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Bhopal*

Varavara Rao

**Oxygen a danger
Sight darkness
Breast milk a mortal kiss
Colonialism feeds
Crops of feudalism
Green revolution
Gurgles life force
On the ground it drained
The village blood
Cities are hugger mugged
By the long arms of multinationals
Exploiters funnel chimney fumes
Right in the heart of cities
A time bomb explodes, heart quakes
In the centre of every home hearth
Leaving dry salvage of ashes blue
Sights devoid of heat or fire
The `hand' passes on ballot paper
To fingers that fumble in the dark.
Human habitations become crematoria
A corpse encounters the enemy as a nightmare
With the peace of rich house
With irate eyes
With breathless hearts, heaving chests
Tens and thousands rise in revolt
They are neither alive nor dead
Yet, burning top to toe
They spout fire and brimstone
Declare `death is none but capitalism'
The group genocide
Reveal the conspiracy of exploiters
Unless you fell the tree of poison
People will kill
In a civil war
Capitalism on its deathbed
Inhaling war and exhaling poison gas
People will kill.**

(August 3, 1984 Translated by N. Venugopal)

[*This poem is reproduced here to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Bhopal tragedy.]

From the Editor's Desk

It is nearly three months since the government declared victory in its war against terrorism. The war was said to be one against the LTTE and not against the Tamils. It was even said that it was a humanitarian war to liberate the Tamils from the LTTE. But the Tamils who were entrapped by war are neither free nor treated with human dignity. Many, according to several estimates more than 20 000, have been killed. Nearly 300 000 people are behind barbed wire fences, and a large but unknown number held by the police for inquiries.

Failure to resolve the national question led to national oppression, its escalation into war, the killing of over two hundred thousand including killings relating to the JVP insurrection of 1987-89, and sending into internal and external exile many times that number. Resolving the national question is still not a priority for the government or the main opposition parties; and none of them have a clearly stated position addressing the just grievances of the oppressed nationalities.

Much has been said in recent months about a solution based the 13th Amendment to the Constitution introduced in 1978. Devolution of power to the Provincial Councils is part of that legislation, which recognises Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic society. The Amendment made Sinhala and Tamil the official languages of Sri Lanka. The struggles thus far have been about the inadequacies of that legislation by way of granting autonomy to the different nationalities, and about the failure to implement aspects of the amendment intended to address the national question.

President Rajapakse has not shown the political will to implement the 13th Amendment, and even less to go beyond it to address the national question. The UNP has retreated from the position that it arrived at during the peace talks with the LTTE and has jettisoned the federal solution which it proposed at the time, and now envisages a solution within the framework of a unitary state. The JVP, like its breakaway faction and the right-wing chauvinist JHU, rejects even the degree of devolution of power possible under the 13th Amendment.

In summary, the government and the main opposition parties have been together in their support for the military action of the government since 2006, and are accomplices in the government's

avoidance of finding a just solution to the national question. The Sinhala nationalist parties fall far behind even the much diluted political package of nine years ago offered by Chandrika Kumaratunga, and disgracefully sabotaged by the UNP opposition.

The principled position upheld by the New-Democratic Party on the national question stands in sharp contrast with those of the main political parties. It has consistently rejected secession as the solution to the national question and prescribed autonomy based on the principle of self determination as the way to address the national question. It was the first political party to recognise the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils as nationalities in their own right and to call for addressing their national aspirations based on autonomy and the principle of self-determination. It also urged the use of the principle of self determination in the widest possible sense to offer autonomy even to minorities without a territory to be identified with them.

The NDP has always rejected a military solution to the national question, irrespective of who had the upper hand during the quarter century of conflict. While it rejected the politics and the style of work of the JVP and Tamil militants, it held the oppressive reactionary state mainly responsible for the killing of innocent civilians and unarmed rebels during the JVP insurrections as well as the armed struggle by Tamil militants.

Today the country's independence and sovereignty are at stake amid aggravation of the national question and a deepening economic crisis; and its democracy is under immense threat. Thus it is all the more urgent to build a powerful mass organisation of left, progressive and democratic forces.

It is particularly important for the left, progressive and democratic forces among the Sinhalese to awaken to the reality and act, especially when the media are actively presenting one or another of Sinhala chauvinist agendas as the only political options for the Sinhalese. They need to pay particular attention to seeking a just solution to the national question so that they can win the confidence of the minority nationalities and thereby be able to unite the entire people in a struggle to restore democratic and human rights. It is only they who can save the country from impending disaster. Thus failure to act would be seen by future generations as a far greater betrayal than the failings of the old left.

Excerpts of Speeches at NDP May Day Rallies

[From texts of speeches in Tamil in *Puthiyapoomi*, May 2009]

The war and the struggle have led to misery. The people should learn from their experiences.

- Comrade Senthivel at the Jaffna May Day Rally

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party, said that while the whole world is celebrating the 123rd May Day of the working class of the world the importance of that revolutionary day is being concealed in our country. A major reason for that is the war of national oppression carried forward by the chauvinistic capitalist ruling classes.

The war has reached its peak with three hundred thousand people cornered into a small area in Mullaitivu and living a life of untold misery under a military siege. They are in the grips of death, caught between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. The NDP wants the people to be protected from attacks by either side.

Chauvinist oppression on the one hand and narrow nationalist militarism on the other are destroying the Tamil people. The NDP, as a Marxist Leninist party, has rejected these standpoints from the outset. It has also explained to the people about the destructive and futile nature of those approaches. It also pointed out that the liberation of the Tamils and other nationalities can be achieved only through the class-based united struggle of the workers, peasants and other toiling masses.

Our policies were rejected by the reactionary Tamil nationalists who opposed Marxism and the left in order to uphold a struggle based on ancient glory and whip up anti- Sinhalese sentiments. Initially it helped Tamil nationalist leaders to win parliamentary seats and later

others to gain political dominance through armed struggle. It is, however, important to note that it was chauvinist state domination and oppression of the Tamil people that provided the basis for the Tamil nationalist leadership to establish itself among the Tamils.

Since there is struggle wherever there is oppression, various Tamil youth groups took to armed activities in the name of liberation struggle. But their essential outlook had no class basis so that they became groups of youth driven by ethnic feeling and hostility. At the same time, the ruling chauvinist forces imposed war on the Tamil people with nationalist arrogance and oppressive militarism.

The present tragedy could have been averted if the Tamil people had been mobilised along the correct political line with clarity about who their friends and enemies were, and their struggles were along the lines of mass campaigns based on class struggle. But the struggles were guided by dreams of a glorious Tamil past and reactionary conservative thinking, and by claiming to fight for the people rather than by mobilising them. All of it went waste and the people who hoped that the youth will win their rights through struggle were not only disappointed but have been left in a desperate situation.

The NDP is not happy but deeply sorry to say this, since for the past thirty years it has stood by the people and carried forward its policies and politics of struggle. The NDP has never sided with the chauvinist rulers to carry forward its politics, but worked hand in hand with workers, peasants, depressed people, progressive intellectuals, artists and writers. It never yielded to any dominating force to do its political work or indulged in practices that seek to dominate over people or collaborated in any such practices.

Look at our party's flag. It is not ours alone. It is a flag hoisted by Marxist Leninist parties and workers, peasants and oppressed people in struggle across the world. The hammer and the sickle and the red hue symbolise the workers, peasants, their struggles and sacrifices. It is a flag transcending race and religion in the struggle for social transformation.

Look at the flags raised in the name of the superiority of race, religion and language to protect domination by the propertied classes and on behalf of their rule and authority. You can find in them the desire to dominate and anti-people motives. A look at two flags of the opposing camps here will remind the people of state power in the feudal era, of claims about their ancestors who ruled the land, and of those who seek to lead capitalist domination and political repression.

Hence the workers, peasants and other toiling masses should unite and mobilise to win their rights and demands through mass struggle.

The great tragedy of today, which is the war continuing to yield cruel destruction, should be ended immediately. A political solution should be put forward for the national question. An autonomy based on the principle of the right to self-determination should be established in the traditional homeland of the Tamil people comprising a merged North-East. The political aspirations of the Muslims could be fulfilled through a solution based on autonomy in the form of internal autonomous units within a united Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese living in the North-East should be guaranteed their rights in a similar fashion. It is only a solution based on power sharing that can transform the conditions resulting from the deterioration of the national question at various levels. From the outset the NDP has said this, based on its Marxist Leninist stand.

The Tamil United Liberation Front adopted its Vaddukkoddai Resolution as a nonnegotiable decision declaring the establishment of an independent Tamil Eelam as the only way to find a solution and to win freedom for the Tamil people. At the time, that decision enthused and excited the Tamils, the youth in particular. But we, as Marxist Leninists, explained clearly and with far-sight that it was implausible, likely to bring about destruction, and lacking in vision. What is the present state of the demand for Tamil Eelam put forward for electoral gain and counting on foreign forces? The past three months of war and struggle have given us valuable lessons and experience. Our plea to the people is that they should think aloud about them.

Carry forward united mass struggles.

- Comrade Thambiah at the Hatton May Day Rally

Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the New Democratic Party, declared in his address from the chair that the 123rd May Day rings aloud as the voice of anti-imperialism and a unanimous call of the workers of the world for economic recovery at a time of rapid decline of global economy and desperate struggle of capitalist imperialism for its survival.

He proceeded to point out that, several political and trade union leaders are, in their self-interest, for political gain and loyalty to the

ruling classes, have avoided speaking out in their May Day meetings for the rights of the people who have been subjected to exploitation and repression. Under these conditions, the NDP is conducting its May Day rallies and meetings in the Hill Country, Jaffna and Vavunia.

Military actions by the government directed at the people should stop forthwith and steps should be taken to find a political solution for the national question. The political solution should fulfil the highest aspirations of the Tamil people. Immediate steps need to be implemented in two phases. The first is to resettle the displaced people in their own homes and create an environment in which they can live a life of peace and harmony. Unjustified arrests, killings and abductions should be ended; the democratic and human rights of the people should be assured; and a social structure suitable for normal life should be ensured. These are the immediate needs.

The next stage is to conduct talks with all Tamil organisations and left and democratic political parties and put forward a political solution that will ensure maximum autonomy for the Tamils and all oppressed nationalities. It is only through carrying this out sincerely that a war-free united and independent Sri Lanka can be built up. It is thus that an honourable peace could be achieved.

If the government of President Rajapakse now intoxicated with chauvinist arrogance and other chauvinistic forces including the UNP would pursue the politics of self interest rather than enable normal life in the North-East, war-free Sri Lanka would only be a dream. Besides, a dangerous situation will continue in which foreign domination and intervention will become unstoppable.

It is impermissible to let the US and Indian hegemonic forces make use of the Sri Lankan national question to dominate Sri Lanka. President Rajapakse is posing as an anti-imperialist. But it is a fact that military actions against the Tamil people are taking place with the approval and support of the West and the Indian ruling classes. Manoeuvres by President Rajapakse have made it possible for a rise in foreign domination in Sri Lanka.

India has through providing total cooperation for the war and thereby robbing the country of its resources has established its hegemony. It is US, European, Japanese and Indian interventions that are responsible for the present state of turmoil. Unless that is understood and the

correct alternative programmes are implemented, stable peace cannot be achieved here.

Under the rule of Mahinda Rajapakse who submitted a Worker's Charter, the working day has been extended from 8 to 9 hours. There is proscription of trade union activity. Fair wages are denied to workers. Steps are being taken to parcel out large plantations to small holders. Thus a powerful, broad-based trade union movement has to be built up to re-establish the 8-hour working day, restore trade union rights, secure a fair wage rise for plantation workers, to safeguard the plantation economy, and to win the basic rights of the workers. A firm political leadership is necessary for it.

Likewise, building up powerful mass movements is the only way to enable normal life in the North-East. The essential need of the time is a broad-based and powerful political leadership capable of protecting the people and the resources of the country from the clutches of the capitalist chauvinists and selfish political forces. Our political journey in that direction will continue. The responsibility for reinforcing and thrusting it forward lies with the people and the youth.

A firm policy and political leadership are essential.

- Comrade Thevarajah at the Hatton May Day Rally

Comrade S Thevarajah, Member, Politburo of the New Democratic Party, stated in his address that a situation has come about where one wonders if a person is disabled if he has not been arrested or gone missing or been killed or threatened. The political culture in this country has been degraded to that degree by the ferocity of the chauvinistic ruling class.

The long-standing demands of the Tamil people for their rights have been rejected by labelling them as terrorist. The Tamil struggle for liberation is being repressed most cruelly. Hundreds of thousands have been made refugees and confined to camps. Killings go on indiscriminately of age. Thousands are being crippled. The rage of ruling class arrogance is finding expression as denial of democratic rights and of the freedom of the media.

It is under such conditions that we stand with our heads erect with pride of being Marxist Leninists, for we have always been firm that the only salvation for the oppressed and exploited masses is Marxism. When the revolutionary mass struggles in the North were blunted and the Tamil people were dragged behind narrow nationalism by the reactionary Tamil leadership, we criticised it and carried forward mass political struggles against oppression as a whole. We were then branded as traitors by the Tamil nationalists and subjected to death threats. But the Party stood in defiance of the threats.

Because we speak and do political work against the war, the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people and the ferocity of the chauvinist ruling classes, the chauvinistic state apparatus is trying to brand us as terrorists. It is trying to intimidate us and obstruct our political path by arresting our comrades.

Our criticism of the Tamil nationalist approach is now proving to be correct. Current reality also reflects our warnings about the West and India. The very India, portrayed as the defender of the Tamil people by the Tamil nationalists to advance themselves, is once again showing its cruel face. The US, Japan and European countries are competing with China and Pakistan and are preparing to plunder our resources. Thus, there is a need for a firm policy and political leadership to emphasise immediate relief for the people affected by war and to put forward a correct political solution to the national question, and it is necessary to carry it forward as a mass political movement.

Let us build a revolutionary trade union leadership.

- Comrade Panneerselvam at the Hatton May Day Rally

Comrade S Panneerselvam, Regional Secretary of the Hill Country Region of the NDP and Member, Walapane Pradeshiya Sabha said in his address that the struggle of the Tamil people is being repressed cruelly with support from the West. He added that the economic burdens on the people have made their daily life uncertain. Under the agenda of the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist ruling class, the culture of arrests, abductions and killings has become a matter of course.

All voices for democracy are being fiercely muzzled. Our comrades had been arrested for carrying forward people's politics. Two of them with one newly arrested continue to be detained along with many others. It is under such conditions that we are conducting May Day meetings in the Hill Country, Jaffna and Vavunia.

Although the period of the collective agreement on wages for plantation workers has lapsed, the leaders of the Hill Country are killing time by issuing statement after statement. Prices rising by the day are suffocating the people. The plantation sector is being gradually destroyed. Under these conditions the opportunistic political and trade union leadership of the Hill Country is kowtowing before the chauvinist state and acting only in the interest of their self advancement.

New people have won in elections to the Central Provincial Council, in a way that Hill Country politics is accustomed to, i.e. of substituting one for another. But all of them are of the same breed, and the people of the Hill Country should realise this soon. These changes will not lead to any salvation for the Hill Country. Thus an alternate revolutionary trade union leadership has to be built up for the people to win their trade union rights and achieve their aspirations.

Neither intimidation nor incarceration can disrupt our journey.

- Comrade Mahendran at the Hatton May Day Rally

Comrade 'Puthiya Malayakam' Mahendran said in his address: "I thank you for the opportunity to be able to appear on a public platform of the Party after two years in prison. Generally many have their suspicions about our arrest, because the state media indulged in a variety of false propaganda since our arrest. It was falsely said that we had training in handling arms and were planning subversive activities in the Hill Country. But we are not terrorists and have not been involved in subversive activities. We are people's activists". We are Marxist Leninist revolutionaries who firmly believe that it is the people and the people alone who are the best weapon to wipe out all oppression of the people. We accept the Marxist ideology and stand by it to carry forward mass politics for the people.

We have been at the fore to build a political platform that would unite the toiling Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim masses against the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist ruling classes and against the imperialist programme of globalisation. The “terrorist” charge against was that we participated in struggles against schemes which affect the people that are designed to plunder the natural resources of the country, being at the forefront of struggles for wage rise for the plantation workers, and participation in art and culture activities for the development of an alternative social culture. We were imprisoned for that offence and three of our comrades are still under detention.

Let me say one thing at this moment. Neither intimidation by the agents of the ruling classes nor incarceration and torture can disrupt our political journey or shake our firmness in our policy. Our revolutionary struggle for the freedom of all political prisoners including our comrades and for building a social structure that will enable all the people of this country to live with freedom and democracy will continue in defiance of all challenges and obstacles. We are ready to pay any price for that.

The country is a hunting ground for hegemonic forces.

- Comrade Soodamani at the Vavuniya May Day seminar

Senior Comrade Soodamani who chaired the May Day Seminar in Vavuniya held under the abnormal conditions prevailing there said in his address that “Our country has now become the hunting ground of foreign imperialists and hegemonic forces. The Government which is unwilling to share powers with the Tamil people is most willing to surrender the country to hegemonists. To conceal this reality, it is waging war and killing countless innocent people. Many thousands have died and many thousands are injured. Property worth crores of rupees has been destroyed. Hundreds of thousands have lost home, wealthy and happiness and are languishing in detention camps. The state is conducting itself with chauvinist arrogance, and shows not the slightest interest in the rights of the Tamil people”.

Only a united struggle based on class can liberate the people.

- Comrade Balasankaran at the Vavuniya May Day seminar

Comrade S Balasankaran said in his address that the government was using the war to crush workers' rights and to destroy the unity of workers. By emphasising the war it deceptively claims that the workers have no problem. Those who speak up for the workers are branded as Tiger terrorists and are put in prison. The government is using the war to frighten the people to the extent that ordinary people are made to think that speaking against the government is treason. The living conditions of the people are becoming increasingly sorrowful as a result of the rising prices and unemployment. The rights of workers are being denied, and the revenue collected from ordinary people compensates the losses of millionaires.

Struggles against the state are portrayed as terrorist campaigns against the people by hegemonic powers which support racist and reactionary regimes. They nurture or annihilate liberation movements as necessary to serve their interests. India used the struggle of the Tamils by supporting a number of movements in ways that served its interests and, when its purpose of subduing Sri Lanka was achieved, it provided support for the Sri Lankan state. The US cultivated movements such as the al Qaeda and Taliban to serve its needs and is now out to destroy them. Hegemonic powers do not support liberation movements to defend humanitarian values.

The hegemonic forces have provided us with an experience of their activities. But the Tamil people have been reluctant to learn the lessons. The prime reason for this is a lack of appreciation of the class nature of the struggle, i.e. a lack of a class outlook on the class nature of the state that oppresses us and about mobilising oppressed classes against the oppressor. The history of our struggle teaches us that it is through a united struggle based on class that an oppressed people can be liberated.

The Main Contradiction in Post-War Sri Lanka

Imayavaramban

The post-war political situation in brief

Sri Lankan Marxist Leninists hold that, by the 1980s, the national question had evolved into the main contradiction in Sri Lanka and found expression as naked chauvinist oppression, and eventually a war of national oppression. The initiation and escalation of the war were encouraged by internal and external reactionary forces who saw in it an opportunity to distract attention from the social and economic problems that the country was to face as a result of the agenda of imperialist globalisation to which the country was being committed by the open economic policy of 1978.

Three decades since the rapid escalation of state-backed national oppression marked by anti-Tamil violence in 1977 and twenty six years since the transformation of the national contradiction into war, the armed conflict was brought to a brutal end. As in the case of the JVP insurrections of 1971 and 1987-89, the number of casualties of this war remains uncertain; but the scale of the uncertainty is much larger, especially with the number of civilians killed in the last stages of the war has been variously estimated at between the conservative 8000 or so by the United Nations and over 30,000 by others, as opposed to the modest few hundreds by the government. The number displaced during this period is around 250,000, making the number of people detained in refugee camps encircled by barbed wire close to 300,000. The number of disabled civilians is estimated at between 20,000 and 30,000. The casualty figures for the LTTE and the armed forces of the government remain undeclared, and are likely to be large, much larger than will be admitted by the parties to the conflict.

Amid the misery caused by the war, the government is in a triumphal mood. Various utterances by the President, leading government spokespersons and chauvinist allies of the government suggest that the emerging view within the ruling alliance is that that the war has

resolved the national conflict and that there are no more minority nationalities but only minorities who may be tolerated within the Sinhala Buddhist state of Sri Lanka.

The mood among the Tamils is one of despair and the Tamil nationalist leaders appear to have lost all sense of direction so that they are still clutching at straws to give Tamil people hope that India and the International Community can still be persuaded to intervene on behalf of the Tamils.

Supporters of the LTTE among the Tamil diaspora are in a state of shock so that a significant number is unable to come to terms with the death of the leader of the LTTE. Grand plans including the setting up of a Trans-National Government of Tamil Eelam have been proposed by the pro-LTTE elite, of whom many have not expressed the slightest concern for the plight of several hundred thousand Tamils in Sri Lanka who have been killed, dispossessed and displaced by war, many of whose democratic, human and fundamental rights are being regularly violated. There are many among the diaspora who are genuinely concerned, but lack a sense of direction and leadership to address these pressing issues. There has also been a small section of the diaspora which for subjective reasons insisted that the LTTE was the main enemy of the Tamils and that only the defeat of the LTTE will bring freedom and prosperity to the Tamils. They too are at a loss after the defeat of the LTTE. However, there are a few who for personal gain or out of cynicism side with the Sri Lankan government despite awareness of the plight of the victims of war.

The Tamil nationalist groups and parties which have been in alliance with the government are now facing a political crisis. The government in its ambition to consolidate its power has succeeded in negating the identities of its minority nationality partners by forcing them to contest elections under the symbol of the ruling alliance. Those who have not sided with the government have been forced to identify themselves with the UNP, with the exception of the Muslim Congress and the Tamil national alliance, both of which have been considerably weakened electorally in the course of events during the past four years. Some Tamil nationalist allies of the government chose to contest under symbols distinct from the ruling alliance, but that was not based on policy or principles but because of rivalry with other groups, personal differences and disagreement about seat allocation.

The government also seems intent on eliminating any serious political challenge to its power and has been helped in its endeavour by the

state of disarray within the UNP and the JVP. The media as a whole is colluding with efforts to sideline the left so that an impression is created that the Sinhala polity is entirely Sinhala chauvinistic, and that the badly discredited chauvinistic JVP is the only 'left' option.

The reality is that there is an emergent Sinhala left with potential for rapid growth in the aftermath of the war and the political and economic realities that it has exposed the people to. Also, there is a growing number of people who are disgusted by the way the war has been conducted and by the treatment of the displaced as well as LTTE suspects. Harassment including detention under state of emergency and anti-terrorism laws is being used to silence dissent from the left.

Re-assessing the status of the national question

The left recognised the importance of the national question many decades ago. But the parliamentary left, which had grown very strong within the left movement by the early 1960s, compromised its position on the national question for opportunistic reasons. The genuine left, nevertheless, was unshaken in its just stand on the national question as well as recognised its evolution into a major contradiction in Sri Lanka. The New Democratic Party went on to recognise the Muslims and the Hill Country Tamils as distinct nationalities with national aspirations, well before political parties representing the nationalities recognised these features.

The NDP also proposed that the solution to the national question should be based on the right to self-determination for the nationalities and that the principle of self-determination should be applied in its true spirit to deal with the aspirations of other national minorities as well. Marxist Leninists were early to recognise the national question as the main contradiction of Sri Lanka. Even others on the genuine left who did not see the national question in the same way recognised it as a problem that had to be addressed urgently, on par with the anti-imperialist struggle and struggles for democratic and human rights.

The importance of the national question, or even its existence, has, understandably, been rejected by Sinhala chauvinists. Even as the question gained importance from the mid 1950s, the tendency was to brand Tamil demands as communal, and separatist, even when the demand was for a federal form of government. During the escalation of the conflict into armed oppression and war and even during peace negotiations, Sinhala nationalist political parties portrayed the conflict

as one between terrorism and the Sinhala nation. Although for the duration of the ceasefire agreement the term 'terrorists' was mostly avoided in references to the LTTE, the Sinhala and English media resumed its use when the government waged war in 2006.

There are some who, unlike the chauvinists, agree that the problem still exists and can be addressed by patchwork solutions like making various concessions to the minorities. Although this approach has by and large failed in the search for solutions in the past, it is still popular among liberals, sections of the old left, and a variety of opportunists, especially from among the minority nationalities.

Pseudo-Marxist analysts of the national question have used arguments based on dogmatic interpretations of class struggle or on pragmatist considerations to insist that the recognition of the national question as the main contradiction amounts to seeing the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils (and in the view of some that between the government and the LTTE) as the main contradiction.

Such objections are based on the misinterpretation of the national question as a conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils to the exclusion of contradictions concerning other nationalities. They also ignore the class interests that underlie the development of Sinhala chauvinism and narrow nationalism among Tamils as well as other nationalities.

Sri Lankan Marxist Leninists arrived at the conclusion that the national question had become the main contradiction by taking full account of class and class struggle and the fundamentality of class contradiction. Their conclusion was based on a careful study of how ruling class interests took advantage of the national question, which is essentially a contradiction among the people, and transformed it into national oppression and thereby a hostile contradiction and then war. It also took into account the role of imperialist and regional hegemonic interests, from much before the escalation of the conflict into war, in escalating the contradictions among nationalities. Thus, they hold that the correct handling and resolution of the national question is essential to ensure that the fundamental contradiction received due attention from the entire people to carry forward the struggle against social oppression and imperialism.

The Marxist Leninists never presented the nation question as a hostile contradiction between the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities, but as a contradiction, which was essentially non-hostile or friendly to the extent that for centuries each of the different ethnic groups benefited

from mutual interaction. They saw the national contradiction in its present form as the result of conflicting interests of ruling elite classes for profit and dominance. The failure of the national bourgeoisie to deal with the pressing economic problems made it necessary for them to find political refuge in chauvinism and for their counterparts among minority nationalities to respond with narrow nationalism.

Marxist Leninists, while they uphold the right of a people subject to armed oppression to defend itself with arms, firmly believe that the national question cannot be resolved by war. Given the need to find a just solution to the national question by peaceful means, an oppressed nationality needs to distinguish between the chauvinistic oppressor and the nationality that the oppressor claims to represent. Likewise there is a need for the majority nationality to distinguish between the interests of elite classes among the oppressed nationality and the exploiting elite classes among them. This position has been repeatedly emphasised by Marxist Leninists.

The correct handling of the national question requires the segregation of the interests of the exploiting classes that take advantage of the national contradiction for their own benefit from the interests of the vast majority of the people who constitute the nationality. Thus, identifying the national question as the main contradiction in Sri Lanka is not a matter of reducing the main contradiction to one between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Such reduction if not childish is certainly mischievous.

Those who thought that the national question would be resolved following the defeat of the LTTE have now been proved wrong. The military defeat of the LTTE is being seen as a defeat of the Tamil people not only by those who pinned their hopes on the LTTE but also by the Sinhala chauvinists. The sentiments which were stirred up among the Sinhalese in the wake of the defeat of the LTTE were certainly not those of reconciliation but Sinhala triumphalism.

The prospect of the unlikelihood of an armed resistance or rebellion on the part of Tamil nationalists does not mean that the grievances of the Tamil minority have gone away. The contradictions are sharpening as a result of the attitude of the chauvinist ruling classes and the government towards the minority nationalities and the resolution of the national question. Also the chauvinists are now more openly hostile towards the other minority nationalities, namely the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils. Thus national oppression remains very much

intact as a force dividing the nationalities, and the national question will remain the main contradiction until its satisfactory resolution.

Foreign meddling in the national question

National oppression in Sri Lanka is likely to be more intense than in the past. Given the triumphal mood of the chauvinists and their increasingly aggressive attitude towards all minority nationalities, the prospects for a peaceful resolution of the national question are bleak. While the form that Tamil resistance would assume in the new climate is hard to predict, it certainly cannot be anything like that in the past two decades. Much will depend on where the Tamils seek their allies in the struggle for their rights, including the right to self-determination.

What Sri Lanka witnessed over the past three decades was the distorted growth of a mishandled national contradiction into war against an international background of imperialist resurgence. Foreign meddling continued, unknown to the vast majority on both sides of the conflict. The imperialists have, in the colonial era and after, appeared to have sided with one ethnic group or another during conflicts; but their intervention was never in the interest of Sri Lanka or for that matter any ethnic group. The conduct of Indian hegemonic forces has been no different.

Since the escalation national oppression, India and the West have on various occasions given an impression of support for the Tamil nationalist cause. But they were swift to switch sides and sympathies in ways that served their hegemonic interests, and loyalty at any time has been based on shared interests based on class allegiance.

The Tamil nationalist elite, like their Sinhalese counterparts, looked up to their former colonial masters and with the rise of the US as a neo-colonial superpower there was a strong tendency for the right wing of the Sinhala elite to turn to the US. The Tamil elite were generally loyal to the West. It was also hopeful that India would side with them in their time of need, although little was forthcoming. This was to change with intensified Indo-US rivalry in the region, especially concerning control over Sri Lanka. When the Sri Lankan foreign policy took a slant towards the US around 1980, India used the grievances of the Tamils to 'correct' the drift in Sri Lankan foreign policy. Indian support and control of Tamil militant organisations was so strong that the entire Tamil militant movement was brought under the Indian umbrella. Once the aim of bringing Sri Lanka into line was achieved,

the Indian government sided with the Sri Lankan government so that it could pursue unhindered economic control over Sri Lanka.

That the West and India were not supportive of the Tamil struggle for secession was well known for a long time. Even after realising that they had decided to side with the Sri Lankan government in militarily defeating the LTTE, the temptation was strong to place the faith in the West and India to salvage the Tamils and the LTTE leadership during the last few months of the war. Sadly, that tendency persists even after the bitter experience of the past several years.

The Sri Lankan government, despite its strong anti-West posturing during the past year, especially in the context of charges against violation of human rights and the occasional plea for a ceasefire, cannot free itself from the clutches of imperialism or India. Violation of human rights, suppression of the media and democratic freedoms, and national oppression are matters about which the US and its allies, despite occasional criticism, will turn a blind eye. But acting in defiance of the imperialist agenda of globalisation will not be tolerated, and Sri Lanka has not taken that risk since 1977.

Thus the two sides to the conflict have in the course of the war weakened themselves to the point of placing themselves under obligation to imperialist and hegemonic forces. Thus foreign meddling could become an unavoidable feature of the Sri Lankan national question in the years to come. But that is not a desirable thing for any of the nationalities.

The future

Sri Lanka faces a grave economic crisis and the recently approved massive IMF loan of 2.5 billion dollars is an indication of it. The terms and conditions of the loan will be detrimental to the entire people of the country. Combined with the global economic crisis the economy is bound to get worse than the government would ever admit.

It is in this context that the national question needs to be seen with fresh eyes so that it will not again be allowed to be used by foreign meddlers to their advantage and to the detriment of Sri Lanka and its people. Such vision and the leadership that goes with it cannot come from nationalists bonded to foreign interests. The left has a major role in filling the political vacuum created by the bankruptcy of nationalism

Indo-US Rivalry in Sri Lanka: Blaming it on China

Mohan

In early May the London-based Times newspaper and its website carried an article that emphasised that it was China that had been most supportive of Sri Lankan war efforts and been the a much bigger provider of economic aid to Sri Lanka than any other country.

Tamil journalists in Sri Lanka are rarely translated into Tamil any article with progressive or anti-imperialist content. Often articles on international events in Tamil are downloaded from Indian websites and republished with the source unidentified and, at best, acknowledged as 'Courtesy: Internet'. The above article by Jeremy Page was, however, translated with great care in the "Sunday Thinakkural". Let us hope that the same kind of interest will be shown in other matters as well.

The contents of the above article were not really from its author Jeremy Page. The Times is an anti-left newspaper. The reason why articles hostile to Russia and China appear in it even after the two countries have moved away from socialism is that the two countries remain as obstacles to global domination by the US and West Europe.

Jeremy Page is not known to be progressive journalist, and his article admits that the source of the information contained it was entirely one B Raman, former Director of the Indian intelligence agency, RAW. Raman holds key posts in at least three 'research organisations' functioning with the main aim of undermining Sino-Indian relations. These organisations have their websites, and information generated by them has been used by Tamil nationalists including the late DP Sivaram to provide their 'analyses'. Gossip and half truths based on them are magnified over and over and presented as facts.

Whenever China is criticised Tamil, and occasionally in the case of Russia, it is emphasised that they are socialist countries and are subject to communist rule. The intention is not hard to recognise. It is none other than mischief to point to misconduct by today's China where capitalism has taken root and Russia which has suffered a crisis as a result of its transformation into a capitalist country and for recovery is struggling to establish state control over its economy and portray that as the conduct of socialist countries. This is similar to their denouncing the genuine left by pointing to the mistakes made by the revisionists and the LSSP.

At the same time, there are leftists who are blindly hostile to China and Russia in view of their abandoning socialism. There are also those who supported one side and criticised the other during the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute who retain their old hostilities. Many of them endorse the criticism of China or Russia from any quarters, without studying the reasons or realities.

Our assessment of global events is influenced by our global outlook. Whatever be our standpoint, if we tend to conceal the truth and present fabrication as fact, we will only be fooling ourselves. Some Tamil nationalists have used information provided by the likes of B Raman and fabrications by the imperialists and Indian expansionists for the purpose of portraying China as the main enemy of the Sri Lankan Tamils. This tendency has grown in recent times. Nevertheless, the essence of their arguments can be summed up as follows:

- 1 China is competing with India for hegemony.
- 2 China is preparing for a naval siege of India.
- 3 China actively supports the genocide of Tamils by providing Sri Lanka with weapons of mass destruction.
- 4 China is seeking to dominate Sri Lanka by propping up the collapsing economy of Sri Lanka.
- 5 It is as a result of the above conduct of China that India is collaborating with Sri Lanka in its chauvinistic war.

It is again on such basis that some seek to justify India's conduct during the past forty years and more in ways that disrupted peace in neighbouring countries.

China has, thus far, not exercised hegemony over any country. The foreign policy that was formulated when China was still a socialist

country has not been changed. That it could change is another matter. But it is not intelligent to equate possibility with current reality.

China's position on disputes concerning its territorial waters continues to be one of resolving them through dialogue; and China remains a country that has not exercised hegemony over any of its neighbours. Thus, for some Indian expansionists to scream aloud about rivalry for hegemony in the South Asian region of the Indian Ocean is like the thief shouting out "Thief, thief" before everyone else.

China has assisted countries stretching from Africa's east coast to Myanmar to develop harbour facilities. China has its own intentions. It will be wise to explore each possible reason before declaring it as Chinese hegemony.

The growth of the Chinese economy has made China depend on the import of petroleum and various other natural resources. The US is actively pursuing its acts of encirclement in many regions around China. Even recently, a US naval vessel intruded into Chinese territorial waters, and was blocked by the Chinese navy and driven away. But the US is not a respecter of the territorial waters of other countries.

The rulers of India have been most obliging towards attempts to transform India into a regional power under the wings of the US. Iran has so far been the obstacle to the grand US plan for a military axis comprising India, Iran and Israel. Against this background it is possible to use some pretext to intercept China's trade routes by sea. Such obstruction could take place in any part of the Indian Ocean. Such incidents have been the cause of wars in the last century. China cannot ignore that prospect or for that matter various possibilities of the US blocking sea lanes used by China.

Taiwan, which is a part of China, has since 1949 been under US domination. The US is encouraging secessionists in Tibet. In China's northwest it is instigating secessionists on the basis of religion. If one considers these factors, one will understand that China cannot be but be cautious about its security.

So far China has, however, paid attention mainly to strengthening its economic influence. Besides that, China is trying to ensure harbour facilities for its merchant vessels by helping some countries in the Indian Ocean region in consideration of the prospect of the US blocking any of its sea routes when it will be necessary for China to have harbour facilities, alternative sea routes and land routes for its

merchandise. But it should be noted that, in the development of harbour facilities, there is no sign of any agreement compelling any country to permit China to use the harbour as a Chinese naval base.

The Chinese loan to Sri Lanka to develop the harbour in Hambantota and the agreement to carry out the construction work are entirely on a commercial basis. But, based on the year in which the loan was finally approved, Jeremy Page, while imputing that China was developing naval facilities in Hambantota, also argued that China had surpassed Japan in providing aid to Sri Lanka in 2008. China's Foreign Ministry made a strong protest against distortions by him. Yet, many receivers of the rumours spread by the likes of Page and Raman have not the slightest interest in the protests by China or in ascertaining the truth.

Although the West had threatened to discontinue economic assistance to Sri Lanka in view of its record of violation of human rights and had in fact discontinued some, Japan had continued to provide financial assistance. We need to examine whether this was done with the blessings of the US or in defiance of the US.

Those who comment critically about China's assistance for the economic development of Sri Lanka do not mention Indian economic activities in regions of strategic importance. The thermal power station to be set up by India in Sampur in the Trincomalee District was approved as soon as the Sri Lankan armed forces captured Sampur in 2006. In addition that region was declared a High Security Zone. The intentions of those who protest against agreements with China without opposing the agreement with India for oil exploration in the North western waters of Sri Lanka deserve attention.

Over the past several decades, rivalry for military domination over Sri Lanka was between the US and India. After the erasure of the last footprints of colonialism in Sri Lanka, the armed forces that set foot on this island were none other than those of India and the US. Indian forces were in readiness for direct intervention in 1971 and actually intervened directly in 1987.

China was never the reason for Indian intervention in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. While China has now been made a convenient pretext, the real reasons lie elsewhere. India did not want the non-aligned policy of Sri Lanka to be perfect. Nothing happened prior to 1962 that required Sri Lanka to take the side of India. But India resented the non-aligned role played by Sri Lanka during the Sino-Indian border conflict and during the Indo-Pakistan conflict of 1971.

In particular it resented Sri Lanka allowing Pakistani military aircraft to land in Sri Lanka for refuelling on their way to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). But for Sri Lanka to assist Pakistan, which was a friendly country, to transport troops to another part of Pakistan did not amount to taking sides Sri Lanka siding with Pakistan against India. Such reasoning was, however, not acceptable from India's hegemonic viewpoint. Yet India remained cautious about intervening in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

Tamil nationalists were, however, hopeful of putting to use Indian resentment to their advantage. The climate that enabled Indian intervention in Sri Lanka came about not because of Indian concern for Sri Lankan Tamils but as a result of the efforts of President JR Jayawardane to shift Sri Lanka's foreign policy in favour of the US. The magnificent image of India that was built in the minds of the Tamils reached its peak in 1987, only to face total collapse in 1988.

No one claims that Chinese intervention in Sri Lanka was the reason for the Indian betrayal of Sri Lankan Tamils in 1987, for China has maintained friendship towards Sri Lanka since 1952. The friendship was further strengthened following the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1957.

In the 1970s China had granted massive economic aid to certain African countries in order to strengthen anti-imperialist and anti-colonial liberation struggles. No one could then accuse China of expansionist intentions.

International events and trends have contributed in important ways to China's foreign policy. There has always a sense of caution about the US. The open contradiction with the Soviet Union since 1961 was intensified by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1967. The relationship with the Soviet Union was severely strained throughout the period when Brezhnev was in power. The thawing of relations since the 1980s have led to the forging of a new strong relationship, following a series of events including the break-up of the Soviet Union, political changes in China and the emergence of strong resistance in Russia to US attempts at global domination.

The US is the world's biggest military power. Its military bases exist in many countries far from the borders of the US. Now the Indian hegemonists have become its allies and are actively meddling in the internal affairs of India's neighbours. Through these interventions the SAARC is being transformed into an arm of Indian hegemony. It is to

cover these up that some are bringing up the bogey of 'Chinese threat'. What is important here is that China has not interfered in the internal affairs in any country for India or the US to be able to point a finger at it. So far no government has criticised China for providing financial and technical assistance for the development harbours in the Indian Ocean referred to as the Chinese 'Garland of Pearls' by some or have attributed military motives to Chinese involvement. Had there been any material evidence for the kind of concerns expressed by some mischief makers, India and the US would not have hesitated to speak out their concerns.

The essence of Jeremy Page's article was that Sri Lanka was able to carry forward its genocidal war solely because of China's military and economic aid. Neither he nor B Raman, his source has given any details about the origins of the bulk of the weapons of mass destruction used by the Sri Lankan armed forces. They would not like to either, since such information will thoroughly expose the acts of deception by the West and India.

China has sold to Sri Lanka naval patrol boats, radar equipment, aircraft and a variety of small weapons. Whether it was right for China to sell military equipment is one matter, but whether Tamils were being annihilated using Chinese military equipment is quite another.

It is correct for China to develop weapons for its defence and to supply weapons to people affected by imperialist, colonial and hegemonic aggression and to liberation forces struggling against an aggressor. That was what China did well into the 1970s. But since China took the capitalist path, its arms manufacture went beyond the needs of national defence to include commercial interests. This is a feature that was witnessed in some former socialist countries of Europe during their political degeneration. Marxists Leninists have always criticised such conduct. But it will be wrong to single out China or Russia for criticism.

China cannot be included in the group of nations which that provoke conflict between and within various countries, including Sri Lanka, and thereby seek to establish their hegemony. Yet there is no way in which China can impose conditions to ensure that military equipment supplied to a country for its defence will not be used in a civil war or in a war of national oppression. That is why, although China is not in the lead in global arms sales, its sale of weapons has to be criticised from socialist and human liberation points of view.

On the other hand, when Indian and US hegemonists seek to bring countries with good relationship with China into their domains of control by military means and other forms of intervention, China gets dragged into such situations in the pretext of defending its national interest. But that does not become correct conduct. However, to claim that India supplies arms to Sri Lanka because China supplies arms is to turn facts upside down.

We should firstly examine closely whether the US continues to pose a global threat against every Third World country and continues to base its troops either on a short term basis or on a long term basis in various parts of the world, and whether India is growing into a major threat to the smaller nations of South Asia. It may be easier to understand and explain China's conduct based on that understanding.

There are many more who are deceived by those who seek false propaganda by the likes of B Raman and propagate it than those who are directly deceived by the falsehoods of Raman, for it is easy to recognise Raman's motives. But when the falsehoods are recast and reinterpreted through the normal media, they gain an appearance of neutrality.

Whether the Tamils trust or distrust China will make little difference to the struggles for their rights and for liberation. But intervention by the US and India are qualitatively different from the role of China. Believing or disbelieving the declared positions of the US and India have practical importance.

It is safest for the Tamil people to trust themselves more than they trust external forces. The course of the politics of their struggle will determine whom they can trust. What is certain is that it will not be any hegemonic power that they can place their trust in.

[Approximate translation of an article in Tamil published in *Puthiya Poomi*, May-June 2009]

NDP Diary

Elections: A Meaningless Exercise

NDP Statement to the Media

4th August 2009

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party issued on behalf of the Politburo of the Party the following statement on the three forthcoming elections.

For whomever the people may vote in the elections to the Jaffna Municipal Council, the Vavuniya Urban Council and the Uva Provincial Council, no benefit or change will come out of the elections. All the parties are like old pots and old toddy. None has fresh policies or programmes for change. The objective reality is that they are contesting to strengthen their grip on power and to perpetuate political domination, and not to resolve the problems faced by the people. Thus the New-Democratic Party is of the view that these elections cannot be considered meaningful and that there is no use in people participating in them.

Elections conducted in the North under conditions where the people do not have a normal life or democratic freedoms are elections that have been forcefully thrust upon the people. It is a matter of concern that the ruling party, the main opposition party and Tamil parties are asking the people for their votes without any moral sense. None of them seems mindful of the sufferings and losses experienced by the people as a result of the policies followed by and implemented by them and the agony of the people caught in a misery from which they have to this day been unable to redeem themselves. None of them seems to have come forward with any review or self-criticism of their role as political leaders or the consequences of their actions. Had they done it, they should have firstly expressed their political apology to the people for their mistakes and the destruction suffered by the people and come out with fresh policies and political programmes. Instead they participate in these elections with the intention of continuing to dominate the Tamil people through their old stances by reinforcing their positions of power and political stranglehold. Under these circumstances, the Party is of the view that participation by the Tamil people in these elections will be tantamount to an endorsement of wrong policies.

Further, the government party and the main opposition party, and the Hill Country Tamil parties contesting the elections in alliance with them, which have done nothing about the basic problems faced by the people, especially the wage increase of the plantation workers, are contesting the

Uva Provincial Council election, based on their age-old methods of deception. There too the case is one of old pots and old toddy. Although some try to portray themselves as new pots, the content is old toddy. Thus, there too they contest to prolong their positions of power and political and trade union domination.

Hence the New-Democratic Party wishes to point out at this juncture that the path emancipation is for the people to realise that these elections donning the mask of democracy cannot bring about a solution for the problems faced by the people and ready themselves for fresh alternative policies and political programmes.

SK Senthivel

General Secretary, New Democratic Party

Elections in the North

NDP Statement to the Media

16th June 2009

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the decision of the Government to conduct elections to local government in the North.

Conducting elections in the North will not bring the forfeited normal life, the denied democratic rights, and the freedoms that have been restricted. Any election conducted in a climate in which the people do not enjoy those rights can only be nominal and actually meaningless. Thus the government should undertake without delay measures to establish normal life, democratic rights and freedom. It is only under such circumstances that people can think about elections and participate freely in it. Otherwise, an election will only be the imposition of authority.

In the North, three hundred thousand people have lost or are separated from their kith and kin and are living a life of misery denied of rights in detention camps. Already, people from various parts of the North who have been displaced from their homes are struggling with a life of displacement. Likewise, the Muslims who were driven out of the North are suffering as refugees. Thus, it cannot be fair to conduct elections without finding an end to the pain and sorrow of the people of the North or showing any interest in them.

Above all, no just political solution has been put forward. Meantime, the political rivalry of the past continues, where one party negates the other. No one has come forward to make a self-criticism about the injustices,

wrongs and misery imposed on the Tamils during the past thirty years or to apologise to the people. Also, they are unprepared to rectify their errors of policy or practice and traverse a new path. Under these conditions, participation in elections will only be a continuation of the deception of the past. As a result divisions and conflicts will be encouraged among the people and there will be a sharpening of a hidden culture of arms.

Hence, if the Mahinda Chinthanaya government is genuinely concerned for the Tamils in the North, it should come forward to grant to the people the due just political solution, normal life, democratic rights and freedom. It is that which the New-Democratic Party emphatically demands of the President and the Government.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary, New Democratic Party

People Detained in the North

NDP Statement to the Media

29th May 2009

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the plight of the three hundred thousand people detained in the North.

The three hundred thousand people compelled to live in detention camps behind barbed wire in the North are people who escaped the clutches of death amid unprecedented losses and sorrow. They deserve to be treated as respectable citizens of the country and not like prisoners of war. The New-Democratic Party emphatically demands of the President and the Government that they should for no reason be treated with partiality or in a discriminatory fashion or in a revengeful manner.

They are experiencing a sorrowful life of imprisonment under tent roofs without adequate food, clothing and basic amenities. Therefore the NDP emphatically demands that urgent measures be taken that will enable the three hundred thousand people under detention in refugee camps to return to settle in their own residences and to undertake reconstruction and rehabilitation activities for them.

The President and the Government have already declared that terrorism has been defeated and that the war has been won and brought to an end. Consequently, victory celebrations and felicitations are being held. At the same time, in the North three hundred thousand people who, having lost their homes, land and property and means of livelihood and having witnessed loss of life and suffered hunger and starvation, are living a life of misery in refugee camps encircled by barbed wire fences. Having lost

their relatives, they pass their days with wounds and emotional damage amid fear and disquiet.

The Tamil people who have suffered this historically unprecedented cruelty are people who were forcefully and based on false hope dragged along a path of unrealistic struggle by the Tamil nationalist leadership, the LTTE in particular, with their unrealistic demands. To treat such a people with indifference or to revengefully detain them is unjust. At the same time, the three parties, namely the chauvinistic ruling class forces, the Tamil nationalist leadership, and the hegemonic forces comprising India, the US and the West should accept the responsibility and blame for this historic sadness and sorrow.

It is through learning from the experience of such historic realities that a just political solution can be found that is acceptable to the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamils. The New Democratic Party points out that it is only such a solution that will serve as the basis to build up permanent peace, unity and equality.

SK Senthivel

General Secretary, New Democratic Party

Urgent Plea by the NDP

NDP Statement to the Media

15th May 2009

Comrade E Thambiah, National Organiser of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the Government's military actions in the name of liberating the Tamil people.

As a result of military actions by the government, called the humanitarian action to liberate the Tamil people, thousands of people have been killed, hundreds of thousands have been displaced, and many of the displaced have been severely injured or crippled. Many have been arrested and detained. It is this tragic situation that is hailed by the chauvinists as victory against terrorism and a victory for the Tamil people. Our Party denounces it and expresses solidarity with all progressive, democratic and left forces that denounce it.

It was to avert the occurrence of such a tragedy that the Party had continuously urged steps to resolve the national question. The Party also warned against the prospect of foreign intervention and pressures. The Tamil people who have been subjected to great misery and are sorrowed and angry are being fed with hope that foreign intervention will bring

salvation. Statements by the United Nations, US President Obama and Foreign Secretary Hilary Clinton may give the impression of exerting pressure on the Sri Lankan government and consoling the Tamils.

Although the cause of this great tragedy and foreign intervention has been military actions, foreign intervention in the current international context cannot transcend imperialist and hegemonic interests. They will be harmful to the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the country and to the right to self-determination of the nationalities. Imperialism and hegemonic forces cannot be the friends of an independent country or of an oppressed nationality. Nevertheless, the danger that prolonging the human misery and military action will accelerate direct foreign intervention is undeniable. Such interventions will only lead to even bigger disasters. The Indian government through participation in the military actions of the Sri Lankan government and the UN, the US and the EU through their criticism of the human tragedy have been seriously interfering with the independence, sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka.

This situation has been created by Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist oppression that denies the right of the Sri Lankan Tamil nationality to self-determination and by the military actions. If intervention by forces of global domination is to be prevented, military action had to be abandoned and a political solution found based on the right of nationalities to self-determination that is fundamental to the coexistence of all nationalities of Sri Lanka with equality and autonomy.

It is essential for all progressive, democratic and left forces to act with unity to put to an end the military actions responsible for the worsening tragic situation and foreign intervention, enable the Tamil people to return to normal life, and find a political solution to the national question.

E Thambiah

National Organiser, New Democratic Party

A General Consensus is Essential to Overcome the Tragic Plight of the Tamil People

NDP Statement to the Media

13th May 2009

A political solution with autonomy based on the principle of self-determination that fulfils the national aspirations of the Tamil people and guarantees to them a normal life is essential to transform the current

miserable situation of the Tamil people. The New-Democratic Party appeals to all left, democratic, progressive, Tamil and Muslim political parties and organizations to initiate discussions in order that the political rivalry of the past for dominance is set aside and a people's democratic political climate based on a pluralistic approach is evolved to enable them to act in consensus to achieve the above goals.

In this post-conflict period, three-hundred thousand Tamils, encircled by barbed wire fences, are living a life of misery and unbearable pain. The Tamil people who had lived with the hazards of war for the past thirty years are now living amid terrible political desolation and a sense of intimidation. Pro-people political parties and organisations should take the initiative to rescue the people from this situation. The New-Democratic Party emphasises that discussions should be commenced for that purpose and consensus reached among leftists for that purpose.

In order to achieve it without delay, the New-Democratic Party puts forward the following ten-point proposal. The Party appeals to honest and pro-people parties and organisations to discuss them to arrive at a general consensus, and emphasise as demands.

- 1 A political solution should be found within a united Sri Lanka that will ensure maximum autonomy for the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil nationalities of Sri Lanka, based on the right to self-determination within a united Sri Lanka, and to the exclusion of debates on whether the Thirteenth Amendment should or should not be implemented in full.*
- 2 Displaced Tamil and Muslim people living in detention camps and other places should soon be allowed to return to resettle in their own dwellings. To avert delays in resettlement, activities relating to reconstruction and restoration of education and health should be expedited. Adequate compensation should be provided for the affected people. The people should not continue to be prevented, on the pretext of security, from returning to their dwellings or engaging in cultivation or fishery.*
- 3 The A-9 highway should be opened for free transport of people. The railway line to the North should be soon restored.*
- 4 The system of travel passes for transport should be terminated and right to free travel affirmed in order that opportunities are created for agriculture, fishery and marketing.*
- 5 Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism legislation should be repealed.*
- 6 All political prisoners should be released.*

- 7 *Total civil administration should be established in the North-East and normal life should be guaranteed for the people there. Democratic rights including the right to life should be guaranteed there and the freedom of opinion and expression established.*
- 8 *The legal status of Tamil as an official language should be put into practice throughout the country.*
- 9 *Attempts to establish planned chauvinistic colonisation schemes in the North-East should be abandoned.*
- 10 *The freedom and safety of Tamils living outside the North-East should be ensured in a way that they are not subjected to security hassles or suffer ethnic discrimination.*

The above resolution put forward by the Central Committee of the New-Democratic Party was signed and released by its General Secretary, SK Senthivel.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

Appeal for Support

The NDP publications, *Puthiya Poomi* and New Democracy uphold democratic values and defend the interests of the oppressed, independently of ethnic, religious or any such identity. They are unique among Sri Lankan journals for high journalistic standards, useful content and coverage of issues unaddressed by mainstream media and publications of political parties representing the interests of the exploiting classes. The rising costs of printing and postage have added to the financial burdens of the Party, which relies on financial support from supporters and well wishers, who also burdened by the rising cost of living. The Party has neither NGO funding nor rich patrons. Hence the Party appeals to readers and well wishers to contribute to its Publications Fund by adding to the subscription, making a donation, or sponsoring the publication of part or whole of an issue of either journal. Payments may be made to:

S Thevarajah, account number 452868
Bank of Ceylon, Supermarket Branch
Colombo 11, Sri Lanka

Please mention 'Publications Fund' in the covering note addressed to:
47, 3rd Floor, CCSM Complex, Colombo 11, Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Events

From Tea Garden to Banana Republic?

The Eastern Provincial Council in mid-July cancelled two projects proposed by the Sri Lankan government involving more than 35 000 acres (14 000 hectares) in the Trincomalee District, allotted to two private, reportedly foreign, companies without consulting the Council. Nation Building Minister Punchinilame has vowed that the government would go ahead with the project, which in its first stage will allocate 15 000 acres (6000 ha) for banana cultivation and in the second the remaining 20 000 acres (8000 ha) for cashew cultivation to the same group of companies.

The issue could precipitate a constitutional crisis *vis a vis* the 13th Amendment and powers relating to the granting of state lands; or may be a storm in the teacup with the Sri Lankan government finally having its way. What is worrying is that major projects are undertaken that have serious implications at national and regional level without due discussion.

Losing Logos

A precedent was set by the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil People when it agreed to contest the Eastern Provincial Council elections under the symbol of the ruling alliance some months ago. Now, a more established party, the EPDP with a significant popular base in the Jaffna peninsula, has been persuaded to contest elections under the symbol of the ruling alliance. The leader was at a loss to justify this loss of prestige, but the incident itself is a sign of things to come when minority nationalist parties could be driven out of electoral politics. If other pro-government Tamil nationalists have held on to their symbols, that is not because of any ideological firmness but because of unwillingness to have their candidates on the same slate as the EPDP.

Dealing with Rebels: 1971 & 2009

After the first armed insurrection of the JVP in which a large number of Sinhalese were wantonly killed, the SLFP-led government of the time realised that the end of the conflict should be followed by reconciliation and acted fast to release and rehabilitate most of the detainees who were not accused of major offences. There were of course some who were unjustly detained for long periods and later released without trial, but

their number would seem negligible compared to the number of instances of prolonged detention without inquiry or trial now.

The war is over now, and there is little justification for the continued detention of innocent civilians behind barbed wire fences. It seems that the detention of LTTE suspects in police custody could be prolonged. One wonders why the present SLFP-led government would not follow the good example set by its predecessor of the 1970s to deal with a situation where national reconciliation is a priority.

No Minorities. No Opposition. No Politics?

The President declared just weeks after the end of the war that there are no more minorities in Sri Lanka. Intentionally or not, the manner in which the statement has been presented failed to give the impression that the idea was that there will be no more discrimination against the minorities and that they will feel one with the rest of the population. Utterances by important spokespersons of the government gave the impression that the government was of the view that the need to deal with the 'minority' problem does not exist anymore. Even more worrying was the more recent utterance that there is no more opposition, which was followed up by important government spokespersons declaring that there was no need for more than two political parties namely the PA and the UNP, so that all other parties could align themselves with one or the other of the two.

Is Sri Lanka in a mad rush towards the end of politics?

Back to Mother India

The TNA, the long discredited successor to the Federal Party and the TULF has now come out with their new plan to seek a solution to the Tamil national question base on the principle of self determination. Some of its leaders shamelessly lied to the media some months ago that the TULF never asked for Tamil Eelam. The TNA which is now effectively a group of MPs from four political parties and their hangers on has no political organisation and is already facing a serious split, cracks of which were evident in the months preceding the defeat of the LTTE. This group which has been repeatedly humiliated by the India has again offered to collaborate with India in return for Indian support for their political revival. How desperate could some people get?

Lessons of a Freedom Struggle

**Bitter Dawn: East Timor, A People's Story, Irena Cristalis.
Zed Books, London & New York, 2002, pp. 306+xiii.**

The book records the personal experiences and observations of Irena Cristalis, a Dutch journalist, who was among the few foreign journalists in East Timor (Timor Leste) during periods covering the struggle of the East Timorese for liberation, the referendum on independence, and the bloody aftermath.

Portuguese set foot in the island of Timor in the 17th Century and the island was divided between Portugal and the Netherlands in 1859 with Portugal ruling the eastern half. Between 1942 and 1945 the Japanese occupied East Timor, which was returned to Portuguese rule at the end of World War II. A bloodless revolution in Portugal brought a socialist regime to power in 1974 and the liberation movement, Fretilin, formed shortly after, took control of East Timor. Indonesian invasion of East Timor followed with attacks across the border and Fretilin declared independence. With encouragement and support from the US, Indonesia annexed East Timor and ruled it by brutal repression. The brutality of the invader only reinforced the struggle. Prospects for independence seemed bright with the overthrow of the fascist dictator Suharto in Indonesia in 1998, but the Indonesian state machinery and the militias created by it in East Timor had their own agenda. Hence a reign of terror by the militias prevailed, with the backing of the Indonesian armed forces, and continued for weeks after East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence in an UN-supervised referendum in 1999.

The book outlines the independence struggle and provides a first hand report of events since 1991 until the people. Vivid accounts of the conduct of individuals and organisations during the critical years are presented truthfully, despite the unhidden biases of the author like her partiality for the rebel leader Xanana Gusmão, who abandoned Marxism around 1978, and her own dislike of Marxism. Particularly revealing are the cynical conduct of the imperialist powers and the ineptness of the UN in protecting the people.

The book contains valuable insightful information and offers positive as well as negative lessons for liberation movements and people facing national oppression.

-SJS-

International Events

India: State Terror Back on the Agenda?

The paramilitary offensive unleashed jointly by the state and the central governments on the people of Lalgarh in West Bengal, has been denounced as an assault on democracy by the left, democratic and progressive forces. A fact finding team of students from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi who were in the region between 7th and 10th of June reported on the police rampage in Lalgarh following a land mine blast aimed at a convoy of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya Chief Minister of West Bengal in November 2008 and the mass resistance in response to it (<http://www.monthlyreview.org/mrzine/lalgarh180609.html>).

Police terror was not new to the people of Lalgarh, but the conduct of the CPM cadres acting hand in hand with the police was new. More significant and unique was the response of the people to repression. The struggle was not only against atrocities by the police and CPM goons but also against 'development' activities and government neglect that had brought misery to the people. It went further to mobilise voluntary work by the villagers to restore long neglected infrastructure; to undertake land distribution which the state government failed to implement; and to revive a long neglected health service. Maoist cadres were present but with mass acceptance, and the people themselves took the key decisions.

It was in this context of mass democratic resistance to oppression that the state and the central governments launched their paramilitary attack. The mainstream media and the organs of the CPM still seek to paint a picture of the government forces restoring law and order in a region in a state of anarchy imposed by Maoist intrusion. The truth is that Lalgarh merely demonstrated unambiguously the government policy of cracking down on every instance of people's resistance on the pretext of combating 'Maoism' or 'terrorism' irrespective of the party in power.

India's Home Minister, who claimed that the government has no intention to wage war on its own people, instructed intellectuals and civil society representatives not to visit Lalgarh so that the 'paramilitary forces will not be 'distracted'. It is strange that the government fears public scrutiny of a paramilitary operation that is not targeting the people. The real reason is that the government wants to conduct its brutally repressive war on the adivasis in Lalgarh away from the scrutiny of civil society.

The central government has declared victory in clearing the region of Maoists. But it has failed to quell the anger of the people, and its class

interests will not let it to address the real issues. Thus, not only will Lalgarh resistance resume with greater vigour, but also inspire many more oppressed communities across India.

The central government has also imposed a ban on the CPI-Maoist. The ban, certainly, is a prelude to intensified attack on dissent and resistance; and the recent pattern of behaviour of the state and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's insistence that the Naxalites are the biggest threat to India's security cannot but bring to mind the 'Emergency Years' under Indira Gandhi over three decades ago.

Democratic, progressive and genuine left forces throughout India have strongly denounced the paramilitary offensive in Lalgarh and the ban on the CPI-Maoist. The CPM has endorsed the former, as it is party to the crime, but disapproved of the latter, perhaps since it is still able to see the writing on the wall.

[Sources: *monthlyreview.org*, *Sanhati.com*]

Nepal: The Struggle Should Continue

The political polarisation in Nepal following the dismissal of the army chief, Rukmangud Katwal is the manifestation of the US and Indian American desire to have a government that excluded the Maoists. How long the newly cobbled up alliance will last in government is uncertain.

The UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), which has been monitoring both Nepal Army and the PLA, wrote to Prime Minister Prachanda to stop recruitments to the Army; and Prachanda, through his defence minister, informed Katwal of the UNMIN directive, which Katwal chose to ignore. Katwal had refused to obey government orders on at least five earlier occasions during Prachanda's tenure as prime minister; and it was the CPN (UML), a major partner in government, that had insisted with Prachanda on the immediate removal of Katwal. But on the very day of dismissal of Katwal the CPN (UML) withdrew support to the government.

It is thus clear that the Prachanda's government was made to resign through a well-orchestrated conspiracy. Bamdeo Gautam, senior vice-president of the CPN (UML) and home minister, publicly criticised this move and called it a suicidal step. Massive rallies followed in four major towns besides Kathmandu to protest President Rambaran Yadav's decision to re-induct Katwal; and Nepal once again seems to be on the threshold of a civil war.

Prachanda addressing the members of the Central Committee of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) on 29th July 2009

said that there was no option left but to take the path to a Third People's Uprising, and appealed to patriotic, republican, progressive and communist forces to unite to launch the uprising, under the leadership of the UPCN-M. There was however no reference to an armed struggle. But his reference to the acquisition of new weapons by the Nepal Army in breach of the spirit of the ceasefire agreement, and the need to persist in struggle have been distorted by the reactionary media in Nepal as well as in India as a declaration of intent to launch an armed struggle.

Hisila Yami (Comrade Parvati), Politburo member of the UCPN-M, explained in an interview with the New Delhi-based Tehelka Magazine in late July that the current impasse was the result of the undermining of the peace process by the Nepal Army hierarchy, which was blocking the integration of the PLA cadres into the Nepal Army, and criticised the role of India in supporting Army Chief Katawal's on the debate over his unconstitutional conduct which led to the resignation of the government led by Prachanda and its replacement by an opportunist alliance. She also made it clear that there was no intention on the part of the UCPN-M to resort to armed struggle in the immediate future, but made it clear that the Party had not unconditionally rejected armed struggle.

Whether Nepal will or will not be plunged into a civil war depends very much on whether the new government will honour in their true spirit agreements made between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance which led to the election of the constituent assembly and the declaration of Nepal as a republic.

[Sources: *kantipuronline.com*, *english.peopledaily.com*]

Pakistan: Straining under US Pressure

The New York Times reported on 23rd July, based on a briefing for the paper by senior officials of the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence service, on condition of anonymity, that the surge in Afghanistan will further reinforce the perception of a foreign occupation of Afghanistan and will result in more civilian casualties as well as further alienate the local population, leading to local resistance to foreign troops. A major concern was that the US offensive could push the Taliban militants over the border into Baluchistan, a province bordering Waziristan in the tribal areas, and where the Pakistani Army is already fighting a longstanding insurgency of Baluch separatists. As a result Pakistan would be compelled to send more troops there, troops the country does not have, and diverting troops from the border with India was too risky for Pakistan's security.

The same concerns were expressed by Pakistani intelligence officials, who pointed out to the Obama administration that attacks by the US Marines in southern Afghanistan will force militants across the border into Pakistan, with the prospect of further inflaming the troubled province of Baluchistan. The US, which is keen to extract a greater commitment from Pakistan to the US war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, seems to be at cross purposes with Pakistan, which is more concerned with the Indian threat than even the versions of Taliban in Pakistani. The US and NATO commands in Afghanistan are dismissive of the prospect of movement of insurgents out of Afghanistan or for that matter foreign fighters moving into Afghanistan through Baluchistan or Iran.

US bullying of Pakistan goes on regardless of cooperation between Pakistani and US military officials in sharing information allowing effective strikes against militant hide-outs by Pakistani F16 warplanes and drones operated by the CIA and risky joint missions to hunt down fighters from the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Charges, such as that Pakistan is doing little about safe havens for Afghan militants in Pakistan reflect US insensitivity to feelings of kinship and loyalty among local populations and their, often justified, suspicion of the West. Some of the differences of opinion also result from the arrogance of US intelligence that grants little credit to its Pakistani counterparts.

The Obama administration, while commending recent military operations by Pakistani forces against the local Taliban in the Swat Valley, leading to the displacement of over two million people, and in parts of the tribal areas, is protesting that Pakistan is more concerned with its internal security than with the threat to US soldiers in Afghanistan or about terrorism in India. The insensitivity of the US to Pakistani concerns of internal stability is further evident in the US desire to find common cause with India in the war against (Islamic) terrorism. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's utterance during her last visit to India that those who had planned the '9/11' attacks were now sheltering in Pakistan was typical of US attitude and was rebutted by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry.

The linking of the US war in Afghanistan with Pakistan by Obama who has dubbed it the AfPak war in April 2009 was not well received in Pakistan. Leading newspapers in Pakistan were critical of the approach and warned the Zardari government about the dangers posed, including that to democracy, by going along with Obama's plans.

In an article dated 27th July in the Internet journal, Foreign Policy in Focus, columnist Zia Mian pointed out that US policymakers in their rush to make money and to preserve American power have averted their eyes from the reality in Pakistan that the government is losing authority in

parts of the NWFP and has less control of its semi-autonomous tribal areas and even in the more developed parts of the country, with mounting economic hardships, frustration over poor governance, the dismal law-and-order situation, and violence between various sectarian, ethnic, and political groups threatening to escalate. He also pointed out that the Taliban to escape US drone attacks and major assaults by the Pakistan army in the tribal areas is taking refuge in the cities so that there are already no-go areas in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, where the Taliban controls the streets.

[Sources: *fpif.org*, *nation.com.pk*, *nytimes.com*]

China: Unrest in the Northeast

The US has had a hand in all unrest in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, including the recent turmoil. Secessionists among the Uyghur people have been cultivated from the time when the US actively pursued the use of Muslim fundamentalism to overthrow the pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan. It was used to sow discord in predominantly Muslim member republics of the Soviet Union and within the Russian republic, and in north-western China. Although the approach backfired in Afghanistan and in the Middle East, it seems to serve in containing Russia and China.

The violence in late June in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, was well organised and directed against the Han nationality and cannot be condoned. The events, like those in Tibet last year, have been reported in the Western media with a mischievous twist, concealing the identity of the initiators of the violence and the fact that the victims were mainly Han. Little has been said about the instigators of the violence sheltered by the US. Nevertheless, the Chinese government needs to be more sensitive to the aspirations of the minority nationalities. Harsh methods to deal with resistance of any form will be counterproductive.

Some of the sources of ethnic conflict are fairly recent, and relate to the change in China's economic policy and the emergence of capitalist ventures at the expense of socialist economic structures. Socialist China, by establishing five autonomous regions including the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and guaranteeing the rights of its national minorities by establishing a variety of autonomous structures, achieved harmony among its many nationalities. The unity of China could not be assailed by reactionaries and imperialists, even through critical periods in the history of People's China. The state policy and the constitutional and legal

safeguards for the rights of the minorities was part of the political line of the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong. But the shift towards capitalism since the late 1970s unleashed the forces of greed and along with it insensitivity to the sensibilities of minority nationalities.

The conflict has a strong economic side since the local population feels that it is not benefiting adequately from economic development based on the natural resources of its region. Under such conditions, the presence of a thriving business community as well as a less affluent group of small traders, of the Han nationality causes local resentment. This is in total contrast with the situation in the first quarter century of People's China, when Han Chinese went to the region to contribute to the social, economic and cultural advancement of the people. The cadres and volunteers who went to various undeveloped regions were politically educated and were respectful towards the customs and beliefs of the people of the regions. In fact, China took pride in the state's defence of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities of all its minorities including those with no region to call their own.

The Communist Party then correctly saw the contradiction between the majority Han and all minority nationalities as a contradiction among the people and dealt with it correctly. Concessions were made to all minority nationalities on many issues including population control. The limited success of the mischievous elements in transforming the contradiction into a hostile contradiction has to be seen in the context of the ideological shift in the Chinese Communist Party and encouragement of bourgeois values of self interest. It was socialism that liberated China and united its people. It is only socialism that can save China from the impending crises on various fronts, resulting from opening up to capitalism.

[Sources: news.bbc.co.uk, guardian.co.uk, english.peopledaily.com]

The Philippines: Back to Peace Talks

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), having failed in its US-backed efforts to destroy the New Peoples Army, finally agreed to resume peace negotiations with the representatives of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The negotiations facilitated by the Royal Government of Norway are scheduled to begin in August, although the sincerity of the US-backed Gloria Macapagal Arroyo government about peace negotiations remains questionable.

Cesar Renerio, NDFP spokesperson in North Central Mindanao pointed out in his statement of 11th July that the resumption of peace talks

between the GRP and the NDFP in August further confirms that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have run out of gas against the New People's Army (NPA) and that the resumption of talks implied further that the US-backed Arroyo regime was forced to eat its words that the CPP-NPA-NDFP is not a terrorist organization.

The GRP ceased to insist on preconditions such as a ceasefire; lifted its suspension of the Joint Agreement on the Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) for it to take effect on July 17; and consented to the release of detained consultants and other JASIG-protected persons, as well as the political prisoners scheduled for release as early as 2001 and 2004. Unwilling to accept the fact that the GRP was thus forced to retreat by the failure of the AFP to subdue the NPA, certain spokespersons for the GRP resorted to distorting the outcome of the informal meeting of 15th June to give the impression that the NDFP had agreed to various conditions laid down by the GRP, which had stood by its preconditions for resumption of talks.

Fidel V. Agcaoili, Member, Negotiating Panel of the NDFP corrected the false impressions in his statement of 13th July and confirmed that the two Parties agreed to reaffirm all previously signed agreements before the proposed dates for the resumption of the formal talks. He also made it clear that since August 2002 the NDFP had never demanded from the GRP it should ask the governments of the European Union and the US to remove the CPP, the NPA and Prof. Jose Maria Sison, the Chief Political Consultant of the NDFP in the peace negotiations, from their "terrorist lists". What the NDFP proposed to the GRP was that the two parties sign a joint statement asserting the right of the Filipino people to national sovereignty and territorial integrity over incidents in the Philippines; and that foreign governments have no right to label as terrorism what are deemed as acts of belligerency in a civil war under international law.

[Source: philippinerevolution.net]

North Korea: Defiance as Way Forward

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea, has been under an international siege led by the US since its resumption of nuclear tests. The global media echoed the views dished out by the US with an aim to isolate and weaken North Korea's will. But North Korea was defiant in asserting its right to develop its defences against imperialist threat across the border with South Korea, partitioned by imperialist intervention and having forces of US occupation on its soil.

The media always present the issue of nuclear disarmament of North Korea one-sidedly, and in ways to portray North Korea as the offender.

Nothing is said of the failure of the US to honour its side of agreements. The North Korean position has been that unresolved issues of regional security mainly concern the US, whose refusal to deal directly with North Korea has been the main obstacle to their resolution. The US, by bringing into the negotiations parties that are not involved in the key issues, has been able to divert attention from the key issues and thereby make North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons the central issue.

North Korea had earlier agreed to denuclearisation, and in June 2007 took the positive step of decommissioning its main nuclear power plant. But the six-party talks failed to go anywhere towards addressing problems arising from the division of Korea and US occupation. It was in this context that North Korea resumed its nuclear weapons programme and missile tests. Attempts by the US to subdue it by applying pressure through US sanctions and all manner of threats failed; and they led to North Korean withdrawal from the six-party talks.

On 27th July, North Korea proposed a fresh dialogue to resolve tensions over its nuclear weapon programme, an implicit invitation to the US to engage in one-on-one talks. This was only hours after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Pyongyang to stick to six-nation talks, saying the multilateral framework is "the appropriate way to engage with North Korea." Hilary Clinton's empty boast that North Korea is totally isolated and had no friends was given the lie when the Russia welcomed the North Korean initiative and the UN Secretary General endorsed it two days later.

A North Korean foreign ministry statement said "Any attempt to side with those who claim the resumption of the six-party talks without grasping the essence of the matter will not help ease tension... There is a specific and reserved form of dialogue that can address the current situation."

The arrest in North Korea of two US journalists near the border with China and their sentencing to 12 years on charges of illegal entry and hostile acts has created a possible opening for US-North Korea dialogue. Former US President Bill Clinton visited North Korea in early August to successfully negotiate their release. The visit could pave the way for a face-saving opportunity for the US to agree to bilateral talks.

[Sources: *almanar.com.lb*, *chinadaily.com.cn*, *guardian.co.uk*]

Lebanon: Elections and Media Games

The 'March 8' coalition led by Hezbollah won the majority of the popular vote in the Lebanese parliamentary elections held in the first weekend of June, although the pro-Western 'March 14' coalition secured

the majority of the seats with 71 seats as opposed to 57 for the 'March 8' coalition.

Al-Manar TV, supportive of the Hezbollah, pointed out that the Hezbollah alliance secured 55 percent of the vote as much as 92 percent of the vote in southern districts, while the pro-Western coalition won just 45 percent.

Washington had linked the outcome of the Sunday vote to continued financial and military support for Lebanon, expressing concern over the possibility of a ruling majority emerging in Beirut that includes Hezbollah. The Western media were gloating over the victory of their allies, but glossing over the fact that the majority of the electorate was with the Hezbollah alliance. Such conduct is in remarkable contrast to the media response to election results in Venezuela and Bolivia where the US allies suffer a severe defeat and the media clutch at straws to convince the readership that Chavez and Morales are losing ground to the opposition.

(Source: upi.com, www.almanar.com.lb)

Iran: Bad Losers

The incumbent populist President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad received 63.3% of the vote against 34.2% for the liberal opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi in Iran's presidential election with a record turnout of over 80% of the electorate. But in the overseas Iranian vote with an unprecedented participation, Ahmadinejad received 33.3% of the vote as opposed to 47.5% for Mousavi.

Mousavi refused to accept defeat and his supporters held a series of mass demonstrations that turned violent. The entire spectrum of Western electronic and print media echoed the opposition's claim of rampant election fraud. Neo-conservatives, libertarian conservatives, Zionists and Trotskyites joined the bandwagon to hail the protestors as the vanguard of a democratic revolution. The right wing establishment demanded harsher sanctions and a halt to Obama's proposed dialogue with Iran.

The election procedure in Iran is as open as in any Western democracy, and more open than in the US. Strangely, the doubters of the results have nothing to say about the failure of the Mousavi camp to produce a coherent picture of how 9.6% (or 5.7 million) of the votes cast could have been stolen to deprive Mousavi of victory, without even a suggestion of such a fraud until after the counting was over.

The government had agreed to post the individual ballot box totals on the web. Also, in the wake of the protests agreed to a recount of 10% of the

votes cast, which was statistically more than adequate for verification of the outcome, even for a narrower margin of victory.

Another complaint by the Mousavi camp was that in 80-170 towns and cities, more people have voted than there are eligible voters. A surfeit of votes was reported in only 50 cities, which was explained on the basis that some towns are weekend or vacation destinations, some voters are commuters, some districts are not demographically distinct entities, and, unlike in the US and many European countries, where they can vote only in a designated polling station, Iranians can vote wherever they want.

Sense has prevailed among European and American governments and, with the exception of President Sarkozy of France no head of state has questioned the outcome of the voting. But the agenda for destabilizing Iran is still on. The opposition has found allies among corrupt members of the clergy, whose corruption has been exposed under Ahmadinejad, as well as discredited and rejected politicians. Its protests have also been encouraged by the support for Mousavi among Teheran's urban population, especially in northern Teheran.

The voting pattern also reflected class divisions far more sharply than religious and ethnic divisions in Iranian society; and that Ahmadinejad enjoys the support of the poorer sections of society and the rural masses.

There is, however, a tendency to see a US conspiracy in the candidature of Mousavi. That is based on his close involvement as the then Prime Minister of Iran in the Iran-Contra scandal of 1985, which was exposed in 1986, where the US sold arms to Iran through Israel in exchange for the release of hostages held by the Hezbollah and for funding the Contras, the US-backed terrorist organization fighting to undermine the legitimate government in Nicaragua, but could not be lawfully funded directly by the US government. Such arguments ignore Mousavi's politics and actions on behalf of the Islamic fundamentalist regime. The reasons for the US backing for Mousavi have to be found in recent developments, as the pro-Mousavi alliance comprises short-term opportunistic interests.

Thus it can be seen that the protests have been motivated by concerns other than for democracy. Within the US there are vested interests which desperately want a 'regime change' in Iran, and that includes the 'Israel lobby' and neoconservatives. Failing that, they want to de-legitimise the government of Iran. A direct consequence of this approach will, however, be to strengthen the hands of the anti-West hardliners in Iran.

There is no doubt that there is dissent and dissatisfaction in Iran and that the enemies of Iran will take advantage of it. There is also no doubt that much of the unrest was instigated by foreign vested interests. However, by

taking a heavy-handed approach in dealing with dissent the Iranian government risks making enemies of potential allies.

[Sources: *nytimes.com*, *english.aljazeera.net*, *democraticunderground.com*]

[For sane analyses of the elections and their aftermath refer for example articles by Mark Weisbrot, Co-Director, Centre for Economic and Policy Research accessible at monthlyreview.org/mrzine/weisbrot290609.html; and by James Petras at lahaine.org/petras/b2lhart_imp.php?p=1781&more=1&c=1]

Kyrgyzstan: Airbase and Elections

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was re-elected with 76.4% of the vote with 8.4% for the main opposition candidate Almazbek Atambayev in the election held on 23rd July. More than 2.3 million (79.1%) of the eligible voters were said to have voted. The Kyrgyz opposition, as well as Western monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), condemned the vote as marred by widespread fraud and misuse of state resources. The opposition has denounced the results as "illegitimate," demanded new elections and vowed a series of protests starting on 29th July.

Kyrgyzstan is known for state repression and political violence so that fears of instability and fighting following a contested result could have influenced the outcome of the election. Opposition MP and presidential campaign manager Bakyt Beshimov accused the OSCE of abandoning the opposition, and told the news agency AFP that he expected little support from the OSCE, as the main goal of the West was to maintain its strategic position in the region.

The US and the champions of democracy in the West have not expressed support for the opposition. Kyrgyzstan is home to a US airbase in Manas used by the US to support operations in Afghanistan, as well as a Russian military base. Significantly, Bakiyev recently scored political points when he secured hundreds of millions of dollars in rent for the Manas airbase, after vowing in February to close it and relenting when Washington agreed to more than triple the rent.

[Sources: *www.almanar.com.lb*, *news.yahoo.com*]

Iraq: US Presence beyond 2011?

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki hinted that US troops may remain in Iraq beyond the end of 2011, the deadline set under a bilateral agreement reached last year. His comments, which came less than a month after US

troops pulled out of Iraqi cities and towns, signalled a shift, as Iraqi and US officials have insisted the December 31, 2011 deadline as firm.

During talks with US Defence Secretary Robert Gates at the Pentagon on 23rd July, al-Maliki discussed the needs of Iraq's security forces as the country continues to modernize its military, a spokesman said. The less than an hour long meeting was also attended by Iraqi Defence Minister, Interior Minister and the US Ambassador to Iraq. Those needs "ran the gamut from air, sea and ground equipment," Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell the told AFP, while declining to name the specific military platforms requested. He made it clear that he is looking for ways to speed up and make more flexible the US systems for arming and equipping the Iraqi security forces.

Although the remaining 130,000 US troops have largely left Iraq's urban areas, al-Maliki said last month that American air capacity would be crucial to support local forces in ensuring security.

[Source: www.alarabiya.net]

Latin America

El Salvador: The Beginning of a New Era

On 1st June 2009 El Salvador inaugurated its first left government, representing the Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN), with Mauricio Funes and Salvador Sanchez Ceren, as president and vice-president. But the FMLN is a minority in the national assembly with only 35 of 84 seats. This could tie the hands of President Funes or force him to use his veto power as a bargaining chip.

The new government represents a coalition of interests comprising the FMLN and its national grassroots organisations, and a broad cross-section of civil society. The country is bankrupt owing to twenty years of failed economic and social policies and rampant corruption under the outgoing ARENA government, which over its last few weeks passed a number of laws and renewed contracts for its allies and supporters to ensure its grip on the economy. El Salvador is thus burdened by heavy internal and external debt, rise in cost of living, soaring unemployment aggravated by the global economic crisis. The ARENA government, in anticipation of an ARENA victory at the presidential elections made changes to protect its political strength, importantly in bringing the control of the citizens and voters lists under the control of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal controlled by the right-wing opposition. It also

legislated to protect the posts and privileges of members and supporters of the ARENA in state employment.

The FMLN won on a platform of priorities created by the people of El Salvador through a thorough popular consultation process. The priorities expressed by the people are access to adequate food, medicine/healthcare, jobs, affordable energy, and security. The new government will have to be creative in its approach to solving some of El Salvador's problems. The popularity of President Funes standing at 82% on the eve of his assuming office is his main asset and the prospects of a national recovery seem high with the likely support of progressive governments of Latin America.

[Sources: mrzine.monthlyreview.org/hartling310509.html]

Peru: Bloodying the Amazon

On 10th May Peru's government declared a 'state of emergency' for 60 days in several regions in the Amazon following protests involving thousands of indigenous people. The state of emergency denounced by many individuals and organisations across Peru has been rejected by the Peruvian protest movement against land reform laws designed to open up parts of the country to international investors.

The underlying issue has been the opening up of the mining sector of the Peruvian economy. Growing Chinese demand for minerals, Peru's low corporate taxes and royalty payments, virtually free access to water and cheap government-subsidized electricity rates have attracted multinational corporations on a large scale. The suspension of enforcement of environmental regulations in the ecologically fragile regions where the indigenous people dwell has led to wide-spread contamination of rivers, ground water, air and soil. Poisons from mining operations have diminished the fish population and rendered the water unfit for drinking. The decimation of tropical forests has undermined the livelihood of tens of thousands of villagers engaged in traditional artisan work, subsistence farming and forest gathering. The overseas companies collected the bulk of the profits of mining, while the García regime distributed state revenue to his supporters among the financial and real estate speculators, luxury goods importers and political cronies in Lima's heavily guarded neighbourhoods and exclusive country-clubs.

The Amazonian Indian communities responded by forming the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESP). Starting on 9th April they held public protests for over 7 weeks culminating in the blocking of two transnational highways and forcing the closure of an airport. AIDSESP activists have reported over

one hundred deaths among the indigenous protestors and their families. Indigenous people were murdered in the streets, in their homes and workplaces. The remains of many victims are believed to have been dumped in the ravines and rivers.

The violent response of the government has only toughened the resistance by the indigenous people. The approval ratings of the President Alan Garcia, fell to 21% and Prime Minister Yehude Simon resigned on 10th July after failing to persuade the Congress to repeal the offensive laws. But the Congress repealed only two of the laws in mid-June to appease the indigenous people.

Although Garcia's approach was criticised in the World Bank's Annual Report for 2008 and even very recently in pro-establishment journals including the Financial Times and the Economist, the Obama regime has not issued a single word of concern or protest in the face of one of the worst massacres of Peruvian civilians in this decade, perpetrated by one of America's closest remaining allies in Latin America.

[Sources: survival-international.org ; amazonwatch.org]

[See www.countercurrents.org/petras170609.htm for a sound analysis.]

Colombia: Obama's New Military Bases

Outrage is growing in Latin America over President Obama's request, agreed to by Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, to occupy five new military bases in Colombia. This agreement, finalised in Washington on 30th June, will turn Colombia into a dangerous launching pad for US unprecedented military operations in the region.

US Congress approved 46 million dollars in May to boost the capacity of the Palanquero base in central Colombia. The base would not be limited to counter-narcotics operations, or even to operations in the Andean region, according to an Air Mobility Command (AMC) planning document. The US Southern Command (SouthCom) aims to establish a base with "air mobility reach on the South American continent" in addition to a capacity for counter-narcotics operations, through 2025. SouthCom is also pursuing access to a site in French Guiana that would permit military aircraft to reach sites in Africa via the Ascension Islands, according to AMC.

Expansion of facilities in Palanquero follow the expiry of the lease for the US "Forward Operating Location" in Manta, Ecuador in November, and Ecuador's notification to Washington last year that it would not renew the lease. The facility in Manta was authorized to conduct only counter-drug operations, but military spokesmen have said that drug traffic in the

Pacific, where aircraft from Manta patrolled, has increased in recent years. US forces in Manta also carried out operations to arrest undocumented Ecuadorians on boats in Ecuadorian waters. Since public documentation of US operations from Manta does not indicate the use of C-17 cargo aircraft, their use in Palanquero would imply expanded US military capacity in the region.

Colombian and US human rights and political leaders have objected to the continued funding of the Colombian army, especially after it was revealed that the army reportedly murdered more than 1,000 civilians and claimed that they were guerrillas killed in combat. The people of the US and the world should protest against this violent and the massive, intimidating US presence in Latin America, authorized by the Obama.

[Sources: forpeace.net, monthlyreview.org/mrzine/golinger200709.html]

Honduras: Obama's First Coup

President Manuel Zelaya, the democratically elected President of Honduras was overthrown in a military coup 28th June because he was about to conduct a non-binding survey of the population, asking the question: "Do you agree that, during the general elections of November 2009 there should be a fourth ballot to decide whether to hold a Constituent National Assembly that will approve a new political constitution?" One of the issues that he hoped that a new constitution would deal with is the limiting of the presidency to one four-year term. He also expressed the need for other constitutional changes to make it possible for him to carry out policies to improve the life of the poor.

The Armed Forces kidnapped him and forced him onto a flight bound for Costa Rica. International response was unambiguous and swift. The Organization of American States, the UN General Assembly, the US government, and every Latin American nation denounced the coup and demanded the immediate reinstatement of Zelaya. The strength and speed of the international diplomatic response left the illegal regime isolated, but could not force the coup leaders and Roberto Micheletti the "president" imposed by them from clinging on to power. That is not surprising as the US is the only country that did not suspend diplomatic relations with the illegal regime; and the US, by its own admission, was aware for weeks of the military's plan to overthrow Zelaya.

In Washington powerful lobbyists close to Hilary Clinton are leading the coup government's strategy; the Republican right, including members of Congress openly support the coup. The State Department and White House see Zelaya as a threat to US interests because he is friendly towards

Venezuela and other left governments of Latin America. Thus it is not surprising that Washington's response to the coup is ambiguous. The first White House statement failed to criticise the coup, and the State Department has not officially called it a coup, while Hilary Clinton has refused to commit herself to bringing Zelaya back. The administration took three weeks for to threaten a foreign aid cut-off, but the US continues to maintain diplomatic relations.

Protests inside Honduras have remained strong and the illegal regime responded with a curfew in place across the country, military roadblocks in various regions, over a thousand arrests including leaders of unions and campesino, indigenous, and human rights movements, and an unknown number of killings including four youth during a protest march.

Zelaya announced on 30th July in Ocotal in Honduras (26 km from the Nicaragua border) that the National Front of Pacific Resistance, which was organised to restore Zelaya's presidency, will become the People's Army of Pacific Resistance. He also announced the beginning of a training, education, exercise, and vigilance stage of the new People's Army in Honduras to defend its conquest and rights with the weapons of intelligence and reason. He told the press that he had visited many estates in the bordering zone, where the camps of his resistance army could be set. Camps of Zelaya's followers' in the border between Nicaragua and Honduras were visited on 29th July by delegates from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to formalise a request of humanitarian aid for the Hondurans in the camps.

It is now clear that the US not only had a hand in the staging of the coup but also has, in the pretext of securing a deal for the return of Zelaya as president through mediation by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, been buying time for the illegal regime to consolidate itself, knowing well that the coup leaders will not agree to the return of Zelaya.

The prospects of a negotiated resolution of the crisis are now bleak, and the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has systematically sought to undermine the position of Zelaya by accusing him of irresponsible conduct when he unsuccessfully tried to enter his country of which he remains the legitimately elected president. Nothing short of a mass uprising will dislodge the illegal regime.

[Sources: *granma.cu/ingles*; *guardian.co.uk*; *chinadaily.com.cn*]

Dumbfounded*

R Murugaiyan

“Why is this silence, my friend?” you asked.
We were dumbfounded, not one word would come out.
A sudden clash – we were shocked!

Would such an evil fire have raged
without hearts soaked in toxic oil poured in urns
for fire lighting false rumours to start a blaze?

What an evil blaze, skull cracking,
cuts and stabs, and blood bathing!

What is the great mystery by which a being
that only a while ago
was warm and calm in conversation
became one consenting without reserve
to startlingly remove the belt from its waist
without hesitance of heart
and thrash with force?

What was the meaning
of the act of fierce hostility?
What was the meaning
of the act of fierce hostility
by robbing, theft, killing, breaking in,
child killing, snatching and torture?

We cannot understand anything correctly.
A sudden clash – we were shocked!
We were dumbfounded
Not one word would come out.

[* Translation of a poem by R Murugaiyan (23.4.1935 – 27-6-2009), one of the greatest Tamil poets of Sri Lanka. The poem was in response to the anti-Tamil violence of 1977]

God is Ours*

Habib Jalib

God is not yours, to Him we have access
He does not look kindly on those who oppress

How long, you men of pelf, will you bleed us white
Get off our backs, you who in filthy lucre take delight
You Satans it is dust that you will soon bite
We believe that He treats mankind with loving tenderness
He does not look kindly on those who oppress

Light of new wisdom we are going to see
A fire flares up, seeing our agony
In this new magical dawn will burst forth the blossoming tree
He brings hopes to those who are mired in distress
God is not yours, to Him we have access
He does not look kindly on those who oppress

We'll break the shadowy spell of fear and dread
Onwards we will march, chains of despair we will shred
We'll not betray the hopes of the people, our dear kindred
And long we will remember this time of duress
He does not look kindly on those who oppress

[The poem addresses religious hucksters irrespectively of the denomination and the system that they defend.]*

