

## Voice of Shakthi Thursday 28 June 2001

### Janaka Perera and the Hypocrisy of Expatriates

The appointment and confirmation of Major General Janaka Perera as the next Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Australia has drawn criticism from many human rights groups which claim that there are reasonable grounds for implicating the highly decorated officer in human rights violations in the north and the south of Sri Lanka. The Tamil and Sinhala expatriates have also lent their voices to the chorus of opinion about the army officer's appointment. The Tamil lobby is vehemently opposed to the appointment while a number of Sinhala expatriate groups have expressed their complete support for and confidence in the Major General. The polarisation could not have been more total.

Few however, seemed to be thinking with their heads at this point. Take for instance the Sinhala expressions of support for Perera. They portray the army officer as a national hero, some going so far as to equate him with Dutugemunu and Keppetipola. Why? All because Perera has been a thorn in the side of the LTTE. For this reason they claim that anybody opposing Perera's appointment is only supporting the LTTE's cause. What they seem to overlook however, is that fighting the LTTE does not absolve even the best commander from the crime of killing civilians – which Perera has been accused of. To say that one should disregard the murder or connivance at the murder of civilians because the perpetrator also killed many a legitimate enemy in battle is a very jaundiced way of looking at human lives. It is probably because these civilians were Tamils that our Sinhalese patriots are so keen to disregard their murder and the suffering of their loved ones who are left to endure the loss. And these are the same people who say with barely concealed glee that Tamils in Sri Lanka do not have a problem.

What the Sinhalese expatriates also seem to overlook is that Perera is also accused of overseeing the deaths of many Sinhala youths during the JVP insurgency. Many Sinhala Buddhist youth, from the same milieu that provides the cannon fodder for Perera's army, disappeared in areas under Perera's control. Should we disregard these accusations too, because Perera killed many Tigers. Does it matter to the mother whose son's bones lie rotting in Chenmani or to a father whose daughter disappeared on the way to school how many Tigers Perera killed? Should they also treat Perera as a great patriot, a great warrior?

Samuel Johnson once said that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. Are the Sinhalese so morally bankrupt as to allow Janaka Perera's military record stand in defence of the charges levelled against him. We pride ourselves in being the heirs to a 2500 year old venerable civilisation. If we let Janaka Perera walk in without clearing his name, we have learnt nothing in 2500 years.

Another indication of how irrational we can be is the often uttered refrain: "oh well, nothing has been proven ". Yes, nothing has been proven *because no*

*investigation has taken place.* All that the human rights organisations are saying is that there are reasonable grounds for believing that Perera killed or connived at the killing of civilians in the north and the south and these claims should be investigated. What a responsible Sri Lankan government should have done in these circumstances should have been to investigate the accusations levelled against Perera by respected international human rights watchdogs and not to pack him off to a country with a large population of Sri Lankan descent. What Mr Kadiragamar - who travels the world telling what a killer Prabhakarans is – should have done is to have resisted Perera's appointment as an ambassador to a country vital to Sri Lanka's economic interests rather than sweet talk his Australian counterpart into accepting the appointment. What all patriotic SriLankans should do is to refuse to have themselves represented by such a man – not to welcome him as a national hero simply because he killed many Tigers.

A word too to the Tamil expatriates tearing their hair out in outrage at Perera's appointment. Those who keep mum when Prabhakaran kills Tamils have no right to beat their breasts when Perera does it. Fighting for the rights of Tamils is not synonymous with justifying bestial crimes. As we have pointed out on many previous occasions hypocrisy knows no race, creed or caste. Those who call for the crucifixion of Janaka Perera while rationalising the crimes of Prabhakaran are no better than those who defend the latter 's crimes because they were committed in the fight against the former.