

*Fr. Emmanuel, whose articles supporting attempts at a peaceful resolution of the war we have published earlier, has sent us a communication from Kilinochchi where he is now a refugee. We publish some extracts from this letter; the omissions relate to matters that have been rendered obsolete by later developments. It should be noted that this was written before Riviresa II*

## PEACE AFTER THE MILITARY OCCUPATION OF JAFFNA

S. J. Emmanuel

**W**hile President Chandrika has opted to present the legal draft of her political package soon after the Jaffna victory, presumably in order to get the support of the euphoric and applauding Sinhala majority, the capture and continued occupation of Jaffna with its agonizing consequences for half a million Tamils have hardened the minds and hearts of the Tamils against Chandrika's approach to solving the Tamil problem and establishing peace in the country. An objective reading of events leading to the military occupation of Jaffna will illustrate the folly and futility of her two-pronged approach—namely, waging a war against the Tamils and their de facto leadership and at the same time trying to push unilaterally a political solution pleasing only the majority Sinhalese but by-passing the Tamils and their leadership.

### 3. Military Occupation a Sign of "Sinhala Imperialism"

**T**he take-over of the ghost town of Jaffna by the armed forces of Sri Lanka had been acclaimed as a unique achievement by the Government of Sri Lanka and its Armed Forces and interpreted as a successful completion of the first phase towards a peaceful solution. It has also been celebrated by the Sinhala extremists as a significant victory for the Sinhalese and a severe defeat, if not a death-blow, to the Tigers and to the Tamil claims for self-determination and autonomy.

But to many Tamils the capture of Jaffna and the hoisting of a Lion Flag over it was an expression of an imperialistic intention of the majority race to subjugate and rule the Tamils of this country. It was hidden behind the pious proclamation of "Peace through War" or "War for Peace" by the present Government and its supporters and has become sharply articulated in the military occupation of Jaffna, hoisting of the Lion Flag, the ceremonial Proclamation and the celebrations in the South.

Some form of an imperialistic wish, to be the sole proprietors and rulers of this country with the Tamils as the "dependent tenants" or "the subordinate minority, to be ruled by the Sinhalese, has been previously given expressions, not only by chauvinistic politicians and narrow minded monks of the South but also by the former President Wijetunga when he said in the crudity of village language that the Tamils of this country have to survive by their dependence on the Sinhala race "like the creepers on a huge tree".

With the defeat of the UNP at the last elections, the Tamils hopefully thought that such extremist and imperialistic intentions among the Sinhalese were on the decline if not altogether dead. They entertained hopes that the Paris educated President Chandrika will follow a non-imperialistic and non-militaristic approach to peace. But these hopes have been dashed to the ground.

Many well meaning Sinhalese and Tamils even today speak nostalgically of a return to peaceful coexistence. But if it implies merely a "social agreement" for a subtle subordination or an enslavement of Tamils, then the Tamils will reject it. The Tamils demand and fight not for the peace between the master and the servant, but for a just and honourable peace between equal citizens of a country. The fact that the Sinhalese and Tamils have lived peacefully in the past does not mean that there was a just peace.

### 4. Humiliation and Anger of the Tamils

**T**he chasing away of half a million citizens from their homes in the Jaffna region by continuous artillery shelling and aerial bombing from the 17th. of October onwards, and then the hoisting of an unloved, if not despised, Lion Flag over their empty-town as a victory over the Tigers, the Tamils and their demands—these have humiliated not only the direct victims and those still surviving in the North but almost all Tamils in Sri Lanka. The untold sufferings the displaced are still going through as a result of the military action and the tightening of relief services to them and restricting the services of the international NGOs—these have understandably pushed the Tamils to greater anger against the Government and have hardened their stance for any immediate reconciliation with the Government.

### 5. Tamils as Scape-goats and Security-threats

**E**veryone agrees that security restrictions and checks are necessary for the safety of Colombo and its citizens, especially when feelings run high and emotions can end up in an outbreak of disorder and destruction. But the way these restrictions are implemented by the armed forces, with the assistance of the "patriotic Sinhala citizens" who appoint themselves as "security personnel" and connected corrupt practices make out all Tamils, not only those travelling from the North to the South and have to be in Colombo temporarily but also those permanently living in Colombo, as scape-goats for any disaster in the City and as perennial security-threats for the City.

The house to house search, the suspicion cast on them by their long-time Sinhala neighbours and friends, the unlimited detention of Tamils in police stations, and a number of anti-Tamil checks done on the person, their property, money etc, including special police passes which over-ruled even the national identity cards—all these were shameful and humiliating acts confirming much of the fears the Tamils have about a peaceful co-existence under a centralized Sinhala Government.

## 6. Hiding the Truth and Tightening Restrictions will not help

**T**he right to know the truth of what is happening in the country is a basic human right of all the citizens of this country. For purposes of military strategy and national security, the Government has a right to enforce the strictest censorship at certain times. But the PA Government has gone beyond limits not only with regard to restrictions and checks but also kept a whole population in the South in the dark about events in the North. The thinking in the South and the moves of the Government are very much determined by the truth of what is really happening beyond Vavuniya.

It has prohibited local and foreign journalists for many months from going to the North. All war-reports in the Colombo media were tailored and supplied by the military and anything contrary was censored. This approach of avoiding the truth and deciding things on hearsay or from aerial views has been a major cause of the Government's failure. Allowing independent journalists and foreign diplomats into the North will help emerge the truth and favour a realistic approach.

Similarly the tightening of restrictions on most of the essential supplies to the North during the last five years has not helped the Government nor disabled the LTTE. Only the people are made victims and their lives inhumanly throttled. And of late all the international NGOs who are to help thousands of displaced people in the Wannai district have been refused permission to have even their instruments of communication.

The truth about keeping almost half a million people in a displaced situation of immense suffering and continuing to increase restrictions on the agencies that could relieve them and the consequent slow-death caused to the population is not well known in the South nor in the world. Displacements from a series of operations, restrictions and sufferings have increased over the last few months that the accumulative suffering of all these has reached a breaking point of national disaster.

## 8. Conclusion: A break-through in approach needed

**E**ver since President Chandrika came to power on the promise of "peace and no war" the country has at times entertained growing hopes for an approaching-peace as well as at other times suffered heavy disappointments at escalating war.

Compared to previous Governments, the present one seems to have made the strongest moves for peace as well as the greatest efforts for war. This double-pronged approach of making war against the Tigers and at the same time offering political proposals to non-Tigers to solve the Tamil problem is clearly based on a wrong analysis and understanding of the Tamil problem.

Failing to arrive at a settlement with the militant but de facto Tamil leadership, the Sri Lankan Government attempts to handle the Tamil problem primarily as terrorism and only secondarily as a political problem. In fact for the last President Wijetunga, there was no Tamil problem but only a terrorist problem. Though President Chandrika has openly acknowledged that Tamil militancy set in because of the intransigence and political expediency of the Sinhala Government in not solving the Tamil problem, her double-pronged approach of attempting a political solution with the help of a Colombo-based pseudo Tamil leadership and at the same time continuing, if not escalating the humiliation and restrictions against the Tamils and war against their de facto leadership, the Tigers, is bound to fail.

The PA Government is making the best use of its Oxford educated Foreign Minister with a Tamil name for an international campaign against the LTTE, for curtailing its activities among the Tamil expatriates and for rallying international support for the war. But it rejects vehemently every offer for a third-party mediation for peace. Who is for war and who is for peace?

Unless a breakthrough is made in changing this two-pronged approach, into an all out political approach with the help of a third party, the spiral of war and violence is bound to stay. And such a breakthrough is possible only when the Government courageously and without the fear of losing face, can pull back its forces from positions that humiliate, restrict, suspect and subjugate the Tamil people. It is futile to throttle the Tamil neck with one hand and shake the Tamil hand with the other.

Another breakthrough is needed with regard to the political package itself. What was started as a radical political solution to the North-east ethnic crisis has ended up with a political package of constitutional changes for the whole country and for Buddhism. That a permanent solution to the ethnic problem be found is the dire need of the country and the wish of the majority, especially the Tamils who have suffered and lost valuable lives for many decades.

But the PA government in trying to offer a broad-based package of solution to the whole country (without appearing to be over-concerned about the Tamil problem) and to Buddhism (by enshrining a special status for Buddhism and winning their support) has met with a heap of opposition and run into unnecessary problems. The majority in the South seem to be asking, why a medicine for the whole country when the problem is only with regard to the Tamils? A breakthrough is needed in reducing the present package to a "Northeast package", selling it to the LTTE as a response to the Tamil demands and implementing it for a limited period of few years before considering it for the rest of the country. ■