

RMB shocks us with unreliable statement

by K Godage

Former Civil Servant and someone who regularly makes thought provoking contributions on national issues has certainly shocked us all with an unbelievable statement on the North-East merger. For a person of his caliber and background he has let himself down.

He has stated in his recent article on the Supreme Court judgment on the merger of the northern and eastern provinces, "Can the Sri Lanka government which recognized the north and east to be the traditional homelands of the Tamils now go back on such recognition. What about the Indian government....."

Surely Mr. Senanayake should have known better, we expect that from a person such as him. The North and East of this country were not recognized as the 'traditional homeland' of the Tamil people, the language used (to quote from the Indo-Lanka Accord) "Recognizing that the Northern and Eastern Provinces have been areas of historical habitation of Sri Lankan Tamil speaking people (please note that this includes the Muslims who are not Tamils) who have at all times hitherto lived together in this territory with other ethnic people". The government of Sri Lanka was compelled to accept the formulation "areas of historical habitation" because of the pressure exerted by India at the instance of Dickshit whose knowledge of our history could have been written on the back of a small

five rupees stamp.

The fact that President JR insisted on a Referendum before such a merger could be effected is proof that he did not accept that the EP was the traditional homeland of the Tamil or the Tamil speaking people. This is also evident from the compromise formulation "an area of historical habitation"--- they had missed out on the words "recent" in the context of our 2500 year history, as would be indicated anon.

I am also surprised that Mr. Senanayake has cited Douglas Devananda as an authority!--- "from the days of our forefathers". Devananda certainly does not seem to have known what the situation was in the days of his forefathers. Well here is a little bit of the history of the present Eastern Province.

There is overwhelming historical, archeological, epigraphical and anthropological evidence to prove that the present Eastern province was never a part of any traditional homeland of the Tamil speaking people; though there was of course a sub-kingdom of Yalpattam, not an inch of the present Eastern Province belonged to that sub-kingdom. There is indelible evidence left by Portuguese, Dutch and English travelers in the 16th 17th 18th and 19th centuries that the Sinhalese Kings exercised suzerainty over what is known today as the Eastern Province. I would advise Mr. S to read Queros the Portuguese historian or the Dutchman Baldeus (who had lived in Jaffna for many years) or

Donald Ferguson ("The earliest Dutch Visits to Ceylon") or even Prof. Arasaratnam who has stated that the Kandyan Kingdom included Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Surely Mr. S should know that Knox was arrested by the 'King's soldiers north of Trincomalee in 1660. It should also be recalled that it was the King in Kandy (Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe) who by a treaty entered into with the Dutch Governor Flack ceded parts of the east coast and a part of the west coast to the Dutch.

Mr. RMB Senanayake should also read Percival's book 'An account of the Island of Ceylon' and learn of how Tamil settlements in the east originated. Does Mr.S know that tobacco was a major crop in the Jaffna peninsula long before onions and chilies came to be grown there? Labour for the tobacco cultivation which was labour intensive was according to Percival, brought from South India. Percival refers to non-native Tamils and states that when the Tobacco boom ended these labour class Tamils from South India were sent out to the Vanni, Trincomalee and Batticaloa by the caste conscious land owning Velala Tamils of the Peninsular. This is why the Jaffna Tamil considers himself to be superior to the Vanni and eastern Province Tamil. In British times the surplus labour from the estates after coffee boom collapsed had also been settled in the East. Yet another group of Tamil mercenaries who had assisted the British to crush the rebellion in 1848 had also

been settled in the east according to a dispatch by Governor Torrington (reference Professor KM De Silva's The Rebellion of 1848).

What Mr. S is perhaps not aware of is that there are over 35 Buddhist archeological sites in the present Eastern Province and the inscriptions speak for themselves.

On the matter of how the 'Eastern Province' itself came into being; after the annexation of the Kandyan Kingdom the British first set about dismembering the former Kingdom. They next created five Provinces for convenience of administration; they were the Western, Southern, Central Northern and Eastern Provinces. The North Western Province was created in 1845; the NCP in 1873, the Uva in 1886, and the Sabaragamuwa Province in 1889 by that year the British had arbitrarily created nine provinces for convenience of administration.

A man of the caliber of RMB should read respected Professors Gerry Peiris or KM De Silva in addition to Queros, Baldeus, Percival and Ferguson and if he does not have the time he should at least read the invaluable booklet of 35 pages by his former colleague KHJ Wijeyadasa on the 'Traditional Homeland' claim. This hoax is being perpetrated in the first instance to effect a land grab for the NP by itself is not a viable entity, further, Trincomalee is the prize and secondly we should recognize the fact that the demand for Eelam has arisen out of the fear of being overwhelmed by the numeri-



Knox was arrested by the King's soldiers north of Trincomalee in 1660

cal strength of the majority community and the 'Majoritarian' policies by post independence governments. Another 'charge' that needs to be countered is that post independence governments changed the demography of the present Eastern province through state aided 'colonization' (a political word used deliberately for 'settlements'). This was perhaps because of a lack of knowledge of the history of the present EP. The new settlers had as much right as those who were 'sent' from the North or the hill country (assisted and aided by the British) and settled in the EP in recent centuries or any other

citizen of this country with or without state aid.

This country should be the homeland of all the communities that inhabit the land and they should be able to live as equal citizens with dignity and in security where-ever they may choose to live. We cannot have mono ethnic enclaves in any part of this our island home. A mono ethnic enclave in the North or an artificially created North-East will only endanger those of the same mono ethnic group who have chosen to live amongst us for generations in the south.

As modern world closes in, India's fabled bandits are disappearing

On a rainy afternoon, just a few days into the monsoon season, a tired lawyer with thinning hair stood on the courthouse verandah, wiping away sweat with a rumpled handkerchief and wondering if business could, after so many years, be turning bad.

His client that day was a 20-year-old woman, an illiterate villager with gold hoop earrings, gentle eyes and charges that included weapons possession and attempted murder. She was, she admitted, a "dacoit" - a bandit - and until a few months ago was part of a gang that had kidnapped and robbed its way through the villages of north India.

Defending bandits has always been a steady business for the lawyers of this small town, a guarantee of work in the quietest of times.

But after more than 800 years, India's once-powerful bandits are disappearing: hunted by aggressive police commanders, denounced by the villagers they once claimed to defend and pushed into ever-more-hidden corners by the spread of the modern world.

The bandit tradition that began when emperors ruled India - a tradition tangled in myth and history, led by men who are part thug, part caste warlord and part Robin Hood - is dying.

"There is so much pressure on them now," said the lawyer, Kumar Tiwary, who earned less than 50 rupees (US\$1; euro0.80) for that day's court hearing. "There are not even many bandits left."

It's hard to imagine they lasted this long.

Tourists mob the Taj Mahal just 80 kilometers (50 miles) to the north, and it's only a three-hour train ride to the glass-walled malls and high-tech offices that line the roads outside New Delhi, India's capital.

But Etawah is also at the western edge of the "Chambal," a maze of deep ravines and scrub forests that has hidden generations of outlaws. Named for a river that runs through the region, the Chambal is a place where 3-meter-deep (10-foot-deep) gullies suddenly give way to gorges with 30-meter-high (100-foot-high) walls of dirt and rocks. A small army could dis-

appear into the ravines and not be found for weeks.

While India's cities grow ever more modern, propelled by some of the world's fastest economic growth, the Chambal remains defined by poverty and violence.

"It's different here," said Nitya Anand, a police official who insists the bandits have been nearly wiped out - but who goes nowhere without heavily armed bodyguards. "People are proud to be dacoits."

For generations, dacoits were at the center of village life, with travelers warning of them back to the 14th century. The most powerful held sway for decades, often with the open connivance of police and politicians. They

the weak. In return, villagers protected them.

While most stories of Robin Hood-like dacoits are exaggerated - much of the money taken from the rich went directly into the bandits' pockets - these old-style outlaws are remembered warmly.

"Our parents and grandparents, they raised us to believe that dacoits were good people. They helped the poor, they gave people money," said Ram Avtar Singh, a 55-year-old farmer walking with friends deep in the Chambal. "They were heroes."

The most famous was Phoolan Devi, a low-caste farmer's daughter who became internationally known as the "Bandit Queen." Widely seen as a



Special task force of Uttarpradesh police patrols, at the Chambal ravines near Etawah, 325 kilometers (203 miles) south of New Delhi, India, Friday, July 7, 2006 (AP)

code: target the powerful; never harm a woman; leave the poor in peace.

Today, there is only one rule: don't target your own caste. Everyone else - rich or poor, man or woman - is

Few mourn him. "These bandits are like rain: today here, and tomorrow gone," said Singh.

The Chambal remains awash in poverty, a place of empty mud-walled homes whose residents long ago fled the economic emptiness, where many schools remain closed because teachers fear being kidnapped, where a plow is often little more than a sharpened stick pulled by a buffalo. But slowly, modern India has reached even into the Chambal.

Paved roads now unravel through some ravines, and villages hidden until just a couple years ago behind swaying pontoon bridges can now be reached by police in minutes. Isolated hamlets now have cell phones.

Then there's Daljeet Singh Chaudhury.

A top regional police commander, Chaudhury has become something of a celebrity here, and everyone from politicians to tenant farmers tell stories of his fearlessness, his honesty, and his relentless ambition to rid the Chambal of bandits. His forces, some of whom worked openly with the bandits just a few years ago, now track them with assault rifles and electronic surveillance gear.

Chaudhury isn't shy about proclaiming his victories.

"They have been shot, they have been arrested, they have surrendered," he said of the dacoits. His men, he says, have killed some 30 in a little over a year, wiping out nearly every major gang.

"Things are peaceful and there is not much movement of gangs in the ravines, and not many kidnappings," he said. "I would say they are on the run." (AP)



A villager sells mango at a crossing of a village, near Etawah, 325 kilometers (203 miles) south of New Delhi, India, Friday, July 7, 2006. (AP)

made money by kidnapping landowners and robbing travelers, and earned fealty by protecting members of their own castes against raiding bandits from rival castes.

In an area with few schools or jobs, the bandits also created what was, effectively, a criminalized social welfare organization: they paid for weddings and doctors' visits, they settled village disputes, they protected

heroine - despite the bloodiness of her 10-year fight - she surrendered two decades ago, served time in prison and became a politician before being murdered in 2001.

But the days of heroes ended in the 1970s and 1980s when more than 600 dacoits turned in their guns under increasing police pressure.

The remaining gangs balkanized, and abandoned the dacoits' informal

fair game.

As a result, the dacoits' support network has withered, and it is fear that now binds villagers to them.

"These men are all thugs," said Singh, whose village saw a local woodcutter become a powerful bandit two years ago - then quickly change into a pure criminal, preying on nearly everyone. A year later, he was killed by police.

Sex offender ordered to wear T-shirt warning others

A sex offender with a history of exposing himself has been ordered by a judge to wear a T-shirt proclaiming "I am a registered sex offender."

Superior Court Judge Jan Jurden also sentenced Russell Teeter, 69, to two months in jail Friday for repeatedly exposing himself at his Newark-area business to a 10-year-old girl.

Jurden handed down the unusual sentence at the suggestion of the state's deputy attorney general, Donald Roberts, who noted that Teeter has more than 10 convictions dating to 1976 and has been treated for being a compulsive exhibitionist.

Roberts told the judge that perhaps the shirt and jail time will "teach him to keep his zipper up."

Teeter will have to wear the shirt for almost two years once he gets out of jail and returns to his horticulture business.

Defense attorney Arlen Mekler opposed the sentence, describing the T-shirt as "a modern-day scarlet letter," referring to the humiliating punishment given an adulterous woman in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel about puritan New England who was forced to wear a red letter "A" on her clothing.

Drewry Fennell, executive director of the Delaware American Civil Liberties Union, shared Mekler's concern.

"There is no evidence that public shaming is effective in public safety," she said. "And there are serious dangers posed to the person wearing the shirt, exposing them to possible violence."

Roberts, the prosecutor, said he believes the T-shirt fits in with the community notification requirement of Megan's Law.

Mekler said Teeter is battling depression and regressed because he went off of his medication. He also noted that Teeter has never molested a child but is just a chronic exhibitionist. (AP)