

We reproduce the following articles on humanitarian situation, human rights and politics.

1. A statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.
2. A statement on US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's call Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa.
3. An ICRC statement on the humanitarian situation.
4. A statement by Bob Dietz of the Committee to Protect Journalists titled, 'State secrets, public denials in Sri Lanka'.
5. An article by the Peace Secretariat for Muslims, 'Anti-Muslim stand of pro-LTTE parties in South India'.
6. An article by by Angilee Shah titled, 'Colombo's Secret War on Terror'.
7. An article by Muralidhar Reddy titled, 'Close encounters'.
8. An article by Liyanage Amarakeerthi titled, 'Closing the Circle: Revisiting Amarasekara'.

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<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30175&Cr=sri+lanka&Cr1=>

Sri Lanka: actions by Government forces, rebels possible war crimes - UN rights chief

Civilians uprooted by the fighting in Sri Lanka's Vanni region

13 March 2009 - The top United Nations human rights official today deplored the mounting deaths and injuries of civilians due to the "bitter" conflict in northern Sri Lanka between Government forces and a rebel group, pointing out that some moves by both sides could amount to war crimes.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said that certain actions undertaken by the Sri Lankan military and by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could constitute violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

"We need to know more about what is going on, but we know enough to be sure that the situation is absolutely desperate," she said. "The world today is ever-sensitive about such acts that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity."

Although there is a Government-designated 'no-fire' zone for civilians in the Vanni region, repeated shelling has continued inside these areas,

according to information made available to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Last week, the UN humanitarian wing said that the conflict zone has shrank from 300 square kilometres to nearly 58 square kilometres in February, with many civilians - the UN puts their number at between 150,000 and 180,000 - taking refuge in a new 14-square kilometre 'no-fire zone.'

Other areas where civilians are sheltering have been hit, and OHCHR noted reports that over 2,800 people may have been killed and 7,000 others injured - many in the no-fire zones - since 20 January. Many children are believed to be among the casualties, with hundred having lost their lives and over 1,000 hurt.

"The current level of civilian casualties is truly shocking, and there are legitimate fears that the loss of life may reach catastrophic levels if the fighting continues this way," Ms. Pillay said, adding that "very little attention is being focused on this bitter conflict."

The LTTE is believed to be continuing to hold civilians as human shields and shooting those trying to leave their control. Further, they are reportedly forcibly recruiting civilians, including children, as soldiers.

"The brutal and inhuman treatment of civilians by the LTTE is utterly reprehensible, and should be examined to see if it constitutes war crimes," the High Commissioner said.

Limited amount of food and essential medical supplies to treat victims are leading to further deteriorating humanitarian conditions.

Ms. Pillay called on both the Government and the LTTE to immediately halt the fighting to allow all civilians to evacuate the conflict zone, urging Sri Lankan authorities to give UN and other independent agencies full access to accurately assess conditions.

Last week, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly deplored the mounting civilian death and stressed the urgent need for the end of clashes.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban repeated his call to the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to "suspend hostilities for the purposes of allowing civilians to leave the conflict zone, and allowing immediate humanitarian access to them."

He appealed to the LTTE to take its weapons and fighters out of areas where there are many civilians, cooperate in humanitarian efforts and instantly end recruiting children, some as young as 13 years of age, as soldiers. In addition, he urged the Government to begin "serious" efforts to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict.

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<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/03/120341.htm>

Humanitarian Situation in Sri Lanka

Gordon Duguid  
Acting Deputy Department Spokesman, Office of the Spokesman

Bureau of Public Affairs  
Washington, DC  
March 13, 2009

On March 13, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa to express the United States' deep concern over the deteriorating conditions and increasing loss of life occurring in the Government of Sri Lanka-designated "safe zone" in northern Sri Lanka. Secretary Clinton stated that the Sri Lankan Army should not fire into the civilian areas of the conflict zone. The Secretary offered immediate and post-conflict reconstruction assistance and she extended condolences to the victims of the March 10 bombing outside a mosque in southern Sri Lanka. The Secretary condemned the actions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are reported to be holding civilians as human shields, and to have shot at civilians leaving LTTE areas of control.

Secretary Clinton called on President Rajapaksa to devise a political solution to the ongoing conflict. The Secretary urged the President to give international humanitarian relief organizations full access to the conflict area and displaced persons camps, including screening centers.

The United States believes that a durable and lasting peace will only be achieved through a political solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all of Sri Lanka's communities. We call on the Sri Lankan Government to put forward a proposal now to engage Tamils who do not espouse violence or terrorism, and to develop power sharing arrangements so that lasting peace and reconciliation can be achieved.

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<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/sri-lanka-update-170309>

Sri Lanka: ICRC continues to help civilians as crisis escalates

ICRC activities in January and February 2009

17-03-2009 Operational update

Fighting continues between Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), prompting growing fears for the lives of those trapped in the conflict area. The ICRC has been bringing a little hope, evacuating the sick and wounded and escorting boats carrying food and limited medicines.

ICRC continues to help civilians as crisis escalates

Tens of thousands of people confined to a rapidly-shrinking area have headed for the coast to escape the fighting, in search of safety, food and medical care. But numbers in the coastal belt held by the LTTE have increased drastically over recent weeks, and clean water is scarce. The area is affected by shelling every day, and the cramped conditions and the lack of water and proper sanitation are putting people at risk of epidemics.

"The humanitarian situation is deteriorating by the day," said Paul Castella, head of the ICRC's Colombo delegation. "Many of these people are forced to shelter in trenches. They are in considerable physical danger. After having been forced to move from place to place en masse for weeks or

even months, they depend entirely on food from outside the conflict area."

The sick and wounded continue to arrive at Putumattalan, where local people have helped set up a makeshift medical facility in a community centre and a school. Medical staff from the ministry of health do their best to cope with a constant influx of people injured by the fighting, but there are not enough medical supplies to meet the needs.

With the agreement of the government and the LTTE, the ICRC has continued to evacuate patients from Putumattalan (which is in the LTTE-held area) to Trincomalee (in the government-held area). The ICRC-chartered Green Ocean ferry has evacuated over 4,000 sick and wounded people, together with their carers, since evacuations started on 10 February. The evacuees included over 1,400 people in need of surgery, so an ICRC medical team consisting of a surgeon, an anaesthetist and a nurse are helping Trincomalee Hospital to handle the influx.

Since mid-February, the ICRC has on 12 occasions facilitated the movement of food shipments from Trincomalee to Putumattalan, delivering a total of over 700 tonnes of flour, dhal, sugar and oil provided by the government and the World Food Programme. On three occasions it was possible to deliver some medicines provided by the ministry of health, but the quantities were too limited by comparison with the needs.

"With patients continuing to arrive at the improvised medical facility in Putumattalan, it is essential that evacuations take place regularly and without interference. It is encouraging to see food and medicines going into the conflict area, but they must be delivered regularly if they are to have an impact," said Morven Murchison, who coordinates the ICRC's health activities in Sri Lanka.

The civil and military authorities have helped with the medical evacuations and the food shipments, as have local people. Offloading food onto the beach in Putumattalan may involve up to 275 people transporting the food in fishing boats and carrying it ashore. These are dangerous and complex operations. The fighting is one hazard, but bad weather and heavy seas often make things worse.

With the help of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, the ICRC was able to give 130 sick and wounded evacuees personal hygiene kits, emergency household kits, kitchen utensils and baby-care parcels. These people received medical treatment at hospitals in Trincomalee and Vavuniya.

ICRC staff member killed

ICRC employee Vadivel Vijayakumar was killed by shelling on 4 March just north of Valayanmadam, on the coastal belt of the territory held by the LTTE. His nine-year-old son was injured in the same incident. This is the second time in less than three months that an ICRC staff member has been killed in Sri Lanka. Mr Vijayakumar leaves a wife and three children.

Acting as a neutral intermediary between the government and the LTTE

The conflict has disrupted traffic through Omanthai, formerly the only crossing point between government and LTTE areas. However, in January the ICRC facilitated the passage of 360 civilians, including 70 patients seeking treatment in Vavuniya hospital and nearly 125 vehicles, including ambulances. ICRC staff also transported the bodies of 100 fighters over

the same period, 99 of them in January. The last ICRC-escorted land convoy took place on 29 January. Since 10 February, the ICRC has been facilitating the movement of the sick, the wounded and humanitarian aid between the LTTE- and government-held areas by sea.

#### Emergency aid for villagers following attack

An attack on a village in Ampara district in February left 14 dead and 10 injured. The ICRC provided a total of 143 families with personal hygiene kits and baby care parcels, while 20 families displaced by the attack received basic household requisites. Five families whose houses had been burned down in the attack also received a tarpaulin, kitchen utensils and a kerosene cooker.

#### Protecting civilians and detainees

The ICRC continues to monitor allegations concerning violations of international humanitarian law affecting civilians throughout the country. In January and February, over 3,900 people contacted the organization with allegations concerning missing persons, arbitrary arrests, recruitment of minors, unlawful killings and ill-treatment of civilians by arms bearers. In order not to endanger the people reporting such violations, ICRC staff discussed their reports bilaterally with the parties involved.

With the cooperation of government officials and the LTTE, the ICRC has been visiting people arrested in connection with the armed conflict to monitor their treatment and conditions of detention. ICRC delegates held private talks with over 1,400 security detainees in over 70 places of detention throughout the country and provided them with clothes, toiletries and recreational items. The ICRC paid for 10 detainees to return home by public transport after release, and for the families of 635 detainees to visit their detained relatives.

Working with volunteers from the SLRCS, the ICRC has been providing water and sanitation facilities for displaced persons in transit centres in Vavuniya and Jaffna. Over 150 toilets have been built, along with tanks to store water.

#### Restoring family links through Red Cross messages

Red Cross messages help detainees, their relatives and separated families to keep in touch. In January and February the ICRC and the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society collected over 1,000 messages and distributed almost 400.

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<http://cpj.org/blog/2009/03/state-secrets-public-denials-in-sri-lanka.php>

#### State secrets, public denials in Sri Lanka

By Bob Dietz

There's a familiar pattern emerging in Sri Lanka, one we've seen in many countries. When the government doesn't have a viable case against a critical journalist, prosecutors turn to state security laws to keep them in detention.

Nadesapillai Vidyatharan, editor of the Tamil daily Sudar Oli, was grabbed

at a friend's funeral in a Colombo suburb on February 26. Since then, in an effort to charge the editor under antiterrorism laws, police have been scouring phone records to try to establish a tie between Vidyatharan and the secessionist Liberation Tigers of Tamal Eelam. Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa has already linked Vidyatharan to a February 20 suicide air attack on Colombo in which two LTTE planes were shot down, the two pilots were killed, and more than 45 people were injured. When Vidyatharan's case came up this morning in Colombo, the magistrate gave police permission to hold him without charge as they continue to trace his calls.

Another case, this one involving editor and columnist J. S. Tissainayagam, has been dragging on for a year. Tissa, as he is known, was detained without charge on March 7, 2008, and held without explanation for more than three months. In August, he was formally indicted under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Emergency Regulations. When he was detained, he was the editor of a news Web site OutreachSL. But he is being held for articles he wrote in the North Eastern Monthly in 2006 and 2007--two years before he was grabbed. Tissa's case was the first time Sri Lanka used this law against a journalist explicitly for published work. His next court date is set for March 20. Trial dates and the appearance schedules of witnesses have changed frequently, possibly at the hands of the judge hearing the case, but it's difficult to tell who is causing the delays.

In February, CPJ documented a shocking wave of violence against the Sri Lankan press in a special report, "Failure to Investigate." That report, coupled with CPJ's appearance before Senate Foreign Relations Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee on February 24 brought us to the attention of the Sri Lankan embassy. When we were doing research in Colombo early this year it was impossible to get an interview with a government official. Only after the embassy in Washington realized that we would be testifying before a Senate subcommittee did we get interviews with Attorney General Mohan Peiris and Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama. Both men asserted that authorities had no involvement in attacks on journalists and that the cases are being thoroughly investigated--responses that we noted in our report. (Our research shows that authorities have failed to solve the murders of at least nine Sri Lankan journalists in the past decade.)

This month, we were invited to a meeting with Ambassador Jaliya Wickramasuriya in Washington. Our six-person delegation sat across the table from the embassy's six-person team and there was, as they say, a frank exchange of views, but really it was like two airplanes traveling in different directions at altitudes several thousand feet apart. The ambassador professed anger at recent attacks on journalists, and he promised full investigations. But another government official, Dhillip Nawaz, claimed that all cases are being fully investigated and that there are no significant media problems in Sri Lanka. Board member David Marash captured the tenor of the meeting in a post on the CPJ Blog. The embassy's response came in a news story the next day headlined, "Sri Lankan ambassador invites journalist delegation to Sri Lanka to observe firsthand freedom enjoyed by journalists."

On Tuesday, I was on a panel discussing Sri Lankan media rights at the National Endowment for Democracy's Center for International Media Assistance in Washington. CPJ Washington Representative Frank Smyth noted that Sri Lankan government representatives were on hand and suggested that they be given an opportunity to respond to criticism. A reasoned response and expression of concern came from Yasoja Gunesekera, who has served in

Sri Lanka's foreign service for more than a decade. Then (toward the end of the video linked above) came an assertive denial of reality from, you guessed it, Dhilip Nawaz, a Humphrey Fellow who ordinarily works as a senior state counsel in the Sri Lankan attorney general's office. Take the time to watch--it is an amazing example of the bureaucratic two-step.

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<http://www.peacemuslims.org/Anti-Muslim-stand-of-pro-LTTE-parties-in-South-India-20-991.html>

Anti-Muslim stand of pro-LTTE parties in South India

by PSM

The suicide blast on the national Meelad Day ceremony (10/03/2008) which was condemned unreservedly by all failed to draw any attention of the pro LTTE formations both in and outside Sri Lanka. The deafening silence of human rights activists and civil societies who are voicing for entrapped civilians in the LTTE held limited areas in Mullaitivu was shocking. This is the first time a National Meelad Day was cancelled under tragic circumstances.

The Muslims of Sri Lanka were not shocked by the LTTE's blast at their religious ceremony since they were victims of similar atrocities by the LTTE in the past two decades. The cold blooded massacre of devotees in the Kattankudy Mosque in August 1990 and killing of about 116 Muslims in Saddam Hussain Town in Eravur and the ethnic cleansing of Northern Muslims in 1990 are history.

Nearly a month ago (17/02/2009), a pro LTTE activist in Tamil Nadu Dr. Ramadoss made a Sri Lankan Muslim bashing in his attempt to incite anti-Muslim feeling among the Tamils of South India. His intention was obviously to create a rift between the Tamils and Muslims of South India who co-exist with unity and amity for centuries.

What Dr. Ramadoss said is given below:

"Pakistan's ISI sleuths with Sri Lankan passports and members of Karuna faction had crossed over to India and were stationed in places such as Egmore, Kolhikode and Bangalore, targeting the supporters of Eelam Tamils. It had come to light that recently, over 2,000 Islamic youths from the eastern province of Sri Lanka were trained in a Pakistan camp. The group might pose danger to India and vital installations such as power stations at Koodankulam and Kalpakkam. Sri Lanka seemed to be getting closer to China and Pakistan."

Dr. S.Ramadoss, founder of the Pattali Makkal Katchi, (Toilers party) the PMK, made the said statement and urged the Centre to order Sri Lanka to immediately end the war.

Muslim political leaders in Tamil Nadu quickly refuted the allegation made by Dr. Ramadoss and appealed him not to incite hatred between the Tamils and Muslims.

Mr. Kayal Mahboob, Indian Union Muslim League - Tamil Nadu Region lambasted Dr. Ramadoss in his interview to BBC Tamil Service on 19/02/2009.

Dr. Kayal Mahboob's statement is given below:

"Some politicians in Tamil Nadu with vested interests are trying to cover up the atrocities committed by the LTTE against the Sri Lankan Muslims and trying to create dissent among the Muslims and Tamils in Tamil Nadu by spreading false allegations. Dr. Ramadoss of Patali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and similar Tamil Nadu politicians should refresh the atrocities the LTTE committed against the Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces".

Mr. Kaayal Mahboob further said the LTTE expelled over 100,000 Muslims from the Mannar and Jaffna districts after seizing their movable and immovable properties with 24 hours' notice at gunpoint in 1990. It is shocking that leaders like Ramadoss have forgotten the assassination of moderate Tamil leaders like A. Amirthalingam et al by the LTTE. No wonder they cannot remember the atrocities committed by the LTTE against the Sri Lankan Muslims.

The Tigers also gunned down Muslims while praying at a Mosque in Kattankudy. They also committed the genocide of Muslim women, children and elders in Eravur, Polonnaruwa and other Muslim areas from time to time. These Muslims are now suffering in refugee camps and taken asylum internally and externally. The origins of some of these Muslims are Thoothukkudi, Ramanthapuram and Thanjai districts in Tamil Nadu. So we feel for these Muslims and cannot forget what LTTE did to our brothers in Sri Lanka, Mr. Mahboob added.

Angered by the quick reaction by the Tamil Nadu Muslims, the PMK member in the Lok Sabha raised an adjournment question on 23/02/2009 on the same issue. Indian Home Minister Mr. P. Chidambaram gave a diplomatic answer to this question. The intention of the PMK is to establish this allegation by raising this in Lok Sabha and they succeeded in that.

LTTE theologian Late Anton Balasingham also made similar claims of Muslim Jihad in peace talks held in Geneva. He even referred to the Muslim township in Trincomalee district Muthur as the place where the Jihad movement is active. Few months after this wild allegation, the LTTE disproved Anton Balasingham by chasing out the Muslims. Surely they would have resisted the LTTE if such a movement had existed.

Time has come to narrow down the gap between communities instead of widening. When speaking for an oppressed minority, leaders should refrain from antagonizing another minority which is victimized by both majority communities.

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<http://www.feer.com/essays/2009/march/colombos-secret-war-on-terror>

Colombo's Secret War on Terror

by Angilee Shah

Posted March 6, 2009

The Sri Lankan government is on the cusp of achieving what once seemed impossible. Its armed forces are crushing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on the battlefield, having pushed the rebels out of their northern

stronghold and surrounded them in a few coastal villages. The administration of President Mahinda Rajapaksa hopes that destroying the Tigers' organization will bring an end to the 26-year civil war that has claimed more than 70,000 lives.

But the president's own tactics make it difficult to imagine the peace holding. Far from healing racial tensions between the Tamil minority and Sinhalese majority populations, Mr. Rajapaksa has whipped up Sinhalese nationalism as part of his campaign against the Tigers. Credible accusations of human-rights abuses against the authorities suggest that after the war the same discrimination against Tamils that created the civil war in 1983 will persist.

This means the conflict will continue in another form, with Tamil separatists relying more on terrorist attacks rather than pitched battles. Terror has long played a big part in the war—the Tigers pioneered the use of suicide bombing, and have repeatedly struck at top government leaders even in the heavily guarded capital of Colombo. And the government will continue to respond in kind, using extrajudicial means to silence its opponents. The civil war is going underground.

#### The Second Front

Far from the headlines, the government is waging another, less well-publicized battle. The security forces are alleged to have ordered or been complicit in the disappearance, torture and murder of thousands of Sri Lankan citizens. Since the president was elected in 2005, Sri Lanka has consistently been short-listed as one of the world's worst human-rights abusers and one of the most dangerous places on the planet to be a journalist. For instance, in December the island was listed alongside Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan as a "red alert" country by the New-York based Genocide Prevention Project.

Mano Ganesan, a member of parliament representing the Colombo district, explains the government's second front in the war on terror this way: "In the name of wiping out terrorism, these government secret forces are systematically eliminating people for ethnic or political reasons." He says that in his district over the past three years, more than 350 people have disappeared, mostly Tamils and political dissidents. "What is prevailing in this country is state terrorism," Mr. Ganesan says. There have been no arrests and no convictions for these crimes. Government commissions of inquiry have been created but have been ineffectual.

In a 2007 statement, a United Nations Commission on Human Rights Working Group "expressed deep concern that the majority of new urgent action cases are regarding alleged disappearances in Sri Lanka." A year later, a March 2008 Human Rights Watch report described 99 cases of disappearances from around the island, and listed 489 more reported to Sri Lankan human-rights groups. In most documented cases, the report said, "there is sufficient evidence to suggest the involvement or complicity of the Sri Lankan security forces—army, navy, or police—in the 'disappearances.'"

At a January U.S. Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing, Human Rights Watch senior researcher Anna Neistat testified to the continued violations on the part of the government. People are going missing near government checkpoints and while being screened to enter sealed, government-run camps for internally-displaced people, she said. And if civilians are being detained by the police and military, there is no public record or notification given to the families of those who are

arrested and interrogated. The government, Ms. Neistat said, is making a "clear effort to cover its abuses."

Victims and their families are reluctant to be named on the record for fear of reprisals. For instance, a Tamil businessman asked not to be identified as he spoke about his experience being kidnapped in late 2006. He was abducted by a group of armed men in public and in plain view of Colombo's ubiquitous security details, forced at gunpoint into a white van, the favorite vehicle of Sri Lanka's death and disappearance squads. As they passed through the city's numerous checkpoints the van was never stopped. Instead, he says, it slowed only long enough for the soldiers and police manning their posts to salute the driver. He was held for 14 days in a small tent on what he describes as a "military base," where he was guarded by men in uniform, and was released only after his family paid a ransom of 25 million Sri Lankan rupees, roughly \$230,000.

Others report months of torture and beatings, amidst questioning about their alleged involvement with the Tigers. One young man, who was released in 2008 from the infamous Boosa detention camp, created because of an overflow of prisoners in Colombo's jails, remains despondent and in constant pain after suffering regular beatings over the course of five months. He says he was held under the provisions of Emergency Rule and never charged with any crime.

Many victims do not live to tell their stories. Before he was gunned down on his way to work earlier this year, Lasantha Wickrematunge was one of Sri Lanka's last remaining investigative journalists, and one of the few people to publicly speak out against the president's brother, Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In an interview late in 2007, just over one year before his assassination, Wickrematunge claimed that although the defense establishment has been very good at disguising its involvement, "there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence linking the defense secretary, the Defense Ministry, and in fact the government, to what's happening on the human-rights front: the disappearances, the abductions and some of the killings."

International observers say that the Rajapaksas are, at the very least, responsible for the lack of justice in these cases. Former U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka Jeffrey J. Lunstead told U.S. senators that the Rajapaksas' failure to investigate and prosecute these crimes sends a strong message that they are tacitly accepting the violence. "You don't have to give an order in that case," he explained.

The fact that these kinds of crimes are taking place inside the heavily fortified Sri Lankan capital is enough to give rise to conspiracy theories. Colombo is a labyrinth of police and army checkpoints. All major boulevards have been converted into one-way streets to make traffic easier to control and help security forces funnel vehicles into checkpoints. Even a foreign-passport holder cannot move more than a few kilometers at a time without being stopped, questioned, and sometimes searched by soldiers or police officers. So, as Wickrematunge asked, how is it possible for hundreds of people to go missing from this high-security city without a single kidnapper being detained?

Weeks before Wickrematunge was murdered, Gotabaya Rajapaksa sued him for defamation for articles published about an alleged kickback. The court issued an enjoining order, preventing the paper from publishing anything about the defense secretary as the case proceeds. In a self-penned obituary written before his murder and published by his paper, the Sunday

Leader, Wickrematunge addressed the president directly, writing, "In the wake of my death I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry. But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too. For truth be told, we both know who will be behind my death, but dare not call his name. Not just my life, but yours too, depends on it."

In a recent interview with the bbc, Gotabaya Rajapaksa denied responsibility for Wickrematunge's death. He dismissed the editor as "somebody who was writing for a tabloid," and told bbc reporter Chris Morris, "In the whole world there are murders. Why are you asking about Lasantha [Wickrematunge]? Who is Lasantha?" He went on to say that there are only two kinds of people in Sri Lanka, "the people who want to fight terrorism, and the terrorists." When asked if he thought that dissent and criticism were treasonous, he answered simply and sharply, "Yes."

### Gotabaya the Great

Sir Lankans on all sides of the political spectrum attribute the military's newfound success to Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Yet despite his crucial contribution to one of the most significant undertakings in Sri Lanka's history, the defense minister, who declined to comment for this story, remains mostly a mystery. A retired army major, he and his family moved to the United States in the early 1990s and settled in a Southern California suburb, where he worked initially as a clerk at a 7-Eleven convenience store and later found employment in his preferred field of information technology.

By the time his brother announced his presidential campaign in 2005, Mr. Rajapaksa was a UNIX administrator at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. His colleagues, who called him George or Georgie, describe him as hard-working and diligent. He was a well-organized and careful administrator who rode the bus 30 miles to and from work every day, and prayed every morning in front of the servers that they would stay up and running. On Sundays, he worked at a homeless shelter and worshipped at a local Buddhist temple.

Mr. Rajapaksa took a leave of absence to answer his brother's call for help on the campaign trail, and when his brother became the president, resigned from his Loyola Law School position. He first took up the second-in-command post at the ministry of defense, taking charge of the nation's army, air force, navy and police. To many Sri Lankans, he is now "Gotabaya the Great," a near savior who has put them on the cusp of defeating a group of thugs and murderers who have terrorized their country for over two decades.

Ananda Wickramasinghe, Sri Lanka's Consul General in Los Angeles, says Gotabaya Rajapaksa is still friendly and humble, a man who likes to take walks in the evening and is frustrated that the security situation in Colombo confines him to his home. He is extremely focused, though, and right now, "His only focus is the war," Mr. Wickramasinghe says.

But to many Tamil civilians, opposition politicians, independent journalists, and human-rights workers, Gotabaya Rajapaksa is a kind of bogey-man. People don't like to say his name aloud, opting instead—when they are willing to talk openly about him—to call him simply "the defense secretary." Mangala Samaraweera, the Rajapaksas' first foreign minister and a one-time advisor to Mr. Mahinda, paints the picture of a man obsessed with the destruction of the LTTE. "[Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his

brothers] see defeating the LTTE as the key to their political strength," he says. "They will stop at nothing to destroy Prabhakaran [and the Tigers]." Mr. Samaraweera was eventually dismissed from the president's cabinet. Soon after, he shifted his political allegiances and is now one of the most vocal leaders in the opposition party.

Ironically, it was the Tigers themselves who made possible President Rajapaksa's rise to power. He won election in 2005 by a narrow majority over the much more dovish Ranil Wickramasinghe after the Tigers boycotted the election and disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of people living under their control, voters who would have almost certainly cast their ballots for Mr. Wickramasinghe. There is a great deal of speculation over why the Tigers chose to help Mr. Rajapaksa win, but it is now very obvious that they underestimated him and his family.

Despite the controversy surrounding Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the human-rights violations he is alleged to have sanctioned, the world's focus mostly remains fixed on the government's conventional offensive against the Tigers. So far, the international community has had very little to say about Colombo's second front in its war on terror.

To many human-rights and policy experts, it seems as if the world is giving the Sri Lankan government a pass because it is so close to achieving a victory that will once and for all destroy the much-reviled Tamil Tigers. But when the government does rout the last of the LTTE's conventional fighting forces, it will be faced with what may prove to be an even greater set of challenges. In defeat, the Tamil Tigers are likely to return to their roots as a true guerrilla terrorist organization, striking from the shadows and hiding among civilian populations. It is then that this offensive's second front will become the major battlefield of the Sri Lankan civil war. This will more than likely mean more torture, more disappearances and more death.

Even if the world does want to get involved in Sri Lanka's uncertain future, it is not so easy. Sri Lanka does not have major geopolitical significance. The government maintains protectionist economic policies, is skeptical of foreign investment, and does not enjoy an abundance of any natural resources. Like the United States, the island is not a party to the International Criminal Court, so prosecuting its officials for the war crimes in the ICC is not possible. Given these obstacles, chances are slim that there will ever be justice for the thousands of Sri Lankan citizens who may have been tortured or killed by their government.

Another option may exist: At some point between managing a 7-Eleven and managing servers at Loyola Law School, Gotabaya Rajapaksa became an American citizen. If he is guilty of what the former foreign minister and so many others accuse him of, then he is indictable under U.S. law.

A Washington D.C.-based group, Tamils Against Genocide, has retained high-profile attorney Bruce Fein to seek these indictments. Mr. Fein submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice a 12-count model indictment against Gotabaya Rajapaksa and General Fonseka, a U.S. green card holder, under the Genocide Accountability Act, a 2007 law which allows criminal charges to be brought against U.S. nationals. The 1,000-page document, Mr. Fein says, chronicles 3,800 extrajudicial disappearances or killings since December 2005. As the leaders of the Sri Lanka's defense and security forces, Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Gen. Fonseka are responsible for the mass violence against Sri Lankan Tamils, according to Mr. Fein. The quest for national security, he says, should not include this kind of war. "It has

never been a defense to genocide that you are fighting terror," Mr. Fein says.

Sri Lankan officials deny these claims. Los Angeles Consul General Mr. Wickramasinghe says that there are inevitably costs to ending a long bloody conflict like Sri Lanka's. "Our troops are fighting with a terrorist organization that doesn't respect any laws in war," he says. "These are the casualties of the conflict. It takes a long time to reach peace."

Angilee Shah is a free-lance journalist based in Los Angeles. Reporting from Colombo, Singapore and Los Angeles for this story was made possible by a fellowship from the South Asian Journalists Association. This article was co-authored by a journalist who must remain anonymous for safety reasons.

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<http://www.frontline.in/stories/20090327260603600.htm>

Close encounters

B. MURALIDHAR REDDY  
in Colombo

The final phase of the war could be bloody and result in a refugee influx that the government does not seem equipped to handle.

ON the morning of March 3, the Sri Lankan military marched into Puthukkudiyirippu (PTK) junction, the last town under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in the Wannai. The Army's capture of PTK symbolises the end of the LTTE as a conventional force, which status it acquired in the aftermath of the departure of the last contingent of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in March 1990.

As of March 4, the LTTE is confined to some jungle pockets in Mullaithivu, which in terms of area would total less than 50 square kilometres, according to the military's assessment. Before the current phase of hostilities broke out in July/August 2006, it controlled an area of 15,000 sq km.

The territory is now just another statistic as the Sri Lankan military has almost completed the goals it set for itself before the commencement of what is referred to in media circles as "Eelam IV". The Mahinda Rajapaksa government vowed a "fight to finish", and is almost there. However, what continues to be a matter of grave concern is the fate of an estimated 70,000 civilians trapped in the areas still under the LTTE's control.

The estimate on the number of civilians has been a matter of debate for over six months. The LTTE has consistently maintained that the figure is above four lakhs. The United Nations and other international agencies projected a figure of 2.5 lakhs. The government contested both these figures as vastly exaggerated and estimated the number to be 75,000.

Neutral observers are now veering round to the view that the government figure appears more reliable. It is improbable for more than a lakh people to be present in LTTE-controlled territory, which is shrinking with every passing day. Whatever their number, the major concerns both within and

outside the island nation are about ensuring their safety and the provision of basic needs and their rehabilitation and resettlement in the long term.

These concerns become all the more grave when one considers the assessment that in the past few weeks the Tigers, consumed by a death wish, have begun to act like robots. An estimated 500 Tiger cadre have been cornered by 50,000 Sri Lankan troops, yet they show no signs of changing their tactics. Pleas to the LTTE to lay down arms and surrender to save precious lives have fallen on deaf ears.

The much-speculated revolt against the LTTE leadership or a split within the organisation's rank and file has not happened. There is no evidence to back up reports in a section of the Sri Lankan media that the LTTE leadership has put behind bars a group of its senior leaders who attempted to flee along with civilians.

Defence and political analysts in Colombo are baffled by the stubborn fight put up by the remaining cadre and leaders of the Tigers in the face of certain defeat. Several functionaries in the Rajapaksa government have, in recent days, gone on record as saying that the military can wipe out the Tigers in a matter of a day and the only obstacle is the presence of a large number of civilians. In this context, what is worrying is that the LTTE may be on a suicide mission to go down fighting to the last cadre and make history as a "martyr for the cause of a separate homeland for Tamils". In such an eventuality, would the Tigers care about the fate of the civilians?

Suicide mission

A glimpse into the current mindset of the LTTE leadership was available on the night of February 20 when it chose to send two of its light-wing aircraft on a suicide mission. Described as a "failed stunt" by the government, the targets of the venture were very ambitious - the Sri Lanka Air Force headquarters in the heart of the national capital and the air base at Katunayake in the vicinity of the international airport on the outskirts of Colombo. They crash-landed close to their targets, presumably after they came under fire from the military forces on the ground.

Imagine a scenario where even one of the aircraft had succeeded in its mission. The course of the war would not have changed, but the military would have possibly got a free hand to march into the remaining territory controlled by the Tigers and crush them without bothering about the collateral damage to civilians. If that had happened, the international community would have lost whatever little clout it had with Colombo in counselling optimum restraint in the conduct of the last phases of the war.

As if to leave no one in doubt, the LTTE not only owned up to the air strikes but also claimed them to be a "success". The pro-LTTE website, TamilNet, quoted a "news release" by the LTTE as saying that two aircraft of "Black Air Tiger" (suicide cadre) were on a "crash mission". The Tigers also released photographs of the two pilots, "Colonel" Roopan and "Lieutenant Colonel" Siriththiran, posing with LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran "before embarking on their mission".

"Both the Tamileelam air force pilots had earlier been decorated with Blue Tiger award for having carried out successful air raids on enemy targets," the website said. The tall claims of the Tigers apart, all that the LTTE could achieve through the ill-advised aerial forays was to embarrass the

government. The raids exposed the weaknesses in the defence preparedness of the military and achieved nothing more.

According to Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the troops close to PTK, the last remaining LTTE-held town at that time, passed on information about the two aircraft even before the radars detected them.

He said: "The LTTE may have used a straight road in their last stronghold for taking off as the outfit had lost all the airstrips to the troops during the past few months. The Tiger craft flew over Mannar and Wilpattu en route to Colombo. It was their normal route. The troops would have captured the LTTE planes within days, and the LTTE had acted before they lost the craft on the ground."

There was no explanation as to how the two light-wing aircraft managed to make their way from PTK to the heart of the national capital and come within metres of their purported targets. The Defence Ministry said each aircraft was loaded with explosives weighing 215 kg and added that the pilots failed to drop any bomb.

The Defence Ministry proudly proclaimed that the two LTTE-improvised, Czech-manufactured Zlin-143 aircraft were brought down by anti-aircraft fire within an hour of their detection. The first craft crashed into the rear of the building housing the Inland Revenue Department, opposite the Air Force headquarters, killing the pilot and two persons in the building, three storeys of which were damaged, and injuring 45, including two airmen. The body of the second pilot was found near the wreckage of the aircraft at Katunayake.

The air raids surprised political and diplomatic circles in Colombo, considering that on the day of the air raids the LTTE was confined to an area of less than 100 sq km.

Incidentally, the air raids coincided with the visit of Sir John Holmes, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinatory, for a first-hand assessment of the crisis triggered by the war. In the course of his interaction with the media, Sir John hinted at efforts by neutral parties to reach a settlement between the LTTE and the government for safe passage for the trapped civilians. In fact, President Rajapaksa told the U.N. envoy that the government would cooperate with any move to free the civilians caught in the war zone.  
U.N. envoy's concern

The meeting between Rajapaksa and Sir John followed the latter's travel to the temporary camps at Vavuniya. The U.N. envoy told the media that he was concerned about restrictions on the freedom of movement of the displaced and the presence of the military inside the camps, and urged the government to complete the registration process of the refugees at the earliest.

He appealed to the government and the LTTE to avert a "final bloodbath". Sir John said "deaths and more injuries" of civilians were taking place daily in the northern Wanni region. However, he concurred with Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe that it was difficult to make a distinction between civilians and Tiger cadre.

In a cheeky commentary, the TamilNet website accused the U.N. envoy of "whitewashing slaughter" by the government. It said: "Within a day of Human Rights Watch's damning report stating that 'Sri Lankan forces are

shelling hospitals and so-called safe zones and slaughtering the civilians there', the U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Sir John Holmes, went out of his way to avoid criticising the hard-line Mahinda Rajapaksa regime and instead praised the 'good cooperation' between the government and the U.N. agencies vis-a-vis the needs of the displaced Tamil population. Instead, he blamed the LTTE for the continuing suffering of the Tamil civilians in Mullaithivu."

In another feature on February 28, a day after Sir John gave the U.N. Security Council an account of his visit, TamilNet said: "The position taken by U.N. Security Council Friday indicating no go beyond 'hearing', and the considerate briefing of John Holmes largely endorsing and trusting Colombo's agenda and assurances for civilians, are read between the lines by international political observers as a 'knowing wink' at Colombo to pursue its offensive. Alternatively, the U.N. stance either paves way for intervention by interested powers outside of the U.N. or perhaps reveals an actuality that the U.N. can be shaken not when people face genocide, but only when ground realities endanger the Sri Lankan state."

Three days after the aerial raids, on February 23, the LTTE wrote to the Sri Lanka co-chairs (the United States, the European Union, Norway and Japan) arguing that it would not be helpful to pressure the Tigers to lay down arms and that it was ready to "cooperate" with the international community for a ceasefire "in the interest of the welfare of civilians".

LTTE offers ceasefire

The political head of the LTTE, B. Nadesan, urged the international community to effect a ceasefire and initiate a political solution as a priority rather than insist that the LTTE lay down arms.

In an appeal to the heads of the co-chair countries, he said: "When a permanent political solution is reached for the Tamil people, with the support and the guarantee of the international community, the situation will arise where there will be no need for the arms of the LTTE." The Sri Lankan government dismissed it as "hilarious".

There is no evidence to suggest that the LTTE is concerned about the safety and welfare of civilians in the war zone. The government is not prepared on the ground to deal with the internally displaced. Samarasinghe told the Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 3 that over 36,000 people trapped in the Wanniyambato had managed to escape the LTTE and flee the theatre of conflict. He added that they have been housed in 12 temporary accommodation centres and one welfare village that had all facilities.

"We will ensure that our fellow citizens will be provided not only with accommodation and food and sanitation facilities but also with a range of government services, including banks, post offices, schools, health and even recreational facilities, counselling and psychosocial care, and vocational training. These persons who flee the LTTE and arrive in safe areas will go through a gradual process of emergency care, accommodation, stabilisation and eventually resettlement," he told the council. "Model village"

However, the ground realities are far from satisfactory. A group of foreign and local media personnel who were flown in to the government "model village" on the outskirts of Vavuniya returned with the impression that the government was simply not geared to meet the gigantic task.

The government has been talking for months about its preparedness to accommodate the displaced in temporary camps. However, at the moment only one camp, which can accommodate 500 families, is ready. The rest are housed in schools and other public buildings. To give one example, minutes away from the model village, several hundred people are housed in a school. The visiting journalists were taken to the school after they insisted on looking at least one other facility. Each classroom in the school is packed with at least 40 persons. Their belongings are kept on benches along the walls.

The government is working on a project close to the model camp to create facilities to accommodate more people. The authorities are not sure how long it will take to complete the facility. On paper, the government is gearing up to accommodate 200,000 displaced people. Informed sources suggest that shortage of funds is a serious hurdle. There is no clarity at the moment on how long the people will stay in the camps. The government's argument is that it will take time to rebuild infrastructure and remove landmines before the people can return to their original places.

Chilling ordeal

The tales of those housed in the model village are chilling to say the least. For most of the families, it has been an unending ordeal since the latest round of hostilities between the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE broke out in March 2007.

Over a span of less than two years, some have been displaced at least a dozen times and are haunted by memories of sleepless nights spent in bunkers, constant bombardment and an uncertain future.

Reporters who visited the village heard horror tales of innocent citizens caught in the crossfire. The choice before them was the known devil, the Tigers, and the unknown deep sea, the military. Every one of the 500-odd families in the village has gone through more or less the same trauma. The worst nightmare for them was the possibility of forcible recruitment of their young boys and girls by the Tigers as the military began to corner them from mid-2008.

"We hid our boys and girls to avoid the fate suffered by hundreds of youngsters who were forcibly taken by the LTTE to the warfront after a short period of military training. The choice was either to die on the battlefield or to incur the wrath of the Tigers, who do not take kindly to anyone defying their orders," said a Jaffna University student who was stranded in Kilinochchi after the government shut down the A-9 Highway in August 2006.

The trust deficit is huge between the military and the displaced persons. So far, over 36,000 displaced persons have managed to cross over to government-controlled areas. They are housed in 17 camps in Vavuniya, Mannar and Jaffna districts and are anxious about the fate of their relatives stuck in the war zone. Some of them have relatives in Vavuniya, Mannar and Jaffna but have no way of communicating with them. With the military and the Tigers engaged in close confrontation, the flow of refugees in recent weeks has slowed down considerably.

"No outsider is allowed into the village, which has been fenced with barbed wire and is tightly guarded by the military. There's not a single telephone here. I've not heard from my daughter and son held up in the LTTE-controlled area. I hope and pray they come out alive," a teacher from

Kilinochchi district told journalists in a choked voice.

The Government Agent in Vavuniya defended the restrictions on the plea that it was in the interest of their safety. "It's not detention. We're keeping them in the safest area," she said. At the moment only those above the age of 60 are being allowed out, and the government hopes eventually to ease the restrictions for everyone, she said.

"Until we finish the screening, to ensure that LTTE cadre have not infiltrated in the garb of refugees, and complete the registration process we cannot take chances," the Government Agent argued.

The people in the village yearn desperately to return to their homes and re-establish contact with family members and relatives but know that the prospect of that happening soon is bleak. The only consolation is that the "model village" has at least a tin shed with minimum facilities for each family.

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<http://www.island.lk/2009/03/18/midweek2.html>

Closing the Circle: Revisiting Amarasekara

by Liyanage Amarakeerthi

Gunadasa Amarasekara turned 80 last year. In an attempt to re-evaluate him as a writer, his publisher has named this year "the year of revisiting Amarasekara". But Dr. Amarasekara is more than a writer. He is one of most influential and authentic intellectuals of our time.

Book publishers come up with various projects to promote their publications and to keep their business going and growing. Even Cumaratunga Munidasa's grandson, the owner of Visidunu Publishers, is bound by this logic of business. Therefore, regardless of the fact that Gevindu Kumaratunghe is an intellectual in his own right, the project of re-evaluating Amarasekara is primarily a business venture, perhaps to keep his books in print for some more years to come. Other than the publisher, any of Amarasekara's ideological children who are key players in various Sinhala nationalist or racist organisations, have not shown any keen interest in seriously assessing the Amarasekara oeuvre. The intellectual or the businessman in the owner of Visidunu, however, is initiating a dialogue all of us must engage in: rethinking Amarasekara Chinthanaya, which is often taken to be "Jathika Chinthanaya."

Amarasekara is an authentic intellectual. All that means is that he is deeply engaged with his chosen community, Sinhala Buddhist people and, during the last few decades, Amarasekara has influenced nearly all cultural and political discourses of his people. There is no other local intellectual who shaped the thinking of radical Sinhala youth during that time as much as Amarasekara. A student of medicine from Lumumba University, named Wijeweera, and a dentist from the University of Ceylon, named Amarasekara, were two of the most significant people trying to cure social maladies of Sinhala society. In fact, Amarasekara spent about four decades trying to stuff Wijeweera's Marxist head - taking Wijeweera as a symbol of many others- with 'national thought' (Jathika Chinthanaya), and in the process, one could argue, Amarasekara effectively destroyed a courageous challenger to the Sri Lankan state if not the status quo of the

Sinhala South (JVP did not challenge all the aspects of the status quo).

Rare authenticity

Yet Amarasekara is an authentic intellectual. Our universities, political parties and NGOs have not been able to produce such an intellectual. For whatever reason, the university has failed to produce engaging and original thinkers. Some are engaging but not original while some are original but hardly engaging. In some rare occasions those two qualities joined together in some of our brilliant scholars, but even those people had very little connection with the masses and their politics. To put it briefly, there is no one in the university whose stature as a public intellectual equals that of Amarasekara. Of late, mainstream political parties have not been intellectual centres at all. The publications coming out of them suggest that there is no real thought-provoking dialogue inside those parties. Ironically, almost all political parties do have individuals of high intellectual status even though they have not been able get their respective parties to engage in intellectual debates.

NGOs are, almost by nature, intellectual centres attracting the most radical thinkers in the country. But only a few of NGO operatives could be called authentic. Writing mainly in English, they could not really reach out to the monolingual masses. Therefore, some of them sound like highly paid parrots talking to themselves in an unknown tongue, living in comfortable cages.

Only a few among those intellectuals could deeply respond to or engage with literature and art produced by Sinhala-speaking people- to focus on my own native language group. The bilingual intellectuals associated with NGOs are more or less ignorant or cynical of Sinhala literary and works of art. Situation in the Tamil community is said to be better, Tamil intellectuals being truly 'bilingual' and developing deep connections with Tamil language cultural worlds. I am still to see, however, a Partha Chatterjee or a Dipesh Chakrabarty, who are equally at home in post-structuralist theory and Bengali pre-modern and modern literature, among the Sri Lankan English-speaking class(es). Without genuine and authentic connections with vernacular cultural life, some important work by NGO intellectuals had very little impact on the masses. In addition, their failure to produce a sustained critique of LTTE violence during the last three decades even created a certain resentment of them among the masses. Of course, some NGO intellectuals were systematically vilified by loud-mouthed nationalists, such as Gunadasa Amarasekara. But had they had some genuine connections with ordinary folk, such vilifications would not have been easy.

Gunadasa Amarasekara has been truly authentic compared to many of those 'funded' intellectuals. His being effective has more to do with his authenticity than with the accuracy of his thought. His Jathika Chinthanaya has ended up creating a kind of cultural relativism that easily translates into something like, "Humans in this country are only Sinhala Buddhists." That cultural relativism, instead of producing any Buddhist science or Buddhist theory of development, which takes the planet earth as our co-being rather than a bundle of nature to be mastered by modernity, has resulted in producing hypocritical middle class consumerists as social beings and racists as political beings. Consumerism and racism nicely synthesise in Sri Lanka's new Buddhist.

"Good luck to you, Dr. Amarasekara"

There is another legacy of Amarasekara's Jathika Chinthanaya: many children of 1956 turned their own inabilities into a form of Jathika Chinthanaya. For example, those who do not know any language other than Sinhala elevated their monolingualism into a form of being "Jathika." These days universities are full of those 'national thinkers.' Some others who are afraid of engaging with the most serious thinkers of our time argue that the Buddha has taught us everything we need. According to them, Jataka Pota is enough, and we do not need Derrida's Grammatology or Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge, for example. The Jataka Pota, to be sure, is a very good book. But it is hardly enough. Those who claim that The Jataka Book is enough cannot read Derrida or Foucault and they cannot deal with such rigorous thought, so they disguise their inability as Jathika Chinthanaya. One cannot begin to describe how the sublimation of mediocrity has destroyed this country. Thousands that surround Amarasekara are such "national thinkers." About Amarasekara's voyage with these fellows I can only say this: "Good luck to you, Dr. Amarasekara".

Those who really can engage with Amarasekara are the ones who are called, of course by Amarasekara himself, "enemies of the nation", "agents of the West" and "imitators of the West". Over the years Amarasekara has successfully taught his followers such name-calling which shuts down any form of intellectual dialogue.

My Wittgenstein, of course he is Western, has taught me that conversation is the essence of humanity. An entire school of mediocre 'thinkers,' masquerading as national thinkers, (Jathika Chinthakayas) is constantly at work to rid our society of genuine conversation. In any institution; including the private sector, the people of average skills and knowledge are the most nationalist calling any innovative and energetic person "non-nationalist". For these disciples of the Jathika Chinthana school, being productive and creative means being Western. Therefore, those who have done nothing substantial for the Sinhala nation are the most vocal defenders of it. Rajitha Dissanayake's new play, "Apahu Herenna Bee", beautifully depicts certain qualities of these "friends" of the nation. I hope very much that Dr. Amarasekara will live long enough to see the destruction his theories have resulted in. And I hope the poet in him will still be honest on that day to regret his mistake.

The critique is worthwhile only when the critiqued is authentic. Amarasekara is such an influential writer that it is always rewarding to disagree with him. In reading his best short stories, I find myself agreeing with him too. His brilliance as a writer manifests itself in his mid-career stories included in 'Ekatamen Polowata', 'Ekama Kathawa' and 'Katha Pahak'. In them, Amarasekara critically evaluates Sri Lanka's postcolonial citizen without any overt ideologically leanings. After those stories, Amarasekara the thinker begins to overshadow the creative writer in him and before long literature becomes his surgical knife to cut open various 'enemies and friends' of the nation. Even in some those ideologically-motivated literary works there are some moments of brilliance but after the late 1980s Amarasekara becomes increasingly predictable as a writer and his artifice becomes obvious and fails to surprise. They are ideas without delight.

One of my favorites of Amarasekara's stories happens to have a title that signifies a turning point in the writer's career: "Etamen polowata nohot Upadi Dhariniya". Roughly translated the title means: "Down to Earth from the Ivory Tower or A Female Graduate." The collection which includes the story, marks Amarasekara's revolt against what he calls, "Peradeni literature". I often use this story in my lectures on postcolonial

literature for it is a fine portrayal of what colonial education does to people.

Education is an important social leveller. But in many postcolonial situations, education only introduces a new kind of stratification and hierarchy that prevents truly human relationships among people. Nimala, the graduate in the story finds her true 'soul mate', the most interesting conversation partner in Siripala, the bus conductor. In a world without any social stratification, these two would have made an ideal couple. Failing to enter the university, Siripala ends up becoming a bus conductor, but he is an avid reader and perceptive connoisseur of literature - particularly of the major works of the Sinhala literary resurgence of postcolonial Sri Lanka. When she meets Siripala again on the bus to a school where she works as a voluntary teacher, for she is still an unemployed graduate, their old friendship rekindles through a series of conversations on modern Sinhala literature. During these conversations she finds out that Siripala, the conductor, is a far superior reader and a much better human being. Their reunion thus grows into a warm relationship.

Before long, Nimala's ivory tower mentality creeps back in reminding her that the graduate is far superior to a mere bus conductor. What would have been a great union of human beings ends abruptly, imprisoning the girl in her 'tower.' The story is not only about what education does to people in post colonial Sri Lanka, but is also a critique of 'so-called people's literature' in which the love would have won against all socio-cultural odds. In addition, the story is an implied critique of 'Peradeni literature' which often idealizes liberal humanism.

Another brilliant story, "Kalanidhi hewath Pachaweda" (Kalanidhi or the Fake Doctor), juxtaposes a student of Western medicine and a 'student' of indigenous medicine in such a way that the story becomes a fine analysis of what happens to natives and their knowledge systems when colonial knowledge presents itself as 'naturally' superior. This is only one reading of this richly layered story.

The most fertile period in the history of the realist short story easily belongs to Amarasekara and in many ways he is way ahead of other writers of his generation. Amarasekara's stories are unique in their structure as well since the author had very little regard for notions like "unity of impression", "slice of life" and the like and his stories are not sketchy 'short shorts.' Quite rightly, his search for 'human truth' is always predicated upon a certain historic truth. Amarasekara, the fiction writer provides invaluable insights into Sri Lanka's postcolonial condition and those insights are far more illuminating than anything Amarasekara the ideologue preaches.

After a series of wonderful stories like these ones, Amarasekara's stories became rather one dimensional and less nuanced. His textual space ceased to be animated by what I would call 'artistic indeterminacy'- a quality abundant in Ajith Tilakasena's stories. But still all the way up to his 'Vila Langa Maranaya' (2007) Amarasekara uses narrative to engage with postcolonial Sri Lankan citizens, often implying that this citizen fails because he/she lacks 'Jathika Chinthanaya'. For me, Sri Lanka's true national quality has to be found in its rich diversity- not in an unbroken Sinhala- Buddhistness. There are many ways of being Sinhala and Sri Lankan. In addition, it is impossible to recover the pure Sinhala person who 'got lost' in a confluence of other cultures; that moment of past purity is a creation of the present and when we look behind the layers of

time what we see is yet another meeting of many cultures, thought and modes of being. If there is any cultural 'essence', it is always in the making, shifting and shaping itself making it impossible to pin down the essence. For one thing, the essence is no longer the essence when we find it. Another thing, a country needs a bunch of Pol Pots to launch the political project of recovering that essence. Our country has had enough of bloodbaths and this era must end.

End of an era

Sri Lanka's 'Sinhala only youth' have learned so much from Gunadasa Amarasekara but when the great writer turns 80, a dramatic epoch in our history ends by making it essential for us to rethink Amarasekara's thinking. Ideologies of people like Amarasekara enjoy unprecedented state power these days and Amarasekara seems to be the 'ideological president' of the country. Stupidly ugly words that he speaks of people like Premasiri Khemadasa show that he enjoys being close to state power. When certain ideologies enjoy state power it is time for people to expedite the critique of them. State is a violent machine that needs to be checked all the time. To do so is a progressive act, and in doing so, one must critique ideologies of the state. It is said that the 'total military defeat of the LTTE' is just a few weeks away. At least after that we need to remind ourselves that Sri Lanka is an extremely diverse country where multiple modes of thought or 'Chinthanayas' coexist, and there is no one 'Chinthanaya' or one basa". Our generation has the challenge of finding the best 'structures' that simultaneously nourish many thoughts, many modes, many voices, and so on.

In order to do so, we need to take a closer look at what is hidden under the blanket of nation. Under that is quite unpleasant. Everything under that big blanket cannot and should not go on without reform. Under the blanket, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened. New forms of stratification have come to being, while old ones are reproducing themselves. Under the cover of nation, many thieves have robbed their way into 'nobility' and power. New nobodies have become new some bodies.

Almost all the institutions on which true democracy should rest have been politicized and manned by corrupt brats of 1956. People like Amarasekara have not been able to produce a sustained critique of these things for they are busy saving the nation. It is like Spielberg's 'Saving Private Ryan'; once it is saved nothing worthwhile is left. Therefore, the future of Sri Lanka partly depends on the way we unlearn what Amarasekara has taught us over the years. We must do that unlearning with a sense of gratitude.