

DAILY NEWS THURSDAY AUGUST 18 2005 (top)

Lakshman Kadirgamar

- a true Sri Lankan

by Hemal Pieris

Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has been felled by a wicked assassin's bullet. This is a brief tribute to a true and noble Sri Lankan, from a humble fellow countryman who has shared with him an abiding love for our motherland. This is also a call to all who profess love for our green and pleasant land to strive to help bring peace and sanity back to our land, through a spirit of "Live and let live".

Is it not ironical even if it be perverse, that those who assassinate others so brutally and cold bloodedly, too argue that they are doing those very acts for the love of their motherland or should we say homeland? But can love whether for an individual or a cause ever be reconciled with brutality and violence and even cold blooded murder, whether by an individual, a group or even by the State? Those who truly follow the teaching of the great religions will readily say that these are irreconcilable? For "Violence will always beget violence and hate", and will resolve nothing, in the long term. This can be seen in many places in our world today, in the Middle East, in Iraq, and elsewhere.

We in Sri Lanka are a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-faceted, plural society. Only the die hard chauvinists, - [and there are unhappily many in our strife ridden land on both sides of the great racial divide] - will deny this. Increasing polarisation along racial lines can result in a ghetto mentality. This is increasingly evident. With the burning down of churches in recent times, the seeds of violent religious strife too

are being sown. Minister Kadirgamar transcended all such trends, and did yeoman service in building bridges between the disparate groups - racial, religious or caste, - using his considerable skills as a debater, orator, diplomat and intellectual. He was at home in any group and had mastered the art of the truly great to be able to "Walk amongst princes, and to keep the common touch".

As a Tamil Lakshman Kadirgamar steadfastly held the view that no individual or group could claim to be the sole representative of the Tamil people. Most democratic minded people would agree that in the absence of democratic process where peoples choices could be tested through the ballot that there could be no such legitimate claims? That issue needs urgent resolution and can best be done through the efforts of the Tamil peoples themselves, with the support of all who wish for a united Sri Lanka, - both here and abroad. That issue will never be solved through violence, but by the ballot. Violence will only result in the deaths of more and more innocents and untold misery to many more, both in the North and South.

The other issue that cannot be swept under the carpet and needs to be resolved before peace can return, is the question of the North-East merger. A referendum that was to be held and was agreed upon years ago, was never held and is at the root of all the problem.

In Sri Lanka there is much double talk and non implementation whether it be on this issue or even the effective implementation of the official languages act or the declaration of assets law, or the



implementation of the 17 Amendment. It is important that a referendum be held to decide on the N-E merger, even if it needs to be done under international supervision. While the wishes of the Tamil and Muslim communities are uncertain, the Sinhalese are perhaps justifiably concerned about the need for such a merger and the fear of separation. This issue needs to be resolved in a democratic manner with transparency and some sort of federal solution arrived at.

Many respected leaders have been assassinated in Sri Lanka in the recent past - both Sinhala and Tamil. There had been a brief respite with the courageous signing of the peace accord and a relative peace and calm returned to our land. The economy was moving forward. We were free to

move about in Colombo and elsewhere, without the constant threat of bombs, - that respect no one. For this we were all very grateful. All peace loving citizens need to help create a climate of tolerance, and respect for human life, and help prevent a slide back to anarchy and mayhem, amidst growing violence and crime that is engulfing our society.

Above all else, what Sri Lanka requires at this time is the recognition of ours, as a multi-cultural, plural society, and the urgent need for a truly national identity for all Sri Lankans. Many multi cultural lands such as Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, Singapore, India and others have resolved their problems through efforts at evolving a truly national identity. Ireland is moving forward despite strains

towards resolving their decades long internecine conflict. Such solutions need a great deal of sincerity and selfless statesmanship by our leaders, [both in politics and outside], - sadly lacking in our land in recent years.

The late Minister Kadirgamar was a noteworthy exception. He overcame the lure of a comfortable life in the ivory towers of academia or the professions, where he would have received warm acceptance and recognition. He instead chose to serve his motherland, knowing well the dangers and thanklessness of such devotion to duty. To my mind he would have been an excellent choice for nomination as President or Prime minister, and Sri Lanka missed a golden opportunity. India, has with great foresight chosen people from minority communities - Muslims, Sikhs and others for the highest positions in the land. The present Indian Prime Minister, a Sikh, is a good example. We have a long way to go, and time is certainly not on our side.

It is not necessary to refer to Lakshman Kadirgamar's many achievements, as much has and will be written on that. We in Sri Lanka need to learn from his example, and to note that those who love and serve our land best are not those who crow about our cultural heritage, although there is much to be proud of in our common cultural heritage, [to which peoples of all races and religions have indeed contributed], nor to blame our past colonial rulers for all our ills, but to strive to evolve a truly Sri Lankan identity, and acceptable power sharing mechanisms, whereby all segments of our society

can live peaceably and preserve their respective cultural traditions. Let not Lakshman Kadirgamar have died in vain. His death only shows the degree of insanity and inhumanity that prevails in the minds of some in this land, and it is necessary while taking steps to ensure security for all in our land, - to address the causes for such insanity to take root, and to resolve them, without further delay and procrastination so that a permanent peace can be established. Murderous violence and war can never resolve the problems of our land. Nelson Mandela, who can be considered the greatest statesman of the last century, was a freedom fighter against a repressive regime, in South Africa. He was never revengeful, in his fight for his people's freedom, nor was Mahatma Gandhi in India. Dr

Neelan Tiruchelvam, another [Tamil] martyr to the cause of peace and ethnic harmony in our land had stated in 1999- [refer epitaph engraved on his memorial slab].

"We cannot glorify death whether on the battlefield or otherwise.

We on the other hand must celebrate life and are fiercely committed

To protecting the security and sanctity of life, Which is the most fundamental value without which, -

All other rights and freedoms become meaningless."

Let us pray that God will help all people in our truly blessed land, to learn to respect human life in a spirit of "Live and let live". "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of".

May God Bless this land, and may God forgive us for our growing collective sin.