

Tamil TIMES

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commences its
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of continuous
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Erik Solheim meeting President Rajapakse in Colombo and LTTE leader Pirapaharan in Kilinochchi (above);
civilians being given military training by the LTTE in the Vanni (Photo: by courtesy of TamilNet)





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- Voltaire

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Whither the Geneva Talks?

The proposed talks in Geneva on 22-23 February between the Government and the LTTE provides the opportunity for the first face-to-face meeting between the parties in over three years. They take place in the wake of an escalation of violent incidents during the December-January period amidst widespread fears that the country was sliding dangerously in the direction of a total collapse of the ceasefire and resumption of full scale war.

Since the Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Soheim secured the agreement of the Government and the LTTE for talks in Geneva, the reduction in the level and intensity of violent incidents in Northeast Sri Lanka has been self evidently remarkable. What this demonstrates is that that if the Government and LTTE are genuinely committed to the ceasefire and the peace process, they have the capacity not only to deter the occurrence of violent incidents, but also to bring an end to all politically motivated killings and other incidents of gross human rights abuses.

Despite the narrow and limited nature of the agenda for the talks in Geneva, as far as the overwhelming majority of the people are concerned, they do entertain the hope and wish that the talks would lead to substantive negotiations towards a durable political solution to the conflict in the island. However when one takes account of the publicly expressed views of the parties in the run-up to the talks, such hopes and expectations appear to be premature to say the least.

While the Government appears to want to revisit the provisions of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and its implementation, the LTTE is firm that the talks should be limited to the issue of 'implementation' of the CFA and has declared its total opposition to the review of its provisions.

During the talks, it is also more than likely that the LTTE will focus on the failure on the part of the Government to comply with the CFA (Art. 1.8) to disarm "paramilitary Tamil groups" among which it includes the Karuna group which defected from the LTTE. For the LTTE, its hegemony over the Northeast and its claim to being the "sole representative" of the Tamil people has been challenged by the emergence of Karuna and his supporters in the east of the island. On the other hand, the Government will probably use the opportunity to concentrate on the thousand cases of ceasefire violations by the LTTE and recruitment of child soldiers.

Any discussion on the CFA and its implementation cannot avoid the fundamental question: Why is it that after four years, the country is teetering on the brink of war?

The CFA was supposed to inaugurate an era of normalcy accompanied by a process of democratisation that would secure the basic rights and dignities of civilians in the Northeast and the restoration of civilian institutions able to function in freedom and without intimidation. According to the CFA, both parties are expected to, "in accordance with international law abstain from hostile acts against the civilian population, including such acts as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment." It also required "total cessation of all military action", and prohibited "offensive military operations", and acts such as "firing of direct or indirect weapons, armed raids, ambushes, assassinations, abductions, destruction of civilian or military property, sabotage, suicide missions, and activities by deep penetration units".

On the contrary, the last four years of the ceasefire have witnessed a process of further militarization of the Northeast, intensified control over civil institutions, and a denial of basic human and democratic rights of the people of the northeast. Nearly five thousand cases of ceasefire violations by the SLMM, more than 5,000 cases of child recruitment and abduction documented by UNICEF, and more than 300 political killings of Tamils documented by human rights groups graphically illustrate the failure of the CFA to fulfil its intended purpose.

Given that the vast majority of CFA violations are in fact human rights violations against civilians, there is an urgent need to focus on the strengthening and implementation of the CFA in this regard. As such, it is imperative that the centrality of civilian security and human rights of the people is recognised by both parties and that they agree to discuss at the forthcoming talks in Geneva and implement (a) a comprehensive Human Rights Agreement to be negotiated between the two parties that articulates specific human rights commitments and benchmarks; and (b) an independent international human rights monitoring mechanism to be agreed upon that will monitor and verify such an Agreement.

Whether the parties arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement at Geneva in

regard to the implementation of the CFA or not, what is paramount is that they must recognise that the overwhelming desire of all the communities in Sri Lanka is that there should not be a return to war. Four years of 'negative peace' enabled by the CFA with all its deficiencies has proved to be much better than four years of full scale war that would have inevitably resulted in unmitigated death, displacement and destruction. What the parties should do is, while committing themselves to continued compliance with the CFA, to commence discussions immediately towards a permanent political solution based on a federal

model as agreed by both parties in the Oslo Declaration in December 2002 for which there appears now a groundswell of support both from within Sri Lanka and the international community.

Though it lamentably failed up to now to bring back the parties to the negotiating table after the LTTE pulled out from peace talks in April 2003, the international community should now apply such pressure and take such steps as are necessary, including appropriate sanctions, to force the Government and the LTTE to return to the negotiating table to discuss and agree on a permanent political solution.

GOVT-LTTE TALKS ON CFA IN GENEVA

Feb 20 - The two days of talks between the Government and the LTTE, facilitated by the Norwegian Government and hosted by the Swiss Government, are to begin on Wednesday, February 22, four years to the date on which the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran signed a Norwegian-brokered Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) which ushered in the longest period of "non-fighting" during the 25-years long armed conflict in Sri Lanka between Government forces and the Tamil Tigers.

These talks will be the first face-to-face meeting between the parties in over three years taking place in the wake an escalation of violent incidents during the December-January period amidst widespread fears that the country was sliding dangerously in the direction of a full scale resumption of war. The LTTE pulled out of peace talks in April 2003.

The discussions are expected to centre on the Ceasefire Agreement and its implementation. Both sides have accused each other of ceasefire violations and for not observing their obligations under the Agreement. The Government side is bound to point out that the Tamil Tigers have been guilty of a persistent pattern of ceasefire violations invoking the SLMM reports which show that the LTTE had been responsible for more than 90 percent of the violations. On the other hand LTTE will accuse the Government of failing to disarm all paramilitary groups, including the Karuna group, for which provision is made in the CFA. In addition the Tigers are likely to accuse the military of acting in collusion with the Karuna group in targeting the LTTE cadres mainly in the east of the country.

While both parties may indulge in mutual accusations over things that might have happened in the past, the Norwegian facilitators are likely to be more interested in the parties agreeing to measures that will prevent the breakdown of the ceasefire and those that will enable the peace process to be taken forward in

the future.

Commenting on the prospects for the talks, Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission chief, Hagrup Haukland, is quoted as saying, "The atmosphere between the parties is still not good as the air has been poisoned. It has improved a bit but there is a lot more needed to restore confidence between the parties." "We have some recommendations on how the situation can be improved but it is up to the parties to decide on implementation," he said.

Announcement of talks: The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the press on February 6 that the parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, have asked Norway to facilitate talks in Geneva from 22 to 23 February. The announcement comes following the meeting between the Norwegian International Development Minister Mr. Erik Solheim and the Liberation Tigers Chief Negotiator and Political Strategist Mr. Anton Balasingham in London, and Mr. Solheim's consultations with the Government of Sri Lanka following his meeting with Mr. Balasingham.

The press release issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "The parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, have asked Norway to facilitate talks in Geneva from 22 to 23 February. The parties will discuss how they can improve the implementation of the ceasefire agreement that was signed on 22 February 2002. This is the first time in three years that the parties meet face-to-face at such a high level.

"It is very positive that the parties have agreed to meet at high level to discuss how to improve the serious security situation," says International Development Minister Erik Solheim. "Norway, in its role as facilitator, will do its best to help the parties find a practical solution to relieve the pressure the ceasefire has come under.

"The parties are taking a small but very significant step towards putting the peace process back on a positive track. And we expect the negotiations to be tough," underlined Mr Solheim.

The International Development Minister will lead the Norwegian delegation, which includes Ambassador Hans Brattskar and Vidar Helgesen. The head of the civilian Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, Hagrup Haukland, will also be present.

"The parties have chosen Geneva for their meeting because of the very supportive role Switzerland has always played in the peace process," the Minister added.

LTTE delegation: The 12-member LTTE delegation led by its political chief S.P. Thamilselvan took flight Geneva bound from Colombo airport on Friday, 18 February. They were joined by Mr Anton Balasingham from London who as Chief negotiator for the LTTE will lead the team in the discussions. The LTTE team comprises: Chief Negotiator Anton Balasingham, LTTE Political Head S.P. Thamilselvan, Head of LTTE Police B. Nadesan; Col. Jayam from the military wing; Political Wing leader for Batticaloa Ilenthirayan (Marshall); and Adele Balasingham. Advisers: Director of LTTE Peace Secretariat S. Pulidevan; and Ms. Selvi. It is learnt that there will also be 'resource persons' drawn from the expatriate Tamil community.

Unlike on previous occasions, the LTTE delegation was not afforded VIP facilities and had to clear formalities as normal passengers. However, thereafter Chairman of the Sri Lanka Airport and Aviation Services (Sri Lanka) Ltd., Tiran Alles, accommodated them in an upstairs lounge and later escorted them to lunch at the public restaurant.

Government delegation: The Government team is comprised of: Main delegation; Ministers Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister Jeyaraj Fernando, Minister Ferial Ashraff, Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, Inspector General of Police Chandra Fernando, Presidential Peace Advisor Dr. Palitha Kohona and senior lawyer Gomin Dayasiri.

Government advisory team: Peace Secretariat Chief John Gooneratne, Deputy Director Shanaka Jayasekera, Navy commander W.K.J. Karannagoda,

Brig. M. Samarasinghe, Plan Implementation Ministry Secretary Nivard Cabraal, President's Counsel H. L. de Silva and Sri Lanka's UN envoys Sarala Fernando (Geneva) and Prasad Kariyawasam (New York). There will be others in the support team, including three representatives from the Ministry of Defence.

As facilitators for the talks, Norwegian special peace envoy Erik Solheim, who is a cabinet minister in the present Government of that country, will be aided by Norway's former deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen who played a crucial role earlier in the peace process will attend the talks with other officials from Norwegian Foreign Ministry. Also attending the talks will be the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission chief, Hargrup Haukland, and other officials of the mission.

Before leaving for Geneva, Mr Tamilchelvan emphasised that the Geneva talks would address only the proper implementation of the Cease Fire Agreement. He ruled out the need for amending the CFA. He said that CFA was drawn with the assistance of the international community and matters related to security, disarming paramilitaries and creating normalcy in Tamil areas are adequately addressed in the existing provisions. He added that proper understanding and implementation of the agreement will put an end to violence and create a

conducive atmosphere for peace talks.

On the Karuna issue Mr Tamilchelvan said, "Karuna affair was an internal matter which could have been solved through disciplinary measures had the Sri Lankan government turned in Karuna to the LTTE. Instead of doing so their intelligence unit has exploited the situation to commit many acts of violence against sections of the Tamil people. Turning Karuna to the LTTE is the proper thing to do."

The Government is hopeful that the LTTE will respond positively at this week's peace negotiations scheduled for February 22 and 23 in Geneva. These sentiments were expressed by the head of the Government delegation Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva, just hours before his departure to Switzerland at the Bandaranaike International Airport. "We have a very clear vision as to how to approach this problem, we are however hopeful that the LTTE will respond positively towards these discussions and we are going to Geneva with open minds. And it is our endeavor to ensure that a peaceful environment be build as a result of this negotiations," he added.

It is said that the higher-ups in the Sri Lankan military want the proposed Geneva talks to focus on the CFA and how it was observed or violated during the last four years. They seem to be confident that if the reports of the Sri Lanka

Monitoring Mission (SLMM) were taken up for consideration, the LTTE would not be able to justify their often repeated allegation that it was the Government and the military that failed to observe the CFA. The SLMM comprising representatives from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden has ruled that the LTTE violated the CFA on 3,471 occasions during the past four years.

Suggestions for strengthening CFA

In the meantime, a large number of well known civil society organisations and activists have expressed their concern regarding the escalation of violence, particularly over the last two months that has posed a serious threat to the CFA and the peace process. It has taken a heavy toll of human lives among civilians and combatants alike. If the peace process is to move forward, we believe that it is imperative to build a shared commitment to end the violence and halt the assassinations and abductions immediately."

They add, "There has been a dramatic reduction of violent incidents since the decision to enter the process of dialogue was taken. This demonstrates that the two parties to the CFA have the capacity to deter violence in the conflict-affected areas."

In their memorandum the civil society groups say, "The Ceasefire Agree-

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ment now in force expresses the desire of both parties to the CFA to 'find a negotiated solution to the ongoing ethnic conflict' through bringing an end to hostilities and improving the living conditions of all inhabitants affected by the conflict. We believe that the Geneva talks must reaffirm the commitment of the government and the LTTE to adhere to the spirit of this agreement, thereby providing a positive atmosphere for negotiations in the future as well.

Recognising the complexities of the ground situation, we call for creative and flexible approaches to consolidating the framework of implementation of the existing CFA. This needs to ensure the security of civilians and the improvement of living conditions for all those affected by the conflict.

In order to address the specific problems, civil society calls for the adoption of some broad principles as indicated below:

Commitment to non violence will strengthen existing terms under the CFA that deal with violence (Articles 1.2, 2.1 etc.). Thereby the parties commit to the spirit of the CFA and not undermine each other's political and military position.

Commitment to civilian protection will ensure that the rights of the civilians, referred to in Article 2.1, are safeguarded through devising specific measures to prevent killings, abductions, intimidation and harassment etc. The measures could include improved investigation, monitoring and reporting of these rights and violations. This would require a broad interpretation of the mandate of the SLMM, to strengthen its capacity to monitor Article 2.1. It should, for example, set in place a complaints mechanism accessible to civilians that could respond to the needs of the affected persons, their families and communities. Assistance programmes for the victims of violence will be a critical tool for strengthening the humanitarian aspects of the CFA and peace process.

Commitment to reciprocity will address the critical issue of the High Security Zones in which demilitarisation by one party is reciprocated by the other. Such reciprocity will allow for a process of confidence building and of strengthening the environment in which the negotiations take place. In this spirit of reciprocity the parties should also take into consideration the rights of the Muslim community to equal and non-discriminatory treatment.

Commitment to strengthening the monitoring capacity of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission through reaffirming a broad interpretation of its mandate and allowing for expansion of human and material resources. For example, making provisions for the Head of Mission to be a

rotating position would increase public confidence in the SLMM. Similarly, if the local members of the monitoring team are jointly chosen by the two sides, instead of being appointed separately by each side, would also enhance public trust in the SLMM."

Muslim representation: Meanwhile, it appears certain that the issue of a separate Muslim representation in the peace talks has refused to go away. Member of the government peace delegation and NUA leader Mrs. Ferial Ashraff has insisted that Muslims should be a signatory party to the ceasefire agreement. Ms. Ashraff is expected to appeal for a separate Muslim delegation when matters relating to Muslims come up during the talks. The Muslims also demanded an opportunity to become a signatory to the Cease-fire agreement which has the government and the LTTE as the only parties.

Concerns of Sri Lankan Muslims will be voiced at the Geneva talks to ensure safety and peaceful co-existence with other communities, Minister Ashraff told the media before her departure to Geneva. Ashraff held discussions with Sri Lanka Muslim Council members on the issues confronted by North and East Muslims before her departure. She told Council Members that her priority was the safety and peaceful co-existence of Muslims. She hoped to take up this issue at the talks and do her best for the betterment of her community.

At a recent roundtable discussion on the "Ceasefire Agreement and Muslim Concerns" facilitated by the Peace Secretariat for Muslims, the participants resolved that the Government, LTTE, Norwegian facilitators and the Co-Chairs should take necessary steps in accordance with the previous declarations and memorandum of understanding signed between the government and the LTTE, to ensure the participation of a separate and independent Muslim delegation at all talks relating to the ceasefire agreement.

Role of other parties: Meanwhile, just a few days before the Geneva talks, in his opening statement to the All Party Conference at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo, President Mahinda Rajapakse expressed the view that there should be room for other movements and parties, other than the Government and the LTTE, to be able to take part in the peace process. This will enable even other parties representing the aspirations of Tamil speaking people to be represented in any peace talks.

The President said that since the peace process started during the former UNF regime, the Government entered into direct negotiations with the LTTE

based on a two-party approach, and that could not be taken forward successfully due to its bipartisan approach. The conflict in the country is apparently between two parties, the Government and the LTTE. Therefore it is important to have discussion between the two stakeholders regard to the ceasefire. "But these these discussion should not be confined to the two parties in our endeavour to find a lasting solution to the problem," he said. "I accept the fact that all the political parties represent aspirations of a section of a society. Those aspirations should be represented in our effort to find a dynamic solution for the problem," the President remarked. "I don't believe in naming parties as stakeholders and spoilers. This should be applicable to the North too," he added.

The President explained to the party representatives that he has instructed the Government delegation to engage in the ceasefire talks based on a multi-party approach. He said the Government aims at a meaningful ceasefire at the Geneva talks despite the debate whether the ceasefire should be amended, strengthened, reviewed or revisited during the talks. "All parties can reach a consensus on this idea since all parties are of the opinion that the ceasefire should be continued," Rajapakse added.

New Head of SLMM: The Norwegian Government has announced the appointment of Brigadier Ulf Henricsson, a Swede, as the Head of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). "It is very positive that another country in the SLMM has produced such an excellent candidate for this important post," said Mr. Erik Solheim, the Norwegian Minister for International Development, in a press release issued by Norway.

"Following consultations with both parties to the Ceasefire Agreement, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Norway invited all the countries in the Nordic mission to propose candidates for the post of Head of Mission of the SLMM. The successful candidate, Brigadier Henricsson from Sweden, will assume his duties on 1 April 2006," a press release said.

"Brigadier Henricsson will be succeeding Brigadier Hagrup Haukland from Norway. Brigadier Haukland is leaving the SLMM after four years of service as Chief of Staff from 2002 to 2004, and as Head of Mission from 2005. Mr Solheim commends Brigadier Haukland for his long and dedicated service, saying that "Norway is very grateful to Brigadier Haukland for his commitment and the outstanding performance of his duties in the SLMM," the press release added. □

President's rejection of 'homeland' criticised

Feb 15 - Ruling out

demands by the Tamil Tigers for a separate homeland in the NorthEast, President Mahinda Rajapakse in an interview with Reuters ahead of Geneva talks said, "This is a small country, where you can't have two states. I won't allow the country to be divided," he added. "You have to give up the concept of having two nations, or two countries ... There is no Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. There cannot be an Eelam."

On disarming paramilitary cadres, Mr Rajapakse said, "If any group operates in our area, we will stop it. Any groups carrying arms will be brought under control, whether it is the so-called Karuna group or the LTTE," Reuters report further said.

Indicating that Mr Rajapakse is looking at British type models for devolving power, Mr. Rajapakse was as saying, "Take Britain ... it is unitary ... That shows that under a unitary government, you can devolve power," adding that "This will be a new Sri Lankan model ... Both sides will have to sit down and decide what they can give up and what we can give up."

Analysts expressed the view that the President's statements have effectively put paid to the notions of federalism, which is underpinned by both the homeland concept and the 'internal' self-determination principle.

In response to President Rajapakse's rejection of the LTTE's call for a 'Tamil homeland' the LTTE in a statement said, "Homeland, nationhood and self-rule are the three basic and cardinal principles," that have been guiding the LTTE in its struggle to find a peacefully negotiated political arrangement, a statement from the LTTE reiterated. If Colombo adopts a political stand ruling out the Tamil homeland concept and insists on a resolution to conflict within the 'Sinhala' constitution, the LTTE would be left with "no alternative other than to endeavour hard to respond effectively to the Tamil call for self rule," the statement said. "The Sinhala rulers are in a dream-psychosis that makes them wrongly perceive that their success in rejecting the Tamil homeland concept would invariably nullify the concepts of Tamil nationhood and self-rule," the statement further said.

Protest over abduction of TRO members

The recent abduction of ten TRO (Tamil Rehabilitation Organization) members, in two separate incidents, by unidentified gunmen has somewhat muddied the waters in the run-up to the Geneva talks between the Government and the LTTE. The TRO, a registered charity in the island, is generally thought to be an arm of the LTTE involved in rehabilitation and humanitarian work in the North and East.

In the first incident, on January 30 the TRO in a statement said that five of its members had been kidnapped by a paramilitary group at Welikanda in the Polonnaruwa district while they were traveling from Batticaloa to Vavuniya on Sunday 29 January.

"Fifteen (15) TRO Batticaloa staff members were travelling from Batticaloa. The TRO staff vehicle had registered at the Welikanda army checkpoint and was continuing its journey when a "white van" that had been following them obstructed their path and forced them to stop. Five (5) members were dragged out of the TRO van and forced into the "white van" the others

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were assaulted and forced to go back to Batticaloa," the TRO statement said.

The TRO identified the abducted persons as:

Mr. Kasinathar Ganesalingam: PSEDC NorthEast Province Secretary; Thangarasa: Driver; Ms. S. Dosini: PSEDC Div. Coordinator Mamunai North Division; Ms. Nadeswari: Pre-School Teacher Vavunatheevu Pre School; and Ms. Chithravel Sivamathi: Pre School Teacher Vavunatheevu Pre School.

In the second incident, a TRO statement dated 31 January said that five more of its members had gone missing after being abducted on 30 January and identified the missing as follows: Ms. Thanuskody Premini TRO Batticaloa Chief Accountant; Mr. Shanmuganathan Sujendram TRO Accountant; Manikkavasahar Children's Home, Santhivelli; Mr. Thambiraja Vasantharajan Accountant, TRO Batticaloa; Mr. Kailayapillai Ravindran Accountant, Vipulananda Children's Home, Palugamam; Mr. Arunesarasa Satheesharan Accounts Trainee, Vellavali;

On February 1, two of the pre-school teachers, Ms Punniyamoorthy Nadeswary and Ms Chithravel Sivamathy, were released by the abductors. "Ms Punniyamoorthy Nadeswary and Ms Chithravel Sivamathy, both pre-school teachers, said that at 8 p.m. on Sunday (29) a white van stopped their vehicle 500 meters from the SLA checkpoint. Armed men from the van blindfolded five of us and took us to an unknown location. We told the abductors, who spoke Tamil, that we live close to the Vavunathivu SLA camp. After more questioning the gunmen brought us to the Vavunathivu area and released us. We were threatened not to divulge any information on what happened to us. We don't know the whereabouts of the other three teachers and of the vehicle we were travelling," said the released teachers, according to TRO sources.

The TRO on Friday, 3 February, said in a press release that one of the abducted TRO officials, Ms. S. Dosini, had returned to her relatives in Chenkalady. "Word has reached TRO through the Non-Violent Peace Force (NVPF) office in Batticaloa that Ms. S. Dosini, PSEDC Divisional Coordinator Mamunai North Division, has returned to the home of her relatives in Chenkalady, a Government of Sri Lanka controlled area of the Batticaloa District," the press release said.

The abductions had the effect of raising tensions between the LTTE and the government at a time both sides had, following the visit by Eric Solheim, agreed on January 25 to hold talks in Geneva on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The LTTE rejected the government's proposal for talks to commence on February 15 and its spokesman Daya Master warned that the abductions would "affect the atmosphere of the peace process" and accused the Karuna group, a breakaway LTTE faction in the east, of being responsible for the abductions. The LTTE has persistently accused the military intelligence of being in league with the Karuna group. However, this group denied any responsibility for the abductions and accused the LTTE of "staging" the abductions to gain international sympathy and place obstacles in the way of resuming talks at Geneva.

The government initially attempted to throw doubt over whether the abductions had taken place at all. The information department issued a statement on January 31, denying that anything had happened near the Welikanda army checkpoint. The military also denied any involvement.

However, in an indication of Washington's close involvement in the push for talks, Jeffrey Lunstead, US ambassador in Colombo, issued a statement on the same day, expressing concern over the TRO abductions and asking for the incident to be investigated. The US embassy and UN Resident/Humanitarian Co-coordinators office also called for the immediate release of the abducted persons.

On a directive from President Mahinda Rajapakse, a high-level team headed by two deputy police inspector generals and including four senior superintendents, 20 investigators and state intelligence officials were detailed to probe the abductions. A reliable news report from Colombo stated that the release of two abducted teachers and "related developments prompted state intelligence agencies to report that the complaints of abductions were credible and warranted investigation."

The fate or whereabouts of the remaining 7 TRO workers remain unknown. Though the Karuna faction of the LTTE has been blamed for the abductions, it has denied any responsibility. There have been several marches and demonstrations in protest against the abductions.

In response to the abductions, the LTTE-front organisation, Makkal Padai (People's Force), issued a statement on February 3 warning that it would resume its attacks and crack down on paramilitary groups in the East. The organisation has previously claimed responsibility for some of the bomb attacks on the military over the past two months.

Many international and local NGOs have appealed for the release of the remaining abducted 7 persons.

Shock over Judges' resignations

Feb 9 - The resignation of two Senior Judges of the three-member Judicial Commission (JSC) of Sri Lanka, has caused shock and alarm within the legal community, civil society and trade unions in Colombo. The resignations were due to the "simmering state of discontent prevailing for some time within the Judicial Service Commission," said Desmond Fernando, President, Bar Association of Sri Lanka, addressing a press conference in Colombo.

Justice Dr. Shiranee Bandaranayake, the most Senior Judge of the Sri Lankan Supreme Court and Justice T. B. Weerasuriya, the most Senior Career Judge in the Supreme Court, had submitted their resignations the previous week due to them 'not being able to hold the posts according to their conscience.'

The JSC, under the Sri Lanka Constitution, is vested with authority over the appointment, transfer, dismissal and discipline of the judiciary. It is headed by the Sri Lankan Chief Justice and two Supreme Court judges, appointed by the SL President.

The JSC which has authority over the appointment, transfer, dismissal and discipline of the country's judicial service, has been rendered non-functional with the resignations of two of its three members, he added. The third and the only remaining member is the Chief Justice, Sarath Silva.

"We of the Bar have witnessed with disgust, pain of mind and a deep sense of anguish the rapid and continuing erosion of the values of Justice and fair play in the country. To us, the latest development represents the final blow to all the concepts that we hold dear in the Administration of Justice," noted Desmond Fernando in his address to the press in Colombo.

The resignation of the two senior Judges is the "culmination of the abuse of power and office," Fernando said adding that

their resignation has brought into disrepute the working of the Judicial System in Sri Lanka. "We of the Bar believe that the cause for their resignation has arisen from within and not from outside the Judicial System," Fernando noted.

Meanwhile, Karu Jayasuriya, the Deputy Leader of the United National Party (UNP), the main Opposition in the Sri Lankan Parliament, in a statement to the press said that the Judges, in their own words, had stated that they were 'not being able to hold the posts according to their conscience.'

Jayasuriya said the development further confounded the "existing problems due to the non functioning of the Constitutional Council, Public Service Commission and the non establishment of the independent Election Commission as stipulated by the constitutional amendment."

The Press Conference, organised by eleven organisations, was chaired by Desmond Fernando, the President of the Bar Association. Six representatives of the organisations addressed the press. The 11 organisations that had called on the press briefing were: Bar Association of Sri Lanka, Organization of Professional Associations of Sri Lanka, Editors' Guild, Free Media Movement, Transparency International, Foundation for Co-existence, Anti War Front, Sri Lanka Railway Trade Union Federation, Sri Lanka Teachers' Association, People's Bank Officers' Association and Health Department Professional Front.

Tigers released in return for policeman's release

Feb 17 - In what is seen as an exercise in exchange of prisoners between the Government and LTTE, four LTTE cadres, S. Shanmugaraj, Xavier Ranjit, S. Vijayakumar and Luxmanan Aravinthan, who were arrested in 2005 by the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) when they were traveling in a boat in the Trincomalee Sea and kept in remand custody after being produced in court on the allegation that they were engaged in taking photographs and video taping Navy vessel movements, were released on bail on the orders of the Trincomalee Magistrate Mr. V. Ramakamalan on 17 February. Upon their release, they were immediately taken to Wannai under the escort of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

Mr. Serasinghe, Assistant Superintendent of Police told court when the case was taken up for inquiry that the LTTE suspects were charged at the initial stage under Aquatic Resources Act. Later they were charged afresh under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Now the Attorney General has issued instruction to charge them under the normal law. Hence the Police have no objection to release the suspects on bail, Mr. Serasinghe submitted to court. The Magistrate accepting the submission of the police made order releasing these suspects on cash and surety bail. Each suspect was ordered cash bail of Rs 2500/= and surety bail in a sum of Rs. Twenty Thousand with one surety. Suspects were further ordered to report to the Trincomalee Harbor Police once in a week.

Thereafter the released LTTE cadres were brought to the Trincomalee SLMM office. They were then taken in a van to be handed over to LTTE leadership in Wannai under the escort of SLMM monitor Ms Anna Helena. A team of police officials in two jeeps provided security to the van in which the LTTE cadres were taken.

Following the Sri Lanka Government facilitated release of four LTTE sea tiger cadres in Trincomalee, the Tigers released a

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policeman held in custody for more than five months 'as a goodwill gesture' ahead of Geneva Talks, Daya Master from the media section of the LTTE said from Kilinochchi on Saturday, 18 February. Police officer Velangoda Gamage Sri Hamantha, 30, was released in Kilinochchi on the following day. Previously the LTTE had released Kariapperuma Aththu Korallake Donsarath (40), another police officer who had been held in similar circumstances on 26 January, following the meeting with the Norwegian Minister of International Development, Erik Solheim. Sub Inspector Bandula Bopitiya still remains in LTTE custody.

Meanwhile, LTTE sources in Kilinochchi said that the LTTE had indicated to the Government of Sri Lanka that LTTE was prepared for a further prisoner swap. It is learnt that that the LTTE has made a request for the release of four more sea tigers arrested by the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) in Mannar seas for the LTTE to release Sub Inspector Bandula Bopetigoda who still remains in Tiger custody.

The Tigers arrested three members of the Sri Lanka Police, K.A.D. Sarath, B. W. Bopetigoda and W.G.D.S. Hemantha, for allegedly trespassing into Tigers held area in Mannar on 11 October last year. The Police officers, all attached to the National Child Protection Agency, after having secured the consent of the Bishop of Bannar and accompanied by a Catholic priest entered into LTTE-held territory in pursuit of a convicted British paedophile who was alleged to have been in the company of two young girls hiding in Mannar. The LTTE arrested and detained the policemen in custody, but the convicted was allowed to go free.

Anti-war coalition calls for peace in Sri Lanka

London, Feb 20 - The London-based Tamil Forum for Peace in Sri Lanka held a vigil and demonstration in central London on Sunday 19 February called for peace with democracy and justice in Sri Lanka. The rally was held in Trafalgar Square.

Representatives from the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF London), Tamil Democratic Congress, Tamil Women's League, Sri Lanka Muslim Information Centre, Committee for Democracy and Justice in Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka Democracy Forum addressed the gathering. The main theme of their speeches was that there should not be a return to war in Sri Lanka.

The demonstrators chanted slogans such as 'What do we want? Peace with democracy', 'No more child soldiers', 'No more unlawful detentions', and 'Peace now'. Speakers addressed the rally in Tamil and English, urging immediate action to bring about a long-term political solution and an end to the violence which continues to overshadow many lives, especially in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Similar demonstrations have been organised in Stuttgart, New York, Geneva and Toronto this month.

The Tamil Forum for Peace urged both parties to the conflict the Government of Sri Lanka and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to resolve not to threaten or return to war, but instead persevere with talks until a permanent political settlement is achieved. The human rights of civilians should be central to the peace process, and a solution on federal lines should be explored: an interim governance measure is not needed. The Muslim community should be given separate representation at the

peace talks as their rights and welfare have been seriously undermined, according to the Forum, and there should be greater transparency in the talks; other parties and organisations should be consulted about the way forward. The demonstrators urged the LTTE to halt the recruitment of child soldiers, while calling on the security forces to end unlawful detentions of Tamil civilians.

UNICEF appeals to LTTE to stop recruiting kids

Feb 14 - UNICEF has said that, in Sri Lanka, since January 2002, UNICEF had recorded 5,368 cases of child recruitment, and has appealed to the LTTE to stop recruiting children for its combat units, and return those already recruited to their parents.

In the context of the forthcoming talks in Geneva between the Government and the LTTE, a press statement from the UN children agency said, "UNICEF today (February 14, 2006) calls on the parties to reaffirm their commitment to the Cease-Fire Agreement, and to ensure that the protection of children affected by the conflict is at the centre of upcoming talks in Geneva. Of particular importance remains the unresolved situation of child recruitment, which led UNICEF to yet again appeal to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to cease the recruitment of children and to release all children within its ranks."

The UNICEF representative in Sri Lanka, JoAnna VanGerpen, said in the statement that the LTTE had, in the past six months, recruited, on an average, 43 children a month. She appealed for the release of all the children in its custody.

VanGerpen's appeal assumes importance in the light of the forthcoming talks in Geneva between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and restoration of normalcy in the war-torn island.

VanGerpen said that "While recruitment of children has been reduced, and the average age of recruitment has increased from 14 to 16 over the past 4 years, recruitment of even one child is unacceptable according to the Convention of the Rights of the Child."

Since January 2002, UNICEF has recorded 5,368 cases of reported child recruitment in Sri Lanka, she said.

As per current international standards, anybody less than 18 years of age is a child and cannot be forced into adult occupations, especially soldiering.

UNICEF is mandated by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to monitor child rights violations under the Action Plan for Children Affected by War. Child recruitment is a serious violation of international law, and UNICEF together with the international community advocates to all the parties to unite against under age recruitment.

According to statistics recorded by Unicef, 83 children were recruited in August, 63 in September, 43 in October, 21 in November, 26 in December 2005 and 25 in January 2006. This amounts to 261 children in 168 days in the last six months. The UNICEF statement noted that since January 2002, UNICEF has recorded 5,368 cases of reported child recruitment in Sri Lanka. That means from January 2002 to January 2006 (49 months), on an average 109 cases of child recruitment each month.

Victor Nylund, head of child protection at Unicef, said the child rights agency who continues to have dialogue sessions with the LTTE, said that, without progress in the peace process, the LTTE were "not so keen" to move in the right direction. This was because children were part of the military process and the Tigers needed military forces. The Government of Sri Lanka,

however, was taking a lead role, globally, by not enlisting young children.

SLA violates rights of detainees

Feb 2 - Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers in Jaffna has grossly violated the fundamental rights of arrested Tamil youths by sending them to the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) in Colombo for interrogation without adhering to proper judicial procedures, said Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Jaffna on Wednesday (Feb 1). In the past 45 days five Jaffna youths, presumed disappeared after arrests by the SLA, have been sent to the TID unit in Colombo, according to Jaffna Police.

Jaffna Police told the HRC officials that Murugathas Theeparooban, 19, from Kaithady East, Nunaval, who was arrested on 22 December at his home by the SLA, and Ratnam Anandarajah, 33, another married man arrested by SLA have been sent to TID in Colombo. Earlier, SLA had denied arresting either of the men and Theeparooban's parents had filed a missing report with the HRC office in Jaffna soon after he was arrested. SLA handed over Theeparooban on 15 January to the Chavakachcheri Police, after keeping him in detention for nearly 20 days, and the Police later left him in the custody of the Kankesanthurai Police at their Special detention center.

Meanwhile, Packianathan Kamalakannan, a trainee at the Palaly Teachers Training college, who was arrested by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) following the claymore mine attack in Point Pedro that killed twelve SLA soldiers on 27 December, and two other Jaffna youths arrested earlier and presumed disappeared, were already with the TID in Colombo, Jaffna Police told the HRC officials.

HRC condemned the long incarceration of the detainees without adhering to internationally accepted procedures that guarantees safety of life, and said that by sending the detainees to the TID before producing them before a judge, SLA stands accused of attempting to place false charges on the detainees through forced confessions at the TID.

SLMM ruling against LTTE

The Norwegian led truce monitoring mission has strongly disputed the LTTE's right to conduct sea movements without government approval. Head of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) Hargrup Haukland advised the LTTE against sea movements as it would jeopardise the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA).

Haukland is believed to have warned the LTTE of unspecified consequences if Sea Tigers launched boats in violation of the CFA. It is learnt that the warning was issued after LTTE political chief S. P. Thamilselvan vowed to launch sea movements irrespective of the government's stand. Thamilselvan in his letters dated December 22 and December 25 last year addressed to Haukland, is believed to have stressed their right to movement in northeastern seas. But the monitoring mission has dismissed the LTTE stance.

The mission underlined the navy's right to engage in, what it termed as, the legitimate task of safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity, in a letter dated February 7 addressed to the government. The ruling came two weeks before the government and LTTE meet in Geneva for talks aimed at ways and means to strengthen the CFA.

Referring to the unprovoked LTTE attack on two navy operated fibre glass dinghies, off Pallimunai, Mannar on December

22, the monitoring mission ruled it a gross violation of the CFA. Navy headquarters claimed that the LTTE mounted the attack taking cover of a group of fishing boats. The LTTE disputed this. The LTTE in its representations to the monitoring mission claimed that the navy triggered the confrontation by engaging the Sea Tigers. The monitoring mission in its observations noted that the navy and the LTTE claims were contradictory while dismissing the Tigers' right to carry out sea movements unless they obtained prior approval.

A new Tamil federal party

FEB 11 - A new Tamil political party that was quietly formed recently in Sri Lanka says its aim is to transform the country into a federal republic.

And the All Ceylon Tamil United Front's top functionary, and the only one prepared to reveal his identity for now, is none other than K. Vigneswaran, who had played a key role in setting up a provincial administration in the island's northeast when Indian troops were deployed there almost two decades ago.

Vigneswaran, a former MP, said that the Tamil United Front took a quiet birth last December even as violence escalated in Sri Lanka's north and east "and has just now won the recognition of election authorities".

Vigneswaran, who has always opposed the LTTE, declined to provide names of other leaders of the new party, citing security reasons. But he said the party counts as members several former MPs as well as professionals both in Sri Lanka and abroad.

"Our objective is to work for the rights of the Tamil-speaking people all over Sri Lanka and to transform the country into a federal republic," said Vigneswaran, who was secretary to the northeastern provincial administration that collapsed when Indian troops left the country in March 1990 after battling the LTTE for over two years.

Vigneswaran, who recently quit the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) of Sri Lankan cabinet minister Douglas Devananda, said that the names of other office-bearers would be made public "in due course".

His comments indicated that the new party was expected to bring together smaller Tamil political groups opposed to the LTTE in Sri Lanka.

About 10 days ago, a Sri Lankan Tamil politician in Colombo had admitted that Tamil groups ranged against the Tigers were indeed planning to form a new political outfit but had politely declined to provide details, again citing security reasons.

Sri Lanka's Tamil scene is dominated by the LTTE, one of the world's most formidable insurgent groups and which controls large areas in the country's northeast. The LTTE has been locked in an uneasy peace process with Colombo since February 2002. The LTTE's political arm, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), controls most of the parliamentary seats from the Tamil areas in the northeast.

"We seek devolution of powers to the various provinces in Sri Lanka," Vigneswaran added, emphasising the importance of federalism as a long-term solution to the country's dragging ethnic conflict. "Besides the Tamil people, we will try to reach out to the Muslims of Sri Lanka and the international community. We stand for human rights, pluralism and democracy."

He gave no further details and did not explain how a party with a distinctly anti-LTTE flavour would be able to function in Sri Lanka's Tamil areas where the Tigers reign supreme.

Though Mr Vigneswaran did not want to discuss any further details, it is reliably learnt that Coming together to herald this new political venture are V. Anandasangaree of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), once Sri Lanka's main Tamil party but now a poor shadow of its old self, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front - EPRLF (Varathar faction). But the EPDP led Douglas Devananda, which has one seat in parliament that it won from Jaffna, is itself unlikely to join the new party.

US Congress urges positive engagement in peace talks

Feb 12, Washington: The United States House of Representatives has passed a resolution stating that "the House of Representatives urges, in the strongest possible terms, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to

(1) engage positively in the forthcoming peace talks and to prevent a return to armed conflict in Sri Lanka,

(2) renegotiate a cease-fire agreement and implement the agreement in a productive and successful manner; and

(3) focus on rebuilding a peaceful, secure, and prosperous future for Sri Lanka.

In adopting the resolution, the US Congress noted the following in its preamble:

* Sri Lanka is Asia's oldest democracy and remains a close friend of the United States; * more than 64,000 civilians have died and 350,000 persons have been internally displaced in Sri Lanka as a result of a 20-year armed conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a group designated by the Department of State as a foreign terrorist organization; * in 2002 the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam signed a cease-fire agreement; * peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have been stalled since April 2003; * on August 12, 2005, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, was assassinated in a terrorist act that has been attributed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; * December 2005 was the bloodiest month in Sri Lanka since the cease-fire agreement came into effect in 2002 due to a series of Claymore mine and suicide attacks against Security Forces of the Government of Sri Lanka by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; * the United States remains deeply concerned about the continued violations of the cease-fire agreement in Sri Lanka, as marked by a recent series of violent incidents involving Claymore mine and suicide attacks; * Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, recently issued an ultimatum to the Government of Sri Lanka to come up with a political settlement within the next year or face an "intensified struggle for self-determination"; * the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has a history of engaging in a campaign of terror and violence; * if hostilities resume in Sri Lanka, the use of unconventional weapons and suicide missions and other terrorist tactics by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam could cause even greater devastation to the country and have implementation on regional security; * to strengthen the implementation of the cease-fire agreement, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have agreed to commence peace talks [at the] beginning of February 2006 in Geneva, Switzerland; and * despite the agreement to continue peace talks, a return to armed

conflict in Sri Lanka is still a very real threat.

'Disappearance' and 'reappearance' of College Principal

Feb 5 - Mystery surrounds the reported recent 'disappearance' and 'reappearance' of Mr. M. Thavarasa, Valaichenai Hindu college Principal in eastern Sri Lanka. On 2 February, TamilNet quoting sources in Batticaloa reported that unidentified persons had kidnapped him between 11 a.m. and 12 noon on Thursday (2 Feb) morning, adding that

Mr. M. Thavarasa, 56, and a father of 3 children was seen working at the school around 11 a.m. and had not been seen since then. Valaichenai is located 32 km north of Batticaloa town.

In another report dated the same day, TamilNet report said that, "Mr. Arunkumar, son of Mr. M. Thavarasa, the principal of Valaichenai Hindu College, who was reported kidnapped Thursday noon, denied the reports that his father was kidnapped." Arunkumar said his father was safe, but declined to confirm the return of his father.

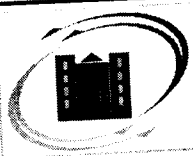
On 3 February, in another report TamilNet said, "Valaichenai Hindu College was shut down by the students and fellow teachers on Friday in protest against the alleged kidnapping of their principal Thursday." The report quoting a school teacher who did not wish to be named told TamilNet, "The family of the principal is probably under threat and confusion. The truth is no one knows the fate of Mr. Thavarasa." Unidentified person had visited the school and asked the principal to accompany him to meet "an important person," at the nearby Pechiyappan Temple grounds, the teacher had reportedly said adding, "Our prin-

cipal said he was busy at that time but offered to come at a later time," the teacher said, detailing what he has learned from his colleagues.

"Mr Thavarasa, with the help of a new employee at the school, went to the temple grounds in a motorbike half an hour later. Then another motorbike without a licence plate, approached the grounds, the person in the bike talked to the principal and took him in his motorbike. Later, the principal was taken in another motorbike via the main road," the teacher reportedly said adding that no one had since heard anything on the fate of their principal.

In a further report dated 4 February, TamilNet said, "Mr. M. Thavarajah, the principal of Valaichenai Hindu College, has returned home Saturday morning around 9:00 a.m. Denying that any kidnapping was involved in his temporary time away from his family, the principal said: 'There is no truth in the reports that I was abducted,' he told reporters when contacted over phone. He further said that although he managed to pass information to his family that he will be delayed, confusion arose as he did not contact the family in a timely manner due to the lack of communication facilities, he said adding that he was made aware of the reports late Friday. He was delayed without being able to meet the Education official of the LTTE on time, he said refusing to provide further details. The Principal said he has clarified the complexity of the circumstances involved to the concerned authorities including Valaichenai Police."

Sources from Batticaloa say that the Principal was in fact kidnapped, but when the news about the kidnap filtered through the media, uproar developed among the students and they started to agitate for the release of their Principal. Unable to confront



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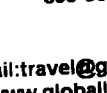
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the pressures building up, the kidnappers released the Principal on 4 February 2006. The same sources allege that it was the LTTE that was responsible for the abduction of the Principal who has been severely warned by the LTTE to maintain silence and asked not to reveal details about his 'disappearance'.

Action and Vigil for Peace in Sri Lanka

New York - On a cold and windy afternoon on Friday, February 17, 2006, activists gathered at the United Nations in New York City to call for peace in Sri Lanka with human rights. The event, "Action and Vigil for a Just Peace in Sri Lanka" was organized by a group of individuals including activists, artists, others concerned about the pending peace talks set to be held in Geneva on February 22, 2006. These individuals, committed to a Sri Lanka free of bigotry, violence and exploitation, gathered to voice demands for a peace with human rights and democracy in the country. More than 30 individuals, including children, came and participated in the event despite low temperatures. The event was composed of street theater, art, and song, concluding with a candlelight vigil to honor the lives of people who have been affected by the ongoing violence.

The chants and songs, repeated in English, Tamil and Sinhala, were produced in collaboration among activists in Sri Lanka and the diaspora. Participants chanted, "Women aren't political props," "We cannot face war anymore," and "We don't want peace talks, like pouring water in broken pots." Individuals also chanted that "Muslims should have the right to return to their homes" and that people should "not move for tsunami" nor "move for war," emphasizing the increasing undermining of the rights of Sri Lankan Muslims and others in the aftermath of the tsunami. Signs worn on participants called for peace with justice and an end to war in all three languages and depicted images that evoked the urgency for the upcoming peace talks to focus on the needs of the people and human rights.

The vigil, held in solidarity with other protests around the world, including in London, Toronto, and Geneva, sought to amplify the voices of those in Sri Lanka who have been forced into silence. The violation of human rights not only needs to be recognized, but needs end immediately. The group formally called for the following:

- *An immediate end to political and extrajudicial killings, abductions, rape, torture, arbitrary arrests, and all actions of violence against civilians;
- *An immediate end to all forms of child recruitment and a commitment to release all child soldiers;
- *An immediate end to violence against women and the use and exploitation of women in wartime;
- *An immediate commitment to respect civil society including the safeguarding of minority rights, protection of displaced peoples, women's rights, economic rights and freedom of expression and association;
- *An immediate end to all acts of violence directed at

one another and a commitment to a peaceful political process to resolve the conflict.

During the event, people passing by and participants engaged in discussion around issues of peace, democracy and human rights in Sri Lanka. Informational flyers were distributed in order to continue a dialogue around the increasing violence and need for justice in Sri Lanka, despite the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement. A participant said, "People of all communities are tired of war. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes —repeatedly— because of the war and the tsunami. Children are forced to take up arms, and abuses against women are rising. These are issues that should concern us all." Another attendee of the event said, "There is a need for more events, such as this one, to break the silence, raise awareness and voice concerns, despite fear and intimidation."

Trawler explodes with four on board

Feb 12 - A suspected LTTE trawler exploded in the seas off Thalaimannar in north-west Sri Lanka on February 11 this evening when the Sri Lankan navy boats on routine patrol approached it, killing four suspected LTTE cadres onboard, military sources said in Colombo.

"A suspected LTTE multi-day boat with four men on board was spotted by naval flotilla on routine patrol in Thalaimannar sea waters this evening. The boat exploded due to self-activation of powerful explosives when the navy boats signaled it to stop, killing all four men onboard," military sources were quoted as saying adding that one naval sailor onboard of navy vessel sustained minor injuries due to explosion. The injured sailor later died of his injuries at the Anuradhapura hospital.

The navy said four people had been seen on the deck of the trawler before it exploded, but the ship had caught fire before it sank and no bodies had been recovered.

The military sources suspected that the LTTE trawler must have been engaged in transporting explosives between Thalaimannar and Vidaltivu in the north western coast and smuggling weapons at the time of the incident and those on board blew themselves and the boat when stopped by a naval patrol to avoid being searched.

"It seems they blew themselves up," a naval officer told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "From the fireball, we could see they were carrying weapons or explosives. With the peace talks coming up, they wouldn't have wanted to be caught."

The incident has taken place at a time when both the government and the LTTE are busy making preparations for direct talks in Geneva on February 22 and 23 on strengthening the shaky ceasefire agreement.

"The report from the navy is that it was a fishing boat and when the Dvora (naval patrol boat) approached, there was an explosion on board," said Helen Olafsdottir, spokeswoman for the SLMM which monitors a 2002 ceasefire. □

Declaration on federalism

Feb 6 - A symposium attended by over one thousand participants has adopted a declaration that "A federal constitution offers a reasonable accommodation in a conflict where one side is committed to a unitary state and the other a separate state."

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA), on Monday (Feb 6) held a symposium on the subject of "The future of Sri Lanka and the federal idea," at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Centre, Colombo, engaging more than 500 participants in a discussion on the history of the Sri Lanka's conflict, past attempts at negotiated settlements, and the basic facts about devolution of power and federalism, a press release issued by the US embassy in Colombo said.

The US Agency's press release added, "The symposium at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Center represents the culmination of a series of grass roots-level workshops facilitated by CPA that involved more than 25 community groups and was funded through a grant from the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives. Through this activity, USAID hopes to establish a core group of trained and informed key community leaders who can transfer their knowledge to the public at large. Improving community awareness of federalism as a model of power sharing could help provide a solution to the Sri Lankan conflict.

"Information and communication are critical to advancing the peace process in Sri Lanka," U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Jeffrey J. Lunstead said at the opening. "Federalism is one model for a non-violent solution, but the United States has no desire to tell Sri Lanka how to run its country or what kind of model to adopt."

The symposium was organized in response to the widely held view that

a dearth of information exists at all levels about the process of federalism and its implications for Sri Lankans, as well as some of the other core issues under discussion and debate.

"Educating and informing the public at large about this concept will allow them to participate more knowledgeably, and confidently, in this important conversation," USAID Mission Director Dr. Carol Becker said.

The USAID/OTI Sri Lanka program was established in March 2003 within the USAID mission in Colombo. It aims to generate greater support for a negotiated peace settlement to end the island nation's longstanding internal conflict by creating awareness and increasing understanding on key transition issues, and supporting increased collaboration among diverse groups at the community level to identify and address local needs. Through its flexible small-grants program, USAID/OTI has awarded 487 grants worth more than \$14 million."

Declaration on federalism

"A federal constitution offers a reasonable accommodation in a conflict where one side is committed to a unitary state and the other a separate state," said a declaration passed at the National Symposium organised by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on 'The Future of Sri Lanka and The Federal Idea' held at the BMICH on 6th February 2006. Over a thousand participants agreed to the declaration, the organizers said. The full text of the declaration is as follows:

"We, numbering more than a thousand and representing more than 25 organisations island-wide, gathered together at a National Symposium to discuss constitutional reform for

conflict resolution on Monday 6 February 2006 in Colombo, urge all political parties, groups and communities in Sri Lanka to work together to develop a durable political solution that will address the aspirations of all peoples within a united and democratic Sri Lanka.

"We have in the past year studied and discussed the evolution of the island's ethnic conflict, past attempts at resolving the conflict, and the federal idea as a possible model for a reasonable and durable political solution to the conflict. We believe that the federal idea suitably adapted to deal with the particular challenges faced by Sri Lanka offers a basis for such a solution. Federalism which seeks to combine self rule and shared rule, unity in diversity, autonomy which is secure and guaranteed within a supreme Constitution which enshrines human rights, pluralism and democracy, is an internationally recognised constitutional / political model for countries that are multi-ethnic and plural in character.

"We believe also that a federal Constitution offers a reasonable accommodation or compromise in a conflict where one side is committed to a unitary state and the other a separate state. The country cannot afford a protracted military conflict where innocent civilians from all communities are displaced, maimed or killed. A reasonable political solution must move beyond the existing, inadequate, maximum devolution of power within a unitary Constitution, as introduced by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution nearly 20 years ago.

"We recognise that many Sri Lankans have fears and misconceptions as to the meaning of federalism. These should be addressed in an island wide debate that is open, informed, and respectful of dissent. This is what we have done in districts throughout the country over the past year. We urge all Sri Lankans, including our political leaders and civil society groups to participate in such a debate and seriously consider the adoption of a federal Constitution in Sri Lanka." □

The Case for the Return of the Northeast Provincial Government

Nisala Rodrigo

The recent presidential election has brought the topic of federalism and the devolution of power back into the limelight. The winner, Mahinda Rajapakse has abandoned his predecessor Chandrika Kumaratunge's commitment to a new federal constitution in favor of preserving the unitary state. Although this position has been popular with President Rajapakse's JVP and JHU allies, it has not been embraced by the international community and more importantly by the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. However, members of Rajapakse's current coalition have not ruled out the devolution of power under a unitary state; the JVP has expressed a willingness to pursue this option as a compromise, and the EPDP has outlined a three-phase gradual proposal to pursue constitutional reform for a federal settlement, beginning with the reintroduction of the Provincial Councils in the North and East as detailed in the 13th Amendment.

Despite the imperfect nature of the 13th Amendment and the inherent contradictions between pursuing devolution while preserving the unitary state, the return of a democratically-elected Northeast Provincial Government (NEPG) has the potential to alter the current dynamics of the peace process. In the short term, it would provide a measure of self-government to the people of the North and East who have been demanding it the most, convincing both them as well as the international community that the Rajapakse government is serious about addressing the Tamils' demand for regional, democratic self-rule. It would force both the LTTE and the alternative armed Tamil groups to take into greater consideration the sentiments of the population of the North and East and the effects of their violent policies against non-combatants. The structure of the Provincial Councils and their relationship to the national government are also not so radical as to provoke a backlash among sections of the other communities who have concerns that a poorly-contrived and hastily-implemented federal system will provide the institutions and resources for the unstable North and East to secede.

Most importantly, the short-term experience of a new NEPG would yield many valuable lessons which will help contribute to a permanent solution. It would also produce a new class of political leaders and administrators who would be able to articulate regional interests and concerns in concrete and negotiable terms, as opposed to ideological and zero-sum terms.

The Experience of the First NEPG

The 13th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution was ratified as a result of the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord and Pres. Jayawardene's 5/6ths majority in Parliament, although many of the specific provisions for the Provincial Councils were formulated by Jayawardene and Rajiv Gandhi through secret negotiations. The fear that the LTTE and/or the JVP would disrupt the elections resulted in none of the 22,000 election officials discharging their duties, leaving the IPKF to conduct the elections as well as providing logistical support and transport for the candidates and overall security. The TULF, TELO, PLOTE, and EROS did not contest. The EPRLF contested in Jaffna and Mannar and the ENDLF contested in Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya unopposed under a joint nomination, and the EPRLF, SLMC, and UNP competed for Eastern Province. Probably due to its military setbacks, the LTTE failed to sabotage either the campaigning or polling processes, and almost 400,000 out of 534,000 eligible voters participated. The EPRLF-ENDLF coalition won all 36 seats in the North and 36 of 71 seats in the East, and it formed the NEPG in December 1988 headed by Chief Minister Varatharajah Perumal with Sinhala and Muslim representation in its Board of Ministers.

Overcoming initial difficulties, the NEPG recruited talented Tamil bureaucrats and took charge of reconstruction efforts in the region. 750 unemployed graduates and engineers were recruited for this work. Boats were given to Batticaloa fishermen, and an agricultural college was established in Vavuniya. The

new NEPG planned to open an engineering college in Trincomalee, expand the Trincomalee and Batticaloa hospitals with European aid, repair 3500 km of roads, and build a railway between Vavuniya and Trincomalee. Yet the new NEPG clashed with both Colombo politicians and civil servants on many matters, particularly relating to the implementation of the devolution of power. Perumal lobbied President Jayawardene through the Indian government to devolve the subjects of land management and development and financial powers, and to allocate more financial resources for the NEPG.

However, the President-elect Premadasa's relationship with the Indian government led him to regard the NEPG as an Indian fifth column and a threat to Sri Lankan sovereignty. From March 1989, he began to limit the executive and legislative powers of the NEPG while courting the LTTE. In response to Premadasa's hostility and the impending pullout of the IPKF, the EPRLF, ENDLF, and TELO formed the "Tamil National Council" and planned to expand the Citizens Volunteer Force (CVF), the security wing of the Northeast Province into an army to resist both Colombo and the LTTE, trained and armed by RAW and the IPKF. From the middle of 1989 onwards, there were reports that Tamil youth were being forcefully conscripted into this force based in Ampara, and on 4 October Perumal declared that a "Tamil National Army" (TNA) was being established. In November, the LTTE began attacking TNA camps (allegedly with the support of the security forces), and the TNA in turn attacked police stations (allegedly directed by RAW).

On 25 February 1990, the Central Committee of the EPRLF issued a nineteen-point Charter of Demands to the Sri Lankan government: 1) the NEPG will have the same list of devolved powers as in India; it should have the same relationship with Colombo that the Indian States have with New Delhi 2) the Northeast Province will never be bifurcated 3) all land policy in the Northeast will be vested in the NEPG 4) all Sinhala settlement after 1977 will be disbanded, and the border areas will be delimited and demarcated for pre-1977 Sinhala settlements to be integrated into other Provinces 5) the security forces will represent the national ethnic ratio 6) the NEPG will have 9500 police personnel by the end of 1990 7) the armed forces will be confined to 7

specifically mentioned bases, and they will not be able to interfere with civil administration in the NEP 8) any person not registered as a resident of the NEP will not be eligible to vote there 9) a second chamber will be established in Parliament providing equal representation to all nationalities to prevent communal legislation from being passed 10) the security forces will vacate Fort Frederick in Trincomalee, Jaffna Fort and Kayts Sea Fort 11) the administration of all places of worship will come under the NEPG 12) all international aid for rehabilitation and reconstruction will be placed at the disposal of the NEPG 13) new Provinces will be established for the Upcountry Tamils and the Muslims in the East, and they will be able to form Governments 14) the NEPG will be able to negotiate with foreign governments and NGOs regarding investment and aid 15) the NEPG will have the same rights enjoyed by the private sector for its economic institutions 16) the NEPG will have executive and legislative powers as far as residual matters of the Constitution are concerned 17) all foreign counterinsurgency training missions will be disbanded 18) the STF will be expelled from the NEP and

never allowed to return 19) the PTA and Emergency Regulations will be repealed.2

After the Premadasa government rejected all these demands, Perumal made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence for the "Eelam Democratic Republic," and the constituent members of the TNC departed for India in March 1990, spelling the end of the NEPG.

Present Conditions

At first glance, the experience of the first NEPG would terrify Sri Lankans of all backgrounds at the thought of bringing it back. However, it is quite obvious that the vast changes in domestic and regional politics in the last 16 years have vastly changed the prevailing conditions. With the deaths of Jayawardene, Premadasa, and R. Gandhi, New Delhi and Colombo no longer have the same unpleasant relationship that they had during the 1980s, when they were willing to use Tamil proxies against each other to advance their interests. However, the LTTE has achieved a monolithic position vis a vis the Tamils in Sri Lanka as the result of a protracted campaign of terror and murder. With the killing of Neelan Thiruchelvam in 1999, the TULF

lost whatever independence it had (with the sole exception of Anandasangaree) and the intellectual resources to pursue constitutional reform; the EPRLF, which despite its mistakes was committed to democratic rule in the North and East, was also diminished by the murders of unselfish leaders such as Pathmanaba in 1990 and Subathiran in 2003. The rump sections of the formerly-independent Tamil parties have either been coopted by the government (EPDP) or the LTTE (Tamil National Alliance), largely for their self-preservation and continued existence. However, the Karuna phenomenon has

challenged the LTTE's supremacy in the Batticaloa region, and his alliance with the ENDLF has opened the possibility for Tamil dissent to spread outside the East.

Despite the pro-LTTE media's claim that the Tamils of government-held Jaffna "boycotted" the 2005 Presidential Election, it is an undeniable fact that a large section of the Tamils in Mannar, Vavuniya, and Eastern Province defied the LTTE diktat by voting. Additionally, they ignored Karuna's endorsement of Rajapakse by voting for Ranil Wickremasinghe. The ability for these Tamils to have voted for the candidate of their choice therefore suggests a possible opening for regional democratic government.

Implementation

The great strength of the NEPG option is that the central government could hold provincial elections at any time, without the need for a super majority in Parliament. This feature allows it to be a viable short-term option preceding either constitutional reform or an interim or permanent settlement with the LTTE. Regardless of the change of conditions from 1989 to the present, the lessons of the first NEPG must be learned for a future NEPG to serve its purpose. Probably the most important lesson is that the NEPG must have a healthy relationship with Colombo, with a common interpretation of the powers devolved to the Councils and those retained by Colombo as explained in the three Lists. To avoid confusion and to give a more meaningful offer of devolution, the powers under the Concurrent List should either be given to the Councils or be eliminated as suggested in the Interim Report of the Moonesinghe Select Committee in 1993. As an alternative for the lack of a second chamber in Parliament representing the Provinces, the President could assemble an advisory council of the Chief Ministers or their representatives. If a conflict remains unresolved between Colombo and the NEPG, the Sri Lankan government could set a precedent of referring the matter to the Supreme Court before taking action.

The NEPG must have adequate security to encourage parties to contest and people to vote in provincial elections. The security apparatuses at both the provincial and national levels must likewise be coordinated, with each level clearly

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understanding and recognizing the jurisdiction and authority of the other. Accountability to human rights and democracy must also be assured to prevent the abuse of power (such as the forced conscription of thousands of young men into the Tamil National Army by the defenders of the first NEPG), and a regional circuit court could be established to ensure that fundamental rights as described in the Constitution will not be violated. There must also be a mechanism to coordinate international investment and aid through the national and provincial governments; a situation should never arise where either level believes its interests are being compromised due to perceived asymmetrical foreign involvement. This last point is extremely relevant to the topic of relief and rehabilitation for the victims of the December 2004 tsunami. The NEPG can facilitate these by drafting a charter or provincial constitution and submitting it to the Supreme Court to determine whether it is consistent with the national Constitution.

The Birth of a Federal Culture

Even in the best-case scenario, it is very unlikely that a new NEPG under the present 1978 Constitution will serve as a long-term solution to the ethnic conflict. The 13th Amendment was added to the Constitution for the sole purpose of serving Indian interests first and resolving the ethnic conflict second. Its drafters had only a crude notion of Indian federalism in that they produced a carbon-copy image of its three Lists while neglecting to provide a second chamber in Parliament to represent the regions, or a judiciary empowered with "judicial review" to rule on the constitutionality of central or provincial law. Essentially there is no mechanism to resolve conflicts between the provincial and central governments; the system is designed so that Parliament will always have the final say. The very predictable outcome of such a system is that when such a conflict arises, the Sinhala-majority Parliament will "win" the argument and the Tamil-majority NEPG will subsequently use its institutions and resources to resist Parliament's position, thus escalating the conflict and

realizing all the fears of the opponents of devolution.

With its non-existent conflict resolution mechanism, the lifespan of a NEPG under the 13th Amendment, even with the above-recommended changes can only be a few years at most. Ideally, it would be implemented at the same time that a new attempt at constitutional reform would be initiated. An operational NEPG would help spark the beginning of a "federal culture" which is sorely lacking in the country; it would direct the discussions and debates away from theoretical speculation (and analogies with wealthy Western federations) towards real concerns and issues in devolved governance in Sri Lanka. Even the above Charter of Demands, formulated in the bleak environment of the impending collapse of the NEPG with the probable intent to demonstrate Colombo's intransigence was a far cry from the Thimpu Principles which were also designed to humiliate the Sri Lankan government. As extreme as the Demands would have appeared to the average Sinhalese, they were concrete enough to be negotiable. They could only have been the products of the administrators and elected leaders of 1989, not the idealistic and inexperienced "boys" of 1985.

In more immediate terms than even the short-term, the possibility of a NEPG will provide a challenge to both the LTTE and the anti-LTTE militant groups active in the North and East. The LTTE and the other militants could either interpret a NEPG as a threat (as the LTTE did in 1989) or as an opportunity for legitimacy which accrues from a democratic mandate. The LTTE through its Tamil National Alliance proxy could possibly win the NEPG election, marking a new page in its history by forming its first democratically-elected government. However, the resources and legitimacy derived from winning such an election would come at the price of having to deliver on its promises and being accountable to its constituency; running a NEPG will require far more responsibilities and work than resting on one's laurels after winning seats in Parliament on a PR closed list. Although the LTTE would be in a stronger position to take ac-

tion against other militant groups in this scenario, it would nevertheless face the vexing problem of dealing with the elected, noncombatant Tamil dissidents and the Sinhala and Muslim minorities in the Opposition.

The LTTE's alternative would be to launch another "boycott," allowing its critics to form the NEPG, gain legitimacy as democratic parties, and lose the stigma of being mere "paramilitaries." In this scenario, the LTTE could try to undermine the administration of the NEPG through sabotage, intimidation, or murder, or launch another rendition of the Good Friday Offensive against the NEPG. In the case of the latter, it would be very difficult for the SLMM to white-wash such an assault as an "internal affair" of the LTTE, and Colombo would have to respond to this abrogation of the CFA by the LTTE. On the other hand, the dissidents comprising the NEPG would face the same challenge of having to be accountable to the people as described above. If they are unable to develop political maturity and represent the people, their credibility as the representatives of "Tamil democracy" will not hold.

In summary, a new NEPG has the potential to be a more constructive and viable entity today than it was 16 years ago, with the ability to fit into a niche in the present stalemate in the North and East. With Tamil-speakers currently comprising only 8.3% of the public services and a much smaller minority in the Police Service,³ the NEPG could serve as a major source of employment and productive activity for them. The beauty of the NEPG is that it would not be advocated as a permanent solution to the ethnic conflict, as it was presented in 1989. It would not pretend to be an interim or any kind of settlement imposed on the LTTE, and thus it would not require the LTTE's approval for its implementation. It would simply and honestly be a change in the nature of administration in the North and East to serve the people in government-held areas in a more accountable manner, and to pave the way for constitutional reform by creating the space for a culture of federalism in Sri Lanka. □

Burns sets out US position on war and peace in Sri Lanka

"We hope that the LTTE will understand that it will have no relationship with my government and, indeed, no effective relationship with any country in this world as long as it seeks to redress its own grievances through the barrel of a gun. Now, we understand the Tamil community here has legitimate grievances, and legitimate issues that ought to be addressed by the government. And there ought to be a dialogue, a better dialogue, between the government and the Tamil community," said US Undersecretary of Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, in a press briefing in Colombo on 23 January.

The following are excerpts Mr Nicholas Burns' s briefing:

I had excellent meetings today with the President and with the Foreign Minister. I was able to meet the Opposition Leader, to see a number of ministers and representatives of civil society, and, of course, fellow ambassadors from friendly countries to Sri Lanka. I had a wonderful lunch given by the Foreign Minister. I also was able to meet Minister Eric Solheim, and we compared notes on our mutual goal, and that is to work with the international community, and certainly work with the government, to try to restore peace and maintain the ceasefire here, and resume negotiations.

I want to say, first of all, we're very proud of the efforts of the American Embassy here, of Ambassador Lunstead, who has done such a wonderful job to represent the United States. We are a great friend to this country. We support its territorial integrity. We support the preservation of peace.

We work very closely with the government and we're proud of what the United States has been able to do as a friend to Sri Lanka. I think many of you saw that in the wake of the horrible tragedy of the tsunami. When our military came here, the U.S. Marines gave immediate help to the people who had been affected. We

are also, in the longer term, very hopeful in 2006 we might reach an agreement with the Government of Sri Lanka to provide a considerable amount of economic assistance, so that reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country can continue, especially those areas that have been so badly affected by the tsunami.

In addition to that, I must say that the United States is dedicated to peace. We call upon the LTTE, especially, to cease and desist from the violence and terrorism that it has afflicted upon the people of this country. The bombing this morning, which cost two lives; the repeated attacks over the past several weeks; and of course the attacks over many, many years upon the political leadership and the average citizens of this country, are reprehensible and they are condemned by the international community. And we hope that the LTTE will understand that it will have no relationship with my government and, indeed, no effective relationship with any country in this world as long as it seeks to redress its own grievances through the barrel of a gun. Now, we understand the Tamil community here has legitimate grievances, and legitimate issues that ought to be addressed by the government. And there out to be a dialogue, a better dialogue, between the government and the Tamil community.

But the responsibility here lies with the LTTE, which has taken up terrorism and violence as its political weapon. So we hope very much that Minister Solheim's visit here will result in a resumption of negotiations on a date certain, and in a place certain. For those negotiations to take place, we hope the ceasefire can be restored and we hope a final peace can come to Sri Lanka. The United States wants that very much, and we'll support the government in its effort to protect this country, and its territorial integrity as these negotiations resume.

So I wanted to begin with that very brief statement. I'm happy to take

any questions that you might have.

Q: You talked about Tamil Tiger violence. In your meetings with the government, did you address the accusations levelled at the military about violence against Tamil civilians?

A: Yes, we did. In fact, we raised that with the President, and the Foreign Minister, and the other officials with whom we met. We said for sure that the activities of the paramilitary organizations also ought to be condemned and they ought to be stopped. And if there are allegations of military abuse of Tamil civilians, they ought to be investigated. If there are people found responsible, of course they ought to be dealt with in the justice system here. We raised those issues because they are important issues, and they are important to the Tamil community and we've heard from the Tamil community of how important they are. I must say that the response we received from the government is that the government leaders also believe that those attacks must stop, and they must not be carried out in the future.

Q: If the U.S. will not negotiate with Al Qaeda in its war on terror, why does it support negotiation with the Tamil Tigers on behalf of the government?

A: Al Qaeda is a terrorist organization that has no grievances whatsoever to negotiate with the United States of America or the United Kingdom or any other country in the world. It's a nihilistic terrorist organization that uses terrorism for reprehensible aims. We also condemn the LTTE, and we brand it a terrorist organization. We sanction any individuals or groups of individuals who would seek to give financial support to that organization. But I must say that all of us who are friends with this country understand that this long conflict is only going to come to an end when the LTTE and the government sit down and find a way forward to end the violence and convince the LTTE to stop using violence as a political weapon. That has to happen.

I think any realistic observer of this country's long struggle would say, and agree, that that kind of dia-

logue has to take place. I'm not aware of any government in the world, or any significant NGO in the world, who believes we ought to be sitting down with Al Qaeda given its agenda.

Q: Is there some kind of direct role the U.S. can play in bringing about a final solution to Sri Lanka?

A: We are supporting the core role, the first and foremost role, played by Norway. I had a very good meeting with Minister Eric Solheim this afternoon. I told him that we support his efforts 100 percent and that he can rely on the United States to back him up. We're also part of the Co-chairs group which meets, as you know, regularly to try to provide diplomatic support to those who would want to end this conflict, including the government. I am the American representative to the Co-chairs, and I assume we will be meeting fairly soon to continue the Co-chairs' negotiations.

If there's any weight that America can bring [it is] to try to convince the LTTE to come in and negotiate, and to try to give advice to our friends in the government that they ought to find a way not to respond to the obvious provocations of the last several weeks. I think that is really what America can do best here. We're a friend of this country. We respect its territorial integrity and want to see it preserved. And the people of this country ought not to have to live for another 15 or 20 years with this reprehensible terrorist group keeping this country verged on the edge of war. What is striking about the situation here, in Sri Lanka, is how so many people are concerned about the possible outbreak of conflict, of armed conflict, of a civil war.

It is incumbent upon all the friends of this country to band together, as we have in the Co-chairs group, to send a message that we support peace, and that we'll do whatever we can diplomatically to help prepare the road for peace. At the same time, we are trying to show our support for the government by providing military assistance and training for its officers, military exercises between our troops and the government's troops, so that the government can be strong and the gov-

ernment's forces can deter future attacks against the people of this country.

Q: In light of the escalating violence, if conflict does break out, what moves will the U.S. take to assist Sri Lanka in the background of the U.S. Global War on Terrorism?

A: We're focused not on hypothetical questions, but on the work at hand this week — and that is to try to give stimulus to a diplomatic effort to do three things: To reinforce the ceasefire; to convince the parties to agree to resume negotiations; and to see those negotiations succeed so that peace can be restored. That's the immediate diplomatic agenda. And our weight is behind that agenda.

I want to say again: while we do believe that the Tamil population has legitimate grievances, and they must be respected by the majority population, and there has to be a way for the Tamils to be able to articulate those grievances, the full responsibility here really lies with the LTTE. That's the organization that has to choose peace, instead of the reprehensible policies of the past decade and more. And so we're working for peace, and we will remain, whatever happens here, a friend to this country, and obviously a friend to the government of this country.

Q: Mr. Under Secretary, Human Rights [Watch] in its annual report a couple of weeks ago criticized your government for human rights violations in pursuing the War on Terror since 2001. If the Sri Lankan government was to pursue similar policies in prosecuting the terrorist organizations like the LTTE, would the U.S. Government endorse such activities or would you crack down or pressure Sri Lanka not to pursue the program that you've been pursuing in your War on Terror?

A: You know we have a friendly relationship with the Sri Lankan government. It's a responsible government, and it's a government that's dealing with enormous challenges, from rebuilding after the tsunami to the effort to provide economic growth, but particularly the fight against [terror], to preserve peace

here, and so we support that government. If, from time to time, there is evidence of human rights abuses, then the United States, of course, would be concerned and would talk as a friend to that country to try to see if that country could redress those human rights abuses. That is normal in international politics.

But for the most part, if I were focused on human rights in Sri Lanka, in addition to trying to give advice to friends - and for instance, one of the issues that I did raise today in all of my meetings was the need for the government to make sure that there is no official support for the paramilitary groups, that there is no involvement by the military in attacks on Tamils. But the major part of our concern here is not with the government. The government is democratic, the government is composed of people who are responsible, who are good people who want to help this country.

Our major concern is with the LTTE. There is no moral comparison, no moral equivalency, that we see between the government and the LTTE, and we think the major part of the burden for peace rests on that organization.

Q: Does the United States feel the LTTE is genuinely interested in peace?

A: We don't have direct contact with the LTTE, so we have to judge them by their actions. The actions of the last several weeks would indicate that this is an organization bent on provoking violence, as it commits violence, as it kills innocent people. And so, if we see that kind of terrorism anywhere in the world I think all of us, as democratic citizens, need to reject it and need to call upon those who perpetrate it to stand down. So that's what the United States is saying today.

It's also the message of all the other friends of Sri Lanka, all the other governments that are here trying to support a process of peace in this country. We want to avoid a war, and that is the strong wish of the government, as we [heard when we] spoke to the President and others today. They wish to avoid war, and so all of us need to be here to help peace prevail. □

Readying for war

DAWN, Kilinochchi, 18 Jan: The time is 7.30 pm. It is an evening with a cup of tea and the television. A group of eager youth affiliated to the LTTE media unit sit around waiting for the beginning of the transmission.

Talk ceases as the channel begins airing its programmes for the day. Nearly fifteen minutes is devoted to the "Tamil Eelam" theme song that is aired daily at the opening of the transmission which lasts for two hours. Vellupillai Prabhakaran looms across the screen larger than life.

"Our problems can only be solved through war" says the Tiger uniform clad LTTE war maestro, in a trailer that is carried every fifteen minutes with cuts of the Sea Tigers in action. In colourful attire dances are featured as well as songs that all run into one theme – the boosting of the morale of the cadres and the preparation for another 'liberation war'.

A half an hour 'archaeology' programme is featured that is focused on giving 'proof' that the Tamils occupied Sri Lanka's north east 'first'.

The programme is followed by an 'arts and culture' programme that shows that exhibition of paintings by youngsters in the LTTE-controlled regions. Paintings of skulls, guns, dead roots and a landscape that has a blood red skyline and a black-red ground is featured.

"We have to die to usher in a new land where we will be free," injects Niresh, one of the 'communication officers' of the LTTE media unit who had earlier been a military trainer. The highlight of the transmission is the news which again begins with a nearly fifteen minute lasting song that depicts the 'glory of Tamil Eelam', ranging from birds, beasts and the Liberation Tigers.

The news focuses on the events of the day. The blooded and smashed bodies of two army soldiers who were shot dead by the LTTE are displayed across the screen. Three civilians allegedly killed by troops are also portrayed. A detailed interview given to the TV station by the LTTE political wing leader S. P. Thamichelvam is portrayed in which he specifies that the only option is war.

Dayanidi, a former school master who functions as the LTTE spokesperson echoes his leaders. Hours after a Norwegian team headed by Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brakstar flew in to Killinochchi on Tuesday for a crucial

meeting with the LTTE political wing chief, S. P. Thamichelvam, Dayanidi in an interview with Dawn emphasizes one word. War.

"We have had no message from the government stating they have considered our demands. We have explained our position to the Norwegians. We have told them we are on the brink of war. We want the army to withdraw from the north east," says Dayanidi.

Five youth were killed in Trincomalee over a week ago allegedly by the government military in a killing that has spurred a series of retaliatory attacks by the LTTE, the chief of which being the first suicide sea attack on the Navy which killed 13 sailors. The suicide sea tiger attack was the first to be carried out within the past five years of the ceasefire.

Meanwhile Jaffna, the northern tip of the country and the former amphitheatre of a 20-year-old war is once again submerged in killings which occur daily. A mother and two daughters were killed in their beds in the Jaffna peninsula on Monday (16) in a killing that some speculate to have been carried out by Tamil supporters of the former LTTE militant, Karuna. On Tuesday, the killing trend continued, with two brothers gunned down in Kopai, Jaffna and two soldiers shot hours later in a retaliation by the LTTE.

"We want normalcy. We want the killings to stop. We will tell the Norwegian peace envoy to Sri Lanka Erik Solhiem that we are ready for talks," says the spokesperson for the guerrillas.

But as Dayanidi points out the talks will have to be on the terms of the rebels, in the only venue that they are willing to agree to, Oslo. Asked by the Norwegians to explain the heavy rate of killings carried out against the military the Tigers staunchly deny responsibility including the spate of claymore mine attacks on the military that killed over 60 soldiers.

Nearly five years after the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the LTTE checkpoint that marks the entrance to the Killinochchi region where the rebels run their de facto state, is virtually deserted. A few lorries with construction material transported by foreign non-governmental organizations stand where there were previously winding queues of vehicles, mostly those bringing in visitors from the South.

"The only people who come here are the Tamils fleeing Jaffna. Nearly four thousand families have fled Jaffna for the past three weeks and have sought refuge here," says a young female police officer, Priya, clad in the smart blue LTTE police uniform.

Twenty-one-year-old Priya who is originally from Jaffna had fled to the LTTE-controlled regions 10 years ago in a background of war and had chosen a career with the 'Tamil Eelam police' three years ago. Appearing amiable and friendly, two rare traits in LTTE cadres and police officers especially to the local media, her conversation with the writer is stopped halfway when a male civil clad cadre joins in and begins interrogating the reasons of why we are here, in a far less friendly manner. As Priya confidently informs, while Jaffna and other north-eastern regions which is under government control but with a high level of influence and presence of LTTE cadres have erupted into an unofficial war, the regions of Killinochchi and Mulativu, the two main bases of the LTTE, seem impregnable and paradoxically 'peaceful'.

Killinochchi, which seemed an area of shrub and temporary shelters five years ago, has now developed into a bustling town that is equipped with many modern facilities, a result of a large number of foreign non-governmental organizations present in the area.

While armed male and female cadres, clad in the LTTE tiger uniform are busy carrying out war training to the civilians and heavy trucks speed down the narrow roads of Killinochchi carrying heavily armed cadres, Sabha Naganathan, a Tamil architect broods in despair.

"We have planned one thousand one hundred houses, destroyed by the tsunami, to be re-built in Killinochchi. The tidal waves swept away these houses and now it looks like a war will do the same," says Naganathan who had studied architecture in Norway and lived in the country for 29 years.

Working as an architectural consultant to an integrated group of three foreign humanitarian agencies identified as the Solidar consortium, Naganathan remembers a time when he studied Sinhala, the language spoken by the 74 per cent majority of the country. "I was a student at the Sinhala Madya Maha Vidyalaya in Jaffna. There were many Tamils who studied there along with Sinhalese students," he says to an audience of captivated foreign NGO workers over dinner, referring to the early 1970's when many Sinhalese lived in Jaffna side by side with their Tamil neighbours. □

Why donors failed to bring peace to Sri Lanka

P.K. Balachandran

In the past four years, the international donor community has pledged billions of dollars to Sri Lanka with the aim of promoting peace and economic reform. And a lot of it has already gone into the country's kitty. Yet, aid has not met its objectives.

The necessary preconditions of peace still do not exist and Sri Lanka continues to be perched precariously on the edge of war.

According to studies sponsored by The Asia Foundation, the reason for this failure is that the donors have not addressed the political issues. The issues, which underlie the conflict are poor governance, an un-accommodative state and political structure, and perceived ethnic and regional grievances. The donors expected economic inputs and macro level economic reform to trigger political change as desired by the Western world. But the changes never happened. In some ways, these external inputs even helped reinforce the existing political divide and accentuate the ethnic conflict.

"The development cart has been put before the political horse," say Goodhand, Klem et al, in *Aid, Conflict and Peace Building in Sri Lanka 2002-2005* (The Asia Foundation, Colombo, 2005).

"Economic imperatives were never likely to override political and strategic interests in a conflict that is primarily about governance and the nature of the state," they observe.

Differences between donors

However, all international donors cannot be put into the same basket. There are crucial differences in the way in which the donors have approached Sri Lanka and the issues in it. And the differences in this regard have impacted the international aid effort and its results

very significantly.

According to Goodhand and Klem, the first distinction is between the Asian and Western donors, and the second is between big donors like the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the smaller bilateral donors.

The Asian donors (principally Japan and India) have been concerned primarily with trade and geo-strategic objectives. But the Western donors, comprising the US, EU and individual European countries, have had a "menu of concerns" including democratization, human rights and the liberalisation of the economy.

Unlike the Western donors, Japan, India and the IFIs have been apolitical, preferring to work through the government of Sri Lanka rather than seeking other channels to disburse their aid or carry out their projects.

The difference between the large and the small donors is also of importance. The IFIs and Japan are the largest donors.

According to Adam Burke and Anthea Mulakala (*Donors and Peace Building-2000-2005*, The Asia Foundation, Colombo, 2005), these large donors account for 75 to 80 per cent of the aid flows into Sri Lanka. And because these large donors have been largely indifferent to the conflict in the island and its social, economic, and political underpinnings, foreign aid has not had a significant impact on the pattern of governance and the peace process.

It is not denied that the post-2000/2001 Sri Lankan and international scenario did bring about a change in the outlook of the previously apolitical or indifferent major aid giving countries and institutions.

The conflict-affected Tamil North and East did begin to get sub-

stantial aid from the IFIs and Japan. Tokyo even appointed a Special Peace Envoy (Yasushi Akashi) to tie economic aid to peace building.

But the impact has not been commensurate with the expectations. According to Burke and Mulakala, this is because the ethnic conflict has only been a "secondary factor" in the process of deciding resource transfers from the development banks and Japan. "Given that these donors represent some 75 to 80 per cent of donor funds, this is significant," they say.

Their plans are based on the theory that greater deregulation and economic openness will eventually remove the "impediment" of ethnic conflict. The IFIs did strive to bring about policy changes in the government of Sri Lanka towards this end. But this approach was not founded on a correct appreciation of ground realities and ground level popular concerns.

Oslo and Tokyo conferences

Undoubtedly, there was political awareness among the donors at the top level. And this was reflected in the decisions taken at the Oslo (December 2002) and Tokyo (June 2003) conferences. Oslo got the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to agree to try and find a "federal" solution within a united Sri Lanka. But Tokyo was the "high water mark" in the convergence of aid, security matters, and liberal ideological objectives, observe Goodhand and Klem.

USD 4.5 billion was pledged at Tokyo, with the top most donors being Japan, the ADB and World Bank. And they saw to it that political conditions for the delivery of the whopping aid package were put in place. "Assistance by the donor community must be closely linked to substantial and parallel progress towards fulfillment of the objectives agreed by the parties in Oslo," paragraph 18 of the celebrated Tokyo Declaration said.

The Declaration called for compliance with the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA); participation of the Muslim minority in the talks; promotion and protection of human

rights; gender equality; and progress towards a final political settlement.

Economic reform was another key aim of the major donors. They found the United National Front (UNF) government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, to be attuned to this objective. Both the donors and the UNF believed that economic growth through liberalisation and foreign investment would automatically blunt social, economic, ethnic and regional conflicts.

Donors over play development card

But the UNF regime and the international donors over played the development card. First of all, the Tokyo conference was held without the LTTE. The LTTE had withdrawn from the talks process earlier in April 2003, complaining of slow progress and "over internationalisation" of the peace process. The rebel outfit did not want to give up the option of fighting for total independence,

under international donor duress. It also wanted to take on the Sri Lankan government on a footing of strategic equality. It feared a state shielded by a strategic and economic International Safety Net (ISN), which the UNF was assiduously putting up.

The Sinhala South too was not happy with the internationalisation of the conflict, albeit for different reasons. Here, it was felt that the CFA was a Norwegian-inspired sell out to the LTTE. The South feared that in its bid to find a quick fix solution to the conflict, the West might have no compunction about yielding to the separatist demand of the LTTE and dividing the country.

Commenting on the Tokyo declaration and its aftermath, Goodhand and Klem say: "Arguably this was a case of international actors pushing ahead with their own time frames and agendas (encouraged by the UNF government) without taking into account the changed ground situation." Not surprisingly,

the international donors could not implement the Tokyo Declaration.

A popular mood in the Sinhala South against the peace process as it was going, resulted in the defeat of the pro-peace and pro-donor UNF in a snap election in April 2004. Power went into the hands of the United Peoples' Freedom Alliance (UPFA), a Sinhala nationalistic grouping which was opposed to almost everything the peace process stood for, including international involvement and the new economic policy. The UNF government's enthusiasm for radical economic change, as per the Western model, endeared it to the donors no doubt, but it resulted in the government's getting alienated from the masses. A poverty alleviation scheme called "Samurधि" was denied to 300,000 recipients; fertilizer subsidies were curtailed; electricity charges were hiked; and efforts were made to restructure the public sector.

A major nationalised bank, providing cheap credit to the poor, was to be privatised. "In the main, these



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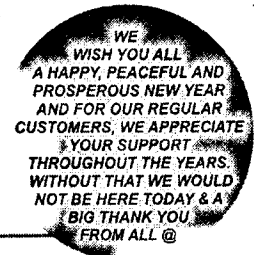
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reforms were done by stealth and there was very little public consultation," observe Goodhand and Klem.

As for the LTTE, it too resisted the Western concepts of development administration. While the donors wanted decentralized decision making, the LTTE was "extremely statist" and "hierarchical". The donors wanted the Tamil North East to enter the globalised market, but there was resistance to this, given its immediate economic costs to the common man there.

Both the Sinhala South and the LTTE felt that the other was getting pampered by the donors. The donors had only exacerbated existing ethnic tensions.

Goodhand and Klem say that policy formulation did not appear to be conflict sensitive and to adequately take into account the need for balanced assistance to the Tamil North East and the Sinhala South. And the attitude remains the same to this day. "In spite of the evidence that shock therapy and a growth-first model are politically destabilising, donors do not appear to have changed their thinking on this matter," the authors say.

Fate of SIHRN, NERF and P-TOMS

Between 2002 and 2005, the donors, Sri Lankan regimes and the LTTE did put up proposals for institutionalising the new democratic development and aid utilisation strategies. But these did not survive or even come into existence, because of underlying political conflicts.

With the backing of the donors, the government and the LTTE set up the Sub-committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) and the North East Rehabilitation Fund (NERF).

But both SIHRN and NERF lacked legal status and the requisite independence, which the LTTE insisted on.

Political opposition in the Sinhala South to any institutional recognition of the LTTE or to the grant of powers to organisations in which the LTTE was represented, prevented the UNF government from going the whole hog in implementing its agenda to co-opt the LTTE into Sri Lanka's administrative structures and wean it away from terrorism, separatism and armed struggle. Not surprisingly, SIHRN and NERF fell by the way side.

Later in mid 2005, the internationally backed and funded post-tsunami rehabilitation organisation for the North East (P-TOMS) also did not come into existence because of political opposition in the South.

Conflict over "normalisation"

Both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE had agreed that "normalization" of life in the North East was a *sine qua non* for carrying out any political or economic development plans and having any meaningful peace talks. But the definition of normalisation differed, leading to conflict.

For the LTTE, normalisation meant the withdrawal of all kinds of movement and fishing restrictions in the North East; the dismantling of checkpoints and the High Security Zones in Jaffna; and the army's quitting public and private places.

But the state had consistently viewed such demands as being extremely dangerous to its security.

The implementation of every good scheme and thought got stymied by underlying political and strategic considerations, an inherited baggage of fears about each other, and deep anxieties about sur-

vival. Goodhand and Klem wonder if there can be normalisation without addressing the underlying political questions.

"Governance" is key

Goodhand, Klem, Burke and Mulakaka, say that the only way out of the current impasse is for the donors to show greater sensitivity to the political dimensions of the Sri Lankan problem and also to see the issues as stemming from poor governance, basically.

"The root cause of problems currently being experienced - such as uneven development patterns, an ethnicised education system, a lack of minority voice in the political process - can be traced back to the political culture and quality of governance in Sri Lanka," Goodhand and Klem say. They also point out that donor policies, instead of helping to change the structures to rid them of their maladies, have only reinforced the existing systems.

In other words, conflicts have been exacerbated by donor policies.

Some donors like Japan do not think of systemic changes, while others like USAID do, and are addressing governance issues at the grassroots level, with some success.

But again USAID touts the Western model, which may not suit local conditions or meet the requirements in Sri Lanka, the authors argue.

The Asia Foundation researchers also recommend that the donors redefine "civil society" and go beyond interacting with "like-minded" civil society groups mainly located in cosmopolitan Colombo, and include "non-like minded" groups outside the metropolis, so that they get a rounded picture of the ground situation in Sri Lanka. □

(Hindustan Times, February 6, 2006)



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The need for a rethink on 'paramilitaries'

Mirak Raheem

The issue of paramilitaries has been one that has dogged the peace process and is expected to take centre stage at the talks between the Government and the LTTE on reviewing the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) to be held in Geneva this month. In addressing the crisis of violence that threatens to unravel the CFA, the paramilitary issue is fundamental. Given the wide coverage on the paramilitary issue, both in the media and by the parties, this article will focus on looking at a solution to the problems through providing an integrated strategy with a number of components. Each component seeks to respond to specific problems relating to the issue, but given the nature of the problem, implementing just one or two of them as options will not resolve the issue as it requires an integrated approach. The larger question this article raises is how issues such as that on paramilitaries can be dealt with without addressing the fundamental problem of the CFA, ie the lack of an underlying human rights and human security framework.

Components of an integrated solution

The term paramilitary is itself contested, as is the term alternate armed groups. This article does not seek to define which group or which part of a group would fall into this category. Rather, it calls for the parties to look at the issue broadly, thereby covering all the main actors linked to the problem, including the Government, the LTTE, alternate Tamil political parties, paramilitary units, the Karuna Group and the Makkal Padai or People's Force popularly referred to as the LTTE's auxiliary forces.

In examining the problem it becomes obvious that it is difficult to adopt a simplistic militaristic solution to the 'paramilitary' question, given the political and human nature of the issue. The general approach adopted by the parties to the talks and in designing the CFA itself is to protect their basic military and political needs, subordinating concerns of the

populations they apparently represent. This article argues that the paramilitary issue has to be addressed through an integrated approach with a number of components that are mutually reinforcing and that offer a more sustainable means of maintaining the CFA.

- 1) Disarmament of such groups
- 2) The parties committing to not assist such groups and not permit such groups to function in areas they control or influence
- 3) Guaranteeing the lives of individuals who are members, supporters or associated with the various political forces by the parties
- 4) Allowing all political groups to function and operate freely in Government-controlled areas
- 5) All political groups and paramilitaries committing to desist from human rights violations, crime and other breaches of 'peace.'

Disarmament

That a disarmament process of paramilitaries will have to be conducted for the CFA talks to be successful is clear. What is unclear is under what terms. Given the problems of transparency and the lack of monitoring in the original process of disarmament, doing so, this time around, would seemingly strengthen confidence between the two parties. One option is for all armed actors that are not integrated into the armed forces or the LTTE to be disarmed immediately and the provisions as per 1.8 to be followed through. Rather than trying to interpret the CFA in strictly legal terms the parties should look at the issue in terms of the spirit of the agreement. Hence the Government may need to look beyond its position that it is well past 30 days since the signing of the CFA, so the terms do not strictly apply to the Karuna Group.

Commitment to not actively or passively support

This technical process of disarmament has, however to be accompanied

by a commitment by the two parties to ensure that they do not actively or passively support these groups. The government, the security forces, police and the LTTE should ensure that they do not actively assist these groups or individuals associated, for instance, through training or arming individuals who are not part of their institutions, nor passively permit these armed actors to flourish in areas they control or influence.

Both the Government and the Karuna Group claim that because the group is independent of the state it cannot be a paramilitary. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the Karuna Group does have the support and protection of the armed forces in Batticaloa and Ampara. Given the support and protection provided by these institutions of the state, there is the critical issue of responsibility which places the onus on the state to ensure it conforms to the terms and the spirit of the CFA. While it is well past 30 days since the signing of the CFA the Government has a responsibility in terms of the CFA, to maintain law and order and to protect human rights, especially given the responsibility attributed to and in some cases claimed by the Karuna Group in carrying out attacks and killings.

In the recent violence a new actor has emerged in the form of the Makkal Padai or People's Force which claims to be a self-defence unit to protect the Tamil people against the occupying security forces. While the composition of the group is yet unclear, it has claimed responsibility for attacks against the armed forces, including the claymore mines, and the LTTE has also attributed the attacks on the armed forces to the Makkal Padai. On account of the role played by the LTTE in training, in reportedly arming these auxiliary forces and in having knowledge of this group, the LTTE has a responsibility over the resulting violence and in taking steps to contain the violence. Adopting these two measures would seemingly contain and thwart violence and also act as an important confidence building measure for the peace process.

Guaranteeing the rights of individuals

Dealing with the issue solely through this dual approach is problematic as it ignores the ground reality of the current situation. The targeting and killing of paramilitants can be seen as part of a wider campaign to eliminate opposition and to

stifle dissent. The killings and counter-killings over 2005 and 2006 between the various armed actors in the North-East have claimed victims from across the political spectrum and created an oppressive climate of fear. In order to better contain the violence and ensure a more solid foundation for sustainable peace it requires that the issue of disarmament be dealt with through the larger framework of human rights and security.

Through connecting disarmament with human rights and political rights clauses the CFA could be better strengthened. Groups such as the EPDP, for instance, which had their paramilitary wings disarmed argue that this has resulted in a fundamental security crisis as their cadres and supporters were gunned down from the inception of the CFA. Individuals whose family members were associated with or through their work who had to interact with such groups have also found themselves victims of this violence. Individuals associated with the LTTE or perceived to be close to the LTTE have increasingly been targeted and intimidated, particularly since 2004. Thus, there is a clear need to address this issue by safeguarding the individual rights

of these individuals, to ensure they are safe from assassinations, abductions, extortion, harassment etc. This, in turn, raises a larger question as to whether this basic right can be secured without a broader human rights agreement or guarantees.

Political guarantees

The political identity of some of these alleged paramilitary groups also cannot be ignored. While some would argue that a ceasefire period is not an appropriate time for pluralism and political dissent, others would contest this, stating the importance of maintaining space for dialogue which would strengthen the political transition from armed struggle to democracy and better guarantee political responsibility. If a sustainable peace with democracy is the expected end result, then critical steps need to be taken in the transition period to strengthen it. Providing political guarantees for the political groups with which paramilitaries are associated with may prove a critical step in strengthening the CFA and easing the transition. Thus, the rights of groups such as the EPDP, EPRLF (V) to maintain political offices,

do political work and provide alternative viewpoints, by means such as through their newspapers, should be recognized and protected.

This issue of political space in the North-East is a key question. The CFA recognizes the right of the LTTE to carry out political work in areas in the North-East controlled by the Government with unarmed LTTE cadres guaranteed right of movement (Article 1.13). The right of other political parties is an implicit understanding, and one guaranteed under national and international law and principles. There is a clearly apparent need to ensure that

all political actors should be allowed to operate within the North East, particularly in Government-controlled areas. Recognizing this right, it is assumed, will allow alternate Tamil groups and the LTTE to function within the limits of the law. Over the CFA, the LTTE has had to face a series of constraints and challenges to both the movement of its political cadres and in the operation of its political offices from the state and its security forces. Thus, there is a clear need to take steps to ensure this right is secured and a corollary right for other political actors to carry out their political work needs to be provided for.

Commitment to desist from breaches of the peace

A key complaint made against the paramilitaries during peace times is their association with crime and illegal activities such as drug sales, prostitution etc. To deal with this the normal law and order institutions of the police and judiciary should be properly activated and they should ensure that complaints are taken up and followed through. These groups should agree to desist from violating human rights. Criticisms have also been made that LTTE political cadres working in uncontrolled areas are involved in a series of human rights abuses including extortion, abductions and harassment, and the political offices have been used for such purposes. There are also charges of the offices being used for military purposes such as storing of arms. The LTTE has to commit to not violating human rights and to avoid using political rights granted under the CFA to commit such violations.

Peculiarities of resolving the Karuna problem

The Karuna Group, in particular, poses a crucial problem with regard to this as the LTTE is unwilling to grant recognition to a breakaway group, let alone allowing such a group to function. If the state was to disarm Karuna cadres and 'turn off the tap' as it were to the Group and also take measures to prevent the group functioning in government-controlled areas it could have a significant impact in thwarting the group's capacity for violence.

There is a question as to what will happen to the Karuna cadres. In reintegrating them into the Sri Lankan Armed Forces there is a key issue of consent. The Karuna Group may not consent to

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the programme and the government will find itself involved in a policing operation, raising issues with regard to principles of conflict transformation and, more importantly, democratic politics. There is also the possibility of the re-emergence of the Karuna Group in another form as the killing spree of Karuna supporters and ex-members continue.

Also, given the spate of killings of Tamil intelligence operatives in the South over the CFA period and the intimidation and gunning down of Karuna Group members, supporters and suspected supporters, it does not seem a safe option for the individuals concerned. With no state programme to ensure their safety and provide alternative livelihoods or the option of asylum as other countries are extremely wary of offering such programmes to ex-combatants, their future is grim. It is somewhat ironic that on the one hand the international community is espousing principles of conflict transformation demanding that the LTTE enter the democratic process and renounce violence and adopt a more human rights friendly approach, while on the other it demands that the Government disarm the Karuna Group and turn a blind eye to the campaign to eliminate a primarily military formation that is seeking to enter the political mainstream.

It would seem that adopting the wider framework would provide a scenario, which would seemingly better ensure the successful resolution of the Karuna question. The state has to take similar steps as with other paramilitaries detailed above (including disarming and agreeing neither to assist nor to permit them to function). To ensure the personal security of these cadres the LTTE needs to provide guarantees for their safety. This issue of personal safety is inherently linked to the political question of pluralism in the North-East: if no other group can function freely in the North-East, then no individual who is sympathetic to that group or is undertaking political work can survive. Thus, political guarantees that will provide for an alternative Tamil opinion may be necessary. A tool that

Cartoon Conundrum

Allbaksh

It has been a downhill journey all the way. First, a Danish newspaper, Jyllands Posten, publishes a set of dozen cartoons on September 30 that appeared to caricature the Prophet Muhammed. One figure presumed to be that of Prophet Mohammed is shown with a headdress that resembles a bomb. Another one sends the message that the paradise was running short of virgins for suicide bombers. The cartoons were supposed to be part of an on-going debate in that Scandinavian country about the 'freedom of expression' and not intended to offend any religion.

Nearly four months later a number of European newspapers reproduced the cartoons. The Muslims were not amused and consequently there have been violent protests in many countries. The editor of the offending Danish paper expressed regrets while maintaining that his paper had done nothing that went against the Danish law. The Muslims were still not amused and the cartoon controversy acquired the overtones of a 'clash of

civilisation': Islam versus the West.

The heathen west is reviled and denounced by many defenders of the faith in no uncertain terms. In Indonesia, a mob attempts to break into the Danish embassy in Jakarta. In the Palestinian territories foreign journalists and aid workers hurriedly exit fearing attacks on their lives. The majority of media in the Muslim world bays for the blood of the infidels and dubs the publication of the cartoons as yet another example of how the 'degenerate and decadent' West is out to malign Islam after launching a 'crusade' against the believers.

In the UK, British Pakistanis are up in arms and on the streets. The Muslim Association of Britain denounced the publication of the cartoons as 'flagrant disregard' for the feelings of the Muslims. While withholding its judgement against the BBC for having partially shown the cartoons, the Association dominated by British Pakistanis warned the British media against reproducing the cartoons. A French newspaper editor was sacked for having committed the sin of reproducing the cartoons. Surprisingly, a Jordanian paper had also reproduced the cartoon ostensibly to show the depth to which the Western media had fallen in running down Islam. But the editor of the paper too was given the boot.

In Pakistan there were demonstrations all over and the country's parliament passed a unanimous resolution condemning the cartoons - as did the military ruler, Gen Pervez Musharraf, who claims to be steering his countrymen towards 'enlightened moderation' even as anti-Americanism is the most palpable sentiment among his masses. In contrast, the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, while condemning the cartoons, asked Muslims to be forgiving. There are some feeble voices of restraint from the liberal Muslims but they cannot reach most ears because they are

can be used for such an initiative is the Government's signing an ancillary agreement with the Karuna Group and the LTTE recognizing the agreement in principle.

Conclusion

The main lesson in devising solutions to the problem of paramilitaries is that it cannot be dealt with in isolation from the wider human rights context of the CFA.

It is highly problematic to devise realistic or sustainable solutions without taking into account the wider environment in which the CFA functions, especially those of killings, abductions and other gross violations. There is a fundamental necessity for it to be grounded in a human rights and human security framework that pays heed to the needs that arise from this framework. □

drowned in the cacophony of anger and hate that has been heard from every corner of the Muslim world.

The generally strong Muslim reaction clearly points to the fact that the cartoons were not only offensive but in poor taste; these are certainly ill-timed in view of the intense anti-West emotions running high in the Muslim world following the US 'invasion' in Afghanistan and Iraq. Freedom of speech is a highly valued concept but it does not mean throwing all caution to the wind. In the present state of uneasy relations between the Muslim community and the West, it is hard to imagine that nobody had imagined that the most likely consequence of these cartoons would have been nothing but one of deep anger with all the possibility of ending in violence.

It will be wrong to presume that the present alienation between the Muslim community and the West or any violent manifestation of anger by holders of extreme religious views

among the Muslims is a post 9/11 phenomenon. Muslims in many parts of the world had staged violent demonstrations after the publication of Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie, a Muslim. The late Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran had passed a fatwa against the India-born British author as the novel had made some blasphemous references. The price on Rushdie's head is still on but the fanatic bounty hunters had as much luck with him as the Western 'crusaders' against Osama bin Laden whose head is more 'precious' in dollar terms.

In the 1990s, at least two literary figures in Egypt found themselves on the wrong side of religious zealots. Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz was attacked with knife for allegedly insulting Islam in one of his novels. Another prominent writer, Farag Fouda, was gunned down for apostasy.

It will also be wrong to single out Muslims as being sensitive about

caricature of their religion in the West. The Hindus have been at odds with consumer goods manufacturers in the US and the UK for what they saw as denigration of their gods in items ranging from shoes, toilet seats to underwear. The Sikhs in Britain had violently protested against a drama written by a British Sikh woman as it had shown a priest doing something ungodly in a Gurdwara. Christians in many countries have demanded stern action against attempts to ridicule Jesus Christ in any form.

Two observa-

tions will be in order. First, the scale of violence and anger among the non-Muslim communities did not reach the feverish level it has after the cartoon incident. Secondly, the extreme reaction in the Muslim community at this juncture when, it suffers from a huge image distortion, is frankly as unwise as was the publication of the offensive cartoons. Two wrongs cannot make one right.

Many Muslim leaders and commentators have given calls for bloodletting. Our neighbour Pakistan is going to the extreme end of banning imports of medicines from the 'offending' European nations. According to the Danish Prime Minister, Andres Fogh Rasmussen, some Muslim clerics said some soothing things on Danish TV and just the opposite when speaking to Al-Jazeera about the call for Muslim boycott of Danish dairy products.

Many in the West have said that the extreme Muslim reaction betrayed their ignorance or refusal to live with liberal secular values (of the West). One French commentator described the 'upheaval' as a show of 'outrageous intentions' of people who wanted to impose their 'commandments on those who do not share their views.' A British paper (The Telegraph) was unequivocal in telling the country's Muslims that those among them 'who cannot tolerate the openness and robustness of intellectual debate in the West have perhaps chosen to live in the wrong country.' A Conservative British MP and former editor of the Spectator, Boris Johnson, was even more candid in saying that the Muslims should expect their religion to be subjected to 'the same rough and tumble' as other faiths.

As observed at the outset, these reactions are as ill-timed as the outbursts themselves. What is needed is not clash of civilisations but an ability to cool emotions so that a semblance of dialogue can take place for putting a long term corrective in place. This is a task political leadership can handle better. So far political executive, both in the west and the Muslim world, has remained a bystander. That is a pity indeed. □

(Syndicate Features)

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Independence Day: thoughts of a Tamil

Dr. Rajasingham Narendran

The agreement to meet in Switzerland to discuss the ceasefire agreement brokered between the GOSL (government of Sri Lanka) and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam) by Norway has been welcomed with the sigh of relief by all the peoples of Sri Lanka- especially the war weary Tamils and the international community taking an interest in our affairs. The war clouds have given way to some sun shine and a ray of hope that miracles are yet possible. We have to be thankful to our creator that as humans we have been blessed with the ability to forget the past quickly and be always hopeful of the future, regardless how bad our situation is at present. However, it is necessary to view the current situation realistically, while awaiting the hoped for miracles.

On the fifty eighth anniversary of our independence from British colonial rule, which falls on the 4th of February, it is opportune to review the role of the GOSL in the affairs of the Tamils. The GOSL has miserably failed, regardless of the party holding the reins of power, to manage Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural entity, bearing in mind that every citizen has equal rights and equal claims to protection from the law irrespective of his or her affiliations. Sinhala and subsequently Sinhala-Buddhist interests have been given primacy in all aspects of governance in Sri Lanka beginning with the government of D.S.Senanayake to the on-going one of Mahinda Rajapakse. The so-called historical grievances of the Sinhala people, the majority, were addressed at the expense of the minorities in a discriminatory, unjust, brutal and uncivilized manner, unbecoming of a nation claiming to be predominantly Buddhist. The result has been the disappearance of the small, but significant and colourful 'Burgher' (people of European origin) community, through what amounted to forced migration; and the severe depletion of the ranks of the indigenous Tamil community of the northern and eastern provinces, through a mix of brutality, economic strangulation and, political and social discrimination, which could be collectively described as calculated ethnic cleansing. The sense of frustration with ground re-

alities and an inability imagine a secure and decent future in Sri Lanka forced large numbers of Tamils to flee the country.

What has been rather astutely described as the 'Dutu Gemunu' strategy was very cleverly deployed by the Sinhala political leadership to achieve their objective of a 'Sinhala Dwipa (Sinhala Island)', where the minorities are unseen, unheard and overwhelmed. However much the Sinhala leadership may have differed in the economic and developmental strategies over the past six decades, the common thread that has run through every single Sinhala dominated government has been this 'Dutu Gemunu' strategy. Some governments such as those of S.W.R.D and Sirimavo Bandaranaike were overtly and crudely espousing this strategy, while the others have pursued it in a more covert and sophisticated manner. This has been an unstoppable juggernaut, although slowed to a crawl at times by the presence of the Indian army and the actions of the LTTE. In these circumstances can we expect the problems of the Tamils in Sri Lanka to be addressed in a sensible and forthright manner by the government of Mahinda Rajapakse, given its avowed positions and composition? On the fifty eighth anniversary of independence what hope does Sri Lanka hold for the Tamils, Muslims and other minorities in Sri Lanka? This should be food for thought for the Sinhala people at large.

On the Tamil side the grievances have been genuine and in the past six decades they have been driven almost a century back in socio-economic terms. The problems of the indigenous Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula, Vanni and the east have been different in terms of ground realities, aspirations and, GOSL strategies and effects. The Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula were deprived of the opportunities in government employment, university education, professional endeavours and industry, on which pillars their economy was constructed through various measures adopted by the Sinhala dominated state. The Tamils in the Vanni largely dependent on rain fed agriculture and animal husbandry were not provided any avenues of progress and support in their traditional pursuits. Their lands also be-

came targets for government sponsored Sinhala colonization, in the name of agricultural development, but with the covert objective of severing the contiguity of the Tamil dominated north and eastern provinces demographically. In the east, there was a deliberate attempt by the governments to change the ethnic composition and balance in favour of the Sinhalese and grab fertile and irrigable land in the guise of state-sponsored colonization schemes. The Muslims in the east were also the victims of this land grab. While the strategy in the Jaffna peninsula was to break the dominance of the Tamils in higher education, government employment, the professions and trade, in the Vanni and the east the strategy was to grab land, reduce the Tamils to a minority status and subvert the demand for recognition politically of traditional areas of habitation. In the Sinhala majority areas where the economic pie was centered, life for the Tamils was made impossible and unsafe, as part of the overall strategy.

In recent years, the Tamils have been permitted to re-settle in some Sinhala majority provinces, without the recurrence of government-sponsored ethnic riots, because of the threat posed by the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups, and a strategy to show the world that the bad old days are a thing of the past. Every time a war is threatened by the LTTE, the Tamils in the Sinhala dominated provinces have to panic and rue their fate, as there is yet no guarantee that the change of heart is genuine. This phenomenon is also becoming the unfortunate routine in the lives of the Tamils in the north and east. On all fronts the objectives sought as part of the Dutu Gemunu strategy since prior to independence by the Sinhala political leadership have been nearly achieved by the Sri Lankan governments. The demand for self governance and independence from colonial rule was as much that of the Tamil leaders as that of the Sinhala leaders of yester year. The reward of independence for the Tamils has been only ever increasing misery. Is there any hope of reversing the trend and regaining lost time in the coming years and decades, for the Tamils? I do not think so, if affairs are permitted to continue as at present.

What have the Tamils done in the past six decades and what have we achieved as a result? Are we better off or are we worse off now as a result of what we have done? Is there any hope that our present strategies and approaches would make things better for us as a people or make them worse?

Have the strategies we have hitherto adopted been appropriate for all the Tamils, considering their geographical distribution and differing aspirations. Have we got to accept that there is no one solution to the problems of the Tamils, considering their dispersion in the Jaffna peninsula, Vanni, eastern province and the rest of Sri Lanka? These are matters that require deep introspection from the Tamil community.

We have pursued in the past the parliamentary and democratic option to solve our problems through discussion, debate and persuasion. It did not work. We thereafter adopted the Gandhian strategy of peaceful public protest and civil disobedience. This too did not work. We thereafter whole-heartedly supported an armed uprising of Tamil youth, which evolved in to a vicious civil war. This too has not worked. However, when viewed as a composite, life has only got progressively worse for us in Sri Lanka since independence. In addition to coping with the evil machinations of the Sri Lankan government, we are now forced to bear the lethal burden of the militancy we emotionally, but irresponsibly succored, without establishing the necessary political controls. We are currently embarked on creating chaos in the Sri Lankan parliament through rowdy behaviour engineered by the LTTE and spearheaded by the TNA (Tamil National Alliance). I hope this is not to convey to the other peoples in Sri Lanka and the world at large that the Tamils are a bunch of unruly hooligans! We are truly like the monkey that had its tail caught between the halves of the sawed log after thoughtlessly pulling the wedge out ('Aappillutha Kurangu' - Tamil). The Sri Lankan government is in a situation where it can watch with mirth not only the Tamils destroying each other, but also destroying everything that is meant by the identity of being a Tamil. They will appease the LTTE to their hearts content, as long as it does not disturb their peace with a new war, because the LTTE is doing what they would otherwise have to do, very efficiently. What the Sri Lankan governments achieved partially has been taken to near completion in the past twenty odd years by the lack of perspicacity and wisdom in our militancy. We are a forlorn people on the verge of being wiped out of the political map in Sri Lanka. We have been reduced to a state where we have lost control of our affairs as a people and have to hope and pray for miracles to deliver us from our tormentors and sad plight.

In the name of liberation (Viduthalai-

Tamil), we have lost our freedom (Suthanthiram-Tamil). Freedom is a concept more profound than political liberation and cannot be part of a Faustian bargain. There cannot be liberation of a people without concomitant freedom for the individual. What is sad is that we have not achieved liberation either. It is nowhere in sight despite thirty years of misery, bloodshed, gore and mayhem. We have not been liberated from Sinhala misrule, but have been bonded to additional serfdom by the wise men in the LTTE and other militant groups. It is sad that many Tamils are unable to perceive our current plight. I am reminded of the story of the live turtles that were being cooked alive in a cauldron over a fire. As the ice cold water gradually warmed the turtles were very happy and enjoyed the coziness of the warm water little understanding that they would soon be boiled meat! Our love affair with the militancy has been similar.

We cannot any longer be what we are or become what we want to be in areas under LTTE control or influence. They decide this for us. We cannot speak or write of what we think or do what we want, if it is frowned on by the LTTE, irrespective of where we live. We are told what to listen and what not to. The fight to retain our right to pursue an education of our choice matched to our abilities was the womb from which the Tamil militancy was born. However, that very right is being thoughtlessly trashed by the LTTE, though its subversive activities in the schools and Universities in the north and east. The freedom to question the LTTE and other militants is no longer an option for most Tamils. This freedom to dissent was there during even the worst years of Sinhala misrule. Dissent, however benign it may be, is now punishable by death under the rules ordained by our so-called liberators. Any one who dissents is a traitor who deserves death, irrespective of his or her credentials otherwise and loyalty to the Tamil cause. Tamil lives have no meaning for the Sri Lankan government and to the Tamil liberators. Our right to life and livelihood do not matter in the games they play.

The 'Movement (Iyakkam - Tamil)' has assumed primacy over the people. The 'Movement' does not live and die to protect the people any more. The people have to live and die for the 'Movement' to thrive and pursue its self-proclaimed selfish objectives. The liberator has become the predator. The current trends within the Tamil polity unmistakably point that liberation from Sinhala misrule, if achieved at all in the near or

distant future through the efforts of the LTTE and other militant groups, will deliver the Tamil people lock, stock and barrel in to a serfdom modern man has seen in Pol Pot's Cambodia, the Taliban's Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

What can we as a people do in these circumstances and how should we chart our course in the future. The achievements of the Tamil militancy and the civil war have been:

1. The world has been made aware of the plight of the Tamil people and the injustice meted out to them in Sri Lanka since independence.

2. The unwillingness of the Sinhala polity or more appropriately the Sinhala dominated governments to find permanent political solutions to the Tamil problem have been universally recognized.

3. The hollowness, shallowness, brutality and political incompetence of the Tamil militancy (especially that of the LTTE) have been also universally recognized, although many Tamils are yet to be convinced of this.

4. The need for extensive devolution of power within the Sri Lankan polity has been widely accepted as the most acceptable solution by most Sri Lankans and the world at large, although extreme elements among the Sinhalese and Tamils have yet not accepted this.

5. The reality that Tamil Ealam as an independent nation-state is no longer a viable option in political or economic terms has been understood by most Tamils.

6. A Tamil Diaspora with the financial muscle, competence, vision and the will to invest in and develop the northern and eastern provinces with minimal support from the Sri Lankan government and international community has become a reality.

7. The belated realization that the Tamils in Sri Lanka, although a distinct group, are not homogenous and that this heterogeneity in terms of political, economic and social aspirations have to be recognized in any solution to Sri Lanka's political woes, has dawned.

In view of these realities, it is essential that Tamils forsake the armed militancy and violence as options in the struggle to obtain our rights within Sri Lanka. The federal constitutional option with extensive devolution of power to at least the northern and eastern provinces must be sought with the support of the international community. International and national- principally the Sinhala peoples, support must be actively canvassed in support of the federal option. An in-

tense and conscious effort must be made to cultivate the international community and the right thinking (the majority) Sinhala people in support of our cause. The international community should be made to force the Sri Lankan government however intransigent it may be, to make the necessary constitutional changes promptly. The international community has the necessary leverage to do this at present. The Tamil leadership must be visionary and not shortsighted in their approach. Unrealizable goals, shortsighted responses, cunning and military tactics have to give way for enlightened strategy, farsighted goals and principled politics.

The welfare of the people must hold primacy over the battle for land and the movement must become subordinate to the people. Democratic politics based on the people's primacy and space for diverse opinion should be permitted without hindrance within the Tamil polity and allowed to assume dominance. The covert pursuit of an independent Tamil Ealam and the trappings there of must be abandoned by the LTTE immediately. The killings of political opponents and dissenters must stop immediately and civility has to return to our political and social life. Bridges have to be built to the Muslim minority and mutual accommodations sought, while past mistakes are apologized for and corrective measures taken. The Sinhala people should not be viewed as enemies but as fellow citizens also demanding their share of sunlight. Their concerns need to be borne in mind while pursuing our demands.

The Tamil Diaspora should be encouraged to invest in all aspects of development in the north and east without let or hindrance. The Tamil Diaspora should be encouraged to strengthen and maintain their links with their land of birth, without having to be supportive of the LTTE or its credo. International funds should be sought to develop the infrastructure in the north and east and guide the deployment of appropriate and eco-friendly modern technology in agriculture and industry. LTTE should transform itself gradually into a political movement, in response to political changes instituted by the Sri Lankan government and give up its ambitions to become a politico-military-industrial-business conglomerate, ruling the roost undemocratically in a future Tamil Ealam. The LTTE should divest itself of all the legal, semi-legal and illegal fund raising ventures it has built up over several decades immediately. It should refrain from coercive acts to achieve compliance of the

Radhika Coomaraswamy gets top UN post

Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, a former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, has been appointed the new UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. She will hold the rank of Under-Secretary-General (USG), the third highest ranking job in the UN system.

Coomaraswamy will succeed Karin Sham Poo, who held the post temporarily, after Olara Otunnu completed an eight year stint. Otunnu, who visited the north and the east to investigate the recruitment of child soldiers by the LTTE, was the first to hold the post beginning September 1997.

Coomaraswamy's primary mandate will be to build awareness of the needs of war affected children. She will also take a critical stand against governments and rebel groups recruiting child soldiers which has been roundly condemned by the United Nations.

Sri Lanka has been in the forefront of countries that backed the survival of the Office of the Special Representative which was on the verge of closing down last year for lack of resources.

Jayantha Dhanapala, a former Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and one of the few declared candidates for the job of UN Secretary-General told IPS: "I am happy to learn of the appointment of Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy a fellow Sri Lankan and friend as the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict".

Sri Lanka must take pride in the fact that one of the country's outstanding

Tamil people and to fund its unnecessary and unaccounted for activities. The international community should set up mechanisms to safeguard the lives and interests of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, while encouraging the LTTE and other militant groups to disarm. The Sri Lankan armed forces presence in the northern and eastern provinces should be scaled down in tandem with the disarming of the militant groups.

This is the road map to our future, if we are to retrieve lost ground, preserve our heritage and pursue a future of hope and prosperity. Will there be any takers?

human rights activists and a leading female professional has been selected for such a high level position in the UN system in an area of vital national and global interest precisely at this important juncture, he added.

Besides Dhanapala, the only two other Sri Lankans to hold the substantive post of USG were Dr Gamani Corea, head of UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Andrew Joseph, Associate Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Christie Weeramantry, a judge of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague held the rank of USG, although he was elected to office and did not head a UN department and wasn't appointed by the Secretary-General.

According to the UN, the Special Representative is also expected to: Assess progress achieved and difficulties encountered in strengthening the protection of children in situations of armed conflict; raise awareness and promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by conflict; encourage the development of networking and; foster international cooperation to ensure the protection and rehabilitation of children affected by conflict.

Coomaraswamy is also expected to be a public advocate and a moral voice on behalf of children whose rights and well being have been and are being violated in the context of armed conflicts.

She holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University and post graduate degrees from Columbia and Harvard. Her late father Raju Coomaraswamy held the post of Assistant Secretary-General at the UN Development Programme when he headed its Asian Bureau in the 1970s.

According to UN figures, about six million children have been injured in the last decade due to war. Additionally, there have been about two million child deaths in the last decade due to war, besides 13 million being internally displaced. Currently, there are over 300,000 child soldiers. The two most notorious recruits of child soldiers are the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). (Source: IPS) □

Abducted man found shot dead: Jan 15 - Tharmarasan Tharmaseelan, 37, who was abducted by unidentified men on 14 January night, was found on the following day shot dead with his hands tied behind. The body of Tharmarasan, a motorbike mechanic was found on Suruvil road in Kayts north-west of Jaffna. Tharmarasan was visiting his friend when four men entered the house and took him away. Tharmarasan, father of five, is from Pandaitharippu.

Youth shot dead: Jan 15 - Sellathurai Yogarajah, 26, who was on his way to a Hindu temple in Kodikamam, in Thenmaradchi in Jaffna district, was shot and killed by unidentified men in Thenmaradchi on 15 January, Sunday around 8:30 a.m.. The victim's body was found on Varani North lane near Suttipuram Amman temple located in Kudamiyan. Police in Kodikamam handed over the dead body to the mortuary of Jaffna Hospital.

Colombo security tightened: Jan 15 - Security in Colombo and its suburbs has been strengthened following warning by government intelligence agencies warned of imminent "terrorist" attacks on government strategic installations. Additional Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) soldiers have been deployed at the Katunayake international airport. Two more army sentry points have been set up in the beach road from Bambalapitya to Wellawatte parallel to Galle Road. Vehicles plying through this road are subjected to severe check by armed forces. Road patrols in Colombo and suburbs have been increased.

Three women shot dead: Jan 16 - Two young sisters, Bojan Renuka, 30, and Bojan Shanuka, 23, and their mother Bojan Arthanageswary, 51, residents of a house in Mudaliyar Kanagasabai Road in Manipay, close to the Manipay Hindu College, Jaffna district, were shot dead Sunday (15) night at 11.45 p.m. by gunmen, suspected to be Sri Lanka Army (SLA) intelligence operatives and members of Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) paramilitary, who entered the house and sprayed bullets at the residents, sources said. The father, Nagendran Bojan, 55, and brother Bojan Ullasan, 26, sustained gunshot injuries and are receiving treatment at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. The gunmen shot the victims as they were coming down the stairs from upper floor of a two-storeyed house.

Bojans are said to belong to a "maaveerar family" and Renuka was acted as the main character in a Tamil film "Amma" (Mother) produced by the Liberation Tigers' film division Nitharsanam. Mr Bojan Nagendram worked as the main co-ordinator of Jaffna St John's Ambulance brigade. The family was displaced from Kollan Kalladdi in Valigamam North and were residing in Manipay.

Two civilians, one SLAF soldier injured: Jan 16 - An Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) soldier manning a checkpoint in Anpuvallipuram in Trincomalee district was injured when an unidentified person lobbed a hand grenade around 8.30 p.m. In a separate incident, two Tamil civilians, Selvanayagam Mayooraan, 35, and Sabaratnam Mathivathanakumar, 32, were injured when unknown gunmen fired at them at 10.30 p.m. Sunday (15) while they were going to their residences in Pallathoddam in Uppuveli Police division. All three injured were admitted to the Trincomalee general hospital. Mayooraan and Mathivathanakumar are employees at a mechanical workshop in Veeranagar in east port town.

Ex-EPDP cadre shot dead: Jan 16 - Navaratnarajah Jegatheeswaran, 26, from Rajakiramam in Karaveddy, Jaffna was shot

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dead at 8.30 a.m. Sunday (15) allegedly by LTTE gunmen riding in a motorbike along Nelliady-Kodikamam road in Jaffna. Jagatheeswaran, who was said to be a former member of the Eelam

Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), was a father of four children and earned his living doing manual labor, loading and unloading lorries, acquaintances of the victim said. Nelliady is a thriving town with a bustling market located 5 km southeast of Point Pedro.

Two killed in Akkaraipattu: Jan 16 - Two Tamil youths Chandranathan Sasikumar, 23, also called Appuhami, a resident of Kurukkal Road in Akkaraipattu and Gopalakrishnan Suresh, 16, of RKM Road Akkaraipattu, were shot dead by unknown gunmen on Monday (15) at 12 noon at Deans Road in Akkaraipattu Town. Both victims were said supporters of Liberation Tigers. Both are masons and were going work on motorbike when gunmen following them in another motorbike fired at them at close range and escaped. Akkaraipattu lies in Amparai district, 64 km south of Batticaloa town.

SLA trooper killed in grenade attack: Jan 16 - A soldier of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) was killed Monday (16) night around 8.50 p.m. when suspected Tamil Tigers lobbed a grenade at a sentry located in the premises of Mannar General Hospital. A combined camp of the SLA and Sri Lanka Navy is located close to the Balamurugan Temple in the hospital premises. SLA soldiers fired in retaliation injuring a civilian who was sleeping on the verandah of the Balamurugan temple.

Man found shot dead in Urumpirai: Jan 17 - Body of Suppiah Murugan was found with gunshot wounds Monday (16) night at Urumpiray Junction along Jaffna Palaly road in front of Urumpirai Hindu College. Mr Murugan is from Trincomalee and was a resident of Navatkuly and working as a cook at a restaurant in Urumpirai at the time of his killing.

Navy convoy attacked in Trinco: Jan 17 - A cycle bomb placed along the Nilaveli-Trincomalee road near a bus depot hit a Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) bus convoy carrying soldiers towards east port town at the third mile post junction Tuesday (17) around 10:05 a.m. Initial reports said about eleven soldiers were seriously injured and are admitted to navy hospital, which is located inside the SLN eastern region headquarters in the east port town. The cycle bomb, detonated by remote control, had missed the target, according to Sri Lankan defence sources who blamed the LTTE for the attack. Meanwhile a SLAF helicopter landed in naval headquarters to airlift seriously injured sailors to Colombo. Following the bomb attack, Sri Lanka troops fired in retaliation killing two and injuring several civilians. Four of them were taken to Trincomalee general hospital.

Two SLA soldiers killed, one wounded: Jan 17 - Two soldiers were killed and one soldier sustained serious wounds in a Claymore explosion that took place in Sarasalai, 4 km northeast of Chavakachcheri in Thenmaradchi, Jaffna district, around 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday (17). The tractor, in which the three soldiers were riding, was hit by a Claymore mine that was fixed at Sarasalai on Kanakanpuliyady - Point Pedro road.

Tuesday morning, two dead bodies of civilians, Sithampari Kanesharatnam, 39, and Visuwar Krishnar, 58, who lived near Kovilarkandy Amman Temple, were recovered in a bylane near Kaithady bridge close to the A9 main road.

One injured in Trinco grenade attack: Jan 17 - Unidentified person lobbed a grenade inside a Tamil shop located in the Madathady junction in Trincomalee Tuesday (17) morning. Mr.Thevatharsan, 25, an employee of the shop was critically injured in the attack. The shop was also damaged. The shop is located few yards away from the Trincomalee Police Headquarters along the Main Street in the east port town.

Muslim businessman beaten to death: Jan 18 - Mr Aham-edleby Abthul Bahir, 35, was beaten to death and his friend Nahurthamby Athambaba Leby, 25, was seriously injured by an unidentified Tamil group on Wednesday (18) evening 3.30 p.m. at Periyakalai in Akkaripattu in eastern Sri Lanka. Bahir and Athambaba came in a motorbike during a protest organised reportedly by the Tigers against the shooting incident in Akkaripattu two days earlier. Athambaba escaped and took refuge in a closeby Sri Lanka Army (SLA) camp. Local Muslim leaders have blamed the Tigers for the killing. Akkaripattu is located 64 km south of Batticaloa in Ampara district.

Three more grenade attacks: Jan 18 - Four Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers were injured in three different incidents of grenade attacks in Kodikamam along Kodikamam-Point Pedro road, Kunjarkadai along Jaffna-Point Pedro Road and in Chavakachcheri, on Wednesday (18). One SLA soldier was injured when unknown gunmen hurled a grenade at the SLA checkpoint located 200 meters from Kodikamam Junction at 9.30 a.m. Two SLA soldiers were reported injured when gunmen lobbed grenades and opened fire at the SLA checkpoint in Kunjarkadai junction 3 km south-east of Nelliadi junction along the Jaffna Point Pedro Road 12 midnight Tuesday. However, SLA denied any of their troops receiving injuries after the incident. In Chavakachcheri, one SLA soldier was injured when unknown assailants hurled a grenade at an SLA patrol in front of the Chavakachcheri hospital 12.30 a.m. The army has blamed the LTTE for these attacks.

Batticaloa housewife shot: Jan 18 - A housewife in Kali Temple Road in Eravur, Batticaloa was critically injured by an unknown gunman who entered the house and shot her with a pistol while she was talking to her husband on Wednesday (18) at 7.30 p.m. The housewife, Ms Puvanenthiran Punitha, 19, mother of one child, was rushed to Batticaloa hospital and her condition is serious, medical sources said.

Medical officers demand security: Jan 18 - Ten Sinhalese medical officers working in the Mannar general hospital left for Colombo Tuesday (17) evening stating that they would not return for work until their security is guaranteed. About fifteen medical officers work in the Mannar general hospital. Of them ten are Sinhala medical officers, health sources said. Their action followed the grenade attack on Sri Lanka Army (SLA) sentry located in the premises of the hospital which killed a SLA soldier, health department sources said. Meanwhile, top health department officials from Colombo are reported to have contacted the Bishop of Mannar to use his good office to ensure security for these medical officers in the Mannar hospital.

Tamil MPs stage mock funeral in parliament: Jan 19 - Tamil parliamentarians on Thursday (19) continued their sit-in-protest for the third consecutive day in the parliament when it resumed sittings against what they described as killings and harassment of Tamil people by the armed forces under the State of Emergency. In a noisy protest they shouted, "Stop killing Tamil people, Stop genocide of Tamil people," and "Withdraw emergency regulations". When the parliament resumed sittings Thursday at 9.30

a.m. Tamil parliamentarians continued their sit-in-protest in the well of house, holding a mock funeral while Mr.M.K.Eelaventhan lying on the floor acting as a corpse. Several Tamil MPs were seen covering the body of Mr.Eelaventhan with white clothes from head to toes. Thereafter all Tamil MPs sat surrounding Mr.Eelaventhan and held "Oppari" according to Hindu rituals at a funeral.

Tamil MPs blocked the Speaker from going to his Chair through normal way. The Speaker thereafter reached the podium through rear entrance. Mr.Nimal Sripala de Silva immediately moved the extension motion of the State of Emergency for another month. The Speaker promptly announced that the motion was carried unanimously while Tamil MPs were occupying the well of the House with placards and shouting slogans against the government.

Civilians, 3 SLA soldiers, policeman wounded: Jan 19 - Ten civilians were wounded in a bomb attack on a Sri Lanka Navy Jeep and the retaliatory action by the army on Thursday (19) evening in Trincomalee district between Gandhinagar and Anuradhapura junction along the Trincomalee - Kandy Highway, 3 km south-west of east port town. SLA soldiers opened fire wounding civilians following the explosion. The bomb exploded around 4 p.m., according to the Police. Among the injured one is Sinhalese, two Muslims and the rest are Tamils. The names of the injured are: - Benedict (38), Vinotharajah (28) Kamalathas (48), Pakiarajah (24), Nawas (42), Arulraj (30) Ravichandran (37), Jeyachandran (34), Chandrasekara (38) and Mashoori (73).

4 killed, 34 wounded in Claymore attack: Jan 19 - Three police constables and a sixteen-year old boy were killed and 17 Sri Lanka Army soldiers, 9 policemen and 8 civilians, including a woman, were wounded in a Claymore mine attack by suspected Tamil Tigers at Thandavanveli in Batticaloa town around 4:55 p.m. on Thursday (19). Two vehicles, an SLA truck and a bus, carrying soldiers and policemen for a clearing operation were caught in the explosion. The wounded soldiers were airlifted to Polonnaruwa and Colombo hospitals. Around 20 T-56 rifles and ammunitions, blown away from the hands of the troopers in the powerful explosion, were recovered by the SLA soldiers who rushed to the site following the attack. Tension prevailed in Batticaloa town.

Police sources said they suspected two different sources of explosion, an anti-personnel Claymore mine attached to a tree and a bomb placed along the roadside, but said it was early to conclude that there was a combined attack involving two explosives. The attack took place on Batticaloa - Valaichenai Road near the CTB Bus depot at Thandavanveli in Batticaloa town. The three policemen killed in the explosion were identified as A.L. Gaffor, W.Wijeyakoon and M. Peter. The civilian killed in the blast was identified as Thivakaran Kathamuthu, 16, a resident of Kommanthurai, Eravur. Vijadevi, Roshalin, Pujenthiran, Sinnampu, Kamalathan and Gajendra were the civilians wounded in the explosion. Additional troops and policemen, who rushed to the site, were conducting a cordon and search operation in the area.

Grenade attack on STF vehicle: Jan 20 - Suspected Tamil Tigers riding in a motorbike hurled grenades at a Special Task Force's (STF's) Buffel armoured vehicle on Friday (20) night 6.30 p.m. at Pandiruppu in Kalmunai, Kalmunai in eastern Sri Lanka. The incident took place while the STF was on road patrol in the vehicle near Arasady Amman kovil in Pandiruppu. The vehicle sustained damages to the frame but no one was injured, according to police. STF soldiers fired at random after the gre-

nade exploded. No details are available on any injuries to civilians.

Man shot dead in Point Pedro: Jan 21 - Thamotharampillai Suntharalingam, 53, was shot dead along Thambachetty Road in Point Pedro in Jaffna on Friday (20) at 8 p.m. Suntharalingam was travelling towards Navalady on a motorbike when gunmen who followed him on another motorbike shot him in front of Mayakkai Pillaiyar Temple. Suntharalingam was from Athai in Karaveddy.

Navy Firefight in northern seas: Jan 21 - Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) patrol boats and two boats suspected to belong to the LTTE exchanged fire in Mathakal, Senthankulam seas west of Kankesanthurai Naval camp between 6.55 p.m. and 7.40 p.m., on Friday (20), SLN sources said. The two boats were moving in a suspicious manner and when the SLN opened fire the boats returned fire, SLN sources added.

Kayts businessman shot dead: Jan 21 - A supporter of Liberation Tigers was shot dead in Kayts, an islet off Jaffna peninsula, by gunmen alleged to be belonging to the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) and Sri Lanka Security forces intelligence operatives on Friday at 8 p.m. Thurairajah Ravichandran, 34, a father of four, was shot dead at close range by gunmen who entered the eating house owned by him located in Puliyanakudal junction in the islet of Kayts.

Two killed in grenade attack incident: Jan 21 - Two attackers were killed when policemen opened fire following a grenade attack at Chettikulam, where a policeman was wounded. Details of the two civilians in the incident were not available. The injured

police constable was immediately admitted to the Chettikulam district hospital. He was later transferred to Anuradhapura hospital in a police ambulance. The sentry point of the Sri Lanka Police is located at Chettikulam junction along Mannar-Madawachchiya main road.

Home guard, driver shot dead: Jan 21 - Unidentified men shot and killed Nilantha Madugalle aged 26, a home guard and Mahinda Navaretna aged 34, a three wheel driver Saturday (21) around 8.35 a.m. at Serunuwara police division when they were going towards Mavilaru area. The home guard was in civil and was going towards Mavilaru when this attack took place. Serunuwara Police division is located in the down south of Trincomalee district, police said.

Transport operator shot dead: Jan 21 - Unknown gunmen shot dead a Tamil businessman and seriously injured his relative near Puttur junction along A9 road between Kodikamam and Chavakachcheri in Thenmaradchy in northern Jaffna around 4.30 p.m. on Saturday (21). Gunmen entered his business in Puttur junction and escaped after shooting at close range. Nadarajah Yogeswararajah, 30, also known as Indiran, owned an eating house near Veerasingham Maha Vidyalam in Puttur junction and also managed a travel service, was killed and his relative Nanthakumar, 23, was seriously injured in the incident. Reportedly, during the last several days, Indiran was busy organizing transport to Jaffna families attempting to move to Liberation Tigers controlled areas in Vanni through Muhamalai checkpoint in his fleet of Japanese made Cantor open trucks, residents of Puttur who knew Indiran said.

Youth shot dead in Batticaloa: Jan 21 - Subramaniam Kishor, 21, was shot dead by two gunmen riding in a motorbike along Sagaya Matha Temple Road in Mamangam Batticaloa at 6.00 p.m. on Saturday (21). The incident took place in front of Mamangam Pillaiyar temple located 2 km east of Batticaloa town.

Retired technical officer shot dead: Jan 21 - A retired technical officer in Thamaraiikulam area Thunnalai Karaveddy in Jaffna was shot to death inside his home by unknown gunmen at 10.50 p.m. on Saturday (21). Gunmen who first asked Ilaithamby Radakrishnan, 61, to come outside his home, and when he refused, forced themselves inside the house, shot him with a hand pistol at close range and escaped. Thunnalai residents said that Mr Radakrishnan had recently retired from his post as a technical officer at the Jaffna office of the District Government and has been working on contract positions in Liberation Tigers controlled areas.

Four STF soldiers injured in grenade attack: Jan 22 - Four Special Task Force (STF) soldiers were seriously injured in a grenade attack by unknown assailants in Kannagi village in Akkaraipattu at 7.30 p.m. Sunday (22), security sources said. The STF soldiers were on foot patrol along Akkaraipattu-Sagamam Road when the attack took place. STF soldiers injured in the attack, J Amarasinge, 24, Sugath, 30, Jeyasri, 27, and Jeyasinghe, 27, attached Sagaman STF camp, were rushed to Akkaraipattu Hospital and later transferred to the Ampara hospital. The incident took place near the Hindu cemetery 6 km south of Akkaraipattu town. Akkaraipattu is located south of Batticaloa town 64 km in Amparai district.

Police officer injured in grenade attack: Jan 22 - Mr Karunaratne Ajith, 33, a Sri Lanka Police constable was injured when unknown assailants attacked Sunappodai, Batticaloa police sen-

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try at 7.15 p.m. on Sunday (22). The incident took place near the Kallady bridge is located 2 km east of Batticaloa town.

3 SLA troops killed, 4 injured in claymore attack: Jan 23 - Three Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers were killed and four soldiers injured in a claymore mine attack on an SLA foot patrol in Urani, along Batticaloa-Valaichenai road Monday (23) morning at 7.45 a.m. Names of those Killed are: Upul Chandana, Tennekoon, and Kulenthirakumar; the injured are: Gamini, Thevarajah, and two army minors injured, names not known. The remotely triggered Claymore mine was fitted to a tree, initial investigations revealed, according to police.

Police officer injured in grenade attack: Jan 23 - M. Ansar, 34, a Sri Lanka Police Constable, was injured in a grenade attack by unknown assailants at Arasady Junction in Batticaloa Town at 10.45 a.m. on Monday (23). The incident happened in front of Peoples Bank, Batticaloa, where Mr Ansar was stationed on security duty. Injured constable was rushed Batticaloa hospital and is receiving treatment there, hospital sources said. Batticaloa police sources said two men riding a motorbike men hurled the grenade at the security stand.

Meesalai trader shot dead: Jan 23 - The owner of an eating house in Meesalai, Thenmaradchy district in Jaffna, was shot dead along the A9-highway near the Chavakachcheri market by two men riding in a motorbike at 1.30 p.m. on Monday (23). Chandragajan Krishnagobi, was riding his motorbike from his eatery to Chavakachcheri market to buy provisions when unknown gunmen following him in another motor bike shot him at close range. A young woman was seriously injured when Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers fired in retaliation following the shooting incident. Thevarasa Yasotha, 21, a young woman from Trincomalee who was visiting her relatives in Nunavil, was seriously injured by the SLA fire. She was visiting the Chavakachcheri market to buy provisions for her relatives when she was injured.

Teacher shot dead: Jan 23 - An unidentified gunman riding in a motorbike shot and killed a private tutoring teacher on Goodshed Road, 1.5 km west of Vavuniya town around 5:00 p.m. on Monday (23). The victim, 35-year-old Kanagalingam Kamalchandran, who received seven 9 mm gunshot wounds, died on the spot. A friend of the victim, Mr. Jeybathas, was rushed to Vavuniya Hospital with serious wounds, Vavuniya Police said.

Tamil journalist shot dead: Jan 24 - Mr. Subramaniam Sugirdharajan, popularly known as SSR, a part-time provincial journalist working for the Tamil language daily Sudaroli was shot dead in his house along Church Road in Muttur town in Eastern port city of Trincomalee around 6.00 am on 24 January by two assailants who came on a motorbike and fired at him from close range. The victim was 35 years and father of two children aged three and two. Sugirdharajan was a Trincomalee port employee as well as a journalist

In condemning the murder of the journalist, Reporters Without Borders said, "We are horrified by the level of violence against Tamil journalists. The impunity enjoyed by the instigators and perpetrators of these murders encourages more violence against the press. We urge Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickrematunge to do everything possible to ensure that the police identify and arrest Sugirdharajan's murderers, as well as the murderers of Relangi Sevaraja and Dharmaratnam Sivaram, who are still at large."

Co-operative officer shot dead: Jan 24 - Mr. Ramalingam Suntheralingam, 54, a board member in Muttur Co-operative So-

ciety, was shot dead on Tuesday (24) morning around 7.30 a.m. in the premises of his house in Muttur town in eastern Sri Lanka by unidentified gunman. The lone gunman had entered the premises of the victim's house, fired at him at close range and fled the scene. Mr Suntheralingam's wife is a Grama Sevaka (GS). Muttur Co-operative staff expressed shocked at the killing and said they were not aware of any activities by Mr Suntheralingam that would have made him target by any of the groups that are engaged in a killing spree.

Student shot dead: Jan 24 - In the escalating incidents of killings in Thenmaradchy area in Jaffna, a student from Varani Yakkalai area was shot dead by unknown gunmen at 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday (24). Kandasamy Vaikunthan, 23, who was returning from classes from a private tutoring in Meesalai was shot dead in front of Kannki Amman Temple Varany Chuttipuram along Kodikamam Point Pedro road by unknown gunmen who followed him from his classes. Reportedly the victim was a member of a Maaveerar family. His brother, a member of Liberation Tigers, had died in combat earlier. The family of the deceased had recently moved to Vanni area seeking safety. Vaikunthan stayed behind to continue to his studies.

Solheim meets LTTE leader: Jan 25 - The meeting between the Norwegian Minister of International Development Mr. Erik Solheim and the Leader of the Liberation Tigers, Mr. V. Pirapaharan, began at 11:25 a.m. in Kilinochchi, LTTE officials said. The LTTE leader was accompanied by LTTE's Chief Negotiator Mr. Balasingham, LTTE's Political Head Mr. S.P. Thamichelvan, Head of Tamilleelam Police Mr. B. Nadesan and Mrs Adele Balasingham, in his meeting with Mr. Erik Solheim and the Norwegian delegation.

The Norwegian Minister, upon his arrival at 10:35 a.m., had a meeting with the officials of NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR) and a group of parish priests from Jaffna and Mullaitivu districts. Norwegian Minister was briefed on the deteriorating humanitarian situation prevailing in the NorthEast by the NESOHR delegation, according to Dr. Malathy, the Secretary of the Humanitarian Secretariat.

The NESOHR and the priests team comprised of Rev. Fr. M.X. Karunaratnam, the Director of the NESOHR, Dr. Malathy, Secretary of the NESOHR, Rev. Fr. A I Bernard, Rev. Fr. James Pathinathar, Rev. Fr. M. Ravichandran, Rev. Fr. M. Rex Sava, Rev. Fr. S Jude Amalathas, Rev. Fr. A. Jude Nixon, Rev. Fr. A.P Thiramahan, Rev. Fr. Anandakumar and Rev. Fr. Mathy Ilamparathy.

The Norwegian delegation headed by Mr. Solheim to Kilinochchi comprised of Mr. Hans Brattskar, Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Odd Naustdal Deputy Director from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Mr. Sondre Bjotvedt, an Executive Officer from the Norwegian MFA and Second Secretary to the Norwegian Ambassador, Mr. Tom Knappskog.

LTTE agrees for talks in Geneva: Jan 25 - The Tamil Tigers said that they had agreed to hold talks in Geneva with the Government of Sri Lanka on "smooth implementation" of the February 2002 Cease Fire Agreement. The announcement of talks came after discussions Mr Solheim had with Government leaders in Colombo and the LTTE leader Mr. Vellupillai Pirapaharan in Kilinochchi. The LTTE and the Norwegian Delegation addressed the reporters in separate press conferences at the Planning and Development Secretariat (PDS) in Kilinochchi.

Chief Negotiator and Political Strategist of the Liberation Tigers, Mr. Anton Balasingham, told reporters that the talks, expected to begin in mid-February, would be limited to the imple-

mentation of the truce which had come under increasing strain recently. Talks on further matters could only take place after complete cessation of the Sri Lankan military's violent repression of the population in Government held areas of the North-east, he said. Mr. Balasingham pointed out that military repression against Tamil civilians had intensified in recent weeks, sparking the flight of several thousand families from Jaffna and many other government-controlled places.

"We will only talk of the smooth implementation of the CFA," Mr. Balasingham said adding that the talks would concentrate on the implementation of the clauses in the February 2002 agreement. The prevailing situation in Sri Lanka's Northeast had been discussed at length during the meeting. Mr. Pirapaharan had detailed the violence and harassment inflicted on the Tamil people by Sri Lanka's military in recent weeks, Mr. Balasingham said. The modalities of the talks, limited to the implementation of the existing CFA agreement, are to be finalized by both sides through Norwegian facilitators, he said. This new opportunity for peace was, moreover, intended to give the newly elected Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapakse, "another opportunity" to take up the peace process, Mr. Balasingham said.

Two youths shot and killed in Jaffna: Jan 25 - Two youths were shot and killed in Jaffna in two separate incidents in Nallur, Jaffna, Wednesday (25) morning around 11:00. Unidentified gunmen riding in a motorbike shot and killed a youth on Konavalai lane in Kokkuvil East and another youth, around the same time, in Kondavil East on Potpathy lane. The victims are yet to be identified. Both the victims were riding bicycle when they were shot by the motorbike-riding gunmen.

Two UNP parliamentarians cross over: Jan 25 - Two senior opposition United National Party (UNP) parliamentarians have crossed over to the SL Government. The two Parliamentarians who crossed over from UNP are Chief Whip of the Opposition and Kalutara District MP Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe and Mr. Keheliya Rambukwella, Kandy District MP. Upon joining the Governing party, Mr. Rambukwella was sworn in as the Minister of Planning and Plan Implementation and Mr. Samarasinghe was later sworn in as the cabinet Minister of Natural Disaster Management.

There is much speculation in political circles that many more MPs from the opposition UNP are likely to cross over to the Government prompted by their unhappiness over the refusal of the current party leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe. It would seem that Prof G L Peiris, who was Minister for Constitutional Affairs in President Kumaratunga's cabinet and later in Ranil Wickremasinghe's cabinet playing the role as Chief Negotiator in the Government delegation in talks with the LTTE, was prepared to cross over to the Government following talks he has had with President Rajapakse. However his move had been thwarted by strong opposition from the JVP which is a constituent of the governing party.

Tamil civilian shot dead in Muttur: Jan 25 - Mr. Thambipillai Selvarajah (48) a mason by profession was shot dead by unidentified men on Wednesday (25) night around 7.30 p.m. close to the market in Muttur town in Trincomalee district. He was the second Tamil civilian shot dead by unidentified persons in Muttur town since Tuesday (24) morning and the third in the Trincomalee district. Mr. Selvarajah was shot dead in a lane near his house. Muttur Police rushed to the scene and began investigation into the crime.

US welcomes peace talks in Geneva: Jan 26 - United States

Department of State has welcomed the agreement by the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to hold peace talks in February in Geneva. United States Department of State Spokesman Sean McCormack issued the following statement in Washington, DC on January 25, 2006: "The United States welcomes the agreement by the Sri Lankan government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to hold peace talks in February in Geneva. We commend Special Envoy Erik Solheim for his effort to advance this positive development and fully support Norway's facilitation of the peace process.

As Under Secretary for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns said during his January 23 trip to Sri Lanka, this long conflict will end only when the LTTE and the government resume discussions, and the LTTE are convinced to stop using violence and acts of terror as political weapons. The United States and the other Co-chairs of the Tokyo Donors' Conference - the European Union, Japan and Norway - have called repeatedly for a return to the negotiating table to work towards a stable permanent peace. The United States remains fully committed to the Sri Lankan peace process.

The United States commends the Sri Lankan government for its restraint in the face of recent provocative attacks and fully supports its efforts as it advances towards peace. We support the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. We call on both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to take immediate action to prevent violence and to uphold the terms of the Ceasefire Agreement.

We believe that the people of Sri Lanka desperately want to see an end to years of conflict. The United States will continue to support them as they take steps to bring peace and stability to their country."

Vessel with detonators captured in northern seas: Jan 27 - India was the source of tens of thousands of detonators seized by a Sri Lankan navy vessel that were to be delivered to Tamil rebel-held territory, an Indian captain said on Friday 27. The navy detained the five Indian crew members of the vessel, which was seized late Wednesday (25) off northern Sri Lanka, an area under rebel control, Commander D.K.B. Dassanayake said.

Raj, an ethnic Tamil, told Associated Press Television while in navy custody that he received the detonators from a Tamil-speaking Indian man in the southern Indian port city of Rameshwaram. Raj said his contact gave him detailed instructions on how to deliver the cargo. "I was told by this gentleman to take this and when we reach a particular destination, give particular light signals and people will come by boats and pick them up," Raj said. Raj, 25, said he was given 5,000 Indian rupees (US\$160; euro130) in advance and was promised an additional 15,000 rupees when he returned to India.

On Thursday (26), when the seizure was announced, the Indian embassy in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo declined comment. The seizure came after the rebels agreed on Wednesday to resume peace talks with the government next month after a lapse of nearly four years.

LTTE official killed in ambush: Jan 26 - An LTTE official, Major Kapilan, was killed and at least one cadre was wounded when a LTTE tractor was ambushed in LTTE held area in Vadamanai near Welikande in Batticaloa-Polannaruwa border on (26) Thursday around 9 a.m. The ambush group had used Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) to attack the LTTE tractor, according to LTTE officials in Batticaloa. Vadamanai is located 6.6 km southeast of Welikande.

The LTTE accused Sri Lankan intelligence operatives and 'paramilitary cadres' of carrying out the ambush attack. The

Karuna group in a statement has claimed responsibility for the attack within the LTTE-controlled area. Meanwhile, S.Puleedevan, the Director of LTTE's Peace Secretariat, speaking from Kilinochchi, condemned the attack on their cadres in the east and accused Colombo for playing "double game, betraying its pledge to cease the violent campaign." The attack on LTTE cadres within 24 hours of the much publicized agreement between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka, facilitated by Norwegian Minister Eric Solheim, to hold talks in Geneva does not bode well for building of trust between the parties before talks, he added.

Two attacks against troops: Jan 29 - Sri Lanka Army (SLA) troops on foot patrol in Irupalai area along Jaffna Point-Pedro came under fire from unknown gunmen Saturday (28) evening, and in another incident in Chulipuram one SLA trooper was injured when unknown gunmen hurled a grenade at a SLA foot patrol. In Irupalai the gunmen hiding behind buildings opened fire and the SLA had returned fire, according to military sources. Areas around Irupalai, Kalviyankadu and Kopay were cordoned off and searched after the incident. Vehicular traffic and civilians using the approach roads to Irupalai were subjected to stringent checks.

Three wounded in grenade attack: Jan 29 - A 13-year-old boy, his 14-year-old sister, and their mother were wounded when unknown attackers lobbed a grenade on Saturday (28) night around 8:40 p.m. on the front-yard of the residence of a reputed trader in Vavuniya. The cause of the attack on the house of the businessman, Chandrakumar, the owner of Gopi Agency, is not known, the Police said. This is the fourth grenade attack to be reported in Vavuniya town within the past 7 days, sources said. A relative of Chandrakumar, J. Sarojinidevi, 36, and her two children, Sureja, 14, and Thamichelvan, 13, were wounded in the attack in front of the villa of the house located on Kathiresan lane.

Tamil farmer shot dead: Jan 29 - Unidentified persons shot dead Mr.Thambiah Jeyarajah (50), father of six children on Saturday (28) night around 9.30 p.m.while guarding his paddy crop in Lingapuram, a Tamil village in Seruvila division, down south of Trincomalee district. He was the second Tamil farmer killed in Lingapuram within two weeks' period. On 12 January, Mr.Thanabalasingham, another farmer, was beaten to death while he was in his watch-hut, guarding his crops. Thereafter about seventy Tamil families fled from the village through fear to LTTE controlled area in Eachchilampathu division seeking refuge, civil sources said.

CWC, UPF to jointly contest local elections: Jan 30 - Following two rounds of talks between the parties, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and Upcountry Peoples Front (UPF) Monday decided to field candidates in the forthcoming local elections jointly as one group with a common symbol. Both parties have decided to strengthen the unity of all Tamil political parties and also to guarantee the political rights of upcountry Tamils, Mr.Chandrasekaran, UPF leader said "We have also decided to bring all upcountry political and other groups under one roof without weakening the political co-operation and unity with the Tamil political parties of the northeast."

Chulipuram student missing: Jan 31 - Ramanathan Ratheskumar, 20, from Chulipuram east in Jaffna and a student at the Vaddukodai Technical College has disappeared after leaving home on Thursday (27) to attend school, said his parents in a complaint registered with the Human Rights Commission in Jaffna on Monday (30). Ratheeskumar's parents also said that they have made

inquiries and have received confirmation from the Political section of the Tigers in Kilinochchi that Ratheeskumar did not cross the Muhamalai checkpoint into the LTTE controlled areas.

Police constable shot: Jan 31 - Ranjith Ratnayake, 30, a police officer attached to Pachchanoor police, was shot and seriously injured by unknown gunmen at 5.30 a.m. on Tuesday (31), while he was duty at the Pachchanoor police post sentry. Mr Ratnayake was rushed to the Trincomalee Hospital and is receiving treatment.

Construction of 13,000 houses: Feb 4 - The World Bank funded North East Housing Reconstruction Programme (NEHRP) has commenced the second phase reconstruction of 13000 houses for the war victim families in the NorthEast. NEHRP officials started distributing forms to collect necessary data to select qualified beneficiaries affected by the two decade-old war in the province to be included in the second phase, a press release of the NEHRP said. During the first phase launched in 2005, 3079 were completed of the 4904 houses selected for reconstruction work. (309 in Amparai, 501 in Batticaloa, 666 in Trincomalee 295 in Vavuniya, 484 in Mannar, 501 in Killinochchi, 513 inMullaitivu and 1635 in Jaffna at district level). The reconstruction of remaining 1195 houses would be completed during February this year, NEHRP added in the press release.

The World Bank has provided financial assistance to reconstruct a portion of the ruined houses in the North East after cease-fire agreement was signed by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 22nd February 2002.

Halo Trust employee missing in Jaffna: Feb 5 - An employee of Halo Trust, an NGO engaged in mine clearing operations in Jaffna, is reported missing from Saturday (4) night. Gunaratnam Logithas, 23, from Kaithady in Jaffna district, was travelling to Chavakachcheri from his home in his motorbike when he was reported 'missing'. Relatives have lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) offices in Jaffna.

Muslim farmer shot: Feb 10 - Mr.W.L.Najeebdeen aged 44 of First Division in Akkaraipattu in the Amparai district was shot and injured on Friday (10) morning around 8.00 a.m. by unidentified person when he was going to see harvesting in his paddy field which is located in Anaivilunthan in Alankulam area. He was immediately admitted to the Amparai general hospital. The incident took place on Akkaraipattu-Amparai main road about 3 km off Akkaraipattu town in eastern Sri Lanka.

Vavuniya youth reported missing: Feb 10 - Sithamparanathan Thamileesan, 24, from Vavuniya, has been reported missing since his departure to Colombo on December 15th, his relatives said in a complaint to the Vavuniya Human Rights Commission (HRC). The youth had contacted home from Colombo on the 18th but since then there had been no news of him, the relatives said. Relatives added that they have lodged complaints on the disappearance with the International Red Cross (ICRC) and with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). The Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission in Vavuniya had informed the complainants, that the CID and the DIG of the police department in Colombo, on being contacted regarding this case, had said they had not arrested any youth named Thamilseelan.

Tamil businessman abducted in Colombo: Feb 11 - Tamil millionaire businessman and jewellery shop owner Vadivel Anandan (54) was abducted by an unknown armed gang on Wednesday (8) night at 11.30 p.m. near his residence at Alexander Road in

Wellawatte Colombo was released by his kidnappers on Saturday (11). He was brought to Royal Private hospital in Wellawatta by the kidnappers and was admitted by them at the hospital saying that he was unwell and handed over his identity card to the hospital staff. The kidnappers, who had earlier demanded Rs 20 million as ransom to release the abductee, seem to have decided to drop the demand, after the news spread about the ransom, family members told media.

Eyewitnesses to the victim's kidnapping had said that men speaking Tamil and armed with handguns came in two vans and forced Mr Vadivel Ananthan Siva from Jaffna, into one of the vans before driving away. Mr Siva had closed his jewellery shop and was going back to his residence when he was abducted.

39 Missing Persons Found In LTTE ranks: Feb 12 - Human Rights Commission's Jaffna district officer Rohitha Priyadharshana said that 39 persons have been found, out of all persons missing in the Jaffna peninsula, from the 15th of December 2005 to 27th January 2006 in various ranks of LTTE. According to information Human Rights Commission had obtained, these 39 persons who were claimed to be abducted by the Armed forces by LTTE proxy media organizations had been recruited LTTE for the next Eelam war against the Sri Lankan security forces.

Teenager with AKMS-rifle caught: Feb 11 - A LTTE teenager, reportedly belonging to the LTTE, who entered the Urani area in Batticaloa for an undisclosed mission with an AKMS-70 rifle was nabbed by the troops Saturday (11) evening after his suspicious behaviour was brought to the notice of the troops, the Army Media Unit stated. Troops apprehended 15-year-old LTTE cadre on suspicion while he was loitering near the roadside. On interrogation the LTTE teenager revealed that he had come to the area with the AKMS-70 rifle to carry out a task given by the LTTE and he had kept the weapon hidden inside a roadside scrub. Troops acting on the information took the LTTE teenager into custody and recovered the weapon. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) was informed. The LTTE teenager was to be handed over to the Batticaloa police for further investigations.

Claymore mine, grenades recovered: Feb 12 - The Army has recovered a powerful claymore mine and five grenades at an abandoned house in Illavala, Jaffna on 12 February. The mine and the grenades were recovered following a tip-off by a civilian, according to army media unit. Meanwhile, during the period from February 4 to February 10, 2006 a total of 12 anti-personnel mines, one anti-tank mine and two un-exploded ordnance (UXO) have been recovered from the general areas of Puttur, Ariyalai and Thanankilappu, in Jaffna and Kudakachchikudi in Vavuniya and Kokilai, Nilaveli in Trincomalee, according to military sources.

Grenades attack on TELO office: Feb 13 - Unidentified attackers lobbed grenades into Thamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) Batticaloa office wounding a party official around 7:45 p.m. on Monday (13). TELO officials alleged paramilitary cadres had targeted Indrakumar Prasanna, who is the General Secretary of TELO, a party in the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) coalition. Mr. Indrakumar is the Chief Candidate representing the Tamil National Alliance in Batticaloa Municipal Council elections. TELO office is located on Sri Sabaratnam Road in Sri Lanka Army (SLA) High Security area in Batticaloa Town. A TELO official, Thambyappa Loganathan, 40, injured in the attack was rushed to Batticaloa Hospital. Mr. Indrakumar had left the office a few minutes before his office was attacked, according to TELO officials in Batticaloa. Reportedly the attackers lobbed five grenades, only three of the grenades exploded.

State of Emergency extended: Feb 14 - Sri Lankan parliament extended the State of Emergency for another month till March 7. Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, Prime Minister and the Deputy Defense Minister moved the extension motion when the parliament resumed its sitting Tuesday (14). The State of Emergency was declared last year on August 13, the day after Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, Foreign Minister was assassinated at his residence in Colombo. Since then the State of Emergency has been extended every month with the approval of the parliament. Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayake moving the extension motion said about 38 killings of civilians and security personnel had taken place in January. He recommended to the House to extend the State of Emergency for another month till the tense situation in the country eased.

Fifteen-year gone missing; 15 Feb - The sudden disappearance of a teenager, reported to have been working for a leading tourist hotel in Nilaveli, Trincomalee, has been brought to the notice of naval troops by his mother on Tuesday (14) at about 6.45 p.m. Ms. Vela pushpakumari, the mother of 15-year old, Velu Rajan of 11th Mile Post, Nilaveli who approached naval troops has complained that her son who has been working at Nilaveli Beach Garden Hotel has gone missing since 12th February 4.00 p.m. The affected mother has lodged a formal complaint to this effect at Kuchchaveli Police station. Police investigations are in progress.

STF men in suspected killing of students detained: Feb 16 - The weapons used by the 11 Special Task Force (STF) commandos and two policemen, allegedly involved in the killing of five students in Trincomalee on January 2, have been sent to the Government Analyst for examination, police detectives said. The CID had also collected spent bullets and fragments of a hand grenade found in the vicinity of the incident. They said the suspects were being held in custody under detention orders under the emergency regulations. But they have reportedly denied allegations of having opened fire at the students.

Three suspects arrested for transporting explosives: Feb 16 - Mannar Police arrested three persons, two Muslims and a Sinhalese, in two separate incidents when they were allegedly transporting dynamite sticks from outstations to Mannar Island. The Police recovered 125 dynamite sticks from one incident and about 100 in the other.

A Mannar bound passenger from Kalpitya was stopped Thursday (16) around 1.25 p.m. at the police check point at the entrance to Mannar town and was checked. Police officers found about 184 dynamite sticks concealed. Two Muslim youths were taken into custody for further interrogation. The second detection took place around three p.m. when a Mannar bound private passenger bus from Colombo at the same police checkpoint. The Police found about 100 dynamite sticks concealed in the bus. They took a Sinhalese person into custody in this regard. All three suspects are being detained in the Mannar Police and they are to be produced in court, police said.

Grenade attack on TELO office: Feb 18 - Unidentified attackers hurled grenades at the the Batticaloa Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) offices located at the Sri Sabaratnam Road in Batticaloa town Friday night 9.30 p.m. Explosions destroyed a motorbike parked in front of the building and damaged the front entrance of the building. No one was reported injured. Police security at the office witnessed two attackers who had come in a motorbike. Although the police fired at the attackers they escaped unhurt. □

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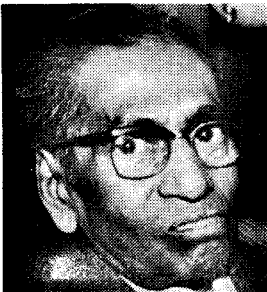
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**Roman Catholic sister in
Scotland** seeks partner for
her elder sister, 43, innocent
divorcee, working in Colombo.
No encumbrances. Please send
details to M 1468
c/o Tamil Times.

Fourteenth Anniversary Remembrance



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

Sadly missed and fondly
remembered by his two
sons.

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Surrey KT9 1XQ.

Eighth Anniversary Remembrance



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

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

- New Leasow, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield,
Birmingham B76 1YL.

Seventh Anniversary Remembrance 10.2.2006



Mrs. Regina Rajanayagam

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her beloved hus-
band Rajanayagam; brothers Ratnam Jesudasan, Anton
James and Prince; sister Cecilia Lawrence; brothers-in-
law Dr. Arasaratham and Nadarajah; sisters-in-law Anula
Arasaratham, Mrs Parames Selvaratham and Mrs Mahes
Sivayoganathan; niece Shamini and nephew Anton.

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Thanabalasingham Pararajasingham & Sivagamasouundaram Pararajasingham



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

Time, they say is a good healer. But the longing and vacuum continues.

Memories of the love and care you bestowed on us, which fill our hearts with pride and gratitude will last for ever. Your ever loving children, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

-285 Malden Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6AH.

The First Year Remembrance



*In ever loving memory of **Rasamanie Samuel**, on the first Anniversary of her passing away on 20th February 2005. Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by children Chandra, Indran and Peter; son-in-law Rajeswaran; daughters-in-law Utaiwan, Lalitha and Mercy; grandchildren Nira, Suren, Monti, Manee, Mike, Tanya, Jonathon, Joel and Ezrie; grandmother-in-law of Pradeep and Allan; great-grandmother of Kishan, Prashant, Nicholas and Colin.*
 - 8 Buckingham Drive, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 6TB.

Ninth Death Anniversary



Mohanadas. K. Samuel
 (18.1.35 - 4.2.97)

Nothing loved is ever lost
Memories last for ever

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

Forthcoming Events

March 06

1. Feast of St. David, Patron of Wales
2. Sathurthi
4. Shashti; Feast of St. Casimir
5. Karthigai
9. Eekathasi; Feast of St. Francis

12. Pirathosam

13. Masi Maham
14. Fullmoon
17. Feast of St. Patrick
18. Sankadakara Sathurthi; Feast of St. Cyril
19. Feast of St. Joseph
23. Feast of St. Turibius

25. Eekathasi; Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, Jesus Christ
27. Pirathosam
28. Amavasai

Advance Information

- April 8.** 11 a.m. Colomthurai Yoga Swamigal Abhisekham and Guru Poojah at Shree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London SW
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tle town Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0207 381 3086/4608.

March 5. 6 p.m. Flute Recital by Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia

March 19. 6 p.m. Hindustani Vocal Concert by Sanjeev Abhyankar

March 25. 6 p.m. Concert of Haridasa Devotional songs by Raichur Sheshagiridas

Bhushany Kalyanaraman Honoured



The presentation of Nanthi Fine Arts Society's first "Lakshminarayana Award for Performing Arts" took place on 27th December 2005 during the Marghazhi Music Festival. Dr. VV Srivatsa, an eminent composer, mu-

sicologist and secretary of the Madras Music Academy presided as the Chief Guest and is seen presenting the Award to eminent carnatic musician **Bhushany Kalyanaraman**. Kum Lalitha Muttuswami, well known violinist who spoke on behalf of Nanthi Fine Arts Society said that they were proud to present their first Lakshminarayana Award for Performing Arts to Smt. Bhushany Kalyanaraman. She hails from a family of musicians and is the daughter of Sangeetha Bhooshanam S. Kulasegarampillai of Sri Lanka. A leading carnatic musician in India today, she is an "A" grade artist performing regularly for All India Radio and Dhoordarshan. She also performs concerts in prestigious venues all over India and particularly in Chennai during the December festival.

The Tamil Nadu government honoured her with the title "Kalaimamani" in the year 2000. She is also a recipient of several coveted awards from leading sabhas in Chennai and other states in India. She is also an excellent teacher having students from abroad who visit and live in Chennai to learn music from her. She is a visiting Professor in Vocal Carnatic Music at the world renowned Kalakshetra Institute in Chennai

The citation of Nanthi Fine Arts reads as follows. "The president, secretary and members of the Nanthi Fine Arts do hereby confer on Smt. Bhushany Kalyanaraman, The Lakshminarayana Award for Performing Arts in recognition of her outstanding achievements and contributions in the field of carnatic music. We present to her the citation and Gold medal and we pray that Lord Almighty shall bless her with long life and strength to render valuable service to the cause of music."

Australian Newsletter

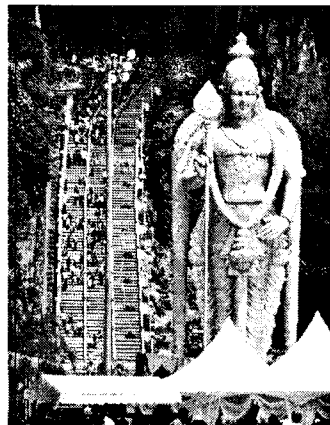
Sydney witnessed high pitched religious activities during January when religious personalities, academics and many others who are involved with religious activities or temples around the globe descended for the International Saiva Conference there. There are Hindu temples or places of worship in each state in Australia, even though the number of Hindus in its population is low. In such a backdrop, it was nothing but an honour for Sydney that presumably has the largest Hindu population, to host such an international gathering.

Memorial meetings for Late Pararajasingam attracted larger than usual participants despite scorching temperatures in Melbourne and Sydney. It was clearly evident that Late Pararajasingam had developed a rapport with a cross section of Tamils in Australia during his uninterrupted parliamentary career. This was manifestly evident from the diverse groups that attended the memorial meetings.

Some parts of Australia experienced scorching temperatures during January and bushfires were rampant in parts of Victoria and New South Wales in the east coast.

Sydney is back on track after the unusual chain of events that culminated in the race riots during the later part of last year and according to the best of indications, the authorities are taking all possible measures to ensure that such a situation

Grand Unveiling of Murugan Statue at The Batu Caves Temple in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 29/01/2005



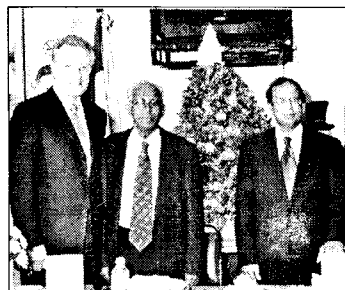
Some 50,000 devotees and tourists thronged to witness the spiritual unveiling ceremony of world's tallest Murugan Statue at the foothill of the Batu Caves Temple in Kuala Lumpur.

Flowers from a helicopter were showered over the new 140 feet high Lord Murugan statue. The 2.5 M Malaysian dollar statue entered the Malaysian Book of Records as the tallest statue of a Hindu deity in the country.

It was crafted by 15 Indian sculptors who worked more than 3 years on this project. Temple official are seeking Guinness Book of World Record recognition for the statue as the tallest Murugan statue in the world.

Cultural performance and devotional songs performed greeted the ceremony which ended at night with a stunning show of fire works.

"English in Action" Launched in Toronto



(L to R Senator Arthur Eggleton, Mr. E. Sangarapillai, Dr. V. Balasubramaniam)

English in Action, a book authored by Mr. E. Sangarapillai under the pen name - E.S.P. Godson-, was launched at an impressive, multicultural function held on 4th December 2005 at St. George's Manor Auditorium, Brimley Road, Toronto.

It was held also to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Author's career as a Graduate Teacher of English.

He was decorated with a Gold Medal by his most distinguished old student, Dr. V. Balasubramaniam, Barrister and Solicitor, Roach Schwartz and Associates. The Chief Guest was Senator Arthur Eggleton, the Guest Speaker Dr. Balasubramaniam and the Hon. Tom Wapper, Member for Scarborough presided over the function.

does not arise again.

Tamil is recognised as a LOTE (Language other than English) subject in Australia and offered in school curriculum. It depends entirely on the number of students choosing Tamil as a subject, for any particular mainstream school, to offer it in its curriculum and therefore majority of students have the opportunity to learn Tamil at ethnic or weekend schools or at institutions like VSL (Victorian School of Languages). Although the number of students offering Tamil as a subject at school final examination is on the decline, controversy surrounding the examinations are for ever on the rise. Some Tamils are yet to be convinced of the fairness in the process, despite the fact that government agencies in respective state or territory are administering the examination in its entirety.

- Sivasubramaniam Sitsabesan

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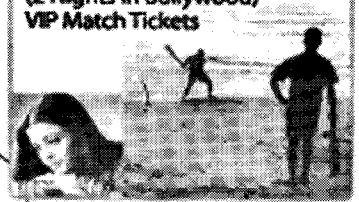
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