

Gamini Dissanayake on N-E crisis

Whither the Accord?

DUNF leader Gamini Dissanayake said last week in Colombo that the ethnic crisis should be resolved only by a "human approach to a human crisis."

He said that the most dangerous place to live in today was Colombo. "Mr. Amirthalingam was not killed in Jaffna nor was he killed in Trincomalee nor was he killed in Batticaloa. He was gunned down in Colombo."

"It had reached a point where the President of this country is not safe in Colombo. Therefore the crisis is a Colombo crisis." Mr. Dissanayake told a panel discussion on "North-East Crisis — possible solutions" held at the YMCA.

The other panelists in the discussion were Kumar Ponnambalam and M. H. M. Ashraff, leaders of the ACTC and SLMC respectively. The moderator was Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda, lecturer at Colombo University.

Mr. Dissanayake added: "The crisis is a crisis among the Sinhalese. The crisis is a crisis among the Tamils. In short, the crisis is a human crisis."

He said no one in the Cabinet or the UNP Parliamentary Group still did not know the contents of the discussions held between President Premadasa and the LTTE in Colombo.

He said: "I think the leadership of the LTTE may be and may not be have misled into the possibilities of a negotiated settlement as all the other Tamil leaders have been in the past. Nine and a half months of negotiations did not result in the LTTE being convinced that there is a possibility of a negotiated settlement. I wish to give the benefit of the doubt to the leadership of the LTTE because upto now the UNP has not been able to present a formula to solve the crisis despite being in government for the last four years."

Mr. Dissanayake associated himself with the contents of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987, "every word, every sentence, every comma."

"Many of us who were party to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord looked down at our political graves when we agreed

to support President Jayewardene, when we decided to be by his side to implement the contents of that Accord because the Accord for the first time recognised the multi-ethnic, multi-religious nature of Lankan society," he added.

Mr. Dissanayake said he believed the ethnic issue arise as a movement of the Tamil People in search of dignity. History has been misinterpreted to show that Sinhalese and Tamils had always, been at war, he said.

"Today we are living in a society that has turned to be increasingly violent. Our violence did not start with Prabakaran. In recent history, the violence started with the racial riots of 1958. Violence continued into the 1960s. Violence occurred once again with its most daring impact of social destruction in 1971, when the Sinhala leadership found that Marxist ideology was not merely to be taught and learnt but also to be practised," said the former minister.

"The next eruption of violence was in 1975. With the elimination of Alfred Duriappah and the subsequent formation of different guerrilla groups which had succeeded in eliminating practically all the Tamil leaders, barring a few.

The chief negotiator for the Tamil community at that time (1983-1987) by common acceptance was the Indian Government. After 1983, the Tamil leadership communicated to the government that they had no faith in the Sinhala national leaders. With the arrival of Parthasarathy here, the government accepted the concept that the Indian Government had a role to play.

"From 1983, through Bangalore, and Delhi through Thimpu and to other discussions the final result was the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987," he added.

Violence did not stop even after 1982 because it was very clear that the Accord was not acceptable to the LTTE. Mr. Dissanayake quoted a speech made by Prabakaran on August 4, 1987 in Jaffna.

The government and the country's leadership has not been able to find any other basis other than provided in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord

for the solution to the ethnic crisis, he said adding that the ethnic crisis must be made distinct from the North-East crisis.

He said the unit of devolution did not seem to be relevant since the presence of a LTTE's struggle of a separate state and the contradictions that exist even among the leadership of Tamil community.

The North-East merger was temporary because the Indian Government had to ask those who were asking for a separate state.

"We have now a merged North-East province, get back to your country get back to the mainstream of politics and try to campaign for a permanent merger if you so wish."

That is the relevancy of referendum, said Mr. Dissanayake who was a cabinet minister when the Accord was signed.

He said: "Whether the referendum was to be held before, or whether it is to be held after was a debatable question. But President Jayewardene thought that the entering of militants into the process was more valuable than the question whether the re-

would never be talking of a 'war and peace policy' for such a policy is not going to take us anywhere.

"A merged Northern and Eastern Province, as one unit, is the alternative to a separate state. But the Tamil parties have said that they would take part in an exercise to redefine the boundaries of the Eastern Province that would help assuage Sinhala sentiments or fears," he said.

"Sometime ago the Tamils were prepared to settle for provincial autonomy. Even this, the UNP administration was not willing to work for. The centre tried to usurp some of the subjects devolved to the provincial unit. It is for this reason the Tamils say today that they want something much more than the existing provincial councils system offered by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution," he said.

Mr. Ponnambalam cautioned that what was thought of as a lasting solution in 1957 will not be accepted as lasting solution now.

Mr. Ashraff said he was surprised to hear

Muslims is in the east. Problems between Tamils and Muslims began after the 1987 Accord. The Muslim community had undergone immense sufferings not only at the hands of the LTTE but also by other Tamil militia since the Accord was signed.

The SLMC was opposed to an unconditional merger of the North and East. It is agreeable to a conditional merger.

There is an intransigent refusal to accept the Muslim religious identity, Mr. Ashraff said. Muslim Parliamentary representation was recognised for the first time on a religious basis and not on a linguistic basis, he added.

The ACTC and SLMC had issued a joint statement a few years ago in which the ACTC recognised the need to devolve power on ethnic-oriented basis. Unfortunately, subsequent changes may have changed Mr. Ponnambalam's thinking as well.

The DPA manifesto presented by Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike envisaged a devolution of power to be shared by Tamils and Muslims on a non-contiguous basis. He added the SLFP had got more votes for this manifesto in 1988 Presidential Election than what it received in the new manifesto in 1989 General Election.

Mr. Ashraff added there was no serious effort on the part of any-

one to resolve the crisis. A President, a State Minister for Defence and Tamil leaders had been killed in Colombo. There is only an urge to protect the seat of power, he pointed out.

He said that a referendum to decide on the merger of the North and East would not be a solution.

Answering a question, Mr. Dissanayake said the Indo-Lanka Accord could be a beginning to find a solution to the crisis. He suggested a non-ethnic solution to the problem but said it would be a difficult process.

Moderator Dr. Uyangoda pointed out that both Mr. Dissanayake and Mr. Ashraff had suggested a politico-military approach to end the current conflict.

By M. S. Vipulananda

ferendum should be held before or after."

The DUNF leader said there was no need for mediation by anybody to solve the present crisis. "We should have the strength within ourselves to negotiate. We must have the courage of our conviction to say what we believe is right whether we become popular or not.

According to Mr. Dissanayake, "if the LTTE is willing to negotiate over and over again we must ask them please come and negotiate."

He said the country needed political reforms from "top to bottom".

He stressed the need to put the question of violence "behind us".

In his submission, Mr. Ponnambalam said: "When we come to talk of possible solutions to the North-East crisis, we can only be talking of the 'Tamil question' and not a terrorist problem.

In the same way, we could only be talking of possible political solutions and not military solutions. If we do appreciate this, we

Mr. Ponnambalam who was speaking only about a Tamil Problem. "I was perturbed when I failed to hear not even a passing reference to the Muslim perspective of the whole equation," the SLMC leader added.

He said the crisis was not only a Tamil problem but there was also a terrorist element in the problem. A politico-military approach to the problem is essential. Terrorism must be eliminated. Political aspects must be identified but there was no use in talking to people who believe only in the gun. The North-East question is not a Tamil Question only. There is a Muslim Question also.

Mr. Ashraff said the Indo-Lanka Accord failed to recognise the multi-ethnic character of the North-East Province. The Accord is not an answer to the crisis. The LTTE rejected it. Muslims too consider it a betrayal.

One third of the Eastern Province population is Muslims. The political backbone of the Lankan