



Killings Must End

There is grave concern over the inter-necine killings that are striking fear in hearts of the people in the Tamil homeland. Since the ceasefire agreement of 22 February 2002, more than 150 people have been murdered. Most of the dead are members or supporters of Tamil militant groups and they accuse the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Since Col. Karuna broke away from the LTTE in March 2004, a number of LTTE members or supporters have also been killed. Most killings have taken place in Batticaloa, but there have been assassinations in Colombo, Trincomalee, Jaffna and Mannar.

Successive Sri Lankan governments in power have exploited divisions among the Tamils to their own advantage and it cannot be denied that the divisions contributed to the political and economic downfall of the Tamils. The disunity of the Tamils was an excuse for the international community for many years and the answer of the LTTE was the forging of links with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). The show of unity was seen by many people as a positive sign even though, in the process, the TNA unfortunately lost its independence.

But the current killings may not only destabilise the peace process but also affect the legitimacy of the Tamil demand for the right of self-determination. Civilian institutions have an important role in ending the killings and their failure will weaken civil society, result in chaos and undermine the struggle. In such eventuality, the sacrifices of the martyrs who fought and died for a cause from all sections would be in vain.

Centre for Community Development founded

The Centre for Community Development (CCD) became a reality, when 26 Founder Members met on 22 August at the offices of the Tamil Information Centre in the London Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames and adopted a draft constitution for the establishment of a charitable institution.

The new organisation with Community Development at the core of its work was proposed, considering the changing scenes in Sri Lanka, Britain and other countries. V R Ramanathan introduced the draft constitution and explained the proposed membership of the new organisation. Mr Ramanathan also explained the need to appoint an Interim Management Committee, its role and the terms of reference. The members agreed that, for the time being, there will be four categories of membership – Life, Ordinary, Corporate and Associate. It was emphasized that representation for women must be ensured in the Executive Committee.

The participants agreed on the objectives of the organisation. Among the objectives are advancement of education, relief of sickness, suffering and distress, poverty, promotion of healthy living, peace and conflict resolution through non-violence means. Empowerment and support of the disadvantaged and destitute, particularly women and children, to enable them to gain control over their own lives and the well-being of their families and the communities was accepted as an aim. Increasing awareness of service provisions and encouragement of appropriate representation at all levels of public life, the promotion of equality of opportunity and good race relations between different racial groups and the promotion of social and economic welfare and community cohesion were also included as objectives.

The CCD will have its offices at Studio 2, Sutherland House, Clifton Road, Kingston-upon-Thames KT2 6PZ. Founder members V R Ramanathan, S Ratneswaren, M V Vijayapalan, V Varadakumar and N Sivanathan were appointed as members of the Interim Management Committee (IMC).

The IMC will act on behalf of the Founder Members to liaise with members and agencies. The IMC will operate as an Executive Committee to manage the day-to-day business, managing all relevant financial and other affairs. It will take action to receive membership, apply for funds for the activities of the Centre, and organise the first election under the constitution to elect the Executive Committee, when registered as a charity.

Volunteering at the TIC and CCD

By *Sinthu Visahan, Tiffin Girls School*

Time. Time is a valuable thing, and to say people living in England have too much time on their hands would be very off beam. In fact a lot of us here have so little time, we are always rushing around, schoolwork, housework, friends etc. Why would anyone in their right mind want to spend any more of their precious time volunteering at an organization? Of course volunteers do not get paid and as they say “time is money”...So what is the point? Well, cliché as it is to say, there are more things in life than money.

The TIC is a unique organization formed in 1981 solely devoted to human rights of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and Community Development of the Tamils in Britain. It has branches such as the TWDF (Tamil Women’s Development Forum) and MWRDO (Muslim Women’s Rights and Development Organisation) run by women and also Child to Child, which is a programme developed and run by children of all ages. In order to promote the community, the TIC offers many ways to develop yourself as a person e.g. Computer Training or English Classes.

It would have been about year nine, when I was thirteen; I first formerly got involved as a volunteer for TIC. Although I must admit I had the upper hand as both my parents are volunteers so I have been raised in the environment of TIC. I started off by setting out the Child to Child programme. Our aim was to create awareness of how the Tamil children live in Sri Lanka and create a connection by perhaps writing letters and sending educational materials to them that would be useful. I am now seventeen and although I do wish to carry on with helping in Child to Child, I have also become interested in all the other volunteering opportunities TIC offers, for instance Health Promotion where I would get the opportunity to visit elderly homes with some of TIC’S voluntary doctors. This would help me in the future as I want to move onto a career in Tropical Medicine. As a person I have been affected in more ways than I would have thought possible. Many of us are

aware of the situation that is happening in Sri Lanka. Many of us know of “a war” that is taking place. But being around in the environment of TIC, I do not just know of “a war”. I have tried my best to develop an understanding of what is happening. I’ve learnt a lot about how the situation started out, what the current issues are and how a lot of the people there are affected by it. Being honest, a couple of years ago I would not have really thought about the war in such a deep way, however I have learnt through TIC, that just because I am a Tamil girl living in London, it doesn’t give me the right to take the Tamil out of the girl. TIC has made me very much aware of many aspects of being Tamil and has also made me very proud of my culture and its values, while respecting and appreciating the cultures of other communities.

As for my Education, I know a lot of parents would be very skeptical about allowing their child to volunteer at TIC, because it would affect their studies. Without sounding arrogant, it has not affected my studies and we must get rid of the notion that doing something for your community only takes up much valued time that could well be spent on furthering your education. I am now doing my A levels and with the experience that TIC has given me over the years, I have decided to set up an Amnesty International Youth Group at my School to help others get interested in fighting human rights abuses all over the world. I have learnt from running Child-to-Child how to handle being a leader and how to run an organization which provides much use in all aspects of life. If you meet any of our child volunteers they are excellent prime examples of how you can get excellent grades while helping your community. We have had children volunteering since they were nine years old and go on to excellently rated Secondary Schools with flying colours in their eleven plus.

There is not much left to say but if you are interested in becoming a volunteer at TIC or just want more information, just phone 0208 5461560 or Email: info.tic@sangu.org

Educational Visit to the National Archives



Success in an ever-changing world demands children to develop habits of inquiry that will last a lifetime. Children learn best when they have fun and search for answers to their own questions. The CCD organised a visit to the National Archives for the D-Day to VE Day event on 11 September to provide Child-to-Child project members, an opportunity to see Britain's biggest archive and discover original documents, food and music from World War II years.

Maanas Poologalingam writes: We went inside National Archives at 11.00am. Unfortunately we had to wait about an hour to get to participate in an activity. So we decided to explore the place and

went into the D-Day section.

We saw many old documents. It was amazing to see such preserved documents. We also made secret letters using wax stamps. I used a typewriter to write my 'secret message' and sealed it with a wax stamp. I found out that the wax was made of a type of insect. We then made ration books. Ration books were mainly hand-made but just trimmed with a machine.

My favourite bit of the trip was where we heard the stories from 'No Time to Say Goodbye', while the younger pupils of Bharathi Tamil school were participating in the activity 'Make and Do'. In 'No Time to Say Goodbye' a storyteller told stories of children who were evacuated in World War II. I was really interested in these stories and they were quite moving as they were true stories. Fortunately, there were a few happy endings. At the end we were dancing to 1940s music. That too was my favourite



Maanas Poologalingam

bit as it was interesting and fun.

We all enjoyed the trip a lot but there could be some improvements made to future trips. Trips need to be more organised so we won't have to wait and do nothing. Activities could be organised in advance so we wouldn't be stuck with nothing to do when we get to the place of the trip. Organisers should know what the children would like to see or which parts of the Museum should be seen for children to learn about, instead of deciding what to do on the day of the trip. Apart from that, the trip was enjoyed by everyone and we look forward to future trips.



Concession for Asylum Seekers ends 31 December 2004

The British Home Office announced a concession on 24 October 2003 to asylum-seeking families who have been in the UK for three or more years. Families whose application for asylum is awaiting initial decision, has been refused and is subject to appeal, has been refused but there is no further appeal and the applicant has not been removed, are eligible to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). The concession applies to the following:

1) Families who had applied for asylum before 2 October 2000; and had at least one dependent child who was under 18

years of age on 2 October 2000 or 24 October 2003.

2) Families with a child or which were joined by a dependent child, between these two dates.

3) Families with limited leave to remain will be eligible.

Families who believe they are eligible under the above criteria, may write to PO Box 1541, Croydon CR9 2YS. The closing date for applications is 31 December 2004. The letters must include details such as name, address, date of birth and Home office reference number. The letters must also include details of why the family think it is eligible. The Home

Office has requested that families who think they may be eligible contact them as soon as possible.

Advisers who would like further information should contact the ILR Integration Helpline on 020 8760 2779 (This Helpline is for advisers only). The policy guidance note on this issue may be seen at the following internet link:

http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws/policy/policy_instructions/apis/one-off_exercise_to.html

Please also see:

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/downloads/briefings/amnesty_oct04.pdf

Change in Indian Regional Interests

A fundamental shift in Indian security concerns in the South Asian region has the potential of altering the balance of forces and may have a notable impact on the political and economic scene in Sri Lanka, says India's Sri Lankan watcher A S Panneerselvam. The former editor of Indian journal Outlook and currently Executive Director at the New Delhi office of British agency 'Panos', addressed a gathering at the TIC on 27 October. A lively discussion followed his address.

India holds a leading position in SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation); India is part of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) alliance; India has observer status in ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). Indian involvement in Sri Lanka may be seen in six stages, from concerns in late 1940s and early 1950s relating to the denial of citizenship of the Plantation Tamils to direct involvement of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in the late 1980s. Indian troops were sent to Sri Lanka for the first time to assist Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike to quell the insurrection of the People's Liberation Front (JVP) in 1971. In the 1980s, India regarded Trincomalee harbour as a vulnerable point as regards security, along with the Voice of America (VOA) radio station at Puttalam and the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in the Colombo District. The increasing involvement of the US in Sri Lanka unsettled India and led to its objections to the VOA and facilities for the US navy in Trincomalee.

The Sri Lankan Tamils are unable to appreciate the radical changes that have taken place in international relations in the 1990s. The Indo-US relations dramatically changed and in 1997 both countries began joint naval exercises. The change in technological advancement, such as the leap from cable links to satellite communication, has also altered the priorities of India and economic progress has overtaken other concerns. In 1999, the US and India entered cooperation agreements which covered nuclear, space and high-tech transfer fields. In 2004, India wants the US to recognize it as a nuclear power and support for permanent status in the UN Security Council.

Trincomalee no longer remains a strategic high point for India. The envisaged Sethusamuthram Project for deepening the Palk Strait will have implications for Sri

Lanka, as the ports of the island including Trincomalee will lose their importance. The southern coast of India is assuming greater significance with military, aerospace, nuclear and cryogenic facilities. India may provide a base on this coast for US shipping. India's strategic focus has shifted from purely geopolitical considerations to economic advancement. India has indicated to the Nepalese government that it will not oppose international mediation in the conflict with Maoist rebels. In the case of Sri Lanka, India no longer opposes foreign involvement in peace and maintains links with international players. On an earlier occasion, India told the African National Congress (ANC) to lay off, but now has no problem in allowing Norway's involvement in the peace process.

With the Congress election victory, the people who determined foreign policy in the 1980s are back at the helm. Natwar Singh is Foreign Minister and MK Narayanan who was Intelligence Bureau chief has been appointed special advisor to the Prime Minister. JN Dixit, the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka during the IPKF years, is National Security Advisor. In this light, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, will remain a thorny problem. The Rajiv issue has been given additional impetus by Col. Karuna, who said that LTTE leaders V Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman were responsible for the killing of the former Prime Minister. New Delhi accepts the statement as it comes from a former senior LTTE officer.

The Sri Lankan Tamils must understand India's position in the region and act appropriately. Realignment of the political forces in India is another factor that is crucial to the Sri Lankan issue. Congress leader Sonia Gandhi accepted the DMK as an ally although the DMK had formed a coalition with strong LTTE supporters PMK and MDMK. These two latter parties have also been offered ministerial posts. Unfortunately, no Sri Lankan Tamil newspaper has written about Mrs Gandhi's conciliatory move.

After the LTTE captured Elephant Pass military camp in April 2000, then Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes offered to evacuate the Sri Lankan troops, indicating that if the Tigers advanced beyond the camp, India would intervene. The LTTE understood this message and did

proceed towards Jaffna town. India has no difficulty in accepting the centrality of the LTTE, but will not recognise an undemocratic proposition claiming the LTTE as the sole representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils. India is unwavering in its position that all Muslims ejected from the north-east must be allowed to return. Although the LTTE has expressed its commitment to allow Muslims back, this is yet to happen. India is also determined that LTTE cadre will not be permitted medical treatment on Indian soil until the Muslims are allowed to return. The LTTE recognises India's position and the link with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) may be their way of addressing the issue.

Sri Lankan Tamils must also recognize the sea change in southern Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, here too, Tamil newspapers are silent. After 1983, there has been no major violence against the Tamils in the south, despite many LTTE attacks, including on the Buddhist temple Dalada Maligawa and Katunayake airport. Many prominent Sinhalese leaders, including a President of Sri Lanka, were assassinated, but there were no anti-Tamil riots. This has given strength to successive Sri Lankan governments. Most Sinhalese civilians now want peace. In keeping with the public desire, all Sinhalese parties, including the JVP and JHU (National Sinhala Heritage), agree that the conflict should be solved through political dialogue with the LTTE. They oppose LTTE's interim proposal, but unlike earlier times, are not speaking of a military solution.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has a role to play in making links with India. India may accept any degree of devolution, even a confederation model, but will fully oppose a separate Eelam. India needs a devolution model to work with and Sri Lankan Tamils need to provide one. A model such as the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which enjoys special status in India, may be suitable. India is not insisting on re-demarcation of regional boundaries, but would like to see a tripartite agreement between the government, Tamils and Muslims. Tamil Nadu is also important. All Tamil parties in the south Indian state, except J Jayalalitha's AIADMK, support a negotiated settlement and accept the LTTE as the leading player. Chief Minister Jayalalitha fears that the LTTE will create security problems for the state and needs assurance. This may be achieved only through dialogue and the Tamil diaspora is well placed for a mediatory role.