

Sri Lanka: A Chance for Peace

by Nirupama Subramanian in Jaffna

Jaffna limps back to life as Tamil who had fled during the army offensive return. But this may again prove a temporary respite unless a political solution is found.

At the 150-year-old Vembady Girls High School in Jaffna town, a science class is in progress. Dressed in clean white uniforms, the children are bent studiously over their books...

The Jaffna peninsula, putting government forces in complete control of the area for the first time in the history of the ethnic conflict. It is to savour this peace again that thousands of Tamils who fled their homes in the Valikamam region of the peninsula...

At least \$200 million is needed right away to put Jaffna back in order. Long-term rehabilitation will cost another \$1 billion.

December last year, this school again suffered extensive damage. Each time we rebuild, we are driven into the ashes, says Vice-Principal Sarojini Tharmalingam. Like her, for most Tamils of Jaffna peninsula, peace now means only an absence of war...

The Sri Lankan Government estimates that more than two lakh of the around four lakh — almost the whole population of the area — displaced people have returned in the last month. Jaffna town, once the most densely populated urban centre in the country...



Identity cards being checked at Achchuvell

On to the Streets and Back, Never Defeated by Life

by Ekram Kabir

ANUFA was helplessly wandering when her stepfather dislodged her from the house. She was only four years old. Workers of Aparajevo Bangladesh, a local non-governmental organisation, spotted her, cradling and brought her to the Arambagh Boys and Girls Club. Since then, it has become her home. While living here, she did her schooling up to Class II, and now wants to study more...

noises of the passengers, some sportive shrill of voices — Sir, apare than, aami loiyete paroom — are always heard. These are the child porters working side by side with the grown-up muscular kulis. "No matter how weighty the luggage is, I can carry it, well, of course, with the help of my buddies," says Morir Hossain in his voice who usually spend his sista at Aparajevo's Arambagh Club or Nayabazar Drop-in Centre.



Working for a better tomorrow, receiving training

in many ways, specially by watching movies everyday at all the cinema halls around the city. What we advise them, when affectionately closer to their psyche, is not to waste the money they earn — they can have a future of their own if they save it, and interestingly these tough-kids listen to us," says Wahida Banu, the Programme Coordinator of the organisation. These take-the-arrows-all children stop working on the platform at Kamapur just before it is 11am. Leaving behind the Platform-1 and Platform-2 on the left, where the asphalt of the road ends, they religiously assemble everyday with reading and writing materials in hands...

children, as part of its philosophy, to either re-integrate them with their families or to rehabilitate them to independent living in the society. The vocational training programme, which started in '94, is quite an example of the organisation's philosophy. This training is provided in the 'sewing and bicycle and rickshaw-repairing trades.' The facilities are incorporated into a corner of Arambagh Club. The programme includes a month-long foundation course, followed by three months of skills training, and an additional three-month-long practical training at various workshops in the city. The number of children enrolled under this programme is 24 — 12 boys and same number of girls. According to Aparajevo's progress report of the ongoing vocational training course, the trainees of 'bicycle and rickshaw-repairing' and 'sewing' trades, the foundation courses, have successfully reached the end of their course module. The instructor says: "These children concentrated well — they knew the pros and cons of what they learnt."

housemaids — who mostly are slum-dwellers leave their babies before going to work. Under the organisation's Day-care Programme, with 12 sub-centres at Azimpur, Rayer Bazaar (now Jikatala), Mohamadpur and Pallabi, the approach is education and healthcare. Children of six months to three years age-group are allowed to receive the necessary care, and each centre takes care of 20 children whose feeding are paid by their mothers. Why are all these hassles? Answering this question, Wahida Banu says: "The needs of 'street children' in urban areas are well-known phenomena in the developing countries, and in Bangladesh, it's a dire need. These are a shifting mass of children and young people who are simply struggling to exist and survive in the shadows and backstreet sub-cultures of overcrowded cities, whom society has forgotten or prefers to ignore. While wrestling for their very existence, these children are vulnerable to abuse, violence and exploitation. What we're trying to do is to show them that they are not completely forgotten, and we offer them hope, affection and true care with the shepherding of relatively a better tomorrow."

cannot rule out the war-weary Tamil people saying, enough of all this politics, and even devolution, first and foremost, give us an administration that works. For them, of paramount importance is a civilian administration that works. In January this year, the Government brought out a legal draft of the August 1995 devolution proposals that have been universally acclaimed as far-reaching. However, the text disappointed many, especially the non-LTTE Tamil parties, who described it as a "dilution" of the earlier proposals. President Chandrika Kumaratunga's defence at the time had been that the proposals were up for discussion in the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC), and that only through discussions would the Government take a decision on tricky issues such as the unit of devolution in the north-east, the status of Buddhism as the foremost religion of the country, and the powers of the Governor. However, with the Government's military success, interest in deliberating on the political package seems to be lagging at the 21-member PSC. At one meeting earlier this month, only three members were present; a fourth, to achieve the quorum, was found with great difficulty. "The PSC is dying a natural death," says Douglas Devananda, the founder of the Eelam People's Democratic Front (EPDF), which with nine MPs is the strongest Tamil parliamentary party. According to him and leaders of other Tamil political parties in Colombo, Kumaratunga is taking advantage of the military success to postpone a political solution. A suggestion to form an interim council for the area with representatives of Tamil political parties has been almost shelved. "There now seems to be a temptation on the part of the Government to project itself as the sole protector of the Tamil people," says Loganathan Ketheswaran of the Colombo-based Centre for Policy Research and Analysis. Indeed, one of the first acts of the Government after the win was series of skirmishes, hoping to catch civilians in the crossfire. But so far, they have been disappointed. While the Government has taken pride in the return of civilians to Jaffna, it has been dragging its feet on a political solution. Says Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar: "You



Soldiers patrolling the Palaly-Jaffna road

The LTTE has been provoking the Sri Lankan Army to retaliate, hoping to catch civilians in the crossfire. While the Government has taken pride in the return of civilians to Jaffna, it has been dragging its feet on a political solution. Says Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar: "You

to open an office of Suddu Nelan, a social organisation fronting for Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party in Jaffna town, in contrast, only with much reluctance did the Government agree to bring representatives of Tamil parties to Jaffna, and has not yet permitted them to open offices. According to Ketheswaran, if the Government believes that it can reach the people over the heads of Tamil politicians, it is only 'fooling' itself. But then, the Tamil parties are themselves in a dilemma. Forced out from the peninsula in 1990 by the Tigers, they have little rapport with the Tamils and are nervous about their reception in Jaffna. More important, the LTTE threat to their lives cannot be countered without weapons from the Government. But Kumaratunga is firm that no Tamil group will be allowed to bring arms to Jaffna. "It would be fatal to allow them into the region with guns," says Kadirgamar. Confusion among the Tamil parties has made them look once again to Tamil Nadu for support. Though the newly sworn-in chief minister, M. Karunanidhi, has not yet acquiesced to a request for an appointment by five Tamil leaders, the very move has sent panic signals in the Sinhalese leadership. A prominent leader warned Tamil politicians against "running to his brother" in the Colombo daily Observer, a government organ. Although Sri Lankan Tamil leaders are convinced that a decent package can still be hammered out of the devolution proposals if the Government only demonstrated more interest, Kumaratunga has problems of her own — a stagnant economy, a non-cooperative opposition and the rebellion against devolution in her alliance's ranks. Still, the prime minister is better placed than any other Sri Lankan leader to win the hearts and minds of the Tamils, by restoring not just normalcy but a lasting peace to Jaffna. Unless Kumaratunga grabs this opportunity, the military successes of the past six months may just dissipate.

By special arrangement with INDIA TODAY

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Tuesday 25th June. All programmes are in local time. We recommend programmes printed in bold. There may be changes in the programmes.
CHANNEL V: 7:00am News, 7:30am News, 8:00am News, 8:30am News, 9:00am News, 9:30am News, 10:00am News, 10:30am News, 11:00am News, 11:30am News, 12:00am News.

STAR MOVIES: 7:30am Action Japan Live, 11:15 (Arabic Subtitles) 9:30 Family, 11:30 Comedy, 1:30 Adventure, 3:30 Adventure, 5:30 Classic, 7:30 Adventure, 9:30 Drama, 11:30 Comedy, 1:30 Adventure, 3:30 Adventure, 5:30 Classic, 7:30 Adventure, 9:30 Drama, 11:30 Comedy.

STAR Sports: 6:00am Galatta World, 6:30am Galatta World, 7:00am Galatta World, 7:30am Galatta World, 8:00am Galatta World, 8:30am Galatta World, 9:00am Galatta World, 9:30am Galatta World, 10:00am Galatta World, 10:30am Galatta World, 11:00am Galatta World, 11:30am Galatta World, 12:00am Galatta World.

PTV: 8:00am Tildaw Aur Farman, 8:30am Tildaw Aur Farman, 9:00am Tildaw Aur Farman, 9:30am Tildaw Aur Farman, 10:00am Tildaw Aur Farman, 10:30am Tildaw Aur Farman, 11:00am Tildaw Aur Farman, 11:30am Tildaw Aur Farman, 12:00am Tildaw Aur Farman.

SONY ET: 8:30am Gane Joane Moane, 9:00am Gane Joane Moane, 9:30am Gane Joane Moane, 10:00am Gane Joane Moane, 10:30am Gane Joane Moane, 11:00am Gane Joane Moane, 11:30am Gane Joane Moane, 12:00am Gane Joane Moane.

EL TV: 8:30am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 9:00am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 9:30am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 10:00am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 10:30am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 11:00am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 11:30am Lata Mangeshkar Special, 12:00am Lata Mangeshkar Special.

ZEE CINEMA: 8:30 Hit Hit Hit, 9:00 Hit Hit Hit, 9:30 Hit Hit Hit, 10:00 Hit Hit Hit, 10:30 Hit Hit Hit, 11:00 Hit Hit Hit, 11:30 Hit Hit Hit, 12:00 Hit Hit Hit.

BBC: 8:00am BBC News, 8:30am BBC News, 9:00am BBC News, 9:30am BBC News, 10:00am BBC News, 10:30am BBC News, 11:00am BBC News, 11:30am BBC News, 12:00am BBC News.

STAR PLUS: 6:30am Voltorn, 7:00 Voltorn, 7:30 Voltorn, 8:00 Voltorn, 8:30 Voltorn, 9:00 Voltorn, 9:30 Voltorn, 10:00 Voltorn, 10:30 Voltorn, 11:00 Voltorn, 11:30 Voltorn, 12:00 Voltorn.

ZEE TV: 9:30am Instantment (TMM), 9:30am Instantment (TMM), 9:30am Instantment (TMM), 9:30am Instantment (TMM), 9:30am Instantment (TMM), 9:30am Instantment (TMM), 9:30am Instantment (TMM).

Garfield: 8:00am Garfield, 8:30am Garfield, 9:00am Garfield, 9:30am Garfield, 10:00am Garfield, 10:30am Garfield, 11:00am Garfield, 11:30am Garfield, 12:00am Garfield.

James Bond: 8:00am James Bond, 8:30am James Bond, 9:00am James Bond, 9:30am James Bond, 10:00am James Bond, 10:30am James Bond, 11:00am James Bond, 11:30am James Bond, 12:00am James Bond.

SONY ET: 8:30am Gane Joane Moane, 9:00am Gane Joane Moane, 9:30am Gane Joane Moane, 10:00am Gane Joane Moane, 10:30am Gane Joane Moane, 11:00am Gane Joane Moane, 11:30am Gane Joane Moane, 12:00am Gane Joane Moane.

Garfield: 8:00am Garfield, 8:30am Garfield, 9:00am Garfield, 9:30am Garfield, 10:00am Garfield, 10:30am Garfield, 11:00am Garfield, 11:30am Garfield, 12:00am Garfield.

Garfield: 8:00am Garfield, 8:30am Garfield, 9:00am Garfield, 9:30am Garfield, 10:00am Garfield, 10:30am Garfield, 11:00am Garfield, 11:30am Garfield, 12:00am Garfield.

