#### Premadasa Focuses on Issues Facing his Island State and the Region

# Shri Lanka is Searching for Political Solution Fair to All Communities

published with the courtesy of BBC.

George Magula of Malawt: Mr President a few days ago the leader of the Tamil sepa ratist group fighting for a sepa rate state stated that his group might agree to a federal constitution. I am wondering what your government's reaction to

BBC Moderator (BBC-M): May I just add to that. The leader of Tamil Tigers Probhakaran said in an interview over BBC Tamil Service that was broadcast in the World Service that the on-going conflict between his group and the government forces. now on for more than ten years, could end if some acceptable solution, a federal solution, could be found.

President Ranasinghe Premadasa (RP): The LTTE, the Liberation Tigers moveof which Mr. Prabahkaran is the leader, are aware that a select committee of parliament is presently examining ways and means of resolving what is referred to as the Tamil problem. I think you arc aware of the endeavours made by my government to reach a political solution to the problem.

The idea of federalism has also been considered in the select committee. After discussions, the parliamentarians belonging to my party, the UNP, and the parliamentarians belonging to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, of which the leader of the Opposition is the leader along with three other parties, I understand, have agreed to devolution of power on the Indian model.

As you know, the Shri Lankan constitution prescribes that Shri Lanka should be a unitary state. This is also en shrined in our constitution. It requires a two-third majority and a majority at a referendum if the constitution is to be changed. Prabahkaran is welcome to make his proposals to the select committee which will then consider the issue.

As you may recall, soon after my election as President in January 1989, I invited the LTTE which was then at war with the state, to give up arms and join the democratic process. We had discussions with their group I think for fourteen months.

In brief, I must say the LTTE agreed to enter the democratic process. They even registered their political wing as a political party with the Commissioner of Elections They demanded fresh elections to the North-East provincial council

At that time an elected provincial council was in office. But under the provincial councils law the government was not in a position to dissolve the council. But later due to certain actions taken by the council, which were against the constitution, we were able to dissolve the council and make it possible for elections.

BBC·M: Do you feel that Mr. Prabhakaran's interview offers a kind of hope that some kind of settlement is possible after your parliamentary select committee has reported on

> EAVY fishing in Southeast Asian seas

> has decreased catches

in some coastal and inshore

of demersal (bottom-dwelling)

fish had dropped from 300-

400 kilograms per hour of

trawling in the early Sixties to

around 50 kg per hour in the

trash fish in the trawl catch

indicate over-exploitation. As a

result, a large number of Thai

trawlers fished in the waters of

Trawl fisheries in Malaysia

contributed considerably to in-

creased catch from 150,000

tons in the Sixties to 700,000

tons in the Eighties. This has

led to intensive exploitation of

shore waters, offshore fishing

had been encouraged. Before,

marine fisheries were mostly

conducted in shallow inshore

waters, predominantly within

Now the potential yield of

Malaysian fisheries within its

To reduce pressure in in-

neighbouring countries.

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The increased amount of

Eighties.

In Thailand, the catch rate

the devolution on the India model?

RP: This is a matter that has to be considered by the select committee. The select committee is composed of all parties. As you know, if you are to introduce fresh legislation and for that if we are to amend the constitution, we need a two third majority in the House. So it is absolutely necessary that we consult all parties and reach a consensus on this mat-

What I was trying to say is that my government made necessary provision for election in June 1990. But what happened? Provision of the LTTE turned on us and again started fighting. Ever since then the war has continued at great cost to all parties for over two and half years.

That is why we are searching for a political solution, a political solution which will be a just and durable one.

We are not seeking a mili tary solution to this problem. Our armed services and the police are protecting innocent citizens in that part of the country. We are always prepared for consultations.

M Uma from London: M Premadasa how do you justify your Buddhist government's action of ordering carpet bombing in Tamil areas as the only means of eliminating the so called terrorists?

RP: It is true that the ma jority of our people are Buddhists and we do have the Hindus. Christians and Muslims. We assist these religions. We are a tolerant nation. We are not, as I said earlier, aiming at a military solution. When a war starts, various methods of war come into play It is the responsibility of the armed services and the police to protect the innocent peo-

BBC-M: Using military means for a political solution? RP: Yes we are not for a mil itary solution but a political solution; A solution based on fairness to all parties con

BBC -M: But the point. perhaps Mr Uma is trying to get at, is in furtherance of a political solution, using military means does not actually protect the civilians you seek to protect. In fact they are suf-

RP; What is the position when terrorist activities are unleashed on common people, innocent people? You can't expeet the armed services people to just look on. They will have to protect the people.

Ken Montgomery from Oxford in England (KM): Hello Mr President, I am very sad to see the beautiful country like Lanka, once called the Pearl of Asia. suffering from economic hardship due to the majority-minority struggles. Instead of spending millions and millions of pounds for fighting. Why not ask the good offices of the United Nations to mediate and bring lasting peace?

Yos Ken Montgomery, did I pronounce your name correctly?



KM: Correct, you have done it very well. We prefer to resolve our problems among our selves. In fact why should we bother the United Nations.

BBC: You don't feel a need at this stage for a United Nations role in solving what is a long standing dispute in which many thousands of people have lost their lives? And as Mr Montgomery pointed out, there is an economic cost and of curse on the social and education front it had hurt the country in many ways: You feel that the United Nations need not have a role?

RP: They may not have a role. But what I am saying is we are capable of doing so if we have the will. And that is why my government stretched the hand of goodwill to LTTE. Anton Jayaraj in Saudi Arabia (AJ): Good evening Mi

Premadasa. RP: Good evening: Good

evening. AJ: People living in Tamil areas particularly Jaffna are without basic needs such as electricity, transportation communication, food and even medical supplies for the past 3 years. Besides, they are subjected to indiscriminate aerial bombing. They are killed when they try to cross the Jassna Lagoon to go to the Mainland. You have been talking about a peaceful solution from the time you became President four years ago. Do you have any plan to alleviate this situation

in Jaffna sooner? RP: Mr Jayaraj, I don't think you are fully aware what is happening here. And I don't think you are aware of what we are doing to help he innocent citizens living in the North and the East. We are providing them with all the basic necessities and their requirements.

But do you know that these supplies are being grabbed by terrorist elements and they don't get to the common people? Even in the matter of creating access to that part of the country to allow the people to have a free movement the LTTE has not been cooperat ing with the government so

ered about the hardships faced by the people in the North is the urgency with which some kind of solution has to found to this conflict. As understand, Mr President, in a speech made some times ago you said if the LTTE dropped the term

BBC·M: What we have gath-

Evlam then there would be a basis on which talks could be held and some kind of up some kind of federal solution. some kind of autonomy for the region would be acceptable sooner or later

RP: Yes, I am very hopeful, and I must tell you the moment I became president I unilaterally extended an invitation to the LTTE. As I said earlier, we were discussing this matter. They only demanded cleetions to the North and East. But by the time we were getting ready for it they again started this war.

What I want to say here is that it will be interesting for you to know, earlier there were several militant groups in our country. At present seven of the militant groups who had opted for separation have given up militancy. Now there is only one — the LTTE.

These other militant groups, I must say, have joined the democratic process. They genuinely attempting to evolve a political solution to this question.

summoned an all party conference. We were deliberat ing over this matter. Then par ties in Parliament were keen to take over this issue. And as said earlier, only one group is outside the democratic proccss, it is the LTTE.

It is conducting an armed struggle in the North and East. Our conflict, I must say, is not against the Tamil speaking people it is against terrorism. You know that our constitution provides equal rights to all

people it is against terrorism. You know that our constitution provides equal rights to all people and these rights are ustifiable. Great expense is being incurred by our government in providing food, medical supplies and other necessities to these people. These supplies are being grabbed in

the North by terrorist action. Anthony Pillat from London: It is reported that 30 per cent of Shri Lanka's budget expen diture goes on defence spending. Aid from donor countries is being used to subsidise this anomaly. Can a developing country like Shri Lanka affords this level of spending on defence?

RP: I fully agree with you. These resources are meant for the well being of our people. I have just being mentioning about the great expense that is being incurred for providing supplies for people in the North and the East.

Many international organisations I must say - organisations like the UNCHR, the ICR will testify to the fact that we are doing everything possible to look after the needs of the people of the North and the East. They are well aware of the humanitarian services that are being provided at great cost. So our government's policy is to resolve the problem through a political solution. The military is there as I said earlier to safeguard the innocent civilians!

During a recent phone-in interview with the BBC, President

Ranasinghe Premadasa dealt with a set of wide ranging questions

relating to his troubled island state and the South Asian region. The

following is the text of the interview made available to us, and

BBC-M: At this stage the amount of money expended on defence and military expenditure is not going to go down.

RP: It has in fact gone up BBC Moderator: You feel that is ustified? President Premadasa: No it is a wastage of resource. These resource are for the well being of our people. That is why we are doing our best to resolve this problem through the process of consultation, through the process of compromise and through the process of you consensus, must say that all parties are co-operating, not only the parties in parliament but also the militant groups that have given up militancy the other Tamil parties.

BBC-M: Do you find the interview given by Prabhakaran over BBC as witness of poten tial co-operation from the LTTE as well? Does it encourage you what he said in that interview?

RP: What is necessary is not just expressing desire but actual performance. He must co-operate with those who are trying to find a political solution. Why can't he submit his proposals to select committee? The sciect committee is to consider all aspects of it. They have not ruled out any thing provided any solution is within the unitary system of government this because our people cannot as survive in separation. We are a small country we must live together as we have been living together.

Jagath Bandara from Sydney, Australia (JI3): Mr President you were talking about freedom of the press and democracy. Why do you control the Rupavahini Corporation and the Broadcasting Corporation. It shows only matters regarding you work. For example it does not so any opposition action. It shows only your movements and you activities. Why do you control like this?

RP: I don't think you are correct in that. I don't think you have the opportunity of watching the electronic media. In this country the freedom of the media is ensured. There are a large number of newspapers in our country your facts are wrong. Our country is a living democracy. Our people have the opportunity to ascertain various views and we project them. There are guidelines that are followed by the electronic media.

Apart from that, there are a number of newspapers that are published in the country and they are free to publish all views. In fact we have four datly Sinhala newspapers, three English newspapers twenty two Sinhala fortnightly papers and one Tantil paper and one monthly. We encourage publication of more news papers. As regards the electronic media, we are providing independent channels on both radio and television. So I don't think your fact are correct.

BBC-M: Mr Bandara you heard the President. How do you respond?

JB: My response is this, for example recently the Stnhaia newspaper Lakdiva was under threat by the government straight away. On the other hand a lot of journ**alists were** attacked by government spansored thug elements. So these things happen in Shri Lanka today. Still our journalists are under threat by the govern RP: Mr Bandara, may I tell

you that there too you have got only one side of the story. You know there are rules and reg ulations governing various as pects in our country Government did not ban Lakdiva. The Colombo munici pal council had taken action or certain violation of their rules and regulations in respect of the premises they were occu pying. Simply because in newspaper you are not going to allow such establishment to violate the rules and regula tions of the country. You said the government

unicashed thugs to attack journalists. That is not correct This matter is now being unqueried into by a commission of inquiry. You have to await that inquiry and the conclusion if that inquiry to pass judgement. You have only heard one side of the story. BBC M: While on this issue,

can we clear another issue There were charges that busi nesses who advertise in news papers who are not automati cally endorsing government policy have been dissuaded by the newspapers are starved of advertising. What do you say about these allegations? RP: That is an absolute

falschood. You have only to turn the pages of these newspapers to see the large number of advertisement that are being published whether any such thing has been done by the government. This is the sort of misinformation that is being spread all over the world. And I am happy to say this so that you will be able to ascertain

BBC-M: We have another

Fisheries is a major revenue

and employment source in the

call from London. Mr Siva from London. Your question please.

Siva: Mr President. I understand that you want a discussion with Mrs Bandaranaike on the economic development of the country. I wonder whether you have thought about having a discussion with the same leader regarding the settle ment of the ethnic problem. specially regarding Tamils.

RP: Of course I am willing to do so I have not yet had a positive response from Mrs Bandarnaiyake to discuss the economic strategies of our government for the country and also to ascertain her alternatives. I am always ready to discuss these matters openly In parliament too the members of my party select committee of parliament is now considering this matter in all its aspects.

BBC·M : Mr Siva, what benefit do you think such an exercise like a television debate between the President and a senior exercise politician would

Siva: What I say is that a discussion with the opposition leader openly at least will make a majority of the Stnhalese people feel that there is a will between the two leaders to solve this ethnic problem. That is why I am encouraging to have an open discussion with that leader so that it will encourage the Sinhalese people to under stand the problem and the necessity to solve the problem.

RP: That purpose can be achieved through the process of the select committee. It will be a very considered recommendation from the select committee where all parties can sit together as this is a very complex problem. It is best that we consider the problem in all its aspects. Mr Pratap de Silva from

France (PS): Mr President why does your government continue to hold Mrs. Wijeweera, wife of Rohana Wijeweera, the slain leader of the JVP and her children in a state of unofficial arrest in an army camp. When numerous requests have been made by family members for her release and several governments have expressed their willingness to accept them.? RP: We are keeping Mrs.

Wijeweera and her children safely for their own safety, if I may say so, because there are a large number of people who have suffered at the hands of the JVP. We feel it is nothing but correct for the government to protect the family of Rohana Wijeweera. They are being provided with all their needs. They are very happy to be

with that sort of security arrangement. Otherwise if somebody harms them, they will blame it on the government. It is for their own safety that we have done so.

PS: I have heard this of the

rest of the political prisoners that have been held in Shri Lanka today that they are being held for their own protection. They have made numerous protects in prison camps is this the behaviour of people who want to be protected? Many political prisoners are being held without trial. In fact there is one who has filed suit against the government for damages, for being held after he was acquitted after trial.

RP: Mrs Wijeweera's case is different from the others. Others are those who had taken part in terrorist activities. They are not political prisoners. They have surrendered themselves. Some have been arrested for illegal action. And they are at liberty to take these matters to court.

As you yourself said just now several cases have been filed. There have been determinations by the courts. The government follows the judgements given by the courts. Others have been rehabilitated. They have entered the normal life in the country. In regard to others, charges are being framed and are being produced in courts.

Mrs. Dabrera from London: Mr President, as AIDS is a major problem in the modern world what steps has Shri Lankan taken to combat the state of AIDS in the country?

RP: All the modern precautionary measures are being taken by my govt. and the Ministry of Health we are in touch with the World Health Organisation and other institutions. We are doing every thing possible to arrest this situa-

Miss Yaseen Vanderhoeri from Amsterdam: Your excellency you have often said that you are very much inspired by the image of King Dharmasoka would you give us an indication of how you were trisptred by RP: I am inspired by his

great tolerance. His method of government, where he treated all people equally giving them equal opportunities and treating not only human beings but all beings with compassion.

S Liyanage from London: Mr President we have heard that one of your special interests is the protection of the environment. What measures are you taking to protect Shri Lanka's natural beauty which has been undermined by the economic development that has been taking place today? RP: Mr. Liyanage. I must tell

you before I became President When I was Prime Minister, introduced the environmental protection action in our country. We have given very careful attention to this problem. Our industrialisation policy includes guidelines for conservation and environmental protection. In fact industrial development within the free trade zones ensures these protective measures needed to safeguard the environment will be put in place. BBC·M: We will to stop

there Mr President we're run out of time. I hope you have found this is a valuable hour.

RP: It was very interesting. You as moderator I hope you would have enjoyed this programme. I am pleased that I got this opportunity because I have been able to clarify certain very important issues on which there had been a lot of misinfor nation.

# Development =

## Over-fishing Decreases Catch in Southeast Asian Coastal, Inshore Waters

by A Special Correspondent

The catches of the main species - including mackerels, round scads, sardines and anchovies had probably reached the upper limit in most price of exported shrimps and

the decline in productivity due to disease induced by water pollution in a number of Southeast Asian countries. He stresses the need to

evaluate current approaches in the development and mahagement of fisheries in the South China Sea. In Southeast Asia, marine fish production increased from

4.7 to 6.5 million tons in 1979-89. Most of the region's catch came from inshore waters mainly from Thatland (34 per cent), Indonesia (25 per cent) and the Philippines (24 per cent). Fish in the open ocean con-

stituted the major resource, in terms of quantity. In the Gulf of Thailand, 80 per cent of the trawl catches consisted primarily of trash fish but contributed only to 16 per cent to the total landed value.

On the other hand, crustaccans and molluscs made up one-fifth of the catch in quantity but contributed nearly half of the total value. The catches of the main

species - including makerels, round scads, sardines and anchovies - had been between 1.1 and 1.3 million tons in the Eighties and "had probably reached the upper limit in most areas," according to a report by the Indo-Pacific

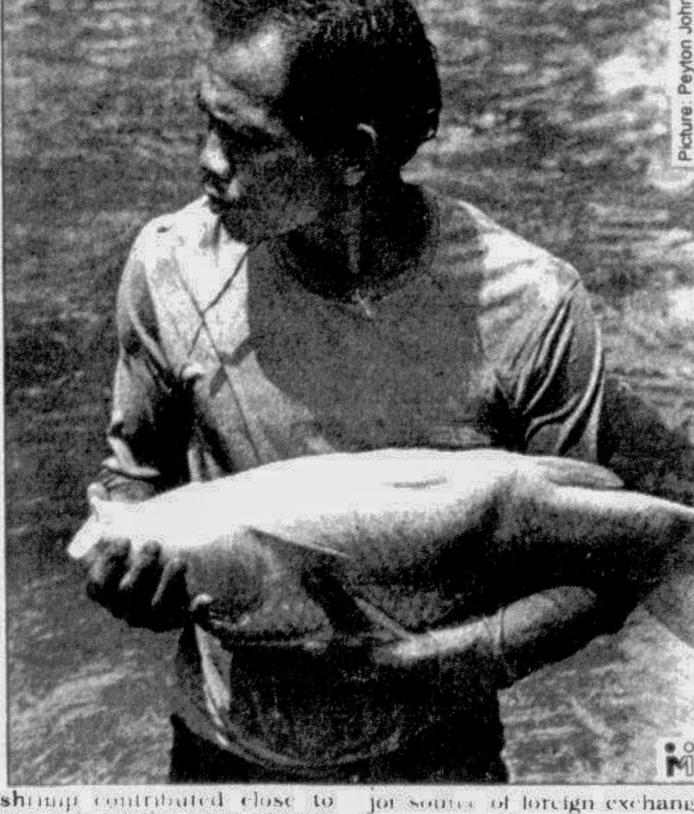
Fishery Commission (IPFC). The IPFC reports that

catches of small-sized coastal tuna - including kawakawa longtail tuna, bullet and frigate tuna - increased from 112,800 to 330,400 tons. Catches of oceanic tuna skipjack and yellowfin - rose only from 145,300 to 260,400 tons in 1979-89, mainly from Indonesia and the Philippines. The IPFC is composed of Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Hongkong. In these countries, inland fish production reached 1.78 million tons in 1989, an increase from 1.1 million in

Major producing countries of inland fisheries are Indonesia (41 per cent) and the Philippines (32 per cent). With the inclusion of China - a potential IPFC member - the production of inland fisheries reached 6.6 million tons, of which 75 per cent came from

Marine and brackishwater culture developed rapidly in the region, particularly in shrimp culture. Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam produced about 200,000 tons of shrimp in 1989, valued at about USS1 billion.

China produce about 175,000 tons and Taiwan about 38,000 tons. Cultured



one-hall of the total shrimp production in the region.

The total export value of fish and fishery products from member countries reached USS 4,300 million in 1989, a significant increase from US\$1.3 billion in 1983. This dramatic increase in exports had made fisheries a ma-

for source of foreign exchange earnings in the region. In several Southeast Asian

countries, the share of fisheries in total agricultural exports increased rapidly since the early Eighties. However, concern has been raised over increasing tariff and other trade barriers in the international market.

region. Malaysia's fishing industry directly employs some 110,000 fishermen. The fish export in 1988 was valued at 507.6 million Malaysian dollars (US\$198 million). Total fishery production in the Philippines reached 2.3

million tons in 1989, valued at USS2 billion (contributing 5 per cent of GNP). Fisherics employs 875,000 fishermen. But Philippine fisheries is experiencing overfishing as a result of excessive exploitation coupled with environmental degradation. Hongkong fisheries earned

US\$130 million in 1989, providing direct employment to 30,000 people. Its annual per capita fish supply was 4.4 kg highest among IPFC member countries. Hongkong's fisheries had

been dominated by capture marine fisheries operating in the northern shelf of the South China Sea, from the Gulf of Tonkin to the East China Sea. About 74 per cent of catches were obtained by trawling.

Major constraints to fishcries in Hongkong include overfishing of bottom-dwelling fish and labour shortage. About 6,300 fishermen from China are employed in Hongkong to case the labour problem.

Foreshore reclamations, seabed dredgings and dumping had affected offshore fisheries. The IPFC has identified ma-

jor constraints to fisheries in Southeast Asia: over-exploitation of traditional marine resources; inadequate resource assessment; environmental degradation; post-harvest losses; and overcapitalisa-

### Thai Workers Now Have Social Security Fund

by Philip Gorton HAILAND'S new Social company not included in the

Security Act, implemented this March marks the first major attempt by the government of provide medical care and other benefits to Thai workers. It is a popular move that

begins to meet the demands of Thatland's lower income groups that the government distribute the gains of economic progress more equitably. For 36 years labour groups

and the government have talked about social security. but action has been stymied by political infighting. Indeed. Thailand is one of the last countries in Southeast Asia to enact such legislation, according to Philip Fishman, Director of the Asian American Free Labour Institute in Thatland.

The legislation, passed during the tenure of the deposed Choonhaven, appears to have been received favourably by members of Thailand's new military-backed regime. In another move by the junta to win favour with the people, Interior Minister Issarapong Nookpakdee said the workers may not have to contribute as much as the government or their employers to the social

Covered under the Act are workers in enterprises em ploying over 20 workers. All workers in such companies will be asked to contribute to the fund, but if they change - Depthnews Asia | jobs and begin working for a

security fund.

plan, they will not receive the benefits. It is hoped that this loophole can be eliminated to provide workers with appropriate returns on their contri-Thailand's first move to

benefit workers came in 1974 when the government established a limited workman's compensation fund. In June of 1990, the new plan was passed. Labour experts and United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) officials here have hailed the Thai legislation as a major breakthrough towards developing an advanced social net for Thai workers. One major obstacle to im-

plementation is the newness of the plan. Not everyone is sure how or if the plan will work. Never before in Thailand have benefits been distributed ongovernment of Chatichai such a vast scale as envisioned by the plan. But contributions of

US\$200.000 from the UNDP are helping establish a legal framework for the social security benefits as well as an ad ministrative structure to ensure that money is distributed properly. For quick and efficient allo-

and employee data will have to be stored on an advanced computer system, according to a UNDP project outline. In addition, a fair and work-

cation of resources, worker

able system of medical care under the Act will need to be devised.

200-km Exclusive Economic Zonc is about 400,000 tons, as compared with about 50,000 tons in offshore waters. 'Overcapitalisation of the industry and heavy fishing pressure in coastal and inshore

waters had resulted in the decrease of total catches in some fishing grounds and consequently the net economic return to sishermen (in Southeast Asia)," says Dr Deb Menasveta, a senior official of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Fisheries Department. He notes that the remark-

able development in shrimp culture in the region was overshadowed by the fall in the