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NATIONALITES & THEIR FUTURE

SK Senthivel

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Deshabakthan

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The crop gets destroyed

by

Paandiyooraan

Mortgaged the *thaali* to buy the equipment,
ate the rice with just skinny dried fish stir-fry,
cleared the forest in July and set ablaze in August,
set up a shelter, pulled out tree stumps and uprooted shrubs,
sowed the *chena* crop and properly fenced.

Within the fence many huts we had built
guarded with care, but the crop got destroyed!
Crackers we lit-
elephant crackers, Chinese crackers and triangular ones-
but yet, my dear pal, the elephants did come.

If all our efforts go waste in this way,
mister, will the towns of your land prosper!
Look at the sorrow of our whole neighbourhood.
Risking our lives we walked
past the tiger and bear of the black hill forests.
It was the *chena* crop that
we spruced up with our working hands!

Rather than lie beside the loving woman
with hands on her breast, we abandoned sleep
to lie beside snakes on the watchman's platform,
bathe in ash and pluck out the flea.
For all the care of the watch by the day
the elephant is sure to come by the dusk.

(continued on inside back cover)

From the Editor's Desk

The anxiously awaited negotiations between the Government and the LTTE took place after a three-year gap. All peace loving people and especially those in the North-East anxiously looked forward to it and were disappointed by the outcome, which was little more than agreeing to meet again on 19th to 21st April, which leaves some room for hope. The rest of the joint statement seemed to be window dressing.

The government claimed victory on the basis that the charges made by them about ceasefire violations and recruitment of children by the LTTE have been accepted, while the LTTE claimed victory on the basis that, by being firm on the issue of paramilitary groups, it made the government agree to disarm the paramilitary groups.

It is not hard to guess what motivated the two sides to go to Geneva. The unhappiness of the public about the deterioration of conditions in the North-East and their desire for progress in the peace negotiations were important considerations, but what was most important was pressure from the 'international community' (actually the Western capitalist countries).

Thus, at the negotiating table, the LTTE emphasised the issue of paramilitary groups which were a threat to its existence, while the government sought to establish that the LTTE was a terrorist organisation by inflating the number of ceasefire violations by the LTTE as 5000, representing 96% of the total. The government also made the recruitment of children by the LTTE a major issue. But the argument of the chauvinist HL de Silva, President's Counsel, who a year ago successfully prevented the implementation of tsunami relief work through the joint mechanism, PTOMS by a court order, that the ceasefire agreement was illegal, backfired.

Overall, the government had failed to act with the sense of responsibility expected of it. The inclusion of rabid chauvinists in the negotiating team and the presence of the JVP leaders Weerawansa

and Somawansa beside the President who was in constant contact with the government team to advise the team gave a hint of the basis on which the government team would have put forwards its case.

President Rajapaksha, a member of a traditional elite class, claimed in his 'Mahinda Chinthana' that he would bring honourable peace. If he was sincere about it, he would not have let slip the opportunity to make meaningful progress at the talks. The chauvinistic stand of the government team at Geneva has been commended by the JVP and JHU, which have, however, denounced the joint statement. The chauvinistic Sinhala and English media too have endorsed the chauvinistic stand.

It is no secret that the armed forces of the state and the paramilitary forces working in collaboration with them, and the LTTE are involved in killings, kidnappings and acts of violence in the North-East. Many of the above acts are carried out as pre-planned acts of revenge. None of them can be defended or justified under the Ceasefire Agreement or the Memorandum of Understanding.

What was expected by the people was that the Geneva talks would find ways to put an end to the violation of the CFA. Of the reported more than 5000 violations, over 700 are killings, over 500 are kidnappings, and several hundred concern serious injuries. There have been internal displacements caused by these incidents and there is an atmosphere of fear and anxiety.

The history of negotiations goes back 21 years, starting at Thimpu in Bhutan in 1985. The talks have since travelled to Colombo, Jaffna, Thailand, Norway, Germany and Japan and now Switzerland, but have not got far. Inability of the two parties to arrive at consensus on a way to solve the problem will not do any good to the country and its people. Prolonging the record of failed talks achieves nothing more than trading of accusations, and does not win any friends. What are at stake are the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The economic crisis of the country and the fast declining quality of life cannot be corrected without solving the national question. Failing to recognise the importance of

solving the national question will plunge the country into depths from which recovery will be extremely difficult.

Both the Government and the LTTE owe it to the people of the country whom they claim to represent to make meaningful progress in the talks so that the war could be brought to an end and the national question solved to the benefit of all nationalities.

The Nationalities in Sri Lanka and their Future

by

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[This article is based on the Comrade KA Subramaniam Memorial Lecture delivered by Comrade SK Senthivel in Colombo on 2005]

Today the countries of the Third World face several problems and crises, of which the ones that concern contradictions between the nationalities and the related struggles seem to be the most prominent. The national question in each country could be seen to be based on them. In handling the national question, each nation state resorts to military oppression, in accordance with the needs of its ruling classes. The environment of national crisis is taken advantage of by the forces of imperialism to serve their needs and interests in the countries of the Third World. The dominant countries provide direct and indirect assistance and support to military oppression of the nationalities by the nation states. Meantime, for the ultimate purpose of serving their own interests, they also assess the forces involved in the liberation struggles and accordingly provide them with support. As a result, struggles and wars based on ethnic, linguistic and religious nationalism are prolonged; and killings continue and rivers of blood flow in many countries.

We have witnessed and experienced in Sri Lanka every cruel aspect of this trend of events. It is the national question that projects itself as the main contradiction and as the war and the struggle in Sri Lanka. The national question needs to be seen as a problem concerning all nationalities of the country. Further, we see in each of

the sections representing the different aspects of the problem ideologies based on a conservative outlook and courses of action based on them. Especially among ideas put forward on behalf of the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities, one finds claims to an ancient history, conservatism, purity, hierarchy, fear for the future, distrust, and mutual rejection. The national question and its solution are viewed on their basis. The notion of “our country” is declared aloud in terms of the notion of majority and minority. As a counterpoint, the notion of “Tamil Eelam” is emphasized as a demand for a separate state.

It is in this context that the national question as manifested above is approached and analysed by Marxist Leninists, and their position put forward, based on class struggle and according to a Marxist outlook. What many who comment on the national question choose to ignore or to avoid is its class basis. Anyone who excludes class in the analysis of the national question will easily fall prey to chauvinistic or narrow nationalistic positions. Hence it is important to take account of the nationalities, and understand the class roots that run through them and the respective roles played by them in the national question. Historical clarity about the nationalities of Sri Lanka and a far-sight based on it are particularly important

We can clearly see that there are four nationalities as well as other minority communities in Sri Lanka. We have the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities and minority communities comprising the Burghers, Malays and the Attho (Vedda). They predominantly speak Sinhala, Tamil and English, while the minority communities also speak their own languages. The religions are mainly Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The Attho continue in the practice of their ancient system of worship. The foregoing demonstrates that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country.

The Sinhala nationality

Let us first take a brief look at the history and development of the Sinhala nationality. Some historians point to ancient Pali texts which say that the ancestors of the Sinhalese arrived from North

India in the 6th Century BC. Others who reject this as a myth have provided evidence in support of their view. In any event, it has been established on the basis of historical evidence that, well before the said settlement of Vijaya and his 700 companions in Sri Lanka, there have been various ethnic groups inhabiting the island. What is as significant is that a substantial part of the Sinhala as well as of the Tamil nationalities comprises groups of immigrants who arrived from South India at various times, some as recently as less than three centuries ago, who were assimilated to either nationality. Mixing between the different ethnic groups too has occurred on a significant scale even during the period of recorded history.

It cannot be denied that among these ethnic groups were the ancestors of the Sinhalese as well as the Tamils. Historically, the Sinhalese have an ancestry exceeding 2500 years, and comprise people who arrived in this country during different periods and made this island their permanent home and developed their economy, language and culture. Agriculture was the main sector of economic production, and other crafts developed around it. The state evolved and along with it chieftains and kings in a system of production based on land. It was at this stage that Buddhism was brought into the island. The Sinhala language emerged and developed alongside the development of the society. It could be said that the Sinhala language derived its form and growth through the blending of Pali, the religion of Buddhism, with the then existing languages of the natives.

Historically, the emergence of Sinhala and its development were closely intertwined with the arrival of Buddhism. The Sinhalese have been attracted to the thought that Sinhala is spoken only in this country, to the legend that the Buddha handed to the Sinhalese the responsibility of safeguarding Buddhism, and to the fictitious racial and religious propaganda of the Mahavansa, written mainly from the point of view of rivalry for power among feudal rulers, that Tamil kings from South India have invaded and ruled this country. The Sinhala ruling class elite has, with ulterior motives, exploited this tradition of history to their political advantage. It was thus that the

chauvinistic claim of “our country” was propagated among the Sinhalese; and the Sinhalese were attracted to it.

It is not wrong in any way for the Sinhala nationality to emphasize its existence, development and future as a nationality. But it needs to acknowledge that other nationalities too have equal rights and concern for their respective nationalities. But the chauvinistic ruling classes have taken the stand of a majority holding on to the power to rule with chauvinistic arrogance, and making it their practice to marginalize and oppress the other nationalities. A close look at the forces of the ruling classes will show that they are mostly descendents of the ruling classes of the feudal era. They are the descendents of those who, as rulers, chieftains, nobility, military officials and administrators in the feudal structure, oppressed the peasants and other people, and divided and oppressed the Sinhalese along lines of caste. It was these feudal elite groups that possessed much of the land and the wealth that derived from it.

The Sinhala kings and the nobility, irrespective of ethnicity, had matrimonial and family ties with their South Indian Tamil counterparts. These close ties were those of feudal elite classes. South Indian Tamil kings have on several occasions ruled continuously for periods exceeding 80 years. Of them, Elara, who ruled longest, is said to have had a 44 year reign as a good king according to Sinhala historians. The battle between the Sinhala prince Dutugemunu and Elara was one between two rulers for state power rather than one of Sinhalese against Tamils. Dutugemunu overcame Elara in battle to become king. Another matter to which historians draw attention is that each the two parties to the conflict had Tamil and Sinhala soldiers and officers. In that case, how could the conflict be referred to as an ethnic conflict? Hence, what is true is that the battle was for feudal state power. Such wars have occurred not only here but across many countries including India.

At the same time, it should be noted that the Mahavansa, written to present and preserve a Sinhala (Theravada) Buddhist version of history, was based on myths, distortions and subjective

prejudices. It should be recognized that Sinhala chauvinist ideology and practice are constructed on its basis.

The Sinhala upper class elite comprising the descendents of the feudal landowning classes preserved their position of dominance through accepting positions and titles under the European rulers with the aim of holding on to their feudal landholdings and wealth. Many of the ancestors of the political elite who pose off as the guardians of Sinhala Buddhism converted to Christianity and rendered service to their white masters. An examination of the names of the forefathers of the Senanayakes, Bandaranayakes, Jayawadanes and Wijewardanes and other such influential families will show that they are largely Christian and English. The members of these families with wealth and caste arrogance were the ones who in the political scenario of the 1920s pleaded for reforms, with loyalty to the colonial masters. It should be noted that they were in unity with the upper-caste Tamil elite. It was they and their likes that took over capitalist growth, which is based on competition. While competing among themselves, they also had to compete with those from other nationalities and communities who developed as a capitalist class. Ethnicity and religion became early weapons in this rivalry. The Buddhist-Catholic conflict and the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915 which followed it can be seen as clear signs of this pattern.

Meantime, activities to defend Buddhism and the Sinhala language were carried forward by the elite of the Buddhist clergy and the Buddhist chapters. The Sinhala Buddhist intellectuals and the Bikkus carried forward the campaigns for prohibition, preservation of Buddhism and the development of the Sinhala language, art, literature and culture as a movement, symbolised by individuals such as Anagarika Dharmapala. This received the support of the ordinary Sinhalese peasantry and other Sinhalese masses who protected Buddhism, the Sinhala language and aspects of their culture from the impact of colonialism. Meanwhile, the leadership of the Buddhist chapters served as the centres of preservation of cultural values including feudal social values and a caste-based elitist hierarchy. It is noteworthy that the highest levels of the Buddhist religious elite in

this country have established themselves on the basis of the very things against which the Buddha preached his Dharma and thereby mobilised millions of the socially downtrodden to follow the path of Buddhism. The Sangha and its Mahanayakes have served as the defenders of the forces of the ruling political elite, in keeping with the pattern of each religion of the world, to become in course of time the armour and weaponry of the ruling elite classes. The development of the ordinary Sinhalese comprising the peasantry, the workers and other toiling masses was deficient, and occurred amid crises of life, through want, insufficiency and inability to fulfil their needs. Besides, hierarchical differences concerning the Kandyan and Low Country Sinhalese, the Govigama and Karava, and caste conflicts concerning oppressed castes continued to survive in the Sinhala society. The contradiction between the land-owning and the landless with its feudal origins has continued to survive up to now.

The Sinhala feudal forces that latched on to capitalist development since the 19th Century have been intent upon developing themselves as a ruling class even prior to independence from British rule, and the British colonialists before departure transferred state power to them. These forces created the impression that they were the political representatives of the Sinhala nationality, transcending contradictions of class and caste. The truth and the objective situation were different. This leadership comprised the political representatives of Sinhala capitalist upper classes of feudal descent who sought to guarantee the survival and security of these classes and did not represent the toiling masses who comprised the vast majority of the Sinhalese. Hence they intensified the role of national contradictions in bourgeois parliamentary politics and used it as a smokescreen to serve their own interests and needs as well as those of the imperialists. This developed into the chauvinistic stand that has rejected and marginalised other nationalities, and denied them their fundamental rights.

Also, during the past quarter of a century, chauvinism has been transformed into military oppression and war. Here, the vast majority of the toiling masses of the Sinhala nationality have been distracted

and deceived by the forces of the ruling classes through emotional slogans concerning race, religion, language and country. This truth could be perceived only through observation based on class. The observation by Marx that a nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free is clearly evident in relation to the Sinhala nationality. Thus, it is only when the workers, peasants, other toiling masses and intellectuals of the Sinhala nationality seek to think on the basis of class and to mobilise themselves and act against the ruling class forces among their nationality who exploit and oppress them that the Sinhala nationality could become a nationality advancing towards a liberation that is truly independent and prosperous.

The Tamil nationality

Let us next look at the historical development of the Tamil nationality in Sri Lanka. Many centuries before the 6th Century BC, when the ancestors of the Sinhalese are said to have arrived, people have lived in this country as ethnic groups. There have been the ancestors of the Tamil ethnic groups among them, as would have been a section of the ancestors of the Sinhala ethnic groups. Archaeological evidence for this has been indicated by historians from time to time. The proximity of the southern Dravidian territory of the Indian sub-continent to Sri Lanka created conditions that favoured the migration and settlement of Dravidian ethnic groups in the island.

Thus States took form among the ethnic groups resident in Sri Lanka and the ancestors of the Sinhalese who settled alongside them. They did not have identities such as a Sinhala or Tamil states. They were founded on the basis of land, production and power. They also served as the source of the feudal social structure. It was through their development that Sinhala and Tamil kings reigned in Sri Lanka. The Tamil kings came from South India, and it is worth noting that the Jaffna Kingdom was founded after the 10th Century.

The Tamils already living in the North and the feudal families that arrived from South India along with accompanying families, which were structured according to a caste hierarchy, formed the

Tamil society. The kingdoms of the so-called Arya-Chakravartins emerged from among them. Similarly, lesser kingdoms emerged in the Vanni. It was, however, in the 12th Century that a well defined Jaffna Kingdom emerged. It should be noted that, when the Portuguese arrived in 1505, Sri Lanka was ruled by the Kotte, Kandyan and Jaffna kingdoms.

The rulers of the Jaffna Kingdom protected and perpetuated feudal dominance and the system of caste hierarchy. Although the lands in the northern region were rain-fed, the economy was feudal, with agriculture based on groundwater and monsoonal rain and crafts that supplemented agriculture. Fishery and commerce developed alongside agriculture. Unlike the Indian subcontinent, the north of Sri Lanka did not have a Brahmin dominated society. Instead, it was dominated by the upper crust of the Vellala caste, which was itself hierarchically differentiated on the basis of land ownership, labour and wealth. Hence, the Vellala elite families with land and property possessed the authority to rule. They belonged to the Saivaitic faith of Hinduism and made use of temples and other religious and social institutions to preserve their dominance and control.

The feudal elite of the Jaffna Kingdom, who initially, in their self interest, opposed the Portuguese who arrived in Sri Lanka, subsequently accommodated them. The succession of colonial rulers, by and large, in order to avoid trouble for their interests and their rule, made compromises with the feudal elite of the north so that no significant changes took place that affected property ownership of the feudal landowners or the systems of caste and untouchability that they firmly upheld. This is clear from the introduction of the Thesavalamai Law for the north. Members of elite families were appointed as administrators of towns and villages under the colonial regime. The exercise of power and oppression by administrators such as Maniyakaararar, Udayaar, Vithaanayaar, Muthaliyaar, registrars of birth and death demonstrated the feudal domination in Jaffna at the time.

Meantime, people were placed at different layers of the caste hierarchy, below those of the Vellala caste. The caste hierarchy could

be broadly grouped into the upper, middle and the lower layers. The middle layer comprised craftsmen and providers of services. They too were placed one below the other in hierarchical order. The last group comprising the depressed communities were made into a group of untouchables. But they were the toiling peasants who were the backbone of agriculture. They did not own even a small extent of land or property. They remained entirely as enslaved peasants. The wealth, power and comforts of the dominant feudal elite were founded on their toil and that of the middle layers.

In the feudal era, with Vellala domination prevailing in the North, Saivism was practiced as the main religion. The bigger temples belonged to the Vellalas. The depressed communities, prevented from entering these temples by the practice of untouchability, worshipped lesser deities and practiced a culture that went with it. Saivism and Tamil were the preserve of the Vellala elite. This could be understood in retrospect through the ideology that was put forward through Arumuga Navalar in the late 19th Century. The Thesavalamai Law again reflect these features.

Meanwhile, in the eastern regions, where there was no separate state for the Tamils, Tamils have lived as early settlers with minor kingdoms. The East and its people have, from time to time, been under the domination of the Kandyan and the Jaffna Kingdoms. Agriculture and fishery have been the main economic pursuits there. Although the society was predominantly feudal, there was no domination by the Vellala elite. In its southern part, the Mukkuva caste was dominant. As a result, although a caste hierarchy existed, the practice of caste and untouchability was somewhat lax. The Mukkuva Law introduced by the colonial rulers in Batticaloa could be seen as one reflecting the social life of the Tamils of the East. At the same time, class identities such as the landless people, toiling peasantry and landed gentry continued to prevail. Worship of minor deities was dominant among Tamils living in and around Batticaloa, despite their being Saivaites.

Tamils have been resident in the Trincomalee region over a long period. They lived in ancient agricultural villages and in coastal

fishing villages. It should be noted that the ancient Konesar Temple, with Saivaite Thevara hymns dedicated to it, bears testimony to the long history of Tamils in the Trincomalee region. The ancient temple of Thiruketheesvaram along the west coast too bears similar historical testimony.

The Vanni region has had minor feudal kingdoms. Agriculture was the sole occupation of the people of the region. They practiced agriculture by developing a tank irrigation system. Tamils lived along the west coast in the Mannar region and in regions beyond it, extending southwards to Puttalam. Historical evidence has emerged from time to time to demonstrate that Tamils have been early settlers in the North-East region and outside it. Thus, it can be clearly seen that Tamils have lived for generations and that their way of life, the related economic efforts, language and culture have been developed in the present North-East Province and beyond. It could also be seen that the Tamil society developed over a long period of history, alongside contradictions and struggles relating to class, caste and gender hierarchy. The development of the Tamil community as a nationality in the period from the late colonial era to the middle of the last century needs to be viewed as a continuation of that process, since, on the basis that emergence of nationalism has followed capitalism, nationalism originated and developed among the ethnic and religious communities only towards the tail end of the colonial era.

The Muslim nationality

A look at the historical origins of Sri Lankan Muslim community shows that their arrival and existence begin nearly a thousand years ago. Muslim traders from Arabia initially settled in townships along the coast of the island. They developed into a Muslim community of sizeable population through matrimonial relationship with Muslims who arrived from the Kerala (then Malabar) region and by marrying local Tamil women. They made Tamil their language. Trade and commerce were their main occupation, and the Kotte and Kandyan kingdoms needed their services. The Sinhala kingdoms also needed them in the affairs of

state in dealings with foreign countries. Early settlements of the Muslims spread from Jaffna along the west coast in townships such as Mannar, Kuthiraimalai, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwela and Galle. Subsequently, they settled in townships in the interior in the course of developing their trade. Settlements in Trincomalee for purpose of trade spread in the East.

The arrival of the Portuguese in 1505 led to competition and to the decline in the trade of the Muslims, and a section of the Muslims established contact with the Kandyan Kingdom and settled there. As various parts of the Eastern Province were then under the Kandyan Kingdom., the Muslims used the opportunity to settle in the Batticaloa region as well. Muslims who settled there in significant numbers ventured into agriculture, and subsequently fishery. This led to conditions where they lived amid the Tamil population already resident there. Similarly, in the North the Muslims lived alongside a Tamil population in Mannar and stretching southwards to Puttalam.

The language of the original Muslim settlers from Arabia was Arabic, and it was the basic language of Islam. While it was necessary for Muslims to learn Arabic, their communications, matrimonial relationships, and the predominance of Tamil as the language of the Muslims who arrived from South India as well as of the people of the regions where they settled, made Tamil the language in their day to day life. In course of time, the vast majority of the Muslims adopted Tamil as their mother tongue. It can be observed that well to do Muslims living in Sinhalese regions made Sinhala the language of their day to day life. However, the vast majority of the ordinary Muslims have Tamil as their language in their day to day life as well as for their education. Also it cannot be denied that the Muslims living among Tamils in the Tamil regions, who have adopted Tamil as their mother tongue, have adopted several customs and cultural practices of the Tamils. However, the Muslims have not adopted the discriminatory and hierarchical caste system or the practice of untouchability prevalent among the Tamils. Yet, class based distinctions between families has persisted throughout. They have diligently preserved and protected the

uniqueness of their Islamic faith and its cultural manifestations. However, despite the emphasis of Islam on brotherhood, class differences have prevailed. While trade and commerce comprise their main occupation, not all Muslims have accumulated wealth thereby. While the big merchants and traders are wealthy, peasants, daily wage earners, workers and other toiling masses form the vast majority of the Muslims.

The wealthy upper class Muslims have worked in collaboration with the forces of the Sinhala ruling classes, whereas the ordinary working class Muslims have been united and in solidarity with the ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils. This should be viewed as unity of class forces transcending religion. Also, it cannot be denied that contradiction and conflict have persisted between the Tamil and Muslim political leaderships. A historical reason for that is the attitude and conduct of leaders like Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan towards the Muslims. Ramanathan declared that the Muslims were Tamils converted to Islam and did not have a unique identity, and it has been on this basis that the conservative Tamil leaders who followed him considered the Muslims. The Muslim leadership vehemently opposed this; the conduct of Ramanathan in relation to the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915 led to further dissatisfaction and disgust among the Muslims. Consequently, hostile feelings were deliberately cultivated between the Tamils and Muslims. This will be studied in some detail on another occasion.

Although the Muslims are scattered among all districts of Sri Lanka, they live in large concentrations in the North-East as their traditional region; and, especially in the Batticaloa, Amparai and Trincomalee districts of the Eastern Province, the Muslims have lived for generations with their traditional regions, economy and culture, with Tamil as their mother tongue. The service rendered by the Muslims to the development of Tamil continues to date.

The historical continuity of the existence of the Muslims serves to affirm religious nationalism and to assert a distinct national identity on that basis. Thus, it is an objective reality that the Muslims are a nationality. The concrete conditions that enabled this

development demonstrate that neither the forces of Sinhala chauvinism nor the Tamil conservative leadership has any logical grounds to deny that the Muslims are a nationality.

The Hill Country Tamil nationality

The Hill Country Tamil nationality identifies itself as the fourth nationality of Sri Lanka. The Hill Country Tamils were brought from South Indian villages into the island in early 19th century by the British imperialists to work in the plantation sector, and a vast majority are still plantation workers. The plantation workers who provided the basis for the existence of colonialism and its exploited wealth remain a people who are subject to the worst exploitation and oppression in Sri Lanka.

Even after the departure of the colonialists from the plantation sector, the life of the Hill Country plantation workers continues as one of pain and sorrow. The Hill Country Tamils live and work in large concentrations in the Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces and diffusely in the Western and Southern Provinces. The people of the Hill Country could be viewed as those who provided their labour for low wages and lived a lowly life to enable the cultivation of coffee in the hill country, and then the development of an export economy based mainly on tea and rubber. At the same time, under the identity of Hill Country Tamils, there have been traders, businessmen and wealthy individuals comprising the upper class forces.

The Hill Country Tamils have remained ethnically Tamil and for over one-hundred and eighty years preserved and developed the unique linguistic and cultural aspects of their identity. The situation continues where they do not own land or residential property, although they have for generations had the plantations as their home. It is important to note that, despite oppression by the British colonialists and the capitalist forces of chauvinism which succeeded them as the ruling class of Sri Lanka, the Hill Country Tamils have continued to exist as a community that has not forfeited its individuality.

It is important to appreciate the essence of the fact that the Hill Country Tamils have persisted in the stand that this land is their home and that Sri Lanka is their country, rejecting the idea of returning through forced repatriation and pressure of ethnic violence to India, the home of their ancestors. Thus, for more than four generations, the Hill Country Tamils has been continuously resident in the Hill Country. Having Tamil as their common language, a long continuity of a common culture and an environment of sustaining an economy has propelled the Hill Country Tamils to the status of a nationality.

It should be noted that Hill Country Tamils live in an environment that is vastly different from that of the Tamil and Muslim nationalities, namely within regions where Sinhalese live. At the same time, the identity of 'people of Indian descent' is being put forward by upper class elements among the Hill Country Tamils, in order to negate the identity of the Hill Country Tamils as a nationality and thereby secure various concessions, indulge in political bargains and make personal gains for themselves. Such people are unable to come to terms with the development of the Hill Country Tamils as a nationality. It is as a manifestation of this attitude that the leadership dominating trade unions and politics among the Hill Country Tamils is continuing to use the Hill Country Tamils to serve its upper class political interests. But it is clear that the new generation of Hill Country youth is recognising the forms of chauvinistic oppression faced by the Hill Country Tamils and is driven by the feeling and motivation to be rid of oppression. This emerges as a feeling for national liberation. When taking into consideration these developments, it is an objective reality that the Hill Country Tamils are undeniably a nationality.

The Burgher community

There are besides the above named four nationalities, the Burgher, Malay and Attho (Vedda) communities. The Burghers are predominantly descendents of the Portuguese of the colonial era. The descendents of the Dutch, who are smaller in number, are also identified as Burghers. The Burghers have adopted Sri Lanka as their

residence and home. They live in larger numbers in the Western Province and in fewer numbers in urban regions elsewhere. They mainly have English as their first language and have been in state and private sector employment as well as been owners of private enterprises. Their religion has been Roman Catholicism, with the Dutch Burghers largely Protestant Christians. Their culture and life style has been that of Europeans.

They do not live contiguously or in large concentrations in any part of the country. At the same time they have mostly identified themselves with the Sinhalese and to a less extent with the Tamils, especially in the Eastern Province. They have, nevertheless, existed as a community with a historical continuity of 400 years. To define, to grant and to defend their rights that will enable them to preserve their social identity is inevitably a matter of social justice.

The Malay community

The ancestors of the Malays arrived from Indonesia under Dutch colonial rule and settled in Sri Lanka. They are Muslims by religion. As a result they have eventually identified themselves with the Muslims. They have become a part of the Muslim community and are by and large integrated with the Muslim nationality. Government Census identifies Muslims in Sri Lanka as Sri Lankan Muslims (earlier Ceylon Moors), Indian Muslims and Malays.

There are, besides the Malays, Muslim communities such as the Memen and the Borah. It is essential to protect the individual identities of such communities.

The Attho (Vedda) community

The Attho, who are probably the descendents of the earliest settlers in Sri Lanka, exist as another ethnic group in this country. The Attho who even today live with the basic features of an aboriginal community live mainly in the forests of the Mahiyangana region of the Uva Province. Their livelihood comprises hunting and agriculture. The Attho numbering over 2500 have a language of their own and a contiguous residential territory. They practice the system of worship and cultural practices of their community. They are

insistent that their mother tongue is not Sinhala and that their individuality and identity should be protected. The forces of chauvinism approach the Attho with the ulterior motive of making it Sinhala Buddhist. The members of the Attho community do not accept it. Hence it is essential to recognise the Attho as a distinct social group and it is important to safeguard their individuality and identity.

Dealing with the national question

It is possible to have an overview of the historical development of the four nationalities and other communities on the basis of the foregoing brief historical comments. The situation that led to the emergence of any community into a nationality emerged only in the years preceding the last century. Nationalism has to be identified in terms of the stages of capitalist development following the emergence of capitalism. Neither Sri Lanka nor any other Third World country is taking such a path of capitalist development. There are several reasons for it.

The European colonialists who had Sri Lanka underfoot permitted controlled capitalist development in a way that suited their needs and interests. It is important to note that, under the continuation of those circumstances, there was no major national movement, like for example that in India, that developed into a struggle for independence or a liberation struggle opposed to colonialism and imperialism as its extended form.

Initially some of the feudal rulers demonstrated their opposition and participated in rebellions and struggles. Such resistance failed to develop further. Later, it was only the left movement that for a limited period played an anti-imperialist role. None of these developed into a national movement of struggle on a major scale, embracing the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Hill Country Tamil and other communities. Thus, it is clear that the capitalist development that took place at a slow pace in Sri Lanka was with the consent and collaboration of colonial imperialism.

Thus, in the name of “independence”, Sri Lanka secured a transfer of power under a semi-colonial and semi-feudal system. The incompletely developed capitalist classes of feudal descent assumed power. The imperialists who handed over the power to them, anticipated the long-term prospect of contradictions and conflicts developing within the different communities in the process of their development as nationalities, and prepared the groundwork for it. While the forces of imperialism are harvesting the benefits, contradiction and conflict continue among the nationalities.

The Sinhala feudal-capitalist elite forces that took over state power handled the development of the Sinhala nationality one-sidedly. That form of development too failed to reach down to the lowest levels of the Sinhalese. The rule in the name of the Sinhala nationality remained, on the basis of class, the protector of the interests and needs of the wealthy upper classes. In order to conceal that from the vast majority of the Sinhalese, it initiated communalism in the form of neglect, partiality and rejection of the Tamil nationality as well as other nationalities and communities, and developed it into oppression. It is as a peak of that oppression that a war has been waged against the Tamil nationality that has gone on for the past quarter of a century.

The Tamil nationality, in the course of its development, has resisted the oppressive Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. The initial leadership of this nominal resistance was held by the Tamil upper class conservative forces with parliamentary politics at the core. Initially a Saiva Vellala elite leadership and subsequently a Saiva-Christian Vellala elite leadership launched non-violent struggles, while holding on to their parliamentary posts. The chauvinistic ruling classes defeated those struggles and carried forward further oppression by denying the rights of the Tamil nationality. The Tamil nationality and other nationalities were subjected to the denial of democracy, violation of human rights, attacks by the army, and police excesses.

It is under these circumstances that armed struggle by the youth from among the Tamil nationality emerged and developed. It was

through the assertion of the right of the Tamil nationality to self-determination, the consequent right to secession and the demand for “Tamil Eelam” that enabled the above armed struggle to spread and gather momentum. The positive and negative aspects of this will be dealt with extensively in another context.

The social order of Sri Lanka is, via its semi-colonial and semi-feudal condition, being transformed into a neo-colonial social order. The programme of imperialist globalisation is involved in activities of re-colonisation in order to accelerate it. Hence, it is cannot be denied or concealed that the fundamental contradiction in Sri Lanka is clearly one of class. However, the national contradiction, accompanied by the related struggles, is overshadowing the principal contradiction as the main contradiction today. The national contradiction has on its one side the war of oppression by the Sinhala Buddhist ruling classes and on the other the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality.

Although it is possible to resolve the ethnic contradictions that have taken the form of the national question, the chauvinistic capitalist ruling class forces are not prepared for a just solution. They, essentially, put forward their class interests. By paying heed to the advice of the forces of imperialism and regional hegemony and seeking to serve the interests of these forces, they are unable to arrive at a solution while making the situation more complex and severe.

What is essential for the future of Sri Lanka is the granting of the highest forms of autonomy, incorporating equality, democracy and human rights, on the basis of the right of nationalities to self determination within a united Sri Lanka. It is only through such autonomies that would guarantee the wellbeing and future of the nationalities that unity, mutual understanding and development could be achieved for all nationalities, and it could be ensured that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country with unity and prosperity. But the question has still remained whether the chauvinistic capitalist ruling class forces will offer such a solution. That is why the Marxist Leninists insist on the importance of struggles founded on the basis of class struggle. They point out that the liberation struggles of

nationalities should be carried forward with policies based on class struggle.

The experiences and lessons of national liberation struggles thus far emphasise the need for a path based on class struggle with a Marxist outlook. The Marxist-Leninist assessment is that nationalities can neither decide nor determine their future by confining themselves to nationalism, because the nationalist position is restricted to aspects confined to narrow boundaries. Nationalism comprises the starting point of capitalist exploitation, market and profit and therefore cannot free the nationalities from the class oppression related to them. Marxist Leninists stand on the progressive side of nationalism to the extent that it opposes chauvinistic oppression. But the path of class struggle chartered by Marxism and the journey are destined to take the nationalities beyond their national boundaries on a broad base toward the liberation of the entire humanity. Therefore the working class and other toiling masses of the Sinhala nationality should recognise the right of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities to self determination and come forward to struggle against the chauvinistic oppressors of their own nationality. In the same spirit, the oppressed nationalities should seek friendship and support from among the Sinhala nationality. Thus it is the need of the times for anyone who has an interest in the liberation and the future of all the nationalities to consider taking the path of class struggle based on Marxism and act accordingly.

Excerpt from the interview of Comrade Prachanda, Leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) with the Charles Haviland of the BBC.

Do you believe in the multi-party system or would you like your party to be the one party ruling Nepal at some point in the future?

I am going to address this question very seriously. Three years ago, at a Central Committee meeting of our party, analyzing the experiences from 20th century communist states, we put forward a proposal for the development of democracy.

In the 21st century we cannot have a state like those of the 20th century. That's why our Central Committee unanimously passed this paper on the development of democracy in the 21st century. The spirit of this paper is that there should be peaceful competition between all political parties against feudalism and foreign imperialist forces. And that there should be multi-party competition. Since then we have said that within a certain constitutional provision multi-party competition [should exist] as long as it's against feudalism, against foreign imperialistic interference and all political parties can compete against each other. And this document was unanimously passed three years ago in very clear terms.

In the agreement that we recently made with the political parties, we have clearly stated that we agree to multi-party competition. What we have seen from the 20th century, and the lessons that we have learnt from the experiences of the 20th century, a very important question was - to understand the subject of democracy and dictatorship we need to develop a new consciousness for this. And we have passed this.

Our opponents have understood us in a dogmatic way. We are not dogmatic but our opponents are. They are looking at us with 20th Century glasses. But we are already moving into the 21st Century. [We are looking at] the kind of state that is possible in the 21st Century, how to give people the maximum possible rights; how to

organize competition; and how to guarantee that this competition does not lead to oppression and suppression.

In short, democracy and dictatorship.... How to make use of this conflict between them - we are developing on this. And from this process of development, we have termed, development of democracy. People think that our commitment to the multi-party competition is purely a tactic and that we are trying to cheat someone. But in reality we have taken the experience of an entire century, discussed it, analyzed it in our party, and we've come to a conclusion that the development of democracy is necessary in the 21st Century. That's why we take multi-party competition very seriously.

We want to move forward. Even in our understanding with the parties, we have said that we don't want autocracy; that we have to crush the feudal autocracy that exists today. It will never propagate multi-party competition. Events have proved this.

Not only now - four years ago, when the royal massacre happened, we saw that the feudal autocracy was snatching away the rights that we gained in the 1990 democracy movement. The parliamentary parties were also against the royal massacre. That's why we appealed to the political parties to join us and build a platform, and [we said] we are ready to compete with you, and the feudal autocracy was a common enemy of ours and we should fight against it. And we have been talking about multi-party competition since then. I strongly believe we need to understand this clearly.

The Future is Bright

(a comment on the fast changing international situation)

by

Deshabakthan

Less than a decade ago, imperialist triumphalism prevailed. Feikama's declaration of the 'end of history' was the most celebrated work to the intellectual elite of the developed world. Many left intellectuals disheartened by the fall of socialist governments in East Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, had lost faith in a future for socialism. Developments in China after Mao Zedong added to their woes. When the imperialists declared that "Communism was dead", feeble-minded left intellectuals got prepared for the funeral.

It is true that the imperialist agenda of globalisation went according to schedule and took impressive strides in the last two decades; globalisation has yet to lose its momentum, and the long-term effects of its impact are serious. The systematic weakening and enslavement of the economies of the Third World is still part of the imperialist agenda, implemented through agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank. By and large, the national bourgeois leadership of the Third World has politically surrendered to imperialism, and is only considering ways of survival under the yoke of imperialism rather than ways to combat the oppressor. The degenerated 'old left' which by the 1980s had lost its credibility as a revolutionary force had lost much of its left identity by the turn of the millennium.

But the last two decades of the millennium also marked the period in which genuine revolutionaries showed their mettle by standing firmly by their belief in the revolution and persevered in revolutionary struggle against severe odds. Many mass revolutionary struggles that were written off in the 1980s and 90s as marginalised or dead re-emerged with new vigour in many countries.

Since the early 1980s, imperialism sought to use religion and religious fundamentalism as tools to undermine the Soviet Union and China and to rally support for its subversion of revolutionary struggles and progressive regimes in Latin America, as for example in Nicaragua. Christian fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism and Jewish fundamentalism directly served imperialism in their own separate ways. Hindu fundamentalism in India sought close ties with US imperialism as did the Sinhala Buddhist ideologues of Sri Lanka. The Dalai Lama had for long been an imperialist puppet. The Vatican collaborated with the CIA to bring down the communists in Poland. However, every successful manipulation by the imperialists had a disastrous downside, as the 11th September 2001 attack demonstrated.

Following the Chilean coup and the assassination of Allende in 1974, South America seemed to be secure against the communist threat, except in Colombia where the government has been unable to overcome the rebels for nearly half a century. The only new serious threat, the Shining Path revolutionaries of Peru, seemed to have been done with, following the arrest of its leader. Central America had been effectively reined in by the 1990s following the cruel civil war imposed on Nicaragua by the US government. US invasion of Grenada was adequate warning to the rest of the Caribbean, except of course Cuba, and the overthrow of Aristide in Haiti by a US-sponsored coup a few years ago declared that what the US says is law.

But the very success of the programme of imperialist globalisation was to be the nemesis of imperialism. Economic reforms, restructuring and opening up of the economy were accelerated in South America, where the US now opted for more democratic governments, since the 'communist threat' was a thing of

the past, and that democratic governments could do the bidding of the World Bank and IMF better than military dictatorships, whose heavy-handed approach invariably involved a risk of popular rebellion. Even once rich countries like Argentina became debtor nations, and the charm of the promised “global village” wore off very fast. The burden of debt was passed on to the toiling masses and the unemployed poor, while the rich got richer by collaboration with the foreign investors who were ruthlessly plundering the continent. The rapid growth of the anti-globalisation movement during the past five years was a direct consequence of the imperialist programme of globalisation.

Left-leaning governments were elected in Brazil and Argentina, but were under pressure from the IMF because of the severe indebtedness of the countries. The loyalty of the governments were divided between the aspirations of the masses and pressure from US imperialism through the funding agencies that it controlled. The rapid rise in the cost of living in Argentina led to a regime change. Regime changes putting a left or centre-left leadership in control followed in Venezuela, Uruguay and more recently Bolivia and Chile.

While these changes and the ones anticipated in Peru and Ecuador following the presidential elections scheduled for this year are clear signs that the mood of the people is hostile to globalisation and imperialist domination, they should not be mistaken to be signals for social transformation. Two of the six South American countries with left or centre-left governments, namely Venezuela and Bolivia, have announced socialist programmes which are more likely to be welfare programmes in the immediate future. The way matters would develop depends very much on the course of events in the region and in the US.

In Venezuela, attempts by the US to topple President Hugo Chavez included a coup which could not sustain itself, politically motivated industrial action, and attempts to murder Chavez. Unfortunately for the US, Chavez is popular and has strong support from the poor and the toiling masses; besides world oil prices and the

oil wealth of Venezuela are helping the economy not only to survive, but also in its diplomatic offensive through helping other oppressed nations and America's poor who are neglected by the state.

The stand taken by Venezuela along with Cuba in the IAEA on the question of referring Iran to the UN Security Council is admirable, and is a positive step towards building solidarity among the oppressed nations of the world. There is growth in political awareness in Latin America and anti-globalisation campaigns have made a strong impact on public awareness. But there is still a long way to go.

The choice before the third world countries is plain: it is "socialism or death" as Hugo Chavez recently put it at the World Social Forum. But the march towards socialism is not simple. A whole host of internal contradictions cry out to be resolved as the economy is freed from the clutches of imperialism. The solidarity of the Amerindian people that made it possible for Evo Morales to win and point to possible victory for Ollanta Humalla in the forthcoming presidential election in Peru could be transformed into ethnic conflicts. The imperialists and local reactionaries have done it many times over; and bourgeois parliamentary democracy, often practiced as tyranny in the name of a majority, is vulnerable to parochial politics. The experiences of former European colonies in Asia and much of Africa will provide ample lessons in this respect.

It should also be remembered that the normal democratic process has always favoured the ruling classes and wherever they lose power they try, often successfully, to recapture it by force. Unless the masses are mobilised, politicised and activated, it is possible for democratically elected governments to go back on their promises and yield to imperialist pressure or even become junior partners of imperialism.

It was mass protests that threw Lucio Gutierrez, President of Ecuador, out of power in April 2005, and he had to flee from the roof of his residence in a helicopter to escape the wrath of the masses. And it was waves of mass protest after mass protest that made

possible the political changes in Argentina and Bolivia. It was, again, mass protests that forced the enemies of Chavez to retreat.

Mobilisation of the masses to bring about regime changes could lead to frustration and disenchantment with struggle, unless there is a clear political program to carry struggles forward to their logical end, namely people's power.

Thus, democratic structures need to be developed in the course of struggle, which would resist the emergence of the politics of ethnic rivalry and hegemony. Besides, most of the economies of South America have been badly battered by imperialist globalisation and neo-liberalism. Recovery needs fresh investment which could mean that the economy could be snared once more by imperialism in the name of aid.

The US failed in its recent bid to impose a US dominated free trade association on South America. But that needs to be followed by positive action. New economic alliances need to emerge in Latin America to strengthen regional cooperation and solidarity against multinational predators.

Thus, the situation in Latin America, especially South America, holds out much promise for the global anti-imperialist struggle. But it is important to guard against over-optimism and complaisance. On the other hand, one should not be overly pessimistic either. The revolutionary and progressive forces of the world should encourage South America to continue unhindered along its path of anti-imperialist struggle by relying upon the masses.

Sri Lankan Events

Peace Processing

The Tamils of the North-East made history by boycotting the Presidential Elections of November 2005. Notably, it was the New Democratic Party that urged the Tamil people to boycott the elections. It recommended that the people should make a political point by spoiling their ballot paper. There was reluctance on the part of the Tamil political parties, especially certain MPs who wanted to support the UNP candidate Ranil Wickramasinghe. However, the LTTE, which initially indicated that it did not care whom the Sinhalese chose to elect as their President and that the Tamils could vote as they choose, changed its mind a few days before the election and called for a boycott.

The fact that the Tamils were not interested in electing either of the leading candidates was clear from the percentage of postal voting from the Jaffna district, which was low at around 25%, despite postal voting closing more than a week before the election. Polling by Tamils was very low even in non-LTTE controlled areas, and was estimated to be low even in Colombo. One factor that disillusioned even the section of the Tamils in the South who may otherwise have preferred the UNP was the revelation by two UNP leaders that the UNP leadership engineered the split in the ranks of the LTTE. Although it was long suspected that Milinda Moragoda had a hand in getting a foreign agency to bribe Karuna to create a split in the LTTE, it was a revelation when he and Naveen Dissanayake ceremonially let the cat out of the bag to lure Sinhala chauvinist votes. Ranil Wickramasinghe failed not only to refute the story but

also to censure his party colleagues. There was no apology or statement of regret forthcoming from him.

The boycott by the Tamils clearly led to the defeat of the UNP by a narrow margin, since Mahinda Rajapaksha's separate agreements with the JVP and the JHU regarding the national question had already antagonised most Tamil voters. The outcome was a disappointment to the US government, which wanted Ranil Wickramasinghe in his capacity as President to play role of facilitator in their scheme to bring Sri Lanka under their control.

Consequently, the LTTE was roundly denounced by various local and foreign NGO watchdogs as well as by the EU monitors, although there was minimal violence in the North-East during the period of the election. The truth was that the verdict of the Tamil people was unacceptable to those who wanted the UNP to return to power. Had only the Tamil people been asked by the LTTE and the Tamil parliamentary parties to spoil the ballot paper as suggested by the NDP, the outcome of the election would have been very much the same, except that there would not have been room for the 'champions of democracy' to complain.

The fact is that, in a situation where the choices before a voter are not actually choices, the most effective way of exercising one's democratic right is to refuse to choose. A democracy that denies this option is not a democracy, and anyone who denounces such an exercise as undemocratic is an enemy of democracy.

Given his pledges to the JVP and to the JHU as well as his position on the national question as stated in the "Mahinda Chinthanaya", issued in lieu of an election manifesto, President Mahinda Rajapaksha failed to surprise any with his approach to the peace process. The President's visit to India was ill timed if the purpose of the visit was to urge Indian involvement in the national question. With State Assembly Elections for Tamilnadu in sight, the coalition government at the centre dependent on support from the Tamil nationalist parties of the South, the popular mood in Tamilnadu less hostile to the LTTE than it was a few years ago, and

the Indian government bending over backwards to be on the good side of the US, India was not keen on obliging with another adventure in the near future, although its agents have been working overtime to wreck the climate of peace in the North-East and to undermine the peace process in the South.

Norwegian mediation was requested in the end, despite various objections to Norwegian involvement in the months before the election and two months after. After much wrangling about the venue, it was agreed that the talks would be held in Geneva in February.

The way the Government's negotiating team was put together and briefed made one wonder whether the Government knew what it wanted at the negotiating table. Dispute about Muslim representation remained and is bound to be a thorny issue, more for the Government and the Muslim leadership than for the LTTE. The Government, after agreeing to an agenda based on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement (CFA), sought to renegotiate the ceasefire agreement at Geneva. In the end, what was achieved was agreement on meeting on another day in April, subject to progress on the implementation of the CFA, and agreement by the Government that it will control the armed activities of the paramilitary groups in the North-East while the LTTE agreed to ensure that there were no attacks on members of the armed forces.

The situation in the North-East has continued to deteriorate with a rise in the level of violence, in the form of killings, kidnapping, threat of violence and damage to property. Attacks by the armed forces on civilians have seen a big rise in the North and many soldiers have been killed in landmine and grenade attacks, allegedly by the LTTE. Meanwhile, the army has denied involvement in the attacks on LTTE targets by the "Karuna faction" or by other anti-LTTE militia groups.

Karuna's refusal to be disarmed or disciplined by the Government is a sign that the situation in the North-East could be transformed into one of anarchy, where neither the LTTE nor the

Government can control the spiralling increase in violence. Given the fact that US intelligence was involved in engineering the split in the LTTE and the fact that Indian intelligence has been active in stirring trouble in the East and in encouraging opposition to the peace process, the Tamil struggle for liberation cannot be confined to armed struggle.

To inform the people of the respective roles played by the forces of imperialism and regional hegemony as well as their agents including the NGOs is essential to the correct orientation of the struggle. Failure to address the contradictions within the Tamil nationality has enabled the development of a social base, however fickle or fragile, for various factions and pro-government militias. The price to pay for the neglect of class politics will be especially high for the Tamil liberation struggle.

Local elections have been called in a situation where the UNP is badly divided and dented by a series of desertions since its defeat in the Presidential Election.

The PA is not in a position to capitalise on that advantage with its internal power struggle dragging on, and President Rajapaksha wanting to gain full control over the SLFP by sidelining Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The JVP leadership too is facing a crisis over its position vis-à-vis the PA. The decision to go it alone at the local elections has added to its difficulties. The outcome of the elections could lead to major changes in the leadership of the parties.

However, one thing is certain: the main Sinhala political parties will not change their negative attitude towards resolving the national question.

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47th National Day of Cuba Celebrated

The 47th National Day of Cuba was celebrated on 1st January 2006 and the occasion was also observed as the Anti-Imperialist Day by the International Solidarity People's Forum, at the Ramakrishna Mission Hall, Colombo 6.

The meeting was chaired by Comrade E Thambiah, Central Co-ordinator of the ISPF, and was addressed by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party, Sarath Kumara Fernando of the Railway Workers Alliance and J Satgurunathan.

A session of poetry reading and recital of revolutionary songs, with Comrade Siva Rajendran in the chair, followed the talks.

Comrade S Nandamohan compered the events and Comrade K Thiruchelvam delivered the vote of thanks.

International Events

The Message from Bolivia

For half a century, Cuba had the distinction of being America's "principal enemy" in the region, and the "sole enemy" for much of that time. With Hugo Chavez becoming the President of Venezuela, the U.S. right has labelled both countries "axis of evil" in the western hemisphere. At the end of 2005, when Evo Morales of the Movement Toward Socialism claimed victory in Bolivia's presidential election, one more member was added to the "axis of evil" club. It is likely that for some time into the future Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia will pose an increasing challenge to the domination of Latin America by the US.

The inducting of Evo Morales, an Aymara Indian, as president of Bolivia is among the most significant events in 500 years of Latin American history. Although people of indigenous origin have, on occasion, risen to the top in Latin America, Morales's overwhelming victory was due to a tide of the powerful indigenous mobilisation in Andean countries and could mean that elections in Peru and in Ecuador this year will bring success to indigenous movements.

Besides Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia, which defy the diktat of US imperialism and its programme of globalisation, there are left-of-centre governments in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, which are under popular pressure to resist the "economic reforms" demanded by the World Bank and the IMF. Chile has now followed with the election of a centre-left president in February.

Let us not forget that elected radical governments were destroyed by armed forces supported by US: Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Bolivia were prevented in the 1960's and 70's from following anything that

vaguely resembled the Cuban road. US intervention has known no bounds in Central America and the Caribbean. To name just two, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua was destroyed in the early 1990's by the Contra terrorist intervention sponsored by the US, and Haiti was robbed of a democratically elected government by the US only a few years ago.

Although there is no cold war to provide an excuse for US intervention in Latin America, US imperialism needs no excuses when it comes to its self-interest. It sees in Hugo Chavez an immediate threat to its domination of Latin America, especially South America. In particular, it fears that the Venezuelan example of improving social welfare and investing in health and education of the masses, assertion of control of national resources, and solidarity and friendship with countries that the US seeks to isolate and destroy. Two major attempts by the US to overthrow Chavez have failed as have attempts to assassinate him, but such efforts do not cease. There is the possibility of invasion by US and Venezuela is currently preparing for that eventuality too.

The current trend of election of left and centre-left government is a good sign. It expresses the anger of the Latin American masses against imperialist domination in their respective countries and against the ill effects of US-led globalisation. But the governments that have been elected, including those of Venezuela and Bolivia, have a long way to go before establishing people's power. The US will do everything possible to disrupt and undermine the economic stability of countries that pose a threat to its domination and thereby stir public unrest and bring about a regime change in the name of political stability.

Thus there is cause for joy but more for caution and carrying out political work to prepare the masses of Latin America to resist imperialist meddling. The lessons of Chile and Nicaragua cannot be forgotten so easily.

Iran: Standing up to the Big Bully

The US is mounting pressure on Iran to stop its development of nuclear power. The United States accuses Iran of developing nuclear weapons secretly, and the European Union holds that Iran's mastery of nuclear fuel technology will possibly lead to military usage. Iran rejects the allegation as politically motivated, insisting that its nuclear program is fully peaceful and aimed at meeting the rising domestic demand for electricity.

The charge that Iran has the intention of developing nuclear weapons is deeply flawed. Firstly, Iran has declared that it has no such intention and more importantly there is no evidence in support of accusations by the US and Israel, each echoing the false accusations by the other against Iran. Secondly, Iran had co-operated with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) throughout, and it is the pressure to curtail its uranium enrichment programme that is at the centre of the dispute.

The IAEA and Mohamed El-Baradei, its Director were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year not without reason. Member states of the Board of Governors of the IAEA yielded to US pressure to refer Iran to the UN Security Council on 4th February, and India has been 'rewarded' by the US for its immoral stand of denying to Iran far less than what India has. In fact, India, which like Israel developed its nuclear weapons on the sly, is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT) to which the Iranian government became a signatory in 2003, but awaits parliamentary approval.

Iran has offered to provide guarantees through Iran's admittance of IAEA inspections and restriction of the appliance of centrifuges to produce low-enriched uranium. Following compromise negotiations with Russia, Iran has also expressed willingness to undertake its uranium enrichment programme in collaboration with Russia

Iran's willingness to make compromises is seen as a sign of weakness by the US, which has been angered by the democratic election of Ahmedinejad, an Islamist, as President of Iran. But, even

before his election, the President of the US had named Iran, Syria and North Korea as an axis of evil.

Thus it is clear that the intention of the US is not to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons, in which case it should first disarm Israel and refuse nuclear co-operation with India until India signs the NNPT, and most importantly, dispose of its huge nuclear arsenal.

The US in its struggle to convert the entire Middle East into a group of client states whose heads will guarantee US monopoly over oil production in the region, with Israel as a watchdog of US interests. The war on Iraq was a step towards that goal, but something that has bogged the US down in what threatens to become a messy civil war. The US wants to strike its next target, namely Iran, soon, but this time with the seal of approval of the UN Security Council. Iran's nuclear programme is only an excuse, but not the only one.

Iran has shown increased defiance following the resolution of the IAEA Board of Management and the stand of the US and the EU. Iran had the support of Venezuela, Cuba and Syria in the IAEA and, at the UN Security Council, China and Russia are unlikely to back any US proposal for sanctions against Iran, since they have more to lose from such a move.

Iran has no choice but to be defiant on the matter of its right to develop nuclear energy, since yielding to US pressure is tantamount to slow death.

Palestine: Dictating Choice

The resounding victory of Hamas on January 25th gave it an absolute majority with 74 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), reducing to 45 the seats held by the ruling Fatah. The popular vote for Hamas is principally a rejection of the disastrous negotiations following the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993, following which Israel continued to encircle and isolate Palestinian towns and villages while the Palestinians were required to police themselves so that Israel could deepen its system of apartheid.

The Palestinian Authority established in the mid-1990s relied on foreign funds for its survival. The funds, mainly from the US and EU, had political price tag of compliance with Israel's ongoing colonisation. Patronage and corruption were inevitable consequences of such a system, with around half-a-million Palestinians reliant upon the PA for their livelihood. Meanwhile, prominent figures in the PA held control over large and Palestinian monopolies, which directly conducted business with Israeli and other foreign companies.

Even before a Hamas-led government could be formed, Israel and the 'Quartet' comprising the US, EU, UN and Russia made demands on Hamas that it should abandon armed struggle, recognize Israel and abide by the Oslo Accord and subsequent agreements. Russia has since softened its approach and held discussions with a Hamas delegation. Shortly after the victory of Hamas, the US encouraged Egypt to join hands with President Mahmood Abbas (Abu Mazen) to impose America's conditions on Hamas. Israel for its part made its threatening demands. This approach has backfired, resulting in several Arab states refusing to cooperate with the US bid to subdue Hamas by throttling the PA.

The position of the Hamas, despite its identity and the terrorist label stamped on it by the US, is one that seeks to put right the injustices resulting from errors of omission in the Oslo and post-Oslo negotiations. Hamas asserts the right of all Palestinians driven out of their homeland to return. It demands, in the interim, that Israel returns to its borders before its occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967. Anyone with some idea of the history of the Palestinian problem can appreciate the position of Hamas.

It is dishonest to point to the 'terrorism' of Hamas without noticing a far worse Israeli state terrorism and to denounce the 'Muslim fundamentalism' of Hamas without condemning the Zionist fundamentalism that led to an Islamic response.

Hamas was elected with an overwhelming majority on its promise of not sustaining the structures of occupation, which if realised will be a huge setback for Israeli and US interests in the region. Hamas has

also pledged to rid the administration of corruption. But, given the complexity of the power network, neither task will be easy. The Palestine Legislative Council (PLC) is a weak body and Abu Mazen officially retains considerable power, including nominal control over the Fatah-led security forces.

However, as long as Hamas stays true to its people and faithful to its goal of liberation, and does not fall victim to sectarianism, it will play a valuable role in overcoming the US imperialist-Zionist alliance to liberate Palestine.

Nepal: A Dictator Isolated

The consensus among seven major parliamentary political parties of Nepal and the agreement reached with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) of Nepal to work together towards replacing the monarchy with a parliamentary democracy has isolated the King of Nepal, Gyanendra, who came to power after a foreign-engineered shoot-out in which the entire royal family perished. Unable to wrest control back from the Maoists in control of the vast countryside covering well over 80% of Nepal's territory, Gyanendra assumed dictatorial powers, dissolved parliament and dismissed successive governments appointed by him, at the sign of the slightest dissent. His plan to find a military solution to the "terrorist problem", as imperialists would call people's power in Nepal, failed and in February 2005 he declared a state of emergency under which he assumed absolute power over the state. This embarrassed the US and Indian backers of the monarchy and their allies, but they went on to help the dictator to remain in power.

The alliance formed last November by the seven parliamentary parties representing two-thirds of the membership of the parliament dismissed by the dictator, and the CPN(M) has made it difficult for the backers of the monarchy to pretend to defend democracy against "terrorism". The campaign against the monarchy gathered so much force that there was an effective boycott of the local elections in

Nepal by the people, with only 20% polling officially, but actually much less.

The monarchy is stumbling towards its eternal political grave while the masses of Nepal are looking forward to the birth of a new era.

Interviewed in early February by international media, Comrade Prachanda, leader of CPN(M) has explained the position of the Party, dispelling the campaign by the reactionaries all over that the Maoists are opposed to democratic rule. The response to a relevant question by BBC's Charles Haviland is given below.

Do you believe in the multi-party system or would you like your party to be the one party ruling Nepal at some point in the future?

I am going to address this question very seriously. Three years ago, at a Central Committee meeting of our party, analyzing the experiences from 20th century communist states, we put forward a proposal for the development of democracy.

In the 21st century we cannot have a state like those of the 20th century.

That's why our Central Committee unanimously passed this paper on the development of democracy in the 21st century.

The spirit of this paper is that there should be peaceful competition between all political parties against feudalism and foreign imperialist forces.

And that there should be multi-party competition. Since then we have said that within a certain constitutional provision multi-party competition [should exist] as long as it's against feudalism, against foreign imperialistic interference and all political parties can compete against each other.

And this document was unanimously passed three years ago in very clear terms.

In the agreement that we recently made with the political parties, we have clearly stated that we agree to multi-party competition.

What we have seen from the 20th century, and the lessons that we have learnt from the experiences of the 20th century, a very important question was - to understand the subject of democracy and dictatorship we need to develop a new consciousness for this.

And we have passed this.

Our opponents have understood us in a dogmatic way. We are not dogmatic but our opponents are. They are looking at us with 20th Century glasses. But we are already moving into the 21st Century.

[We are looking at] the kind of state that is possible in the 21st Century, how to give people the maximum possible rights; how to organize competition; and how to guarantee that this competition does not lead to oppression and suppression.

In short, democracy and dictatorship....How to make use of this conflict between them - we are developing on this.

And from this process of development, we have termed, development of democracy. People think that our commitment to the multi-party competition is purely a tactic and that we are trying to cheat someone.

But in reality we have taken the experience of an entire century, discussed it, analyzed it in our party, and we've come to a conclusion that the development of democracy is necessary in the 21st Century.

That's why we take multi-party competition very seriously.

We want to move forward. Even in our understanding with the parties, we have said that we don't want autocracy; that we have to crush the feudal autocracy that exists today.

It will never propagate multi-party competition.

Events have proved this.

Not only now - four years ago, when the royal massacre happened, we saw that the feudal autocracy was snatching away the rights that we gained in the 1990 democracy movement.

The parliamentary parties were also against the royal massacre.

That's why we appealed to the political parties to join us and build a platform, and [we said] we are ready to compete with you, and the feudal autocracy was a common enemy of ours and we should fight against it.

And we have been talking about multi-party competition since then.

I strongly believe we need to understand this clearly.

Book Reviews

Ethnic and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka, Kumari Jayawardena, Sanjiva Books, Colombo 7 (6th printing), 2003, pp. 126 + v.

Kumari Jayawardena is a reputed scholar and author of books on the history of the trade union and left movements and the women's movement. She is also considered by many as a left intellectual who made major contributions to the historical study of the development of social movements. The book reviewed here was published nineteen years ago and shortly before Indian meddling in the affairs of Sri Lanka took the form of an armed intervention, and concerns the emergence of Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness over a century, running up the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983.

The book, in the course of tracing the development of Sinhala Buddhist consciousness, supplies a wealth of useful historical material. However, there are pointers to a flawed approach in the analysis and interpretation of the course of events. Significantly, the book uses the term 'ethnic' to refer to the national awareness of the minority nationalities, which had developed into a formal demand for a separate state by 1976, and an armed struggle by 1983. It refers to Marxist Leninists as 'Stalinists', a term that even the most ardent defenders of Stalin in Sri Lanka have not used to describe themselves; and prefers to refer to the national bourgeoisie as 'petit bourgeoisie', a ploy of the LSSP to camouflage its opportunist alliance with the national bourgeoisie, to avoid admitting to collaboration with the 'class enemy', something that in Trotskyite opinion only the 'treacherous Stalinists' do in the context of anti-colonial and other such struggles.

Against this background, the errors of omission seem to relate to a political bias. The book deals at length with the left's betrayal of the 'ethnic' minorities. But there is no reference to the split in the LSSP in 1964 following the principled stand taken by Edmund Samarakkody and others on the language issue. The role of the 'Peking Wing' Communist Party in opposing Sinhala chauvinism fails to receive a mention. Following the split in 1963, the section of the CP led by N Sanmugathasan carried with it a substantial part of the party membership and the bulk of the trade union membership. However, when it comes to blaming chauvinism on someone, the 'Maoists' seem to come in handy.

It is claimed that the JVP comprised splinter groups from 'Peking Wing'. But there were no splinter groups at the time of the formation of the JVP except the one that left with Wijeweera, who used the anti-Tamil card against Sanmugathasan to lure the Sinhala youth affiliated to the Party and its youth league. The Party led by Sanmugathasan split into several factions much later, while the JVP had among its leading members several from the revisionist Communist Party led by Keuneman, including Mahinda Wijesekera.

The book says that the JVP took the idea of 'Indian expansionism' from the 'Maoists', but fails to explain that it only borrowed the phrase but not the meaning. The book complains about the JVP's interpretation, without even making a passing comment on the real threat of Indian expansionism and its role in undermining the political stability of Sri Lanka.

There is reference to the left parties supporting the 1964 Sirima-Shastri Pact to 'repatriate' a majority of Hill Country Tamils, participating in the chauvinistic procession in 1966, and pandering to chauvinism since 1965. But the principled criticism by Marxist Leninists of the pact and the conduct of the parliamentary left does not seem to deserve a mention.

The left is unfairly faulted for supporting the take over of denominational schools. While hostility towards the Christian missionary establishment was a motivating factor, the take over was

a necessary and desirable thing from the point of view of developing a national curriculum and ensuring equality of access to education. Also management of each all school were given the option of remaining private but forfeit the state subsidy that it enjoyed up to the time. Several Catholic schools chose to go private and levy fees and still do so. Most importantly, the government did not alter the nominal religious identity of any school that it took over. The take over certainly rid the elite group of school managers of the power that they exercised over the socially oppressed and, in the Jaffna peninsula, strengthened the struggle against caste oppression. It is at this point that I wonder what the class stand of the author is.

The book talks about class but makes no effort to apply class analysis to interpret the approach of the various political parties to the national question, and avoids reference to the class origins of the Sinhala left leadership, especially the LSSP. As a result, the book is at a loss to explain the degeneration of the LSSP and the revisionist Communist Party, and their opportunism on the national question to ideological flaws.

Class and class loyalties are strong forces in society, and there is no objectivity that transcends class interests. Avoidance of class analysis in understanding the national question is no guarantee of neutrality or objectivity. Despite the criticism of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, the book seems to adhere to a tradition of Sinhala dominated thought.

The portrayal of chauvinism as a petit bourgeois phenomenon in the book ignores the fact that, the world over, it is the bourgeoisie who are the driving force behind the chauvinist agenda: the national bourgeoisie to win political power by mass appeal, and the comprador for the imperialist agenda. All forms of chauvinism, including fascism, first strikes root among the petit bourgeoisie while, as always, the bourgeoisie, too small in number to be involved as individuals, merely call the shots. The book does not concern itself with the role of ideology in such matters and, inevitably, the role of bourgeois parliamentary politics in the degeneration of the old left is allowed to slip through.

There are several instances where the author repeats careless interpretations without much thought. The Sinhala term '*para demala*' has no caste connotations as the author imagines. It simply means 'foreign Tamil', a notion with origins traceable to the great work of historical fiction, the *Mahawansa*.

The book seems to suggest that the Marxists have not come to grips with 'ethnic' issues. Here, the author chooses to ignore a wealth of contribution that Marxist Leninists and other genuine left organisations have made to the resolution of the national question.

In that context, it is important to draw attention to the role of another section of the population that has failed the minority nationalities by its failure to stand up to chauvinism. Sinhala left intellectuals with and without political affiliations, by and large, remained silent during the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983. I remember trade unionists and some religious leaders denouncing the anti-Tamil violence. The cowardly silence of left intellectuals was deafening. It is not surprising that many of them subsequently found NGO sponsored-identities and other projects that allowed them to steer clear of Marxism, and even found accommodation with the Sinhala chauvinist establishment.

-SJS-

Naviinaththuvaththin Nerukkadikalum Cirantha Maanuda Ulakai Katti Ezuppum Vaaippukkalum (The Crises of Modernism and Opportunities to Construct a Utopia), **Sunil Wijesiriwardana, Kailasapathi Study Circle, Colombo 6, (in Tamil), 2006, pp. 34.**

This booklet is the published version of one of several Professor Kailasapathi Memorial Lectures delivered in 2005. (My translation of the title may be slightly in error, because I used the word 'utopia' for the Tamil phrase meaning a perfect or ideal human world).

Kailasapathi was a committed Marxist intellectual with an outstanding contribution to literary criticism in Tamil, who did not conceal his ideology or political leanings. This booklet is,

interestingly, the antithesis of very nearly everything that Kailasapathi stood for, and is therefore puzzling why the Kailasapathi Study Circle chooses to publish something that is not even a critical study of his work. The booklet is not intellectually stimulating either.

The author drifts in various directions, denouncing modernism as the causes of the sad plight of humanity today and criticising Marxism for being entrapped by materialism and failing to develop a practical path for spiritual liberation. His concerns in this booklet seem to be limited to the environment and the mechanisation of the human being. The author strongly disapproves of post modernism, globalisation and neo-liberalism, and expresses concern about the limited scope of various liberation ideologies. It seems that he believes in the existence of some form of universal spiritualism that can liberate mankind. However, the author's notion of spiritualism seems to be limited to his knowledge of Buddhism.

So it is not clear what kind of spiritual-political thought that the author is prescribing as panacea for the ills of humanity or how millennia of spiritualism, which failed miserably to resolve the problems of humanity, can by its marriage with political thought show us the path to perfection.

NDP Diary

News Release for the Media

NDP Calls for a Boycott of Presidential Polls

13th November 2005

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party made the following observations at a seminar titled “The Presidential Election and the Tamil People” held at Thirunelveli, Jaffna and chaired by Comrade K Kathirgamanathan, Northern Region Organiser of the NDP.

If we intend to counterattack the two parties of the chauvinistic ruling classes and their policy makers and teach them a proper lesson through the ballot box, the entire Tamil population should be unanimous in its rejection and boycott of the forthcoming Presidential Election. The people should demonstrate through the forthcoming Presidential Election that it is possible to use the very democratic right to vote in elections to reject and to boycott through not exercising that right.

We have for the past 27 years had the executive presidential system of government. There had been four presidential elections, and four presidents have occupied the presidential seat of power. The late JR Jayawardane and the incumbent Chandrika Bandaranayake have been in power for long periods.

It is necessary for us to consider the kind of cruelty that has been perpetrated against the Tamil people and the North-East during this

period. That no nationality or community that has failed to advance along the correct political path by summing up its experiences and lessons can secure its liberation is a lesson that history has continued to demonstrate.

The North-East has been destroyed by a cruel war and the Tamil and Muslim people have been subject to untold pain and suffering. The livelihood of the people has been shattered and up to a hundred thousand lives have been lost. People have been displaced and live as refugees to this day. The two chauvinistic ruling class parties are asking for your votes in the Presidential Election. These two parties which, behind the scenes, sold out the resources of the country and the labour of the people are the foes of the working people. The political parties of the Hill Country are canvassing for votes for the chauvinistic parties which have denied the basic living rights of the Hill Country Tamils, and are thereby slavishly kissing the feet of those who kicked them, merely to serve their politics of self-interest.

Under these conditions, the forthcoming Presidential Election offers a good opportunity for the people of the North-East to express their opposition to chauvinistic oppression and to demonstrate their self esteem and honour. Hence the people should boycott the forthcoming Presidential Election and teach the chauvinistic political parties a lesson.

Press Communiqué of the NDP

NDP Demands an End to Army Brutality

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party made the following statement in his press communiqué of 20th December 2005, issued on behalf of the Politburo of the Party.

Two days ago, when the members of the Jaffna University community went on a procession from the University Campus to the office of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, the armed forces intercepted the procession, attacked the participants, and fired shots. Several students, lecturers, professors and media personnel who went

in the procession were seriously injured. This brutal attack which was in the form of revenge needs to be seen as an act of war. The New Democratic Party strongly denounces this attack on the university community by the armed forces. The party demands that the government should stop the armed forces from carrying out such attacks in other places to take revenge against the youth and students.

It was in a climate where, a month after the swearing in of Mahinda Rajapaksha as President, the people, including those in the North-East, were anticipating talks and the continuation of the condition of peace that this brutal attack was carried out by the armed forces on the university community. As a result, the people are in apprehension and fear, and are anxious about the prospect of a return to war. The New Democratic Party strongly urges the President and the Government to take steps without delay to bring to an immediate end attacks, round-ups, search operations and arrests by the armed forces.

Press Communiqué of the NDP

NDP to Contest Local Elections outside North-East

Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the New Democratic Party made the following statement in his press communiqué of 2nd February 2006, issued in connection with the forthcoming elections to the local councils.

The New Democratic Party will contest the forthcoming local elections as an independent group in regions outside the North-East. The New Democratic Party, while rejecting opportunist alliances for purposes of elections that only help reactionary politics, is contesting as an independent group for the purpose of uniting the people to build up a political alternative.

There is no salvation for the Hill Country through electoral alliances that will bring reactionary elements to the fore through announcing new alliances in place of old faces and in the process introducing several more reactionary elements. It is only alternative political activity based on a common programme to unite the people which

will show the way forward for the liberation of the people of the Hill Country. It is on that basis that the New Democratic Party is uniting honest representatives of the people to contest the elections.

The report added that the Party will not contest in the North-East in view of the continuing turbulence and the anti-democratic climate prevailing there.

Press Communiqué of the NDP

NDP Appeals for a Climate of Peace

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party made the following statement in his press communiqué of 8th February 2006, issued on behalf of the Politburo of the Party.

As agreed between the Government and the LTTE a date has been decided for talks in Geneva. But it is also clear that evil forces are at work behind the scenes to undermine and throw into confusion the talks. It is as an aspect of it that ten members of the staff of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation were kidnapped by unknown persons and three released subsequently. Whoever may have carried out this kidnap, it is an act that should be strongly condemned in the interest of democracy and peace. The New Democratic Party appeals to all concerned to release forthwith those who have not yet been released and cease completely the killings, kidnaps, and threats occurring at various places so as to create a climate that would be helpful to the talks in Geneva.

Following the visit last month by the Norwegian minister and facilitator Erik Solheim and his efforts to initiate the negotiations, there was a lull in the spate of killings, kidnaps and threats. Consequently, the people of the North-East breathed a sigh of relief. The talks have now been scheduled for the 22nd and 23rd of this month. But local forces seeking to unleash war and make profit from it and forces of foreign domination seeking to bring the whole country under their economic, political and military domination are concentrating their attention on their respective ulterior motives. The

kidnapping of the TRO staff is one aspect of this. Thus, the LTTE and the Government should carry forward the Geneva talks without preconditions and without falling prey to the aims of these local and foreign forces to undermine and to throw into confusion the talks. It is only thus that a climate could be created where the ceasefire could be properly implemented and the talks continued. Besides, the New Democratic Party urges both sides to take decisions that would provide a sense of consolation and peace to the people who are living in anxiety and fear amid conditions where even the small degree of normal life that existed has been disrupted.

Press Communiqué of the NDP

NDP Announces Candidates for Local Councils

The Politburo of the New Democratic Party issued the following press communiqué on 8th February 2006, through Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the Party.

The New Democratic Party is contesting the Pradesha Sabhas of Nuwara Eliya and Walapane in the Hill Country as Independent Group 1. Its symbol is the candle. The Party is contesting Walapane under the leadership of S Panneerselvam, Hill Country Regional Secretary of the Party, and Nuwara Eliya under the leadership of DK Sutharsan, member of the Hill Country Regional Committee of the Party.

The party is contesting the elections to use them to highlight through the local councils the problems faced by the people living in the plantations of the Hill Country, to find solutions to the problems to whatever possible extent, and to awaken the people politically to carry forward mass struggles concerning issues of land, housing, employment, education and health.

Since there is no democratic environment in the North-East or conditions under which the people could vote freely, the Party is not contesting there. Meantime, the Party has asked the people to vote for honest leftist democratic forces in Colombo and elsewhere.

Commemoration

In Memory of Comrade Chandrakumar

The first death anniversary of Comrade Chandrakumar, Member of the Hill Country Regional Committee of the New Democratic Party and teachers' trade union activist was marked on 19th February 2006 at his native Galkanda Estate. A memorial was built in stone amid tea bushes at the location where his remains were interred. The memorial bore the logo of the New Democratic Party comprising a hammer and sickle in the middle of a star. The memorial bore as epitaph the quotation from Julius Fucik, "Heroes battle, cowards retreat, traitors betray". The memorial was declared open by Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary and E Thambiah, National Organiser of the New Democratic Party.

A memorial meeting chaired by Comrade S Malar Raj was held in the auditorium of the Galkanda Estate Community Centre. Comrades SK Senthivel, E Thambiah, S Panneerselvam and S Rajendran and several others addressed the meeting. Revolutionary songs were sung at the meeting. A large number of plantation workers, youth and teachers participated in the luncheon at his family home following the meeting.

Charity

by

R Murukaiyan

Come hither, people of the world.
Let us carry out tasks to make the land fertile.
Let us throw seed into the furrows
Dug by the plough as moved by the hand
Along the path trod by the bull
So that green plants may surge.
Let us extract the juice of fruit and
Consume it to heart's rejoice.

Let us bore the earth to bring out in plenty
Gold, silver, iron and gemstone.
We will build all kinds of machine that
Whiz away with a spin and a swing
Spit fire with vigour and fury
To carry out countless tasks.
We will make a thousand elegant goods
That make the possession of eyes a true blessing.

We who produced fruit and goods
Will share and set up a new code.
Let us make it a rule
That there shall be none here
To cry and to groan in pain.
No more is any to worship or command.
No more is a fate to weaken and wear down.
Arise ye world that is aware of truth
Achieve for yourself
A path of joyful goodness.

Announcement

New Democracy publishes articles of social, cultural and political importance to the people of Sri Lanka and their struggle for emancipation from imperialist domination and freedom from oppression of all kinds by the reactionary ruling classes.

Articles on local and international matters, with a Marxist outlook or with a progressive content are invited for publication. Articles should preferably be in English. Articles in Sinhala or Tamil will be considered for publication in translation.

Readers are encouraged to write their comments on the journal and its contents. Where the comments are of general interest, the letter or relevant sections will be reproduced in the journal.

Readers are also encouraged to draw our attention to articles of value to our readers so that they may be reproduced in New Democracy in full or in abridged form with the consent of the author/publisher.

Only a limited number of copies of the journal are published and back numbers may be obtained from the publisher at

47, 3rd Floor
CCSM Complex
Colombo 11, Sri Lanka

(continued from inside front cover)

Banda and I tired of chasing for days.
Mohammed, Arumugam and David, nearby,
exhausted by yelling till their throats went sore.
All the effort with eyes for lantern and flame on our hands
is going to waste.

Each in his direction, each in his voice,
each on his platform, each in his way.
Divided each day, where is our dawn?
With crop destroyed each day,
on our land only ills will flourish.

If the sky and the soil would raise our earnings
let us cast the fire-tongued snares in all eight directions.
If the platforms in all four directions would unite among us,
thunder will soar from the hoot from our throats.

Is the monkey to eat the honey
while the bees just sit and wonder?
We will gather the might of our two hands
with the *chena* as our support
we will plant to crop the mounds looking skywards
and the forest packed with shrub and wood.
Who will dare stop us from
defending with care the crop that we planted?

As arrive monkeys to break the corn,
birds to nibble the seed
and droves of parrots by evening,
the plantation to be harvested in that one day.

Two poems by Samih Al-Qassem

The Wandering Dove

I wander everywhere, a frightened dove,
Displaced, denied, and deprived of love:
Snakes always coil to block my path,
Hissing, menacing, and full of wrath;
And hounds, chasing me, continue to bark,
So that my memory of love is pale, dark.
The images of my dreams are lost, worn,
And I always seem to tread on thorn!
Night has slaughtered my moon;
And in nightmares I writhe and swoon:
The Zionists robbed the stars of my night,
And nobody cares about my painful plight.
Ghosts tear my heart as I bitterly cry,
And the indifferent world never wipes my eye!

Vicious Vampires

When the sun set in my home,
When the moon began to roam,
They said I had, at last, vanished,
They believed that I was finished.
Yet, they were frightened, terrified
They gazed at me, spell-bound, horrified
When they saw me touch the trees,
And address the stars in the cool breeze,
Because I came back. They saw my face!
They heard the sound of my solid pace,
I came back, armed with solid stones,
With patriotic love raging in my bones.
Then fled the lurking, vicious vampires
And vanished the dream of Zionist empires.