

A referendum on devolution

I refer to Neville Ladduwahetty's article on "The 13th Amendment and beyond" appearing in the Island of 1st May. His recommendation that a referendum be held before implementing a political package, appears to be procedurally proper and legally correct. But the outcome of such an initiative is bound to be a foregone conclusion, in a country where the race to be most disturbed by devolution, forms 75% of the population. A referendum in such circumstances would be a waste of time and energy and an encouragement to majoritarianism which Ladduwahetty impliedly wished to

discourage through a Bill of Rights in an earlier article. The more pragmatic move appears to be the alternative of sticking to the status quo as regards the 13th Amendment and consider its future development through 'soft diplomacy' after the ongoing moves to resettle and rehabilitate the North and the East are successfully concluded. Even Hon. Vinayagamoorthy Muralidaran had expressed his willingness to think of the 13th Amendment after the immediate priorities are accomplished. Whether the majority of Tamils agree with him or not,

they do not appear to have an alternative at the moment. Perhaps saner counsel may prevail after the dust of the war has settled down and Tamils are satisfied that they have not been taken for a ride.

Somapala Gunadheera



Negotiate with India to repeal the Indo Lanka Agreement

As the person who went before the Supreme Court in 1987 in connection with the Indo Lanka Agreement (my attorney at law was Mr. Sarath Wijesinghe) I have some satisfaction that our line of reasoning has been proved to be correct over the years.

The Indo Lanka Agreement as many people would agree was imposed on us under the emergency laws of the J.R.J government with Shri Rajiv Gandhi rushing to Colombo to dictate terms to J.R.J with the notorious Dixit "overlooking" and "looking over" matters. The agreement is completely out of date today with Prabhakaran who killed Gandhi himself being killed, and the LTTE defeated. It has to be pointed out that we advocated the defeat of the LTTE by military means instead of negotiations based on the Indo Lanka

Agreement against all odds even in 1987. All the main actors J.R.J, Rajiv Gandhi, Prabhakaran, Dixit, Ganiini Dissanayake are no more and only a person who would not understand simple reasoning and logic would believe in a Tamil homeland in the northern and the eastern provinces created by the British as late as 1889. The 13th Amendment which was based on the Indo Lanka Agreement should have no place in our constitution in the present form.

It is time that the Sri Lankan government start negotiations with the Indian government to repeal the outdated Indo Lanka Agreement in the light of the change of context, and in this regard, the decision to review the 1959 Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty should be an example.

Nalin de Silva

A Rejoinder to Nalin de Silva

Two prominent members of the government seem to be out of tune as far as the quick and urgent relaxation of tension among the Tamil-speaking people of the country is concerned. Minister Champika Ranawaka of the Jathika Hela Urumaya and Wimal Weerawansa of the National Patriotic Front, are evidently stumbling blocks on the path of smoother racial relations. On the other hand, among the academics Prof. Nalin de Silva seems to have turned a new leaf according to his article in 'The Island' two weeks back (Midweek Review of June 24, 2009).

He wrote: "I have more than a 'soft corner' for the Tamils as well as the other communities in Sri Lanka and I respect them as citizens of the country." He went further to explain that "Of course, I have no hesitation in stating that the Sinhala Buddhist culture is the significant culture of the country, not the dominant culture". Prof N de S could bridge the gap in understanding between the communities if he could explain his thinking to the Sinhala masses in the Sinhala media. That would go a long way in bringing the estranged communities to think afresh.

At the same time I am uncertain whether his following statement has any validity: He wrote: "Tamils in Sri Lanka do not have a continuous history going back to a date before the 17th century." During the Dutch period in the island's history there was the tobacco trade between



Champika

present southern districts of Kerala. Perhaps people from such regions speaking Tamil and Malayalam came in great number in the 17th century. And they become either Tamilians or Sinhals depending on what region they settled in.

But Tamilians and other Dravidians had lived in Lanka even before the 7th century as could be learned from the Tamil Bhakthi literature. There is one other point where I disagree with Prof N de S. He says, "The close relationship between Tamil spoken in Jaffna and Chennai or in Madurai has to be understood."

I am afraid this is not so. The Tamil spoken in Chennai is a hybrid kind of Tamil (a hodge-podge colloquial mixture of different tongues) And in Mathurai, Tamil speech is strongly influenced by Telugu. In fact Yaappaam and Mattakkalappu spoken Tamil has closer affinity to the Tamil spoken in southern districts like Nagarkovil, Thirunelveli and even Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. The Lankan king Deva Nambia Tissa is known in Tamil as Theva Nambia 'Theesan' and not 'Thesam' as Prof N de S says. The name means, one who believed in Deva (God).

K.S. Sivakumaran

Bursting Colombo Sewers

Your newspaper carried an article highlighting the nuisance caused to Colombo citizens due to bursting or collapsing sewers and that the CMC is faced with difficulties to do anything about these never ending discharge of sewage onto streets and surrounding areas, particularly at a time when the government is forcefully educating the people about the health hazards arising from even tiny pools of water in their households.

CMC, like all other local authorities in the area, is engaged in looking for householders who permit collection of tiny water pools in their premises that with authority to prosecute them. Amidst this kind of situation it is difficult to imagine that a people based institution like the CMC will allow sewers to open up into streets and let raw sewage flow all over. It is pertinent to find out the State Agency responsible for the Colombo Sewerage System.

Colombo Sewerage Works were vested in the NWSDB in the 1980s to fulfill requirements to obtain World Bank Loans. Since then CMC has been contracted for performing operation and maintenance work. It is unlikely that this arrangement has been reversed because there is no provision in the NWSDB Act

to divest what is vested in the NWSDB. Besides, NWSDB is responsible for repaying the loans obtained for carrying out improvements to Colombo Sewerage Works. Yet, what the CMC says about non availability of sufficient funds for repair and maintenance of the aging sewers must be correct.

On the other hand, the Act does not entrust any responsibility for repair and maintenance of sewers to rate payers.



CMC Colombo

NWSDB Act provides that it can fine and pursue action in District Court or Magistrate's Court against users and others within its area of authority for neglect of maintenance, timely repair, etc pertaining to sewers. Please read Sections 40 to 56 in the NWSDB Act if you need confirmation. It is difficult to imagine the plight of the people if CMC goes round finding people for water collecting in their premises and NWSDB pursues legal action against city dwellers affected by regularly bursting sewers by neglect of repair and maintenance of sewers.

This, perhaps, could be reason why NWSDB opts to keep quiet about these problems arising from bursting sewers and spillage of sewage.

K.R. Ranasinghe, Ratmalana.

New Formula 20 over Cricket

It is a child took a great fascination for the classic game known as a Gentlemen's game and at the initial stages the cricketers were branded as 'Flannelled Fools' by the English themselves, who were responsible for its creation!!

I remember clinging to my Father's arm entering into Galle Esplanade to witness the famous 'Lovers' Encounter' between Richmond and Mahinda College in 1930's which has now passed 100 years of play. My cousin the late Rev. Joe Weerasooriya was the Captain of Richmond, who was at the crease and had stroked a ball to high Heaven's like the many foolish ones witnessed in our Final's match of 2008. So, when Joe retired crest fallen to the pavilion for 6 runs I started to cry and Father took great pains to console me with chocolates.

My reminiscence to these catches as Foolish strokes by our team may cause added pain of mind for their miserable display and defeat... Allow me to withdraw this word 'Foolish strokes, since I don't blame anyone in particular as I am one of the few who is against this 20 over rash game, which does not conform to the established rules and regulations. For instance their metal

build-up to face this strike game from the world go is to hit the ball with all their might to reach the highest score rightly and plan for a win is the motto. Nothing else matters; Is this cricket? taste differs. On the other hand how pleasant it is to relax and watch a 50 over or Test game with all its rules followed by the glorious uncertainty of the game.

I agree this rush game is meant for the rush world and the younger generation whose lifestyle is also surrounded in a similar fashion in any of their undertakings. Even their normal meals are taken in a mighty hurry with their TV, tele-dramas in front of them. Further their much needed The balms of hurt minds that nits

up the ravel sleeve of care' get blasted by their late night life. We of course of the old generation are classed as 'Kopi Kade' products as Foolish strokes by our team

Coming back to cricket, I do hope that this speed game will not creep into the Test and 50 over game as the possibility is there for the technically trained cricketer to get unconsciously drawn into the modern style. So, be aware of the danger blooming on the Horizon.

Derick Weerasooriya



Galle Esplanade

by Sunimal Fernando

Presidential Advisor, and Coordinator (English) and Convenor of the Presidential Task Force on English and IT

The letter to the editor entitled 'Learn Bad English' written by a reader Mr. K.D.Jayasinghe of Ratmalana appearing in the 'Island' of June 29th is in somewhat poor taste. The letter gives expression to a series of inaccuracies, falsities and absurdities hurriedly laced together with the intent perhaps of 'throwing mud' at the Presidential Initiative on English as a Life Skill, the Presidential Secretariat, the Presidential Advisor coordinating the Initiative and also on the country that is helping the President to take Spoken English skills to the youth, namely India.

The writer refers to this laudable initiative of our President as a 'mere eye wash'. But once we dismantle the falsehoods and inaccuracies in his letter systematically as we will now do, the writer may need a cure for his myopic view of this subject. 1. The writer says "why should the President's office run a national programme like this, when the Ministry of Education with all its resources can do it much better?" The answer to this was given by none other than H.E. the President himself. In reply to a question raised at the launch of the '18 month Road Map to Promote Spoken English Skills in Sri Lanka' on Monday the 22nd June at 'Temple Trees' His Excellency said it was because the Ministry of Education and relevant institutions such as the National Institute of Education (NIE) had not done their job to promote English skills in the country that the Presidential Secretariat had to take the initiative for a national drive for English. The record speaks for itself - today we have 21, 984 English teachers for 9714 schools. All children learn English for 10 consecutive years but most of them leave

school without the ability to converse in English. After such a colossal failure in English teaching in the school system despite the vast resources expended over the last several decades, does the writer seriously suggest that the task of English teaching in our country should be kept for some more time solely in the hands of the Education Ministry?

2. The writer says "What we need is not more tuition classes with teachers from India but a proper action programme led by the Ministry of Education. I believe the President's Office is not equipped to run such programmes at all". The fact is that not a single teacher is being brought down from India and tuition classes are not at all a part of the Presidential Programme. On the contrary Sri Lankan English teachers are going to India, 40 per year, to

be trained to return as Master Trainers in Spoken English. It is also the fact that the '18 Month Road Map' launched on the 22nd at 'Temple Trees' is an 18 Month Action Plan composed of 16 clearly defined activities, all of which, except for the 200 Module Distance Learning TV Programme, are to be implemented by the Education Ministry. The role of the President's Office is to provide the much needed Drive, Motivation and Resources and be responsible for the coordination and monitoring of the entire initiative so that it conforms with the letter and spirit of 'Mahinda Chintana' and the vision of H.E. the President. The Presidential Secretariat as we all know is not and will never be an implementing agency of any programme.

3. Referring in a disparaging manner to me, the writer asks "is somebody trying to create a small sphere of influence for himself by creating an ad hoc system of teaching English using that office?" While this statement is both unprofes-

sional and discourteous, I leave it to those who have interacted with me officially and personally to conclude whether his invective conforms to my conduct and demeanour.

4. The writer also asks "Who were the educationists and specialist teachers of English behind the programme?" From the newspapers we gather that a gentleman by the name Mr. Sunimal Fernando is behind the programme. But according to Mr. Fernando himself, he is a sociologist, not an English specialist. I function as the Coordinator (English) of the Presidential Task Force on English and IT which has among its members a number of English language specialists and educationists. Furthermore, the 19 page trilingual programme document distributed at the Presidential launch of the 18 month Action Plan as well as the

er is that different countries and even within the same country when speaking English differ in pronunciation and diction. American diction and pronunciation differs from that of England, Wales, Scotland, Australia, West Africa, East Africa, West Indies, South Asia, South East Asia and Japan. It therefore shows ignorance to think that the whole world speaks one kind of English and that we South Asians too should speak that kind of English. Our position is not what the writer suggests. In the Foreword to the '18 month Action Plan' also launched by the President on June 22nd I have stated as follows: "Teachers should encourage their students to speak Sri Lankan English the Sri Lankan way and encourage a neutral accent as is the case in India for which we must purge our system of the Anglo-centric elocu-

tion culture which perpetuates an approach to English speaking that is socio-psychologically most damaging for a Sinhala and Tamil speaking country. The sacred cow of Anglo-centric pronunciation and diction has been the scourge of the English teaching enterprise of our country, rooted in the narrow self interest of the old urban English speaking elites and the greed of the elocution industry". Our stand therefore is something like this - "Don't ape the British, speak naturally, and speak in a South Asian manner like other South Asians do. Don't be Anglo-centric in your diction and pronunciation. Be Asia-centric instead which is more natural to us Sri Lankans".

5. The writer says "Mr. Fernando has said we should learn what he terms 'South Asian English' as opposed to English the rest of the world speaks". The writer seems to believe that while South Asians speak one kind of English, the rest of the world speaks another (correct) kind of English. The reality howev-

er is that different countries and even within the same country when speaking English differ in pronunciation and diction. American diction and pronunciation differs from that of England, Wales, Scotland, Australia, West Africa, East Africa, West Indies, South Asia, South East Asia and Japan. It therefore shows ignorance to think that the whole world speaks one kind of English and that we South Asians too should speak that kind of English. Our position is not what the writer suggests. In the Foreword to the '18 month Action Plan' also launched by the President on June 22nd I have stated as follows: "Teachers should encourage their students to speak Sri Lankan English the Sri Lankan way and encourage a neutral accent as is the case in India for which we must purge our system of the Anglo-centric elocu-

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6. The writer says "Mr. Fernando says for South Asian English, grammar and pronunciation are unimportant. He recommends a kind of sign language in which we try to crudely and weakly to express ourselves and calls it English". The writer's imagination seems to have

taken the better of him. I have never said anything of this sort. I only show how distorted when purposefully or otherwise. What we have been suggesting is something like this - "Don't ape the British in pronunciation and diction; speak naturally with your natural Asian accent because 80 years from now the world's largest number of English speakers will be from South Asia and English will then largely be a South Asian language, and South Asian pronunciation and diction will dominate the English speaking enterprise of the world. So let Sri Lanka link its English speaking enterprise with a proud Asia-centric future and not shamelessly with a colonial Anglo-centric past". And as for Grammar, what I have said is very different to the writer's brazen distortion of our position. The main document distributed at the June 22nd launch, states as follows: "Students should be allowed to make mistakes in pronunciation and grammar when speaking, while the teaching strategy should be to quietly and gently guide them to progressively make less and less mistakes and to do so without disturbing the learner's self confidence and belief in his / her ability to speak the language".

7. The writer asks "Can we properly learn a language when we are encouraged to learn bad English at the outset?Can anyone learn our own language Sinhala for instance if one is told that rules of grammar and pronunciation do not matter at all?" Nowhere have we suggested anything of this sort. Our position quite simply is that a person must be first taught to speak English and thereby gain confidence in 'using' the language before he / she is taught the rules of the language, namely its structure and grammar which are important for 'constructing' the language. After all as children we all learnt first to speak Sinhala or Tamil before we learnt the rules of our own language. Hence the emphasis in our schools should be on Spoken English first and then on grammar and structure.

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Reply to 'Learn bad English'

Teacher Guide on Curriculum and Teaching Material for Teaching Spoken English" also launched by His Excellency on the same day state very clearly that the entire Presidential Programme on English as a Life Skill was crafted by a team of 40 rural and small town English teachers (educationists) from Sinhala and Tamil speaking homes with the cooperation of the English Unit of the Education Ministry and the regional and zonal educationists in charge of English Language Training in all 9 provinces. This dispels any doubts about the participation of English Language Specialists and Educationists in the design of the Presidential Programme.

5. The writer says "Mr. Fernando has said we should learn what he terms 'South Asian English' as opposed to English the rest of the world speaks". The writer seems to believe that while South Asians speak one kind of English, the rest of the world speaks another (correct) kind of English. The reality howev-