

## **Voice of Shakthi Thursday 18 October 2001**

Sri Lankan society in Australia has been home to some interesting characters. On the one hand we have had, learned, respected gentlemen; like the late L. B. Ekanyake while on the other hand we also have numerous unsavoury personalities who make a living out of selling everything from phonecards to the Sinhala language. There are also a number of jokers who think little of making fools of themselves - in public. This week, we wish to speak about one such joker who recently bared his idiocy - and malice towards fellow humans - before hundreds of thousands of TV viewers.

The incident occurred on a prime time television show on the weekend. The joker, who styles himself the foremost spokesperson for the Sinhalese in Australia, appeared on the show where a discussion on boat people and terrorism was taking place. When the discussion turned to Bin Laden and the Afghan refugees the Sinhala hero rose with customary bull-in-the-china-shop aggression and declared - very authoritatively we must say that Bin Laden has sent the Afghan refugees to Australia to engage in Terrorism. Then, he went on to add that the Tamils also did the same namely send terrorists to Australia.

What can we make of this statement? We believe our man had two equally despicable motives. One was to curry favour with those Australians who are dead-set against the boat people landing anywhere in Australia by appealing to their worst fears. God knows he doesn't need to do this - there is Pauline and John and Peter and Phillip to do all that. But it makes so much of a difference when this 'Australian of Sri Lanka descent also jumps on to the anti-boat people band wagon and endorses the red-neck view. The other motive was to inject into the Australian society his own, very intense, personal hatred for the Tamils. A dastardly attempt if ever there was one.

But what the fool did not seem to understand is that the people he was appealing to, that is the red neck element in the Australian society, does not distinguish between Bin Ladens and Afghans or Tamils and Sinhalese. To them, all people from the Third world, whether Afghan, Sinhalese, Tamil, Hindu or Muslim, are simply undesirable characters who are here to upset their way of life and ruin this country, as they have known it. By trying to curry favour with such people by linking Bin Laden with the Afghan refugees or terrorism with Tamil migrants, our Australian of Sri lankan descent has not only made a fool of himself. He has also brought disrepute to the Sinhala community in this country before the eyes of the majority of Australian who support equality and social justice.

Anthrax, we know, can be cured if detected early. But not stupidity.