
After the War - What Next?

Tuesday, 28 July 2009

Last Updated Tuesday, 28 July 2009

Excerpts from a symposium held on the National Question : Manjari Peiris The mistake of making Sinhala only the official language lost the support among the Sinhala people on one side and the Tamil people on the other side. Dr. N. M. Perera and another leader and the Left Movement in general which espoused the cause of Tamil too, saw how racism came up in our country and we have witnessed the consequences thereafter, said Leader of the LSSP and the Minister of Science and Technology Professor Tissa Vitarana.

He added: Had Dr. N. M. Perera been alive today he would have wanted us very much to see that there is no recurrence of what had adopted earlier. Is there a danger of such a recurrence? There is! It is unfortunate that the successful war against separatism and terrorism which has resulted in the military defeat of the LTTE is being considered by some people as a sufficient guarantee of the unity of our country as one Sri Lankan people and is getting together as one Sri Lankan people. "I think we have to be realistic and face the truth. Following the loss of confidence over the language issue, the Tamil people had to face the problems that occurred in the period 1977, 1983 which culminated in Black July about which we are all familiar and about which we are all deeply sad." In that situation innocent Tamil people were murdered brutally and their property was destroyed just because they were Tamils was the Black Chapter in the history of our country. It ultimately resulted in military struggle of the Tamil people to set up a separate state - a Tamil Eelam as a part of our country where they could live in safety and also be able to develop their culture and their economy, under their own leadership. Professor Vitarana pointed out that this need had not disappeared just because the LTTE was militarily defeated. "We have to remember that in 1987 with the introduction of the 13th Amendment for the first time into our Constitution, the principle of devolution of power to provinces that had caused all other militant groups; there were close to 10 militant groups who had taken up arms against the state to give up the arms, because they felt that devolution of power was an adequate solution to their problems. We have a situation where even the 13th Amendment is not being properly implemented." "What is the message that is going from the country to the world? Is it to tell those people who gave up arms at that time on the basis of the 13th Amendment, we are not going to implement the 13th Amendment. Isn't that an invitation for them to go back to arms?" He elaborated; We have a situation where the President, in his own election manifesto in the Mahinda Chinthanaya clearly stated that the source of the problem was political as such there had to be a political solution. It was for this reason that he set up an All Party Conference and said that he would implement the suggestions that came out of the All Party Conference. The implementation of the 13th Amendment would be sending of the correct signal. The proposals of the APRC, need to be implemented, but will take time. Therefore we have to send the right signal to those Tamil people and convince them that after the defeat of the LTTE, that they can be assured that they will get their due rights in our country as equal citizens. Power The whole society has been brutalized of the way in which the problem was manifested. So we have to repair that situation, come out of that with a clear program where the immediate needs of the affected people such as their housing, food supply, water supply etc. are provided; we must go beyond and empower them. Power has to be shared both at the centre and the peripherals so that we may really build up one Sri Lankan nation. This is really the situation that is confronting us," Professor Vitarana concluded. If the correct decision had been made by politicians at that time, including the Tamil leaders, Dr. N. M. Perera would have taken over the reigns of the country; it would have been a very prosperous one then, said, V. Anandasangaree - former Member of Parliament from Kilinochchi, President of the Tamil United Liberation Front, General Secretary of the Democratic Tamil National Alliance and former Member of the LSSP. When NM was holding the portfolio of Finance, he allowed only three Pounds exchange to go out of the country. Within a short period the country regained its position in the international field. Everybody started appreciating what he had done earlier. That is the type of a leader that we had! He was a man who thought the country as one and not as two or three. The Government defeated the Tigers or the terrorism not alone, but with the support of everybody. You all know that the amount of contribution made by me for the eradication of terrorism in this country, Mr. Sangaree said. Everyone in this country had suffered. No one could walk on the street freely, in this country a couple of months back. I think now we are free from these troubles. If we are to live as free as we want in a peaceful country, the role that everyone plays is vital. Let us forget differences among us whether communal or otherwise or religious. Let us work towards building one united nation! How do we get a united country? By treating everyone equally as said by Dr. N. M. Perera. We all feel that we are equals, no one is superior to the other, and no one is inferior to the other either. All the rights enjoyed by one should be enjoyed by everybody. That is how I and our great leader looked at it! The children who had been forcibly taken and detained for training should not be treated as LTTE cadre; they are innocent people and should be released as early so that they can go to school. The things that I appreciate about the LSSP were that firstly in my recollection it was the only political party that did not exploit ethnicity to gain power. In fact it was one of the few parties that were able to treat all ethnic groups with dignity. It was also a party that had great passion for the working class, but I suspect the passion was more for the urban working class and this could have been one of the reasons as to why the LSSP did not continue to make its impact. There was the caliber of leadership, wise and informed men and women with integrity, said Bishop of Colombo, Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera. Cultures He added; "Various people have set down to analyze why the LSSP has come down, what it is today. I don't know whether to class it a failure or whether to suggest that there has been some inability to appeal to the nation." We have to strive from where we are towards an integrated, united, just reconciled nation that recognizes its pluralism; we are a people of many cultures, many ethnic groups, and several religions. The war is over; what next? Firstly we have to respond to certain physical challenges - the crisis of IDPs. Certainly that is not the most important crisis that the country is facing today. But it is an important crisis and we must be careful when we read the headlines not to allow the IDP crisis to call the diversion from other fundamental issues that the people of this country had been called to struggle against. The position that the Government has taken in

security screening is acceptable, but it must be done professionally and speedily; people must be arrested in broad daylight so that people know that an arrest is being made. People feel that one has to wait till the whole process is over for re-settlement and rehabilitation to begin. What we need is a concurrent process. People in IDP camps have got to be screened, released in batches and must go back to their villages, returned to their own schools, their temples, their churches, their livelihoods. The resettlement process must be seen as a contribution towards the productivity not just of the Vanni, but of the whole country as well. Resources Like the Sinhalese, Muslims, the Tamil community is a resourceful community and we must not only recognize the human resources, but support the contribution that it can make no matter how small towards the economic growth and stability of this country. In the process of "decommissioning for wars", soldiers must also be assisted to return to normalcy as against fighting a war. Men and women of the Armed Forces who have lost certain opportunities must be given a chance to qualify to pass examinations and to follow the dreams of their hearts. The nation has still not come to terms with those who have died. Over the years particularly during this war so many Sri Lankans had died and killed each other. We have a culture where death occurs, there is community solidarity that is expressed and people come together to mourn. We know that the Tamil community in this country had increasingly felt alienated. If you want to attack Tamil militants, you must have surveillance over the Tamil community. Strengthening of democratic institutions like a free media, independent judiciary or police force is absolutely essential. When we conduct conflict resolution workshops sometimes within the churches, inter-faith with brothers and sisters of other religions, we ask children and usually about the age of OLTs to give us a solution to the problem. Whether they are Sinhala, Tamil or Muslims they always get it right finding a solution to the problem. This must be a country in which we treat others with dignity and all equal before the law. If school children get it right, the politicians must get it right. The problem is the process that is where different agendas content with each other. Who is responsible for the process are political leaders. That's why we elect them. Solution to the problem will be somewhat entrenched in our constitution. That will reduce the anxiety of certain minorities in this country. All sound religions condemn killing and death, will stand with the vulnerable and the poor, will preach forgiveness and reconciliation, will talk about unity in diversity. We have different backgrounds and skills and contributions to make, but we can all stay together united in this country. What sound religions speak about and offer is something that the political leadership of this country must accept as a challenge. "The Left has made a big sacrifice in the past so that it's entitled to be heard during the language debate, communal riots, and periods of interrogations. During the long period when the Left leaders of the North were systematically assassinated by the LTTE for no other reason that they belonged to the Communist party or to the LSSP" said Minister of Public Administration and Home Affairs, Dr. Sarath Amunugama. He added: Not for their political records, but simply because through the left they were providing an alternative vision. This is the time for people who have made sacrifices to make their ideas known. Most of the people who are talking about what should be done next are the people who have not made any sacrifice whatsoever in terms of the political conflict for the last 30 years. We have to examine in terms of this heritage what should be the attitude of the people in varying forms and political parties who share this common human and humane concern as to how we should view the future. It is already enshrined in our Constitution, that every Sri Lankan citizen irrespective of his ethnicity, other particular distinct characteristics are entitled to equal recognition and treatment in terms of all those constitutional guarantees that are by common consent enshrined in our constitution. Tradition We should stand up for not what we think right, but what is right because that is the human and liberal tradition of thought. When we address these questions, what is important is to clarify from what advantage for it we are looking at these problems and the tradition which helps us to accept no other solution, but that of equality of all people for which as if not mentioned there had been a long struggle of humanity. We should be able to manage these different concerns in terms of much practical decision making with different ethnic groups, communities, perspectives, fears, approaches, etc. Politics is a question of compromise and management, except for a few people like, NM and Philip Goonewardena was not widely recognized by the left of that time. We saw it in terms of rigid ideological positions and could not move to understand the bigger social forces that were creating this type of conflict at that particular period. The first thing we have to create in this country is a realistic approach to the ethnic issue on the basis of the radical and liberal traditions which are very important. The debate on questions of federalism nobody other than the LSSP have that most rhetoric attack of federalism which is found in the Hanzard. No way were they going to compromise on the sovereignty or unfettered rights of Parliament. This has to be qualified by thinking that at that time the question of the devolution process or the devolution of power as a solution to regionalism was not very much in the intellectual horizon of that time. It was a later development. The question of unit of devolution has been solved. My view right through has been that the North and the East should be two different Provincial Councils. The Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are working pretty well there. Very many people try to sweep under the carpet if that there had never been a permanent jointer of the North and the East. Nothing in the Indo-Lanka accord or in the legislation that followed in Parliament in the 13th Amendment speaks of a permanently joint North and East. Powers must be given at one point with the touch of a button or concurrence. Certain co-powers can be devolved immediately and others can be done over a period through experience and so on. We need not be pessimistic, a lot of good work has been done and we are much closer to a realistic solution than we were two or three months ago. One of the tragedies of the ethnic conflict was that we were never able to realize our real economic potential because of this unfortunate conflict. China and India which were considered very backward in regard to economic growth have been pushing the global growth from 4-5%. People spoke contemptuously of the Hindu rate of growth or Buddhist rate of growth 2-1%, but with the new reforms in China because of the Communist Party there were 4 modernizations, viz. modernized agriculture, industry, army and science and technology. China has got a superb growth of over 10 percent of GDP over 5 or 6 consecutive years. We did too badly - around 6-7 percent growth. I feel the whole of Sri Lanka on a growth path may have very close to a 10percent growth; partly we spent on arms and the war, we have a negative growth that way and that we don't have enough agriculture, irrigation, productivity. Productive If both ends were made productive, we

could have gained a 10 percent growth. Very few people realize the interrelationship particularly between the Eastern province and the Central Province. It is lunatic to talk of East separately. The full irrigation development of the Eastern Province which is the mega major agricultural sector in Sri Lanka depends from water from the Central Province. All the dams are in the Central Province. President Mahinda Rajapaksa is a strong believer in the radical tradition of no discrimination whatsoever in this country. It is the strongest legacy that the Left has in this country. The Government is dedicated to investing in the future. When Mr. Bandaranaike brought in a law that Sinhala only shall be the official language in 1956 did the greatest damage and divided our country in 1956. On the day in 1956 the Sinhala Only Act was passed and the Tamil Members of Parliament walked across Galle Road sat down at Galle Face Green and had a peaceful sitting. It was a symbolic protest because the entire Tamil population who has worked for this country was wiped out. Half an hour later Sinhala people attacked them. Even Buddhist monks did the same thing. former MP Managala Moonesinghe said. There are good Buddhist monks but I don't consider who take politics as good Buddhist monks. Then the rift widen. As the years went by the 1958 riots took place. Why did the riots take place? They obliterated all the Tamil signs, both public and private. The UNP Government in 1970 had a group of Ministers with different views, utterly racist pro Sinhala and anti Tamil. It was the beginning of the conflict. They held elections for the District Councils, took some Party thugs and there was no democratic election where they pilfered ballot boxes and won it. Pact It was the turning point. Tamil youth thought enough is enough. Then in 1958 Mr. Bandaranaike entering into a pact with Mr. Chelvanayagam and wanting to implement the reasonable use of Tamils and giving pride of place to Tamils including language, the UNP in opposition protested in a march to Kandy. The racist Sinhala people and Buddhist monks surrounded Mr. B's residence and demanded that the B-C Pact be torn up. He tore it up. A few years later when Dudley Senanayake and the UNP came back to power the SLFP was in opposition. The UNP also wanted to do the same thing as it felt it was unfair by a large section of our Tamil population. It engaged in an agreement with Mr. C. to bring a reasonable use of Tamil. Then the SLFP who originally proposed this summoned all its political leaders and started a march from Viharamahadevi Park right up to Parliament and protested. Thereafter Mr. Dudley Senanayake was also weakened. So there was no place for Tamil. What is the signal we give to the major Sinhala political parties? - You will get nothing as long as the Sinhala people rule this country. The youth were disgusted even with their own political leaders and took to militancy. Prabhakaran wiped out all the Tamil militant youth and Tamil political leadership, those who were in the main stream. We are responsible for the suffering we went through for the last 25 years. Dr. Colvin R. de Silva said one language, two countries and two languages, one country. That's what the LSSP taught the people. Now we are faced with What Next? Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and three Service Commanders worked in an excellent manner, planned and pursued this conflict to bring about Prabhakaran's end. The LTTE which was the most ruthless and fearsome and internationally organized terrorist outfit was destroyed in three years. No other government or Army leader has been able to do that. In 2007 the Army in advancing camp after camp, destroyed LTTE camps. They took over its capital - Killinochchi moved and confined this fearsome outfit to a small area of land. Before that the Army took over the Eastern Province where the LTTE ruled and they were driven out. Elections were immediately held to bring civil administration there. The Eastern Province is going to be one of the most important and developed provinces. When elections took place the international community felt that here is the chance to support peace and reconstruction.Courtesy: Dailynews.lk