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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:

Former US Presidents Bill Clinton
and George Bush visiting Sri Lanka
as part of a tour of tsunami-hit
south Asian countries.

A fraught ceasefire

THERE are those who glibly say that nothing has been achieved during the 34-month-old ceasefire. Worse still, there are still others who assert that the peace talks between the Government and the LTTE over a period of six months was a waste of time. Only congenial war-mongers cannot see the enormous benefit that the people, more so those of the war-torn Northeast, have experienced during these 34 months. There has never been such a long period of respite for the people from the horrors war since 1983. If past experience is to go by, if there had been no ceasefire and the war had continued, literally thousands more would have been killed, tens of thousands of more people would have been displaced and the Northeast would have seen more devastation and destruction. This factor alone - the saving of thousands of lives, the avoidance of the displacement of tens of thousands of people and the destruction of properties - demonstrates that the ceasefire has been positively beneficial and therefore completely justified.

It should be noted that when the talks were ongoing, neither party nor anyone from their delegations ever said that the six rounds of talks, or any one of them, was a waste of time. The parties subscribed their signatures to the joint statements issued at the end each round of talks. In fact the participants on both sides appeared to be happy and enjoying the experience of going from one capital to another each month.

Though the ceasefire had lasted over 34 months from February 2002, the peace talks took place only during 7 months - September 2002 to March 2003 - until April 2003 when the LTTE pulled out. And that means the ceasefire has continued for 21 more months when the parties were not formally engaged in peace talks.

Besides the temptation to speculate as to what progress the peace talks would have reached had they continued up to now without their suspension in April 2003, one is also tempted to raise the question as to why the parties or either of them did not break the ceasefire and resume armed hostilities once the talks were interrupted. The reason must be that they considered that the continuation of the ceasefire was more beneficial to their interests than to engage in a destructive war. If that was the reason, it remains still valid and eminently sensible. The fact the there is disagreement between the Government and the LTTE on the agenda for the resumption of peace talks would not make resumption of war any less destructive or any less inimical to the interest of the ordinary people who will be compelled to bear the brunt of the horrors of war. Neither the Government nor the LTTE can claim the moral right to plunge the country and people into another bout of destructive bloodletting.

Both parties profess commitment to maintain the ceasefire. Both parties profess to be eager for peace talks to resume. The bone of contention is only on the agenda. The LTTE wants that any resumed peace talks should be only on the basis of the ISGA. That is to say that the only document on the table for discussion should be its ISGA proposal. The LTTE leader says that if some elements of their proposals are deemed problematic or controversial, these issues can be resolved through discussions at the negotiating table. The Government has recognised and accepted the need for the setting up of an interim authority for the Northeast and first insisted that talks on the ISGA must be linked to negotiations for a permanent settlement. When the LTTE rejected this condition the President signalled her willingness to begin talks on the LTTE's ISGA proposal alone, adding only the phrase "within a united Sri Lanka", a phrase borrowed from what the parties had agreed to in Oslo in December 2002.

The gap in the positions of the two parties is recognised, but it cannot be said that it is so wide as to be unnameable to a compromise through a process of give and take. Nor can it justify a return to war with all the terrible consequences it entails. Returning to war is not an inevitable option in the present circumstances.

● EU's position on Sri Lanka spelt out

Mar 8 - The European Union's Commissioner for External Relations, Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, who was on a two-day visit to

Sri Lanka, said that the LTTE should renounce violence, respect the Oslo declaration to find a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka.

Addressing a news conference in Colombo on 8 March, Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner sent out the following message to the LTTE on behalf of the European Union: renounce violence; respect the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2002; restate their commitment to the principles stated in Oslo Declaration of December 2002 to find a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka; stop recruitment of child soldiers; and give breathing space in the North and East to political parties and people who have a differing opinion.

The European Commissioner also called for the speedy establishment of a joint mechanism between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to distribute Tsunami aid. She emphasized that the joint mechanism was an 'urgent need'.

The LTTE leadership skipped a previously arranged meeting with the European Commissioner for External Relations Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner who was on a visit to Sri Lanka where she had extensive discussions with Government leaders.

The LTTE had cancelled the meeting scheduled to take place at their Peace Secretariat in Kilinochchi on 8 March claiming that their leader Velupillai Prabhakaran had been indisposed, reports from Colombo said. Addressing the press at the end of her busy two-day visit to the island, Ferrero-Waldner said, "The visit wasn't possible due to practical reasons."

Referring to the cancellation of the meeting with the LTTE, the European Commissioner said, "I made clear my readiness to meet the LTTE leadership, but for logistical reasons this has not been possible on this occasion."

In a wide-ranging address to Journalists in Colombo Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner spelt out the European Union's position both in regard to the post-tsunami aid and the Norwegian facilitated peace process which remains stalled at present. The following are the highlights of the European Commissioner's address:

"It is good to be back in Sri Lanka! I have a long association with the country: in my former job as Austrian Foreign Minister, I helped facilitate a dialogue with civil society actors here on the peace process.

During this trip I have had the opportunity to meet senior members of your government, and other parties to the peace process. I have seen at first hand the terrible devastation caused by the tsunami last December, and I have been able to finalise plans for a Commission reconstruction package worth €100 million. It has been an important visit – and, I hope the results of this trip will bring real benefits for the citizens of this country."

"I regard the EU's relationship with Sri Lanka as an important one, for us, and for you. Why important? Many reasons, but to take just two examples: Thousands of people of Sri Lankan origin live in Europe and thousands of Europeans enjoy every year visiting your beautiful country; one quarter of Sri Lanka's exports go to the EU, and half your imports come from us.

News Review

I think we need to take our contact with you up a gear, and that is why I am proposing to upgrade the European Commission representation in Colombo to a full Delegation.

This is not just a diplomatic nicety: it will really help us build stronger ties with Sri Lanka."

"One prime focus of my visit has been the tsunami - and my determination to demonstrate that Europe will not forget Sri Lanka. The European Union (taking together the EU Member States and our contribution from the Union's own joint budget) is the biggest donor in the aftermath of the Tsunami – with pledges worth €1.5 billion.

"The European Commission was very quick to react to the disaster. Our first humanitarian aid was on its way on the very day the tsunami struck. ECHO, our Humanitarian Office, is deploying €31 million in Sri Lanka alone."

"Today I have travelled to some of the worst affected areas. What I have seen today is shocking, devastating – certainly unforgettable. I promise you, we will still be here to help rebuild the country long after the foreign TV crews have left, and no matter what new disasters may strike in other parts of the world

"On top of 100 million euro in humanitarian aid, the European Commission is programming a €350 million package of reconstruction aid for the region. I have proposed to allocate some €100 million of this to Sri Lanka."

"It is essential that aid is able to flow to those who need it most, wherever they are in the country. Our aid is blind to political divisions and ethnic or religious differences. The important thing is that Sri Lankans who have lost everything are given the help they so badly need. As I have already said to you, my central concern is that aid reaches those in greatest need. It is important that the distribution of aid is based on where it will be of most use, and not on any political consideration.

"I understand that negotiations are taking place to find a way to do this, and I hope that those talks will have a successful outcome. Such arrangements will be an important element in ensuring aid money reaches all those areas that need it. Without such a mechanism, it will be difficult to ensure that international aid flows as wish we it to do, that is to say, fairly. I urge all the parties of the government coalition, the opposition, as well as the LTTE to support work for such a mechanism. This is too important to risk failure. And, it needs to be done quickly.

"The International Community is counting on all parties to show the wisdom, and vision, and leadership, to bring the current negotiations to a successful conclusion.

But of course, the other main focus of my trip was because of the European Union involvement in the peace process. We in Europe have a lot of experience of trying to rebuild peace after years, you could say, centuries of conflict. Making peace takes patience, courage, and a willingness on both sides to compromise.

"We support all those who are working sincerely to find a political solution. Violence will never provide the answers, nor lead to a better life for the people of this island.

I asked the Government and representatives of other political parties I met to take a decisive step in favour of peace. It is time for those in positions of leadership to 'go the extra

mile'. These contacts were in my role as part of the Co-chair structure put in place after the Tokyo Conference, and designed to support to Norway's excellent work. The EU is 100% behind the work of the Norwegian Facilitator. It is important that his work is respected and supported by all parties.

"Recent violent incidents have marred the Ceasefire. Both parties need to do all in their power to halt such actions and bring all culprits, no matter what their affiliation, to justice. The country has experienced real benefits since the Ceasefire; these must not be lost.

"I made clear my readiness to meet the LTTE leadership, but for logistical reasons this has not been possible on this occasion. The messages I would have passed, are the following. The LTTE must:

- * renounce violence;
- * respect the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2002;
- * restate their commitment to the principles stated in Oslo Declaration of December 2002 to find a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka;
- * stop recruitment of child soldiers;
- * give breathing space in the North and East to political parties and people who have a differing opinion.

"It is crucial that no one underestimates the clear wish of the international community to see an outcome that respects Sri Lanka's integrity as a single state. That is, a one that gives self-determination to the Tamils, through a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka.

"We are with you for the long haul, but the Sri Lanka we want to support will be a united Sri Lanka that chooses peace and puts the long term well-being of its people above all other considerations."

● Threat ceasefire, warn truce monitors

Mar 8 - The Norwegian-headed Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) that oversees compliance with the ceasefire between the Government and the LTTE has warned that it "perceives the recent killings in the eastern parts of the country as a direct threat to the CFA and the Peace Process" adding that the "SLMM monitors are currently making inquiries into all the incidents. However, it is important to underline that the SLMM is tasked to monitor and assist the parties in implementing the Ceasefire Agreement. SLMM is not here to conduct police investigations."

In the background of escalating violence involving killings and counter-killings between the Tamil Tigers and loyalists of the LTTE's former eastern commander Karuna, and also recent violent incidents in northern Jaffna, the SLMM issued the following press release:

"SLMM perceives the recent killings in the eastern parts of the country as a direct threat to the CFA and the Peace Process, and we condemn these barbaric and cowardly acts in the strongest possible terms. The violence has raised serious fears and created uncertainty, not only in the East, but also in the whole of Sri Lanka, and is preventing Sri Lankans from living a peaceful life.

SLMM monitors are currently making inquiries into all the incidents. However, it is important to underline that the SLMM is tasked to monitor and assist the parties in implementing the Ceasefire Agreement. SLMM is not here to conduct police investigations. Such work falls outside our mandate, which is spelled out in the CFA. We, thus, encourage and sincerely hope

that the Police will be able to shed light and bring the perpetrators to justice.

We urge the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, not to let these acts of violence damage the Ceasefire Agreement. We strongly recommend that both sides in an effort to do all in their power to prevent these senseless attacks. SLMM will continue to do everything possible to assist the two parties to stop these atrocious and violent attacks."

● JVP demands removal of WB Chief

Mar 7 - The junior partner the governing coalition, JVP has called on the World Bank to remove its representative in Sri Lanka if he did not withdraw his statement given to a newspaper indicating that Rs. 6 billion of the tsunami aid for uncleared areas would be disbursed by state agencies in consultation with the LTTE and for describing the areas controlled by the LTTE in the northeast of the island as an "unofficial state".

World Bank Country Director Peter Harrold is entangled in a dispute over a statement attributed to him in the Sunday Times (6 March). Under a banner headline, "WB giving Rs. 6 b. for Tiger areas" the report said that the World Bank would channel six billion rupees through State agencies for the rebuilding of houses in LTTE-controlled areas but will consult the LTTE on the disbursement of funds, quoting Mr Harrold.

Further quoting the World Bank Country Chief in Colombo, the Sunday Times report said that the projects were for tsunami victims and those displaced in the two decades of war, and that the WB was considering the LTTE as a key stakeholder. "I have often been roasted by sections of the media and the Patriotic National Movement because they considered our consultation with the LTTE inappropriate. Given the fact that there is an officially recognized LTTE-controlled area, a kind of unofficial state, and since it is a party to the ceasefire agreement with the Government, the LTTE has the status of a legitimate stakeholder."

The report further quoted Mr. Harrold as saying that "it would be naïve for anybody, including the Government, to think that they could successfully carry out operations in the North and East without having a dialogue with the LTTE or without bringing it in as a stakeholder. The World Bank grant to the LTTE-controlled area is part of an overall aid package to Sri Lanka for the tsunami-affected and internally displaced people. The overall aid will be about 22.5 billion rupees which will be partly a grant and partly a loan on soft terms."

"If you accept the basic rationale as to why the World Bank is around - to alleviate poverty - you will have to accept that we will work in these areas where the largest numbers of poor exist. And if we are going to work in the North and East, then it is only right and proper to talk to the LTTE and engaging with it can only be good for the peace process in Sri Lanka." the World Bank Country Director said.

The JVP, which stridently opposes any official recognition to the LTTE, charged that WB's country chief had overstepped his boundaries by making the controversial statement which threatened the sovereignty of the country. "The World Bank representative in any country should not make controversial public statements on internal political matters. He is not entitled to act or say anything that would jeopardise or challenge the country's sovereignty," the JVP politburo said in a statement on 7 March.

It questioned on what basis Mr. Harrold had said that the

LTTE had an unofficial state and queried as to how one could identify areas in the North and East as a separate state just because an armed terrorist group held those areas by force through killings.

It also said Mr. Harrold had no right to say anything that would challenge the sovereignty of the country. "Neither the World Bank nor any other foreign institution has a right to hold direct talks or directly assist financially an internationally recognised terrorist group on development or any other issues," the JVP statement said.

The JVP statement further said: "we vehemently oppose the statement of Peter Harold, the representative of the World Bank, and demand that the relevant statement, which undermines sovereignty of Sri Lanka and challenges the authority of the state, be withdrawn immediately. If not we demand that the heads of the World Bank to take steps to withdraw their representative immediately."

Caught up in the midst of a controversy, Mr. Harrold issued a statement which said that he had never used the phrase "unofficial state" and that he was "misquoted." The World Bank, he asserted, did not recognise the LTTE-held areas as an unofficial state.

"A careful review of a recording of the interview shows that what I said was that 'given that there is such a thing as the LTTE-controlled area - that's an official statement, an officially recognised part of the country is the LTTE-controlled area'. There is an enormous difference between recognising the LTTE's role in this process (which we and the Government do) and recognising an unofficial state, which we do not," Mr. Harrold said.

● Senior LTTE political official shot

A senior political official and two of her colleagues were shot and seriously wounded around 6 pm Monday, 28 February, near Akkaraipattu in Batticaloa by gunmen suspected to be from the Karuna faction. Ms. Kuveni, head of LTTE's political division (women) for Batticaloa-Amparai was travelling in a auto rickshaw with two of her colleagues, deputy women's political wing leader M. Sasimathy and an Tiger cadre named as Ahilla in Thambattai, about six kilometres south of Akkaraipattu when gunmen riding a motorbike opened fire on them, according to LTTE sources. They alleged that this "could not have happened without the knowledge of the Sri Lankan armed forces in that area".

The three were rushed to Kalmunai hospital. Ms. Kuveni's injured colleagues, both from LTTE's women wing, are Akanila and Sasimathy, LTTE sources said. The three wounded women were at Kalmunai Base Government Hospital, Batticaloa.

SLMM spokesperson Helen Olafsdottir told the media that a man on a motorcycle had stopped the three-wheeler the three women were travelling in and indicated it to stop. He had thereafter fired six shots, two at each of them from behind leaving one in a critical condition and two others injured, she said. The LTTE Peace Secretariat in Kilinochchi had contacted SLMM Head of Mission Hagrup Haukland on the incident. "We are taking this very seriously," Ms. Olafsdottir said.

: Mar 1 - LTTE said the three wounded female LTTE cadres who were shot and injured were flown from Kalmunai base hospital in the east by the Sri Lanka airforce to Colombo on 1

March for further treatment. It is learnt that the LTTE leadership wanted their injured cadres transferred both for medical and security reasons.

The government had deployed police to prevent any anti-LTTE elements from infiltrating a leading private hospital in Colombo, where the wounded three female LTTE cadres, including Kuveni, had been warded. "We aren't taking chances," a security official said, adding they were the first Vanni faction cadres airlifted to Colombo after being wounded in an ambush in the east.

The Airforce deployed a Chinese-built Y 12 to airlift them to Ratmalana from Ampara after which they were taken overland to the Indian-owned Apollo hospital. A US-built Bell 212 brought the remaining cadre, a military official said. The helicopter carrying the LTTE cadre had landed on the roof-top of the hospital believed to be the only medical facility with a roof-top helipad.

In the meantime, Mr. S.P. Thamilchelvan, head of LTTE's political division, in a message conveyed to the Norwegian government through its ambassador in Colombo, said, "The continuing killing and shooting of our senior political leaders is a very serious and disturbing matter." Mr. Puleedevan, secretary general of the LTTE peace secretariat said, "The killing of Mr. Kousalyan and the attack on Ms. Kuveni, both senior political leaders of the LTTE, since the Tsunami is casting a dark shadow over the peace process."

Commandant of the Police Special Task Force, DIG Nimal Lewke on March 1 categorically denied any involvement by the STF in any form in the Akkaraipattu shooting incident or any other incident in which LTTE cadres were attacked.

DIG Lewke said "the area, Tambiluwil is a predominantly Tamil area and the nearest STF base is located approximately seven kilometres away at Tirukkivil," and the attack on three LTTE female cadres had been carried out in the LTTE-held area.

The military dismissed claims made in a LTTE website that a person named Parthipan who allegedly involved in this attack had been arrested by STF police. An army officer said that a man identified as Johnson Jeyakanthan alias Pratheepan. of Periya Kallar, Kalavanchikudi, surrendered to the STF claiming that the LTTE was gunning for him accusing him of being the gunman responsible for the attack on the three wheeler carrying Kuveni and her colleagues. He had surrendered at the Carmel Fatima College Tsunami refugee camp in the Kalmunai town. Jeyakanthan had told the STF that he had belonged to the LTTE and that he quit the organization in 1997. Thereafter he had been abroad for over a year and had returned on February 22

DIG Nimal Lewke also said that the Karuna Group, that has risen to challenge the LTTE, was enjoying a great deal of sympathy and support within the Tamil community of the area and had become a force to be reckoned with, a fact that the LTTE was not prepared to accept.

"The LTTE has hurriedly tried to make amends and to conceal their weakness by making baseless allegations, due to the fear of exposing their predicament that the Karuna Group has become a formidable opponent", DIG Lewke said.

He also said that the LTTE had lost its popular support bases and this was having a deleterious effect on their cadres. It

sends a clear message of the weakness of the LTTE and it was no surprise that the LTTE was resorting to the issuing of statements with distorted, baseless and malicious allegations. DIG Lewke said, "The STF has always acted with impartiality, with lot of restraint and has responded strongly to situations to keep the peace process alive."

● Muslims must be resettled and compensated

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem has insisted that the thousands of Muslims evicted from the North by the LTTE in 1990 should be conferred with their rightful respect, and dignity, and due compensation should be paid all these victims who are still housed in refugee camps.

Addressing the SLMC Jaffna District Convention, held at the Puttalam Town Hall on February 26, the SLMC leader stressed that the Northern Muslims should be resettled in their original land, where their homes once stood. He emphasised the government and the LTTE held the responsibility of ensuring that the Muslims were given their rightful place. "The SLMC which is the main Muslim party of Sri Lanka will work towards realising this task," he said.

Mr. Hakeem noted that only if the Muslim resettlement issue was carried out in the correct context would there be true meaning to the word 'peace' in Sri Lanka. He also emphasised that even the Tamils' respectability would depend upon the Muslim resettlement issue. He recalled a statement made by the LTTE leadership soon after signing the ceasefire agreement, where at a news conference the Tiger leadership accepted that evicting the thousands of Muslims from the North was a major mistake by them and termed it as a 'tragic event'.

Pointing to the party's decision not to join the Government, the SLMC leader said he did not wish to join with a government which did not respect the minority communities. "They even refused to recognise the participation of a separate Muslim delegation at peace talks," he said. "We are not a part of anti-peace elements and the Tamil leadership should recognise this as a pivotal point towards strengthening Tamil-Muslim relationship," he said. The Tamil community should give the due place to the Muslim community and only then the Tamil struggle would be considered as fully justifiable.

"We don't need to depend on Ministerial portfolios to win our community's rights and aspirations. During a meeting with the Tamil National Alliance, we told those MPs that the Sinhalese and Tamil leaderships can't decide on what place to give the Muslims in the tsunami joint mechanism structure. The Muslims will decide what place they should have and what component they should get," he said.

● Student's death sparks off riot

There was an outbreak of violence leading to a riot following an accident in which a school girl died after being knocked down by a Sri Lanka army tractor on 4 March, Friday morning. The twelve year old school girl Nagendiram Dushika was crossing Hospital Road in Jaffna town when she was hit by a passing military vehicle. She was pronounced dead upon admission to the Jaffna hospital. Dushika from Manipay in Jaffna was a grade 7 student at Vembady Girls' School in Jaffna town.

The tractor driver was arrested immediately after the incident and remanded.

Tension mounted following the incident. Hundreds of students and teachers from Vembady Girls' School blocked traffic in protest following the accident. A group of civilians in the neighbourhood who joined the students' protest attempted to set fire to a Sri Lanka Air Force vehicle. Shops closed as SLA deployed hundreds of additional troops in the tense town around noon. Around 1.45 p.m. a group of protestors set fire to a Sri Lanka army sentry point at Catapult Junction in Kandamadam, near Jaffna University. Six bunkers of the security forces came under the attack by the protesters. A spokesman for the military is quoted in a report as saying that the Tigers were behind this organised rioting. Some students and adults reportedly went on the rampage setting fire to a Sri Lanka Freedom Party office at Vembady junction and burning tyres on the roads.

In the afternoon, one civilian was killed near Parameswara Junction and another wounded near Kottadi Junction, in Jaffna town. When Sri Lanka army opened fire on protesting university students and civilians who turned violent near the Jaffna University pelting stones and bricks at the police and security force personnel. The man who was shot dead by troops near Jaffna University was identified as Mr. M. Kathirgamu, 65.

The rioting crowd set fire to six military points and smashed up President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) office. A large number of Sri Lanka army troops were deployed around the Jaffna University in Thinnevely, near Jaffna town.

During the ensuing clash between the protesters numbering several hundreds and the troops a journalist working for the state run Lake House Newspapers received blows. The rioters blocked all roads leading to Jaffna town by obstructing the opening of the roads with burning tyres and logs and paralysed the normal life in Jaffna; crowds pelted stones, threw petrol bombs, burnt bunkers and attempted to set fire to an Air Force jeep, and therefore the police were compelled to intervene to quell the riot.

All roads leading to Jaffna were blocked by rioters with burning tires and logs. The northern town was deserted. Hundreds of SLA troops and riot Police patrolled its empty streets.

The LTTE attributed the outbreak of violence to the 'spontaneous reaction' of the public and students to the death of the school girl.

At an emergency meeting held on 5 March in Jaffna, LTTE's Jaffna political wing leader Ilamparthy denied that the Tigers were involved in organising the violence and inciting the protesters. He told security forces and ceasefire monitors that it was the students and civilians who created the disturbances. The LTTE had pointed out that this was not the first time that crowds had become unruly following an accident.

It has been reported that President Kumaratunga is to give Rs. 500,000 as compensation to the parents of the 13 year old student who died in the accident.

It has also been reported that Army Officers and other ranks, based in Jaffna swept into action minutes after the tragedy and raised a sum of Rs. 100,000 as an immediate measure of relief and consolation to the bereaved family.

● Increased US assistance

Mar 4 - Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Donald Camp testifying before the United States Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, presenting the Bush administration's request for foreign assistance funding for South

Asia in fiscal year 2006, which commences in October this year, said that "the increased Foreign Military Fund (FMF) funding will be used to help Sri Lanka's navy meet threats posed by national and regional terrorist groups, and will help to reform and upgrade its military."

Donald Camp said this to the powerful Senate Committee which authorizes foreign assistance to other countries while noting that the United States and other donors encourage a resumption of talks (between the Government of Sri Lanka and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), the U.S. continue to provide a package of assistance programs aimed at providing a boost to reconstruction and reconciliation in war-torn (northern and eastern) areas.

As a U.S. State Department Foreign Service Officer who served in Sri Lanka for several years and subsequently handled south Asian issues in the Department, Donald Camp is considered an authority on Sri Lankan scene whose expertise is sought by the South Asia Bureau to which he is now attached to shape policy decisions on Sri Lanka. In regard to US assistance to Sri Lanka following the tsunami disaster and the peace process, he told the Senate Committee, "The United States has been in the forefront of the effort to assist Sri Lankan recovery efforts (since the tsunami disaster) and will remain engaged as we transition into meeting the country's enormous reconstruction needs. Other important long-term concerns remain, however. First among them is resolving the conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Despite the largely successful ceasefire begun in 2003, peace negotiations between

the two sides have not been restarted. The necessity for cooperation between the two sides on tsunami relief may help establish a higher level of trust helpful to the peace process."

"The United States continues to support Norway's facilitation of a peace settlement and remains prepared, along with other donors, to help Sri Lanka address urgent post-conflict reconstruction needs. The goal of peaceful reconciliation will also need to help guide our post-tsunami reconstruction assistance. As we and other donors encourage a resumption of talks, we continue to provide a package of assistance programs aimed at providing a boost to reconstruction and reconciliation in war-torn areas."

● Clinton-Bush visit

Feb 22 - Expressing hope on a joint mechanism for reconstruction of Sri Lanka's tsunami-shattered coastal areas, US ex-president Bill Clinton said that he was informed that the Liberation Tigers (LTTE) and the Sri Lanka Government were working together to create such a mechanism for tsunami relief. "My experience is, whether it is Middle East or Northern Ireland, whenever people work together on specific issues, it helps to resolve the differences," media sources said Clinton as saying. The ex-US presidents met with and had discussions with Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga

Clinton who is also the United Nations' Special Envoy for tsunami relief, noted that it was a positive sign that the 3 year long Ceasefire agreement was holding.

Responding to another question, Clinton said that they [US Ex-presidents] were not on a political mission. A US embassy press release on Thursday said that the visit came at the request of current President Bush and was not connected to any role President Clinton might take up with the United Nations once he returns to the United States.

George H W Bush, talking to media, reminded that Sri Lanka is famous for tourism and said speedy efforts are needed to revive the tourism industry.

George HW Bush and Bill Clinton accompanied by Sri Lanka's Media Minister Mr. Mangala Samaraweera visited several areas affected by the tsunami in the south of the island.

Tight security was provided by Sri Lankan military personnel belonging to Special Task Force (STF), Sri Lankan Navy (SLN), Sri Lanka Army (SLA), Sri Lankan Police, Sri Lankan Presidential Security and by US officers belonging to the US Secret Service. Some of the US Secret Service Agents were seen wearing Sri Lankan batik shirts.

Meanwhile, a media release issued by the Sri Lankan Presidential Secretariat said that the Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her officials had sought trade concessions particularly in the apparel sector for the next two to three years. US assistance in easing Sri Lanka's debt service commitments was also discussed, the media release added.

Clinton said the political differences would be narrowed when they started working together as has been the case in Northern Ireland and other places. President Chandrika Kumaratunga who hosted former Presidents Clinton and George Bush senior for dinner had informed her guests that the government and the LTTE were trying to reach a working arrangement for tsunami aid distribution and reconstruction work in the North and East. □

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Violence escalates in Eastern Sri Lanka

Mar 5 - The crisis in the East is escalating almost daily with the LTTE and Karuna faction engaged in a killing spree in an apparent bid to gain supremacy.

A member of the LTTE, 'Maj.' Pushparaj, was shot dead by supporters of the former LTTE special commander, V. Muralitharan, in the eastern Batticaloa district. Two LTTE cadres were injured in the attack. Supporters of the LTTE's former Special Commander, 'Col.' Karuna, who led a rebellion a year ago, claimed responsibility for the killing.

Two houses were attacked with gunfire by unknown assailants killing six people while three more including a three-year-old girl were injured in more violence reported on Saturday(5) night.

The victims were identified as Arachecal Selvarajah (25), Asoka Wijesooriya (48), Segu Lebbe Abdul Jabbar (42), Mohamadu Hanifa (32), Mohamudu Lebbe (33) and Asinam Lebbe (28) all of Konakulaweli.

Military spokesman Daya Ratnayaka said ten assailants had been involved in the attack. It is believed that the attack had been unleashed by the LTTE as one of the victims, Selvarajah was a member of PLOTE. The assailants had come searching for members of the Karuna faction.

Police sources said earlier there had been several killings by both the LTTE and the Karuna faction. The attackers had also destroyed several shops and boutiques in their search for Karuna loyalists. A joint STF and Army cordon and search operation has been launched in the area to defuse the tension.

On Saturday (5) at Eravur, Mailvaganam Pullendran (26), a Karuna loyalist was shot dead allegedly by an LTTE cadre at Kaluwankaran while riding his motorcycle. He had earlier been in the LTTE and had branched away with the Karuna faction. Police said he had been regularly threatened by the LTTE.

In Batticaloa, a PLOTE leader identified as Kandiah Ganeshalingam, 26, was shot at and seriously injured when he refused to follow LTTE orders to dismantle their PLOTE office. Mr. Ganeshalingam was shot by a gunman riding on

the pillion of a motor cycle the People's Bank Batticaloa branch close to the ICRC office at 9.15 am.

He was airlifted to Colombo for medical treatment. The PLOTE said it had named the LTTE as the group responsible for the attack in a complaint with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

Brig. Ratnayaka also said a clash erupted between the Karuna faction and the LTTE early on Saturday (5) in the LTTE-controlled area of Kirimichchiya, resulting in the death of an LTTE cadre Pushparaja.

The military spokesman said that Pushparajah's body was brought to the government-controlled area of Valaichchenai.

The TamilNet website claimed the incident had taken place about six kilometres from the Sri Lanka Army Cadjuwatte camp and was allegedly carried out by the army. However, the army denied involvement in the incident and Brig. Ratnayaka said they were not surprised at this allegation as this had not been the first instance the LTTE had made such charges.

In the meantime Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission spokesperson Helen Olafsdottir said they feared the situation "might spiral out of control." "We are afraid there may be demonstrations or hartals," she said, adding that this situation was "unacceptable" and "cannot go on."

According to reports the LTTE is conducting a search operation to round up Karuna loyalists in the Batticaloa-Polonnaruwa border areas. A contingent of 200 cadres from the Wannai has been mobilised for this purpose, according to reports. Reportedly 25 cadres of the LTTE's elite Special Intelligence Unit headed by Sivakumaran alias Newton are on a special assignment in the East to establish electronic surveillance to monitor Karuna cadres.

Meanwhile to mark the first anniversary of Karuna's defection from the LTTE on March 3, five units led by Mangalan Master, Sinnathamby, Markan, Inniyabharathi and Pillaiyan have been active in the east attempting to establish

Karuna's claim that his faction would soon gain superiority in the area.

Mar 6 - Six civilians were killed on Friday (5) night by suspected LTTE gunmen. The six civilians included four Muslims and one Tamil and Sinhalese each in Kolakanawadi, which comes under the Welikanda police division in the Polonnaruwa district. Several who were injured in the incident were currently undergoing treatment at the Polonnaruwa hospital.

TamilNet, a Web site backing the main Tamil Tiger group, alleged that the renegade Karuna faction was responsible for the killing of six of its supporters who had provided intelligence information about the breakaway group.

But the military dismissed this claim and its spokesman Brig. Daya Ratnayake said the six were murdered by 10 Tamil Tiger fighters armed with rifles who stormed Sevanapitiya village bordering the restive Batticaloa district. Ratnayake said four ethnic Muslims, one Tamil and a Sinhalese were killed in the attack, and that three other villagers were wounded.

"They (the Tigers) could have suspected that these people were helping the Karuna faction," Ratnayake said. "But we are still investigating to establish the real motive."

The Welikanda police are conducting investigations. Meanwhile, informed sources also revealed that there had been one survivor from the incident, who had gone into hiding but had later surrendered to the nearest police station, where he had revealed details about the incident.

Mar 7 - Another person identified as Mr. S. Pathmanathan was shot dead allegedly by LTTE gunmen in Aaraiyampathy, Batticaloa, on 6 March Sunday night around 11 pm. He had escaped an attempt on his life four months ago, according to the Police. The gunmen had taken him away from his home and shot him in Maavilangaimunai, on the outskirts of the village. Three empty rounds were found at the scene of the murder, Police said.

Mar 7 - Another "paramilitary cadre" was gunned in the Eravur area, 14 kilometres north of Batticaloa, Monday night (7) around 9.15. The victim reportedly belonging to the Karuna faction and identified as Mr. Velautham Ilankeswaran, 25, was gunned down on Sinnathamby Road in Thalavaai, a suburb of Eravur town.

Mar 8 - A person waiting to board a bus to Colombo in front of Police head-

(continued on next page)

CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

The Third Anniversary

The third anniversary of the Ceasefire Agreement has come and gone with no sign that the peace process will be resurrected soon or for that matter in the foreseeable future. While both parties to the agreement have assured that they are committed to the ceasefire, the weeks that preceded and followed the anniversary have witnessed an escalation of violent incidents, particularly in the east of the island where daily killings have become a matter of routine.

Mr. Erik Solheim, the Norwegian Special Peace Envoy who must have visited the island more times than any other foreign diplomat, arrived in Sri Lanka on 21 February to participate in celebrations of the third anniversary of the ceasefire in Colombo and to have discussions with government and LTTE leaders. The LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) signed the Oslo-facilitated Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) 3 years ago, on 22 Feb. 2002. Solheim was expected stay in Sri Lanka till the end of February.

On the following day, Erik Solheim and Norwegian Ambassador in Co-

lombo, Mr. Hans Brattskar, went to Kilinochchi where the Tamil Tigers have become firmly entrenched to meet with LTTE leaders. Though they did not have the opportunity of meeting the LTTE leader V Pirapaharan, they met and had discussions with the Head of Political Division, Mr. S. P. Thamichelvan, Mr.P.Nadesan, Head of Tamil Eelam Police and Mr. Pulidevan, Secretary General of the LTTE's peace secretariat.

Colombo's 'covert war'?

It would appear that the discussions between the Norwegian envoy and the LTTE did not reflect any celebratory feeling from the LTTE side on account of the third anniversary of the ceasefire. On the contrary, according to a report datelined 22 February in the TamilNet website, Mr. Thamichelvan speaking to the press after meeting charged the Government with waging a 'covert war' against the Tigers. "The Sri Lankan military has formed new paramilitaries to wage a covert war on the Liberation Tigers and our people. This covert war should be stopped

immediately. We pointed out during the discussion that the ceasefire and peace would fall apart if this covert war against us continues," is reported to have said.

Directly accusing the Sri Lankan armed forces of being responsible for the murder Kousalyan and four others in his team (though the Karuna faction had already claimed responsibility for it), he told the press that the "CFA has been pushed to a critical point." He accused the Government of renegeing from its commitment in the CFA "disarm paramilitaries and withdraw them from our homeland."

However one positive note came from the LTTE's political leader's comments and that was they were committed to maintaining the ceasefire. He said, "The Liberation Tigers are exercising maximum restraint in the face of grave provocations. Our leadership is determined to remain fully committed to peace initiatives with whatever international support we may get. Our leadership is resolute to act in the interests of peace with extreme patience despite the murders, CFA violations and instigations. However, the limits of our patience are being tested. There are clearly premeditated attempts to break our will to remain committed to the cease fire. On this day there is a window of clear opportunity to take the cease fire agreement seriously and resolve the crisis."

(continued from page 9)

quarters office in Batticaloa town was shot dead by 'unidentified gunmen' around 5.10 am Tuesday (8). The victim identified as Mr. Alakaiah Kirubeswaran, 36, was reportedly a former LTTE member identified as T. Tirubasewaran (36) Batticaloa headquarters inspector Duncan Paul said Mr. Tirubasewaran had been threatened earlier and was trying to flee to Germany when two gunmen came on a motorbike and killed him.

In Valachchenai Sivarasan Ravindran, also believed to be a supporter of the Karuna faction, was shot dead allegedly by LTTE cadres. Valachchenai Inspector M. K. Daramawardene said Mr. Ravindran, a businessman, was going to the bank when he was shot dead.

Mar 8 - LTTE gunmen killed an EPDP member, identified as Sathachalingam Amaladas, at Arayampati, near Kattankudy on Sunday night (7), while he was on his way to meet a friend. He was the Batticaloa correspondent for

a Tamil Newspaper.

Mar 9 - A Muslim auto rickshaw driver who was abducted Tuesday (Mar 8) evening by 'unidentified' gunmen in the in the general area of Kadjuwatte, north of Batticaloa, was found shot dead on the morning, Army spokesman Brig. Daya Ratnayaka said. He blamed the Tamil Tigers for the abduction and killing. The driver was abducted at 2nd mile post on the Valaichenai-Vaakarai road near the State Cashew Plantation garrisoned by the SLA. Three persons who had hired the auto rickshaw escaped and informed Valaichenai Police who informed the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission in Batticaloa. The driver, Mr. Abdul Hameed Rahim, 31, was residents of Oddamavadi, a Muslim town, north of Batticaloa. The passengers too are from the town.

A LTTE spokesman is quoted as denying the allegation by the army and saying that this killing had been carried out to create enmity between the LTTE and the Muslim community. □

Govt ready for talks

To mark the anniversary, the Government issued a statement which said "Today, 23rd February 2005, marks the third anniversary of the entry into force of the Ceasefire between the GOSL and the LTTE." The Government "expressed satisfaction as the Ceasefire agreement entered between Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam marked the third anniversary and reiterated its strong commitment "towards the implementation of the CFA in letter and spirit."

The Government's press release added, "While expressing satisfaction that the continued absence of full scale conflict has saved many valuable lives and prevented widespread destruction, the GOSL regrets that despite all its efforts, a positive atmosphere for negotiating a lasting solution has still not been created. For its part, the GOSL reiterates its strong commitment to-

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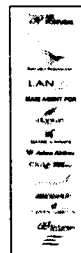
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wards the implementation of the CFA in letter and spirit. Saying that it was ready for talks with the LTTE for the establishment of an interim authority to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of the North and East of the country."

It also said that Government "continues to be ready to reopen direct negotiations with the LTTE on the establishment of an interim authority to meet the urgent humanitarian and development needs of the people of the North and East and to proceed thereafter to negotiating a final settlement of the ethnic conflict."

The United National Party (UNP) and Opposition Leader, Ranil Wickramasinghe, who co-signed the Ceasefire Agreement on 22 February 2002 when he was Prime Minister, said in a statement on 22 February, "Parties with vested interest would like to go back to war. But the reality is, this country cannot face another war. We will all be destroyed by the fight," adding that the Agreement, which is entering into the fourth year, was "under threat" and called for unity to safeguard

the ceasefire agreement and to achieve a lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

Wickramasinghe further said, "In January 2004, everything was set to recommence peace talks breaking the standstill situation it was experiencing. But unfortunately, the government is yet to resume peace talks from the point we left. Instead, the Ceasefire Agreement and the ceasefire are under threat. Parties with vested interest would like to go back to war. But the reality is, this country cannot face another war. We will all be destroyed by the fight.

Therefore, let's get together to safeguard the Ceasefire Agreement, and to achieve lasting peace in united Sri Lanka acceptable to all communities. I must thank everyone who in their own way has helped to safeguard the ceasefire and to take forward the idea of political solution acceptable to all. I must specially thank the Norwegian government, the Indian government, the Japanese government, the American government, the European Commission, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Koffi Annan and all other

countries and international organizations that have helped us to sustain the ceasefire and are now urging us to find a final solution. Let us commit ourselves to a long lasting peace based on a political solution acceptable to all communities where we can all live within a united Sri Lanka."

Monitoring Mission

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) that oversees the ceasefire agreement cautioned that the prolonging stalemate in the peace talks causes serious strain on the very existence of the ceasefire, in a press release issued on 22 February coinciding with the third anniversary.

Mr. Hargrup Haukland, head of the SLMM said in a statement, "Lack of peace talks is putting a serious strain on the Cease Fire and creating dangerous uncertainty. The two Parties will inevitably have to return to the negotiating table. SLMM will do its utmost to assist both sides in upholding the CFA by continuing our work and confidence building measures."

Confirming, "as a matter of fact,

that there have been no clashes between the Parties, military forces after the signing of the CFA”, Mr Haukland said, “I would like to use this opportunity to commend the Sri Lanka Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for their willingness to act with restraint in situations that could have escalated.”

The SLMM statement further said, “Assassinations and killings are, however, still jeopardising the CFA. I strongly condemn these horrible acts, as they undermine and pose a serious threat to the peace process. They have without a doubt poisoned the atmosphere between the Parties and lead to an unsafe environment creating fear among the general public. The killings must be stopped and SLMM urges both sides to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice.”

Expressing confidence that the parties would adhere to the ceasefire, the SLMM added, “The Tsunami brought added suffering to Sri Lanka and has increased pressure on the Parties. It is therefore more imperative than ever that the Cease Fire holds so that people can restore their lives and return to normalcy. My experience with both Parties leads me to believe that the two will do everything in their power to keep the Cease Fire.”

Conveying the full support of the SLMM for the maintenance of the ceasefire, the SLMM said, “Lack of peace talks is putting a serious strain on the Cease Fire and creating dangerous uncertainty. The two Parties will inevitably have to return to the negotiating table. SLMM will do its utmost to assist both sides in upholding the CFA by continuing our work and confidence building measures.”

Ceasefire violations

In spite of the fact that by and large the ceasefire has held during the last three years, there have been a large number of violations which have been documented by the SLMM.

According to a report based on data provided by the SLMM instances of LTTE cease-fire violations, including child recruitment, abduction of children and adults, harassment and provocative acts such as flag hoisting, had gone up during January this year. The report deals with violations since February, 2002 and it came on the eve of the third anniversary of the signing of the CFA.

During this period, SLMM members had been denied access to LTTE-held areas 14 times by the group. The forces and police hadn't been blamed on this particular charge.

Sri Lankan forces and the Police during the same period have lodged 5459 formal complaints of LTTE violations with the SLMM whereas the number of LTTE complaints against government forces and the Police was 1012, of which only 115 were ruled as violations.

Those LTTE acts, ruled as violations by SLMM, centred round child recruitment, abduction of children and adults, harassment, hostile acts against the civil population, extortion, intimidation, moving military equipment, provocative acts, occupation of private property, movements in zone of separation, forced recruitment of adults, confiscations, restriction of movement for SLMM, torture, construction of new positions, illegal carrying of arms, firing of weapons, offensive naval actions, denied access to specified military areas, assassinations, etc.

The SLMM had noted that instances of LTTE violations such as child recruitment, abduction of children and adults, harassment, provocative acts, flag hoisting and confiscations had gone up sharply during January this year.

Batticaloa, Jaffna and Trincomalee recorded the highest number of LTTE violations during the specified period mentioned above. Six hundred and ninety eight violations from Batticaloa, six hundred and twenty four from Jaffna and two hundred and thirteen from Trincomalee have been ruled as LTTE's gross violations of the CFA.

The SLMM has officially ruled that the LTTE during past 34 months (February 2002 - 31 December 2004) has violated the CFA agreement 2,668 times whereas the government security forces and the police, according to the SLMM figures, had done so 115 times.

SLMM has ruled that government authorities violated CFA provisions 44 times by way of 'harassment'. The recorded number of instances of such violations by the security forces are as follows: Other measures to restore normalcy (10), hostile acts against the civilian population (09), other restrictions of movement (09), intimidation (07), extortion (06), construction of new positions (05), occupation of private property (04), fishing restrictions

(03), movement in zone of separation (03), abduction of adults (03), firing of weapons (02) and failure to vacate public buildings (02) are the rest of such violations.

The Sri Lankan Army in statement issued on 23 February said that a staggering sum of Rs. 4400 million has been collected by the LTTE during the past three years by way of ransom, extortion or 'taxation', the Army claimed on 23 February.

Military spokesman Brigadier Daya Ratnayake said according to statistics collected by security forces this amount of money had been collected mostly in the north and east after directing death threats and/or by intimidation. Most of this amount had been collected by way of 'taxes', according to complaints from the people of those areas. This is completely against the Ceasefire Agreement signed between the government and the LTTE exactly three years ago, the spokesman said.

According to available Army statistics there have been 1122 cases of abductions, 89 instances of extortion, 536 incidents of conscription, 65 cases of forcible removal of private vehicles, 225 flag-hoisting acts, 898 acts of harassment caused to civilians, 109 instances of weapon-carrying in cleared areas, 122 various provocative acts, construction of ten new camps or bunkers, three instances of naval exercises with live ammunition and a total of 191 instances of other violations which have been referred to the monitors during these three years.

No 'paramilitaries'

Erik Solheim met and had discussions with President Kumaratunga the on Thursday, 24th February during which she told the Norwegian envoy that there weren't any paramilitaries working with the Sri Lankan armed forces

A press release issued after the meeting said that the President had expressed her Government's commitment to discuss "a working arrangement with the LTTE for the equitable allocation and implementation of post-tsunami aid."

Mr. Solheim briefed the President on his discussions with Anton Balasingham in London earlier this month (February) and on his meeting with LTTE political wing leader S.P. Thamichelvan in Kilinochchi on Tuesday, 22

February. Mr. Solheim conveyed to the President concerns expressed by Mr. Thamichelvan on the killing of Kausalyan and the implementation of Article 1.8 of the Ceasefire Agreement in relation to the disarming of paramilitary groups. He also conveyed the readiness of the LTTE to continue discussions on a working arrangement for the allocation and implementation of post-tsunami aid.

The President, while unreservedly condemning the killing of Kausalyan, LTTE's political leader for Batticaloa - Ampara and five others by unidentified persons on 7th February, emphatically rejected the suggestion that there are any paramilitary forces operating in association with the Sri Lankan security forces. She deplored the killing of a Sri Lankan soldier and the injury of another by the LTTE on the third anniversary of the CFA. The President also reiterated the sincere commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka to establish a working arrangement with the LTTE for the equitable allocation and implementation of post-tsunami aid.

Mr. Solheim was accompanied by Ambassador Hans Brattskar the Norwegian envoy to Sri Lanka and other Norwegian officials. Associated with the President were SG of the Peace Secretariat Jayantha Dhanapala, and Foreign Secretary H.M.G.S. Palihakkara and other officials".

JVP's threat to quit

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the main coalition partner in President Kumaratunga's government threatened to pull out of the ruling alliance if the long stalled talks between Colombo and the LTTE on setting up an interim administration to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the war torn Northeast of Sri Lanka are resumed.

JVP's threat came in the wake of President Kumaratunga's statement at a recently held public rally in Nittambuwa in which she challenged "any party" that stood in the way of her government to quit.

In a hard hitting statement issued on 24 February, JVP slammed the Government for neither consulting nor informing them about the announcement made on the previous day that the Government was ready to restart talks with the Tigers on the basis of a proposal for establishing an interim administration.

The government Information Department said in a statement that the

government was prepared to resume talks to set up first an interim arrangement to handle the urgent humanitarian needs of the people and then proceed to discuss the final solution to the prolonged ethnic crisis.

"We are not even aware how this decision was taken. We got a firm mandate from the people at the 2004 April election that we will not let the country be divided. We were not consulted regarding this announcement although we are part of the government," the JVP said in a statement issued by its Propaganda Secretary, Mr. Wimal Weerawansa.

The JVP also demanded the government to withdraw immediately its reported statement. At a press conference in Colombo on 24 February, Wimal Weerawansa said that the statement of the government was totally contrary to the policy of the UPFA and was made without the knowledge of Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar or any other senior minister of the Government. "This statement by the Government Information Department has been made without the knowledge of the JVP, which is a major partner of the government. We have received the mandate from the people not to resume talks based on the interim administration. Therefore it should be withdrawn as soon as possible."

Although he said that the JVP would oppose strongly any move to resume talks to set up an interim structure in the North-East, he did not answer a question from the media as to what the JVP's future cause of action would be if the government's statement was not withdrawn. He too did not want to set a time frame for their demand for the withdrawal of the statement.

Earlier, in a hard-hitting statement made in parliament, Mr. Weerawansa said that there was no way that the UPFA government could resume talks to set up first the interim administration in the North-East. "If the government attempts to first set up an interim administration according to the whims and fancies of the LTTE, we will pull out of the government with immediate effect," he said in parliament.

Direct peace talks between the government and the LTTE came to a halt exactly two years ago. However, both sides have been negotiating during the last few weeks focussing on setting up a joint mechanism to rebuild coastal

communities ravaged by the Indian Ocean tsunami in December. The JVP spokesman also said at the press conference that the party was totally against the proposed joint mechanism involving the LTTE for post-tsunami relief distribution effort. "We are totally against the theory of a joint mechanism for the post-tsunami relief supply. The LTTE can help it, but relief supply should be handled by the government alone," said another JVP leader and, MP Nandana Gunatillaka.

Hakeem meets Solheim

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader, Rauff Hakeem, alleged that the Government and the LTTE were 'dominating the decision making processes on the tsunami reconstruction mechanism completely ignoring the Muslim community and asked the Norwegian envoy to take up the matter with both parties.

Mr. Rauff Hakeem at a meeting with Norway's Peace Envoy, Eric Solheim on 24 February insisted that mere representation of the Muslim community once the mechanism was worked out, was of no use. Instead, he said the Muslims wanted to be a "substantial stake holder" in the mechanism. "Muslims should be involved in the decision making process. But we are only seeing the government and the LTTE dominating the decision making process," he said.

According to Mr. Hakeem, Mr. Solheim responded saying the Muslims would be represented in the joint mechanism. "We do not want mere representation. In the east the majority of the worst-affected are the Muslims. We want to be part of the decision making process."

"We wonder whether this would be a continuation of the way the peace process was taken forward," Mr. Hakeem said. He said that Mr. Solheim promised to keep both parties informed regarding his request and expressed confidence that the two parties were "close to an agreement on reconstruction". He insisted on the need to detach the peace process from the reconstruction work and arrive at a consensus on reconstruction immediately.

Troops shot

As if to mark and drive home the point that the ceasefire on its third anniversary is not in good shape, a soldier from the Sri Lankan army was killed and another one was injured when the Tigers fired on them in the no man's

zone when the SLA soldiers had advanced to within 40 meters of the LTTE Forward Defence line in the lagoon between the SLA held Kilali, Jaffna, and the LTTE controlled mainland around 5 p.m. on Wednesday 23 February, according to a report in the TamilNet website which further said that LTTE women cadres in the forward defence line opened fire when they spotted SLA soldiers taking aim at them.

No go zone extends to 600 meters between the Forward Defence Lines (FDLs) of both parties and soldiers from either party are allowed to wander only within 50 meters from their own FDL, according to the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA).

Quoting LTTE sources, the report said the two SLA soldiers had advanced more than 560 meters from SLA's FDL when the incident took place. SLA soldiers were on a reconnaissance mission and were spotted by the women cadres manning the defence posts at the Liberation Tigers' FDL, the report alleged adding that the LTTE cadres opened fire when one of the SLA soldiers took aim at the LTTE defence posts. It fur-

ther alleged that the soldier who was killed had a pair of binoculars and a hand grenade in his possession. The injured soldier had a rifle.

The Political Division of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has said in a statement on 24 February that the attempt by the Sri Lankan military soldiers near Kilali lagoon in the Jaffna peninsula to intrude with firearms well into the Forward Defence Lines (FDLs) of the LTTE was a clear violation of the Ceasefire Agreement and the attack on them was only a defensive action. According to the LTTE statement, LTTE took defensive action against the Sri Lankan military personnel when they were seen moving with weapons and telescopes towards the LTTE FDLs.

"The army soldiers were just 40 meters away from our front line and were aiming at our cadres when LTTE took the defensive action. One soldier was killed and another one was wounded as a result," the LTTE statement said.

"This area has 550 meters of no-mans-land. Therefore, the spying activities of the security force just 40

meters from our FDLs and their attempt from this position to attack our cadres are clear violations of the Ceasefire Agreement. Our cadres were forced to open fire at them to defend themselves," it said.

"The SLMM was informed of the incident and they visited the scene at 6.00 pm. Subsequently, LTTE handed over the body of the dead soldier to the Sri Lankan military in the presence of the SLMM official at the Muhamalai no-mans-land," it said.

The military strenuously denied that the soldiers on duty were engaged in any spying activities or offensive operation. The Government also issued a statement condemning the LTTE's action in killing one soldier and injuring the other.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the peace process remains interrupted and peace talks remain stalled, what one can say as the ceasefire enters the fourth year is that its maintenance for such a long period has certainly saved thousands of lives which would have been lost had the war continued or resumed. □

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Govt position on peace talks

Mar 3 - The Government in a recent statement clarifying its position on the issue of resuming peace talks with the LTTE has reiterated its agreement to "the concept of setting up an Interim Authority within the context of negotiating a permanent settlement to the ethnic conflict, on the basis that an interim authority will be useful in a transitional period from a situation of conflict to one of democracy.

The Government's statement also stressed that it had never agreed to the LTTE's demand of resuming talks "on the basis of a single agenda item and based solely on the specific LTTE proposals of Interim Self Governing Authority."

The full text of the Government statement issued on 3 March said, "There has been some confusion with regard to the reasons for the failure to resume talks with the LTTE last year. The Government wishes to clarify this issue with regard to efforts to draw up an agenda for the resumption of peace talks prior to the devastation wrought by the tsunami in December.

The Government has always expressed its willingness to begin talks immediately. It has emphasised the importance of direct negotiations as a means of building confidence, maintaining the ceasefire and improving the climate for a durable solution to the ethnic conflict. Unfortunately, the LTTE did not share this view and insisted on opening negotiations on the basis of a single agenda item and bases solely on the specific LTTE proposals of Interim Self Governing Authority. The Government has never agreed to this.

During efforts to evolve an agenda for peace talks, the Government has agreed to the concept of setting up an Interim Authority within the context of negotiating a permanent settlement to the ethnic conflict, on the basis that an interim authority will be useful in a transitional period from a situation of conflict to one of democracy. Agreeing to negotiate an interim authority in such a context is very different from opening negotiation solely on the basis of the LTTE demand of the Interim Self Governing Authority, which prevents the reopening of direct negotiations.

This view has been articulated in previous statements excerpted below:

The President's speech at the inaugural meeting of the National Advisory Council on Peace and Reconciliation on

Cross Currents

October 4, 2004, where she said; 'The Government's position has been that we accept the concept of setting up an Interim Administration in the interim period whilst a permanent solution is negotiated and implemented. But we require commitment from the LTTE that the Interim Administration as well as the final solution would be based on the Oslo Declaration.'

The GOSL Press Release of 1st December 2004 in response to the LTTE leader's statement of November 2004: 'A call from the LTTE now for the resumption of negotiations without conditions, while setting conditions itself by insisting unilaterally on a single agenda item is scarcely conducive to good faith negotiations. The Government of Sri Lanka has conveyed publicly, and through the kind facilitation of the Royal Norwegian Government, its readiness to discuss the establishment of an interim authority to meet the urgent humanitarian and development needs of the people of the North and East as a priority, while exploring a permanent settlement along the lines of the document signed and accepted by the Government and the LTTE in Oslo in December 5, 2002.'

JVP's opposition

Some observers see the Government's latest statement of clarification as an attempt to placate its coalition partner, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which had threatened to leave United People's Freedom Alliance Government following a previous statement made on 23 February that apparently emanated from the Government's Peace Secretariat and released by the Information Department. If the JVP with its 39 Members of Parliament were to quit, the very survival of President Kumaratunga's will be threatened, and hence, observers say, the Government has been compelled to issue the latest statement of clarification to reassure its coalition partner, the JVP.

The JVP took exception to the statement of 23 February which said, "It (Sri Lanka Government) continues to be ready to reopen direct negotiations with the LTTE on the establishment of an interim

authority to meet the urgent humanitarian and development needs of the people of the North and East and to proceed thereafter to negotiating a final settlement of the ethnic conflict."

Wimal Weerawansa leader of the Parliamentary Group of the JVP mounted a blistering attack on the veracity of the statement and questioned as to how such a statement could have been made without consulting his party. In his speech Mr Weerawansa said, "We don't oppose taking steps to fulfil the humanitarian needs of the people living in the North and the East. Also, we have no opposition for entering a process of discussion with the Tiger organization to find a final solution based on democracy." Stating that talking about having discussions after "establishing an interim authority" would become a joke as there would be nothing to talk about once the Tamil Tigers take control of the North and East under the ISGA proposal, Mr Weerawansa expressed JVP's opposition to negotiation based on ISGA proposal: "We would like to emphasize that what should be established in the Northern and the Eastern Provinces is not fascist dictatorship of the Tiger organization but democracy. We resolutely reject the latest stand announced in the "government announcement" mysteriously issued yesterday (23rd) of "establishing an interim administration first and thereafter discussing a final solution" and if the present government arrives at such a step we would like to emphasize that we will discontinue to be a party to the Government."

TNA offers unconditional support

One of the parliamentarians belonging to the LTTE-backed Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has promised the unconditional support of the TNA's 22 MPs to the Government if it resumed peace talks with the LTTE.

"No one need doubt the 22 parliamentarians of the Illankai Thamil Arasu Kandchi (TNA) are willing to extend our unconditional support to the government, if only they would restart the stalled peace process," said TNA parliamentarian for the Jaffna District Nadarajah Raviraj, according to a report in 'The Island' of 4 March.

According to the report, when contacted the MP, who along with other Jaffna district MPs participated in a hartal and mass demonstration in Jaffna town

on 3 March urging the government to restart the peace process and grant tsunami aid to the north-east, said that the people were frustrated because the government had lost its credibility by having internal disputes on core issues especially with regard to the ethnic crisis.

Raviraj had further said the main partner of the coalition government the JVP was threatening to leave the government if it starts peace negotiations with the LTTE on the basis of its ISGA proposal. This was although the President had indicated her readiness to commence negotiations with the LTTE even at the cost of the JVP withdrawing its support to the government. Furthermore she had indicated that the JVP was free to leave the government at any time. But the JVP was still clinging on to the government, Raviraj had said.

"If only I would revive the memory of our countrymen as well as the JVP to their past, they were the first organisation to commence two insurrections, firstly Che Guevara in 1970's and Deshapremi in 1980s and never had a stable policy ever since they resorted to armed struggle. Up to today the JVP had not officially or publicly surrendered their weapons which they were using in

their attempt to overthrow the elected government; neither had the JVP rendered public apology to the citizens of this country for the horrible crimes that they committed," Raviraj said.

"It is very much sad to note that the JVP is refusing to allow the LTTE to enter the democratic political mainstream. The Tamil people or the Tamil political leaders never opposed the JVP's return to the mainstream politics. In fact the Tamil people gave their fullest support to the JVP to restart their political life," he said according to The Island's report.

Another TNA MP, Joseph Pararajasingham, had reportedly said, "If the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna pulls out of the government opposing peace talks, we would support the government while sitting in the opposition like we did during the United National Front government."

Presidential probe

In what is described as an unprecedented move, President Chandrika Kumaratunga on 1 March appointed a Special Presidential Commission comprising two High Court judges to probe recent attacks on LTTE cadres in eastern Sri Lanka.

ld be made to find out whether any group or groups of terrorists or any other forces in the Eastern province were behind those attacks. The Commission has also been directed to submit a report within a month from the date the hearing begins,

The President's move came amidst repeated allegations levelled against the government by the LTTE which charged that the attacks on its cadres and senior leaders could not have been carried out without the knowledge of the military

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission has welcomed the appointment of the Presidential Commission. "We hope it would lead to the identification of the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. We believe that some sort of resolution would be found to the issue since it is indirectly undermining the ceasefire", SLMM spokesperson Helen Olafsdottir said.

Ms. Olafsdottir said the third cadre injured in Monday's attack was receiving treatment at the Kalmunai hospital and she too was reported to be out danger.

Some observers doubt whether the Commission could carry out its probe effectively because the evidence of the LTTE as well as cadres of the Karuna faction who are alleged to be behind the attacks will have to be examined by it wants to make some rational conclusions. It is extremely doubtful whether the LTTE or the Karuna faction would appear before any Commission to give evidence.

In the meantime, TULF President V. Anandasangaree, in welcoming the decision to appoint a Special Presidential Commission to probe whether one or more armed groups opposed to the Peace Process are operating in the Eastern Province, said,

"Like many others I am also one who is of the opinion that no one has any right to take the life of another person. Unfortunately in this country of ours there is no respect or value for human life which is most precious for a living human being." In his letter to President Kumaratunga, Mr Anandasangaree said, "The terms of reference to the Commission should not be limited only to the two incidents, in one of which Mr. Kausalyan, Mr. Chandra Nehru and a few others were gunned down and the other in which Quveni and two others were seriously injured. Killings of this nature especially during the day time causes a lot of concern to the civilian population

The appointment came in the wake of the shooting incident on 28 February in which three female LTTE cadres, including Ms. Kuveni, head of LTTE's political division (women) for Batticaloa-Amparai, were injured. This attack came three weeks after the LTTE's Eastern political wing chief E. Kausalyan, was ambushed and shot dead along with four other cadres to the fury of the LTTE.

The Commission is required to inquire and report on the recent circumstances and other motives leading to attacks on LTTE cadres in the Eastern Province. The President has directed that investigations shou-

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who live in constant fear and tension. I suggest that the terms of reference should be extended to cover all such incidents from 22.2.2002, the day the Ceasefire Agreement was signed. Your action should bring relief for the civilians also."

It would seem that there is support for Mr Anandasangaree's request for the Commission's probe be extended to cover the whole period since the Ceasefire Agreement was signed. The national English daily editorially said, "Now that the government has initiated a probe into violence against the Wannu cadres, it ought to show a similar concern for the victims of LTTE terror as well. So far about 200 persons including 40 intelligence operatives and a police officer (IP Sunil Thabrew) have been killed by the LTTE after the MoU was signed and these killings also need to be investigated, with the LTTE being given an opportunity to defend itself if it so wishes."

The bombshell that failed to explode

The fragile nature of the governing UPFA coalition was demonstrated recently when the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) announced its decision to quit the Government and cross over to the opposition with all its eight parliamentarians. The bombshell was dropped by the CWC in the background of the threat from the JVP with its 39 MPs would leave the Government on the issue of talks with the LTTE. It also resulted in the Government losing its majority in parliament.

In the parliament of 225 members the UPFA had 118 seats with the support of the CWC's eight MPs. Their resignation turned the UPFA into a minority Government raising the prospect of another general election.

Minister of Estate Housing, Infrastructure and Community Development, Muththu Sivalingham and his Deputy Minister S. Sellasamy of the CWC submitted their resignations to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse in protest against what they described as continued negligent attitude by the government leadership towards their grievances. One of their primary grievances was the Government's decision to proceed with a disputed hydro electric project in the Upper Kotmale area in the island's central province. The CWC has consistently opposed the project.

Explaining the reasons for this sudden decision, a top CWC official said that

the CWC despite being a crucial member of the ruling coalition, the party was unable to discharge its duties to the people in the plantation sector and meet their daily grievances. Deputy CWC leader R. Yogarajan, said that the government's failure to implement its 14 point programme led to the resignation of the two ministers of the CWC. "We agreed to support the government on the basis that our fourteen point programme which includes a proposal on the Upper Kotmale project be implemented. Since the government has not responded positively, there is no point in our members continuing as Ministers."

Political observers familiar with the political antics of the CWC leadership doubted whether in fact the CWC would withdraw its support to the Government and go into opposition. This is because the CWC has developed "political bargaining" into a fine art in the context of coalition politics that has become a feature of governance in the island during the last fifteen years or so. Was the CWC engaging in this brinkmanship only to secure a powerful and 'lucrative' cabinet post for its leader Arumugam Thondaman was the question that was being asked. The other reason for the doubt was that the resignation letters were not delivered to the President, but to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksha who did not have the power to accept or refuse the resignations. Another reason was that parliament had been adjourned and it was not due to meet until 10 March, and there was enough time for further "political bargaining" to be undertaken.

In the event what was portrayed for a few days as a major political crisis facing President Kumaratunga's Government was overcome with a deal being struck at a meeting on 26 February between the President and a CWC delegation led by its leader Arumugam Thondaman at the President's House. The CWC pledged to continue its support to withdraw their resignations which had remained unaccepted until then.

It was reported that both sides succeeded in reaching common understanding over the CWC's 14 point proposal which formed the bone of contention with the Party with President Kumaratunga assuring the speedy appointment of trained Tamil teachers to estate schools and the recruitment of trained clerical hands. The President also promised the speedy implementation of the third stage of Estate development programme and

to entrust the housing programme for estates and the improvement in the infrastructure development with the CWC officials attached to Ministry. But there was no word about the fate of the hotly disputed Kotmale hydro-power project. For the moment nothing has been mentioned about an important cabinet post for the CWC leader, but knowledgeable sources indicate that will come in due course.

A presidential bet

Speaking at World Women's Day celebration organized by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, where the party women's association presented her a five point action plan, asking for "peace through negotiations" and "10 per cent female representation in future parliaments", President Chandrika Kumaratunge said that she would bet her Presidency that 80 per cent of Sri Lankans would, if a Referendum was held on the issue, vote to arrive at a negotiated federal solution to the North East conflict, adding that there could be no development in the country if there was no solution to the problems in the Northern and Eastern part of the country.

Addressing thousands of women at the Viharamahadevi Park, the President said the SLFP had the courage to go ahead with a majority decision on a federal solution or other issues although 10-15 percent of the people might oppose it.

The President said loads of foreign investments were coming in and the economy was back on track but one big bomb in Colombo could ruin everything and she would not allow such a situation to arise. The President said successive governments had failed to recognize the basic aspirations of the Tamil people and hence they turned to LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran even though he was a man who hacked people to death. She said no government was able to come up with a better solution than what the constitutional package that her government put forward as a solution to the ethnic conflict.

From the "Sunday Leader"

The Colombo-based "Sunday Leader" has drawn attention to the following statement made by JVP Leader, Somawansa Amarasinghe in an interview with Reuters in Colombo on March 2:

"We are going to break with the government if (it) pushes for a joint mecha-

(continued on next page)

Make the possible real

Travails of the north in the aftermath of the tsunami

Paul Caspersz

On July 12, 1979 J.R. Jayawardene, then first Executive President of Sri Lanka, sent Brigadier Weeratunga to Jaffna with the notorious mandate to eliminate the menace of terrorism in all its forms from the island and more specially from the Jaffna District. The newspapers headlined the mandate as, 'Wipe out terrorism by December 31'.

Twenty-five years have passed and what in 1979 went by the name of terrorism is still with us. Brigadier Weeratunga has gone, but a line of others has succeeded him with no more success than he in carrying out his mandate.

As one stepped out of the plane at Palaly — the plane started very late at Ratmalana some 75 minutes earlier — the first impression was of a city under siege. Palaly is in a High Security Zone (HSZ) and the men and some women of the Armed Forces are everywhere.

The airport bus takes you out of Palaly and deposits you half an hour later at its terminus on Hospital Road in Jaffna town. Though you are no longer in the HSZ, you will see the armed men either

(continued from page 17)

nism with the LTTE for distributing tsunami aid or interim self-rule. That is not going to work. We ourselves took up arms against an undemocratic government. We will be very happy if they enter mainstream politics. The LTTE is a fascist organisation, which is trying to establish a one-party rule in the north and the east which should not be allowed and should not be promoted. Velupillai Pirapaharan is like former Serb strongman, Slobodan Milosevic. Pirapaharan must be at the Hague. He is responsible for ethnic cleansing."

Having drawn attention to the above statement, the paper also raises the following *interesting question*:

"If the Tiger Chief should be in the Hague being tried for war crimes, one can only surmise that Amarasinghe should join him, involved as he was during the JVP's own days of blood and gore, in ordering the deaths of so many innocents." □

behind their sandbags at sentry points or walking along the streets alone or in batches of two or three. They pass you by along the dusty streets in army trucks, on motor bicycles, even on push cycles. They look tired men, and bored. At home in their villages they were never condemned to spend their day in heavy army camouflage, socks and boots. Many of them are so small and slender that it wouldn't need a tiger to take them on, two or three at a time, in close combat. They are where they are, largely because this is the place in which they are paid to be. They know that if they did not sign up to the Armed Forces they would be members of the rural unemployed. They seemed to be doing their deliberate best to maintain good relations with the people. They do not speak Tamil, of course, yet they do not harass, nor bawl at people rudely. They do not know the ancient history and culture of the Tamil people, their music, their literature, their religious rituals. They have to carry guns which contribute to the atmosphere of occupation and siege. But the guns are not pointed at anybody. When they are not on sentry duty, their task is to perambulate the main streets or remain within the confines of their camps. They are good fellows and probably sigh each long hour for home and village. We were told that they are not given well-cooked, wholesome food, nor anything close to a balanced diet. When we were there in early February, there wasn't even the famous Jaffna mango season to compensate.

Twenty-five years is a long time, the length of one whole generation. Those who were born at the time Brigadier Weeratunga came under orders to Jaffna are now twenty-five years old. True, they were not all years of war, of grenades and mortars and filthy barrel bombs, of deprivation of electric lights, motor transport and regular radio news bulletins and musical programmes. Yet, there was not even one year of normalcy. When abnormalcy is the ordinary, it is no wonder that Daya Somasundaram, Professor of Psychiatry in the Univer-

sity of Jaffna wrote his book on the Scarred Minds of his people.

And yet, during all these sad years, the youth heard their parents say that it was never like this, not until the tragic day when in 1956 the Sinhala only Act was passed in Parliament.

From the time of the Donoughmore Commission constitutional reforms, indeed from the 1920s and the Ponnambalam brothers, the Tamils, always achievement and government employment-oriented, began more and more to study Sinhala. They sensed that there was, indeed had in the nature of things to be, a growing pro-Sinhala trend in public office, thus a knowledge of Sinhala was therefore necessary. The trend became more and more open and manifest with the educational changes introduced in the early 1940s and especially after Ceylon obtained Dominion Status in 1948. But once the Sinhala Only Act was passed, it became a sign of public protest and a matter of honour for the Tamils not to proceed with the study of the Sinhala language. One language, two nations; two languages, one nation, pleaded the earlier Colvin R. de Silva. But in vain. The two-nations theory became a two-states demand. The situation continued to deteriorate and the Tigers were born.

During the twenty-five years the Tigers have been omnipresent in the North and all but omnipresent in the East. Whatever one may say about them — and I personally do not like much of what they say and do — a prominent Tamil leader told the writer in 1985, there can be no doubt that it is because of the Tigers that we have been able to hold our heads high in Jaffna.

However, there are some in Jaffna, a minority, who whisper into your ears that it is not altogether a bad thing for the army to stay on in the North. As long as the soldiers move around, the Tigers have to be careful that the exaction they make on the people do not transgress the limits of tolerability. Sour plantains are sold at Rs. 35 a kilogram, but the seller mutters that five of the thirty-five has to go to the Tigers as taxes. Cigarettes are sold at Rs. 75 per packet in the South (it is significant that the words North and South are now in the daily vocabulary of our people) but at Rs. 90 in Jaffna. What's to be done, there's a tax to be paid. There are also stories of forced recruitment and child recruitment, often completely against the real wishes of the family and of the recruits themselves.

It was on top of all this that the tsunami waves broke into the land on December 26.

I am not a TV-fan myself, but am informed that TV coverage of the North and East was proportionately much less than the south though the loss of life and property there was much higher. So were Velvettithurai, Sakkottai and Point Pedro under-covered. Even the blanket wasteland that is now Mullaitivu town did not get the TV footage that it merited.

On the other hand, the Tigers themselves would not have been too welcoming of TV crews from Colombo. Like the JVP, the LTTE is a monopolist organisation. Come and help us if you feel like it but, remember, on our terms, under orders from us, and with our approval. When the relief distributors were men and women from the Armed Forces, the LTTE sometimes forbade people under pain of the lash to queue up for the relief-packages. Especially in the High Security Zones, but not only there, the Tigers were, to say the least, unenthusiastic about relief by way of dry food rations, fruit, vegetables and clothes. Give us back the HSZs, they said, they are our prime land. We can then grow for ourselves all the food we need, and have enough left over to export to you in the South.

At Velvettithurai on the evening of arrival in Jaffna, there was the first evidence of the tsunami devastation in the North. In and out of the maze of little lanes we went to the sea and were told of how the waves invaded the land. At the sentry point three soldiers on duty told us how two of their men were among those washed out into the sea. All the way from Velvettithurai along the coast on both sides of the road the devastation was similar to what we saw earlier on the journey from Colombo, through Korallawella, to Matara.

At the Catholic Church at Sakkottai, we saw a Portuguese doctor and a nurse at work with patients; wounds suffered while being tossed by the waves from one tree trunk or stone to another, bronchitis and fevers, severe shock. We were impressed by the devotion to duty of the Portuguese medical team. The priest was there as translator and as friend and counsellor to the children who gather there every evening for supervised night study. Whatever happens, fair weather or foul, the children of Jaffna keep to their books and their priests are close to the people. It was dark when we arrived at Point Pedro. On the way we delayed at a

'Mahavirar Thuyilam Illam' (Sleeping Home of Great Heroes). It was one of several in the North and the Sleeping Home of Great Heroes was most beautifully laid and could not but be a source of inspiration to the youth of the North. How short-sighted it had been of the Army Colonel to order the bulldozer to ride over the graves! Undeterred, the Tigers laid them out again.

The return to Jaffna from Point Pedro was by another route via Kaitadi.

The next day we travelled southwards from Jaffna to the islands. We visited a place of worship which, after the recapture of Jaffna, the Army had used as a soldiers' camp; after many months of negotiations, the Army had finally vacated the place. If there had never been an idea of willful desecration of a place of worship, neither had care been taken to treat places of worship of another faith with respect and reverence. The soldiers who occupied these places of worship had left mischievous drawings on the walls and added playful festoons, sometimes funny moustaches, to religious icons. They often did so without malice, like school children on a picnic, but did not pause to think that they would hurt the sensitivities of those to whom the place of worship belonged and who had used it, and would one day use it again, for prayer and devotion. In no circumstances, so it seems to me should a place of worship be used as an army camp. Take the grounds, if needed, the rooms for visiting pilgrims, if there are any, but leave the temple itself untouched.

On February 7, we went eastwards via Koppay, Chavakachcheri, Kodikamam, Miresuvil, Pallai, Elephant Pass and Paranthan to Mullaitivu. If I was asked which single place I had visited after December 26, seemed to have been most ravaged, it wouldn't take me long to say, Mullaitivu. We first went to the Maha Vidyalayam there. The Principal and the priest-teacher were there talking with groups of students. But the school itself was as if it had never been built. About 200 children had gone with the tsunami, some bodies never to return to Mullaitivu. The priest broke down as he told us that many of the children he had buried in mass graves had been his own students. The Principal too was visibly shaken. A wall or two of the pre-school conducted by the Tigers remained. A well-built house still stands, but outside it, planted in the sand were five Crosses to mark the graves of the five people who had lived in it

before the tsunami came. Some Portuguese Burgher families who lived around the Catholic Church had their homes damaged by the bombing. They repaired them, only to see them completely washed away by the tsunami. We were told that at least 5000 persons in Mullaitivu snuffed out the taper of their lives on the terrifying day of the tsunami.

After the ravages of colonialism we had the opportunity in 1948 to rebuild our island home. We squandered it. After the disaster of the tsunami on the evening of December 26, 2004 we were given another opportunity to rebuild it. The task was not only to bury the dead, a task which we have substantially completed but to give the living the opportunity of a better, safer future. The opportunity is not only to build better homes for those who have lost them to the waves but to build a nation of freedom and justice for all. To recall Aimé Césaire in his Discourse on Colonialism: 'It is a new society that we must create a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the sharing of olden days.'

The enormous sums of money that have already poured into the country for post-tsunami relief and reconstruction can help to ensure that this new society will have sufficient food, clothing and shelter for the fishing community and for the small artisans along the coasts and, by the multiplier effects of increasing demand by the people of the coasts, for the whole country. But for this firm and decisive planning at the centre with due delegation to the periphery for purposes of implementation is necessary. Most unfortunately, neither central planning nor due delegation to the provinces and districts has been much in evidence since December 26.

The same date also brought good news for the inter-ethnic situation that has grown progressively worse since 1948. The differences between Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers the Portuguese Burghers of Batticaloa and Mullaitivu suffered like the others were forgotten. One was just a human person. So persons, also soldiers and navy, tried to save other persons, even at the risk of their own lives, regardless of ethnic, religious, linguistic and political differences.

What was possible on the day of the tsunami ought to be possible every day. To make the possible real is the summons the receding waves of the tsunami issued to us. □

Refugee Babies: The Lasting Effects of Tsunami Aid in Sri Lanka

Nimmi Gowrinathan

A UCLA graduate student, just back from serving in the relief effort in Sri Lanka, writes of how political and economic problems there will affect children for years to come.

The true idealist and the apolitical pacifists of the world often convince themselves that the corrupt world of politics exists in a vacuum detached from pure humanitarian work. Despite their attempts to stave off impure intrusions, the politics of Sri Lanka pervade every action and interaction, are entrenched in every perception and prejudice, and are inextricably linked to the Tsunami relief efforts now underway in every part of the island. Residual political tensions of the past taint the current aid efforts, government bureaucracy and corruption inhibits the dispersion of funds, and international actors find their arms tied by U.S. imposed directives and stereotypes. While all this seems status quo in Colombo, the impact of this reality will be felt most poignantly by the surviving rural children, who have been left to overcome far greater obstacles than a 30-foot wave.

A child swings from a sari strung in between 2 makeshift tents. Pieces of metal, bark, palm leaves create shelter for thousands of tsunami victims along the North Eastern shores of Sri Lanka. To call these shelters temporary would be misleading. There is no indication that these people will be resettled in the weeks and months to come.

Walking through rows of tents what is striking is not the living conditions which seem to lie on the border of some human rights violation. Rather, it is the similarity between these camps and those that existed last February, and the February before. In the North East of Sri Lanka the post-tsunami issues are not the tsunami orphans, rather the tens of thousands of war orphans now left homeless. It is not the helplessness of refugees crowded into makeshift shelters, it is their disorientation at having their prior camp of 8 years washed away and trying to regroup in a shelter further from the water, and closer to possible land mine areas.

There are some key differences on this island nation after December 26th.

Some apply to immediate relief efforts and their impact will subside along with international attention. Others will permanently alter the already volatile political environment in Sri Lanka.

A five-year-old child now knows the term NGO. According to ministry officials, NGOs are the fastest growing industry in the region, with 2-3 new groups registering daily. Disaster relief efforts, while predominantly well-intentioned, tend to overlap, lack cohesive coordination and often times step on culturally sensitive "landmines". Villagers complain of flashy SUV's roaring through town with a logo or organization name plastered all over the vehicle and it passengers-leaving behind nothing but refugees wary of survey questions and empty promises.

Large sums of money flow freely into post-tsunami Sri Lanka. These same funds which are the life blood of relief, reconstruction, and rehabilitation efforts are accessed to sustain arms build ups, military development, and continued violence. The Sri Lankan government may have been war weary in early 2002 when it conceded to a bilateral ceasefire, but it was also bankrupt, with a skyrocketing rupee value. It had neither the funds to continue the armed combat, nor to reconstruct damaged areas and serve their constituencies.

In the last month the Sri Lankan Government has secured US \$500 million from the World Bank and Asian Development fund, a promise of approximately US \$300 million from the U.S. government, US \$10 million credit extended by the Pakistani government, and large offers from donors such as the Government of Japan. Sri Lanka's foreign debt has been forgiven for three years, providing the government with an additional 550 million US dollars a year. Inflated state bank accounts with minimal regulations have permanently altered the incentive structure for the government to engage in and remain committed to a peaceful solution to three decades of conflict.

In Trincomalee today, relief workers receive an unintended brief respite from the scorching heat of the camps teeming with refugees. The "kharatal" (day of protest/mourning for the killing of an LTTE leader) reveals to those on the outside that when working in Sri Lanka, humanitarian efforts and expectations of universal compassion will always be marred by the unnecessary bloodshed of political violence.

Working with child trauma therapists in the Eastern camps, it is difficult for anyone to reconcile the innocence of children with the corruption and inefficiency which has left the eyesight of a 7-year-old girl failing from severe vitamin deficiency, or a diminutive 13-year-old boy easily mistaken for a preschooler. How does one assess the trauma of these children? Some fear the sight of a soldier on either side. Some fear the ocean. Some fear loud sounds. Others call for Amma at night. She occupies their dreams and is missing from their reality because she was swept away. It may have been a towering wave, it may have been the recurring waves of violence crashing indiscriminately down upon a hapless civilian population.

Questions left unanswered hang in the stale air throughout the refugee camps. They seem questions which are critical, but for which nobody is accountable.

The head of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Commission recently stood up in Parliament and asked the question on everyone's mind. If those homes close to the water are required to be 100m from the water, yet the homes 100m away from the water are standing and unaffected — where are the refugees to go and who will donate the land?

What is to happen to all the widower fathers who have never participated in childcare, and to the children in their care? If significantly more women than men lost their lives as a result of the first wave snatching their saris, leaving them naked and hesitant to run towards town—is there a lesson to be learned about the stringent gender rules of Sri Lankan society? What effect will the massive influx of foreigners and aid workers have on the North Eastern Tamil culture, which has adamantly resisted the infusion of a "western ideals"? Can we criticize a population for never learning to be self-sufficient when their government happily forgoes principles of national sovereignty for the

(continued on next page)

Rebuilding after Tsunami: Sri Lanka's next challenges

Sir Arthur C Clarke

When the Hollywood movie *The Day After Tomorrow* was showing in Colombo last summer, many asked me if such a calamity could befall Sri Lanka. Without debating the scientific merits of the movie, I said that Nature always had a few tricks up her sleeve.

Little did I imagine that before the year ended, killer waves 30 feet high would lash the coast of Sri Lanka, leaving an unprecedented trail of destruction in my adopted country. For over two million Sri Lankans — and indeed, all of us — the day after Christmas was a living nightmare that mimicked the celluloid horrors of *The Day After Tomorrow*.

When they arrived with practically no warning, the waves were ruthless and indiscriminate. They swept away fishermen and tourists, pilgrims and prisoners, soldiers and rebels. They displayed gross disregard for our artificial human divisions and demarcations. As the death toll passed the 30,000 mark, with thousands more missing, I kept recalling the words of William Makepeace Thackeray: 'Good or bad, guilty or innocent — they are all equal now.'

My heart-felt sympathy goes out to all those who lost family members or

friends. My family and I were more fortunate — Colombo was spared the highest waves, being on the opposite side of the island. But among those who directly experienced the tsunami were my staff at our diving station in Hikkaduwa, and at my holiday homes in Kahawa and Thiranagama — all beachfront properties located along the southern coast. They all survived, and relate harrowing tales. However, our diving equipment and boats were washed away.

As Sri Lankans struggle to come to terms with the shared grief and multiple impacts of this tragedy, they confront a massive humanitarian crisis involving over one million displaced persons. The first priority is to provide emergency shelter and relief, and then create conditions that will help them to return to normal lives and livelihoods as soon as possible. We also need to address the long term issues of better preparedness, effective warning systems and disaster mitigation.

The best tribute we can pay to all who perished or suffered in this disaster is to heed the powerful lessons it offers us. Nature has spoken loud and clear, and we ignore her at our peril.

For over two decades, I have been an

(continued from page 20)
convenience of foreign wire transfers?

These questions will not be answered in the lifetimes of many of the older generation, and their answers will come to determine the lifetimes of all the children now sitting on the floor of one-room schoolhouses.

Though these are complex questions to be grappled with...what is most jarring after spending these past weeks in the North East of Sri Lanka, is that there is a pervading sense of acceptance amongst the refugee population. Behind melancholy faces which have come to characterize a Sri Lankan Tamil lies the belief that their life has been predestined to be as such, that there is no higher standard for their existence, that violence, death, displacement and disease are not anomalies—they are expectations.

A generation of children growing up under passive guardian figures with broken spirits, learning not to question authority, not to resist injustice, not to demand basic rights and dignities - is far more devastating to this society and its future than any tsunami might have been.

▲▲▲

Nimmi Gowrinathan graduated in 2001 from Johns Hopkins University, and is now pursuing a Phd in Political Science at UCLA. She has spent the past 3 summers working in orphanages in Sri Lanka teaching English and leadership skills through the VISIONS program. She is currently the Sri Lanka Project Manager at Operation USA, and is continuing her graduate work at UCLA, concentrating on ethnic conflict. UCLA International Institute. Can be contacted at nimmi@opusa.org. □

unhappy witness to the bitter armed conflict in Sri Lanka, which has consumed twice as many lives as the tsunami, and blighted the future of millions more. Peace in Sri Lanka has been my number one wish for many years — there is now renewed hope that the lashing from the seas will finally convince everyone of the complete futility of war.

Struggling to save lives

Political cartoonists in Sri Lankan newspapers were quick to make this point. One cartoon, appearing two days after the disaster, showed a government soldier and Tiger rebel swimming together in the currents, struggling to save their lives. (Indeed, there have been reports of them helping each other in the hour of need.) Their common question: what happened to the border that we fought so hard for?

In a message broadcast over local television only a few days before the tsunami, I made the same point. 'We should not allow the primitive forces of territoriality and aggression to rule our minds and shape our actions. If we do, all our material progress and economic growth will amount to nothing.'

I added: 'have always been an optimist, and I still remain optimistic that Sri Lanka will achieve lasting peace.'

The week after the disaster, the usually bickering political parties came together — at least momentarily — to mourn the dead and to pledge rebuilding the ravaged island. If only such unity is sustained, Sri Lanka can rebuild physically and also heal the long standing wounds that have bled this beautiful island for far too long.

On a more technical level, too, the disaster holds lessons that must be heeded. One that is particularly close to my heart concerns coastal resource management. In the wake of the tsunami, the government announced that it will strictly enforce an existing rule that regulates any construction within 300 meters of the shore. For a long time, this rule has been ignored or openly flouted by individuals as well as hotel developers and shrimp farmers — many of who have now paid a terrible price for their arrogance or ignorance.

We should also ensure that all remaining coral reefs and coastal mangrove forests are fully protected. These natural formations act as splendid bulwarks against the wrath of the sea — while they cannot block out tsunamis, they can cer-

tainly reduce their impact. In the past few days, environmentalists and divers from across South and Southeast Asia have reported examples of this phenomenon. Dr M S Swaminathan, father of India's green revolution, says mangroves in southern India's Pitchavaram and Muthupet regions acted like a shield and bore the brunt of the tsunami. The impact was mitigated and lives and property of the communities inhabiting the region were saved?.

Alas, this news arrives too late to save most of Sri Lanka's mangroves and coral reefs. For half a century, I have watched with mounting dismay how both these natural resources were plundered. From the mid 1950s, when I first explored the seas around Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and decided to settle down on the island, I have been calling for greater protection for the reefs. For every person who heeded my call, there were many who did not. Fuelled by a combination of poverty, indifference and official apathy, coral mining has continued to destroy these 'rainforests of the sea' — thus eroding our natural defence.

Mining was not the only threat to the reef. My first book on Sri Lanka, *The Reefs of Taprobane* (1957), carried a photograph showing fishermen using dynamite to stun and catch fish blowing up everything for metres around. This completely illegal activity has continued over the years, depleting fish stocks and wrecking the reef.

I once warned that Sri Lanka's southern coasts will be inundated by enhanced sea erosion owing to coral mining. Of course, nobody could predict the tsunami — but I wonder how many thousands of innocent lives could have been saved if the right action had been taken at the right time.

As memories of the tsunami slowly begin to fade, it can once again be tempting to resort to these and other gross violations of nature and law. Our big challenge in rebuilding Sri Lanka is to not only restore the damaged infrastructure, but create viable livelihood opportunities for millions of people who will otherwise return to illicit and unsustainable practices. At least part of the large volume of aid should be invested in long

term projects that address these needs.

Globalised disaster

The outside world can play a role to ensure that this happens. The Asian tsunami has been called the first truly globalised disaster of our time. Certainly, the tremors from the bottom of the Indian Ocean reverberated well beyond the dozen countries that were directly impacted. Inspired by television coverage, people all over the world donated in cash, kind, skills or time. This prompted their governments to follow — but this is just a start.

For real changes to happen, Sri Lanka and other affected countries need sustained assistance and constant engagement by the world's rich nations and corporations. They also need appropriate investments in technology and skills to stand on their own feet.

The media can keep these issues alive. The New Year dawned with the Global Family closely following the unfolding tragedy via satellite television and on the web. As the grim images from Aceh, (continued on next page)



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Dhanapala in the ring for UN

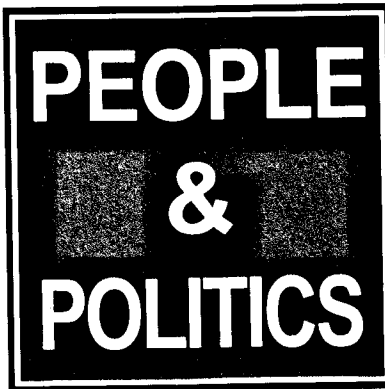
Mar 5 - Sri Lanka has officially launched its bid to succeed UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan when he leaves the prestigious post at the end of his second term next year.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry has informed the country's diplomatic missions to lobby for its candidate Jayantha Dhanapala, a former Under Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs at the UN and a veteran and respected diplomat.

The Foreign Ministry has asked its missions to campaign in their host countries for Dhanapala and has provided his curriculum vitae to be made available to the respective foreign ministries.

Dhanapala's formal candidature was announced in the Sri Lankan parliament last December when Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said in reply to a question that the government had indeed tapped Dhanapala for the job. Dhanapala who had a long and distinguished career in Sri Lanka's diplomatic service later joined the United Nations and is now heading the Colombo government's peace secretariat that is heavily involved in trying to kick start the stalemated talks with the LTTE, the Tamil Tiger rebels.

Dhanapala's name was thrown into the ring as a possible successor to Kofi Annan shortly after the Association of South East Nations (ASEAN) endorsed the name of Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai as its candidate. It is generally recognized that Annan's succes-



sor should come from Asia as the Asian continent has not had a UN Secretary-General since Burma's U Thant.

When Foreign Minister Kadirgamar confirmed Dhanapala's candidature, he made it a point to underline that the principle of geographical rotation that gives each continent an opportunity to head the UN should apply "both among regions and within regions."

This was to make a case for the South Asian sub-region. Burma, the only Asian country to hold the post is in Southeast Asia, the same region that has now decided to back the Thai foreign minister.

Although there are only two candidates right now, it is possible that more candidates could emerge later. In the end the decision on who replaces Kofi Annan will really be made by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council each of whom has a veto power.

Uma Maheswaran's brother's ordeal

Mar 2 - Kathirakumar Yogeswaran, bro-

ther of late Uma Maheswaran, one of the leading figures in the Tamil militant movement until he was gunned down in 1989, now living in France, has complained to the French Ambassador, the SLMM and the leader of the PLOTE about the LTTE seizing his passport and extorting money from him, when he returned to the Northern Sri Lanka after 24 years, to see his kinsfolk at Inuvil, Jaffna recently, according to PLOTE leader and parliamentarian Dharmalingam Sitharthan.

Mr Yogeswaran has complained that his French passport number 047B 33039 was seized by the LTTE, when he went to his hometown in the North and he was later forced to sign a document stating that he would pay the LTTE at the rate of one Euro a day for the entirety of the 24 years he spent in France. The LTTE had also demanded him to sign a document promising a further payment of 30 Euros for each month he would spend in France in the future, Sitharthan said.

But when the LTTE cadres got hold of Mr Yogeswaran he did not have the large sum of money demanded by them from him, The LTTE also asked his sister-in-law Jeyarani Varatharajah, a resident of Temple Road Jaffna, to stand surety for paying the money demanded by the LTTE. Mr. Yogeswaran said since he did not have such a large sum of money as demanded by the LTTE, but if he failed to pay up he feared for the life of his sister-in-law.

He has also said that he had to pay the LTTE 1,000 rupees and a further sum of 4,000 rupees when he crossed the Muhamalai LTTE check point on his way to Jaffna on arrival in the country on February 18. The LTTE cadres at the check-point had told him he had to pay these amounts as he was returning from Europe.

Sitharthan said that Mr Yogeswaran had told him that it was only after he signed the the document promising to pay the LTTE the entire amount of money on returning to France and his sister-in-law guaranteed the payment that his passport was returned to him, Sitharthan said.

Major German Honour for Human Rights Watch

The prestigious Theodor-Heuss Foundation announced today that it will award its highest honor to Human Rights Watch in April 2005. The foundation recognized Human Rights Watch for "the

(continued from page 22)

Chennai, Galle and elsewhere replaced the traditional scenes of celebrations, I realized that it will soon be 60 years since I invented the communications satellite (in Wireless World, October 1945). I was also reminded of what Bernard Kouchner, former French health minister and first UN governor of Kos-ovo, once said: 'Where there is no camera, there is no humanitarian intervention.'

But cameras and other media have to do more than just document the devastation and mobilise emergency relief. Media need to move beyond body counts and aid appeals to find lasting, meaningful ways of supporting Asia's recovery.

The real stories of survival and heroism are only just beginning. Let network

TV move on to the next big story. I am confident that the cyber activists and committed local journalists will keep us informed. The Web offers a platform for passionate individuals and small groups to get their views out to the world.

Indeed, this will be a real test for information and communications technologies (ICTs).

On that fateful day, hundreds of amateurs captured breath-taking images of the Asian tsunami using their hand-held video cameras. TV networks and professionals arrived only hours later.

In the coming months, we should return to these locations, armed with video cameras, to record the next big wave of human spirit and human perseverance. □

even-handedness and credibility" of its global reporting.

"We are honored to receive this prize from an institution whose dedication to freedom is widely celebrated," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. "We share with the Theodor-Heuss Foundation the belief that democracy is vital to the struggle for human rights." Previous recipients of the Theodor-Heuss Prize include Vaclav Havel, Gunter Grass, and leading German statesmen. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Theodor-Heuss prize. The awards ceremony will take place April 29 in Stuttgart, Germany. Two other recipients will share the award with Human Rights Watch.

In explaining its decision, the Foundation said: that the "hallmark of Human Rights Watch is the even-handedness and credibility of its reporting.... Highly respected, Human Rights Watch is at times dreaded by governments and international organizations for the accuracy, impartiality and timeliness of its reports. The concern, size and perseverance of this organization ask for stronger appreciation and support in Germany."

The Foundation was established in 1965 by Hildegard Hamm-Bruecher and friends of Germany's first president, Theodor Heuss. The Foundation's mission is to support democracy as a way of life according to the philosophy of Theodor Heuss.

"We are proud to be furthering Dr. Hamm-Bruecher's life's work in support of democracy," said Roth. "And we find inspiration in the democratic leadership of Theodor Heuss."

The two other recipients are Prof. Dr. Meinhard Miegel, a trenchant analyst of social and economic data and an advocate of civil society, and Prof. Dr. Klaus Toepfer, who heads the United National Environmental Program in Nairobi.

In spring 2005, Human Rights Watch plans to open its first office in Germany, an advocacy office in Berlin. "The timing of this prize could not be better," said

Roth. "Germany has an enormously important role to play in promoting human rights around the world. We will continue to push for Germany to realize that potential."

Learning from stories, if not from history

"If we cannot learn from history, let us learn from short stories," said the former Prime Minister, I. K. Gujral, while releasing a book by Gana Moonesinghe, political scientist and wife of the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in India, at the Sri Lankan High Commission in New Delhi on February 25.

Launching the book, *Build a Bridge*, which is a collection of five short stories set against the backdrop of the violent conflicts that have engulfed Sri Lanka over the past two decades, Mr. Gujral said the problems that Sri Lanka faced were a result of decolonisation. The "same story could apply to any country of South Asia," he said. "Though your pain is much more," others like Bangladesh and Pakistan had also suffered due to intolerance and lack of understanding.

The Editor-in-Chief of *The Hindu*, N. Ram, who introduced the book, said the five delicately crafted short stories combined the insight of a political scientist with that of a gifted storyteller. The stories registered the change in the character of violence in Sri Lanka - from spontaneous to sporadic to violence in aid of political change through the use of force. He said that the infringement of civil rights and the problems of majoritarianism - which we also saw in India as some rode roughshod over the rights of the minorities in the name of nationalism - lay at the root of the crisis.

While bringing our various facets of the violence in the stories, which dealt with issues such as genocide, Jaffna and hope, this debut work of fiction, contained nothing preachy or propagandist, Ram said. The storyteller had only empathised with every section living in multiple deprivation and, like all good writing, this too

was marked by sincerity.

'Reflected on situation'

Ms. Moonesinghe said she had tried to reflect on why the violent events took place and Sri Lanka became a society where violence became accepted and was condoned; where human rights were preached but humanity and humaneness forgotten; and how the image of a smiling and tolerant Sri Lanka was damaged. The author said that during the colonial period people learnt to compromise and coexist and learnt the art of integration and how to resolve conflicts through negotiation. But after Sri Lanka gained freedom and the citizens became masters of their own destiny, the divisions grew wider as selfishness and greed grew. However, now, with a historical ceasefire in place between the Tamil secessionist groups and the Sri Lankan Government, she said there was hope that the voice of sanity would rise above violence. (*The Hindu*)

A tree to remember

Feb 26 - Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar planted a tree on behalf of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, at the Hyderabad House near the India Gate in New Delhi. The planting of the tree was done as a gesture of sincere appreciation and abiding gratitude for the immense assistance in relief and rescue operations immediately rendered by the Government, Armed Forces, especially the Indian Navy of the Republic of India to the people of Sri Lanka who were severely affected by the unprecedented giant Tsunami waves.

Kadirgamar was in New Delhi as a Special Envoy of President Kumaratunga to thank India. Tsunami waves caused havoc in the coast of Sri Lanka killing over 35,000 deaths, destruction of over 113,000 houses and displacing over half a million people. Foreign Ministry sources described the tree planting ceremony as a sincere gesture of appreciation. A spokesman said "When the flowers bloom one day our friends in India will remember that Sri Lanka appreciated very much what India did to help our people." □



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LTTE's 'Air Force' worries Govt.

According to a report in the *Sunday Times* (6 March), the serious concern felt by the Government over the construction of a new airstrip in Kilinochchi and the acquisition of air capability by the LTTE has prompted President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to write to Norway's Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, raising the issue. A copy of her letter has been handed over to Hans Brattskar, Norway's Ambassador to Sri Lanka, by Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, for onward transmission.

The President's letter is accompanied by an aide memoire and a set of colour pictures of the airstrip as well as an aircraft. The aide memoire contains extensive documentation of matters relating to the new airstrip as well as acquisition of air capability by the LTTE, the report said.

In her letter to the Norwegian PM, pointing out that that the development of an airstrip and acquisition of aircraft were not in keeping with the spirit of the Ceasefire Agreement, President Kumaratunga is learnt to have made clear that the Government fully reserved the right to defend Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity. She has expressed serious concern that there was now a direct threat to Sri Lanka's air space and sought Norway's help to dismantle LTTE's air capability and the airstrip, the report said.

The *Sunday Times* report further says that authorities in the United States has confirmed to the Government that one of the aircraft used by the LTTE was a two-seater Czech built Zlin Z 143. The identification came after the Government handed over photographs obtained by the Israeli built Searcher Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and sought US assistance to identify the aircraft. It is not known whether US also used its resources for independent verification. According to data made available to the Government, the Zlin Z 143 aircraft is said to have a range of 630 nautical miles and is capable of carrying an ordinance load of 240 kilograms. Such an ordinance load could be doubled or made more if only one pilot flies the aircraft as a "flying bomb"

on a suicide mission.

President Kumaratunga's aide memoire has also provided details and photographs of the newly constructed airstrip located south east of the Iranamadu irrigation tank in Kilinochchi. It has been paved with threshold and centreline markings. In addition lights have also been placed alongside the runway. The document lists the length of the runway as 1.2 kilometres, the report said.

The *Sunday Times* report further said that President Kumaratunga had decided that her Government should not go public immediately with the protest to Norway or on other matters relating to LTTE's acquisition of air capability. This is not only until Norway initiates action on the matter but also till the responses of several countries closely associated with the peace process are made public. She also feels an early official announcement would lead to the public being alarmed and a panic situation being created.

The Government has already taken steps to brief friendly countries of what is being described as the "enormous threat to the region" caused by the LTTE building a new airstrip and acquiring air capability. One such country which has been given a detailed briefing was India. According to authoritative sources, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar is learnt to have apprised Indian leaders including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. A similar brief, same sources said, had been given to the United States. Once India, United States and other countries that have been given the facts carry out a study and make their responses known, the Government proposes to place all the facts before the public.

Reportedly the Sri Lanka Air Force had told the Government it had irrefutable evidence that the the LTTE possessed one light aircraft and an airstrip and that the quality of images obtained by the UAV on the second aircraft caused some difficulty. It also told the Government that it possessed the capability to carry out offensive operations against the runway and the LTTE's air assets. But the

ongoing Ceasefire Agreement prevented them from engaging in any offensive action. They have, however, pointed out that the only option available would be to prevent any enemy air asset from carrying out any activities detrimental to national security by intercepting and destroying them in the air. The Air Force views such a course of action as a defensive one, the *Sunday Times* report said.

The presence of a new airstrip in Kilinochchi and the acquisition of air capability by the LTTE, the Government believes, have tilted the military balance drastically during the ceasefire. It was on the morning of January 12, this year the UAV obtained its first video footage. It showed an aircraft parked at the southern (05) end of the runway. A second UAV reconnaissance mission was carried out in the night on the same day. Infra red images showed another aircraft parked near a structure that resembled a makeshift hangar. These images showed that the second aircraft had been concealed under camouflage netting to hide its presence. On February 3, an Air Force UAV on a routine reconnaissance flight over Iranamadu during the night videod an aircraft touching down in the newly built airstrip. This came as the first confirmation through visual images that the LTTE was in possession of aircraft, the report said.

Reportedly the construction of the runway began during the tenure of the previous United National Front (UNF) Government. Metal for the construction of the airstrip had been moved from suppliers in the Anuradhapura district ostensibly on the grounds that it was to be used for building the badly damaged Alpha Nine (A-9) highway.

At one top level conference at the Ministry of Defence in Colombo during this period, a senior Army officer had raised issue. He had alluded to intelligence reports of how vast quantities of metal and cement were being moved into the Wannu. Though it was on the grounds that paving of the Kandy-Jaffna (A-9) highway was taking place, the quantities seemed too enormous. The Army officer had in fact cited the role played by a local Government official in the area in expediting metal and cement supplies. His protests, however, were ignored. That was during a time when the UNF leadership chose to ignore many such complaints or reports. Hence no remedial action was taken.

(continued on next page)

UN Security Council acts on child soldier issue

24 Feb - The report presented by Olara Otunnu, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), was discussed at the special meeting of the UN Security Council on February 23. In a statement issued after the meeting, the Council strongly condemned the recruitment and use of child soldiers "and all other violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict." It called for a "systematic and comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism" that would provide the basis for "appropriate action."

Olara Otunnu said after the council hearing: "All the members of the Security Council showed the political will to have this (set of recommendations in the report) implemented."

Being an organization mentioned and discussed in the report, the LTTE had in a letter to the Special Representative, Olara Otunnu, requested a dialogue on the issue of child soldiers.

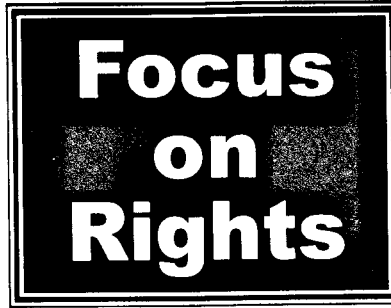
The Security Council of the United Nations had recommended taking forward the implementation of its previous resolutions on child soldier recruitment. The declaration was made at the end of a day-long debate the 15-member body. The debate was initiated by an earlier report issued by the Secretary General Kofi Annan.

According to a statement issued after the discussion, the new steps would be taken for, "ending the recruitment or use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict situ-

(continued from page 26)

During the same period several packages brought into the country by members of LTTE delegation returning to Colombo after peace talks abroad were cleared without Customs or security inspection. Confirmation that such unchecked packages contained radars in knocked down condition and other war like material had been given by the one time LTTE strongman and renegade eastern leader Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan alias Karuna.

Meanwhile Norway's Ambassador Brattskar is learnt to have briefed the LTTE leadership about the Government's concerns over the new airstrip in



ations, and promoting their reintegration and rehabilitation."

Earlier, some media agencies commented that the debate would lead to concrete action against those who recruited children. However, the statement issued at the end of the debate did not make clear whether it would impose sanctions or "targeted measures" against those who recruited children, a key request made earlier in the day by Olara Otunnu, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).

Acknowledging the need for a monitoring and reporting mechanism to track the recruitment of child soldiers and other children's rights violations, the Security Council said it had started considering the proposal for such an instrument from Secretary-General Kofi Annan. In a statement read by Foreign Minister Rogatien Biaou of Benin, which holds the Council presidency for February, at the end of a day-long debate the 15-member body said it was working on a new resolution to "take forward the implementation of its previous resolutions." It reiterated "its intention to complete expeditiously the process of the establishment of the mechanism" and said it would ensure compliance and end impunity.

Kilinochchi and the acquisition of air capability

If the previous UNF Government saw the birth of a new LTTE airstrip in the Wannai, the UPFA Government has seen the guerrillas acquire air capability. During a ceasefire, whilst the UPFA leadership remained ill informed and unconcerned, the LTTE seized the military balance in its favour. There was little or no intelligence about these developments. And now, the UPFA Government awaits international reaction before it could tell Sri Lankans the grim truth - the Tiger who had an "Army and a Navy" have now developed the nucleus for an "Air Force", the report said. □

The new resolution would be aimed at "ending the recruitment or use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict situations, and promoting their reintegration and rehabilitation." It did not make clear whether it would impose sanctions or "targeted measures" against those who recruited children, a key request made earlier in the day by Olara Otunnu, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).

He made his remarks during a special Council session convened to review the problems facing child victims of wars and his third report on the situation. The situation of vulnerable children has improved in just a few years, mainly under Security Council leadership, Otunnu said, but too many of them were still being brutalized by parties to conflicts, with UN field representatives complaining of lack of security, access, cooperation and, especially, an organized and functioning mechanism for monitoring and reporting at the country level.

"The Council has on previous occasions expressed its intention to take concrete and targeted measures against these (offending) parties. It is most important that the Council make good on its promise on this occasion. On that depends the credibility of this exercise," he said. "The targeted measures should include the imposition of travel restrictions on leaders and their exclusion from any governance structures and amnesty provisions, the imposition of arms embargoes, a ban on military assistance and restriction on the flow of financial resources to the parties concerned."

He suggested that the Council establish a committee to review any sanctions imposed to protect children exposed to conflict, demand that the parties named prepare time-bound action plans to end their violations and put the recommended monitoring and reporting mechanism into operation expeditiously.

Listing an offending party, whether a Government or a rebel, was to ensure accountability of a "specific, identifiable and identified entity," not a broad or non-specific category of offenders, Otunnu said.

The LTTE of Sri Lanka, named in

this year's report, notified him in a letter he received just yesterday (22 February) of "their readiness to enter into dialogue, using the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism," he said.

He called on the LTTE leadership to embark immediately on tangible actions, leading to a time-bound action plan to end, once and for all, the practices of recruitment, abductions and use of children as soldiers. Otunnu concluded his remarks by reciting from a Bob Marley song, "Hear the children crying".

European Union on child soldiers

Following hard on the heels of the UN Security Council telling the LTTE to end child conscription, the LTTE was the only organisation that was named in a press release issued by the European Union (EU).

Furthermore, the EU in its statement mentioned Sri Lanka among the three countries where it will be active on the child soldier issue. It said, "The Plan of Action, recently adopted by the EU, is meant to further reinforce the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict through political and practical EU involvement on the ground and a better use of the wide range of tools at our disposal. The Plan of Action intends to match technical assistance with political action by identifying gaps and possibilities for increased co-operation on this issue.

As a first step, three focus countries have been identified for pilot projects, namely Uganda, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka."

The EU also stated: "The EU fully subscribes to the views and recommendations of the Secretary General with respect to the role of the International Criminal Court, both for its deterrence effect and the prospect of prosecution of war crimes against children. The EU stresses the importance of putting an immediate end to impunity.

In this context, we urge States to accelerate the process of ratification or accession to the Rome Statute of the ICC, which contains an important provision classifying the conscription or enlisting of children under the age of fifteen years as a war crime."

Acting under invalid emergency regulations

Mar 3 - The Civil Rights Move-

Post-Tsunami Relief: Govt and NGOs

The presence of non governmental organisations (NGO), the United Nations and its partner organisations have increased significantly with the tsunami disaster and the NGOs had received more tsunami aid than the government, Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Planning and Secretary to the Treasury Dr. P.B. Jayasundera said on 2 March.

ment of Sri Lanka (CRM) has called upon the President to act according to the Constitution and the law when exercising emergency powers, and Parliament to be punctilious when exercising supervisory control over emergency rule.

In a press release CRM Secretary Suriya Wickremasinghe said the state of emergency proclaimed by the President on January 4 was not approved by Parliament and therefore had expired within 14 days. "A proclamation of emergency is valid for a period of one month (at a time) if it is approved by Parliament within 14 days. Parliament met on January 4 but the Proclamation was not approved by Parliament on the day and the next meeting was fixed for February 8," it said.

"Furthermore, before obtaining Parliamentary approval for the Second Proclamation of February 3, the President acted beyond her powers and made another set of emergency regulations, which replicated the previous regulations made in January.

When Parliament approved the second proclamation on February 11, this Proclamation became operative which then gave the President the legal power to make emergency regulations.

"Therefore, the set of emergency regulations the President made on February 3 has no legal force. The set of emergency regulations that were made on January 6 lapsed after January 18."

The CRM further pointed out that the Commissioner General of Essential Services and Competent Authorities appointed by the President to act under emergency regulations of February 3 were exercising powers that have no legal force or validity. □

Delivering his address on He made the following remarks at the Independence Commemoration Lecture on 'The Impact of the Tsunami Disaster on the Economy of Sri Lanka - Challenges for Rebuilding the Nation' in Colombo, Dr Jayasundara said that Sri Lanka had so far received financial aid amounting to rupees six billion through private donations. He added that the government was requesting from donor agencies to take over the infrastructure development, which he believed was the most important area to be developed for betterment of the country.

"The government account has received only rupees 1.5 billion, against which the government has already implemented several measures costing over rupees 10 billion, about US\$ 100 million. The international and domestic NGOs engaged in relief operations too have increased considerably. With the large aid pledges by several people and civil societies abroad, it is necessary that a coordinated effort, both in terms of capital inflows as well as on development assistance is undertaken by the government, he said.

He said that several international NGOs now command nearly a billion US dollars for the post tsunami related relief and rehabilitation activities in the region. "In the interest of the best outcome, it is necessary to ensure that these funds are channelled to the benefit of victims in the affected areas. Towards this, asserting how funds are raised and how they are utilised will be essential," he said adding that in the name of tsunami some reputed NGOs were involved in many other activities.

Tsunami tragedy and NGOs

The tsunami devastation of many of the south Asian countries would appear to have created opportunities for the proliferation of local and international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with vast sums of money at their disposal. Some of them, with long standing experience in undertaking relief and rehabilitation work in disaster situations, are doing valuable work, but it would seem

that there are a great number which do not.

International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) are said to staging relief activities to gain publicity and more funds from donors in many parts of the country. One aid worker is quoted as saying that there is a heavy competition among these organisations, mainly among the international organisations. She said "This is unbelievable how they compete with each other. They stage activities and show them as relief efforts. Then they photograph them and send it abroad and to show their donors and others. Also what they give cannot be used by our people. We can also see that there is business interest among them. They carry out business in the guise of humanitarian work."

It is also said that the Tsunami has created unprecedented employment opportunities to people from the west and other developed countries. Many of them have landed lucrative job contracts in Sri Lanka as aid workers and in international organisations such as the UN and the International Red Cross and other foreign agencies. An expert Sri Lankan doctor has been quoted as saying that Sri Lanka has no proper mechanism to control and monitor activities of these organisations. He said how he saw a doctor from a foreign INGO trying to give some kind of body lotion as medicine to people in camps down south. He called on the government to take immediate action to curb activities of this nature. He also pointed out that psychosocial activities must be carried out by local counsellors and not foreign counsellors who do not understand the language and the culture of the island.

The post-tsunami situation has also seen a proliferation local NGOs purporting to do relief work obtaining huge amounts of funds from donor agencies which see only their "project proposals" which appear to be very fine and laudable on paper, but producing very little on the ground. Even some established local NGOs which used to engage in other type of activities such as election monitoring or lobbying for peace would seem to have switched to activities relating to "monitoring relief distri-

bution" undertaken by Government institutions or other NGOs!

NGOs in fierce competition by Ravi R. Prasad

Tangalle, Sri Lanka, Jan. 24 (UPI) - They are of all shapes, sizes and colours. The tsunami hit areas of the Indian Ocean island of Sri Lanka look like a world conference amid rubble.

Every cluster of camping tents has a flag showing the name of the non-governmental organization or the country that it has come from. There are vehicles flying flags of NGOs and armed forces that are working with the tsunami victims in the east and south of the country.

A quick surf of the Web sites of many international NGOs gives an impression that they have taken care of all the problems of the victims in Sri Lanka. Most of them claim to be busy constructing temporary shelters for people now living in welfare camps or under tarpaulin.

In spite of these loud assertions that fetch the aid agencies huge donations back home, thousands of tsunami survivors have to go without food at times and run for shelter when it rains heavily. "Last night I had to go to the Buddhist temple because my tent collapsed," Lakshman, a barber, who was displaced by the tsunami that hit Sri Lanka on Dec. 26. "The aid workers, who come here every morning, did not turn up when it rained heavily. They know that the tents cannot withstand heavy shower."

Outside the office of Government Agent or the chief administrator of one of the districts, representatives of NGOs are perched in a row like birds on a wall. They wait for their turn to meet the officer and promise him the moon. "One of the agencies working in the district has promised to rebuild the entire city, but it has no experience in civil engineering. It is recognized world over for medical relief," said a government official in the southern Matara district.

The tsunami has sparked of fierce competition between aid agencies. They are trying to outsmart each other and in the process, making promises that cannot be fulfilled. In most places aid agencies work in camps that are alongside the road. It increases their visibility. Camps

in far flung areas still depend on armed forces and government officials for succour.

As all the agencies are trying to work on water, sanitation and health, confusion reigns supreme. The government, on its part, does not have a system to ensure coordination between the NGOs to reduce duplication of work.

In the capital Colombo, the aid agencies are calling up reporters to invite them to visit the areas where they are working. "We are working in Matara, Hambantota, Galle, Batticaloa and Ampara. If you are going to any of these places, please let us know. We can arrange a visit to the camp where we are working," a public relations official of an NGO said over the phone.

Persistent queries revealed that the aid organization was involved in "advocacy," trying to convince the district officials that the tsunami victims living in welfare shelters should not be moved to temporary shelters for the next few months. Asked if the agency was doing something for the people that could help them recover from the tragedy, the answer was a long winding one with full of jargon.

"Oh yes, we are distributing NFRI (nonfood relief items) and also doing Wat/San (water and sanitation). We have also taken up protection issues and working with children to provide them counselling," the public relations official said.

Plane loads of clothes, bottled water and relief items arrived in the country a couple of days after the tsunami strike. While water was exhausted quickly, food items and clothes have gone to waste.

Hundreds of thousands of cans of baked beans, canned meat and frozen raw meat were never consumed. "The donors had no idea of what Sri Lankans eat," said a government officer working with relief agencies. "The expression of solidarity made us feel that we are not alone, but what they sent was of no use to our people."

At a Buddhist temple near Seenegama in Galle district, women burned excesses clothes that they had received as aid. "These do not fit us, some of it is woolen," said Dilusha, who was burning the clothes. "There is so much of it in the

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temple that we have no place to keep anything else, so we decided to burn it."

According to rough estimates, the killer wave left some 7,000 children orphaned and thousands of women widowed. Not one aid agency has set up a children's home or a home for destitute women. "We do not believe in institutionalizing children," said an official of an aid agency that works with children. "We are into advocacy, and we believe that children should be with families and not in children's homes."

Thousands of medical experts turned up soon after the disaster hit Sri Lanka. Many of them are still around struggling to help people. "What is trauma?" asked a doctor, who has come from far East Asia. In his broken English, the doctor asked the interpreter to explain what the patient meant by trauma.

"Why has he come here when he cannot understand either English or Tamil?" said 64-year-old Ganesan, a retired government employee, who speaks fluent English. "I tried to explain to him that the child is traumatized, but the doctor does not understand English."

Some of the aid agencies have won the hearts and minds of people. Those constructing temporary shelters or employing the displaced, jobless men have gained the respect of the people.

Karuna cadre injured in shooting: Feb 20 - Mr. Vadivel Ravichandran, 22, of Kiran in eastern Sri Lanka and known to be a member of the Karuna faction of the LTTE

was shot and injured allegedly by Tamil Tiger gunmen on February 19, Saturday night around 10.15 in Oddamavady, 34 kilometres north of Batticaloa, Police said.

The injured man had urged medical officers at Valaichenai hospital where he was admitted Saturday night that he be transferred to Polannaruwa base hospital. Valaichenai hospital authorities had informed Police that they could not comply with his request as Polannaruwa base hospital is outside the Batticaloa district. They had, however, explained that the Sri Lanka army had the authority to transfer the injured man in a military ambulance to Polannaruwa.

Indian soldiers help reconstruct Arugam Bay bridge: Feb 20 - Soldiers of the Indian Army contingent that arrived in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of tsunami disaster have started construction of temporary spans over the partially but heavily damaged Arugam Bay bridge in Amparai district. Multiple spans of a total of 150 feet were destroyed of the 350 feet bridge when the wave struck, engineering sources in Amparai said.

Spokesperson of construction crew of the Indian Army told media that 80 soldiers were deployed in the reconstruction of the Arugam Bay bridge. He added that ten Sri Lankan Army soldiers were assisting the Indian crew on the construction effort. The bridge would be usable again within three weeks, according to their

Oxfam on inexperienced NGOs
Michael McDonough

Jan. 26, 2005 (AP) - In Sri Lanka, some new houses were built too close together, leading to potential sanitation problems, and the dwellings lacked the country's traditional kitchens, which are open to the elements.

There also have been significant difficulties in southern India over the coordination of agencies, the charity said in its report, "Learning the Lessons of the Tsunami: One Month On."

Cox declined to identify the charities that Oxfam referred to. "We're not naming and shaming," he said. "We're taking this up with the bodies coordinating the relief effort: the U.N. and local governments."

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, said that smaller aid organizations which turn up unannounced can make a relief effort more complicated. "This happens in many emergencies, it's a common problem," OCHA spokeswoman Elisabeth Byrs told The Associated Press. "We see many staff running to the place and we do our best to get these people on board."

Byrs said sometimes these groups don't have the necessary expertise and their efforts need to be coordinated with wider aid operations conducted by the

United Nations and larger relief organizations.

Another leading British charity, Christian Aid, agreed that some inexperienced NGOs were working in tsunami-hit areas, but said their help was nevertheless valuable. "There are inexperienced NGOs working in various areas," said Nick Guttman, head of emergency at Christian Aid. "Anybody who can is out there trying to help each, but they aren't very experienced, so they can't do anything on the large scale. But they definitely can give a lot of small scale help."

No one was immediately available for comment at Britain's Department for International Development. A phone message wasn't immediately returned.

When asked about Oxfam's comments on inexperienced NGOs, a spokesman for Save the Children U.K. said the charity hadn't noted anything similar.

The Oxfam report also said governments have pledged US\$912 million (euro703 million) of the US\$977 million (euro753 million) requested by the United Nations for urgent humanitarian aid. But it added that so far they have only contributed half the amount asked for.

Oxfam added that governments needed to do more to tackle wider problems facing tsunami survivors, such as debt, trade barriers and conflict in the affected regions. □

NEWS TRACK

spokesperson.

The temporary construction is expected to last up to three years if regular maintenance is done. A more permanent structure

has to be rebuilt within that time period. Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala residents of Arugam Bay, Ullai and Panam villages people have been undergoing severe transport difficulties without the use of the bridge. Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) has been providing boat service to cross the bridge after the tsunami.

Karuna cadre killed: Feb 20 - Villiasingham Manoharan, 26, suspected to be a supporter of the Karuna faction of the LTTE was killed and another wounded when gunmen reportedly belonging to the Tamil Tigers ambushed them near the Batticaloa-Polannaruwa district border on February 21, Sunday around 11.45 am, according to the police. The two men, both cadres of the Karuna Group, were travelling on a motorbike from Karapola to Muththukkal, villages in the interior of Polannaruwa District, about 65 kilometres northwest of Batticaloa, when they were ambushed. The injured cadre identified as Mr. Vinayagamoorthy Jeganathan (Suthaharan) was admitted to Polannaruwa Base Hospital.

Remove language barriers urged: Feb 20 - Mr. Kasinather Sivapalan, newly elected President of the Trincomalee District Bar Association (TDBA) said he would request the police to appoint Tamil speaking personnel in all police stations in the Trincomalee district to record complaints in Tamil language and

also to submit reports in courts of law at least with Tamil translation.

Mr. Sivapalan, a senior lawyer and a leading human rights activist was unanimously elected President of the TDBA for the year 2005 Friday evening.

He added that he will meet the Constitutional Affairs Minister Mr. D.E.W. Gunasekara to request him to take immediate steps to implement the Official Languages Act and Court Languages Act for the northeast province without any further delay.

Currently complaints in the police stations in the northeast are recorded in Sinhala and police submit reports in cases in law courts only in Sinhala without a translation in English or Tamil, legal sources said.

Mr. Sivapalan in January 2005 participated as the sole delegate from Sri Lanka at the Wilton Park Conference on Transitional Justice and Rule of Law in post-conflict society held in London with the assistance of the Centre for Transitional Justice based in New York and supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the British Government.

Lanka protests over Annan's statement: Feb 20 - Sri Lanka has expressed serious concern over what it sees as an ill-conceived statement by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his quick condemnation of the assassination of the LTTE's eastern leader E. Kaushalyan. The government's concern was personally conveyed to UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Danilo Turk, by Sri Lanka's UN envoy Bernard Goonetilleke.

"The timing and contents of the statement were inappropriate and not helpful to the ongoing peace process," Mr. Goonetilleke told Mr. Turk, at a meeting with the Assistant Secretary-General in his Secretariat office.

Mr. Annan's statement was considered "unusual" because he rarely, if ever, condemns the killings of rebel leaders, and certainly not members of a designated "terrorist organisation". At the same time, Mr. Annan has not reacted as quickly - or reacted at all - to the killings of several other political leaders in Sri Lanka over the past few years.

Mr. Turk, who initiated the meeting with Mr. Goonetilleke, was particularly keen on denying news reports that Mr. Annan's statement had been inspired by the UN office in Colombo which was picketed by demonstrators in protest.

He expressed regrets if any misunderstanding had been caused. In Colombo, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar is reported to have said, "It is of little concern to me whether the message in question originated from Colombo or New York. That is a matter between the UN in New York and the UN in Colombo. My concern is to ensure at all times that Sri Lanka as a member state is treated with respect."

Mr. Annan's statement - which described Mr. Kaushalyan as "a senior political leader of the LTTE" - urged all parties "to exercise calm and restraint so as to avoid actions that could disrupt the ceasefire agreement of February 2002 or the long-term interest of peace in Sri Lanka."

Chopper prototype detected: Feb 20 - A person who had arrived from Germany, bringing with him a remote-controlled prototype light aircraft, was arrested by Criminal Investigations Department sleuths said. Preliminary investigations had revealed that the suspect has had a close relationship with the LTTE, police said.

A video tape of the 'Mahaweerar' celebration, organized in Germany and a photograph of the suspect taken with Kaushalyan, the Eastern Province leader of the LTTE, who was recently killed, had been found amongst his possessions. Photographs of senior LTTE leaders, including LTTE police chief Nadeshan and women's wing leader Mathialan were also found on him. He had also tried to smuggle in twenty ultra-powerful torches along with the light air plane, security sources said.

The suspect had divulged to the investigators that the light

aircraft and other equipment were to be handed over to LTTE's Pulliyankulam office. The five-foot long light aircraft was expertly packed in a box and was first noticed by the Airport customs officials who had later handed him to the police for further investigations.

The suspect, Somasundaram Paramakandan (28) told investigators that he is a resident of Kopai North in Jaffna. He told the investigators that the pictures and the light aircraft were given to him by an LTTE cadre by the name Rajitharan who is in Germany.

Grenade kills three in Court: Feb 21 - Three people were killed and more than 50 people were injured in a grenade explosion in Embilipitiya Court Monday (21). 24 prisoners including 19 accused as hardcore criminals and brought for their cases to the court, escaped from the scene, according to a prison-officer. Embilipitiya is a city located in Sabaragamuwa Province in the South. One prison official was among the three dead, sources said. Police suspected underworld gang for the attack.

Fishermen threaten death fast: Feb 21 - Fishermen from the Maruthamunai village are warning of an uprising, if authorities fail to withdraw the '200 metres buffer zone rule' for the Kalmunai Division. "We will give the Government considerable time, but if there is no proper feedback, then we will launch a massive fast unto death in front of the Divisional Secretariat's office in Kalmunai," fishermen are reported to have warned, when they met SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem recently.

They urged the SLMC Leader to intervene and compel the Government to withdraw the buffer zone idea for Kalmunai only, especially due to the lack of land and other practical issues. Mr. Hakeem in response is reported to have said, "I understand your plight, and according to the United Nation's accepted norms, people cannot be relocated against their wishes," he said.

Meanwhile, the fishermen had also requested the Government to urgently provide them with boats and fishing nets, so that they can get back to sea and start to earn their day to day living. The fishermen also queried as to why the Government was meeting out step motherly treatment towards the eastern province, while providing almost everything to the South which was not even half affected compared to the East. Newspapers reported that the Fisheries Minister had handed boats and the documents of ownership to Southern fishermen. "Why aren't we given such treatment, aren't we also affected?," they queried.

24 varsity students request transfer: Feb 23, 2005 - Twenty four students, consisting of 20 Muslims and four Sinhalese who were granted admission to the Jaffna University for the 2005 Academic Year are urging authorities to provide them with alternate Universities as they are afraid to go to the Tamil populated University because the situation in the North is extremely 'tensed'.

It's nearly 15 years since the last batch of Muslim and Sinhalese students had studied at the Jaffna University. The parents of these students have expressed their deep concern noting that due to the fragile peace process and with the possibility of hostilities escalating between the LTTE and Government, they fear to send their children as they don't know what plight will be awaiting them. The students have also informed that they will not be able to carry out their studies with a peace of mind due to fear, as the environment in Jaffna is not all that conducive.

These students along with their parents have made several representations to Ministers Ferial Ashraff, Dinesh Gunawardena, A.H.M. Fowzie, and several other Government and Opposition politicians including Alavi Moulana, Rauff Hakeem, Anver Ismail and Rishard Bathiudeen. The Ministers are reported to have informed the students that they will take up the matter at the Cabinet meeting and request President Kumaratunga to allocate alternative Universities for them. This undertaking was given on February 15th, but the parents and students are yet to receive any favourable feedback from the authorities.

Court quashes death sentence: Feb 23 - Mr. Shanmugam Ragupathi, a Tamil youth of Jaffna was released Monday, 21 February after fifteen years in Welikada jail when the Supreme Court quashed the death sentence imposed on him by the Colombo High Court in a case in which he was indicted by the Attorney General for causing deaths of several soldiers of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in an attack on the Karainagar army base in the year 1990.

The Attorney General under the Prevention of Terrorism Act indicted the accused (PTA) in the Colombo High Court in 2002, and following a trial the Colombo High Court imposed death sentence on the accused, accepting his confession as a voluntary one despite defence position that the confession was made under duress while in police custody, legal sources said.

The accused filed an appeal against the death sentence stating that the High Court had erred in accepting his confession as a voluntary one. He also said in his appeal that the prosecution had failed to establish the fact that there was an army camp in Karainagar during the period of committing the alleged crime. The prosecution also failed to prove with authoritative documents that about five hundred soldiers were killed in the Karainagar attack, said the Supreme Court in its order quashing the death sentence.

Tamil MPs protest march: Feb 24 - A group of a dozen Tamil National Alliance MP marched on the driveway to the Sri Lankan Parliament carrying placards condemning Colombo for failing to avail itself of the cease fire with the Liberation Tigers signed three years ago. "Do not buy weapons with Tsunami aid", "Disarm the paramilitaries", "Don't divide the Muslims and Tamils", read some of the placards. The march and demo were led by senior Tamil Parliamentarians Mr. R. Sampanthan, Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, Mr. Mavai Senathirajah and Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan.

"We are doing this to register the Tamil speaking people's disgust at the manner in which the Sri Lankan state has squandered these three valuable years of peace by trying to find ruses to preserve the unitary Sinhala Buddhist state by means other than war," said Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan, explaining the TNA decision to hold the demo and protest march at the Parliament.

Oxfam, EI to reconstruct tsunami hit schools: Feb 24 - Education International (EI) and Oxfam-Netherlands have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Central Ministry of Education for reconstructing fourteen schools which were destroyed in December 26 tsunami in the northeast and south of Sri Lanka. Mr. Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary of the Education International, Ms Sylvia Borren, General Director of the Oxfam-Netherlands and Dr Ms. Tara De Mel, Secretary to the Ministry of Education signed the MoU, education Ministry sources said.

Of the fourteen schools, nine will be constructed in the north-east province at a cost of 475 million rupees. The Schools for the South will be constructed at a cost of 320 million rupees, sources said.

Dr de Mel thanked the Education International and Oxfam-Netherlands for their assistance to improve the education in tsunami hit areas. She said although the Sri Lanka government has signed MoUs with foreign governments and international and national non-governmental organizations, this is the first time the government has signed MoUs with organizations representing world teachers to reconstruct schools.

Schools to be constructed in the northeast are: Trincomalee District: Nilaveli Tamil Maha Vidiyalayam (Rs 70 million), Kuchchaveli Al Nooriya Vidiyalayam (Rs 44 million), Cheenanveli

Athavan Vidiyalayam (Rs 42 million), Upooral Sivasakthi Vidiyalayam (Rs 37 million); Batticaloa District: Kurukkalamadam Kalaivani Maha Vidiyalayam (Rs 82 million), Chettipalayam Maha Vidiyalayam (Rs 74 million); Mullaitivu district: Mullaitivu Hindu Tamil Vidiyalayam (Rs 30 million), Mullivaikal East Government Tamil Mixed School (Rs 30 million); Amparai district: Oluvil Al-Jailani Vidiyalayam (Rs 58 million)

75 million dollars emergency grant from WB: Washington, Feb 25 - The World Bank has approved USD 75 million emergency grant for Sri Lanka to help it recover from the tsunami disaster of December 26. This is in addition to the USD 75 million made available to the country earlier this month as an immediate response to the tragedy, bringing the total aid to USD 150 million.

Total financing needs for Sri Lanka's recovery and reconstruction are estimated to be approximately USD 1.5 to 1.6 billion, according to a damage and needs assessment made by World Bank with the Asian Development Bank and Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

The new grant is expected to contribute to the recovery process by assisting the affected people in rebuilding their damaged houses, restoring livelihoods, and reactivating the delivery of basic services to the devastated areas.

The tsunami had caused widespread devastation along Sri Lanka's eastern, southern and western coast, damaging over 1,00,000 houses and affecting about a million people. The emergency project will finance housing, roads, water supply and other infrastructure; livelihood support and capacity building for implementation. "The need is to create a strong foundation for a longer-term reconstruction and recovery effort, that ensures equity between regions and ethnic groups," said Peter Harrold, World Bank Country Director for Sri Lanka. He said, "the financing package approved is geared to help people get their lives back but as the recovery and rebuilding progresses, and as other donors come to the table, we will be flexible about the areas we finance."

Thellipalai hospital to be upgraded: Feb 25 - The Government of Japan has donated a sum of USD 90,204 (approximately Rs. 8.9 million) towards the "Project for Emergency Rehabilitation of Water Supply and Sewerage Systems at Thellipalai Hospital" in the Jaffna peninsula as a part of its continuous efforts in improving the emergency health care needs in areas where access to health facilities and services are insufficient.

Akio Suda, Ambassador of Japan to Sri Lanka and R.M.S. Ratnayake, Provincial Secretary of Health, North-East Province signed the grant contract on Friday at the Ministry of Healthcare in Colombo.

Minister Nimal Siripala De Silva and S. Maligaspe, Secretary to the Ministry of Healthcare and M.S. Jayasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation were present at the occasion. Chief Secretary, North-East Provincial Council and Government Agent Jaffna District also attended the ceremony.

A statement from the Japanese embassy said that the project was to be implemented by the North-East Provincial Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medicine.

The Thellipalai District Hospital, which was the second largest hospital in Jaffna is located 18 km from the Jaffna town was badly damaged during the conflict and is now functioning in a temporary rented building. The damaged hospital is now being reconstructed by the Government of Sri Lanka under the North-East Emergency Relief Project, which includes facilities to treat cancer patients as well.

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"At present there is no cancer treatment center in the North-East and hence, all cancer patients are referred to hospitals in Anuradhapura, Kandy or Colombo. This has caused severe hardships for such patients who require long term and intermittent treatment. Further, people in these areas are faced with various social problems which have increased in magnitude after the tsunami disaster and also problems of dependency due to loss of life.

"Therefore, it has become a difficult task to transfer cancer patients away from their familiar surroundings for treatment to hospitals outside the region. In this context, setting up of a cancer unit in the North is an urgent need, but has so far being delayed due to lack of basic facilities for the hospital, such as water supply and sewerage facilities. In addition, the tsunami disaster many people were resettled in and around Thellipalai, thereby creating an additional demand for health care services."

Sri Lanka re-directs tsunami aid: Feb 25 - Sri Lanka has so many tsunami relief supplies it is now distributing them to those unaffected by the disaster. The country's social services minister said goods were being sent to homes for the elderly and institutions for children and the disabled.

Supplies of milk powder, tinned food, bottled water and other goods have left warehouses bulging. Social services minister Sumedha Jayasena said on Friday the donated goods far exceeded the needs of the tsunami survivors. She said if the goods were not distributed elsewhere they would go to waste. "All those affected by the tsunami have already received food aid and will continue to do so wherever they need it," Ms Jayasena said. The minister reported that 94,000 people were still in relief centres and another 407,000 were living with friends and relatives awaiting the rebuilding of their homes. "What we need right now is help to rebuild houses," Ms Jayasena said.

Tsunami data go missing: Feb 26 - With officials still struggling to deal with reconstruction efforts two months after the worst-ever natural disaster hit the country, the information collected during the first month after the tsunami by the Centre for National Operations (CNO) has reportedly gone missing.

It is learnt that among the data lost are the number of missing people, number of deaths and information regarding foreign donors. An official of the now disbanded CNO is reported as saying, "The CNO had maintained a good record of statistics and activities carried out by the Centre. In the transition of duties from the CNO to the Task Forces for relief and rebuilding this data had been lost. This was less than a week after CNO chief Tara de Mel, stepped down.

According to the CNO official, all information regarding foreign donors, including amounts pledged, rebuilding that these groups would undertake and places where the rebuilding would be done were among the data that had gone missing. After the CNO wound up on February 3 this information was to have been transferred to the task force for rebuilding the nation.

He said that one reason for the accumulation of cargo at the air and seaports was because officials did not have the data to tell them where the relevant items should go.

"A whole lot of tents have arrived at the airport and no one knows where they should be directed as the information has gone missing," the official said. Currently, the lost data is being reinstalled outside the normal procedure.

Solheim meets LTTE in east: Feb 26 - Norway's special peace envoy for Sri Lanka, Mr. Eric Solheim met head of LTTE's political division for Batticaloa-Amparai district, Mr. Irasaiah Ilanthirayan for discussions on post Tsunami work and the political-security situation in the region. Solheim and his team visited the Tsunami devastated coastal areas of Paandiruppu, a village south of Batticaloa accompanied regional LTTE officers.

During discussions with the Liberation Tigers the Head of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission for Amparai was also present. They

discussed problems in this region relating to post Tsunami relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The LTTE also reportedly explained to the Norwegians the current security environment in this region and discussed the LTTE's concerns in this regard.

Mr. Pirapa and Mr. Ramanan, LTTE commanders in Batticaloa-Amparai region, Mr. Kuyilpan, head of LTTE's political division for Amparai, Mr. Daya Mohan, deputy head of Batticaloa-Amparai political division and Ms. Kuveni, head of women's wing (political) for Batti-Amparai also took part in the meeting with Mr. Soheim.

India pledges aid for hospital: Feb 26 - The Indian Government has pledged a \$7.5 million grant assistance to build a state-of-the-art cancer hospital in Colombo, the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Nirupama Rao, said.

In addition, as part of its continued assistance to the tsunami-devastated districts, the Indian Health and Family Welfare Ministry will also "augment the existing facilities" in three hospitals in southern, eastern and northern Sri Lanka.

An official team of Indian officials - led by Bhawani Thyagarajan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare - visited hospitals in Hambantota in the South and Point Pedro in the northern Jaffna peninsula and is scheduled to visit the Trincomalee base hospital in the East on 27 February. Discussions were also held with the Sri Lankan Health Minister, Nimal Sripala De Silva, and senior officials on the areas of collaboration.

The team would look into the needs of the hospitals - both short-term and long-term to chart out areas where continuous collaboration was possible, Dr. Thyagarajan said. The team, which included S. Badrinath, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General of Health Services, and three other officials, lauded the "committed doctors" in Sri Lanka's tsunami-affected districts. Measures to improve accident and emergency services, trauma care and operating theatres were some of the areas identified. Improvements to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, where the Indian Government donated a state-of-the-art CT scanner in 2003, were also discussed. Some of the areas for improvement included psychiatric counselling, oncology, training of nurses and trained personnel, said Mrs. Rao, who visited the Jaffna Teaching Hospital today along with the official team.

Discussions are also on for constructing a hospital in Dikoya, in Sri Lanka's central hill districts, where there is a concentration of plantation Tamils of Indian origin.

SLN rescues twelve Tamil refugees from midsea: Feb 26 - Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) rescued 12 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, five children, three women and four men men, returning from South India from a sandbank in the midsea between Thanushkodi and Rameswaram on 24 February and handed them over to Talaimannar Police, security sources said.

They were produced in Mannar Magistrate Court on the following day and Acting Magistrate Mr. Johnthasan released them and instructed the civil authorities concerned to send them back to their own areas in Jaffna and Mannar. The refugees reportedly left Thanushkodi in South India in a boat on 23 February paying a sum of forty thousand rupees to four Indian boatmen. The Indian boatmen had left them on a sandbank telling them that they had reached Sri Lankan coastal area. When the refugees were struggling on the sandbank without water and food, a SLN craft spotted them and with the assistance of some fishermen in the area rescued them and brought to the shore.

Pirapaharan's relatives flown in for funeral: Feb 26 - The government of Sri Lanka reportedly "facilitated" the return to the island of a number of relatives of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to attend a family funeral. Ten close relatives of Prabhakaran had arrived at Sri Lanka's only international airport from Malaysia and travelled to the LTTE-held north of the is-

land, according to officials. They said the family members were in the country to attend the funeral of V K Arambu master, the father of Prabhakaran's wife, Mathiwathani.

Indian help to reconstruct Jaffna: Feb 26 - A delegation led by Ms Nirupama Rao, Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, arrived in Palaly military air base Jaffna by a special aircraft and held discussions at the Point Pedro base hospital regarding its development with the funds allocated by the Government of India, according to health ministry sources.

Ms Nirupama Rao was taken to Point Pedro military camp from Palaly by a special helicopter. Later she proceeded to Point Pedro Hospital by road with maximum security provided by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA). However members of her delegation were taken by land route from Palaly to Point Pedro escorted by the government soldiers.

Dr.C.Kathiravetpillai, District Medical Officer (DMO) of the hospital, Mr. C. Sinnathurai, Administrative Officer and Dr.E.Thivendran, Regional Director of Health Services in Jaffna district received the Indian delegation. Ms Nirupama Rao was briefed about the difficulties in running the hospital. Only three medical officers were working in the hospital and 31 vacancies for medical officers currently existed. Acute shortage for paramedical staff and technical officers prevails in the institution, Indian envoy was told.

Ms Nirupama Rao said posting more medical officers and other employees was the responsibility of the Government of Sri Lanka. However the Government of India was prepared to provide funds for the construction of buildings and to buy medical equipments. She added that her government was prepared to assist in reconstructing the hospitals in Hambantota, Trincomalee and Point Pedro affected by tsunami.

Dr. Kathiravetpillai said he would submit an estimate for the construction of new buildings and for other needs to the Indian

High Commission on the request made by Ms Nirupama Rao. Later she visited Vallipuram Aalvar Temple, Selva Sannithi Murugan Kovil and Point Pedro Sri Saratha Devi Sevashramam with SLA escort.

Abducted teenager rescued: 27 Feb - An irate mother of a seventeen-year-old Tamil girl has assisted troops at the Muhamalai Entry/Exit point in northern Sri Lanka to rescue her child from the LTTE while her daughter was abducted on February 25 around 1.15 p.m.

The victim's mother, Mahendran Wasanthi (42), after learning that LTTE men were preparing a forged identity card to alter her daughter's real age after she was abducted by LTTE, had provided a photo of her teenage daughter' to the Muhamalai Entry/Exit point, Manipay Police station, Human Rights Office and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Jaffna, pleading them to help rescue her loved one.

The teenage girl's LTTE abductor, Mahalingam Manivannan who was also arrested at the Entry/Exit point along with the girl, had reportedly confessed to the Police that the LTTE, within February (2005) alone, has managed to abduct over 28 such minors and subsequently detained them under an LTTE woman cadre named Madhavi at a transit in Pallai before those minors were handed over to the LTTE women's corps at Kilinochchi or elsewhere for LTTE weapon training.

The victimized girl had allegedly fallen victim to LTTE when she approached Kokkuvil, Ponpadi LTTE office after she reportedly developed a personal dispute with an unknown party. During her stay at the LTTE office on February 23, 2005, those LTTE men had duped the girl in question into believing that they (LTTE) were in the process of issuing a new Identity Card to her, similar to those being issued to Jaffna residents.

Both the teenage girl and the LTTE abductor were arrested by Police at the Muhamalai Entry/Exit as she was being abducted and handed over subsequently to the Kodikamam Police for further investigations. The girl was to be handed over to her parents after necessary investigations were over. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was also to be intimidated.

NE Governor affirms language rights: Feb 27 - "I agree that every citizen of the country should be given the right to communicate with the government institutions in their mother tongue," said Mr.Tyronne Fernando, Governor of the North East Province at a discussion held with the members of the Trincomalee District Bar Association in the Trincomalee Court Complex during the weekend. He made this remark in response to the speech by Mr.K.Sivapalan, President of the TDBA that most of the problems would not have arisen if the constitutional amendments in regard to the language rights of minorities were implemented.

Mr.Sivapalan pointed out that currently people are talking about conflict resolution after creating a conflict. "We should have adopted a conflict avoidance policy instead of conflict resolution," said Mr.Sivapalan. He brought to the Governor's notice that the Court Languages Act in relation to the North-East had not been implemented at all. Police were submitting their reports and related documents to courts in Sinhala language causing hardships to litigants and members of the Bar. Police stations in the province, especially in the Trincomalee district were recording complaints from Tamil speaking people in only Sinhala. Action should be taken to post more police officials proficient in Tamil language to record complaints in the mother tongue of the complaints.

Jaffna gets communication tower: Feb 27 - Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT) established a second link to Jaffna with the recent commissioning of its second transmission tower in Jaffna, under its "Project Hope" for the north, launched in 2002. This was a landmark in SLT's Northern Area Development Programme, by providing for two communication routes to Jaffna.

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With the commissioning of the new 150 m high stand-alone tower, (the highest such communication tower in the country), the radio transmission link to Jaffna, which was till then operating to Jaffna over the sea via Mannar, has been upgraded to an ultra-modern high capacity transmission link, entirely land based. The capacity of the new link via Kilinochchi will be 126 Megabits per second (Mbps). SLT established a 34 Megabit radio transmission link over the sea to Jaffna via Mannar last year. The upgraded new link bringing two high capacity links to Jaffna operates to Jaffna via Kilinochchi, where too SLT has built a new communication tower.

In view of the need for rapid implementation of telecommunication facilities in the North, SLT formed a special project team comprising its technical and managerial staff. This team handles all Northern Area Telecommunication Development work and is responsible for outside plant development, switching, radio and transmission equipment installation and transportation.

SL praised for abolishing criminal defamation: Feb 27 - Commonwealth publishers and editors paid a handsome compliment to Sri Lanka for abolishing 'criminal defamation', and urged other Commonwealth Governments to do the same, when they met at their biennial meeting in Australia this week.

In a resolution passed by Commonwealth editors when they met earlier in Manley, Sydney and later ratified by the publishers at their meeting, the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU), which has been spearheading a campaign to have laws of criminal libel abolished in the Commonwealth, has specifically targeted the United Kingdom as a country, which despite not implementing the laws of criminal libel for the past 25 years, has still to formally repeal the law.

The proposal was initiated by editors from Zimbabwe who said they were facing the brunt of this law as a deliberate policy of press suppression. The full text of the resolution, released through the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka is as follows:

"This Forum deplores the continued existence of Criminal Defamation laws around the Commonwealth and their use to inhibit press freedom. It welcomes the action of those nations such as Ghana and Sri Lanka which have repealed the law.

We call upon Commonwealth Governments to repeal all remaining criminal defamation measures as incompatible with modern democratic practice. This particularly applies to the United Kingdom, whose antiquated Criminal Defamation law was the model for most legislation around the Commonwealth. It was used to suppress nationalist voices in the past and continues to be used today by many nations, as justification for Draconian acts against the press."

Soldier went too close to LTTE FDL: SLMM: Feb 27 - The scene of the incident where an Army soldier was shot dead by the LTTE in the 'no-man's' land was inspected by the Magistrate from the Army-controlled area in Kilali through a binocular. Chavakachcheri Magistrate B. Subramaniam had visited the Army's Forward Defence Line (FDL) to inspect the site to conduct the inquiry. The 'no-man's' land extends to an area of 600 metres. Reportedly the Magistrate refused to go any further and chose to survey the site of the killing with the binocular.

The victim, J. Upul Priyadarshana, 25, of Ganemulla was serving in the Vijayaba Regiment. He was killed by female LTTE cadres when he along with another had gone beyond the permissible 100 metres at the FDL.

Meanwhile, SLMM spokesperson Helen Ulassdottir said they have firmly established that the soldier had gone beyond the 100 meter zone of separation. "He was way too close to the LTTE locality," she said. She said that the SLMM was conducting a formal investigation into the incident.

Man shot dead in Batticaloa town: Feb 28 - A man was shot dead in Batticaloa town Monday (28) night around 8.45 by uni-

dentified gunmen, police said. He was identified as 'Thayanithi' of Thiruchendur Kovil Road, a coastal part of Batticaloa town. He was a refugee in the Batticaloa Paddy Marketing Board stores near the junction where he was shot dead. Sri Lanka Police sources said they had seen him visiting the NGO consortium office in the eastern town.

Protest march in Jaffna: Mar 2 - Thousand of people marched in Jaffna urging the international community to persuade the Sri Lankan government to restart the long stalled peace talks with the Liberation Tigers. The march condemned the killing and shooting of LTTE political leaders and called on Colombo to set up a joint mechanism with the Tigers for the equitable distribution of Tsunami aid to the northeast. Jaffna peninsula was shut down until the march, which wound through the northern town from morning 10.45, concluded in the afternoon.

"The Sri Lankan government's failure to restart peace talks with the Tigers on the basis of the Interim Self Governing Authority has created fear among the people of Jaffna and all the people of northeast that cease fire will break down", said the Consortium of Civil Organisation in Jaffna, which organized the march, in a memorandum to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan submitted through the UNHCR office in Jaffna town. Thousands poured into Jaffna University grounds from various parts of the peninsula in hundreds of hired vehicles and buses to take part in the rally.

The memorandum was also sent to President Chandrika Kumaratunga through Jaffna Government Agent by Tamil National Alliance MPs for Jaffna Mr. Mavai Senathirajah and Ms. Padmini Sithamparanathan

Marchers carried placards urging the Sri Lankan armed forces to disarm paramilitaries and stop killing LTTE political activists. They shouted slogans demanding that the Sri Lanka army should leave the towns and villages which it occupied in the peninsula.

SLMM officials ousted from LTTE office: Mar 2 - Two officials of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) from its Vavuniya office in northern Sri Lanka, who had gone to the Vavuniya LTTE political office 1 March to investigate a complaint that the LTTE was detaining several PLOTE members inside the office, were reportedly chased away.

The drama had started, when a PLOTE member complained to the SLMM that the LTTE was forcibly keeping several PLOTE members inside the Vavuniya LTTE office. Later two Ceasefire Monitors along with their driver had gone inside the LTTE office. A Few minutes later it was reported that LTTE cadres had pushed the two monitors out and warned them not to come to check their office again. When the SLMM members were returning to their office, several motorbikes allegedly ridden by LTTE cadres had followed, which led the ceasefire monitors to lodge a complaint with the Vavuniya police. Following the incident, police had provided security to the SLMM office. While declining to comment on the incident, an SLMM source said two of their monitors had visited the LTTE office to investigate a complaint by the PLOTE.

UAE to build new town for Kalmunai: Mar 2 - UAE Ambassador Mahmud Al Mohamed Al Mahmud, who met President Chandrika Kumaratunga on 28 February, said the UAE government would build a completely new town with a hospital, schools, houses and public utility buildings in tsunami affected Kalmunai, a press release from the President's Office said.

President Kumaratunga, who thanked the UAE Ambassador for the assistance given to Sri Lanka, explained that over 19,000 homes were destroyed in the Ampara district where Kalmunai is located. She explained to him the relief and rehabilitation projects being implemented by the government of Sri Lanka in the affected districts. She also said the region was the most severely

damaged in the country and explained the government has been able to identify lands for resettlement of the affected people though there was some problems experienced at the outset due to the demand for suitable lands.

SLMM probes torture charge: Mar 3 - European cease-fire monitors on 3 March said they were investigating into allegations that the Tamil Tigers abducted and tortured two people in northern Sri Lanka. Two men, one a former member of a Tamil militant group (PLOTE) opposed to the LTTE and the other a civilian, had claimed they were held against their will and tortured at the Tigers' political office in Vavuniya town in northern Sri Lanka. The other man is a civilian.

"Torture is always a serious allegation and we are inquiring into the complaint. There were visible bruises on the men that could have stemmed from torture," said monitoring group spokeswoman Helen Olafsdottir.

Trinco govt. official remanded: Mar 3 - Mr.Nimal Dissanayake, Assistant Land Commissioner in the Trincomalee district secretariat and two others was ordered to be remanded by the Trincomalee District Judge and Additional Magistrate Mr.S.Thiagendran in connection with the "disappearance" of twelve generators missing from the land department store. The generators were a part of a consignment of goods donated by the Indian government to supply electricity to temporary shelters for tsunami refugees.

A special investigation unit of the Trincomalee Police arrested Mr Dissanayake on a tip off. Earlier a watcher and a peon of the Land Department Store in Trincomalee were arrested and remanded in custody.

An application for bail made on behalf of third suspect Mr.Nimal Dissanayake came up for inquiry before Trincomalee Magistrate Mr.M.Ganesharajah. Counsel appearing for the third suspect told court in support of the bail application that the Police had no power to arrest his client as his anticipatory bail application filed on March 1 was listed for hearing on March 11 in the Trincomalee court. Hence the arrest of his client by the Police on March 2 was illegal. Therefore his client should be given relief, Counsel Mr.D.Rupasinghe argued.

JVP blamed for tension in Trinco: Mar 3 - A tense situation arose in the eastern port city of Trincomalee as members of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), led by parliamentarian Jayantha Wijesekera, attempted to construct shelters to settle some displaced Sinhalese people on State land in a portion of the esplanade of the urban council in the heart of Trincomalee town. JVP members started clearing the open land, lying between Kaali kovil and the McKeyzer Stadium overnight and unloaded timber, sand and other building materials to build small houses to settle Sinhalese people. The land selected for the encroachment was levelled in preparation to build the settlement.

Tension escalated during the afternoon as groups of Tamil youth blocked traffic by placing blockades on roads protesting against the JVP's attempt. Shops, government institutions, banks and cinema halls were closed in protest against the illegal settlement. Police riot squad was rushed to vulnerable sites to prevent outbreak of violence, police said.

Tension developed into violence following clashes between Tamil groups and JVP supporters over the construction of temporary housing for tsunami victims on state land. A vehicle was set on fire and a hand grenade exploded during the clashes between the two groups. The Tamil groups allegedly backed by the LTTE had launched a protest against the project. A vehicle belonging to the JVP was set on fire and at least two people were injured.

Later, police and Sri Lanka Army (SLA) intervened, imposed a local curfew and stopped the construction of the temporary houses and removed building materials brought to the esplanade.

Security forces started to load the materials in their vehicles, when JVP cadres hesitated to accede to their request. Later some JVP cadres were also seen joining the security forces in removing building materials from the site. The situation in the east port town returned to normal by evening.

JVP parliamentarian Wijesekera accused the LTTE of sabotaging his party's plans to build houses for tsunami victims of all races.

Protest against private Medical college: Mar 5 - The agitation against the setting up of a private medical college by medical faculty students went a step further when they almost came to blows with the Police who were manning the BMICH main gate, where the private organization concerned was having a stall at an education fair on March 4.

Around one hundred and fifty Colombo medical faculty students held a protest outside the BMICH main gate, the venue of the EDEX education and career fair organised by the Royal College Union.

Vinyaka Research Foundation, a university in Tamilnadu, which is a partner in the joint venture to set up the private medical college, also had a stall at the venue. The protestors chanted various slogans against the parties concerned and vowed to resist moves to set up a private medical college. Then they attempted to enter the main compound, when several policemen intervened and tried to push them away. The main body of students attempted to go around the main gate and enter the complex, but later dropped off the attempt and vacated the scene. A major confrontation was thus avoided as the police could be seen calling for reinforcements. However, the students managed to distribute some leaflets to the public who came for the event.

A person who called himself an individual consultant for the Vinyaga Mission's Research Foundation, S. Niranjana, said they were not disturbed by the protests, and would proceed with the setting up of a private medical college with a local private hospital.

"The Indian Medical Council and Indian University Grants Commission has recognised our University. It is situated in Selam City in Tamil Nadu. Under our UGC rules, we are authorised to set up offshore campuses any where in the world, in concurrence with Indian Government and Indian UGC," he said. "Let's face it, my individual opinion is that education nowadays is a business," he said. When questioned about the course fee of Rs. 6.5 million, he said that it depended on demand and supply, and differed from place to place. He emphasised that he was not a representative of Vinyaka Foundation or the Private Hospital, but an individual consultant, and that his statement was his private view.

Tsunami victims protest: Mar 8 - Thousands of people, mainly belonging to the Muslim community, who lost their homes when the Tsunami hit Maruthamunai, 35 kilometres south of Batticaloa, blocked the main highway to Kalmunai protesting against the Government of Sri Lanka for not helping them rebuild their houses.

Entire coastal suburbs of this densely populated Muslim town were flattened by the surging sea. The protestors erected tents and cooked on the road. Only the JVP and three Muslim organisations had put up some temporary shelters for them, the protestors said. Streets were deserted and the usually busy town was shut down.

"Has the government decided to leave us permanently homeless? Our ministers have lined their pockets and abandoned us," said Mr. M.L.A Naseer, a young organizer of the protest.

"This our fourth protest. But the Sri Lankan government is unmoved. The JVP came here in its private capacity and spent its own party funds to clean up the debris and build us temporary shelters. They did not come here as part of the government. But our ungrateful, self-serving Muslim ministers are absconding. We are determined to fight on until we have a response from the

(continued on next page)

Amnesty's father of human rights

Peter Benenson

The founder of Amnesty International, Peter Benenson, has died at the age of 84.

Amnesty has become one of the world's most important human rights organisations, created in the wake of an article Benenson wrote in the London-based *Observer* newspaper in 1961.

Benenson, an Eton-educated London lawyer, penned the opinion piece after being outraged by the arrest and imprisonment of two students who had drunk a toast to liberty in a Lisbon cafe. "Open your newspaper any day of the week and you will find a report from somewhere in the world of someone being imprisoned, tortured or executed because his opinions or religion are unacceptable to his government. The newspaper reader feels a sickening sense of impotence. Yet if these feelings of disgust all over the world could be united into common ac-

tion, something effective could be done."

These sentiments struck a chord with the British public, and a few years later Amnesty International was created. From South Africa and Chile to China and Iraq, Amnesty has since helped highlight the abuse of prisoners. The organisation coined the term "prisoners of conscience" while its logo, a candle surrounded by barbed wire, became a symbol of hope and freedom. In 1977, the organisation won the Nobel Peace Prize for "its tireless fight for justice round the world," as the award committee put it. "When I first lit the Amnesty candle, I had in mind the old Chinese proverb: Better light a candle than curse the darkness," Benenson explained.

Flair for controversy

Born in July 1921, the grandson of a Russian Jewish banker, Benenson re-

vealed a flair for controversy at an early age. When 16 he launched his first campaign, to get school support, during the Spanish Civil War, for the newly formed Spanish Relief Committee that was helping Republican war orphans.

His concern had been inspired by Arthur Koestler's *Spanish Testament*, which described the horrors of imprisonment and threatened execution of prisoners by the Fascists. His next campaign succeeded in getting his school friends and their families to raise £4,000 to bring two young German Jews to Britain, thus saving their lives.

Irene Khan, secretary-general of Amnesty, said Benenson's vision gave birth to human rights activism. "His life was a courageous testament to his visionary commitment to fight injustice around the world. He brought light into the darkness of prisons, the horror of torture chambers and tragedy of death camps."

John Jackson, director of Burma Campaign, said: "Peter showed us that something as simple as a letter can save lives, and that's a strategy we still use. He demonstrated the power of the pen. It shows that the world is watching."

- *Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004*

(continued from page 36)

government," Mr. M.S.M Ibrahim, a trader who lost his home to the sea," said. "There are nine in my family. We are living in a store now which was given by a friend who took pity on me. But very soon I will have to leave or pay a high rent which I cannot afford," Mr. Ibrahim lamented.

Balasingham-Solheim meet: Mar 9 - Norwegian Peace Envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, is reported to have told the LTTE's Political Strategist and Chief Negotiator, Mr. Anton Balasingham, whom he met 9 March that Oslo was optimistic that a joint mechanism for aid distribution could be agreed "soon" between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, according to a report in the TamilNet website.

Mr. Solheim, accompanied by Ms. Solfried Lien, an Executive Office at the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, met with Mr. Balasingham in London for two hours of discussions on the political situation in Sri Lanka and the outlook for Oslo's long-running peace effort in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Solheim discussions in London following his talks with Sri Lankan government leaders in Colombo and visit tsunami-struck areas to examine ongoing relief efforts.

Mr. Solheim had also registered the Sri Lankan government's concern over the LTTE's airstrip in Vanni, Mr. Balasingham told TamilNet.

Mr. Solheim also conveyed Colombo's concerns over the LTTE's airstrip in Vanni to Mr. Balasingham, who had reportedly assured Mr. Solheim that government's concern was unfounded and pointed out that the airstrip had been in existence even before the February 2002 ceasefire. Sri Lankan press reports have,

in extensive reporting in recent weeks, suggested the LTTE had newly acquired an air capability.

LTTE delegation off to Europe: Mar 10 - A high level delegation of Liberation Tigers will begin an official visit to several European capitals from Friday, 11 March. "Our meetings will focus on delivering aid to Tsunami affected people in northeast directly and efficiently", Mr. S. Puleedevan, Secretary General of the LTTE peace secretariat in Kilinochchi, told the media.. The delegation led by Mr. S. P. Thamichelvan, head of LTTE's political division, left Colombo on the Thursday and will travel to Norway, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Ireland, and Switzerland. The Tigers will also visit the European Union headquarters in Brussels, Puleedevan said.

The Tigers are scheduled to meet Norway's foreign minister and its international development minister on 11 March. They will also meet the foreign minister of Finland, Germany's international development minister and the EU commissioner for external affairs, during the tour, Mr. Puleedevan said.

The Tigers and Sri Lanka's government have been locked for weeks in a tussle over international donor relief that has pushed to the back burner any hope of converting the current truce struck after two decades of civil war into permanent peace. "We want the international community to exert pressure because the Sri Lankan government totally depends on finance from the international community," said Mr. Puleedevan, who heads the Tigers' Peace Secretariat. Mr. B. Nadesan, head of the Thamil Eelam Police Service, will accompany Mr. Thamichelvan along with Ms. P. Geetha, deputy head of LTTE's women's political division and Mr. Puleedevan. □

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OBITUARY

Rasamanie Samuel, widow of the late J. M. G. Samuel, (Principal - Stanley College, Jaffna); beloved mother of

Late Mohan (ADB- Manila), Chandra (UK), Indran (USA) and Peter (UK); mother-in-law of Utaiwan (Canada), Dr. Rajeswaran (UK), Lalitha (USA) and Mercy (UK); grandmother of Nira, Suren, Montti, Manee, Mike, Tanya, Jonathan, Joel and Ezrie; grandmother-in-law of Pradeep and Allan; great-grandmother of Kishan, Prashant, Nicholas and Cole passed away peacefully on 20th February 2005 after a short illness. The funeral took place on 5th March - 8 Buckingham Drive, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 6TB, UK. E-mail: maniesamuel@hotmail.co.uk



Anthony Jacob Eustace, Retired Chief Draughtsman, C.G.R. and former resident of Kotahena expired on Sunday, March 06, 2005.

He is the beloved husband of Zitta; loving father of Dr. Manoharan (USA), Vasa-

ntha (UK), Karunaharan (Australia), Kantha (USA); father-in-law of Alegacone (UK) and Dr. Christy (USA) and grandfather of Shiran, Brenda, Joshua and Joanne.

Funeral mass was held at St. Pius Catholic Church on March 09, 2005 and he was buried at New Calvary Catholic Cemetery, Flint, USA.

The members of the 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. - 1111 Briar Cliffe, Flint, MI 48532-2102, USA. Tel: + 810 733 8556.

IN MEMORIAM**Second Year Remembrance**

In ever loving memory of **Dr. N. Sahadevarajan** on the second anniversary of his passing away on 14th March 2003.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his beloved wife Thabonithy; loving children Rajkumar, Niranjala and Girija; daughter-in-law Dr. Jane Rajan; sons-in-law Dr. Ravindran and Dr. Kesavan; grandchildren Dr. Vanaja, Dr. Roshan, Catriona, Duncan, Tamara and Devan.

- 'Longwoods', 26 Wergs Road, Tottenham, Wolverhampton WJ6 8TD.
Tel: 01902 579228.

The First Year Remembrance

In ever loving memory of **Mr. Ramasamy Vijayaratham**, B.Sc. Eng. Hons (Sri Lanka), M.Eng. (AIT - Thailand), C.Eng., MIE (SLIMASCE); former Head of Dept. of Agricultural Engineering, University of Jaffna on the first anniversary of his passing away on 2nd March 2004.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Selva (Research Officer in Charge of the Agricultural Research Station, Thirunelvely, Jaffna; loving children Purushoththaman (Jaffna Hindu College) and Toothiransali (Chendikuli Girls' College). He was brother of Vijiyakumar (Jaffna), Vijayadevi, Vijayarani and Jegasothy (all of London); brother-in-law of Nathan, Sundaralingam, Thillainathan (all of London) Naguleswary (Jaffna); uncle of Anand, Meni, Luxey, Vasanth (all of London) and Periappah of Luxana (Jaffna).

You have never left our hearts and our thoughts as we remember you in our daily life. We will treasure your love, wisdom and beautiful memory for ever.

-11 Bulstrode Avenue, Hounslow, Middlesex, TW3 3AA.UK.
Tel: 020 8577 6377.

Fourth Death Anniversary

Dr. N. Kandasamy Passed away 16th March 2001.
'Always in our thoughts'

In loving and treasured memory of a devoted husband, father, father-in-law and grandfather. Affectionately remembered by all the family and friends.

**Fourth Anniversary Remembrance
Mrs Somawathy Kanagasabai**

Birth: 26.01.1916

Rest: 17.03.2001

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by children Chandra, Indra, Logendra, Yogendra, Ambi, Gowri and Jayanthi; daughters-in-law Sakunthala, Kamalalani, Rathy and Yoga and son-in-law Raghu. - 34 Woodcote Valley Road, Purley, Surrey CR3 3AJ.

Anniversary Remembrance

In loving memory of Miss Rathini Ananthamoorthy, Assistant Lecturer, Eastern University of Sri Lanka and of Kondavil East, Jaffna on the anniversary of her passing away on 5th March 1992. Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her ever loving parents, brothers, sisters, relations and friends. S.Ananthamoorthy, 30 Hans-on Road # 507, Mississauga, Ontario L5B 3A7, Canada. Tel: 1-905 276 9682.

20th Anniversary Remembrance Poem**MR.V.K.THILLAINAYAGAM**

Fellow of the Institution of Electronics & Radio Engineers, UK
Inventor of the First Tamil-Sinhala Computer-Wordprocessor

[11 November 1928 - 07 April 1985]



*Little could I've even dreamt, it would be our last
Tete-a-tete. We ate lunch together that spring day
Before I flew away. Niece Gowri rang at half past
Midnight to curb and curtail my Lankan holiday.*

*His unyielding spirit when no end was in sight while
He shaped new things, shooing away all conformity
And flushing out lurking lethargy in love-lorn style
With his passion, had taken early flight to Eternity.*

*My built up guilt from Fate's decree to have grown
Old aside from him, sulks in my memory's treasury
Since then. Twenty long years grown curt and flown
From our pilot-run WP-IT Project for RupaVahini!*

*He tutored me, when both were so green, in making
Things like tom-toms, apiaries and even crystal sets
With whatsoever from within the house one begets -
Preludes to our pondered escapades in engineering.*

*Doctor Uncle de-orphaned us, his sister's boys, who
Were joined with his own family - our cousins, two.
Yet in his teenage years Thillai suspended schooling
To supplement Uncle's war-time medicinal earning.*

*It was years after me that he managed to return to
Engineering but beat me into inventions, spending
All his hours of late-night years (his keep-safes too!)
On prototypes and trials, attorneys and patenting.*

*We jointly wrote research based technical papers,
Talked of trends in technology, the world, weather
And everything else. Not even seconds for capers!
He went soon as we again began working together.*

*From a clay-walled cottage he'd climbed quite high
The hard way, with his instinctive convictions, guts
And iron-will to win, in whatsoever he chose to try.
Thillai thrilled himself bulldozing via ifs-and-buts.*

- Professor Kopan Mahadeva [CEng, FRSH, FCMII]

A Lifetime Devoted to Music



Bhushani Kalyanaraman's talent was spotted by her parents in early childhood. Her father, S Kulasegaran, was a Sangeetha Bhushanam from Annamalai University. Her mother was also a good singer. No wonder Bhushani memorised Sivapuranam and sang Thevaram at the local temples when she was just four!

During her school days, she took part in many national level competitions and won several gold medals. Educationist K Lashkmana Iyer felt that she should pursue a career in music rather than medicine. Her father also thought the same and sent her to the Tamil Nadu Music College in Chennai. At that time, the college had very gifted teachers like TM Thyagarajan and KV Narayanaswamy. Bhushani also learnt the veena to understand musical nuances in depth. She was immensely captivated by Tanjore S Kalyanaraman, the disciple of the ebullient GN Balasubramaniam and did not lose time in becoming his disciple. While the music college gave her a strong foundation in Carnatic grammar, Kalyanaraman taught her the more demanding skills of the performer.

Armed with an academic degree and performing skills Bhushani went back to Sri Lanka and began her teaching career at Jaffna University. But she could not remain away from her guru for long and eventually married him and settled in India. She recalls her early days with him: "Kalyanaraman (whom she affectionately refers to as SKR), was a brilliant innovator and an extraordinary mu-

Bushani Kalyanaraman's melodious voice and deep understanding of music made her a much sought after musician.

sician, a hard taskmaster and strict teacher but kind at heart and understanding. His simple living and high thinking inspired me very much. He taught me the importance of vivadi ragas. He also felt that every concert should be out of the ordinary."

Bhushani started performing all over India and became an A grade artiste of AIR, Doordarshan and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation. With her sweet voice and deep knowledge of music, her performances became hallmarks of excellence. This was recognised by institutions such as the Music Academy and Krishna Gana Sabha with appropriate awards. In the same year she was awarded the Kalaimamani by the Tamil Nadu Government. The Sri Lankan Government also honoured her with the title Sangeetha Ratna.

Bhushani has several cassettes and CDs to her credit that have sold well all over the world. Her popularity in UK, USA, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Australia keeps her busy and when she performs in India her concerts are much sought after. She says, "For me every concert should be a masterpiece. This is the lesson I have learnt from SKR."

Bhushani has been performing regularly in Colombo in the Kamban Kazhagam music festival along with other senior musicians from India. She has been functioning in an advisory capacity in music schools in London and Toronto. At home also she teaches a number of students. Her engagement at Kalakshetra as visiting professor gives her immense satisfaction.

Ganapati Ramakrishnan-
(Courtsey - The New Sunday Express, Chennai.)

Mr. Muthuvelu Arumugam - An Appreciation

It is with profound sadness that the Tamil Community record the death of **Mr Muthuvelu Arumugam** who passed away peacefully on 19th December 2004 at the age of 84. He was born on 29th May 1920. His parents were Mr Muthuvelu and Mrs Sellamuthu- born out of dual pearl. Not all the people live up to their name. However, Mr Arumugam truly lived up to the name given by his parents. He was not only deeply religious but always had thoughts and deeds to match his actions, which he did always to benefit others. He was born into a family with a brother and four sisters. His native place is Karainagar where he had his early education at Karainagar Hindu College. Thereafter he studied at Jaffna Hindu College. He was regarded as one of the best students of his time and brought fame to both schools.

On completion of his studies, he entered government service. He worked as chief clerk in many government departments and was well respected for his honesty, integrity, efficiency, punctuality, loyalty, sincerity, hard-work etc. All these good qualities helped him to obtain quick promotions. He was very popular among his colleagues both junior and senior. I am able to personally testify to his excellent qualities as I had the good fortune when in 1975 I worked as state counsel, in the Attorney-General's Department, Sri Lanka he functioned as chief clerk. All these extraordinary qualities paid good dividends and he received commendations and promotions in quick succession and eventually rose to the high position as Chief Accountant at Police Head Quarters, where he earned the reputation of introducing changes which had stood for many years ahead. He commanded the respect of every one and admired by many for his honesty and integrity. His virtues remains a rare commodity. He was held in high esteem and his services were much sought after. He retired from this position as chief Accountant. His services continued even after retirement for a short period of time when he was appointed to a key position in the Palmyrah Board.

Let me now dwell into his personal life. It is an old saying that no one life cycle is complete without marriage (saints and hermits are exceptions). On 6th September 1952, he married Parameswary daughter of Mr Selliah and Mrs Sellammah. They lived as role model with high standards beyond reproach. They had their golden wedding anniversary together in 2002, attributable to their good nature, deeply religious and a good heart always helping the fellow human beings. They are blessed with five children. They are Mrs Arunthathy Srisantharajah, Mr Yogenthiran, Mrs Nalayini Raventhiran, Mr Gnanendran and Mr Balendran. He also leaves behind his wife and 11 grand children.

Mr Arumugam arrived in the U.K. 18 years ago. He was personally blessed by Sivayoga Swamigal. He never lost touch with his birth place of Karainagar and devoted much time and energy including making lavish donation for improvement, development and welfare of his old schools and the Karainagar Sivan Temple known as Chidambaram of Eelam. He took a keen interest in propagating the teachings of Sivayoga Swamigal. He was the prime mover in the establishment of Sivathondan Nilayam (U.K) in London in 1993. He functional as its founder President. He was a committed and devoted Community and religious worker. In recognition of his services to the Tamil Community and Hindu religion, he was honoured at a public meeting by the Saiva Munnetta Sangam (U.K) by the conferment of the title Eesanadiyar Amuthan.

have no doubt that he is now at the feet of our Almighty God.

He who is hidden, who has entered into the cave of the hearts of hearts cannot be seen with external eyes, he is seen with the eyes of the soul without beginning, without end and, he is not destroyed, when the body is destroyed. He will live with us for ever and ever.

Let me end with the quotation from Shakespeare.

"His life was so gentle and the element so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world that this was the man."

We pray to our Almighty God that his soul rest in peace. Om Shanthi.

-Cumarasamy Sithamparapillai.

FORTHCOMINGS EVENTS

April

2. Feast of St. Francis of Paola.
4. Krishna Eekathasi
6. Pirathosam
7. Feast of St. John Baptist
8. Amavasai
10. 6 p.m. Vedagama Sabha presents **Carnatic Vocal Concert by Kulabhushani Kalyanaraman** at London Sivan Centre, London Sivan Temple, 4A Clarendon Rise, London SE 13 5ES. For tickets & Information **Tel: 01923 22457/0582 704105**
11. Karthigai; Feast of St. Stanislaus
12. Sathurthi
13. **Paarthipa Hindu New Year**
14. Sashti
17. Sri Rama Navami
20. Sukkla Eekathasi

21. Pirathosam; Feast of St. Anselm

23 Chiththirai Full Moon

27. Sankadahara Sathurthi

28. Feast of St. Peter Chanit

29. Feast of St. Catherine of Siena.

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

April 9th 6.30 p.m. Karnatic Vocal Concert by Papanasam Ashok Ramani

April 10 6.30 p.m. Carnatic Vina Concert by Vina Jayanthi

April 11th - 19th 6.30 - 8.30 p.m. Vina Workshop by Vina Jayanthi

April 30th 6.30 p.m. Karnatic Flute Concert by Shasank & Group

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding

Raveendranath son of Mr & Mrs Vyramuthu of 138/1, Point Pedro Road, Annaipanthi, Jaffna and **Sudharshana**, daughter of Mr & Mrs Ravindren of 30/2 Majestic Road, Colombo 11 on 25th March 2005 at the Hotel Ram-

muthu, Galle Road, Colombo3.

Sri Ganesh (Shun) son of Mrs. P.Mahandra of Uyarapulam, Anaikodai, and the late Mr. Mahandra and **Priat-harshiny** daughter of Mr & Mrs K.C. Sivasubramaniam of 51, 1st Lane, Brown Road, Jaffna on 30th March 2005 at Peru-mal Devasthanam Wedding Hall, Jaffna.

Australian Newsletter

Weather patterns in Australia have been rather unusual this year with severe tropical cyclone affecting far north Queensland and some parts of Northern Territory during the beginning of the month and the ferocity of the weather across the continent is being described as something unheard in the past half a century.

It is common with any young migrant community to be exceedingly ambitious with cultural preservation in its entirety and Tamils in Australia are no exceptions to this phenomenon, whose arrival in significant numbers in this country began couple of decades ago. Australia's Tamil cultural landscape in east coast is fairly resonant and rest are following suit. It would not be an entirely over statement to say that no week-end passes without some form of cultural/social gathering.

One wonders whether Melbourne is attempting to become "Arangetram City of Australia". It witnessed two to three arangetram on an average each month during the last few quarters with more coming up in the immediate future.

There has been a steady upsurge in language & religious learning along with that of fine arts amongst Tamil

children across Australia. Parents with growing-up children frequently observe that week-ends tend to be rather demanding for children with endless cultural orientation such as language schools, fine art lessons etc. Although far many children are able to acquire & develop new skills in the process with a small proportion tending to become wary, which may not always mean a lack of interest. No doubt, if children are burdened enormously with cultural dosage it may possibly create a negative effect too.

The scale of Tsunami relief fundraising undertaken in Australia during the past few months were reported in this columns previously and it is certainly encouraging to witness the spirit continues to remain high amongst numerous community groups including TRO and ongoing efforts are being directed towards rebuilding Tsunami affected areas.

Bharathakalanjali staged a grandiose dance drama "Silapathikaram" amongst packed audience in Melbourne recently. Sivarathiri was observed in all temples across Australia and the congregation during such occasions is no doubt an encouraging reflection of faith amongst Diaspora.

- Sivasupramaniam Sitsabesan

Tsunami Tears

*Tsunami tears are bitter and strong even now
In our land that was war-torn and frail*

The battered people were battered again

Nature was furious one day

And within minutes the destruction saw

Tsunami tears bitter and strong

Nature has no eyes to discriminate

Man has the power

To sympathise, emphasise and discriminate

Let the Tsunami tears wipe out the stains

The bloodstains that have steeped in our soil

Let lasting peace prevail with justice to all

To wipe out the Tsunami tears bitter and strong

And bless all the people in our land

- Varatha Shanmuganathan

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