

Global Peace Support Group Seminar - Speech on Saturday, 22nd March 2008

TAMIL HOMELAND - A SOVEREIGN NATION IN HISTORY
AND EMERGING ONCE AGAIN FROM OPPRESSION

Mr Chairman, Distinguished guests and my dear friends

I wish to thank the organisers, Global Peace Support Group, for the invitation to address this seminar on the TAMIL HOMELAND - A SOVEREIGN NATION IN HISTORY AND EMERGING ONCE AGAIN FROM OPPRESSION.

In a seminar of this nature it is perhaps best to start by seeking to clarify our thinking by defining the word 'nation' in the title that would give meaning to our discussion today.

What is a Nation?

Ernest Renan (1823-1892) was an important French theorist who wrote about the concept of a nation. His famous essay "[What is a Nation?](#)" was first delivered as a lecture at the Sorbonne in 1882. It continues to be an important influence on scholars. In my search for some elucidation I have borrowed heavily from his lecture.

“Taking a metaphysical view, a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory - this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more - these are the essential conditions for being a people. One loves in proportion to the sacrifices to which one has consented, and in proportion to the ills that one has suffered. One loves the house that one has built and than one has handed down”.

Renan spoke of "having suffered together" and, indeed, suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort”.

I shudder with astonishment and emotion when I think how close Renan's thinking has come to anticipating the suffering and the struggle of the Tamils of Sri Lanka to validate their existence as a nation. A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. Renan concludes by stating that **if doubts arise regarding its frontiers, consult the populations in the areas under dispute. They undoubtedly have the right to a say in the matter.** Again, I say how perspicacious Renan was – a la Tamil Eelam!

I now come to John Stuart Mill a British Philosopher and Liberal Politician of the 19th century, on: Considerations on Representative Government. London in 1872.

"Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. An altogether different set of leaders have the confidence of one part of the country and of another. Their mutual antipathies are much stronger than their jealousy of the government... Above all, the grand and only effectual security in the last resort against the despotism of the government is in that case wanting: the sympathy of the army with the people. Soldiers to whose feelings half or three fourths of the subjects of the same government are foreigners, will have no more scruple in mowing them down".

I am again tempted to ask whether this is not true of the SL army busy mowing down the Tamils.

Charter of the United Nations (Excerpts)

Article 55

c. universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion

With regard to the following article 73, I invite you to look beyond the post-colonial chimera of the artificial nation state of Ceylon, truly a monster born out of wedlock comprising a mix of the ebullient and volatile Sinhala race and the studious and phlegmatic Tamils. The Tamils did not achieve a full measure of self-government in this artificial insemination.

Article 73

Members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a **full measure of self-government** (and in my words this is in effect the case with the Tamils of Eelam) recognize the principle that the interests of the **inhabitants of these territories are paramount**, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security established by the present Charter, the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories, and, to this end:

a. to ensure, with due respect for the culture of the peoples concerned, their political, economic, social, and educational advancement, their just treatment, and their protection against abuses;

b. to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement;

It is my contention that judged by these criteria of a nation in political philosophy and international law that I have expounded today and given the history and traditions of the Tamil nation in Ceylon for centuries prior to European colonial times, and the preservation of this structure for administration during the Portuguese and Dutch occupation, there can be little doubt that the merger of the separate kingdoms in 1833 by the British was a temporary colonially driven aberration that should have been reversed at the time of the withdrawal of the British in 1948.

Having presented so far the thoughts and principles that should govern the concepts of nation, state, nationalism and minority rights in a democracy, we will try to relate these to the Conflict in Sri Lanka and the fundamental rights of the Tamils.

The process of decolonisation of the British Empire after the Second World War has left behind a legacy of conflagration and debris as a result of the imposition of artificial boundaries and new rulers. Examples abound in the case of India, Burma, Cyprus, Kenya, Zimbabwe and of course Ceylon. The fate of the Tamils of Sri Lanka is a classic case of either crass ineptitude of the British occupiers or insufficient regard paid by them to the history of the separate nations living on the island; their wholly separate and immiscible languages, cultures and traditions and the tales of the wars between them going back some centuries.

Metaphorically speaking, upon ceding governance to the Sinhalese at the time of independence, the British left the foxes in charge of the chickens. Now it is a moral and political compulsion that the British and the international powers have to step in to stop the foxes (the Sinhalese) from finishing off the chickens (the Tamils).

The current plight of the Tamils of Sri Lanka

Successive Sri Lankan governments after independence have competed with each other to apply the writ of the majoritarian Buddhist Sinhala chauvinist classes over the Tamil people with an iron fist.

The Sinhala government has gerrymandered with traditional Tamil areas in the Hill country (the home of the Plantation Tamils), in the Eastern Province (a part of the Tamil homeland) with jungle clearance and massive irrigation schemes to change the demography and bring in large numbers of Sinhala settlers from outside the area. The Manal Aru area in the north east which was home to thousands of Tamils has now been cleared of Tamils and Sinhala settlers shipped in and the area renamed Weli Oya in Sinhala to give a final seal to this egregious land grab. From the first post independence government of DS Senanayake to the present one under Rajapakse there has been a concerted plan backed up with unmitigated action to import Sinhalese into Tamil areas and change the demography of Tamil areas in order to deny a Tamil homeland.

If the world allows this evil scheme of mass Sinhala colonisation (settlement) accompanied by the genocide of the Tamils to continue unabated, there will be no Tamil homeland or Tamils left to call for a separate nation state for themselves.

This is the final solution that has been the insidious plan of the Sinhalese people and their government. Hitler and Nazi Germany set out to exterminate the Jews based on their ideology of Aryan superiority and the world has either failed or refused to recognize that the Sinhala doctrine of Aryanism and militant Sinhala Buddhism which reserves the whole country for Sinhala Buddhists only is also a modern abomination that has to be fought and crushed before there are no Tamils left standing. This is the ultimate form of State terror that presents itself to the outside world as fighting international terror. It has climbed on board the West's abhorrence of Al Qaeda and its despicable campaign of international terror to cast the freedom struggle of the Tamils of Sri Lanka within the same mould.

The whole world should know that the freedom struggle of the Tamils who are resisting a ruthless and murderous Sinhala war machine is only fought within Sri Lanka. The ill considered banning of the representatives of the Tamil resistance in western countries gave added encouragement to the Sinhala government to pursue its military campaign to subjugate the Tamils with added vigour. It might be said that the West has conspired involuntarily with the Sri Lankan government in its campaign of genocide to exterminate the Tamils. The West and the free world have to re-examine their moral consciences and their commitment to human rights without further delay.

They have to establish the UN and international monitoring missions in Sri Lanka to bring this unconscionable and brutal regime to work for a political solution acceptable to the Tamils and in conformity with the human rights and fundamental freedoms declared in the UN charter and by such eminent political philosophers such as Ernest Renan and John Start Mills.

The traditional homeland of the Tamils of Eelam has been occupied by Sinhala troops for more than 35 years and in this whole period the Sinhala supported government has trampled on the fundamental rights of the Tamil people by governing through Emergency regulations.

These override the constitutional protection afforded to the (Tamil) people, by granting the police and the army extraordinary powers that remove habeas corpus, fundamental rights and accountability in law for death in custody. There has been no instance of any member of the armed forces convicted for their killing of Tamils and this feeling of impunity from prosecution and accountability is now firmly entrenched within the armed forces. Massacres of Tamils and mass murders in custody by the Sinhala armed guards and organized Sinhala mobs led by government ministers and Buddhist monks in Welikade, Chenmani, Bindunuwewa and many other places have been whitewashed by the government, which is bent on state terrorism, reprisals and ‘teaching a lesson to the Tamils’.

There is no functioning democracy in the homeland of the Tamils, except for the rule of the Sinhala government and its armed forces under the most repressive regime seen anywhere in the world.

The government of Sri Lanka has never had a democratic mandate from the Tamils to rule over them and in the last democratically held general election in the Tamil areas in 1972 there was an overwhelming majority for the Tamil party that contested with a manifesto pledge to seek a separate state for the Tamils. There are about 50,000 members of the armed forces based in the Northern Province which today has a population of 400,000 in the government controlled area. This works out at one soldier per 8 Tamil civilians and no doubt represents an open prison where the Tamils are bullied, terrorized and killed by the Sinhala army of occupation.

It is a tragedy indeed that the whole world appears to look at this continuing human tragedy without compassion or concern for the enforcement of the very rights conferred by the UN Charter about which they have so loudly and vehemently proclaimed to salve their conscience. They appear to be impotent to act with any degree of enforceable sanction except for mouthing pious platitudes that do not save a single life of the Tamils at risk.

There have been over 80,000 Tamils killed in this period and hundreds of thousands injured. Millions have been rendered homeless as they have been driven away from their homes, which in many cases have been demolished in the incubus of a cruel war of oppression without any international witness.

Why juridical or statist nationalism labeled as ‘Sri Lankan’ fails when significant minorities form a distinct and separate nation?

In a talk “What is a Nation? What is a State?□ Exploring Minority Rights and their Limits”, Richard Falk - April 19, 2004, expounds the conceptual issue involved as follows: when does ‘a minority’ qualify as ‘a nation’ or ‘a people’ (the language used to designate the holder of the right of self-determination in international law) and when should ‘a nation’ be entitled to form ‘a state’ even at the cost of fragmenting a former state?

He spoke of the related issue relating to humanitarian intervention or, as the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, phrased it, an exercise of “The Responsibility to Protect” – **R2P** by the organized international community, that is, the United Nations. The retiring British High Commissioner Dominick Chilcot in his recent valedictory speech in Colombo also spoke of this right of intervention (R2P) in recalcitrant states to protect the people.

Falk went on to state that Kosovo illuminates the dilemmas associated with this theme of nationhood versus statehood as the basis of political community. If a minority feels beleaguered and discriminated against, and does not succumb to assimilation, it will often tend to form a defensive nationalism as a mode of cultural survival. Looking around the world at places such as Sudan, Kashmir, **Sri Lanka**, Colombia, parts of Indonesia, to mention a few of the more prominent instances, it is obvious that this tension between national consciousness and state unity is one of the great divides active in the world with no happy ending in sight.

Turkey with the Kurds illustrates the confusing reality of juridical “nationalism.” We can quite easily posit the 12 million Kurdish minority as “a captive nation” (especially, the six million or so Kurds living in eastern Anatolia); that is, a nationalism that is suppressed by the state. This reality is somewhat disguised by the misleading juridical claim that the Turkish state confers a Turkish nationalist identity on the entire population regardless of their preferred nationalist and ethnic identity. The great Turkish nation-builder, Kemal Ataturk, insisted in this vein that the Kurds were “mountain Turks,” and should be assimilated into the general population without any deference to autonomy claims or even cultural rights associated with language and traditions. There is thus a tension between nationalist aspirations of minorities and the statist aspirations of Turkish Kemalism.

The people of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and their history

Marco Polo wrote “Ceylon is undoubtedly the finest island of its size in the world”. It has been variously described as the ‘Pearl of the Orient’ and ‘the other Eden’. But today the land is steeped in the blood of the Tamils consumed by the racial hatred of the Sinhala Buddhists. It lies at the southern extremity of the Indian sub-continent and separated by the Palk Strait at some 22 miles away from India at the shortest distance.

Two distinct people constitute the main ethnic grouping of this island. The Sinhalese form about 72% and the Tamils about 20% of the population. There are in addition 6.5% Muslims most of whom speak Tamil. The Sinhala and Tamil languages are totally dissimilar; Tamil being one of ancient languages of the world that is still a living language. The Sinhalese are mostly Buddhists and the Tamils are mostly Hindus. As a result of European missionary work there are also Christians in both communities.

The existence of two separate Sinhalese and Tamil nations can be traced in historical records. The Tamils belong to the Dravidian group of people, one of the oldest races in the world. The Indus Valley civilisation that was contemporaneous with that of Egypt and Mesopotamia was Dravidian. The Ceylon Tamils are thought to have migrated from India in ancient times. There is historical evidence of a Tamil presence on the island in the sixth century BC. There is documented evidence of two Naga (Tamil kingdoms) on the island from the years 1000 to 100 BC.

They are mentioned in the Mahabaratha and the Ramayana, the two great Indian epics written in Sanskrit before the sixth century BC.

The Anaikoddai excavation of 1982 found evidence that Hinduism was the religion practised by these early people who were the ancestors of the Tamil people.

On the other hand, there is no evidence of Sinhalese presence on the island before 247 BC which is long after the Tamils arrived on the island. The Sinhalese came from Bengal in India. Sinhalese historians since the end of the 19th century AD, following the extreme Sinhala Buddhist revival started by Anagarika Dharmapala, have revised their history books to write about the island belonging to them as ordained by the Buddha and have twisted history to show the Tamils as usurpers.

Throughout the centuries and the millennia the Sinhalese and the Tamils existed as separate kingdoms in the country divided by impenetrable jungle and arid zones. There were three kingdoms; that of Kotte and Kandy for the Sinhalese, and Jaffna for the Tamils. Even the European occupation, first by the Portuguese (1505 – 1656), then the Dutch (1656 – 1796) did not disturb their distinct identities and territorial separation.

After the British occupied the country in 1796, the British initially ruled the Tamils from Madras in South India. However, the British merged the three kingdoms in 1833 for administrative convenience under the Colebrook-Cameron Commission and ruled the whole island from Colombo in the South.

I shall try to show that the Tamils participated as equals with the Sinhalese in the British colonial administration of Ceylon until the 1930s, just preceding the granting of independence. Emerging from the Colebrook Commission, the British put in place a tightly controlled administration through an advisory body called the Legislative Council reporting to the British Governor. Representatives from the Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamil, Burgher and local European communities were nominated by the governor to sit on this council. Until 1920-30, they were not appointed in proportion to the size of the population that they served.

For reasons to do with the establishment of Christian missionary schools in the north and which was spurned by the Sinhala Buddhist leaders in the south, there were more Tamils educated in English at that time who were preferred by the British for employment in government service. Nomination to the Legislative Council also took account of the English educated class of people, many of whom came from among the educated Colombo Tamils. At this time the Sinhalese and the Tamils were considered to be the joint co-founders of the country and the Tamils were neither considered nor treated as a minority.

Although their nominations were meant to represent their race, their numbers in Council were not limited to a proportion of their numerical strength within the whole population. British colonial records mention the significant administrative and political roles played by members of the Ramanathan – Arunachalam clan, a Tamil family that served the country with distinction from mid 19th century to the early part of the 20th century. From 1872 – 1920, the two brothers Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam were at the forefront of Legislative Council reform and were looked upon as all-island leaders. They worked as equals with the Sinhalese leaders to obtain self-governance for Ceylon. Once the Sinhalese became the ‘governors’ after the British left them in charge, their role as oppressors of the Tamils over the past 60 years of independence is indeed diabolical and evil.

Post independence Ceylon and Sinhala Buddhist State repression

Nation building is a continuously evolving process. Most of today's established nations have achieved nationhood through wars of independence or annexation or freedom struggles to free themselves from colonial rule. In modern times, the Tamils of Eelam have been making a painful political journey to freedom and a restored nationhood, from the time that Sri Lanka was granted independence from British rule in 1948. A nation shall rise from the blood of its people.

In the aftermath of the Colebrook Commission of 1833, the Tamils were for the first time ruled from the South and, much later as it will be proven, sowed the seeds of the sad plight of the Tamils that followed after the granting of independence in 1948 by the British, giving effect to a permanent Sinhala dictatorship. As the general elections in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) are conducted by parties based on racial lines and the electorates are also largely racially separate, the form of democracy granted to Ceylon will permanently leave the Sinhalese majority in charge of the Tamils, to do as they like.

Although the Tamils supported the first government of post-independence Ceylon headed by DS Senanayake, he immediately commenced to suppress the Tamils by disenfranchising 1 million Plantation Tamils who had been brought by the British from India in the early 19th century to work on the Tea and Rubber estates. They and their progeny had known Ceylon as their only home for nearly 150 years but the Sinhala government callously deprived them of their vote in 1948 and later in 1949 deprived them of their Sri Lankan citizenship. They were to languish as stateless people, being neither Ceylonese nor Indian. The only reason for this obnoxious assault on their fundamental rights, which after nearly 150 years of domicile would have been assured in any other civilised country, was the hatred and fear of the Tamils by the Sinhalese based on a pathological fear of India and the Tamils of Tamil Nadu.

In 1949, the Senanayake government started large-scale Sinhala settlements in the Tamil area of the Eastern Province with massive investment in jungle clearance, in reservoirs and irrigation schemes from which the local Tamils and Tamil speaking Muslims were excluded. Like the Israeli settlements in Palestine, the settlements of Sinhalese brought into the Eastern Province from outside continues to permanently change the demography of the region, where the 66% of Tamils before these settlements has now been reduced to 33%. The Sinhala Buddhists are on a racist conquest backed up by hate-filled anti-Tamil pogroms and the Tamil resistance is met with disproportionate military force.

The roll of dishonour of the Sinhala government continued to gather momentum with the new SWRD Bandaranaike government enacting the Sinhala only Act in 1956, replacing English as the official language and granting no place or concession to the Tamil language which was the language of the Tamils. The Tamil Parliamentarians who staged a peaceful sit down protest against this outlandish measure outside Parliament House were seriously assaulted by Sinhalese yobs led by Buddhist Monks and incited by Sinhalese MPs.

Tamils MPs had broken heads and fractured bones to show for staging a peaceful demonstration that was within the law. But regardless of Tamil protests the Sinhala government passed another law to change the language of the Courts to Sinhala. By this gross violation of their fundamental rights, the Tamils were rendered unable to correspond with the government or seek employment in public service.

Courts and Police Stations functioned in the Sinhala language only, which denied Tamils access to the law and equality before the law.

In 1959 the government of his widow, Sirimavo Bandaranaike continued to apply the Sinhala Only Act to the Tamils without compunction, gloating over the difficulties experienced by them. The largely Sinhala constituted police and armed forces were used to trample further on the rights and lives of the Tamils.

The Buddhist monks and the Sinhalese people were not satisfied even with this degree of political debauchery and skulduggery in their plan to suppress the Tamils. They had found that the Tamil youth who were hardworking and studious by nature and had been imbibed with ambition which is a Tamil trait, had been getting into University and Further Education in large numbers.

The government conspired with their supporters to prevent the Tamil youth from entering Universities based on the merit of their performances in the University admission examinations. They devised another subterfuge backed up by law in 1970 to standardise the results of University entrance examinations and confer an entrenched advantage to Sinhala students from Sinhalese areas.

This required Tamil students from Tamil areas to get much more marks in their subjects compared to Sinhalese students. This effectively stopped intelligent and hard working Tamil students from pursuing a University education. This might be described as the last straw that broke the Tamil camel's back.

It did not take long for the Tamil Youth to realise that they could not remain passive in the face of a determined Sinhala government onslaught to impoverish the Tamils both economically and culturally, until they ceased to be human beings possessed of dignity and aspiration. This was the point at which the Tamil resistance to Sinhala repression was born with the 'Cry for Freedom' and aspiration for a free Eelam'.

Under the Sirimavo government a new constitution was promulgated in 1972 wherein the provision protecting the rights of the minorities under the previous Soulbury constitution was removed. Buddhism was given primacy and protected position in law not accorded to any other religion. Appeals to the Privy Council were also scrapped as the Tamils had used previously this channel to reverse anti-Tamil legislation and discriminatory measures of the government. Sri Lanka also ceased to be a British Colony and became a Socialist Republic.

The Tamil MPs from the North and the East did not participate in the sham of the Constituent Assembly, one of whose primary purposes was to establish the Sinhala Buddhist regime under permanent constitutional safeguard and to treat the Tamils as second class citizens. This was a new constitution of the Sinhalese that was drafted by the Sinhalese for the Sinhalese. The Tamils had decided that they will have no truck with it.

The Sri Lanka constitution was again tampered with in 1978 under President JR Jayawardene, resulting in a powerful executive President and weakening the powers of Parliament. Further in 1983, the 6th Amendment to the constitution was passed outlawing the advocacy of a separate state. This was meant to place the Tamils in a straitjacket as regards seeking a viable political solution to the issues of discrimination and oppression and is tantamount to a bruised and battered wife not being able to get a divorce from her abusive husband.

In 1987 at the instance of the Indian Prime Minister, Parliament passed the 13th Amendment to this constitution creating a merged North and East as the traditional homeland of the Tamil speaking people. This entity was to be governed as a separate province within the prevailing unitary constitution and the merger would be subject to receiving a mandate from the people.

This is now the fig leaf purporting to come from the APRC and used by the present President Rajapakse, who is pretending to offer this as a solution for the Tamil 'problem'. He knows it was rejected by the Tamils in 1987 as grossly inadequate to meet their aspirations but is using it to cover his fanatically deep seated anti-Tamil position and that of his vile cohorts from the JVP and JHU. The Tamils have suffered for far too long and far too much to accept this sop from a devious and dishonest man. It is indeed ironic that Rajapakse, then in opposition in 1987, spoke his true mind against this amendment as he considered that it offered too much to the Tamils. But now to appease the Indians who sponsored this amendment, this chameleon has changed his colour but his true intent is to stuff the Tamils.

The Chandrika Kumaratunga government agreed a federal solution in negotiations with the Tamils in Oslo in 2002. Rajapakse who was a member of that government then endorsed this Federal agreement. But he has now (post 2005) reverted to the hackneyed old provincial council idea of 1987 within the current unitary Central government, which will be packed with rabid Sinhala Buddhists. This is a man devoid of any principle except to get to the top and remain there. The Indians, on the other hand, also sponsored the merger of the North and the East in the 1987 amendment, which formed the key pillar of the settlement for the Tamils.

But the Indian government now have had to swallow without demurring the de-merger of these two regions of the Tamils, brought about by political machination involving the injudicious action of a political minded Sinhala Chief Justice and the demagogic JVP encouraged behind the scenes by a mean-minded Sinhala supremacist President Rajapakse.

Acts of genocide and war against the Tamils

In 1956, SWRD Bandaranaike who became Prime Minister had unleashed the evil genie among the Sinhalese with pent up communal hatred against the Tamils. He had harvested their votes to come to power on a slogan of Sinhala only as the official language and Buddhism as the state religion. In 1956 and 1958, Sinhalese mobs armed with clubs, knives, petrol cans and lighters roamed the streets of Colombo and a number of other towns attacking Tamils, their homes and their shops. They hacked, mutilated and killed Tamils that they pulled out of buses, trains, their homes and shops. Many were burnt alive and their homes and shops razed to the ground. These attacks left hundreds dead and a hundred thousand Tamils homeless.

The thugs were invariably led by Buddhist monks and Sinhala politicians, and were well organised to the extent that they knew which were the Tamil houses in Colombo to attack. The police, mostly Sinhalese, looked on while these attacks took place. Although these attacks were euphemistically called 'riots', these were indeed the start of well calculated pogroms against the Tamils.

Tamils continued to live in a Ceylon where they were harassed and intimidated by the organised violence perpetrated on them from time to time by Sinhalese mobs led by Buddhist monks. The political screws were also being turned. The Sinhala government continued to erode their right to language, education, employment and the security of life on a continuing basis.

There were various attempts made to arrive at a negotiated settlement of the issues facing the Tamils. In 1958 Prime Minister Bandaranaike reached an agreement with Mr SJV Chelvanayagam, the leader of the (Tamil) Federal Party over Federal power-sharing, parity of status for both Tamil and Sinhala and to end colonisation of Tamil areas.

This was called the B-C pact and led to some optimism in the country. However, Sinhalese protests against this pact soon ensued led again by Buddhist monks and by the wily politician JR Jayawardene. A week later Bandaranaike quite timorously tears up the pact and this marks the start of a trail of such agreements made with the Tamils and abrogated later by the Sinhalese. The Tamil leaders had negotiated with honesty and hope for a settlement to remain within the Ceylon political fabric but all to no avail.

Again in 1965, the Opposition UNP leader Dudley Senanayake struck a pre-election deal with Mr SJV Chelvanayagam, which was a milder version of the previous B-C pact. This new pact was called the D-C pact but again Sinhala protests led by the Buddhist monks followed, and the pact was abandoned by the UNP no sooner than it had won the general elections.

The perfidy of the Sinhalese leaders and the rabid extremism of the Buddhist monks is a deadly cocktail for the Tamils to keep on swallowing.

As mentioned previously, the blatant attempt to limit access to University education for Tamil students by 'Standardisation' and the dismal failure to obtain any redress to the severe problems faced by the Tamils through a so called democratic process in name only, led to Tamil youth considering ways to arms themselves to fight against this creeping death. A nascent armed Tamil militant group called the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) was formed in secret in 1972, and in 1976 this group was reconstituted as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A conglomeration of Tamil political parties representing all the Tamils got together in 1976 to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). They met in Vaddukoddai in 1976 to discuss the grave situation facing the Tamils and passed a resolution demanding a separate state of Tamil Eelam in the North and the East of Sri Lanka. This is now referred to as the seminal 'Vaddukoddai resolution' and in shorthand means the demand for Tamil Eelam.

In the General Elections that followed in 1977, the UNP won the South by a landslide and the TULF won the North and the East by a landslide. It must be noted that the TULF fought these elections on a manifesto promise of a demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam. This is the overwhelming mandate obtained by the TULF from the Tamil people and these were the last elections held in the North and the East. More than 1000 Tamils were killed in anti-Tamil pogroms following incendiary speeches made by JR Jayawardene, the UNP leader.

The Jaffna Public library had been a repository of ancient Tamil Ola manuscripts and contained over 90,000 historical Tamil books. It was a prime centre of reading, learning and research and considered one of the best in South East Asia and had become the envy of the Sinhalese in the south. In 1981 the library was burnt down by Sinhala policemen stationed in Jaffna who were incited and led by a Government minister, Cyril Mathews, a member of the UNP government of JR Jayawardene.

All of this Sinhala provocation was creating much resentment among the Tamil youth and in 1983 the LTTE staged the first major attack on the armed forces based in the Tamil north. 13 soldiers died in the ambush.

Following the funerals of the soldiers in the south, government inspired Sinhala thug squads come out on the streets to wreak vengeance on the innocent Tamils living in the south. The thugs and their leaders (generally Buddhist monks) were provided with electoral lists by government officials to target Tamil homes.

In this pogrom alone more than 3000 Tamils were killed and thousands of Tamils fled from their destroyed homes in the south to seek refuge with relatives and friends in the north. Tamil homes and businesses were looted and destroyed.

The Sri Lankan military repression that followed was like the recruiting sergeant of Tamil youth to the armed militant groups.

The period 1983 to date is a history of a series of wars waged by the Sri Lankan government to conquer the Tamils and to force their racist writ upon them. These wars have been interspersed with ceasefires and negotiations. These negotiations and agreements have all suffered the same fate of being abrogated by the Sinhalese who have no real desire for any compromise except to gain some breathing space to launch the next war of conquest.

But unlike the passiveness of the Tamils prior to 1983, this period is marked by Tamil youth trained to fight against a vicious enemy and led by selfless and dedicated leaders. More than 80,000 Tamil civilians have been killed in this cruel war without witness and the North and East of the island obliterated by reckless shelling and aerial bombing. This is an indefensible position of a government bombing its own subjects and demanding to have their loyalty. Indeed a madness beyond comprehension!!

For the Sinhalese, this war is far from their homes and it is the heart of the Tamil homeland that is being deliberately wrecked. Over 80% of its buildings have been damaged by shells and bombs and essential food and medicine is in very short supply. Over 1 million Tamils have been driven from their homes into internal exile and another million have fled to other countries.

What is the government hoping to gain from this ruthless extermination of the Tamils, their property and their way of life? The answer must be the same as the final solution that Hitler wanted for the Jews.

There is a plethora of books and papers covering this period and it is not my intention to go into the events of this period in any detail, save to draw the lessons from these events. The ebb and flow of this war is there for all to see. The Sri Lankan army has launched a number of military campaigns with much fanfare in the past. Over the past 25 years they have captured some ground but have inevitably lost it to the Tigers in subsequent military reversals. Even if for arguments sake the Sinhalese were to conquer the Tamils now, will the following generations accept such subjugation? The spirit of man can only grow and develop in an environment of freedom and it will eventually break free of its fetters.

This was the period of the Timpu talks, many cease fire agreements, the Norwegian peace initiatives, peace talks, PTOMS and ISGC. As the war has got drawn out over these 25 years the country has gone from being one of the brightest prospects in Asia to a failing state. It is sadly not the state that fails because it is an inanimate thing. It is the people that fail and it is not their fault entirely although they do elect the people who represent them in government. Ultimately it is at least two generations of politicians from both sides who have failed their people.

On the Tamil side the present leadership is selfless, efficient and incorruptible. On the Sinhalese side, it is obvious that most of their politicians are crooks and sharks who are in it to make big money. Where in the world other than in Sri Lanka do politicians cross over from one party to another in exchange for millions of rupees and for a cabinet position or the promise of one in the future.

Is it not farcical that every member of the ruling party is also a minister, drawing a large salary and a retinue of cars and bag carriers? Look at the junkets that the President Rajapakse enjoys on state expense with his friends. The Rajapakse brothers in government and their clan are the biggest businessmen in town, having a hand in major government contracts. There is no concept of 'conflict on interest' in this parody of a 'democratic' government.

There is the recent spectacle of a cabinet minister who storms into a TV newsroom with his mafia friends to assault a news director for not televising his speech. In a form of instant justice, the ruffian minister is bound up and assaulted by the TV staff in the building. All of this is telecast to the public. This is tragedy lurking as comedy and even as farce. But the people of Sri Lanka are not laughing. The minister still remains in cabinet as a protégé of the President. It is said that the judiciary, the police and the armed services are all corrupt to the core. They are all power drunk.

Where does this rot start, you may ask? It must be from the moral bankruptcy of an evil war to kill and decimate the Tamils that feeds corruption and depravity for thirty years. Buddhism, a religion of peace and love has been corrupted by the war-mongering Buddhist monks. By all accounts, not just in economic terms but in moral, ethical, political and in juridical terms Sri Lanka's decline is closely co-related to the period of the futile war. Even America after a period of 5 years in Iraq is looking for a way out.

The lesson we have to draw from this is that there cannot be a military solution to a political problem. Vietnam and Algeria, East Timor and Kosovo, and even Iraq are examples of the folly of military conquests and eventual political settlements. The Tamils of NorthEast Sri Lanka have been systematically excluded from the economic, employment, educational, cultural or social benefits of being Sri Lankan, first by law and then by the actions of Sinhalese politicians since 1948.

For the past 25 years they have been bombed and shelled out of believing that they are Sri Lankans. It is no longer possible to keep the Tamils within a single state of Sri Lanka, which can only treat Tamils as serfs and second class citizens.

It is better in the long run for the Sinhalese to let the Tamils have their traditional homeland, as it was before colonial times, for a separate state of their own. The history of liberation movements based on previous nation states is that they inevitably will result in the creation of a new state. If even now it is done in amity through political negotiations, the resulting two states of Tamil Eelam and Sri Lanka on the island can collaborate on their own or in regional co-operation for their own and mutual benefits.

The international community must now not get transfixed and misled on a bogus question of 'terrorism' concerning the Tigers and to see the Tamil struggle as genuinely for unwinding an unworkable and volatile mix of two distinct states that have been forced together at independence to the detriment of both. In order to achieve this end result, India and the West should maintain a balanced and transparent attitude to both parties to the conflict. It does not do anybody any good by banning one party and turning a blind eye to the human rights abuses of the other. The British Minister, Lord Malloch-Brown has reprimanded the Sri Lankan government for serious breaches of human rights. The UN Human Rights Commissioner Louise Arbour has also reported on torture, kidnapping and murder of Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan army or its paramilitary allies.

There has been a litany of serious Human rights complaints against the government of Sri Lanka by a number of independent sources. But actions speak louder than words.

The standing and voice of these persons and the establishments they represent will be respected and regarded if they will also apply equal sanctions to the Sri Lankan government. A ban for a ban is what is required for equal transgression. In order to encourage the Tigers towards peace talks the ban on them should otherwise be lifted. This is the equitability I am talking about to achieve peace and a sustainable settlement in Sri Lanka. To the veritable alphabetic soup of failed B-C and D-C pacts, APRC, PTOMS, and ISGC, let me add the final ISTE. The Independent State of Tamil Eelam. Given the history, culture, natural intelligence and innate hard work of the Tamils, the world can look forward to an addition to the lustre of the international community.

Let me end by congratulating the organisers for assembling such an international galaxy of eminent and erudite speakers and I wish them good luck and God speed in their contribution and conclusions towards a sustainable negotiated settlement that should bring deliverance to the Tamils with justice, equality and fair play to both sides of the conflict.