

review

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

Vol.1, No.3

Our wounded civilization:

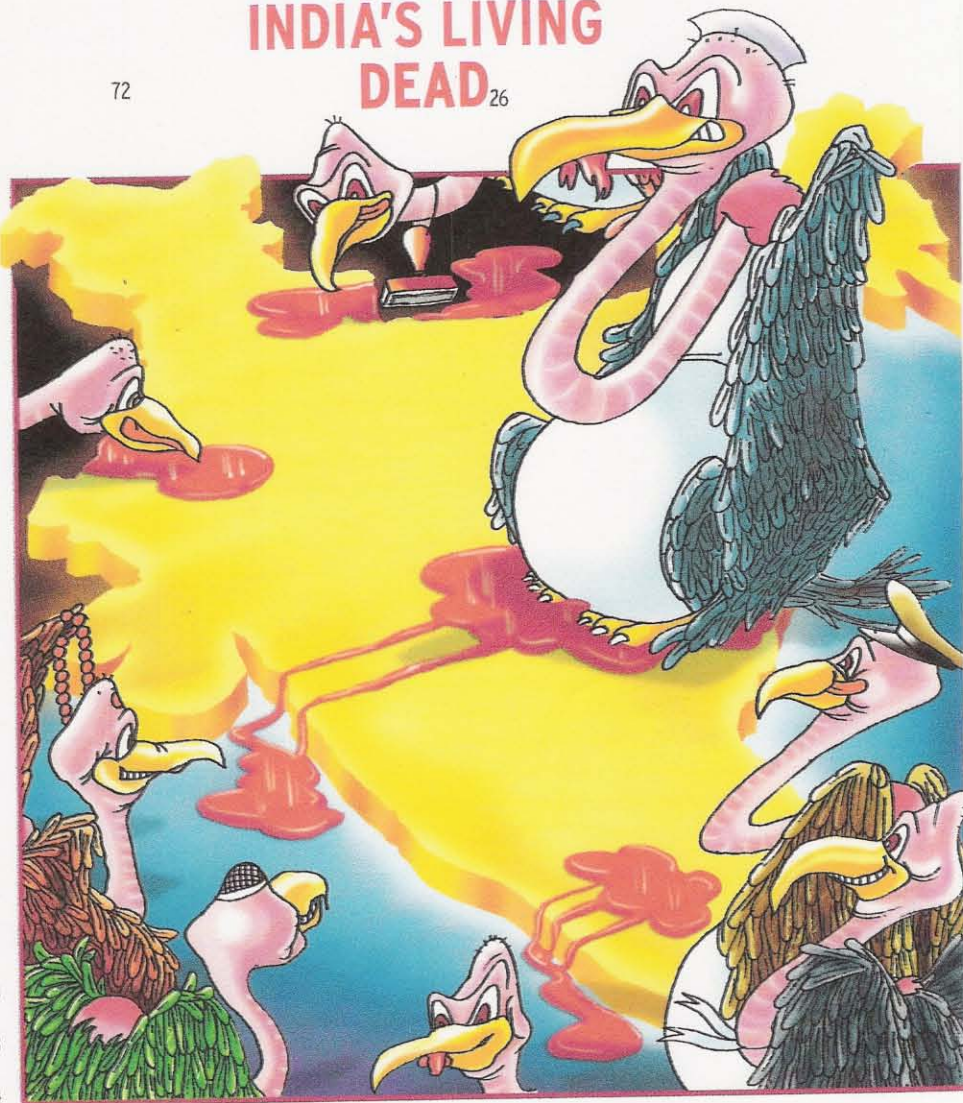
Jagmohan says Indians are hanging themselves

EXCLUSIVE
A horrifying expose of
INDIA'S LIVING DEAD

72

26

Should the constitution be junked?	16
Facing up to Hindu-bashing	19
Reality check on Sonia's leadership	67
VP Singh denounces caste politics	34
Hindutva's economic high	69
Yashwant Sinha lectures Uncle Sam	28
Confessions of a trial court judge	94
Inside BJP: How Vajpayee, Advani, Naidu teamed up to isolate Joshi	54
Rise and fall of Dilip Singh Judeo	48
War and no-peace in Sri Lanka	50
American ideals betrayed in Iraq	58
How US unshackled its press	42
Telecom policy: Playing favourites	24
BPO: The new 3-million job buzz	84
4 keys of great managers	88
Getting Lay'd, Enron style	98
The making of 'Tehzeeb'	104



CONTRIBUTORS

Jagmohan Rajinder Puri Neerja Choudhury Swapan Dasgupta Vivek Bharati Navtej Sarna
 Zafar Agha Kalyani Shankar Khalid Mohamed Sunil Jain Swarna Rajagopalan Seema Alavi
 Pradeep Kumar Sudhir K Malik Shaadaab S Bakht G. Joslin Vethakumar James C. Goodale
 Francois Momal Suresh Menon... and more...



Photos: REUTERS

Sri Lanka: **POLITICS, WAR AND PEACE**

By Swarna Rajagopalan

ON OCTOBER 31, 2003, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) presented a set of proposals for interim administrative arrangements pending the negotiation of a final settlement with the Sri Lankan government. Within five days, the president of Sri Lanka took over three key cabinet portfolios and prorogued parliament, while the prime minister was away in the US. In recent weeks, Indian opinion editorials and seminar interventions on Sri Lanka have repeatedly drawn our attention to 'reality'.

To those who were pessimistic about the peace process in Sri Lanka, these events come as vindication. The ethnicity or politics of the pessimist is immaterial. Typical of any conflict, trust levels are low on all sides in this one, and these events have simply proven nay-sayers right in their view.

The proposals establish the perfidy of the LTTE. The Tigers' claim to represent the Tamil people and their claim to be the rightful negotiators on their behalf have both been questioned in light of their track record of violence. Moreover, Sri Lankan detractors do not trust them because they have always used periods of ceasefire to regroup and rearm and then pulled out of negoti-

Business as usual: (From top) Kumaratunga, Prabhakaran and Wickremesinghe

The costs of ethnic conflict are enormous in economic and human terms, leaving no alternative to a negotiated settlement between warring groups

ations. Indians do not by and large trust them not just because they proved intractable in their pursuit of Eelam rather than amenable to Indian counsel, but also because they were responsible for the assassination of an Indian prime minister. The prospect of dealing with them internationally is anathema to Indians.

To Tamils among others, the fissures between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wikramasinghe establish that to the mainstream Sri Lankan political parties, Tamil grievances are and always have been an excuse for politics as usual. In this instance, it is the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) People's Alliance (PA) president who appears petulant and self-centred. It seems as if she is spoiling a good thing by throwing a constitutional tantrum; the valid quest for representation of the presidency in the negotiations is being lost in the drama. The prime minister has shown more *savoir-faire* in his response to this particular crisis, but this underscores to those who cannot trust the Sri Lankan government that neither will be allowed by the other to fulfil the peace mandate both seek at elections. After all, while in Opposition, the prime minister's party derailed discussion on every devolution package that the PA proposed.

This brief discussion has not even touched on the other political stakeholders in Sri Lanka—the other

minorities and the vocal anti-talks groups within the Sangha, for instance. From either of just these two standpoints, there is nowhere to go. Sri Lankans of all communities are caught in a nightmare where running hard leaves them frozen where they are. Will the conflict be resolved? The only answer possible with such pessimistic readings is: not in the near future.

However, this is not an answer that any of us can afford to accept. So here is another set of realities that lead us to a more hopeful reading.

FIRST, THE WAR has taken an enormous toll of Sri Lankan lives on either side. Beyond that, it has displaced thousands and thousands have lost their property and livelihood. A generation of Sri Lankan children has grown up in the middle of war—everywhere witnessing great brutality, sometimes inflicting and/or suffering it and at the most benign, suffering disruptions in education and healthcare. If they were our children, would we be so quick to be realists or pessimists about the peace process? The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka (available at http://www.peace-sri-lanka.org/npc_cost.html), an independent non-governmental organization, has a brief on the costs of war where it places that cost at SL Rs 295 billion in direct military expenditures, around SL Rs 137 billion in col-

lateral damage and SL Rs 250 million in expenditures on caring for the displaced. Disruption of economic activity because of the war has resulted in loss of around SL Rs 1052.5 billion.

These overwhelming numbers have no meaning to those who have lost their home, family or means of livelihood. To those of us who have the good fortune of living at this moment in a place that is not at war, any one of these is enough to disorient us and send us to a grief therapist or spiritual centre. The macroeconomic estimates barely do justice to the challenges of survival and coping faced by war-affected Sri Lankans from every community.

Not much of a surprise, then, that there is support for peace talks as polls conducted by Social Indicator (<http://www.cpalanka.org/polling.html>) show. Polls were held in July-August in Jaffna and other parts of the island. Some of the findings we should consider are:

61.7 per cent of those polled said war meant death/destruction. In Jaffna, a lower percentage chose this option, choosing also 'fighting for rights' and 'a means of achieving peace'.

60 per cent said they could not tell when there would be peace in Sri Lanka.

81.9 per cent said peace talks were the way to end the war and have peace, as opposed to either the government or the LTTE decisively winning the war. In Jaffna, 85 per cent felt this way, even though some saw the war as a means of achieving peace. In answer to another question, 48.5 per cent of people polled in Jaffna felt neither party could achieve total victory in this war.

42.8 per cent said corrupt military and political leaders were responsible for the lack of a solution to the war for the last 15 years, and 34.2 per cent said there was no political will for ending the war.

Almost the same percentage 47-48 per cent felt that the government and the LTTE are committed to the peace talks. Interestingly, trust in the government was higher among Tamil and Muslim communities than among the Sinhalese, while both the Tamil communities trusted the LTTE much more. The Sinhalese on the whole showed low levels of trust in the government or political system.

More people polled (25.1 per cent) chose an all-inclusive negotiation mediated by an international third party over less inclusive options.

Third-party mediation was seen as essential or at least having a positive impact for the most part. And Indians

will be gratified to know that their role is considered positive, maybe essential, to the process. Approval for the Norwegians was unequivocal in Jaffna, while lacking in the other poll.

In a ranking of the most important issues, cost of living and unemployment led over the ethnic conflict. In Jaffna, communication facilities, availability of household items, transport facilities and freedom of movement ranked high. In short, the experience and costs of war have created the conditions in which people would like to see a negotiated settlement. Their trust in the leadership is low, and recent events can hardly have altered this positively.

A third reality is that we are living in an age where on the one hand, there is zero-tolerance for terrorism as a technique for achieving any goal and on the other, there is great support—economic and political—for peace processes everywhere. Intractable conflicts in Ireland, the Middle East, the Balkans and even, closer home, in the case of Kashmir, are sought to be resolved through negotiation and mediation, along more than one channel of communication. In the international system, there are both carrots available for talking peace and sticks of censure for failing to capitalize on the opportunities. Today, the concept of human security—meaning basic human rights, a decent quality of life and humane living conditions that certainly include sustainable peace—is gaining currency. Simple, old-fashioned realpolitik with its attendant neuroses constrains our ability to be as creative in seeking our political goals as the times require.

By which set of realities is the ordinary Sri Lankan, from any community and in any part of Sri Lanka, best served? I would submit that it is the latter. The war has already been too expensive and there is a groundswell of support for peace talks both within and without. The Sri Lankan leader (on either side) or the Indian opinion-maker (with nothing to lose by taking either position on this issue), who ignores this, does so at the peril of ordinary people.

The prize in Sri Lanka is peace. The leaders who keep their eyes on that prize and play this moment out patiently and strategically, will find a place in history where vision and fortitude are rewarded.



The writer is a Chennai-based analyst of South Asian political and security affairs. She is also a Research Fellow of the Cuny Center, Washington DC