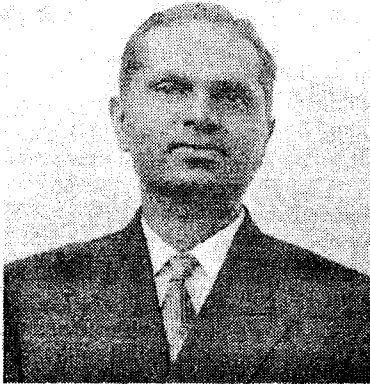


In ever loving memory of our dearest Aiyah and Amma who departed this world, three years and seven years ago respectively. We are grateful to God Almighty for blessing us through the love and affection of the two great souls for so long.

Life goes on, but you will always be missed..

*Your ever loving children, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and great grandchildren
 - 285 Malden Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6AH.*

Third Year Remembrance



*In ever loving and precious memory of **Mr. Suppiah Kanagalingam** on the third anniversary of his passing away on 27th February 2002.*

Your silent love and great guidance for all of us brightened and strengthened our lives.

*Dearly missed and remembered with love and affection by his loving wife, children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grand children and great grand children and brother.-
 9 Fosseyway, Lichfield, Staffs WS14 0AD.*

Loving memories of you are held close to our hearts.

Seventh Anniversary Remembrance



*In loving memory of **Mrs Pakiaratnam Kandiah** on the seventh anniversary of her passing away on 3rd February 1998.*

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by her only sister Parimalaratnam Thirunavukarasu of Yogarswami Abode, Colombuthurai, Jaffna; children Sivayogaratnam, Sivayoganatham, Sivayogeswary, Sivayogaiswaran and Sivayogan; sons-in-law Varatharajah and Sivathanan; daughters-in-law Umasakthy, Sivayogi and Amirthavalli; several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

*- 3 New Leasow, Walmley,
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Eighth Death Anniversary

Mohanadas K. Samuel
(18.1.35 - 4.2.97)

**Nothing loved is ever lost
Memories last for ever.**

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by wife Utaiwan; children Monti, Manee and Mike; son-in-law Allan, grandsons Nicolas, and Colin;; sister Chandra; brothers Indran and Peter and their families.

Death Anniversary Remembrance

In loving memory of Mr. Chelliah Sivasampu on the thirteenth anniversary of his passing away on 9th March 1992.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his two sons.

*- 15 Wolsey Way,
Chessington,
Surrey KT9 1XQ.*

**FORTHCOMINGS
EVENTS**

March 2005

1. Feast of St. David, Patron of Wales
4. Feast of St. Casimir
6. Eekathasi
8. Maha Sivarathiri; Pirathosam
9. Amavasai; Feast of St. Francis
13. Sathurthi

14. Shashti; Karthigai
17. Feast of St. Patrick, Patron of Ireland
18. Feast of St. Cyril
19. Feast of St. Joseph
21. Eekathasi
22. 11 a.m. **Colombuthurai Yoga Swamigal Abhishekham and Guru Poojah followed by Prasatham at Sree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London SW19. All welcome.**

23. Pirathosam
25. Fullmoon; Pankuni Uththiram; Thiru Kalyanam; Feast of Annunciation of the Lord, Jesus Christ

28. Sankadakara Sathurthi
Presented by Vani Fine Arts Society at Bhavan Centre, 4a Castletown Road, West Kensington, London W14 9HE. Tel: 020 7386 0924. Fax: 020 7610 0460 Web: www.vanifinearts.net

Mar 3rd till 18th 6.30 p.m - 8.30 p.m. Karnatic Vocal Workshop by Prof. T.V.Gopalakrishnan

March 5th 6.30 p.m. Kathirgama Kuravanji Dance Drama by Guru Sri Prakash Yadagudde and his students.

March 12th 6.00 p.m. Karnatic Vocal Concert by Prof. T.V.Gopalakrishnan

March 13th 6.00 p.m. Bharatanatyam Recital by Priyadarshini Govind.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding

Sivagnanaraj, son of Mrs T. Kunarasah of 19 Beach Road, Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka and the late Mr. R. Kunarasah and **Gaithree**, daughter of Mr. & Mrs Nagendra of 394, Wendox Crescent, Mississauga, Ontario L5R 3H3, Canada on 22nd January 2005 at Orchard Wedding Hall, Galle Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka.

Agasthiya, son of Mrs G. Narendranathan of 53, Crossways, South Croydon, Surrey CR2 8JQ and late Mr. P. Narendranathan and **Malini**, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Thus-hyanthan of 'Victoria Court', 54, 8/5 St. Lawrence Road, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka on 22nd January 2005 at Hotel Samudra, Galle Face, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka.

Nithiyavaran, son of Mr. & Mrs. Yohesvaran of 34 Moor Road, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka and **Madurika**, daughter of Mr. & Mrs P. Sivapathasundaram of 138/1, 3rd Cross Street, Jaffna on 22nd January 2005 at Ceylon Continental Sapphire Ballroom, Colombo 1.

Dr. Reuben Nithi, son of Mr. & Mrs Karunanithi of 12 The Manor Drive, Worcester Park, Surrey KT7 7LG and **Kerry Amanda White**, daughter of Mr Trevor White and Mrs Gill Daniels on 12th February 2005 at Pennyhill Park Hotel, Bagshot, Surrey.

Prayer Meetings in the Thames Valley Area

Hindu Tamils resident in the Thames Valley area meet regularly at the Reading Hindu Temple (Old Methodist Church at 112, Whiteley Street, Reading) from 6 to 8 p.m. on Sundays for prayer meetings. Singing of Tamil devotional songs, including

Thevarems, Sivapuranam etc is conducted, followed by Poojah. All devotees are kindly welcomed to these meetings.

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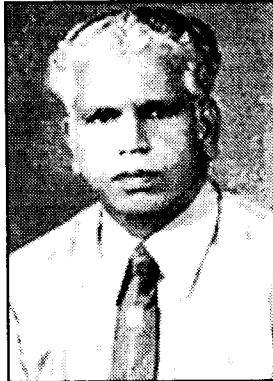
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The Late Chelliah Gunapalasingam Principal Emeritus

Nurtured by the pedagogic traditions of Handy Perinbanayagam, A. R. Rajanayagam and C.K. Kandaswami, Gunapala-singam bloomed in later years into a model educational administrator to the envy of many educationalists of the day. At the same time, many were not aware that the success of the Principalship of Handy Master and C.K.K. at Kokuvil Hindu was in large measure due to the silent background work done so efficiently and meticulously by a few teachers led by Gunapalasingam – mainly drawing of the time table, and the planning of the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.



Hailing from Urumpirai, he entered the University of Ceylon from Jaffna Hindu in 1945 and after graduation and a brief spell as a Land Development Officer joined the teaching staff of Kokuvil Hindu in 1950. A superb teacher of Geography, he should be proud of having turned out excellent geographers who are at the helm of affairs in Sri Lanka and in many other countries. Apart from school teaching his contribution to the teachers' welfare and the progress of students in varied fields have made him a master figure in the educational horizon of Sri Lanka.

As Secretary of the NPTA Examination Council for long years his meticulous streamlining the JSC examination made it a popular one for all the Tamil Children to raise their level leading to the GCE O/L examination. In the planning and conducting the examination Gunapalasingam maintained and improved on the high standards of credibility, reliability and acceptability set by earlier stalwarts like C. Vyrarnuttu and K. Pooranampillai.

He was a long standing member of the executive committees of the NPTA, ACUT, and the NUT and his contributions helped in a large measure to enhance the professionalism of the Teachers Trade Unions. His measured and weighty advice was always sought after in preparing educational memoranda and any document that he had a hand was welcomed by persons in authority at the national level as one with polish and precision and hence he was held in high esteem.

I had the privilege to work with him in many educational and professional committees and found him to be a hard task – master. He is an embodiment of method, system, punctuality and very choosy in getting correct words and phrases and spends lot of time and care in polishing details. It was easy to get a document approved from the NPTA executive committee of 55 members but a Himalayan task to get it through Guna as it had to go through "Baptism of Fire" but once approved by Guna it was a well rounded model of a document. As the Assistant Secretary of the NPTA I had a wonderful training under him (though with some grumbling) when he was the General Secretary and Vice President of the NPTA which helped me immensely and I had a smooth sailing later as the General Secretary and President of the NPTA. He always had an open mind and a helping attitude and took great care to put others on the correct path and also to discharge a given responsibility true to his conscience.

He was a long standing and silent member who managed the funds of the Northern Province Teachers Provident Soci-

ety to the entire satisfaction of all concerned and when the NPTA Benevolent Fund was organised in 1960 his experience in fund management was a tower of strength to ease all our teething problems and still the fund is going strong.

Though his entire teaching service was at Kokuvil Hindu College he crowned his career with the Principalship of Velanai Sir Waitilingam Duraisamy M.M.V. and the Jaffna RKM Vaitheeswara Vidyalayam. His wife Nithiyalaksmi, daughter of another prestigious History teacher of Jaffna Hindu (a teacher of mine) and later Principal of Kokuvil Hindu, Nagalingam (popularly known as Shakespeare Nagalingam) was a source of strength to him in all his endeavours. We have lost an eminent educationalist and a perfect gentleman when he passed away in Vannarponnai Jaffna on the 31st January 2005. May we pray for his soul.

- V.Sivasupramaniam, Seychelle

Australian Newsletter

All public gatherings of Tamils in Australia during the past month were in a rather sober atmosphere and the fifth annual Tamil Writers Conclave held in Sydney was no exception. It is normally conducted during the summer break in different cities of Australia and the previous conclave was held twice in Melbourne, once each in Canberra and Sydney. The event usually draws participants from a cross section of the community and Mrs Kokila Mahendran, a prominent novelist and Mrs Jeyanthi Vinothan were among the participants this time. The day was packed with seminars, book reviews, artistic displays and cultural programme and Annaviyaar Ilaya Pathmanathan was honoured for his contribution to Tamil Art.

The Tamil Coordinating Committee's Annual Sports Meet in Melbourne was a rather abstemious occasion. A concerted effort was made during the day to raise the awareness on the suffering of Tamil brethren in Tsunami affected areas, while maintaining the sporting sprits of Tamil Melbournians.

Australia Day Tamilar Ondru Koodal in Sydney took Tsunami Relief as the underlying theme of this year's event. Durgadevi Devasthanam in Sydney organised a cultural event in support of the temple project.

"Kalaivalavan" Si Su Nagendran's "Anthakaalthau Yarpanam" was ceremoniously released at the Tamil Senior Citizens monthly gathering in Melbourne. "Anthakaalthau Yarpanam", is a collection of essays on lifestyle, traditions, and customs etc that were prevalent in Jaffna during the yesteryears. The author delightfully narrates the role of "Kinnaru" in Tamil society, benefits of "Palmyrah" etc. with infinitesimal details and the book is not just an interesting read in Tamil, but also a valuable source of information on Jaffna Tamils.

"Kallappai, a quarterly Tamil Journal published by the Australian Tamil Graduates Association in Sydney is commemorating its tenth year of publication. Kuchupudi legend Dr Vempati Chinna Satyam's dance ballet "Arthanareeswarar" was held in all major centres of Australia. Members of the Tamil Community in Sydney and across Australia grieved the sudden loss of Dr Venathanar Ilango, who spearheaded Tamil language education.

Tamil University Students in Melbourne, Tamils of New South Wales and many other community groups successfully conducted fund raising campaign during the past few weeks in all major cities across Australia in support of Tsunami victims. On a larger format, The Tamil Rehabilitation Organization is actively pursuing the fundraising campaign throughout Australia & New Zealand in aid of Tsunami victims in the North & East.

- Sivasupramaniam Sitsabesan

Shankar Rajee (Nesadurai Thirunesan) - An Appreciation

Rajee was an incomparable leader. From a military point of view, he was extraordinarily courageous, and as a human being extraordinarily kind. If as a guerrilla Commander he had a weakness, it was this quality of extraordinary kindness and his absolute contempt for injustice.

Anyone who associated with Rajee would never doubt his quality. The tributes that have come from his many friends all speak, in the essentials, of the same man; warm hearted, responsive; spreading with a loving generosity, amongst his friends, his acquaintances, amongst everyone with whom he came into contact, the sparkle of his sense of fun, his dedication for the cause he believed in; the kind and untiring mentor of the young and inexperienced, but uncompromising in opposition to all that was unfair, unjust and overbearing. He was too true a man to wear a different face for different occasions. Unpretending himself, he had the gift of being the cause of unpretentiousness in others. He trusted all and had no fear of anyone. He exemplified the life of a free soul and a fearless fighter.

Rajee was a man of many parts. He had come the full course, from the boy soldier - short smiling young man with curly hair, a master of words with a good turn of phrase, and of a gentle manner. As someone who knew him for quite some time, and if I had judged him right - I believe that the World of Injustice oppressed him and the World of International politics appalled him. In them he found a rough, ungenerous world of military politics pursuing narrow national interests and there he placed himself to change the world. Through that he mainly followed the cultivation and development of two arts; the art of achieving a wide understanding of others, and the art of communicating to others the quality of that understanding.

Rajee walked into our lives through Ealam Research Organisers (EROS) in 1976. By then he had had his education at Jaffna Hindu College - and experienced the rise and fall of Sivakumaran another student of the College - then travelled to England and qualified as an Engineer. This shy and quiet man joined EROS and decided to blaze a new trail to free the Tamil people he had left behind in Ealam. For him, the immediate task was to create the peoples army that was capable of freeing his oppressed people.

He was one of the first to be trained by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. With a small band of trained men he went back to Ealam and established the first base at Kannatty and set about the task of organising and training a people's force. From this moment he was ready to shed his generous blood spontaneously, for the cause of his people. Indeed there could have been no better example of a happy warrior like Rajee. His radiant smile and the slant of voice conveying the jokes were always there to lift our spirits and lighten our endeavours.

He used all his gifts of perception and sympathetic understanding to uncover beneath the surface of the Tamil charac-

ter those rich veins of ore that make the community tick. This quality was at its most productive; when in 1983 he became one of the triumvirates leading EROS. He believed in the goodness of the human being and believed that people can be changed by the highest expression of revolutionary stoicism, the revolutionary spirit of sacrifice, revolutionary combativeness and the revolutionary spirit of work. Under his leadership, EROS was trusted by friends and foe alike. These qualities enabled EROS to cut across all divisiveness among the different liberation groups and uniting them under Ealam National Liberation Front (ENLF) in 1984. EROS as a unifying force was personified in Rajee. This was the time when EROS was at its best and the Tamil national forces were at their strongest. Rajee will have a secure place in history as the author and architect of the four principles at Thimpu.

He saw the clashes and the tensions between the groups. He saw a community hugging tightly to itself and confronting many uncertainties within it. He caught and reflected on the problems afflicting his society, which, frustrated and appalled him. He saw the essential brittleness of the scene and the endemic violence implicit in a social tension that could neither be permanently justified nor immediately released. He thought that what was amiss with this society was not so much that this group prevailed rather than that, or one philosophy or doctrine against another, but that there was still in the world so much of mistrust. He never sought to inculcate hatred, suspicion or distrust of motives, on the part of some men toward others.

He along with others in EROS believed that India was the key player who can unlock the National Question in Sri Lanka. He held on to this position without fear or pain. Until his death, he continued to strive to bring an understanding between the Indians and the LTTE. Right up to the end, he maintained his faith that he could bring a rapprochement between the two. That hope, retained against reason was severely tested. The fresh inspiration, which spring from his example, the continuing guidance that is gleaned from his actions, is a tribute to his genius and to his contribution to the Tamil community

His conduct was always profoundly influenced by the idea that men have a relative value in history, the idea that causes are not defeated when men fall, that the powerful march of history cannot and will not be halted when leaders fall. Indeed, his dedication for the cause was not diminished even after his arrest and imprisonment in India.

He was a man of fine and distinguished manners. Generally, it was an informal manner, not easy to penetrate. That made the effect all the more engaging when, as he often did when he was happy and at ease, he abandoned formality for a style that was direct, simple and entirely personal. His presence was always a delight. His rich humour, his great purpose, generous impulses and strong passions raged within him making him the genuine character we knew. We are privileged to have had him in our midst and thankful for the many gifts that he unceasingly showered on us.

The untimely death of Rajee is a hard blow for the Tamil Freedom struggle, in that it deprives it, without a doubt, of its most experienced and able leader.

- Velupillai Kuhanendran

KRISHNAPILLAI VAIKUNTHAVASAN

15 April 1920 – 3 January 2005

This is a short story of a great Eelam Tamil hero whom we lost recently in London. He was born to Hindu Tamil parents of Alaveddy, Tamil Eelam, Sri Lanka, with three brothers and a sister. Though he was the eldest, all the others had predeceased him. Vasana was nearing his grand 85th year when the good Lord called him up to His Court. May be to command Vasana's counsel on some tricky judgements which He had to make. For, Vasana was a Barrister of the English Bar, Advocate of the Supreme Court of Ceylon (also of the Madras High Court) and District Judge & Registrar of Zambia's High Court - all by His Grace, of course! But the Bar and Bench weren't his true peaks.

Vasana's beginnings were modest. His father Ambalavanar Krishnapillai was a devout Hindu, well known as a Karma Yogi, who inspired his five children towards good moral values. But he was not so well-to-do. Vasana and his siblings were born in their mother's village, Karai Nagar, but brought up in Alaveddy (their father's place) where the family lived, and the children went to school. Vasana had to play the expected role of most eldest boys in middle class Tamil Hindu families in those days.

He had to forget all ideas of further schooling. He enrolled with the General Clerical Service of the Government of Sri Lanka, in order to earn his living, as well as to bolster the family income. Being blessed with an ideal wife in Maheswary both happily accommodated Vasana's siblings in their own rented house in Colombo, as each grew up, from where they all went for their tertiary education.

From his humble beginnings Vasana rose steadily, both in his career and in popularity among all his colleagues at work, progressively in the Trade Union Movement, then the bar, thereafter on the bench and finally in the political arena, as an activist more than at any elected post. The long and painful tribulations he underwent, the difficult but courageous path he took during his life, the contributions he made for liberating social underdogs like fellow workers, and lately the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka are a matter of record. A committed socialist he was one of the towering figures of his time in the trade union movement becoming General Secretary of the Government Clerical Service Union and the All-Island Middle Class & Public Service Trade Unions. Along with some of his comrades in government service, he was summarily dismissed from government service on allegations of being involved in political activities by vengeful government which was confronted by militant industrial action by the trade unions. Undaunted, Vasana became the architect founding editor of a weekly newspaper, *People's Voice* (1951-53), which became the standard bearer of the oppressed people by an unconscionable government led by the United National Party.

When the UNP was defeated in 1956 and the MEP came to power under the premiership of the late S W R D Bandaranaike, there was in his cabinet T B Illangaratne as Minister of Labour, another victim of the witch hunt by the previous UNP regime. The new Government reinstated all the victimised government servants with full back wages and seniority for all the years they had lost, and Vasana was one among them.

Within a short time Vasana decided that he was not cut out for being an obedient government servant and took up to law. Vaikunthavasan had authored a dozen books and pamphlets during his lifetime. Among these is an authorised Biography of Vaikuntha Vasana [2003] by S.M. Satha Ananthan. The books he authored and others from his library are being sent by

Vasana's beloved wife Maheswary Amma to the rebuilt world-renowned Jaffna Public Library.

Vasana's crowning glory was perhaps the 2-minute surprise speech he made at UN General Assembly on October 5, 1978 to express Sri Lankan Tamils' political plight and express the repression faced by Tamils from the government to the world. Vasana had 'smuggled' himself into the General Assembly where the delegations of all the nations of the world had gathered, walked up to the rostrum when the President called the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister to make his speech. In a split second, Vasana was at the rostrum to perform some thing historic which no one had previously or since then dared to do.

Before the shocked UN officials could gather their wits as to what do and order the guards to remove the 'intruder' from the rostrum, Vasana managed to make the following address to the assembled delegates: "Mr. President! Leaders of the World! If oppressed minority nation such as Tamil Eelam cannot make representations to this supreme body, then where are we to go? My name is Krishna, and I come from the 2.5 million strong Nation of Tamil Eelam lying between Sri Lanka and India. The Sri Lanka Sinhala government is continuing a policy of genocide aimed at the destruction of our Tamil Nation. We have exercised our right of self-determination to live as a separate Nation. There is every danger of the Tamil problem threatening the peace of the Indian Region. The problem in Sri Lanka will develop to be as serious as the Palestinian and Cyprus problems unless you, the world leaders intervene and help in its solution now. We appeal to you for such help! Thank You. I apologise for speaking without permission. Long live Tamil Eelam".

Vasana captured global headlines overnight. Vasana had indeed thought grand, mingled with the world's mighty, and sculptured his greatness!

- Professor Kopan Mahadeva

(continued from page 35)

had been attached to Kandy Police Division as an Assistant Superintendent of Police.

Injured PLOTE member critical: Feb 18 - Saranai Pakyanathan, 38, member of a non-LTTE Tamil party, PLOTE, allegedly shot by a group of suspected LTTE cadres near the Boo Oya Army checkpoint on the Vavuniya-Kandy Road on February 17 was admitted to the Colombo National Hospital in a critical condition. Saranai Pakyanathan had been travelling in a double cab at the time of the incident. He is said to have joined the PLOTE after decamping from the LTTE ranks.

Desmond wins BASL presidency: Feb 18 - The hotly contested election for the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) presidency has resulted in victory for Desmond Fernando, PC, by a majority of 139 votes

The final results were announced by Solicitor General C. R. de Silva, who functioned as the Returning Officer. Fernando obtained 1,853 votes while his main rival and incumbent president Ikram Mohammed got 1,714 votes. The third candidate in the fray R. S. S. Thangarajah received 56 votes with 36 of them coming from Colombo. 42 of the ballots cast were declared spoilt. In Colombo, Fernando won by 220 votes with 2,041 of the 4,122 registered voters casting their ballots, .25 of them were spoilt votes.

3,665 of the 6,484 registered members of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL), voted in what turned out to be the most bitterly fought elections called after one year. Usually the incumbent is re-elected uncontested.

Feranando, a former President, broke with tradition to contest the election saying that the independence of the unofficial bar was at stake. "We will not permit outsiders to manipulate the BASL according to their whims and fancies", he said. □

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