

A Black Taj Mahal around Bill Clinton's Peccadillo

by Khurshid Hamid

One shall resort to some armchair soothsaying averring that the Republicans by their present venture into the uncharted waters of impeachment of the Presidency are shooting themselves in the legs politically, as they have been adept at lately, and are likely to suffer setbacks in the coming elections.

EVEN Emperor Shah Jahan had only dreamed about it. But the American Judge Kenneth Starr, its Republican Senators and Congressmen, and the prurient harpies of the U.S. press have succeeded in building a majestic black Taj Mahal around their President Bill Clinton's dozen or so consensual dalliance with a pneumatic intern Monica Lewinsky.

The final bricks to this structure are being laid as I write with the House Judiciary Committee recommending a few days ago and the full House of Representatives debating and in an hour's time will most likely vote to initiate proceedings of formal impeachment inquiry against President Clinton on the basis of the Executive Summary of the Mt. Everest load of incriminating documents stacked up by Starr.

The facts of this overweening tamasha of *mein-mein tu-tu* (me-me thou-thou) surrounding the supposedly most powerful man in the world today are all too well known: the legal definitions of "sex" to exclude oral sex, of "alone" of "truth" (remember the jesting Plate of Francis Bacon?), of venturing into those information asked for by the inquisitors and no more being legally punctilious-all matters which absolve President Clinton of perjury or wrong-doing under oath, but the Grand Inquisitors will have none of this.

All of us have also watched like riveted zombies the four-hour testimony before the Grand Jury of President Clinton, a one-would-not-have-believed-it-unless-one-had-seen-it-with-one's-own-eyes present-day sexual McCarthyism. One will not relish them here, but rather one will indulge in some analytical philosophizing on this lurid happenstance at this point of history of the most successful, vigorous and powerful democracy, which if tainted

diminishes this hallowed form of human governance for us all.

What is the eye of the storm? Bill received fellellio from Monica about ten or eleven times over a period of a year and a half. Bill said under oath that he did not have sex per se with Monica. Bill like any normal man asked his friends to try to sweep the embarrassing matter under the carpet. Bill was caught out by a vengeful Linda Tripp and a spurned Monica assisting that tenacious bulldog of a Judge, Kenneth. Bill is therefore morally a shaitan and should be impeached and sent packing from the White House.

The Republican political leaders and the U.S. and international media have high-mindedly drawn on their moral indignation (read political opportunism and yellow journalism) respectively to propose the unwise notion of impeachment. Even that too-clever-by-half journal *The Economist* has cover-storied one-two-many times that Clinton should "just go".

But American Presidential candidates do not successfully cross the threshold of the White House on the ticket of their unimpeachable moral character. Rather the reverse is true that to clamber on to the heights of power they have to indulge domestically in many a shady political deal and cut corners trudging through the slough of morally gray areas: a weak pillar of virtue would never ever make it to the top.

The United States as other nations usually find their moral exemplars in past Presidents and heroes who have passed into legend (George Washington, Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Lancelot) or in religious saints, and not in the-flesh sitting Presidents. Furthermore the top gun of a superpower while in office has to take many hard decisions for reasons of

realpolitik which are without or goes against the grain of the ordinary moral scruples of man, particularly in the international arena. Witness the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing hundreds of thousands only to field test the efficacy of and have a head start on what then appeared to be the mother of all weaponry for warfare.

Witness again the 1990 sudden-death dismantling of the Soviet Union and the prescriptions of instant democracy and free market economy for the country though these brought about dehumanizing agony to its teeming millions but put final "paid" to the burdensome Cold War.

Nearer home recall Henry Kissinger's 1971 famous "tilt" towards Pakistan, although the latter was savaging its own citi-

zens and carrying out the genocide massacre of millions, only to say thank you to the debauch leader Yahya Khan for providing an opening to China. In fact one of the occupational hazards of the Presidents of the United States is to be blindfoldedly and stringently amoral.

The ordinary Americans have therefore always in the past intuitively tolerated and forgiven the personal sins of the flesh of their Presidents, are doing so now, and will do so in the future. But what about the obstruction of justice by President Clinton? Any sane person will try to hide his sexual cheating from his wife and family and if a public figure from the world at large. Even if confronted by a judicial inquiry to testify under oath he would indulge in legalese hair-splitting of definitions of sex, alone and

truth as Clinton has done in order to hide his embarrassing peccadillo, which in Spanish translates literally to "little sin".

The Republican politicians are crying hoarse that this constitutes perjury that clearly meets the constitutional standard for impeachment for "high crimes and misdemeanours". They are rummaging through the tons of documents supplied by Starr seeking to decide whether the president has broken any laws. They pretend that this is all about "carrying out the law" and due process, stonewalled from public opinion.

This is all sham posturing. As the columnist Lexington of *The Economist* and others have pointed out the trouble with this legalism is that the U.S. Constitution lays down no pre-

cise standards for impeachment. The Constitution holds that a President may be impeached for "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanours", but stops short of defining these categories. No statutory laws have so far been enacted to annotate and clarify the afore-mentioned terms, and the U.S. Congress would be serving history and avoiding future constitutional and national trauma if it sets about legislating on this. Legal judgement is tightly bounded by a complex code and a multiplicity of precedents and leaves scant room for discretion. Yet one remains eternally cynical about.

The Law as we know it and the Republican Congressmen are behaving exactly as the poet W.H. Auden described many years ago:

Law, says the judge as he looks down his nose,
Speaking clearly and most severely
Law is as I've told you before,
Law is as you know I suppose.
Law is but let me explain it once more,
Law is the Law.
Yet law-abiding scholars write;
Law is neither wrong nor right,
Law is only crimes
Punished by places and by times....
Others say, Law is our Fate;
Others say, Law is our State;
Others say, Law is our Law
Law is no more
Law has gone away.
Ironically after Watergate, the Congress created the independent counsel to shun politics and to apply objective, legal methods to investigate misbehaving Presidents. But Starr's partisan single-mindedness and fury to topple Clinton by misusing the legal apparatus of subpoena and perjury to compile incriminatory evidence has if anything more deeply politicized and one may add friviled the issue of impeachment, to the indelible detriment of United States' democracy as a practicing statecraft.

Impeachment of American Presidents has only two precedents of widely varying circumstances in the 222 years of the country's history, the opportunity for discretion is wide, and no guiding code exist. Impeachment thus remains a thoroughly political process and a handmaiden to the brute majority of the Congress and the Senate. The corollary ensues that if the process is indeed political the Congressmen must exercise their judgement on behalf of the voters. It follows that in order to be true to themselves both politically and morally it is imperative for

them to hark to the opinion polls of the ordinary Americans, more than 65 per cent of whom, according to the latest polls, are crying out loud that President Clinton should stay his term.

They should not resort to the subterfuge of pretending to hide behind the mantle of the law and thereby impervious to the voice of the electorate as they seem to be doing now. One shall resort to some armchair soothsaying averring that the Republicans by their present venture into the uncharted waters of impeachment of the Presidency are shooting themselves in the legs politically, as they have been adept at lately, and are likely to suffer setbacks in the coming elections.

The U.S. Senate's unsuccessful impeachment of President Andrew Johnson (he was acquitted by a single vote) in 1868 on the flimsy ground of firing his own Defense Minister without consulting the Congress (violating a recently enacted Tenure of Office Act) was perhaps the most ignominious in the country's political history. Let not this whimsy be repeated as humanity enters the third millennium with the United States as its undisputed leader. It will spell disastrous political and more horrifyingly civilizational regression not only for the United States but also for all the democracy-loving peoples which now-a-days encompass the entire globe.

Let us not forget that above the moral high ground to which the Republicans have rushed to judge and condemn President Clinton there lies a higher peak wherein rests the all-important integrity of the U.S. Constitution and the preservation of its eternal principles, which remains more than ever a beacon to most of humanity.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Switzerland



Mahathir Sees Through the Game

Malaysia, IMF and the Evil Designs

by A M M Shahabuddin

Let not another emerging Asian economic tiger be 'crucified', at the altar of vested interests of the West, due to outside machinations. Economically badly mauled and politically almost disintegrated, Indonesia is already bleeding and gasping for breath. Let there be no repeat performance.

A dark shadow was hovering, rather, is still hovering, over Malaysia, cast believably, from the evil designs of the vested interests of the West. Perhaps, Malaysia is the only country which has very deftly and bravely foiled the machinations of the West. After the economic collapse, social unrest and political destabilisation brought in the largest Muslim state, Indonesia, they spread their claws towards Malaysia, another Muslim state, to strangle and stop its voice for good. But south-east Asia's most outspoken statesman, who looks straight to the eyes of the West's leaders, and that is most disliked by the West, saw through the upcoming 'game' and took a bold stand to thwart it. And he did it very successfully, to the utter disappointment and despair of the West. But they are not a sort of accepting defeat. They are still shadowing Mahathir to remove him from Malaysia's political scenario by hook or crook.

'Doomsday' Prophets on Commonwealth Games

Before coming to the economic scene, let us have a look at the just concluded Commonwealth Games held in Kuala Lumpur. The second international sports event after Olympic more pointedly held in an Asian country for the first time in the history of the Commonwealth Games. So from the very beginning, they were busy in putting a speck in the wheel to discredit Malaysia and make it a laughing stock before the world as an inefficient nation. But they got the hardest slap when the 11-day Games concluded on 21 September in a glorious success. Even the so-called weather 'pundits' were shouting, through well-orchestrated western media hype, that the inaugural session would be washed out and the sports events will be in doldrums. But their "doomsday" prophetic prophecies fell flat in the midst of bright sun-shine and millions smiling throughout the games. And thus Malaysia, led by its dynamic leader Mahathir, came out with flying colours, adding another feather in its crown.

IMF 'Bail-out' Funds

Similar is the scenario in the economic field of Malaysia. It is the only South Asian country that has survived the deadly thunder-storm that swept over Asia, from one end to the other, bringing in economic catastrophe in its wake, causing widespread damage and devastation. In fact, today Malaysia, led by Mahathir who has declined to become a 'yes man' of

the vested interests of the West, faces a double-barrel gun. One, political unrest created by the vested interest through their 'hunch-men' like former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, placating him as a great reformist and a new saviour of Malaysia; two, 'carrot and stick' game of the West through that 'blessed' organisation, called International Monetary Fund (IMF), with their so-called 'bail-out' funds to rescue ailing economy of Malaysia. Both the thrusts have awful potential dangers which threaten the economic foundation built by Mahathir over the last 17 years or so.

Doubtful Role

In the context, it wouldn't be out of place to throw some light on the role of IMF, conducted by its present 'guardians', in the developing countries. As the saying goes: 'In the land of the blind, the one-eyed person is said to be the king'. And the same applies to the IMF, financed and controlled by America. A columnist of an Australian daily had nicely drawn a scenario showing how an ailing country blinded by an impending economic collapse try to catch a straw as the last resort like a sinking man and then IMF "springs" into action, to help the "vested" interest rather than the ailing country. According to the columnist, "During the 1990s, the destructive power of capital markets has been seen in Mexico, East Asia and Russia. The scenario has become all too familiar. Unexplained Euphoria takes hold and sucks vast sums into unstable markets, generating huge profits, for foreign investors. Then panic takes hold, capital collapses — and the IMF springs into action, bailing out foolhardy investors, leaving behind economic collapse and social disintegration."

Thus, whenever a developing country faces a deep financial crisis, the IMF arrives with its lucrative "bail-out" proposals at its doors like the proverbial Trojan Horse. But once it gets into there, it is in full control of the affairs to dictate terms which are likely to bring more miseries than relief to the country. Under such an abominable situation, the ailing countries are tempted to fall in the 'trap'. And they invariably do fall. And it leads to a vicious circle of crushing debt burden for the poor countries. They undoubtedly look for an escape-route, but fall in the quagmire or quick sand, plunging deeper and deeper, like our poor peasants borrowing from the village moneylenders, ultimately losing everything because of their

failure to pay the interest on the loan, not to speak of the amount taken as loan. Thus the debt-burden piles up crushing the debtor-countries under the wheels of juggernaut.

Even the British aid-agency OXFAM has recently dismissed as mere "white wash" the IMF and World Bank review of the plan to help the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) out of the 'debt trap'. OXFAM also dubbed as 'farjical' the IMF's present debt-relief initiatives.

Founding Fathers' Angle

In fact, the IMF, which was established in 1945, following the Bretton Woods conference is not the same organisation today as envisaged by its founding fathers, including Keynes. As a foreign columnist says: 'When Keynes designed the IMF, he ruled out capital liberalisation, because private capital markets were "failure prone", having "a tendency to panic" and this could lead to "a general collapse". What was apprehended by the founding fathers of IMF, has come true today. History is repeating the 1930s great financial crisis. Today, the IMF is being "revolutionised" which has led it far off from its original beaten track. Under the present IMF lending policy, the borrowing countries will be required to fulfil several conditions, including liberalisation of their financial system, which would ultimately result in an "unprecedented transfer of sovereignty to global markets dominated by Wall Street". Ultimately, the vested interests realised that Mahathir's Malaysia is really a hard nut to crack. So they have changed their strategy from 'carrot to stick' to remove Mahathir from the scene so that they can ride on the shoulders of a more friendly man to look after Malaysia sans Mahathir. In such cases, they are always on the look-out of an alternative leadership.

Prime Minister Mahathir apprehended for his country when he totally refused to accept any 'bail-out' fund from the IMF. Ever since the currency crisis struck the South-east Asian countries, including the four emerging 'economic tigers' — Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan — Mahathir has been opposing tooth and nail to be lured into the 'mouse-trap'. Perhaps he was guided by the time-honoured saying: 'Fear the Greeks bringing gifts'. Malaysia, under Mahathir's leadership, decided to stick to its own policy of depending more on internal resources and less on foreign debts. This policy of Malaysia was directly opposed to the West's open-market policy which meant IMF's 'free' economic prescriptions for so-called 'reforms', a *summon bonum* of which was devaluation, trade liberalisation, tariff cuts etc.

ready found that friendly 'reformist' in former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who is being pampered as the future leader and saviour of Malaysia. The much-orchestrated Western media is already running in full gear to focus on Ibrahim as the most capable leader to handle Malaysia's problems. But how far Ibrahim will succeed in ousting Mahathir is still difficult to say. Mahathir has taxed too much on the patience of the West which will leave no stone unturned to achieve their mission. But so far Mahathir has come out with flying colours as a populist national leader to the amazement of the West. But the storm is still there.

The West's dislike, rather hatred, for Mahathir who is deadly against towing the path shown by them, is not just a bolt from the blue. It has grown gradually for the last several years. Mahathir's hard-hit statement at the APEC Summit held in Manila in 1996 brought it to a bursting point. Addressing the Manila Summit, Mahathir accused the APEC forum, led by developed countries, of "coercing" the less developed countries "beyond their capacity". By raising question against the one-eyed policy of the developed countries, Mahathir alleged that the developed countries were paying "too much attention to trade liberalisation than development cooperation". Their aim was to capture the vast markets as well as abundant cheap labour sprawling over the vast Asia-Pacific region. Perhaps Mahathir made his bitterest attack on the West, while addressing his ruling party convention held in Kuala Lumpur last June. In a "fire and brim-stone attack", as a Western journalist puts it, Mahathir blasted "the international banks, greedy

currency speculators, neo-colonial governments and the foreign media". He declared: "we are pushed to become a backward, weak race which is re-colonised and having to serve others. They are trying to destroy all we have built." He sounded a note of stern warning that "outside interests were trying to determine who should lead the country", a clear reference to the West's support to boost Anwar Ibrahim as the alternative leader of Malaysia.

As the proverb goes: "The higher the monkey climbs, the more he shows his tail," the IMF, and its patrons have not only showing more of their tails, but have become thoroughly exposed, in the language of a columnist in the *Guardian*, "Not content with creating a risk-free casino for reckless foreign speculators, the IMF is now seeking to expand their gambling outlets." After such a thorough "strip-teasing" of the IMF by the *Guardian's* columnist, the less said, the better.

political fields. Indonesia is a glaring example. The agents of the moral high ground are waiting in the wings "to spring into action" at opportune moment. More troubles, trials and tribulations are in the offing for Mahathir to cope with and to steer his country clear of the turmoil.

Undoubtedly, he has done "miracles" during the last 17 years or so to pull out Malaysia literally from the rags to the riches. But some ominous signs are casting their dark shadows now. An ambitious person, like Anwar Ibrahim, is being trumpeted as a great reformist and saviour of Malaysia. The bloody street demonstrations against Mahathir, portraying him as an autocrat, (as they now called Suharto after worshipping him as a hero for three decades), are showing the 'ugly faces'. "How Mahathir" will contain his *enfant terrible*?", as questioned in DS editorial of 22 September, only time will show the shape of things to come in Malaysia. But let not another emerging Asian economic tiger be 'crucified', at the altar of vested interests of the West, due to outside machinations. Economically badly mauled and politically almost disintegrated, Indonesia is already bleeding and gasping for breath. Let there be no repeat performance.

How to Contain the Enfant Terrible?

However, Malaysia will have to do a lot to keep itself standing upright on firm footing, particularly during the coming months, to foil the outside machinations to topple Mahathir and bring about a chaos in the economic, social and political fields.

In Search of Alternative Leader

In Malaysia, they have al-

ready found that friendly 'reformist' in former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who is being pampered as the future leader and saviour of Malaysia. The much-orchestrated Western media is already running in full gear to focus on Ibrahim as the most capable leader to handle Malaysia's problems. But how far Ibrahim will succeed in ousting Mahathir is still difficult to say. Mahathir has taxed too much on the patience of the West which will leave no stone unturned to achieve their mission. But so far Mahathir has come out with flying colours as a populist national leader to the amazement of the West. But the storm is still there.

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Army Rules Sri Lanka in All but Name

by Shani Raja

In a recent outburst of fighting with the Tamil Tigers 1,000 rebels and Sri Lankan soldiers were killed around Kilinochchi, south of Jaffna. News of the battle came at a time when disturbing evidence was growing that the country could be on the brink of military dictatorship.



After 3-day battle, Tamil Tigers have captured Kilinochchi, while government forces have taken Mankulam. Casualties totalled 1,000. Both towns lie on strategic road heading south from former Tiger stronghold of Jaffna.

time after a three-day battle which left an estimated 1,000 dead, the Tigers in control of the large town of Kilinochchi and the army having captured Mankulam.

Censorship is not new in Sri Lanka, but a closer look reveals that the censor is no longer a civil servant. He wears khaki. And that is just the official kind of censorship.

The London-based human rights watchdog Article 19 knows of a growing number of Sri Lankan journalists, particularly those daring to uncover military scandals, who have been treated to repeated doses of the unofficial variety — sudden house raids, arrests without charge and in the case of at least one famous defence correspondent, threats, at gunpoint in front of their children.

In August, word from the top general that upcoming local elections would be "impractical" to hold while brave soldiers were battling Tamil "terrorists" in the north, prompted the government to cancel them indefinitely.

"We've taken this decision to preserve democracy," was the explanation offered by the embarrased Justice Minister. Being a learned man, he cannot have been insensitive to the chilling irony of his utterance.

Yet the postponement seems to have injected a sense of urgency among the country's disorganised democratic opposition, worried not just by the disregard for democracy by military leaders, but by their increasing boldness.

Some, sensing the scale of the danger, are co-ordinating efforts to buckle this trend by forging new political alliances.

The United Left Front is one such venture which pulls together reds of many shades, traditionally at loggerheads over the correct socialist path.

Minor ideological splits aside, the new movement seems to be gathering momentum. But there have also been a number of more impulsive backlashes

against the militarist trend.

State bank employees have said they will not co-operate with the proposal to submit a week's salary to defence costs. Thousands of lawyers are boycotting the courts demanding the release of a high court judge they say was arrested by the CID in a calculated drive to intimidate the judiciary.

In a further unsettling turn of events, an eye-catching article appeared in a newspaper with known military connections. It spoke of a new movement dedicated to overthrowing the country's constitution and abolishing the present system, which it says breeds disunity.

The new group advocates replacing irksome party politics with a handing of supreme authority to a single executive president, who would no longer be saddled with the usual checks and balances of a parliamentary democracy.

It was to many a conscious sowing of ideological seeds by the military's own intelligence. The aim: to legitimise a military takeover should any credible political opposition arise to its stated commitment to purely military solutions to the northern war.

"In Sri Lanka we now have military rule in all but name," one worried lawyer in Colombo told me. "It doesn't have to be declared simply because no politician has yet stood against the military's wishes."

The real test would come, he knows, if Colombo refused any of the general's fundamental demands, which are increasingly difficult to satisfy.

Such a definitive moment could arrive sooner than many imagine, not through any impending election, but simply through having no more money in the coffers to give them. — *Gemini News*

(Exchange rate: \$1 = Rs 70.6)

ILO Predicts Worsening Labour Situation in SA

Ela Dutt writes from New York

THE International Labour Organisation (ILO) has predicted deterioration of labour market conditions in South Asia and expressed concern at the "grim" unemployment situation across the world.

In its World Employment Report 1998-99, the ILO says "not only has the situation in the fast-growing economies dramatically altered (since the East Asian crisis) but there is concern that labour market conditions in many countries of South Asia will worsen."

The Geneva-based body, which has a office here, estimates that out of a global labour force of three billion, 25-30 per cent are underemployed and about 140 million are fully unemployed.

The large-scale displacement of workers as a result of the East Asian economic debacle, ten million more workers are expected to join the unemployed ranks by the end of this year, it says.

In sun, the unemployment situation in the world remains largely grim and the pressing challenge is to find new ways to open the barriers to employment, the ILO says.

Developing Asia still has a "more than proportionate share of world poverty, with almost two-third of the world's 1.1 billion poor mostly in South Asia," it points out.

While countries in South Asia have yet to be "significantly" affected by the East Asian crisis, the ILO notes, Pakistan in the 1990s has a slowdown in out-migration and to a significantly lower growth of output, has been facing a more difficult situation. The trend of declining poverty Pakistan had achieved in the 1980s has been reversed, it says.

As for India, its economic performance has fluctuated in the 1990s because of both the liberalisation and the weather, the ILO says. "Although the

trend of growth rate has been higher than earlier, it has not been sufficient or sustained for long enough to reduce significantly the existing high levels of underemployment and to absorb new job-seekers productively," it maintains.

The same applies to other South Asian economies including Bangladesh, where growth rates have been significant. "In none of these countries has there been a significant increase in the small share of formal sector employment," the report says. South Asia comprises India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

In India and Pakistan, the fear of the effects of economic sanctions following the May nuclear tests "could slow down" the economies and lead to high unemployment and poverty, the ILO predicts.

Annual employment growth rate in India was 2.4 per cent

in 1987 and 1996, the last figures quoted. The annual labour force growth rate in the same period was 2.2 per cent. However, even as the annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was a high 6.9 per cent during 1993-97, the annual rate of growth of real wages in manufacturing during 1990-96 was negative.

Rapid globalisation and fast-paced technological progress present new challenges, including heightened competition and economic change that can result in instability and difficulty in maintaining the employability of large segments of a country's labour force, the ILO says.

At special risk of exclusion from the work force are unemployed youth, long-term unemployed, older displaced workers, the less skilled, workers with disability and ethnic minority groups, it says. Women face higher barriers to work in all these categories, according to the labour body.

— IANS

EVIDENCE of a state of undeclared military rule in Sri Lanka is mounting rapidly.

In 1994, the year the progressive People's Alliance coalition strode to power under President Chandrika Kumaratunga, a typical Sri Lankan would have scoffed at the suggestion that a few years down the line the country would be teetering on the brink of a military dictatorship.

If you suggested the same thing now, they might be more receptive. For today, the military in Sri Lanka decides such matters as when and whether the president can attend parliament, and it determines when and whether elections can be held.

A high-profile general was recently quoted as saying that peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the main rebel group fighting for independence for Tamils in the north, were completely out of the question.

His comments blatantly contradicted the official government position that the war's aim is to force the Tigers to negotiate.

More telling, perhaps, than the general's boldness was the government's silence.

In the 1950s, the military in

Sri Lanka was merely ceremonial. Under the present administration — a broadly leftist coalition — it has swelled enormously.

About 120,000 of the country's 18 million citizens are now under arms. Defence-related industries are possibly the most prosperous in the country, and spending on the war this year will approach Rs 60 billion, an all-time high.

On top of that, the Defence Ministry had the audacity to ask workers in every government department — already crippled by a lethal defence levy on goods and services — each to donate a full week's wages to the country's defence fund.

So far the call has been for voluntary donations, but few doubt that non-complainers would entail its own hazards. Journalists, local and foreign, are required to hand their stories to a censor who dutifully snips off any demoralising information.

The primary target is the ongoing anti-Tiger offensive in the north: a military operation cursed with the name Victory Assured which is all but stalled halfway after 18 months and thousands of government casualties.

The army has just suffered its heaviest setback for along

time after a three-day battle which left an estimated 1,000 dead, the Tigers in control of the large town of Kilinochchi and the army having captured Mankulam.

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against the militarist trend.

State bank employees have said they will not co-operate with the proposal to submit a week's salary to defence costs. Thousands of lawyers are boycotting the courts demanding the release of a high court judge they say was arrested by the CID in a calculated drive to intimidate the judiciary.

In a further unsettling turn of events, an eye-catching article appeared in a newspaper with known military connections. It spoke of a new movement dedicated to overthrowing the country's constitution and abolishing the present system, which it says breeds disunity.

The new group advocates replacing irksome party politics with a handing of supreme authority to a single executive president, who would no longer be saddled with the usual checks and balances of a parliamentary democracy.

It was to many a conscious sowing of ideological seeds by the military's own intelligence. The aim: to legitimise a military takeover should any credible political opposition arise to its stated commitment to purely military solutions to the northern war.

"In Sri Lanka we now have military rule in all but name," one worried lawyer in Colombo told me. "It doesn't have to be declared simply because no politician has yet stood against the military's wishes."

The real test would come, he knows, if Colombo refused any of the general's fundamental demands, which are increasingly difficult to satisfy.

Such a definitive moment could arrive sooner than many imagine, not through any impending election, but simply through having no more money in the coffers to give them. — *Gemini News*

(Exchange rate: \$1 = Rs 70.6)

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