

# SRI LANKA FROM NEW YORK ... NEW YORK FROM SRI LANKA ?

Judy Waters

**B**y the end of 1992, Sri Lanka's image here in New York consisted of an absurd conglomeration of short takes (see "Sri Lanka from New York", *Pravada*, 11.92) The New York Times sporadically reported on incidents of war, especially killings; presidential candidates Bush and Clinton derided the state of Sri Lanka's economy; and the name 'Sri Lanka' could even be heard in TV advertisements for hamburgers and international telephone service. For the casual viewer, this portrayal served to obscure or cover-up much of what was happening in Sri Lanka. In this process Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans were trivialised.

Since then, the New York Times has allotted more space to Sri Lanka, due to several eye-catching events in 1993. The name dropping of 'Sri Lanka', however, seems to have diminished significantly. A look at this coverage may be useful, especially in light of the continuing debate over the propagation of racist images of Sri Lanka. Ethnic stereotyping of Sinhalese and Tamil, as practised in the U.S., serves definite ends, raising questions about the use of this tactic generally.

As a prelude, it should be noted that the Presidential candidates did not escape criticism over their comments on Sri Lanka. Towards the end of the campaign, both former Rep. W S Broomfield (R Michigan) and Rep. Charlie Wilson (D Texas) spoke up in Congress (Sunday Observer 25. 10. 92). Broomfield stated that the situation in Sri Lanka "should not be casually dismissed and caverliarily [sic] stereotyped". Sri Lanka had "adopted the ideas of a market economy long before the Soviet Union". Despite two insurgencies, growth had continued, literacy remained high, and "popular elections" were held. While there were serious concerns about the government's human rights record, Premadasa worked to keep the economy growing and democratic institutions in place. He also worked to improve the human rights record and to improve command and control over the security forces and initiate greater transparency and accountability in the Government's actions. Under Premadasa, "there is hope for this country". Wilson, noting his activity on South Asian issues, stated that Sri Lanka "deserves better than off hand stereotypes from the campaign trail". Both representatives praised an op-ed in the Washington Post, written by Premadasa's special representative M. Moragoda, as providing an accurate picture of Sri Lanka.

During the first two months of 1993, the New York Times was very quiet on Sri Lanka. A general article in February, entitled "Foreign Maids in Kuwait Fleeing by the Hundreds", reported that 15-20 Sri Lankan runaways were turning up at the embassy in Kuwait each day, and two Sri Lankan women were quoted on beatings, nonpayment of wages and rape.

(New York Times 24.2.93)

The next reference came in connection with the Bombay bombings. Under the headline "Focus is on Tamils in Bombay Blasts", the Times highlighted early statements made by the Bombay police Commissioner and Maharashtra Chief Minister on the LTTE's technical expertise and thus possible responsibility.

## Sri Lanka is "Choking off Long Ethnic Revolt"

**A**bout a week later, a very unusual thing happened. There on page one was a story by the Times' India-based correspondent, Edward Gargan, filed from Batticaloa on 13 March. (NYT 20.3.93) The three-column-wide title read, "Sri Lankans choking off Long Ethnic Revolt", and above it was a 4"\*6" photo of boys sitting in rows on the floor and eating. "As a result of the war in Sri Lanka, orphans are filling the Ramakrishna Boys Home in Batticaloa", was the caption. The story continued on page five, taking up more than a third of the page, including a 5"\*6.25" photo at the top. In it, two dead men lay on the ground with a woman squatting just behind. Her agony-filled face is partially turned to the side-caption:

A woman grieving over the body of her husband who was one of the victims of a massacre last October in the village of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka. After 10 years of fighting, the Government seems to be gaining the upper hand and may be about to offer a political settlement to the Tamil rebels.

There was a small blurb further down the page which read, "prospects seem better for an end to a bitter ethnic conflict". Also included was a 2"\*2" inset map. Which included Sri Lanka and a bit of the coast of India. Marked on Sri Lanka were Batticaloa, Colombo, Jaffna and the Jaffna peninsula, with a few connecting roads. A neat image had been provided to newspaper readers, a number of whom won't go on to read the article-which runs something like this.

The first two paragraphs present the theme: army success in the East, along with a "recent spurt of rapid economic growth", have raised the confidence of the government, which will soon propose a political settlement.

Sharp fighting between the Army and the LTTE continues, with 20,000 killed since 1983.

Continuing episodes of bomb explosions, massacres of villages and bus passengers and other violent actions make the

Sri Lanka war one of the most hate-filled in a world that at times seems to be on fire with ethnic conflict.

A recent episode saw the disappearance of sixteen Tamil farmers, presumably killed by the Army. Human rights groups have been severely critical of the government.

Prabakaran has stated his willingness to consider a solution short of an independent State. The LTTE "is bereft of virtually any international support". The Jaffna peninsula is secure for the LTTE, but has been so heavily under siege that it has turned into a totalitarian pre-modern society, without electricity, running water, sewers or permitted dissent.

Then, inserted as a reminder about the causes of the conflict, is a variation of the 'standard paragraph' (more below); this one briefly notes that 75%, of Sri Lankans are Sinhalese, mostly Buddhist; 18%, are Tamils, mostly Hindu; 7%, are "Tamil-speaking Arab Muslims".

The LTTE has been driven from Batticaloa, and the roads to the west cleared. A week before, cabinet ministers had visited. A Tamil MP from Batticaloa is quoted on the LTTE being pushed back into the jungles. The MP belongs to the TULF, "a Tamil political party largely sympathetic to the aims of the Tigers". Eighteen months ago, however, Batticaloa "was battered by fear and death". More civilians than guerrillas were killed or missing in the Army/LTTE fight. The government has been criticised over its human rights record. Amnesty International visited the country and made recommendations. It found "significantly fewer" abuses by the government, but no lessening by the LTTE. The LTTE recently had, for example, gunned down more than 190 Sinhalese villagers in Alanchippotana. A Major General is then quoted on the former effectiveness of the LTTE in the East.

The MP's list of TULF demands is noted: North and East linkage, limits on colonisation, and devolution of power, But [these fall] "within a murkily defined federal system". Even these demands for Tamil "homelands", however, "are regarded as extremist by many Sinhalese". A leader of the 'Sinhala Protection Organisation' is quoted to the effect that homelands are a myth, and that there is only "one kind of solution, bringing them to heel".

The article then digresses to background history: one short paragraph on the LTTE and IPKF; one on the Gandhi assassination; and a slightly longer one on the "revolt by militant Sinhalese nationalists", which was "ruthlessly crushed" by Premadasa with more than 50,000 killed "in a wave of disappearances, executions and torture committed by the Sri Lankan Army". "However, despite crushing the revolt, the sentiments of Sinhalese chauvinism still remain a formidable political force in Sri Lanka."

Premadasa has "changed discriminatory laws and has moved swiftly against more aggressive expressions of Sinhalese chauvinism." He does seem to be seeking a political solution but "is caught between his need to retain his Sinhalese political base, which opposed concessions to the Tamil rebels,

and pressures for a return to peace, which requires at least some measure of compromise with the Tigers". A "framework for future discussions" is soon to be proposed by a parliamentary committee. The proposals "would allow considerable governmental autonomy for distinct northern and eastern provinces". Premadasa will likely accept them, and call for talks with the LTTE. Prabakaran is then quoted regarding willingness to consider a federal model "which gives autonomy and satisfies the expectations of the Tamil people". Finally, a Jesuit priest is quoted on "seeing a light at the end of the tunnel". "It may be an oncoming train, but maybe not".

In the time between this article and coverage of the assassinations a month later, I picked up two references to Sri Lanka. On 7 April, the Times ran a story by Gargan under the headline "For Arthur Clarke, Sri Lanka is a Link to Space." Clarke was interviewed at his house in Colombo, and most of the article deals with his many projects; Clarke has "consciously remained apart from the politics and wars of Sri Lanka." Several days later, a general article on child prostitution mentioned Sri Lanka as having 10,000 male prostitutes aged 6-14 (NYT 9.4.93)

## Assassinations

The Times ran one article on the killing of Athulathmudali, a six-paragraph Reuters release under the headline "Sri Lanka Opposition Leader Slain at Rally". (NYT 24.4.93,p.4) Athulathmudali "for years was a central figure in the fight against Tamil separatists," and at the time of his death was "leading a strong opposition challenge in elections for seven government-controlled provincial councils". According to police, he was killed by a lone gunman. The last paragraph mentions that the opposition includes a "five party alliance".

There were five long articles on the assassination of President Premadasa in the first nine days of May, and one editorial. It is interesting to look at the development of the Times' take on Premadasa during that week. The editorial will be dealt with after this, along with editorials from two other newspapers, and a noteworthy mention on national TV.

## Story-1

On 2 May the Times ran a long, page one article filed by Gargan in New Delhi. Headlined "Suicide Bomber kills President of Sri Lanka", the third paragraph notes that the government has placed blame on the LTTE. Premadasa's roots in Colombo ("son of a washerman") and political career are detailed. As both Prime Minister and President, he had "worked to ease poverty in Sri Lanka" through the model village and small-scale industry programs. Premadasa was also known for his "political ruthlessness", against former UNPers, the JVP and Tamil rebels. Toward the latter he followed a strategy of confrontation and negotiation, seeking a constitutional and political solution. The last paragraph states that D.B. Wijetunge is not considered to be a serious contender for power.

## Story-2

The next day's article appeared on page three, under the headline "Death in Sri Lanka: A Paradise That Lost Its Peace" (3.5.93). A 5" \*6.25" photo shows army men at the site of the explosion, and an inset map of Sri Lanka marks Colombo and Jaffna. Gargan, filing from Madras, writes that

the country's emerald forests, placid beaches and Buddhist tradition have long belied Sri Lanka's post-independence history of ethnic and political violence. Ethnic rivalries between...[Sinhalese and Tamils] have coloured this country's politics and led to bloodshed for nearly four decades.

The same standard paragraph mentioned above then follows. Further on in the article. Gargan notes Premadasa's efforts at a constitutional solution. These efforts resulted in great "hostility" toward Premadasa among "vast segments of the Sinhalese population". This hostility was evident after Athulathmudali was killed: "Despite the absence of evidence, it is widely believed... that Athulathmudali... was killed on Mr. Premadasa's orders". "A senior western diplomat in Colombo" is quoted on being struck by the very different public reactions to the two killings. Gargan writes of the lighting of firecrackers in the south after the second killing, and then describes Premadasa: he "tolerated no opposition" within the UNP, and was "widely regarded, both by Sri Lankans and Western diplomats, as a man who would not hesitate to use violence to silence his critics and to achieve his political ends".

## Story-3

On 4 May the Times ran Gargan's story, filed from Colombo, on page seven, under the headline "Sri Lanka Capital Mourns President". He notes the "waiters and teachers, taxi drivers and shop owners" who were filing past the coffin of the "man who had pushed Sri Lanka towards normalcy". "Not all, though, admired his style of power". Some saw Premadasa "as a violent politician, a ruthless, autocratic practitioner of the most dangerous Sri Lankan game." Gargan then quotes a (very uncharacteristic) source, a taxi driver: "He was a bad man, sir. We do not know what will happen. But I think the people are not sad. We think he did kill Lalith". As for the identity of the assassin, the police still believe that responsibility lies with the LTTE, "a guerrilla movement in the north" which claims that Tamils deserve a separate state because of a history of discrimination. The LTTE has denied involvement.

## Story-4

The fourth article ran on 7 May. Page one carried a 4.5" \* 6.25" photo showing Mrs. Premadasa placing flowers on the coffin, with the title "wife of slain Sri Lankan President May Enter Politics". The story appeared on page three, "At Sri Lanka Rite, Widow Speaks Up", under a 5.25" \* 6.25" photo of a Buddhist monk beating a drum near the funeral pyre. After describing the ceremony at the pyre, Gargan notes Mrs. Premadasa's political ambitions, and that she and her hus-

band "had been estranged for several years", and lived in separate houses. Once before a widow had succeeded her husband - Mrs. Bandaranaike who "wrested control" of her husband's "left-wing party". But Mrs. Premadasa's chance of becoming Prime Minister would require the support of President Wijetunge, who is said to back Ranil Wickremasinghe. According to the latter, Premadasa's killing had exhausted the nation's tolerance for violence, and "certainly violence is a threat to the political system". Another opposition leader, Gamini Dissanayake [sic], however, placed blame on 'Premadasa's authoritarian inclinations for the violence that has infected the political system'; "Sri Lanka is heading for democracy", he said, "But it will fail if the bullet takes over from the ballot". Mr. 'Dissanayake' did not attend the funeral; nor did much of Colombo's population.

## Story-5

The fifth and last article appeared on 9 May and was entitled "Sri Lanka Calm in Spite of Slaying". It was sub headed "Many Ignore the President's Assassination and Other Recent Civil Strife". A day after the ceremony, Colombo's streets were filled with normal activity "in what seemed to be a determined effort to ignore the violence of recent weeks and recapture the lost celebrations of...Vesak". Violence, however is not a recent phenomenon. For more than ten years, the LTTE has waged a "vicious civil war", Premadasa crushed the JVP, and Athulathmudali was killed. Several senior Asian and Western diplomats believe that the investigation into the latter has been mishandled by the government, one of them using the word "coverup". The upcoming (May 1993) provincial council elections would illustrate if Sri Lanka "can practise electoral politics in an atmosphere free of violence". (I found no stories on these elections, nor on any subsequent ones.)

## Editorials and Miscellaneous Coverage of the Premadasa Assassination

On 1 May, before news of the assassination could make the press, CBS TV picked it up in a short segment on its national nighttime news show. Newscaster Bob Schieffer reported that Sri Lanka's President had been killed by a suicide bomber riding a bicycle. Footage showed the bomb site, with injured people being carried away on stretchers. Schieffer identified the victim as President "Premadasa" [sic].

The New York Times did not carry President Clinton's reaction. The Hartford Courant, did (2.5.93). Clinton praised Premadasa as having "worked tirelessly to promote his country's development and raise the standard of living of all Sri Lankans". The attack was "a brutal act of terrorism", and Clinton was "outraged".

On 5 May, the New York Times ran its editorial, "The Tragedy of Sri Lanka", summing up the situation. When Sri Lanka

gained independence, the country “seemed to have it all: reasonable prosperity, a stable parliamentary system, habits of non-violence and a landscape of bewitching beauty”. Now, however, the name Sri Lanka “is synonymous with strife and tragedy”. The question is asked, “How did things go so terribly wrong?” The answer: “Sri Lanka’s story says a good deal about the unintended consequences of rooting politics in religion and ethnicity”. The story began in 1956, with government policies on Buddhism and the Sinhalese language. These policies “angered a minority of mainly Hindu Tamil, communal riots erupted”, and he was later assassinated “by a fanatic Buddhist”. A “full-scale civil war followed later. In 1987, Rajiv Gandhi, seeing “a chance to placate Indian Tamils and win points as a peacemaker in Sri Lanka”, sent troops as part of a peace accord; he was later assassinated. The conclusion: “The lesson is sobering. When an ethnic majority diminishes the citizenship rights of a well-established minority, even a pacific people in an idyllic island can plunge into a bloodbath. It is an open question whether Sri Lankans can ever recover what has been lost. But there is time for other countries with peoples of different creeds and cultures to ponder Sri Lanka’s tragic experience”.

The Boston Globe ran an editorial on the same day, entitled “Asia’s Balkan War”. It begins: “In the new world order’s current configuration, the island nation of Sri Lanka may come to be known as Yugoslavia East”. The assassination of Premadasa “illustrates the pathology of ethnic and religious warfare that has tormented Sri Lanka”. The method of killing suggests that the assassin was a Tamil Tiger; the “fanatical Tigers” aim to establish a separate state. Other Tamils propose self-government within a unitary state. The Eelam [sic] Tamil Association of America proposes a federal constitution. The conclusion: “If such a solution is not tried, the United States should take the initiative and bring the conflict in Sri Lanka before the United Nations. Asian victims of ethnic or religious conflict deserve the same protection as European victims”.

The Berkshire Eagle (Western Massachusetts) ran its editorial on 9 May, entitled “Blissless Sri Lanka”. Buddha preached the middle way, but “what he would make of his followers in Sri Lanka today is a question they ought to ask themselves”. In the name of Buddha, “this idyllic Indian Ocean island nation [has been reduced] to a tropical charnel house”. “For 40 years [the Sinhalese] have been making life miserable for the minority Tamils. This was done in the name of a rare phenomenon, rabid Buddhist nationalism.” The Tigers may or may not have killed Premadasa, whose chief political opponent, Athulathmudali, was killed a week before. “Both were violent men who detested each other. Mr. Premadasa hated Mr. Athulathmudali’s unyielding anti-Hindu fervor, and Mr. Athulathmudali couldn’t stand the President’s attempts to offer the Tamils any social status at all.” The problem started in 1956, and a rebellion broke out in 1983. “Bosnia-like atrocities are common.” The conclusion: “The bullying instinct seems to run deep in human nature, and when given rein by, and the imprimatur of state religion, hell breaks loose”. The Sri Lankan example argues yet again for the separation-nearly always, just about everywhere-of church and state.

## New York Times Coverage Since the Assassinations

**T**he reader might have expected the Times to follow up on some of the themes raised in the coverage above. In the past year, however, I’ve only seen short takes, mostly on war incidents. Articles published from May 1993-June 1994:

1 June 1993 “At Least 31 Die in Sri Lanka as Rival Groups Battle” (Reuters, 4 para.). LTTE attack on PLOTE militia post in Vavuniya; 150,000 homeless from flooding in south.

19 August 1993 “Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka Offer to Talk” (AP, 6 para.). Prabhakaran states willingness to consider a federal structure.

3 October 1993 “350 Die in Sri Lanka Raids” (AP, 1 para.). Troops capture LTTE sea base at Kilali and destroy more than 120 boats.

12 November 1993 “Rebels kill 200 Sri Lankan Troops” (AP, 7 para.). Pooneryn, one of the LTTE’s “most stunning victories”.

14 November 1993 “Sri Lanka Reports Ending Rebel Siege at Base” (Reuters, 12 para.).

15 November 1993 “Sri Lankan Troops Recapture a Base” (AP, 8 para.).

1 January 1994 “4 Die in Raids in Sri Lanka” (AP, 1 para.). Jets bomb Chavakachcheri buildings.

13 March 1994 “Baby Asian Elephant on view at US Zoo” (travel section, 3 para.). Shanthi, a Sri Lankan elephant at the National Zoo in Washington, DC, has a baby, named Kumari.

23 March 1994 “Student Found Guilty of Enslaving a Maid” (AP). Kuwait student at Boston University convicted in case of Sri Lankan maid, “a case of modern-day slavery enforced by fear”, according to prosecutors.

## Other Recovering the Past Year

c. 18. 3. 93 Prime Time Live (ABC TV, Thursday night news journal show). Reference to poverty in Russia, where the per capita income is less than in Sri Lanka, ‘one of the poorest countries in the world’.

21.6.93 New York magazine (monthly, and not to be confused with the New Yorker). Cover story, “The cult of Tilak-the Guru of West 87th street”. Regarding controversial, Sri Lanka-born guru Tilak (“pronounced TEE-lock”), and his present and former disciples.

24.1.94 Newsweek. Article, "Dynasty' meets 'Family Feud'-South Asia: politics Divides some Ruling Houses", (with photos of Bhuttos, Gandhi and Mrs. Bandaranaike and Anura). Mostly on Gandhi and Bhutto families, who along with Bandaranaike's "are tenacious dynasties that make the Kennedys look like office temps". "If anything, the Bandaranaike's in Sri Lanka have too many would-be political leaders". Mrs. Bandaranaike is "still feisty at 77," and "wants her leftist SLFP to be led by her daughter Chandrika ... Anura, an able M.P. with a mind of his own"... defected to the UNP. He "complained last week about his mother's bossiness and his sister's "discredited marxism." But in a democratic age, having a foot in both the government and the opposition may be the surest way to keep a dynasty in business. (by R. Watson, with correspondents in Karachi, New Delhi, and Mervyn De Silva in Colombo)

## Sri Lankans Lose Out?

**I**n view of the very bizarre image of Sri Lanka and of Sri Lankans in the above coverage, it is understandable that complaints can be heard, in various quarters. One concerns the image of the Sinhalese as being racist. In May 1993, the issue was raised in the Lankan, a publication of the New York Sri Lanka Association, with reference to the New York Times' image of "Sinhalese fanatics". One explanation for this image that I have heard is that the western media has been duped by a skilled LTTE propagandist machine (which certainly does pick up only the most rabid of Sinhalese positions).

The problem with this focus, however, is that the image of Tamils is no better; they are extremists or terrorists, with the ordinary civilian meriting no coverage, even when being bombed year after year. And let's face it folks, we can't conduct that hallowed scientific tool of the opinion poll in Jaffna-so who knows, maybe Tamils do support the LTTE (and thus are even more unworthy of coverage, and by implication deserve being bombed). Complaints can be heard about this slant, as well as about the lack of coverage of the war.

It all comes back to the standard paragraph mentioned above, which has been included in most articles, especially after 1983. We are given the percentage of the population who are Sinhalese, their religion and their language; the same for Tamils who, it is often written, 'claim' they have been discriminated against. Muslims are sometimes included in the paragraph, perhaps so that the figures add up. In the end though, the paragraph serves to forever divide Sri Lankans into nice neat groups, who have always been and still are at each other's throats.

And even when a newspaper like the New York Times airs 'other' views, by printing letters to the editor for example, the same slant is enforced. After the stories on the assassination of President Premadasa were published, the Times ran three letters (NYT 17.5.93), illustrating whom the Times allows to speak for whom.

1. By the editor of Tamil Voice, "the newsletter of the Association of Tamils in the U.S.A.", We are told of the history of discrimination, enabled first by the British handing over power to the Sinhalese, with violence starting in 1956. Ironically, the "conflict is easily resolvable"; Sinhalese and Tamils should be 'segregated' in two separate areas provided with self-rule. Because the two sides cannot agree on a "suitable political structure", violence has escalated between and within the two groups; this has been "compounded by the huge influx of arms and explosives into this once-idyllic island", culminating in the Premadasa assassination. A solution is unlikely without intervention; India failed, and now an "honest broker" is needed (Australia, Norway, Canada or the U.N.).

2. By a reader in Los Angeles, critical of the Times' editorial. Before independence the Sinhalese were "dominated by the Tamil minority, in collusion with British colonial rule". After 1948, the Sinhalese "redressed" the imbalance "through a democratic process." The "privileged Tamil minority resorted to violence", encouraged by India, whose security forces created the LTTE. Interference by this "regional bully" is the basis for the tragedy in Sri Lanka. The lesson is that the international community especially the West, should "bring some morality in international relations and not allow bullies to get away with murder".

3. By another reader in California. Violence in Sri Lanka is due to the "political manifestations of Sinhala Buddhism", which through "propaganda and news management" have been "hidden from the rest of the world". The "endangered Tamil minority" took on their own defense. The solution is to find a way for Sinhalese and Tamils to live "independent of each other". The international community should intervene.

So we have it, the ultimate answer to the ultimate question, "Mee mone magalak dhe mee?" If you think that the overkill in this portrayal by ethnic stereotype might boomerang and raise questions as to the legitimacy of the coverage, think again. These stereotypes of Sri Lankans are extremely widespread, in very diverse circles. One could perhaps forgive the ordinary newspaper reader, who has no other connection to Sri Lanka, for holding them. But I am always amazed at their influence on people who do have connections, often longstanding. In academia, in the church-even among 'liberal' Protestants, just try convincing people that all Sinhalese are not racist, or that all Tamils are not terrorists. Part of the reason is that so many conflicts in so many countries today are portrayed in this same way-these are tribal and/or age-old conflicts between distinct groups.

Thus we can see, for example, the fallacy in the argument that a clever LTTE propagandist machine is to blame for negative images of the Sinhalese. Rather, coverage by ethnic stereotype should be seen in terms of the information that is being withheld from readers over here. The point is to obscure, and if possible to completely hide, any idea that there are outside influences and pressures working on a country's internal

conflicts. If these were consistently reported, the myth of the isolated, generic ethnic conflict would be blown to bits.

While this myth is now old hat with regard to Sri Lanka, there was a new twist added to coverage in the past year. That is that the conflict situation may be unsolvable. In today's 'new world order' this aspect is key. We see countries where government structures of control are crumbling, with armed factions left to play out the great game. The world just watches; whole countries and/or peoples are deemed expendable. And if at some future time Sri Lanka has to be written off, it will be. And what easier place to write off than a small island nation far away from Europe and the U.S.? For now the message being sent is clear: the conflict in Sri Lanka is reasonably contained, and foreign investors can chance a five, ten or fifteen-year dip into the Sri Lankan market. That's all that matters.

In the end, the New York Times' highly influential strategy of news coverage by ethnic stereotype certainly raises questions about the adoption of similar tactics by varied Sri Lankan groups and individuals. Whose game is who playing? What short-term advantage will in the long-term accrue to whom? Both very unsurprising questions to be sure.

## So how about us New Yorkers?

**H**ere in the New York City area, the coverage of local news plays out like this. Outside of the multi-cultural

nature of crimes, the most covered Whites are politicians or businessmen; the most covered Blacks are perpetrators of crime, members of the nation of Islam or sports/entertainment stars; the most covered of Jewish people is the fundamentalist Lubavitcher Hasidic sect; the most covered Muslims are those connected with the world Trade Center bombing; the most covered Asians are small shopkeepers (Korean) or Chinese gangs; the most covered Italians are those associated with crime syndicates. It is absurd, especially considering the tiny minority within groups, and within the total population, that these actually are. But there is no doubt that this coverage plays a big role in the development and enforcement of stereotypes, and there are bad vibes in this city.

It is hoped that you the reader will reject these, just as stereotypes of Sinhalese and Tamils must be rejected. As in Sri Lanka, all the stereotypes are not held by all, and for most people the main concern is financial survival. From my vantage point in particular, the Sri Lankan visitor who comes here seeking to increase understanding of the situation in Sri Lanka, or to gain support for some legitimate cause, should not underestimate the dissonance created when such attempts are combined with racial or ethnic slurs on groups, and on Blacks in particular, here in New York.

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## BOOK REVIEW

# CHELVANAYAKAM, FEDERALISM AND ETHNIC POLITICS

Rajan Philips

A.J. Wilson, 1994: *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947-1977*. C.Hurst & Co (Publishers Ltd).

Those who are familiar with Prof. A.J. Wilson's academic writings will recall his piece on "The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics" (*Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, July 1966), in which he outlined the communal compact thesis that the transfer of power, in 1948, was predicated on the understanding that Tamils and other minorities will not be discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese. That D.S.

Senanayake, as the island's first Prime Minister, had breached the constitutional compact was S.J.V. Chelvanayakam's reason for launching the Federal Party in 1949. Through all these years, no Sri Lankan government leader has responded substantively to this indictment. Worse still, the constitutional revisions of 1972 and 1978, far from restoring the communal compact, further aggravated the original breach. The mainstream academic community, perhaps with the exception of the late I.D.S. Weerawardena, has traditionally downplayed D.S. Senanayake's breach of trust and ignored the politics of the Federal Party. The fact of the matter is that