

Editorial

Re-awakening of the East A beacon of hope for the North

The restoration of democracy in the East despite numerous obstacles and after a lapse of nearly twenty years is a cause for cheer and optimism. The recently concluded elections to the Batticaloa Pradeshiya Sabha and the Provincial Councils of the Eastern Province were a watershed in the contemporary political history of Sri Lanka.

There have been solid gains. Former ‘terrorists’ have joined mainstream democratic politics, dozens of child soldiers have been released, and there has been renunciation of calls for secession from the mouths of those who not so long ago were attached to these aims.

The East is bountiful but under-explored, under-developed and under-utilized. The rest of the country is now awakening to the economic potential of the East. Currently the province is in urgent need of improvement of its infrastructure facilities and supportive services, which are essential prerequisites for accelerated development. The Government has released a comprehensive three year development plan as part of the **Eastern Revival** covering:

- Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons and rebuilding the Capacity of Public institutions
- Revitalizing Productive Sectors and the Regional Economy e.g. Crop Agriculture
- Improving Economic Infrastructure e.g. Electricity, Roads, Ports
- Strengthening Social Infrastructure and Fostering Social Services e.g. Education, Health
- Development of Human Settlements e.g. Environment, Urban Development, Housing

Fulfilling the true potential of the East will also ensure that it becomes a role model for the transformation of the North. The challenge is before us, all of us, to convert the East into a beacon of hope.

Senaka Weeraratna
Editor

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Elections in the Eastern Province

Democracy unfolds for representative local government

The elections were held on 10th March 2008 in the Eastern Province in nine (09) local Government electorates in the Batticaloa District. These are Eravurpattu, Koralepattu, Koralepattu North, Manmunai South & Eruvilpattu, Manmunai, Manmunai West, Manmunai South West and Porathivupattu Pradeshiya Sabhas and Batticaloa Municipal Council. The UPFA, SLMC, UPF, SLMC (National Congress), EPRLF, PLOTE, EPDP (Front) and TMVP were the contesting political parties.

Even before the elections were announced, there were claims that early elections would be inappropriate since they would necessarily be unfair in view of continuing tensions in the area. Though democracy is a sine qua non as far as the vast majority of this country's citizens are concerned, the arguments of those who claim there might be problems in pursuing it should, however, be taken seriously. The biggest concern that has been expressed currently with regard to the restoration of democracy in the East is the approach of the TMVP, composed largely of individuals who had earlier been militants in the LTTE, and then broke away from it. Though obviously such individuals need nurturing in democratic ways, given that many of them were foully brutalized by being recruited as child soldiers, their very willingness to enter a democratic path bodes well for the future.

Significantly, among the 831 candidates putting themselves forward for election are many from the EPDP, EPRLF, PLOT and TMVP, all of whom had taken up arms against the government at one point or another in the past. They have now given up militancy/terrorism and have entered the main stream politics. They were deprived of becoming people's representatives of the Eastern Province for more than two decades.

The appeal made by Civil Society Organizations and Concerned Citizens for a free and fair election in the Batticaloa District

and the solidarity expressed is an eye-opener as to the thinking of concerned civil society organizations about participating in the democratic process.

The election provided space and opportunity to enable the people to begin participating democratically in the peace process.

The Eastern Provincial Council
Election results can be accessed
through the following URL : [http://
www.slections.gov.lk/provincial/
2008_results/](http://www.slections.gov.lk/provincial/2008_results/)



People at polling booths



A Woman of our time: Ms. Sivageetha Prabhakaran - A profile

Sivageetha Prabhakaran, alias Padmini, is a quiet, but deeply confident, person. She is the first female Mayor of the Batticaloa Municipal Council, 26 years of age, elected with the highest number of votes at the Local Government Elections held on 10th March 2008. She shares her last name with the LTTE Leader Piribaharan or as many spelt it 'Prabhakaran.' The contrast in their values is however significant. She lost her father to the LTTE and thus shares the suffering of a majority of the people in the East.

She has wasted no time since taking office as she has planned every detail of the Municipal Council's future, in consultation with her fellow members. She speaks with confidence of plans which reflect a clear vision, focus and commitment towards uplifting the people of Batticaloa and lands destroyed by the wrath of terrorism. Ms. Prabhakaran by her conduct illustrates the idiom 'actions speak louder than words'. She places an emphasis on achieving a smooth implementation of all development work.

Ms. Prabhakaran has spoken proudly of a striking feature of the Municipal Council's "90 day" programme, relying solely on its own financial resources and manpower drawn exclusively from the Batticaloa District itself. This is proof of people in the East working towards their own development. Ms. Prabhakaran prioritizes all the development work that is required in the areas for which she is accountable.

She understands the importance of her responsibilities, mainly to the people of Batticaloa. Therefore she aims to prevent duplication of development work and wastage of time, financial and human resources. While the Municipal Council has identified key development projects, she acknowledges that not all can be done by the Council/Government



itself, but requires the assistance of all I/NGOs and the International Community.

She is truly a person dedicated to serving her people. When one inquires about the wellbeing of the people of the East, Ms. Prabhakaran's face lights up. She believes that development work in the East and in Sri Lanka cannot take place without the people's participation, she sincerely believes in them and speaks passionately:

"The then leaders did not really feel the needs of the people. The people do not want a separate state (Eelam). They want their province which is rich in resources to be developed very well. Because of terrorism in the past, they could not do anything. However now, within a united Sri Lanka, as democracy now prevails, they want to meet their basic needs and the province developed. The people are also very happy with the election of the local body after 14 years, as their most basic issues will now be addressed."

The Sri Lanka Police welcomes its first ever batch of Tamil stream Police recruits

Saturday February 16th saw a historic moment in the 141 year old history of the Sri Lanka police with the passing out parade of 175 new police constables trained at the Kallady Police Training College in Batticaloa.

The 125 young men and 50 young women who proudly marched into the parade grounds, comprised the very first intake of recruits to the Kallady Training College, the first police training school established in the Eastern Province. This batch of recruits were Tamil Sri Lankans from Batticaloa and Ampara Districts, the first recruits taken specifically from these areas and trained in the Tamil medium.

Though applications have always been called from all citizens of the country, for various reasons, very few Tamils have joined in the recent past. More recently, there have been fears of the terrorist approach that Tamils serving in security forces were specifically to be targets of attack, being denigrated as traitors. Tamil officers serving in the Department were threatened by the LTTE to force them to leave the service. It seemed likely then that Sri Lanka's proud record of a multi-ethnic police force, with two recent Inspectors General of Police being Tamil, would not easily be maintained.

The government however is committed to such a record, and in the short term it is essential to have Tamil officers serving in Police Stations in North and East. Another important aspect is to give an opportunity to Tamil youth in these areas to serve their own communities.

There was an overwhelming response but only a small number was accepted. Initially many of these young men and women had suffered numerous disadvantages due to the conflict which had an adverse impact on their education, so successful training presented a great challenge. Educational standards as well as age restrictions were varied and they were able to enter the college and complete a four month intensive training.

The requirement of establishing a separate Police College in the Batticaloa area was fulfilled by conversion of a few buildings at Kalladi, earlier used by security forces, to a training facility. These new policies are in keeping with the commitment of the Government to fully implement the official languages policy, and develop confidence in all citizens that they are full stakeholders in government institutions. They will provide the backbone of the reawakening that the government brings to the East now, and which it is hoped will soon be extended to the North. All the recruits received copies of the Evidence Ordinance, the Penal Code, Code of Criminal proceedings and other such relevant legislation in the Tamil language.

After the rigorous training, the new recruits had a ceremony, in a beautiful setting in the Province. The Chief Guest was Senior DIG North and East Region and the Commandant of the Special Task Force Mahinda Balasooriya. He took the salute of the new police personnel as they marched past to the sounds of the police band, with the Sri Lanka and Police flags flying proudly overhead, while the families of the new recruits who had come in great numbers looked on from their special enclosure.

Passenger transport services restored to normalcy in the East

The Sri Lanka Transport Board together with the Road Development Authority (RDA) has restored the public transport services in the East to normalcy. This has been achieved by effective clearing operations conducted by the security forces and the rehabilitation of a number of roads by the RDA in most of the areas, inter connecting towns and villages. RDA has also reconstructed several bridges which were destroyed by the LTTE, and the ferry service at Verugal-Aru.

The Chairman of the Sri Lanka Transport Board in the Eastern Region confirmed that 232 buses are in operation and 12 of them will be used for the transport of IDPs to their homes for resettlement. The Minister of Road Passenger and Transport Services has placed a target of 269 buses in the Province within the next few months.

This regional transport service will connect passengers to road arteries linked to the main towns in and outside the region. Some of the bus depots have been fully reconstructed whilst depots in Vakarai and Valachchenai are still under construction. Due to the high demand for public transport from Vakarai to Colombo and back, the SLTB will launch a direct bus service connecting these destinations.

However most roads in the East, like in many other parts of the country, require monitoring, maintenance and upgrading. The East has come a long way from its 'threatened region' status as of early 2006. People are now constantly on the move and it appears that they feel comfortable at the turn of events for the better.

Freedom of movement is guaranteed in the Constitution. It is a fundamental right. It will be the responsibility of the new authorities who will take over work following elections in the East. The links to localities near and far should be protected and fostered in order to build trust and promote peace among the communities. As Professor Lederach has clarified 'the



grassroots are the most important in undoing the web of conflict and the cycle of violence which has led to mistrust, thus they need to move freely and fearlessly and talk to one another'.

Passengers have expressed satisfaction with the public transport services provided. While they raised concerns over security checks at many points, they have at the same time accepted the necessity for such security checks considering the recent bombing incidents orchestrated by the LTTE targeting civilians using public transport. Since January 2007 to date the LTTE had targeted innocent civilians i.e. men, women and children, using public transport (predominantly buses) across the Island. One of the worst attacks of its kind took place in June 2006 where over 60 people - many of them children - were killed in a land mine attack carried out by the LTTE on a bus in the town of Kebitigollewa in the Anuradhapura District. There has been a clear trend in the attacks targeting civilians traveling in buses over the years, thus requiring stringent security measures to protect the innocent from such attacks.



The tragedy of Tamil civilians

The Peace Secretariat regrets the death of Father Karunaratnam, in a roadside bomb attack on the road between Mankulam and Mallavi. Father Karunaratnam was head of the NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights, and had been deeply critical of the LTTE as well as of the government.

This is the tenth episode in which civilians have died at the hands of unknown agents after hostilities resumed following the LTTE attacks on Muttur and Muhumalai in August 2006. The first of these, on October 10th 2006, related to a van that exploded after it was released by court, while the next four claimed five lives due to what seem to have been untargeted shrapnel or shelling.

The next five relate to claymores, all in territory currently held by the LTTE. One of them, in which a dozen persons died, on January 29th 2008, took place in Mannar, fairly close to the forward lines of the Sri Lankan army. The other four took place deep in LTTE controlled territory, so, if the armed forces were responsible, they would have had to penetrate about twenty miles on each occasion.

It would be difficult to do this unless some ground support was available. If the LTTE really believes then that these explosions, three of which claimed one or two lives each while the other claimed thirteen, were the responsibility of the armed forces, they must assume at least some degree of local involvement. This may seem unlikely, given the stranglehold the LTTE has on the local population, but perhaps in the context of increasing suffering through this, there has been a substantial change in attitudes.

The belief that such a sea change had occurred governed the report of the Jaffna University Teachers for Human Rights, which attributed the destruction of a van at Iyankerny on 27th November 2007, causing 13 civilian deaths, to local people disgusted with the LTTE. That revelation suggested for the first time the deep hatred felt amongst some people in the Wann

for their taskmasters, though it is possible that the targeting of civilians including children was not deliberate, but the result of an essentially amateur approach.

Whatever the cause of these deaths, they should not be repeated. Other Tamil militant groups, having realized the suffering intransigence causes, have abandoned the military option and entered the democratic process. Tamils in the North can see how things have changed in the East, and seem more interested in a political settlement than seemed possible under any previous government. If the LTTE really believes that the government has penetrated so deep into its territory, it must realize that continuing militarization, more conscription, more disruption of health and education, more reliance on a world that is tired of terror, will get it nowhere. The extraordinarily good record of the Air Force, with allegations of civilian deaths in just half a dozen cases out of one hundred and seventy carefully targeted aerial attacks, is a tribute to the precision of the personnel involved and also the information they have received. That information has not come out of the blue.

It is not likely that their awareness of the feeling against them will make the LTTE rethink. But they should be aware that, as UTHR pointed out, the people are not only tiring of continuous suffering, they are taking steps to find relief. Attempts to persuade the international community, as the LTTE terms their few interlocutors in the world at large, to bail them out will not succeed when there is ample evidence that the Tamils at large have begun to understand the need for democratic pluralism. Resistance to totalitarianism may be limited to begin with, but with elections and other opportunities presenting themselves, the civilians in the Wann may soon make themselves free. In that case the efforts of Fr Karunaratnam to stop the scourge of child soldiers and forced conscription would not have been in vain.

Spoken Tamil / English language training programme for Traffic Police Officers

A training programme entitled “**Spoken Tamil / English Language Training Programme for the Traffic Police Officers**” sponsored by the Rotary Club of Colombo Mid-Town, was inaugurated at the Colombo City Traffic Headquarters, Mihindu Mawatha, Colombo 12, on 8th April 2008.

The purpose of this training programme is to develop the communication skills of Traffic Police Officers in all three languages and particularly in Tamil and English when they are on duty. This programme would enhance the ability of the Traffic Police to guide and direct members of the public in a choice of language best understood by them. In addition it is expected to develop better rapport between the Police and public, and improve the overall quality of service provided by the Police.

Initially instruction will be imparted in the Spoken Tamil Language Course. Classes have been scheduled to comprise one day per week of two hours duration altogether making a total of eight (8) hours per month. The length of the course is two months (16 hours). SCOPP suggested the idea of such a public/private partnership and was associated with the organizers in facilitating the process.

New Publications

Pursuing Peace, Fighting Falsehood

Prof Rajiva Wijesinha

International Book House (Pvt) Ltd : Kurunegala, Sri Lanka

This book is a collection of press releases and other articles by Prof Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary-General, Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process. Written in the last year, they deal with criticism of government and military action that rarely includes attention to detail. Since often such criticism passes in time for truth, and is then used by forces hostile to the peace process and to pluralistic democracy, this collection has been put together to make clear, through examination of the context and evidence of actual events, the actual situation.

One Step at a Time-Reflections on the Peace Process in Sri Lanka.

Dr Sumanasiri Liyanage

South Asia Peace Institute : Colombo, Sri Lanka

This book analyses the events and processes that took place in Sri Lanka between 2001 and 2006, in the context of the search for peace through the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002. It covers the areas of identity, nation, nationalism, conflict, negotiations, peace, democracy, justice and equality. Dr. Liyanage argues that the process of 2001 was based on the idea that the expansion of trade and economic growth would help transform the conflict and bring peace to the country. This liberal theory of conflict and conflict resolution however failed to grasp the rich complexity of modern ethno-political conflict. While there is a positive correlation between the two factors, casual directionality cannot be asserted so readily. This book probes this theory of liberal conflict resolution using the events in Sri Lanka as an example, and looks at a possible framework for a future peace process in the country.

Private sector focus on Eastern Development

After the restoration of peace and a pluralistic civil administration in the Eastern Province, investor confidence is returning and it is likely that GDP will grow in what is potentially one of the most productive areas in the country. With the state investing in key infrastructural projects like roads, electricity and schools, after the liberation of the area from terrorist control and influence, the private sector has also begun to focus on the East.

Rs. 8000 million for farmer development from Cargills

Cargills Ceylon Limited together with the Ministry of Nation Building and the World Bank will launch a mega Rs. 8000 million project to develop agriculture and livestock sectors with a buy back arrangement. This strategy will ease the problem of market access that is experienced by small and medium size entrepreneurs across the country. Cargills is planning to focus on vegetables, rice, fruits, fish and milk, and with the buy back arrangement to avoid middlemen and thus the escalation of costs.

Cargills is also trying to reduce waste significantly by a better logistical management system. Currently the country experiences 40% waste on fruits and vegetables in transit from a farm to a supermarket chain. This is to be reduced to just over 5% with the strong distribution system that Cargills intends to introduce. To support this, the World Bank will jointly conduct training programmes on how post harvest losses can be mitigated in Batticaloa, Thambuththegama and Ampara.



Hayleys investment in Agriculture

Hayleys Agro which already had a presence in the Eastern Region will focus on driving advanced technology into the Eastern Region and thereby increasing productivity levels in the agricultural sector. The company will train farmers in the use of biotechnology to produce high yielding crops such as banana, pineapple, strawberry and related fruits so that it can get the best from the rich soil quality of the Eastern Province.

CIC puts 750 million into fruits and dairy products

5000 growers in the Eastern Province will benefit from focused investment in a banana cultivation project by CIC, the Agri-specialist in Sri Lanka. The investment will cover an over 15,000 acre area close to Kantale River. The project will provide employment to 10,000 farmer families and the target is to export 200,000 tons of bananas and other fruits a week.

The company will also establish another joint venture project with the government for a 2200 acre dairy farm project on a 49/51 per cent partnership basis at Mutuwalla. The investment will produce more than 2000 liters of milk a day and will attract 1000 outgrowers.

Apart from milk CIC intends to produce 2000 tons of compost fertilizer and 8000 tons of maize on the farm itself, to ensure diversity for the total investment.

Medical Camp for the Wannu IDPs in the Puttalam District

A Medical Camp for the residents of the Noracholai and Alankudah camps was successfully conducted at the Alankudah Muslim Vidyalaya in February 2008.

On a request made by SCOPP, the Golden Key Eye & ENT Hospital made available the services of four general physicians and four Eye & ENT specialists together with transport and accommodation costs.

The drugs to treat the patients were made available by the Health Minister. Preparations for the camp at the venue, lunch and refreshments were arranged by the officials of the Ministry of Resettlement.

Two doctors who at the camp were from the Wannu and had passed out as doctors after studying in Colombo and they offered to make available the services of 20 doctors and to meet their expenses to conduct medical camps for more than 100,000 Wannu IDPs on a monthly basis. The Golden Key Hospital agreed to continue supporting this initiative and to distribute spectacles free of charge and to facilitate resources for surgery to the needy.

Local doctors, school principals, bank managers, youths and several others along with the Ministry officials volunteered to assist and SCOPP was able to successfully conduct this community service project, earning the appreciation of the residents of the IDP camps.

Alankudah has four main camps, housing 2,700 families. They have been living as IDPs over the past 18 years and the youth have been born and bred in the same area.



About 50% of the inmates of the camps have already bought plots of land and are being provided a sum of Rs.250,000 each to build a house. The remaining 50% continue to live on state land as refugees and have requested that the land be permanently alienated to them since an entire generation considers Alankudah as their home.

11 children of IDP families from the Alankudah Vidyalaya and 01 student from the Noracholai



Vidyalaya have been selected this year for University admission. Three of these children have lost their fathers and almost all do

not have the means to pursue higher education. Each student require approx. Rs.6,000/- per month to pursue higher studies, SCOPP is coordinating to obtain sponsorship to enable these students continue their higher education.

About 25 young girls of Alankudah have been trained as seamstresses. SCOPP is working with NGOs to provide them with sewing machines for self employment. There is no permanent livelihood for the people of this locality. They depend on food rations to a large extent. They are prepared to work hard and earn a living if they are provided livelihood assistance. They could be set on their feet if each family is given Rs.30,000/- for goat farming, cultivation of minor crops or to set up small businesses and offers of assistance on a coherent basis are welcome.



In memory of Maheswary Velautham



The Peace Secretariat profoundly regrets the murder of Ms Maheswary Velautham during a visit to Jaffna to see her sick mother. Given the plethora of deaths this country suffers from, the Secretariat has not been accustomed to issuing statements of sympathy and sorrow for individual cases.

We regret the lives of known and unknown, of civilian and military, and even the lives of our fellow citizens conscripted or deluded into fighting intransigently for a terrorist movement.

Maheswary was martyred to terrorist intransigence, and the day and the manner of her death are symbolic of the uphill struggle Sri Lanka faces. It occurred just after the election of a Provincial Council that should be able to fulfill the diverse demands of development in the East, whilst maintaining the unity of the country.

It occurred shortly after the appointment of a Task Force for the North, that would be able to promote the needs and aspirations of the people there who have suffered for too long from totalitarianism and terror, during which specific measures for development fell by the wayside.

Maheswary's murder occurred too on the day when Sri Lanka was subject to the Universal Periodic Review with regard to Human Rights. Ironically, it brought home to those worried about continuing violence in Sri Lanka the root cause of all this violence, the terrorism that victimizes everybody, but most obviously the vulnerable.

Thus she was killed when she went up in haste to see her sick mother, leaving aside the security given to her because she believed that, amongst her own relations, she would not be in danger.

We recall now what happened to Mr Kadirgamar, who did not allow the homes of his neighbours to be searched, in the belief that they were like him and could be relied upon.

At a personal level, the Secretariat worked closely with Maheswary Velautham, as she was the nominee of the EPDP to the APRC. She was the legal adviser to the Hon Douglas Devananda, Leader of the EPDP, and was a lawyer and forceful Human Rights Activist. As the only woman member of the APRC, she was more than capable of holding her own in discussion.

She was deeply committed to a political resolution of the conflict and to a united Sri Lanka where all ethnic and religious communities would live together in peace and dignity and passionate in seeking to meet the aspirations of the people in the North and the East.

In addition to her deep and vibrant political and social commitment, Ms Velautham was closely involved in meditation and spiritualism and often said that this was an effective way to reach an understanding of one's self as well as others.

Two weeks before her death she spoke at the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Conference on an area in which she felt the expansion of opportunities was essential. Her vibrancy and sense of humour and camaraderie at that conference exemplified her thorough commitment to service through sympathetic involvement.

Peace promotion tour to Japan

Since the liberation of the Eastern Province in 2007, development activities sponsored by the Government of Sri Lanka have been implemented on a large scale across the Province. Several have engaged the youth of the Province in a range of ongoing work, enabling integration, building of ethnic harmony and economic development.

Some of these youth were provided with an opportunity to visit Japan, and explore opportunities to build bridges between the people of Japan and the youth of the Eastern Province.

Upon an invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Embassy of Japan in Colombo requested the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) to nominate candidates to participate in a 7 day Peace Promotion Tour to Japan in April 2008. Accordingly SCOPP, having consulted the Government Agents in the Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara Districts and civil society,



short listed candidates who met the requirements set out by the Embassy. The final selection was made by the Embassy of Japan in Colombo. The

Sri Lankan delegation was represented by Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim youth, both male and female, reflecting the multi – ethnic composition of the Eastern Province.

In Japan the Sri Lankan delegation, held fruitful discussions with Mr. Yashushi Akashi, Japanese Special Peace Envoy to Sri Lanka, Mr. Kohara, Deputy Director General Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Ashiwa of the Hitotsubashi University, Prof. Shibuya of Wako University and students of both the Universities. They also paid a courtesy call on Mr. Kimura, Senior Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

They had discussion with Mr. Uyangoda, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Japan and were hosted to dinner by the Sri Lankan Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also visited many tourist sites in Japan.

The Sri Lankan delegation described the tour as a successful and valuable experience, and said Sri Lanka has a lot to learn from Japan, in particular the industry, discipline and unity of the people of Japan. They also observed that they have a better understanding now of the depth of Japan's commitment, towards assisting Sri Lanka achieve a peaceful settlement and economic betterment.

This initiative by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Embassy of Japan was welcomed by SCOPP as it has provided a valuable opportunity for the youth from the East to venture in to the international arena and gain interactive skills and experience through exposure to different conditions in a foreign country.

New Hotlines at the Disaster Management Centre

The Peace Secretariat welcomes the establishment of hotlines on which disappearances and related problems can be reported immediately for investigation. The Policy Unit of SCOPP had discussed this problem with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights and notes the swift implementation of suggestions in this regard.

The Ministry launched hotlines (011-2676513 and 060-2119246) to report disappearances, at the Disaster Management Centre, BMICH.

Livelihood assistance to Tsunami affected women

A sum of Rs. 300, 000 (Three hundred thousand Rupees) granted by the Rotary Club of Windward Oahu (Hawaii) via the Rotary Club of Colombo North was distributed to 06 Tsunami affected women in Trincomalee through the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Trincomalee in the form of loans to develop their businesses. The Peace Secretariat (SCOPP) handed over the cheque for Rs 300,000 obtained from the Rotary Club of Colombo North to the Chamber of Commerce of Trincomalee.

A sum of Rs 50,000 was distributed each to of the 6 women at a function held at the Chamber of Commerce Office, Trincomalee on the 5th April 2008. The Deputy Secretary General of SCOPP, Mr. C.S. Poolokasingam, Director Ms. Dayani Panagoda and Assistant Director Ms. Amanthi Wickramasinghe participated at this function. The Chamber of Commerce of Trincomalee Chairman Mr. R.Rajarammohan, Secretary K.Thiruchchelvam, Treasurer Mr.Sarathchandra Wijesooriya, Director & Board Members Sandya Priyadarshini, R. Ravichchnderamohan, and Chief Executive Officer S. Mohanasundaram also participated in the proceedings.

The six beneficiaries are currently engaged in retail, sewing, dress, dry fish, vegetable, and furniture businesses. A seventh beneficiary will be handed over a remaining sum of Rs. 50, 000 to commence a Dress making business.

This loan is issued to start new businesses or develop existing businesses. Receivers of this loan should settle this loan within a period of thirteen months. If any unavoidable circumstances occur a further period of 02 months will be given as a grace period. Interest will not be collected against this loan. The receiver of this loan should pay the monthly installment of Rs. 4000 for 12 months and Rs 2000 on the 13th month on the 5th of every month. Recovered money will be given to other female business people as loans.



Mr C S Poolokasingam, Deputy Secretary General, SCOPP (left) & Mr. K. Thiruchchelvam Secretary, Chamber of Commerce & Industries, Trincomalee (right) handing over the grants

Sri Lankans discuss peace and reconciliation in Oslo

A number of speakers from Sri Lanka participated in the Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in South Asia organized by the International Association for Human Values in Oslo on 10th and 11th April 2008. They had been invited in their personal capacity by IAHV, which was founded by the Indian guru HH Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. The Conference dealt with different conflicts in South Asia, but Sri Lankan issues attracted the greatest interest and discussion, with presentations also from Prof Indra de Zoysa of Trondheim University and John Hanssen-Bauer, the Special Envoy for Sri Lanka. Niraj Deva of the Conservative Group of the European Parliament also participated.

Minister Arumugam Thondaman gave a succinct outline of the conflict and of measures currently taken to promote peace through a political solution. He noted too the manner in which the citizenship issues of people of Indian origin had been resolved through the political engagement and peaceful agitation of Minister Saumyamoorthy Thondaman. This speech was followed by a Tamil oration by Rev Brahmanawatte Seevali Nayaka Thero, who laid down the Buddhist precepts that would contribute to peaceful resolution of conflict. After Dr Jayalath Jayawardena had described the current situation, Rev. Maduluvave Sobitha Nayaka Thero reaffirmed the pluralistic character of Sri Lankan society. The second day saw a presentation by Mr Hanssen-Bauer on the general Norwegian role in Reconciliation of Conflicts in Asia. The last session dealt with the role of the media in conflict resolution, and Prof Rajiva Wijesinha of the Sri Lankan Peace Secretariat showed how conflict could be perpetuated by media misrepresentation.

This was followed by workshop sessions, with the workshop on Sri Lanka being chaired by Erika Mann of the Socialist Group of the European Parliament. Prof Indra de Zoysa also made a presentation at this workshop, as did the first four Sri Lankan speakers. There was much lively debate, with impassioned statements by several representatives of the Tamil community now settled in Norway and



Minister Thondaman addressing the meeting

elsewhere in the West. The Sri Lankan speakers responded firmly to misrepresentations whilst engaging in sympathetic dialogue since it seemed that many of the expatriates were not aware of recent developments. Minister Thondaman pointed out for instance that deficiencies in recruitment were not due to prejudice but to educational circumstances now being remedied, whilst Rev Sobitha talked of the now nationally recognized need to ensure a due place for the Tamil language. The question of the 1990 ethnic cleansing by the LTTE of Muslims from the Northern Province was raised, and was met with universal regret on the part of Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates too.

In reporting afterwards on the workshop, Ms Mann noted the positive measures that had been taken recently, and suggested that further initiatives in terms of positive discrimination to enhance state sector employment for Tamils would go far to resolving the sense of deprivation now felt. In general it seemed that the interaction, and the opportunity to discuss issues openly, could lead to positive results.



The delegation at Oslo

The Long Table – dialogue forums

The “**Long Table**” dialogue forum series is an initiative of the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) in collaboration with the Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO (SLNCU), the Ministry for Mass Media and Information and the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC).

Background

The theme of peace in Sri Lanka has been dominated by the discourse on power sharing almost to the exclusion/ neglect of other aspects of peace-building, which in the broadest possible terms connotes a range of policies, processes and activities which address political, economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian concerns towards a durable peace.

In an effort to broaden this process a series of dialogue forums will be held and broadcast over national TV with the participation of different stakeholders – government institutions, civil society, academics, business community, cultural community and ordinary citizens on, some of these neglected aspects of peace building in Sri Lanka.

Objective of the Forum

- While emphasizing the need to find a political solution, help broaden the current understanding of peace building beyond the discourse of a political solution
- Help document current efforts at peace building in Sri Lanka whether by government, civil society, academics, etc
- Identify gaps, and problem areas
- find ways to bridge those gaps and address problems
- create a dynamic, meaningful and non confrontational dialogue on these issues between different stakeholders
- highlight best practices at the international level in order to learn from those experiences
- come up with a series of recommendations to strengthen government’s peace building efforts



Experience from South Africa

The series has been titled the “The Long Table” citing the terminology widely used with regard to the consultation process in South Africa where the ‘High Table’ was considered a highly conspicuous and visible dialogue consisting of the main negotiators and other key decision makers, with the ‘Long Table’ i.e. the political leaders, academics, professionals, trade unions and the business community feeding their ideas to the ‘High Table’. In light of the dialogue process in Sri Lanka on the peace process this series is an attempt to highlight the viewpoints and recommendations of the ‘Long Table’ in Sri Lanka.

Dialogue Forums

The first of the forums aired was on the APRC, with the participation of Hon. (Prof.) Tissa Vitarana, Chairman, All Party Representative Committee (APRC), Minister of Science and Technology, Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General, Secretariat for Coordinating the Process (SCOPP), Mr. V. Anandasangaree, President TULF, Recipient, UNESCO/ Madanjeet Singh (Prize for Tolerance and Non Violence) and Mr. Javid Yusuf, (fmr) Secretary General, Peace Secretariat for Muslims.

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The program focused on the need for the APRC and its work to date, issues related to the 13th Amendment, the obstacles to its implementation including the devolution of land and police powers, the perceived aspirations of the Tamil and Muslim communities and the wayforward.

The second dialogue forum concentrated on 'Language Rights and Provincial Empowerment' featuring Hon. (Mrs.) Ferial Ashraff, Minister of Housing and Construction, Mr. Prithviraj Perera, Secretary General, Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO, Mr. Jeevan Thiagarajah, Executive Director, Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) and Mr. Samantha Abeywickrema, Secretary General, Business for Peace Initiative, Federation of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL).

A conceptual outline on the subject of 'language' and the importance of improving language proficiency both at personal, national and global levels and possible areas to improve implementation of policy focusing especially on structural change were discussed to some length.

Stressed was the fact that strengthening dialogue, diversity and development through language, brings out creativity. Key examples are India which has a vibrant multi-lingual culture as also Europe where knowledge of a second language has been encouraged.

It was pointed out that finally however, it is the English speaking people who hold the more dominant positions in key decision-making bodies. Thereby even though we talk of swabhasha, in order to empower our children to work effectively within the ambit of the national and interconnect with the global community, language proficiency in English is essential. This would entail the promotion of English which is

an international link language amongst communities in Sri Lanka leaving the choice to the communities of a common language of communication.

Future Programs

The dialogue forums will thereafter continue, taking up numerous other issues, such as the roles of education, culture, education, mass media and communication, constitutional rights and related issues on peace building in Sri Lanka, which shall be documented. These will provide opportunities for concerned stakeholders to express their views, so that decision makers in government could take them into account, in the process of policy planning and implementation.



A young refugee is seen engrossed in reading at an IDP camp

Peace through soccer festivities in Trincomalee – a resounding success

A Soccer Carnival was organized by the Social Affairs Unit of SCOPP as part of the Peace Secretariat's initiative to promote *Peace through sports*. with the collaboration of the Eastern Province Governor and the Ministry of Education and Sports. It proved a resounding success, attracting large crowds and the event served as a boost to the game of soccer and young sportsmen of the area.

The Soccer Carnival was made possible by the liberation of the East by the government. All this while, the soccer fans seldom had a chance to see games featuring teams from various parts of the country. The programme organized by SCOPP proved to be a rare opportunity for these fans to witness the game. Large crowds thronged the McHeyzer Stadium in Trincomalee.

The teams that participated were the Colombo Combined Multi Ethnic School team, Colombo Army Team, a combined schools team, a youth team and the Trincomalee Football League. The northern region was represented by teams drawn from the Wannai, Mannar, Vavuniya and Jaffna districts. The players were drawn to the carnival mainly due to their interest in the game despite the various constraints posed by the conflict situation.

Mr. C S Poolokasingham, Deputy Secretary General of SCOPP and the Eastern Province Secretary Balasingham participated as chief guests in the event. The Captain of the Wannai Combined Team, S. Sivaruban said "We have come here surmounting many obstacles. We are unable to fine tune sporting talents due to the war. We could even become national players with proper training and facilities. Players in the East are now able to get the facilities which we lack." He expressed the fervent hope that very soon the soccer players of the North should also be able to enjoy these facilities.

Mr Poolokasingham delivered the welcome address, speaking in all three languages, stressing on the need for peace and role of sports in fostering understanding and goodwill.



Female soccer team

The keynote address was delivered by President of the Trinco Football League, DIG Upali Hewage. He invited SCOPP to organize more events of this nature, promoting goodwill and understanding among people.

Immediately after the event, the Manager of the Colombo Combined School team and also the General Secretary of the School Football Federation, Milroy Perera said, "The Players from the North and East have much talent. They could be transformed into national players with proper training and facilities."

SCOPP organized a cricket match in Colombo last year as part of its programme of promoting peace through sports, featuring combined Schools teams from the North and Colombo. The event attracted a representative gathering, many drawn from the people of the North currently living in and around Colombo.

SCOPP also plans to promote the sporting skills of women of North and East through women's soccer and cricket.



Male soccer team

GLIMPSES OF LIFE IN THE EAST



A street scene in Batticaloa



Family on a motorcycle



Students on their way to school

Excerpts from an interview with Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, Secretary General of The Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) aired on BBC World Service TV – Asia Today (May 9, 2008)

BBC: Well is there a peace process? or are you now redundant?

SG: No, I think it is very important at the moment. Or rather, there is no point talking of a peace process, there has got to be a political solution. We found that the Tigers were not responding politically. But fortunately, particularly in the last six months, we had a number of minority groups, Tamil groups, willing to come into politics and take to the democratic path.

BBC: But from outside there seems to be ominous signs that the government and the Tigers now seem really determined to fight to the death.

SG: Well the Tigers have always been determined to fight to the death if they could not get a separate state. I think the heartening fact is that many Tamils are coming over, and are recognising that the way to achieve the political goals of Tamils is through politics and not through a military solution.

An excerpt from a speech by Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, on the occasion of the adoption of the Universal Periodical Review Report on Sri Lanka by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR), in Geneva on June 13th 2008.

Thankfully we no longer hear allegations that our security forces, in their struggle against terror, indiscriminately target civilians. That is a canard that has been disposed of. Not so the allegations about child soldiers that seek also to incriminate the Sri Lankan forces, in a vain attempt to draw attention away from the continuing malpractices of the LTTE.

Dialog and Asia Foundation donate computers and books to Jaffna Schools

On an initiative taken by Major General GA Chandrasiri, the Commander of Security Forces, Jaffna to donate Computers and books to schools in Jaffna and the Islands, which produced the most outstanding results at the last GCE (A/L) examination held in 2007, the Peace Secretariat (SCOPP) agreed to facilitate the collection and distribution of goods for school children.

Both Dialog Telekom and Asia Foundation responded favourably to an appeal made by SCOPP by donating Computers (21) and books (approx. 1500) respectively. Transport was provided free of charge by the Navy.

The presentation of the Computers and books took place at the “RE - AWAKENING JAFFNA” festival held at the Alfred Duraiyappah stadium in Jaffna on the 24 and 25 May 2008. This event attracted large crowds, with an estimated 100,000 attending the event which was organised jointly by the Army Security Forces and the Jaffna Traders Association. In addition to musical shows and sports events, the festival also had numerous outlets which provided consumers an opportunity to buy essential food items at concessionary prices.

The books included fiction, and the educational range was from Elementary to Advanced Level grades. They will immensely benefit the students of Jaffna who have limited access to reading materials. This donation is one of the largest, apart from the regular government provision of books, including English medium ones, in recent years.

Asia Foundation’s book donation program was initiated in 1954. The program aims at donating 100,000 books among 500 institutions in Sri Lanka for the year 2008. The main focus of this program is to encourage reading and develop learning of the English Language.

SCOPP is grateful to Dialog and to the Asia Foundation for their generous donations, and to the military authorities for initiating the request and facilitating distribution. Mutual co-operation between the private and public sectors to assist war affected civilians to regain normalcy is most welcome, and we hope that such private - public partnerships will be followed suit by other institutions.



Mr Nilan Fernando, Country Representative of the Asia Foundation presenting the books to Mr.C.S.Poolokasingham, the Deputy Secretary General of the SCOPP.

The Statement of Prof Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General, SCOPP General Debate on the Annual Report of the UNHCR at Geneva

Let me begin by extending our sympathies to the people of China and Myanmar who have suffered from the recent natural disasters. Despite its own difficulties Sri Lanka tried to provide some assistance, not just because we have been beneficiaries of such in times of difficulty, but also because as the High Commissioner said, this is the duty of governments.

Sri Lanka, in wishing the High Commissioner well for her future, takes this opportunity to thank her, her office, and the various special representatives who work in association with that office, for the advice and assistance they have provided to us over the last year. We also congratulate her on the elegance of the thematic summation in her speech of the various strands that go to make up the ideal to which we in this Council aspire. Her enunciation of the importance of rights that some from more prosperous backgrounds ignore makes clear her wide-ranging commitment, and we are especially grateful that she stressed the need to move from a culture of charity to a culture of entitlements and international solidarity.

The recent experience of the Universal Periodic Review amply demonstrated the international commitment to this more comprehensive approach which the High Commissioner's concise philosophical overview today suggested. In that context, Mr President, we would like to support the comment of the distinguished ambassador from China, that in the reporting there should be greater balance, so as to ensure that the less restricted perspective of the world at large finds better representation.

Youthful enthusiasm combined with excessive prosperity sometimes turns a means to an end, and we hope therefore that the High Commissioner's more rounded and circumspect approach will be better reflected in the future. It is in that spirit, Mr President, that

we express our support for the rebuttal provided by the distinguished ambassador from Italy, who like all of us would condemn attacks on individuals based on ethnicity. When these happen, they indicate attitudes amongst other individuals that we hope will change. However the suggestion that the recent attacks against Roma settlements represents **policy** too was unfortunate, because that in some sense attributes responsibility to the Italian government and, as was suggested, such criticism seems misplaced and should not be made about a member state without clear evidence. Sri Lanka is particularly perturbed about this suggestion, which may have arisen from careless drafting, because we have benefited from Italy encouraging legal migration, and welcoming workers from Sri Lanka in a non-racist approach that we could wish replicated elsewhere.

To comment in particular on matters affecting Sri Lanka, we wish to take this opportunity too to express our gratitude to the two Special Representatives who visited Sri Lanka during the last year, and prepared extremely helpful reports. Whilst drawing attention to shortcomings, their whole approach made it clear that they did this to support remedial measures, and they have both, since returning, in both cases to Europe, provided advice and assistance as requested. We look forward to further discussions with Prof Manfred Novak and Prof Walter Kalin, and hope the latter will be able to conduct the workshop on particular rights that was suggested during his visit.

This spirit of engagement, Mr President, should never be abandoned, and we are sorry that in some cases it has been avoided. We are of course used to trying to negotiate with adversaries who withdraw when they do not get what they want, and ignore all invitations to discussion, whether sent direct or through intermediaries. We hope our friends will not act in a similar way, and that Sri Lanka's decision

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not to have an office of the High Commissioner in the country will be respected. Though at one stage it was indicated that this might preclude further discussion, we are sure that you will ensure that requests for assistance to improve human rights will be met.

In this regard we are delighted that, though the UNDP Stocktaking Report on our Human Rights Commission was ignored for over a year, at our earnest pleading it has been brought back into play and the UN Country Team in Sri Lanka recently met the Commission to discuss how to improve its effectiveness. The Report has now finally been brought to the attention of your Head of Capacity Building and, though he would have benefited from seeing it before his visit to Sri Lanka, we are sure that he will work on it actively, and in particular ensure the strengthening of the Regional Centres for which we requested support many months ago.

We believe there is a greater role for your In-Country Senior Adviser on Human Rights to play with regard to facilitating assistance, and we are sorry that the last incumbent, who was very positive in her approach, was transferred to do bigger things in Nepal. We hope you will be able to ensure the appointment of an equally qualified replacement, who will work together with us actively to improve capacity and ensure the training of officials who must ultimately bear the burden of responsibility themselves. We hope in this regard that, though other countries such as Australia have come to our aid on this, the initial requests for assistance with regard to witness protection policy and practice, addressed to a previous incumbent of the Senior Adviser position, will now find an active response.

We also appreciate the greater awareness that seems to have emerged with regard to the difficulties we face in upholding rights whilst dealing with terrorism. We appreciate the comments made earlier by the President of

Slovenia but, while human rights must be protected, we believe that indulgence to those engaged in a terrorist agenda is misplaced. Though we are sorry that in the past there was some suspicion all round about motives, we are grateful to the present UN country team for working together with the government to reintroduce confidence. The recent discovery of a UN employee armed with a pistol pen, for which in earlier times excuses might have been proffered, was this time round dealt with firmly by the UN. This sort of approach, if maintained consistently, will help in ensuring a context in which we can benefit from the much greater good the UN system can help us achieve.

Finally, Mr President, we associate ourselves with the other speakers from South Asia who indicated areas in which the need for greater consultation with this Council must be recognized, and hope that the Council will work together with the High Commissioner's Office to develop this aspect. The campaign for human rights, like each of us, as the High Commissioner so eloquently put it, carries multiple identities, and we need to respect all of these in affirming the values and principles that each of us embraces, for ourselves, and for each other. Though I cannot be as eloquent as our Russian colleague, let me conclude by affirming that, whatever identity the High Commissioner takes on in the coming years, we have no doubt that the commitment and enthusiasm she brought to this present identity will continue to serve us all.

PICTURESQUE EAST

The natural scenery of the Eastern Province is captured in these pictures.



An opportunity for peaceful pluralistic development

The Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process welcomes the conclusion of the Eastern Provincial Election, and the possibility now of establishing an Eastern Provincial Administration that will be able to fulfill the spirit of devolution as required in Sri Lanka.

For too long now devolution has been seen as leading to the emergence of a Provincial administration that is either subordinate to the Central government, or else in absolute opposition to it. On the contrary, a Provincial administration should be able to promote unity through diversity, the promotion of Province specific solutions for local problems, pursued in conformity with general government principles but not necessarily in conformity with practices in other provinces.

The perversion of the concept of devolution began way back in 1988 when the then government, implemented the 13th amendment when the country was in a state of anarchy. This was in part due to the denial of democracy for over half a decade, which led to the emergence of militant movements in both the north and the south of the country. The brutality with which the government suppressed movements, whilst arming not only politicians seeking election but also their henchmen, has now been forgotten.

In such a context the government picked strongmen to lead provincial election campaigns, engaged in thuggery and stuffing of ballot boxes - against weak opponents, and set a model for provincial government that has precluded independent development. The

positive contribution to a provincial identity of the Chief Minister of the North-Western Provincial Council was the exception that proved the rule, but even he could not prevent the steady erosion of provincial authority by the center, contrary to the provisions of the 13th amendment. Successive Chief Ministers since then have suffered from the practices laid down then. Given the general principle, that movement from a Provincial Chief Ministership to even a minor portfolio at the Centre was a devoutly desired promotion, productive initiatives were rare.

All that has changed with the election of a Provincial government which owes its primary allegiance to the people of the Province, whilst it maintains close and cordial relations with the Central government.

Some elements in the international media have already begun to highlight the opposition threat to campaign against the results of the election, and it would be tragic if such threats were taken seriously. A proper understanding of the facts would make it clear that the people have spoken, and that the result is as acceptable as results in Sri Lanka generally are - and certainly very different from what obtained during the horrors of the eighties, when massive majorities were registered in the most unlikely places. We need to move forward now on this basis, for Sri Lanka is ripe and ready for pluralistic development. The attempts of oppositional forces to persuade the world to prevent this should be seen for what they are, the sourest of sour grapes, and resisted.

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The Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP)

Born out of a need to institutionalize the Peace Process, the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) was established on 06 February 2002. The Secretariat was headed by **Bernard Goonetilleke (2002-2004)**, **Jayantha Dhanapala (2004-2005)**, **Dr John Gooneratne (Acting Secretary General) (2005-2006)** and **Dr Palitha Kohona (2006-2007)**. **Prof Rajiva Wijesinha** is the current Secretary General of SCOPP.

SCOPP is primarily a coordinating and facilitating body of the Peace Process. It is the main instrument of the Government to consolidate and strengthen the Peace Process. SCOPP engages in extensive consultations with all stakeholders involved in the Peace Process including the public and private sectors, civil society, donor community and line agencies on a regular basis and is presently under the purview of H E the President.

Vision: To act as the cutting edge of the Government of Sri Lanka to consolidate and strengthen the peace process on behalf of all Sri Lankan citizens, whilst promoting a negotiated settlement to the current conflict

Mission: To develop confidence in the peace process and its potential benefits for all Sri Lankan citizens.

Strategy

1. To act as a resource centre for the government of Sri Lanka and its representatives in any negotiations.
2. To liaise with facilitators and potential facilitators of the peace process so as to

- a) ensure synergy by bringing together all possible stakeholders and developing awareness of the wider benefits of cooperation and mutual understanding
- b) promote activities that develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and commitment amongst all Sri Lankan citizens with regard to the peace process and related reforms
- c) while promoting constitutional changes ensure commitment, in particular through its own practices, to truth and objectivity in reporting events and responses to them, and minimize distortion and innuendo that will weaken confidence in the peace process
- d) remove barriers to economic activity and social intercourse, whilst recognizing and respecting security constraints due to continuing terrorist activity, facilitate training and education as well as investment
- e) drive livelihood development activities, and in particular for IOPS, with relevant stakeholders so that adequate income generation alternatives are provided to the people in the East and North
- f) initiate programmes that would contribute to greater understanding of mutual needs and. promote strategies to satisfy these
- g) ensure transparency in its relations with stakeholders and encourage all of them to work to similar standards
- h) enhance understanding of other peace processes and assess their relevance to the Sri Lankan situation

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