

# Lankans' dialogue with deputy speaker in London. (1994, October 21). *The Island*.

THE ISLAND  
21. 10. 94

## Lankans' dialogue with deputy speaker in London

On the evening of September 20, the Sri Lankan High Commissioner Gen. Cyril Ranatunga hosted his last interaction dialogue programme between the representatives of Sri Lankan Associations in the UK and the High Commission officials. This was the fourth meeting, of this nature, to have a two way dialogue between the Sri Lankan government and the Lankan Community in the UK. The inter-action programme, which was Gen. Cyril Ranatunga's brain child, has produced good results within his short, one year period of service in London where many school books to Sri Lankan children were sent along with medical equipment, drugs etc. worth £ 150,000 as a direct consequence of the close liaison work between him and the Sri Lankan fraternity living in Britain.

His last group meeting was graced by a VIP from Colombo, Mr. Anil Moonasinghe, the new Deputy Speaker. Activities of the evening concentrated entirely on a "question and answer session" rather than long drawn speeches. The deputy speaker was showered with a variety of questions, ranging from Air Lanka Airbus deal & alleged commissions thereof, dual nationality, the possibility of expatriates to contribute to mother Lanka by going & working there; high cost of new passport fee & the most current and sensitive question of the ethnic problem.

Amidst a mixed

gathering of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim the temperature of the hall too rose at various stages along with some individuals' emotions, during the question time. On the question of "withdrawing the Army from the North & East", Mr. Moonasinghe stressed that there must be a base to do so. In the Northern Province the LTTE did not allow any one to work in Jaffna he said and "how can you withdraw an army when there seems to be a civil war within a civil war in the northern province", he posed.

"Of course the present government wants to settle this matter and that's why we have shown our bona fides by releasing various banned items such as food, medicines etc., but when the government has swiftly acted in good faith the answer Mr. Prabhakaran has given unfortunately is by destroying a Naval Vessel belong to the Sri Lankan government and killing Sinhalese soldiers", he lamented.

"Cease fire is not an unilateral act but it has to come from both sides" he reminded. To achieve this he said we must discuss and agree on modalities and the first thing in the agenda should be peace. Today doctors are not prepared to work in the North or East because of there is unrest, and it is the people in Jaffna, therefore, who have been suffering; people are not allowed to get out of Jaffna and Prabhakaran does not allow any other political group to survive in Jaffna & they do not seem to like the democratic

process.

This is the prevalent situation today in the North and the answer should be to bring about a political solution to put an end to all these. Similarly as a democratic country, we have to respect the wishes of the people of the South too and if we are to announce today that we are going to withdraw the forces, there will be a revolution in the South tomorrow, he emphasised.

Therefore if the LTTE really wants to have a political dialogue and to suggest what they really want, this is the most opportune moment for them, but if they were to ask for a separate state, I am sure, no Sri Lankan government will ever allow that, he continued.

Asked about the possibilities which existed for a peace solution, Mr. Moonasinghe went on to say that the Government was already working on it and restoration of electricity power to Jaffna was another attempt. "Mr. Thondaman too has come out with a peace formula but I am not certain whether Mr. Thondaman's peace formula would be palatable to the LTTE". Mr. Moonasinghe repeated over and over again the words, "we are prepared to discuss and see what political solutions are feasible to end this long drawn problem."

In reply to a question as to how the Government should pressurise Prabhakaran to come to a peace settlement, Mr. Moonasinghe said he could only think of stopping all financial aid going to the LTTE

from the West. Quoting an experience he has had during his visit (en route to London) in Copenhagen where he stayed with a Tamil

cliation, Mr. Sriharan, paid a glowing tribute to Prime Minister Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge for identifying the pre-

been made to send the much loved former GA of Jaffna, Mr. Walter Fernando to meet Prabhakaran.

This is the informa-

### by Tilak Fernando in London

family, he explained how the LTTE had exported Rs. 150,000 from them to release a family member from Jaffna and a second demand for a similar sum for a second member. This is the situation Tamil people from Jaffna face today he said. In the South of Sri Lanka there is no such problem, any Tamil can walk about freely, live freely and buy house and property freely but can Sinhalese go beyond Trincomalee if posed (to a loud applause) and said these are the questions you should ask.

Mr. Moonasinghe said a lot of coloured misinformation, to suit their own ends by various Tamil organisations have been filtering through to the world at large which have undoubtedly given a completely wrong picture altogether. "Once I had to explain about two hours to a Secretary of the Senator Kennedy in the USA, he said, to convince her that there was no genocide in Sri Lanka. He pointed an accusing finger at the information agents of the Government in foreign countries who are not being effective and powerful in contrast with their Tamil opponents for such a debate."

A moderate Tamil, and the President of the Tamil Lawyer's Asso-

sent situation as an 'ethnic problem' and giving a firm commitment to end this dispute. "I have a great respect for her because she was the only leader who has gone to the people without instigating the anti-Tamil sentiment; she had the courage to go to the people and say that she was going to solve the North East problem". "I have equally the greatest respect for the Sinhalese masses in the South, West and the Central Province who have given Mrs. Kumaratunge the mandate to solve the problem", he added.

Quoting a Tamil psychiatric consultant, Daya Somasundaram, who had been working in Jaffna, Mr. Sriharan said 'you have to set your mind to peace to have peace and if you set your mind to war then the war will continue'.

Updating with upto the minute, information from Sri Lanka, much to the surprise of all those who had attended, including the High Commission officials, Mr. Sriharan said (at 7 p.m.) "Mrs. Kumaratunge had convened a meeting today at the Temple Trees at 5 p.m. inviting various sections, including the ethnic minority members of parliament and arrangements had

tion I have got this evening" Mrs. Kumaratunge has taken an additional portfolio as

the Minister of Ethnic Affairs and national integrity because she has the courage to work on a project which will integrate all nationals", he said, "especially when there is a new generation of Tamils in Jaffna who have not seen a Sinhalese man in their life".

Referring to the bombing of the Naval

vessels on 20th September, Sriharan said that isolated incidents like forces killing ten Tigers the previous week at Palalali were bound to take place because there was no official cease-fire as yet, and, "we must not look at these and say they are Prabhakaran's work" he affirmed. "Let me tell you what

Prabhakaran has done during the last four days, he has contacted his regional commandos and explained to them the present climate, why he concentrated on a peace settlement and why he is going to negotiate for peace and a political settlement because it is only Prabhakaran who can bring peace to Jaff-

na", he concluded.

When Mr. Moonasinghe was drawing parallels with the CTB during his days as Chairman and how efficiently he improved the Board, a question was raised in lighter vein as to why he did not take up the Ministry of Transport. He simply smiled and said, "I did not ask for anything."