

Satisfying Summitry

The Delhi SAARC summit has ended successfully giving a lie to a nervously-held notion that political distancing between some member-states in the long two-year aftermath of the Dhaka summit could affect its outcome.

The New Delhi SAARC summit breaking the cobwebs of these negative soundings has only proved the commonsense truism that with years it is an expanding circle of cooperation that you find yourselves in rather than a shrinking one.

The Delhi Declaration limbers up to some global concerns such as terrorism which has been roundly condemned, and nuclear weapons whose elimination has been sought through the holding of an international convention.

The Delhi summit has provided a new thrust to poverty alleviation by adopting a comprehensive strategy. A three-window development fund to be raised. The declaration of 1995 as Poverty Eradication Year and of 1996 as Literacy Year clearly bring out the order of priorities set.

Use of Electricity

A front-page notice, put up by DESA, in the form of advertisement, in this newspaper yesterday, deserves the general public's attention for the sake of implementing the government's electricity load management policy.

No doubt, the bottom-line of the notice is practice of some sort of austerity in the use of power. In some cases, however, a little effort alone can help save the commodity.

From this point of view, the notice seeking prudent use of electrical power couldn't have come a day earlier. However, there is another aspect to reckless use of electricity which calls for corrective actions on the part of the authorities themselves.

Fleeing Passengers

Two news items carried in a Bangla daily deal with the same subject — swindling money out of passengers. Organised blackmarketing of railway tickets and increase of bus fare — one and a half times or double the normal rate — become a dreaded phenomenon before the two Eid festivals each year.

With a festival approaching thousands of people have to go through a hell of an experience before they can manage tickets to travel home. The bus operators in the north have taken the lead this time, others on different routes are surely to follow suit.

What is the message then? Organised groups have the capacity to hold the general public hostage to their Eid-time pressing demands. They feel no qualms for the suffering of innocent people — women and children included.

PERHAPS Lok Sabha Speaker Shivraj Patil saw early in the day that the next parliament would have no party enjoying a majority.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao encouraged him; so did Atal Behari Vajpayee, the opposition leader who, in a press interview, commended the Speaker's efforts.

He is not enthusiastic over the presidential form of government which, his paper argues, gives stability, not accountability. His emphasis is on making the office of prime ministership a linch pin for protecting democracy from sliding off the rail.

One of his proposals is that the prime minister should be elected by the Lok Sabha. Only on the election of the other person should the prime minister elected previously be ousted.

In a way, the proposals epitomise the idea of a national government. Such a formation is possible during the war when political parties defer their differences to fight an outside enemy.

Speaker's Way to Avoid Hung Parliament

No doubt, India is in the midst of a crisis — a crisis of expectations and the system's failure to respond. It is in the midst of a war-like situation of sorts. But will a national government help, even if it comes about, when the different parties have conflicting programmes, not one target as happens during the war?

Domestic problems are only pushed into the background, not solved.

No doubt, India is in the midst of a crisis — a crisis of expectations and the system's failure to respond. It is in the midst of a war-like situation of sorts.

Even otherwise, the proposition will not work since political parties will forsake their affliction only outwardly. The example of Janata Party (1977-79) is before us. The erstwhile Jana Sangh merged into Janata but kept its identity alive inwardly.

The idea of a national government was tested in 1990 when the Janata government was tottering. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu, then abroad, was approached to head a national government (the BJP was kept out).

The idea of a national government was tested in 1990 when the Janata government was tottering. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu, then abroad, was approached to head a national government.

Shankar Dayal Sharma, then vice-president, to head it.

Knowledgeable people believe that it was Venka-taram who himself floated the proposal of a national government so as to have a stint as prime minister.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

and Shankar Dayal Sharma tossed back the proposal to each other for such a long time that fresh elections became inevitable.

Yet the eventuality of a hung parliament cannot be wished away. It will have to be faced after the next Lok Sabha elections. No political party will have a majority.

Whatever their claims, the two have done badly in the state polls. Since the parliamentary elections in 1991, as many as 16 states have gone to the polls.

The other three states in which Congress has won are: Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and

Punjab where most people boycotted the polls. All the seven have a population of 11.5 crore against the 51.5 crore in the nine states where Congress has lost.

The BJP has fared no better. It has won three and a half states: Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi and half of Maharashtra

in view of the party's alliance with the Shiv Sena. These 37 states have a population of 14 crore and 76 seats in the Lok Sabha.

Therefore, there is no go from a non-Congress and non-BJP government at the Centre. The CPI(M) has already announced that it would revive the National Front. True, the experiment has failed twice earlier.

Karnataka chief minister Deve Gowda has already begun sounding several state leaders outside the Janata Dal. At some stage, the Congress dissidents, including Arjun Singh, may also be approached.

The other three states in which Congress has won are: Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and

nasty. The constituents of National Front are confident because despite the dynastic factor in favour of Congress, they have won convincingly. The five states they have bagged since the Lok Sabha polls are: UP, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Sikkim. They embrace a population of 22.2 crore and 207 seats in the Lok Sabha.

On the verdict of state elections, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao should have resigned. The Janata dismissed the Congress state governments after it won the Lok Sabha polls on the plea that they had ceased to enjoy the people's support.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN Fallout

We hold these truths to be self-evident: Most people who own a gun would not blow up a building. But most people who would blow up a building own a gun.

The reason these people would blow up buildings is that they are afraid someone is going to take their guns away from them.

If they could call attention to their fears in some other way, they would do so. But apparently nobody will listen to them unless they blow up a building.

These unhappy "soldiers of fortune" have many friends in Congress who have vowed to see that assault weapons will be available to every American to protect himself against those who would try and confiscate his weapons — thus leaving him naked when he makes his last stand against those who would put all the "patriots" into concentration camps.

While the National Rifle Association (NRA) does not support people who blow up buildings, they have to defend those who want to purchase any firearm on the open market.

Actually, that's not completely correct. Guns don't kill people, bombs kill people. Wait, there's more: Guns don't kill people, bombs kill people, but they're owned by people who need weapons to keep them free.

The NRA still claims that just because crazies blow up buildings is no reason to penalize law-abiding citizens who want to buy AK-47s for squirrel shooting.

If your congressman doesn't buy this, the NRA will not give him any money for his reelection and the organization will ensure that he loses his seat. This is to teach other anti-gun legislators a lesson.

People who blow up buildings do not believe that the NRA is doing enough to let Americans hold on to their weapons. They prefer to send a message to Washington in a large truck filled with fertilizer and fuel oil.

If the country can't guarantee a well-armed militia to defend itself against the infidels from abroad and from within, then by golly they'll do something about it themselves.

This is not only a question of defending the country. It's a love affair. People who have assault weapons are obsessed in their cars, they sleep with them under their pillows, and they kiss them in drive-in movies.

What to do to placate these people? The answer is not to confiscate these weapons, or refuse to sell them in the first place (the NRA would never stand for it), but to ban the sale of fertilizer. That will be our final compromise with bombers.

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB

Chandrika Banks on the Tigers Changing their Spots

Vilma Wimaladasa writes from Colombo

With defence expenditure running at \$300 million this year, and the World Bank exerting pressure for economic reforms, the Sri Lankan government was hoping for a continuation of the fragile peace in the island's 12-year civil war. Even when the ceasefire was shattered by lethal rebel attacks, the administration refused to be panicked into retaliation.

THE breaking of the ceasefire by the secessionist Tamil Tigers is a major setback for President Chandrika Kumaratunga's recently installed government, which came to power on a tide of optimism that Sri Lanka's 12-year civil war could be brought to an end.

The prospect of further fighting also threatens the government's economic programme, with defence expenditure already running at \$300 million this year.

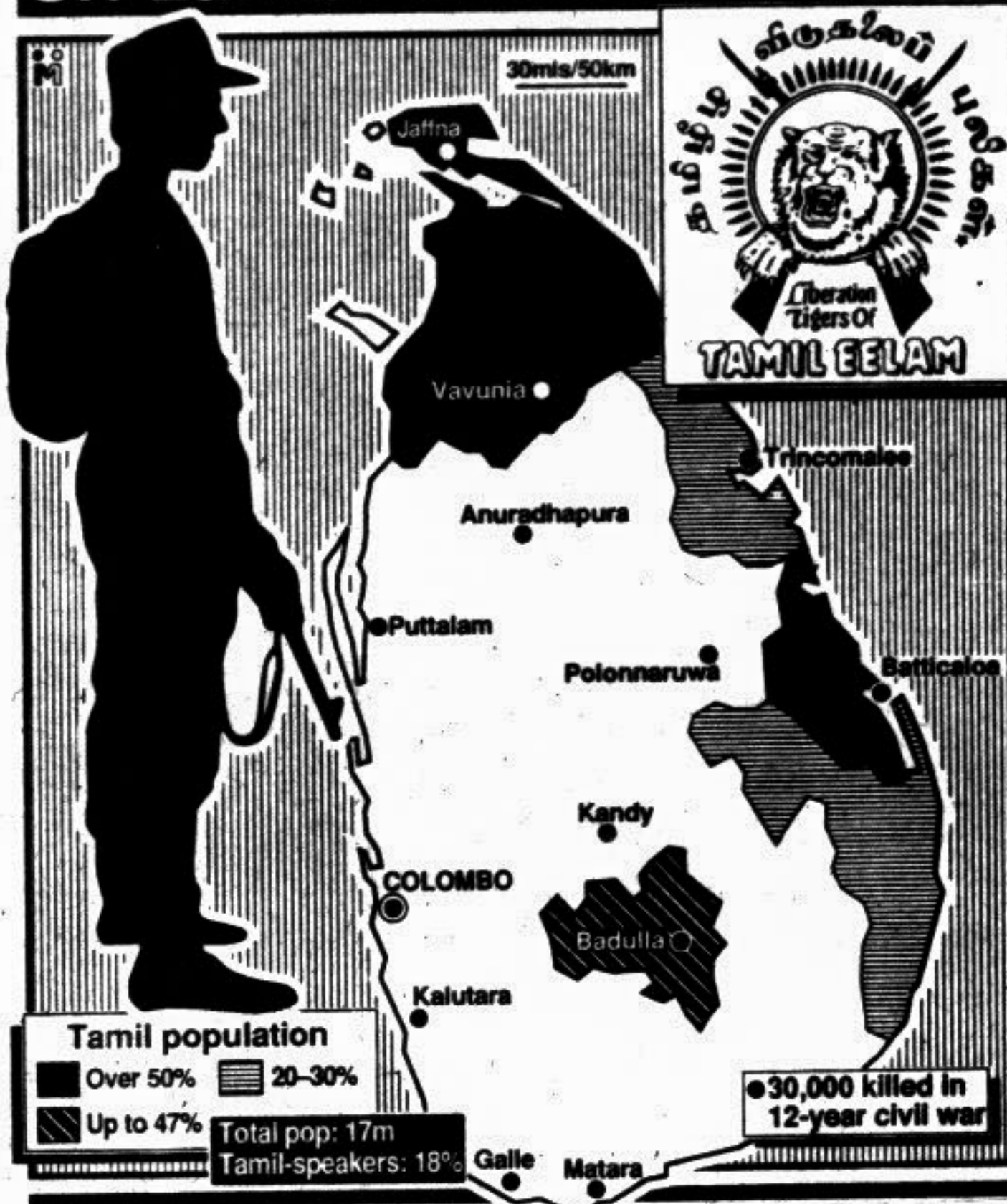
There was speculation that the Tigers attacks were timed to coincide with a meeting in Paris at which donors were discussing their 1995 aid allocations to South Asia's most prosperous country.

One of the background documents was a World Bank study pointing out that growth has been slowed by the struggle for a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east of the island. More than 30,000 people have been killed in the fighting.

Kumaratunga is also under pressure from the Bank and other donors to make extensive economic reforms, and is grappling with persistent labour unrest. So the blowing up of two naval gunboats in the eastern port of Trincomalee, killing 12 sailors, and subsequent attacks on army camps, were a particularly unwelcome development.

The attacks occurred when many soldiers were just returning to camp after the long Sinhala and Tamil new year holidays. The Sunday Times criticised military unpreparedness. "The military must wake up," it counselled, and

Sri Lanka: island in crisis



said the navy had been "parrying". One immediate response was a decision to recruit another 5,000 troops immediately.

Kumaratunga's determination not to give up the search for peace even after the unilateral breaking of the January ceasefire was shown by the government's instruction that troops should conduct only search operations and attack only in defence.

It also reimposed a re-

Jaffna, who after 12 years of life in a war zone stood to benefit from the softening of the economic embargo and the halt to the fighting which followed Kumaratunga's election.

Kumaratunga certainly hopes that is the case. She told a mass rally in the South: "It is apparent that the LTTE is not prepared to make an effort to achieve the aspirations of the Tamil people for peace," she said.

"We will achieve peace with or without the LTTE. The people of the North as well as the South are crying for peace. Hence, the LTTE will not be able to suppress their aspirations by sheer force. The people of the North desire peace and we will work with that aim in mind."

Perhaps mindful of the propaganda war, the Tamil Tigers later said they had "not closed their mind nor their doors to peace," but said they wanted a fresh initiative from the government on the resumption of talks.

The government, however, has to take account of the anger of the majority Sinhalese community. Many Sinhalese argued that the Tigers' flouting of an agreement that the "cessation of hostilities" would be ended only after the giving of 72 hours notice proved that they are not to be trusted.

The Tigers, they argued, always prepared for war, even while talking peace, and had used the ceasefire to re-supply, reconnoitre and recruit. A large number of hard-core Tigers are said to have come to Colombo since January.

— GEMINI NEWS
VILMA WIMALADASA is a Sri Lankan freelance journalist.

To the Editor...

Rules are for breaking!

Sir, This refers to one of your most interesting reports in SAVE DHAKA published on 25 April. I would like to draw, through this column, the attention of Rajuk authorities to the following difficult situation I am faced with.

I have a piece of land by the side of a 12-foot by-lane of Kalabagan area in the city. The plot is 50-feet in length on the lane side and 40-feet in breadth. It measures less than three kathas.

In order to follow the rules of Rajuk (as mentioned in your report) I need to leave approximately 15-feet (4.5 metres) on the roadside which means a total of 750-sft (115X50). On all three other sides, according to Rajuk, the vacant space (1.75 metres on each side) will account for 715-sft. Thus out of

my 2000 sft, I will be required to spare a total of 1465 sft and build my house on a space of 535-sft only. Is it a practical proposition? Is it a rule to be followed? Can I afford to go along Rajuk rules? Can Rajuk suggest me as to how to plan a house on my plot?

Your report reveals that one of the highly placed Rajuk official has confessed that 99 per cent of houses in the city are built without following Rajuk rules. This brings forth the following points: What are the responsibilities of the Rajuk authorities? The answer is: to ensure that construction in the city area are carried out according to Rajuk rules. Are they doing it properly? If 99 per cent do not follow rules then one can safely reach at a conclusion that Rajuk officials are not doing their duties at all. Are they being paid for their jobs which are not done

at all? The answer is yes, of course.

It is alleged that Rajuk engineers are 'looked after' for not doing their jobs properly. Would the situation be much different had there been no Rajuk?

There is no rules in jungle. But animals still manage to live in it. Had there been no Rajuk, we the citizens of this metropolis could find out a means of constructing our houses which would in no case could be worse than the present state of affairs. We could rather get an additional dividend by not 'specially treating' the Rajuk engineers.

Ali Reza Bakhtier
64 North Road
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Water crisis

Sir, It is water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink! In oil rich Arab coun-

tries there is no scarcity of petroleum. But in our land of rivers and rivulets there is water crisis.

Our capital city Dhaka is surrounded by numerous big and small rivers. Does it not look funny that we are faced with water scarcity? We wonder what our policy makers, planners, engineers and the WASA officials have been doing for the last two decades? From time to time they simply report system loss and raise the rate of water tariff.

If we set up 5-6 water purifying plants near river and rivulet sources around our city, for supply and distribution of water area-wide, this would be more feasible and less expensive than carrying out constant repair of the deep tubewells and still having an erratic water supply.

O H Kabir
Dhaka-1203