

FEATURES

The report of the Select Committee on the ethnic crisis which was tabled in Parliament last week immediately came in for mixed reactions. Mr. Mangala Moonesinghe, MP, seen as the initiator and driving force of the Select Committee, however, is convinced that the report, despite the reactions, just might hold the key to peace.

# Dynamics of peace explained

By Rajpal Abeynayake

The Pooneryn attack, says the Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the ethnic crisis, Mr. Mangala Moonesinghe, has "underlined the need for a political solution to the national crisis". The Select Committee, which completed its work last week, tabled its report in Parliament with a dissenting report to the Speaker, plus a number of additional annexures.

The Select Committee report, according to its Chairman Mangala Moonesinghe, "forms a good basis for negotiations, a viable basis on which to build a long-term solution". The basis for this argument, he says, is "the very significant fact that there is, for the first time, an agreement between the two major Sri Lankan political parties on a solution to the national issue". "It means that if a deal is struck, then we can guarantee to stick by it, because the major parties are in agreement on the basics".

Though initial reaction to the Select Committee report has been less than sanguine among certain quarters, Mr. Moonesinghe dismisses the critics saying that "the Select Committee report does not mean that there will be a ceasefire today, but it certainly does mean that there is a very good foundation on which a solution can be built".

One reason, he says, is that it also accommodates one of the basic demands of the LTTE, which is a "federal system of government". He explains that the report envisages "devolution of power on the Indian model, without using the term federal in any manifest sense".

On the question of the North-East merger, the report envisages two separate Provincial Councils for the two provinces, though earlier an apex body of both councils was considered in the option paper. The "apex council", says Mr. Moonesinghe, would have made for "both a merger and a de-merger of the North and East", but "had to be dropped because the Tamil Parties walked out on the deliberations".

## Rationale

Mr. Moonesinghe seems to be confident that the matter of the merger is "negotiable" after the principle of devolution has been accepted. For instance, there is a possibility to negotiate for certain pockets of the Eastern Province to come under the jurisdiction of the Northern Province, based on the premise that the Tamil people in the eastern Province "should be made to feel secure". He also says that the LTTE will probably be amenable to such an arrangement.

What follows in the event that the LTTE rejects in toto the devolution on an Indian model envisaged in the Select Committee proposals?

To this, Mr. Moonesinghe replies that "then there will be no option in any case but to implement the Select Committee's recommendations. Which means that, there will be a referendum on the matter

The crux of Mr. Moonesinghe's argument is that 'there is some chance for peace, so why not take it, when there is war all around us'.

of the merger, and a subsequent devolution of power that will follow".

Citing the examples of Israel and the PLO, and De Klerk and Nelson Mandela, Mr. Moonesinghe says that "the issues that concern peace are all dynamic - they are not static". He means that there are different variables that are bound to change, hence making the atmosphere viable for peace. In the case of the PLO, he points out that "Arafat was more amenable to peace, because he saw his funding from the Soviet Union drying up with the collapse of that country.

There was a change of one significant variable, that brought the PLO closer to the idea of peace".

In Sri Lanka, he wagers that this variable will be "economic development", explaining

that "economic development can be one of the greatest factors that can make peace". "There is a \$85 million budget for the development of the East. This is why we urge the Pradeshiya Sabha elections, for instance should be held soon for the Eastern Province, because it will mean that the East can develop. There are plans for an export processing zone, a superhighway, and

plans for the development of tourism in the Eastern Province".

Mangala Moonesinghe's rationale is that "economic activity will remove the causes that lead to rebellion and revolt". He cites the example of the JVP.

"There is a tremendous amount of economic activity in the South now. It's growth rates are high, and this has precluded the possibility of JVP activity in this once-hotbed of tefror,

## Rigorous

The way they were carrying on, nobody thought that JVP activity would cease, but there were many other variables that operated to bring peace to the South".

He also cites the recent example of Cambodia "where elections were

held in much harsher conditions than which now obtain in the Eastern province now. However, Cambodia is now moving towards peace, and they are ac-

tioned in the North and the East since independence, together with an ethnic classification of individuals settled in the colonization schemes. These statistics, says Mr.

tral Government was notified".

The politics of efficiency would come into the devolution experiment, according to Mr. Moonesinghe who says that "the development of certain provincial councils has depended entirely on the efficiency of each Chief Minister. There are some Chief Ministers (in the south) who have generated unprecedented economic activity in their provinces, while others have been quite lethargic. There will be similar parallels when power is finally devolved to the Northern and Eastern provinces.

## Devolution

How good are the chances of a "political solution" based on the Select Committee report, especially in the context of the ground situation, militarily speaking, and other assessments such as the assertion by the President that "there is no ethnic crisis"?

Mr. Moonesinghe replies that when the President says "there is no ethnic crisis" he probably means that the "Tamil people are living among us, in the rest of the country, and they have no problems in doing so. Hence, the rider that there is no ethnic crisis.

Giving what he calls this "generous interpretation" to the President's statements, Mr. Moonesinghe says

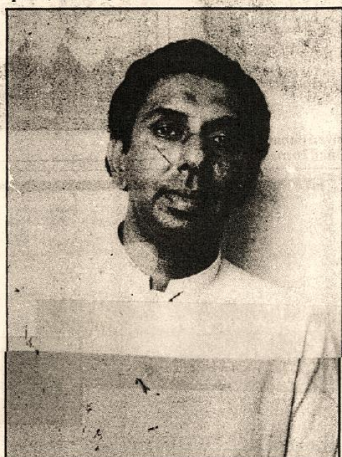
that "ordinary people be they Tamil, Muslim or Sinhalese want peace. To that extent, our problem is different from that of the Balkans or even South Africa or Somalia "where there is tribal warfare and people are killing each other. That is why this is a terrorist problem and not an ethnic crisis".

In his perspective, it is an unparalleled breakthrough, and an unprecedented consensus among the Sinhala parties, which means that any negotiated settlement can finally be made viable to the Sinhala polity.

Mr. Moonesinghe also seems to be an ardent believer in the fact that peace has to be obtained incrementally, that it is a gradual process that has to evolve slowly, under changing circumstances. That's why he cites the PLO and South Africa as examples.

## Parallel

But asked if "intransigence" might not emerge as the key factor, or whether Sri Lanka will be closer to the parallel of Northern Ireland than Israel and Palestine, he says "in fifteen years, there may be no peace, and that's unfortunate for all of us. But we can work towards peace, and given that the search for peace is a dynamic process, there is every chance that we can have peace in a few years".



Mr. Mangala Moonesinghe

usually selecting beauty queens now in that place".

The deliberations of the Select Committee took more than twelve months, because "the issues involved were complex and several people had to be called before the committee to give evidence". This rigorous process, he says, has cleared the air on many issues such as colonisation, for instance, and matters such as development aid when devolution of power is realised.

The facts gathered on colonisation were related to land settlement

Moonesinghe "indicate that almost 99 per cent of those who were settled in the Northern Province were Tamils. There was no "forced colonisation, he says" but gazette notifications called for names of those who wanted to be part of the colonization schemes".

With regard to aid, the Director of External Resources was called, and it was her view that "the Chief Ministers of each province could negotiate separately with foreign governments to procure loans etc., provided that the Cen-