

# Vibhasha

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## All three languages essential for medication labels



### Sandamali Seneviratne

The use of Sinhala and Tamil languages, in addition to the currently used English language, to denote information and instructions on the packaging of medicinal products sold in the domestic market, has been

made compulsory as of the 1st of January 2013.

Director of Monitoring and Review of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and Attorney at Law, Ms. Thusitha Samarasekera has informed the Centre for Policy

Alternatives that the decision to implement this policy was taken subsequent to investigations held by the Commission on the 7th of August 2012, regarding the complaint bearing the number HRC /2249/12 filed by the Centre for Policy Alternatives on the 8th of June 2012.

Issuing a related communiqué, Director Medical Technology and Supplies Division of the Ministry of Health Dr. B.V.S.H. Beneragama states that approval of the Cosmetics, Devices and Drugs Regulatory Authority should be sought henceforth with regards to the packaging of medicines, medical equipment and cosmetic products, and that the packaging should be in the Sinhala, Tamil and English languages alone as per

recommendations by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

Accordingly, all producers of medicines for pharmacies in Sri Lanka and all medical equipment and medical supply importers are required as of the 1st of January 2013 to display the contained and essential details on the new packaging in all three languages for the information of the patients.

While this is another milestone in the language rights struggle in this country, the Centre for Policy Alternatives has previously been successful in bringing about numerous similar victories via court action.

## Another lesson from the LLRC report; Language rights solely via the internet

Though the government publicized last August that the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report has been translated and published in Sinhala and Tamil, neither a Sinhala nor Tamil printed copy of the report can be obtained via any institution thus far.

Upon being queried by us, officials of the Department of Government Printing, the Ministry of External Affairs, the Central Bank and the Presidential Secretariat, stated that Sinhala and Tamil translations of this report could only be obtained via the websites [www.info.gov.lk](http://www.info.gov.lk) and [www.news.lk](http://www.news.lk)

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◀ The media recently carried several news items stating that Sinhala and Tamil translations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission Report were now available. Depicted herein is said to be a photograph of the moment when Professor G.L. Peiris presented these translations to a group of representatives of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, including Governor Ajith Nivard Cabral. However, as at present, there is no other means by which to obtain a copy of these translated reports apart from via the internet.

### Pesalai fisheries problems remain unresolved

Having to obtain permits to go out to sea even after the end of the war, and being subjected to daily checking by the security forces, has resulted in the fishermen of Pesalai in Mannar being unable to engage in their livelihood, Tamil National Alliance Chairman of the Mannar Pradeshiya Sabha Martin Dias said, at a gathering of community activists held in Mannar on the 01st of November.

He further stated that though Pesalai, with approximately 1000 fisher families, contributes significantly to the fisheries industry of Mannar, no progress is seen in this industry under the current environment, and that the time the fishermen can spend on their livelihood has been limited as a result of the security checks taking approximately 3 hours per day.

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## A study on language related issues in the marketplace: get involved - send information

A study on language related issues faced by the Sri Lankan consumer in the marketplace has currently been commenced under the initiative of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

The Centre for Policy Alternatives has received a significant amount of information from Sinhala and Tamil speaking consumers indicating the hardships they

face as a result of the majority of product packaging containing information solely in English. While the Consumer Protection Authority has a responsibility to intervene in such situations, no satisfactory intervention has been seen thus far.

As a result of a complaint filed by the Centre for Policy Alternatives with regards to this problem the use of all three languages on medicinal labels has been made compulsory

from 2013 onwards. However, in addition to medicinal products, the basic information on labels and packaging of the majority of items sold in the local market is also provided solely in the English language.

While the attention of the responsible authorities was drawn to this issue via the lead story of the inaugural issue of Vibhasha as well (October 2011), adequate response

to the same has not been received thus far. As such the Centre for Policy Alternatives is in the process of conducting a formal study on the problem and necessary steps.

The Centre for Policy Alternatives is prepared to take future action on the issue based on the findings of the study and awaits related information from interested consumers and consumer organizations.

### A shortage of Sinhala Doctors at the Trincomalee Hospital

Patients attending clinics at the Trincomalee Hospital face grave difficulties as a result of the majority of doctors at the hospital speaking only Tamil. Patients claim that clinics conducted at this hospital are unsuccessful as a result of doctors who speak only Tamil not knowing Sinhala, and some patients attending clinics not knowing the Tamil language.

Ms. Dilani Samarasinghe who attended a clinic at the Trincomalee Hospital stated that she returned without participating in the clinic as her knowledge of Tamil was insufficient to explain her condition to the doctor.

### A Tamil teacher shortage in the Horana Zone

A shortage of Tamil teachers in the Horana Education Zone was brought to light at the District Development Committee meeting.

It was also revealed that this was as a result of teachers coming to Horana from Colombo District returning to Colombo on transfers.

Speaking at the gathering, the Grama Niladharini of Kotamgoda elaborated on the details of the Tamil teacher shortage at Kotamgoda Vidyalaya.

### Award from Tamil Nadu for Upali Leelaratne's literary contribution

#### *Sandamali Seneviratne*

The Chinnappa Bharathi Foundation of Namakkal, Tamil Nadu, recently presented renowned author and Sinhala-Tamil translator Mr. Upali Leelaratne with a special award in appreciation of his literary and translation contributions.

While this award was presented on the 2nd of October, last year, in 2011, Mr. Upali Leelaratne's translated novel Charcoal (Gal Anguru) also received the Indian award. This was the first time a Sinhala publication received an award from Tamil Nadu.

Mr. Upali Leelaratne is popular amongst the Sinhala and Tamil readership as both an author as well as a translator.

His translated novel Dewy Planes (Pinivanthalawa) was also translated to Malayalam and launched on the 4th of October at the Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit in Kerala.

Mr. Upali Leelaratne, who is presently employed as a translator at Godage International Publishers, has emphasized and maintained throughout his literary career that persistent intervention by both governmental and non-governmental organizations is necessary to create peaceful coexistence amongst the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups.

A special discussion conducted with him is published on page 6 of this issue of the Vibhasha newsletter.

### Language rights violation complaints exceed 65

The Official Languages Commission had received 65 complaints of language rights violations as at November this year, Research Assistant to the Commission Ms. Dilini Jayawardena told Vibhasha on being questioned.

While the majority of complaints are against police stations, Tamil residents allege that their complaints are recorded in

Sinhala by officials at all police stations.

Ms. Dilini Jayawardena added that a few complaints have also been received against Birth and Marriage Certificates being issued in Sinhala to Tamil citizens.

She further stated that though some police stations now record complaints by Tamil citizens in Tamil, it has not been 100% successful.

### Another lesson from the LLRC...

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Over a year has passed since this report was publicized in English. Various community organizations and individuals criticized the government, which, in response stated that Sinhala and Tamil translations of the report will be published at the earliest possible.

Subsequently, the media announced last August that the Sinhala and Tamil translations had been published. The media

even carried images Minister of External Affairs Professor of G.L. Peiris presenting these translations to the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Mr. Ajith Nivard Cabraal and Secretary to the President Mr. Lalith Weeraratunga.

However the government now states that the Sinhala and Tamil reports can only be read via the internet.





# To win language rights, active intervention is necessary

It is commonly heard said that it's more productive to light at least one lamp than to sit around cursing the darkness. Those who light lamps however are not that common.

We are experiencing a similar situation with regards to the language rights problem in this country at present. While the imprecators and critics are many, those who seek and act on behalf of solutions are an extreme rarity.

This is not to say that criticism is wholly fruitless. Intervention for a solution along with the criticism however would be far more productive.

The lead story of this issue of Vibhasha focuses on one such fruitful experience. The information on medicine labels not being depicted in Sinhala and Tamil was a grave problem continually faced by the average citizen of this country. However it was apparent that many did not believe that a solution to this problem could be found. As such the majority learned to live with the problem. Even a criticism was rare.

However the Centre for Policy Alternatives has not only understood that there was a solution to this problem, but it also actively intervened to obtain this solution.

It was on the 8th of June 2012 that Mr. Lionel Guruge of

the Centre for Policy Alternatives first lodged a complaint regarding this issue with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Guruge, in his complaint emphasized two major problems faced by the Sinhala and Tamil speaking populace as a result of this issue.

The first was the risk to life and health faced by this community as a result of not being able to understand the instructions.

The second was that the Sinhala and Tamil speakers were being discriminated against.

While requesting that details and instructions be made available in Sinhala and Tamil as well in medicine packaging in order to solve the problems faced by this community, he also named the officials and institutions on which the responsibility fell.

They were, the Chairman of the Cosmetics, Devices and Drugs Technical Advisory Committee, the Director General of the Consumer Affairs Authority, the Director of the Cosmetics, Devices and Drugs Regulatory Authority, Director of the Medical Technology and Supplies Division of the Ministry of Health and the General Manager of the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation of Sri Lanka.

Amongst the key factors emphasized by the Centre for Policy Alternatives during the hearing of the complaint bearing the number HRC/2249/12 by the Human

“This is not to say that criticism is wholly fruitless. Intervention for a solution along with the criticism however would be far more productive.”

Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, was the fact that the right to language, a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 12(2) of the Constitution, was being violated therein.

Upon completion of the investigation of facts related to the complaint, Mr. Lionel Guruge received a letter from the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka dated 17th October 2012.

It stated thus.

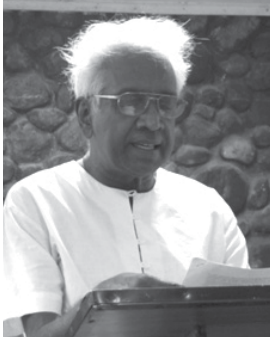
**“As the Respondent has taken progressive action regarding the implementation of the Language Policy subsequent to the hearing conducted by the Commission on 07.08.2012 in relation to your complaint bearing the above stated number, we hereby inform you that no further action will be taken in this regard.”**

A copy of a letter sent by the Director of the Medical Technology and Supplies Division of the Ministry of Health, to all producers, importers and distributors of pharmaceutical products, instructing them of the necessary action, was also attached therein.

That is how a solution was found to a problem that the majority of Sri Lankans had grown accustomed to bearing in silence. This may not even be the final solution. Other related issues may still crop up. There is also the danger that it will be limited to the word. But the solution even then would be to not remain silent. To act instead to take the victory obtained forward. Any victories achieved so far were also accomplished thus.

The Centre for Policy Alternatives has made over 30 similar complaints to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. A similar number of complaints have also been made to the Official Languages Commission. Victories obtained thus cannot in any way be considered minor.

Another key victory similar to that of the pharmaceutical labels was that regarding language rights related to currency notes. The Central Bank recently had to admit that action will be taken in the near future to depict in all three languages, certain key phrases thus far printed solely in Sinhala on currency notes. This too was a result of a complaint made



# A few short and long term steps to ensuring language rights

Dr. Devanesan Nesiah

## Part two of a series of articles on Tamil language rights in Sri Lanka

**Dr. Devanesan Nesiah is a distinguished former civil servant and senior official of the Sri Lanka Administrative Service who has accumulated a wealth of experience through his service as the Government Agent of Jaffna, Mannar and Batticaloa Districts.**

### *Languages of administration*

22(1) Sinhala and Tamil shall be the languages of administration through out Sri Lanka and Sinhala shall be the language of administration and be used for the maintenance of public records and the transaction of all business by public institutions of all the provinces of Sri Lanka other than the Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamil shall be so used.

Provided that the President may, having regard to the proportion which the Sinhala or Tamil linguistic minority population in any unit comprising a division of an Assistant Government Agent, bears to the total population of that area, direct that both Sinhala and Tamil or a language other than the language used as the language of administration in the province in which such area may be situated, be used as the language of administration for such area.

22 (2) In any area where Sinhala is used as the language of administration a person other

than an official acting in his official capacity, shall be entitled:

(a) to receive communications from, and to communicate and transact business with, any official in his official capacity, in either Tamil or English;

(b) if the law recognizes his right to inspect or to obtain copies of or extracts from any official register, record, publication or other document, to obtain a copy of, or an extract from such register, record, publication or other document, or a translation thereof, as the case may be, in either Tamil or English;

(c) where a document is executed by any official for the purpose of being issued to him, to obtain such document or a translation thereof, in either Tamil or English;

22(3) In any area where Tamil is used as the language of administration, a person other than an official acting in his official capacity, shall be entitled to exercise the rights, and to obtain the services, referred to in sub paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of paragraph (2) of this Article, in Sinhala or English.

As per the 16th Amendment to the Constitution, Article 24 (1) has been amended as below.

"24 (1) Sinhala and Tamil shall be the languages of the Courts throughout Sri Lanka and Sinhala shall be used as the language of

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Despite these and other improvements in the Constitution and other regulations to provide for greater use of Tamil in administration, there is very little benefit to Tamil speakers on the ground.

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the courts situated in all the areas of Sri Lanka except those in any area where Tamil is the language of administration. The record and proceedings shall be in the language of the Court. In the event of an appeal from any court records shall also be prepared in the language of the court hearing the appeal, if the language of such court is other than the language used by the court from which the appeal is preferred:

Provided that the Minister in charge of the subject of Justice may, with the concurrence of the cabinet of Ministers direct that the record of any court shall also be maintained and the proceedings conducted in a language other than the

language of the court;”

Despite these and other improvements in the Constitution and other regulations to provide for greater use of Tamil in administration, there is very little benefit to Tamil speakers on the ground. The Language Audit of 30 December 1998 submitted (by a team led by myself) to the Official Languages Commission pointed out (p6) that:

- a) There have been chronic shortages of Tamil speaking cadres and no serious attempt appears to have been made to correct this deficiency in any of the offices visited, although they all served large numbers of Tamil speaking people. In consequence, Tamil speaking persons are often compelled to transact their business in Sinhala (sometimes through interpreters whom they bring along) or, in a few cases, in English.
- b) Even officers who had passed Tamil proficiency examinations and drawn incentive allowances appeared to be mostly unable to work in Tamil, particularly in relation to correspondence.
- c) Basic equipment such as typewriters was not available or was in short supply in many offices. In some offices there were one or two Tamil

Phase two of the program promoting language rights amongst minority communities commenced last July. This article presents the experiences gained during a coordination workshop between language committee representatives and provincial journalists, held in the Batticaloa District in the Eastern Province.



## Citizens' solution to language rights problem that has the whole country lost

### Phase two of language rights promotion program commences

**"A Sinhala youth works as my friend's driver. My friend does not know Sinhala. The driver does not know Tamil. As a result, when told the direction in which to turn in Tamil during travels, he often turns the vehicle in a different direction. As a result my friend is often lost."**

A citizen of the Eastern Province recently made this comment in the presence of a group of media personnel. The two persons who faced this situation are not the only ones lost as a result of the language problem. The manner in which all of Sri Lanka got lost can be ascertained when carefully examining our history.

It is to seek solutions to this problem that the Centre for Policy Alternatives, together with a number of other organizations sensitive to language rights, commenced a program to promote the language rights of minority communities.

Through varied activity and experience, the program is currently being successfully implemented.

Phase one of this model program on the promotion of language rights of minority

communities commenced in 2011. In implementing this program, the Centre for Policy Alternatives gave priority to the Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts of the Eastern Province.

The identification of stakeholders, the raising of awareness amongst the public, media personnel and government officials, and the establishment of community led language committees as the GramaNiladhari Division level took place successfully under phase one of the program.

Phase two of the program commenced in July 2012. Steps have now been taken to also cover the newly named bilingual Divisional Secretary Divisions. As such, steps are currently underway to establish 60 new language committees in addition to those currently registered. In particular, the Centre for Policy Alternatives has also placed emphasis on establishing a coordination network between language committees and the provincial

journalists working in those Districts through this phase.

The workshop conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in the Batticaloa District, with the participation of language committee representatives and provincial journalists, had several objectives. Key amongst them were the identification of problems related to the implementation of the language policy, and examining the legal position – then and now – with regards to language rights in Sri Lanka. Another was the identification of action to be taken in the event of a language rights violation and related legalities. In addition, a broad discussion on the theme The DiviNaguama Bill: areas to be challenged, was led by Attorney at Law Mr. S.G. Punchihewa.

The educational session for media personnel on how to report incidents of language rights violations stood out herein. The reportage produced by participating journalists during a practical exercise based on information provided

by language committee representatives was subjected to discussion by senior journalist Mr. Thimbiriyagama Bandara.

A few thoughts expressed at the workshop by Unit Coordinator at the Centre for Policy Alternatives Mr. Lionel Guruge on the program to promote language rights of minority communities were as below.

"The Centre for Policy Alternatives began this as a model program. The Centre for Policy Alternatives' main task is to build mutual trust and amity by, recognizing Tamil citizens' right to work in Tamil and ensuring that it is respected, and by teaching minority communities to respect the Sinhala citizens' right to language.

Minority communities are subjected to injustices primarily when dealing with government institutions. Though both Sinhala and Tamil have been named official languages, most government institutions violate this law, limiting themselves to Sinhala alone. The Centre for Policy Alternatives intervenes in two ways in this regard. They are:

1. Meeting with the relevant officials of government institutions and requesting that they function in both official languages (Sinhala and Tamil).

2. Attempting to win the right via court action in the event the government institutions remain unresponsive to requests and mobilizing civil society organizations to give voice to the cause."

Mr. Guruge pointed out that the Centre for Policy Alternatives had sought court action on 30 incidents of language rights violations and that the majority of them had been won.

Subsequently Attorney at Law Mr. S.G. Punchihewa proceeded to elaborate on the legal positions then and now





Mr. Upali Leelarathne

Mr. Upali Leelarathne, renowned and popular amongst the Sinhala and Tamil readership as both a creator and translator, is an author who believes that literature can play a great role in creating mutual understanding amongst ethnic groups. He has received both national and international awards for his contribution to this. Today's language dialogue is with him.

## Sinhala – Tamil Tamil – Sinhala



### For the development of translation literature

### A new program is needed

- Upali Leelarathne

literature is minimal. Similarly I also don't think the country's common interest regarding Tamil culture and literature is adequate. Sinhala cultural and literary creations rarely make it to the hands of Tamil readers. Even if Tamil readers enjoy Sinhala literature the opportunities they have to study them are few.

**"Tamil newspapers make a great contribution to literature"**

Even the majority of mass media in our country addresses the Sinhalese and not the Tamils. As such a new program to develop this translation literature has become an urgent need.

- **How do you view the average reader's interest in and attitudes towards Tamil culture and literature?**

It's apparent that Tamil people are greatly interested in literature and books and at present an increased trend towards readership is seen amongst the Tamil population. The great Mr. Martin Wickramasinghe's publication in particular Mangrove Island (Madol Doova) has already been translated to Tamil. Tamil readers are keen to experience such creations. But the linkage between Sinhala and Tamil

- **What is your view on the Official Languages Policy?**

The language policy is inadequate. In education students are taught Sinhala and Tamil merely to know the language, but the study of neither Tamil nor Sinhala culture takes place through school education. Often the study of the Tamil language is done solely with the intension of obtaining a promotion at work. Though the government is making some effort it is insufficient to propagate language policy within the

country. It is also not something the government alone can do. It needs the intervention of authors, artists and everyone in the cultural fields. When language policy is established through the hands of politicians alone, a few problems arise. Politicians display a suspicious view of Tamil persons during educational and other activities carried out by the government. It can be said in all honesty that there are still attitudes of suspicion regarding Tamil people amongst the Sinhalese.

- **How do you view the trend amongst Sinhala and Tamil authors towards literary creations following the end of the war?**

At present Sinhala and Tamil writers in our country are paying special focus to literature. The mayhem, mental unrest and limitations to freedoms that existed during the war are now at a minimum. The opportunities to enjoy books and literature have become abundant. A significant amount of novels are also seen to be available to Tamil readers. However, very few short stories and poetry books are created in the Tamil medium. Tamil peoples have a particular affinity towards the poem and the short story. It can be said that the poem and the short story are very powerful within Tamil

**"The Sinhala media should take the forefront in introducing Tamil literature to Sinhala readers"**

literature. They are not too fond of the novel.

Poems and short stories created in the Sinhala language being translated to Tamil would be very useful in filling this gap.

- **How do you view the service provided by Tamil publication houses?**

When looking at the literary field within Sri Lanka, the majority publication houses are Sinhalese. Tamil publishers are next to nonexistent. What happens most frequently is that writers, having had their creations published in newspapers, subsequently collate the material and publish and launch books with their own money. Participating readers purchase a copy of the book despite its price at such launches.

Sinhala works being created is a good thing. However sales are lower than in the case of Tamil works. Fewer Tamil works are created. This results in the readership trend reducing amongst Tamils.

- **What sort of support do media provide Sinhala and Tamil literature?**

The Sinhala media provides some contribution to Sinhala literature. Many newspapers have a poetry page and books page. However no information regarding Tamil creations is available in Sinhala newspapers. As far as I know Tamil readers respect literature very highly. The media too could be one reason for this. Tamil newspapers give literature a prominent place. Tamil creations are always highlighted. I believe that this is why I, Upali Leelarathne, am better known amongst the Tamil readership than amongst the Sinhalese.

Interviewed by  
**Sandamali Seneviratne**

# Bilingualization of the Public Service; Opportunities and Challenges



- Mr. Raja Collure

In this article, the former Chairman of the Official Languages Commission Mr. Raja Collure expounds on the complexities of the process of ensuring language rights within Sri Lanka. He focuses his attention herein on both the challenges faced in the bilingualization of the public service as well as the victories achieved.

The article is an extract from the publication *Language Rights in Sri Lanka: Enforcing Tamil as an Official Language*.

In 2008, when this article was written, Mr. Collure predicts that through the speedy implementation of recommendations made by the Official Languages Commission, Sri Lanka would be able to achieve bilingual administrative ability in 15 years or less.

## Introduction

The Official Languages Commission [OLC] was set up to carry out four main objectives. The first object is to recommend principles of policy on the use of the official languages and to monitor and supervise compliance with the provisions of the Constitution on language in chapter IV. Secondly, it is expected to take all such actions and measures as are necessary to use the official language [Sinhala & Tamil] and the link language (English) in accordance with the spirit and intent of Chapter IV of the Constitution. Thirdly the OLC should promote the appreciation of the official languages in regard to their status, equality and right of use [i.e. awareness creation]. Fourthly, it should conduct investigations in regard to complaints on violations of language rights and take remedial action.

In the opinion of the Official Languages Commission the provisions of Chapter IV of the Constitution on language are comprehensive in regard to their status, equality and right of use. Although certain aspects need improvement, clarity and correction they could wait, in the

present circumstances until the drafting of a new constitution. However, what has to be noted is the enormous gap that still exists between the constitutional provisions and their application.

## OLC Recommendations

We firmly believe that the 2005 Memorandum of Recommendations of the official Languages Commission is a landmark in the march towards the implementation of the official languages policy as contained in the Constitution. This Memorandum made an in depth analysis of the existing situation and problems that have to be overcome in order to ensure its proper implementation.

With due respect to other opinions the Recommendations of the OLC show the way forward. The objective set out in the Memorandum is the establishment a bilingual administration, at all levels, throughout the country. On an examination of the provisions of Chapter IV one cannot come to a different conclusion in regard to the objective. The OLC is pleased to say that its 2005 Memorandum of Recommendations has been well receiving by the Government as well as civil society.

## Government Circulars

On the part of the Government two of the major recommendations of the OLC have been endorsed and made government policy. They are:

- That the government should ensure that all new entrants to the public service are either proficient or attain adequate degree of proficiency in the Second Official Languages relevant to their functions within a specified period.
- That intensive payment to public servants who acquire proficiency in the Second Official Languages relevant to a level relevant to their function should be increased to a realistic level.

We earnestly hope that the relevant Public Administration Circulars Nos.3 and 7 of 2007 will be faithfully implemented. Had these steps being taken at the outset, i.e. soon after the introduction of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1987, there would not have been a serious problem of the sort that we are confronted with today.

However sending out government circulars is one of thing and their implementation is another. For e.g. President Kumaratunga's circular dated 30th June 1997 on implementation of the Official Languages policy was not implemented by the Ministerial Secretaries and Heads of Departments to whom it was addressed. There were also other Public Administration Circulars which were also not heeded. Only time will tell the extent which these Circulars are given effect to. I believe that civil society has an obligation to follow their implementation.

Considering these facts it is necessary that the Government enacts legislation for the implementation of the provisions

It is always important inquire into how sensitive the mass media is being to language rights in Sri Lanka, given that it is through the media that the public obtains its understanding of this grave and decisive issue. Through several previous analytical volumes of this newsletter we attempted to understand how the Sinhala and Tamil media behaves regarding this issue by looking at the news items they publish.

Through this publication we inquire into the efforts of English newspapers of this country in bringing knowledge and awareness on language rights to their readership. This article is based on the analysis of English news items, published during the six month period from December 2011 to May 2012, conducted by Ms Kate Kondolf who is currently studying language Rights in Sri Lanka for her Masters degree in Human Rights and Democratization. Sixteen articles chosen from eight newspapers are discussed and analyzed herein.



Attitudes surrounding language in Sri Lanka have deep and complex origins. European colonialists occupied the country for generations, later bestowing recognition, opportunity and better jobs onto locals who mastered English until independence was established in 1948. In 1956, in a political move to garner support of nationalist Sinhala elements, and the masses left out by the lack of English capacity, the controversial "Sinhala Only" Act was passed, replacing English with Sinhala as the official language of the country. This effectively disadvantaged Tamil people in dealing with the state administration and denied them equal access to education and employment; years of language based misunderstanding and distrust followed not only among the majority Sinhala and the Tamils, but between Sinhala and other non Sinhala such as the Burghers (who decided to remove themselves enmass from the island, in a latter day exodus Australia) and even between English-speaking (considered the epitome of elitism, upper class status, rejection of one's own roots) and Sinhala Only speaking Sinhala, who insisted on rearranging everything from Administration, to education to their benefit. In 1960 the Official language Act was amended to make Sinhalese the official language of the courts.

Concurrently one of the longest running and bloodiest ethnic conflicts in the region, flared on, based on differences between Sinhala and Tamil citizens of the country. A new constitution formed in 1978 grudgingly recognized Tamil, the second most widely spoken language after Sinhala, to be a "national" language-however keeping Sinhala as the sole Official language. By 1987 another grudging and half hearted amendment to the constitution was made granting official language status to both Sinhala and Tamil, with English as the official link language. In 1988 an additional amendment was enacted with a provision

# Language issues in Sri Lanka: a Media Analysis

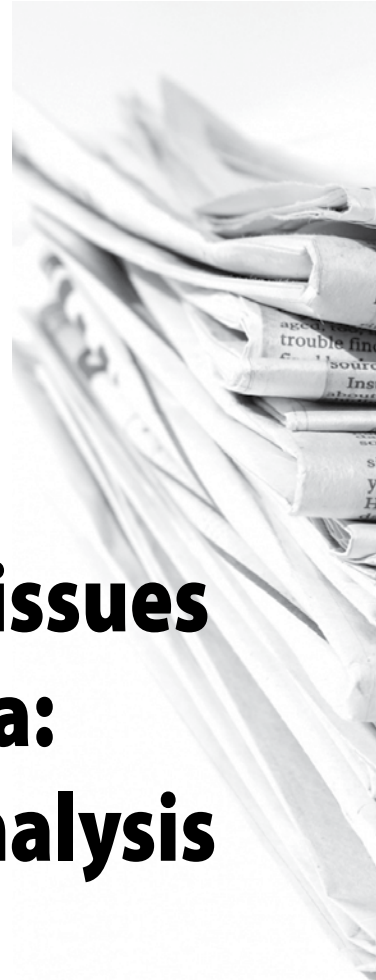
- Kate Kondolf

for both Sinhala and Tamil to be recognized and accepted languages of administration and legislation. In December 2011, a report was drafted by Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), which investigated the final stages of the almost 30 year civil war and recommendations were put forth towards creating a more united and harmonious Sri Lanka. Among its contents was a substantial portion dedicated to language issues. Following this report, the Government coined 2012 the "Year of a trilingual Sri Lanka", and issued a ten year action plan designed to fulfill the objective.

While this history of legislative modification is complex enough on paper, the practical implications of these changes and the evolution of language rights in Sri Lanka are downright convoluted. While constitutional and legal provisions in regards to language rights are in place,

inadequacies and oversights are nonetheless so rampant as to be taken for granted by the majority. As a result, it is not surprising that perceptions amongst the general population regarding language and language rights, vary dramatically.

This essay seeks to examine the overall impression conveyed by local English newspapers to their audiences regarding language rights over the course of a 6 month period, from December 2011 to May 2012. This timeframe is of particular significance as language rights can be considered to have come to the forefront with the publication of the LLRC Report recommendations, as well as the launch of the 2012 Trilingual Sri Lanka Ten Year Action Plan. This analysis is based exclusively on English newspaper coverage over the course of 6 months and is therefore limited. A noteworthy range of position and interpretation is reflected







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**"Needless to say 'language' per se is not the bone of contention. It is what language stands for and what it represents that goad communities and individuals to take it up as a cause" – Dharmadasa, 1996.**

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however, due to the diversity of the reportage within this time period. Sixteen articles from eight newspapers will be discussed and analyzed in hopes of gaining an overall impression the media conveys to its audience regarding language rights in Sri Lanka.

Although coverage of language rights issues in English newspapers is not substantial, it is nonetheless present. Some people may not have heard or even recognize that a language problem exists, (apart from agreeing that English language education standards are lacking in the country, again routinely blamed on the “Sinhala Only” policy) but this could be because the general public may not be affected by language issues in their day to day living. By the same token, those who are affected may or may not have consistent access to media sources that discuss such matters. Most importantly, does the general public know exactly why language rights are significant and why these rights should be respected and protected? How do mainstream media sources frame this concept and in what way is it being explored and explained? Language rights are safeguarded under the constitution, in addition to being a basic human right. It has been proven that children learn better and more effectively when being taught in their own language. Recognition and appreciation of language rights is about more than just communication, as it fosters harmony and unity on a larger scale, a critical function in a country like Sri Lanka where there is strong evidence to support the notion that language violations were an impetus to the 30 year civil war. While many in articles portrayed in mainstream English newspapers discuss the negative ramifications of violations of these rights, and suggestions for improvement in this matter, some articles reviewed dispute the claim that language discrimination even exists. In fact, one article actually claims that if

language was a root cause of the conflict, then with the 13th amendment language policy all conflict would have been resolved. This short sighted interpretation fails to take into consideration the decades of ingrained marginalization and indoctrinated discrimination, not to mention the lack of implementation of the 13th amendment, and the insufficient public knowledge of the issue.

In general, articles reflected in mainstream media describe the importance of language equality. Many of these articles are written from an academic perspective however, and may not be connecting to those outside of academia with no background on the issues. This is an important concept to take into consideration when seeking to educate the general public on an issue such as language rights. There is a particular danger in the inability to connect with the mainstream public regarding these issues. If the public cannot follow what is being addressed due to lack of background knowledge, they may be apt to agree with the opposing side. In addition, if citizens do not understand that language rights violations are also human rights violations, they may choose to stay neutral on the subject, which in turn is ultimately indirectly supporting injustice. In one example, an author argues that having English as a national language would be the equivalent of returning to the days of colonialism, or backtracking in a sense. What this unconsidered view fails to take into consideration however is the fact that English has become the language of globalization, technology, travel, business, commerce, literature, and trade, and denying the population the opportunity to be a part of this would be a disservice to citizens, and a disadvantage to Sri Lanka in general.

One theme very apparent over the course of this 6 month period is the shortcomings of implementation. Although legislation and policy are

in place to ensure equal language rights, the reality of the situation tells a different story. The lack of effort on the part of the Government to ensure implementation of equal language rights has further marginalized many citizens, particularly Tamil speakers. Despite legislation being in place, language rights violations continued to occur. There are particular actions that have been described as necessary to move towards a more progressive atmosphere of language equality, such as mandatory Tamil speakers in public service, updating of signs, announcements and official documentation to reflect all 3 languages, and contributing funds to budgets required for these changes. At the root of these issues however is that fact that public awareness is not at the level it needs to be to create social change.

Without implementation, without political will, there is no enforcement. According to one article incentives could be a progressive way to stimulate change, for example pay increases, which would help language issues gather more attention. Many of the articles in mainstream media speak of the importance of language rights on the surface, but fail to dive into the repercussions of a society lacking language equality, and the social implications of language rights that are portrayed in this manner. Unless there is a move of an attempt from civil society to address these issues, change will come about only slowly. In general, the coverage of language rights in the mainstream media covers a wide range of areas along various opinions. Until there can be more consistency within this coverage, language rights as viewed by the general public will also be varied. Continued activism in the field of language rights and the implications of this will contribute to exposing the reality of language rights to mainstream media as well as the community at large.



# Language abuse is not over yet

Experiences from Ampara

- Thimbiriyagama Bandara

**"Our language is a mother to us; for it should be loved. As all that we have received has been primarily through language, it is through this language that we express all that we should receive. As we have grown up with a language, we express all that we need to grow on further through this language. It is through our language that we proclaim our humanity. If we cognize a commonality in humanity yet a disparity in language, it is because ones humanity is unchangeably tied to his language that we should respect the tongue of that other. Only then is his humanity proclaimed. To be respected thus, is his right as the speaker and user of another tongue. It is in such an environment that peace and prosperity is inherited by all. When deprived of the right to be respected thus, how does the speaker of this other language feel it? As if his mother, his soul, the very fact of his humanity, is being neglected."**

## **Being neglected**

The priceless excerpt above was taken from the publication Language and Humanity by Attorney at Law S.G.

Punchihewa. It could almost be said that no other Sinhala literary work so compendiously captures the deep and ultimate application of language in transforming a human existence into an abundant life.

This quality of language is relevant to speakers of all languages, be it Sinhala, Tamil, English or Mandarin. The shock and isolation of the soul resulting from this relevance being neglected, becoming a collective shock and isolation, gives rise to disasters knows as ethnic conflicts which wet the earth with rivers of blood. The escalation, of this willful neglect and disregard of minority ethnic groups by the all powerful majority, into fierce conflict, has been the experience at a global level. It is also a grievous situation which fells a human life into darkness.

Ampara District is known for being an area with approximately equal Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim populations. It is also known that Tamil is the common language of the Tamil and Muslim ethnic groups. As such the majority there uses the Tamil language. However, it is a piteous situation that faces them when attempting to transact with institutions at times of need.

## **Sinhala only**

It is to obtain a copy of her birth certificate that Shivanandani visited the District Secretariat. However as she was unable to obtain the assistance of a Tamil speaking official, she had to return empty handed after wasting a lot of time.

“

"There is no Sinhala speaking official at the Pottuvil People's Bank. Sinhala residents of areas such as Lahugala, Sinhapura and Ulla face grave difficulties on visiting the bank to transact. According to them, informing the authorities of this situation has yielded no results."

”

MuththulingamVijayalechchami too has a similar grievance.

Both Sinhala and Tamil students study at the Old Temple Junior School. However the school's name board is only in the Sinhala language. There is also no Tamil medium teacher. Numerous requests on the issue have gone unheard.

Many similar grievances are

heard when speaking to the non-Sinhala citizens of Ampara District. This is a visible truth. The name boards of Sri Lanka Transport Board as well as private busses running from the Ampara town to adjoining areas are only depicted in Sinhala. The right to know what direction the bus is travelling in has not been ensured of Tamil citizens travelling by bus to areas such as Sethsirigama and Pansalgama. A Sinhala citizen living in the majority Tamil speaking area of Pottuvil is also faced with a similar situation.

## **The Sinhalese also faced with language problems**

There is no Sinhala speaking official at the Pottuvil People's Bank. Sinhala residents of areas such as Lahugala, Sinhapura and Ulla face grave difficulties on visiting the bank to transact. According to them, informing the authorities of this situation has yielded no results.

The Provincial Council or the Ministry of National Languages of the Central Government has a responsibility to prevent the language related abuse that has become the common reality of the Eastern Province, within which Ampara too falls.

While varied discourse on the elimination of the causes for

# Media assistance sought in implementation of the Social Integration Policy

**Sandamali Seneviratne**

A workshop on the role of the media, in the implementation of the Social Integration Policy Framework prepared by the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, was held at the Department of Government Information on the 7th of November.

This policy framework has been created by the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration with a view to promoting social cohesion, unity, and equality in citizenship through the protection of fundamental and human rights such as the rights to education, healthcare, employment and

protection by the law, and the ensuring of social justice and socio-economic security.

While media personnel representing a large number of mass media institutions participated in the workshop, many useful suggestions on the implementation of the Social Integration Policy Framework were also voiced therein.

## Language abuse...

*from page 10*

a return to conflict has risen subsequent to the quelling of the LTTE in 2009, the harsh reality is that they are not even reflected through the sign board of a bus.

The recommendations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission, appointed by President Mahinda Rajapakse, are currently receiving public attention. In sections 9.238 to 9.250, under The Language Policy, the Commission reports thus:

"The Commission heard from many Tamil persons and noted the sense of marginalization expressed by them due to the language policy and the deficiencies in its implementation followed by successive Governments."

"The Commission during its visits to the affected areas witnessed firsthand, that even today many persons of the minority communities are made to transact business not in the language of their choice."

"No district or province should be categorized in

terms of language. Officers in Government service should possess language skills to serve in any part of the country."

### **Talk of international conspiracies**

It should be emphasized herein that this was not compiled by international conspirators. According to the provisions for the implementation of the National Languages Policy set out via Special Gazette Notification on 25.09.2009, letters received by government institutions in the Sinhala, Tamil or English languages should be replied in the same language. General instruction such as Circulars should be issued in all three languages. Where not implemented despite the availability of facilities there should be punishment. If facilities are not available the government should be responsible.

It is evident that the Ministry of Social Integration is in the process of taking certain steps to implement

these provisions. However what we see is that these efforts are snail paced. This is the reason Sinhala customers visiting the Pottuvil People's Bank face problems. This is the reason Tamil residents of Sethsirigama are unable to read the sign boards on busses. This is why the language of the minority Sinhala population has become a burden to the majority Tamil speaking population of the Eastern Province.

In closing, I would like yet again to present an excerpt from Mr. S.G. Punchihewa's publication.

"Is it surprising that gun powder had to be sought as a means of solving the problem when a peoples have been subjected to this language grief for years? This is how our country faced a language based war for 30 years. It is true that this war has ended. Yet no one has won it. It is with language at the forefront that we must begin to win it."

A leaflet published to raise community awareness on language rights (No. 2)

## Linguistic autonomy requests are not new

- The idea that State affairs should be conducted in Sinhala and Tamil was first proposed as a resolution before the State Council in 1932.
- Yet it was not implemented. State governance continued in English.
- Ideas on linguistic autonomy were also expressed at various Commissions.
- The Soulbury Commission stated "If discrimination is practiced against a minority, it is usually by means of administrative actions which are more difficult to detect and expose than are legislative measures."

### **The Soulbury Constitution of 1947**

As a result of this observation, Article 29 was included in the 1947 Constitution. It stated that laws that discriminate against a community or religion were void.

### **Article 29(2) states thus.**

"No such law shall confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions."

1. Was this situation yet to be established post independence in 1948?
2. What damage was caused to the country by it not occurring?

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# Pesalai fisheries problems remain unresolved

**From page 1**

It was also revealed at this discussion that though maritime boundaries were imposed on fisherman as during the wartime, Indian fishermen were breaching these boundaries.

It was also revealed that a majority of the Tamil speaking fishermen have suffered grave difficulties as a result of the security force personnel conducting checks speaking Sinhala alone.

"If you take someone along who speaks Sinhala and provide answers you can leave soon, but

if not hours are wasted. This is a grave injustice" a fisherwoman Sobamalai Lucia Kalan stated.

"People are under great pressure as a result of the security forces invading everyday life despite the end of the war. This is a highly tragic situation", a Catholic priest who wished to remain unnamed, stated.

When contacted by us, Secretary of the National Fisheries Federation of the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Mr. Premasiri Perera stated that though it was true that fishermen were checked by the Navy

on a daily basis, no fishermen were harmed as a result. The Secretary added that much of the checking was done in order to prevent illegal trade and rackets between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen, as fishing for conch shell was illegal for Indian fishermen and the Sri Lankan fishermen were in the habit of catching and illegally selling conch shells to them.

He further stated that obtaining permits from the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has been made compulsory to fisherman. It is the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources that

intervenes on the various problems faced by Sri Lankan and Indian fishermen. He added that while the government was ready to face any problems that arise, obtaining these permits was one useful way in which to find solutions to these problems faced by fishermen.

The Navy states that permits for fishing boats should be obtained from them. We have made arrangements for the Defense Secretary to discuss this matter with the Minister of Fisheries, Secretary of the National Fisheries Federation Mr. Premasiri Perera added.

## A few short and long... *From page 4*

typewriters but no Tamil typists.

- d) Even simple and low cost measures such as having all name and direction boards and notices in Sinhala and Tamil had not been taken in most offices.
- e) None of the offices had a complete set of the legal documents and circulars issued by the Ministry of Public Administration and the Official Languages Commission.

The basic problem was identified as the crippling shortage of Tamil speaking officers despite the fact that eleven years had passed since Tamil was also made an official language. No notice appeared to have been taken of the ethnic composition of the various districts when recruitments and postings were done.

This part consists of Recommendations made over 13 years ago to the Official Language Commission (OLC)

by a team headed by the writer and appointed by the OLC to conduct an Audit on the Use of Tamil as an Official Language in provinces outside the NorthEast. Although the Audit did not research the North or East, the Recommendations relate to the whole Island and include the use of Sinhala in the North and East. The recommendations dated 30 December 1998 include far reaching changes, most of which remain valid but unimplemented. For this reason they are reproduced unchanged.

### Recommendations

If the administration is to meet the needs of the Tamil speaking people, there should be a sufficient number of Tamil proficient officials in state institutions and corporations. The officials needed will be translators, clerks, typists and others as well as departmental grades, such as police personnel at all levels. Recruitment of adequate numbers of Tamil speaking staff is essential. But this cannot be done overnight.

The team realizes that immediate, short term and long term measures are needed.

The first urgent need is a consensus between the Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Finance & Planning, Salaries and Cadre Committee and the Official Languages Commission on the immediate, short term and long term measures needed to implement Tamil as an Official Language. Based on our language audit, we have formulated following proposals for consideration.

Immediate Measures (to be taken within the next few weeks)

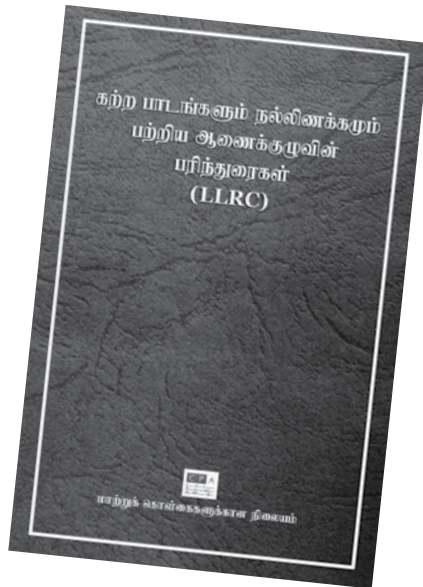
- (a) Identify constraints like lack of equipment, documents etc, and take immediate measures to purchase the equipment needed, print the documents, etc, using available funds or savings under other items in the budget.
- (b) Convert all monolingual and bilingual name and direction boards into trilingual name and direction boards. The cost of doing this will be minimal and it is unlikely that any additional resources will
- (c) Withdraw all forms in the Department that are not trilingual, destroy them and have the forms printed by the Government Printer in all three languages on the same paper. The Government printer should be asked to give top priority to this work.
- (d) Instruct all public servants to comply with Government policy in regard to the use of the national languages, particularly reminding them of widespread failure to implement Tamil as an official language.
- (e) A circular setting out the language policy of the government in relation to the use of Tamil may be jointly drafted by the Ministry of Public Administration and the Official Languages Commission, and circulated to all offices and sub-offices. The Circular should detail the obligations of the public servants in relation dealings with Tamil speaking persons.

**To be continued**

# An important publication for understanding the LLRC report

“

The publication of such a work, at a time when there is no broad understanding of the report amongst the majority of the citizens of this country despite it being over a year since its release, is of great use. ”



The publication by the Centre for Policy Alternatives, which includes the recommendations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission, fulfils an important and timely social need. It is rarely, that ideas expressed from the point of view of the general public, on the 30 year war, which can be described as the most brutal tragedy faced by post independence Sri Lanka, are given voice through the mainstream media or literature. The Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission Report is a rare publication of this nature.

Though it has already been a year since this Commission's full report was presented to Parliament, the Sinhala and

Tamil citizens of this country are yet to have the opportunity of reading a Sinhala or Tamil copy of this report. In response to these allegations, government spokesmen state that the Sinhala and Tamil translations are now available and can be downloaded from the website. However it goes without saying that this option is wholly inadequate for the purpose of creating meaningful social discourse or awareness on the report. Though it is the Sinhala and Tamil speaking general public that suffered most as a result of the war, the fact that they are yet to receive the opportunity to read this report evidences the fact that the responsible authorities of this country still have no adequate understanding regarding the factors that led to the war.

It is fair to level this allegation directly against the government. However, to be limited to this criticism and to remain inactive would not

be the mark of a responsible community or community organization. It is appreciable that the Centre for Policy Alternatives, understanding this fact, has taken steps to this publication available in the Sinhala and Tamil languages. The reader was only given the option of reading merely the recommendations of the report via the internet and photocopies. However a Tamil translation of the full report had already been published in India. Not even this publication seems to have been made available to the Tamil speaking general public of this country.

Under such circumstances, a publication that reaches the general Sinhala and Tamil readership of this country will undoubtedly strengthen the rising discourse on the report. This debate is essential to bring about the broad reforms that the country begs at present.

In addition to the recommendations, the publication also includes a basic introduction to the Commission. The Commission's composition, tasks, period of operation, and a range of related information is covered herein. Of further

importance is the segment that introduces the recent historical contexts of the Commission's recommendations. This segment of the publication edited by Mr. S.G. Punchihewa includes a range of related topics such as the European Union's recommendations for GSP+ concessions, the Darusman Report and the Human Rights Council proceeding from Geneva.

The publication of such a work, at a time when there is no broad understanding of the report amongst the majority of the citizens of this country despite it being over a year since its release, is of great use.

At present, the publication is frequently seen used as a handbook during the village level discussions on the L.L.R.C. report, conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in partnership with a range of community based organizations. This is a discourse which should be broadened further. It is also a discourse that is essential to postwar Sri Lanka. This Centre for Policy Alternatives publication is a valuable resource that nurtures this discourse.

## For your language rights

In the event that there is no official at a Police Station capable of recording your statement in your language, you may request that your statement, recorded in your language (Sinhala or Tamil) on a separate sheet of paper, be pasted into the Information Book.

Any citizen whose language rights have been violated can seek redress via a complaint at the Official Languages Commission.

**Direct line for complaints and inquiries**

**0112878687**

**Official Languages Commission**

*Chairman/Secretary,*

4th Floor, Bhasha Mandiraya,  
341/7, Kotte Road, Rajagiriya.

Email: olc@sltnet.lk

related to language rights in Sri Lanka:

"Subsequent to both Sinhala and Tamil being named official languages via Article 18 of the Constitution, a circular was sent by the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs to all departments. It stated that all department activity should be conducted in both these languages. Yet none of these departments implement the law as it should be. As a remedy, the government established the Official Languages Commission. As this too was not functioning as it should, a Ministry of Official Languages and Social Integration was also established. Despite all this however the language policy is not adequately implemented in our country. The currency notes used in our country can be cited as a prime example of this.

The phrase 'This note issued on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka is legally valid for the payment of any sum within Sri Lanka' is stated on every note. But it's written only in Sinhala!"

Following Mr. Punchihewa's presentation was an activity lesson on the independent reporting of language rights violations between media personnel and language committee representatives. Here the language committee representatives teamed up based on the areas they represented and reported their experiences on language rights violations before the media personnel attending the workshop.

The media personnel recorded the complaints made to them in detail, and produced news items from them which were presented to the gathering at the end of the activity. Mr. Punchihewa then pointed out that the media personnel now also had the opportunity of getting the news items they produced during the activity published through their respective media institutions.

## Citizens' solution to language rights problem that has the whole country lost

From page 5...

### The citizens say...

A few citizens' experiences related to language rights violations shared with provincial journalists by language committee representatives from the Batticaloa District were as below.

#### No response from the Police

*Member of the Kaththankudi language committee  
Saundaryani*

We went to the Police to report an injustice to a villager. The complaint was written down in Sinhala. We don't know what was written down. There was no investigation. We sent a written complaint to the Officer In Charge via registered post. It has been several weeks but we have not received any response.

#### The Sirs are the thieves, and the Sirs are the Judges (NaduthHamuduruwange, BaduthHamuduruwange)

*Eravur*

Suresh Kumar and Ramesh were travelling together. They were stopped by the Traffic Police and questioned. When questioned in Sinhala the answers were received in Tamil. The two youth were remanded. And fined Rs. 10,000.

"We faced the injustice of having our language rights violated. The Officer who violated the right punished us."

#### Signature obtained on an unknown thing

*Eravur*

The bus driven by Sivalingam met with an accident. He was arrested. The Police did not understand the statement he gave them. His signature was obtained to what was written in Sinhala without his knowing the content. Investigations have still not been concluded. Sivalingam does not know what is happening.

#### Language ability is necessary for coexistence Jaya Janani, Secretary, Chenkalady Language Committee

(1st year student at the Eastern University)

I felt lost on day one of attending the University. There were students from various areas. But we could not converse. We just sat there staring. That day I made up my mind to learn to speak Sinhala somehow. I can speak a little bit now. I joined this language committee with one objective. And that is to teach my Tamil villagers the Sinhala language. If both Sinhala and Tamil are Official Languages then we should be able to speak both. Without this there is no way in which we can speak of coexistence.



The gathering of information, collation and reportage through media was discussed during the second session of the workshop. Senior Journalist Mr. Thimbiriyagama Bandara began his lecture based on the news items presented to the gathering by the media personnel during the previous activity. He stated that preparation was necessary especially when reporting on language rights violations and that all necessary information needs to be gathered beforehand. To illustrate he took the incident related to the Eravur Traffic Police Officers as an example.

"According to this news item, they have not stopped at violating these Tamil youths' language rights, but have also gone on to issue a punishment. When reporting an incident such as this via the media, the reader should be given a correct understanding of the incident. What is important therein is when the incident took place, how, at what time, why and who the involved persons were. That is when the reader trusts the news item."

At the end of the presentations the participants forwarded a few questions to the resource persons. Questions on language rights, media, and related issues were included.

Details on these will be presented via the next issue.



## Bilingualization of the Public Service *From page 3*

in Chapter IV of the Constitution as directed in Article 18[4]

### Dearth of Human Resources

The basic problem facing the public administration in rendering its services in both official languages all over the country is the dearth of the necessary human resources i.e. officials who are proficient in both official languages to the level relevant to their functions.

Presently, Tamil speaking people living in the provinces outside the North-East cannot obtain a satisfactory service in their own language at the public offices and institutions situated in these provinces. It is true that Sinhala speaking minority living in the North-East have similar problems. But the problems is not comparable with that faced by the Tamil speaking people living in the provinces outside the North-East who comprise 61 percent of the total Tamil speaking population in the country.

According to a survey conducted in 2002 by the Census and Statistics Department the total number of Tamil speaking employees in government service was only 8.31 percent compared with their national proportion of 26 percent. This is where the problem begins. If there had been Tamil speaking public servants in government service comparable to their national proportion the problem would have been less severe.

**Table , shows the number of public servants proficient in Tamil and English, by sector in 2006.**

Ministry	Total Employment	Language Proficiency (%)		
		Sinhala	Tamil	English
<b>Total</b>	<b>813,030</b>	<b>91.3</b>	<b>15.7</b>	<b>32.0</b>
State Sector	325,275	94.8	13.9	32.2
Provincial Public	279,924	85.3	21.8	28.5
Semi-Government	207,834	93.7	10.4	36.3

*Source; Preliminary Report- Census of Public and Semi-government Sector Employment-2006, Department of Census and Statistics*

Table 02 gives the total number of Tamil speaking public servants and their ethnicity.

**Table 02 Tamil speaking public servants by sector and ethnicity [2002-provisional]**

Sector	Total number of Employees	Muslim	Sri Lanka Tamils	Tamils of recent Indian origin	Tami speaking employees[Total]
<b>State</b>	295,734	3.09%	5.06%	0.25%	8.40%
<b>Provincial Council</b>	292,072	5.75%	12.3%	1.76%	19.81%
<b>Semi-Government</b>	247,845	3.20%	5.48%	0.37%	9%

*A more recent (2006) survey shows certain improvements in the proficiency of public servant in the eight Provincial Councils (prior to de-merger of the North-East province).*

**Percentage Distribution of Provincial Public Sector Employees by Provincial Council and Language Proficiency**

Provincial Council	Total	Language Proficiency (%)		
		Sinhala	Tamil	English
<b>Total</b>	<b>279,924</b>	<b>85.3</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>28.5</b>
Western	60,898	94.7	8.7	29.7
Central	39,339	90.6	23.0	35.3
Southern	37,459	98.9	3.3	22.9
North-Western	40,534	95.3	10.2	26.3
North-Central	19,210	96.0	10.6	24.4
Uva	19,214	95.5	15.1	26.9
Sabaragamuwa	25,541	96.2	9.2	25.1

*Source: Preliminary Report- Census of Public and Semi-Government Sector Employment 2006, Department of Census and Statistics*

*To be continued..*

## To win language rights... *From Page 3*

by the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

It is as a result of a series of such interventions that the Sri Lankan citizenry was able to secure a series of historically important language rights victories.

The concurrent countrywide awareness raising programs should also be emphasized herein. A range of programs were conducted amongst the general public as well as government officials. An awareness raising programs on language rights for media personnel stood out amongst them.

However the end result of such awareness-raising can only be yielded by augmenting this awareness towards wider social activism alone. It is this truth that is confirmed through the pharmaceutical label victory as well as the currency note victory. Knowledge and criticism alone does not suffice to obtain any victories.

It needs activism and intervention. The victories achieved over the last few months confirm that language rights, like any other right can only be won thus.

They may be very minor. They may be incomplete. However they can only be carried forward into substantial and absolute victories via remaining alert and through continued broad ranging activism alone.

## Write to us

The Sri Lankan language policy is a topic which has been subject to extensive discussion. Through the Vibhasha Newsletter, we aim to further foster this discussion. It is our belief that reader contribution is vital in building up this dialogue. Write to us with your various ideas, news and information. The Vibhasha Newsletter is open to all those who are sensitive to language rights of this country.

### Regarding language rights

Send us your ideas, suggestions, problems and feedback.

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# Let's unite for language rights

A coordination program between the Language Committee representatives and provincial journalists of the Northern Province, implemented under the second phase of the programme promoting Language Rights of minorities, is currently underway.

The coordination program is implemented with the objective of increasing media reportage of issues related to language rights. It was the view of the representatives of the Language Committees, as well as the majority of journalists, that many shortcomings existed in the mainstream media reportage of issues related to language rights, which are fundamental right of the people.

The need to identify these shortcomings and improve reportage, and thereby create a voice within the nation for language rights related issues, was emphasized during this discussion series.

While this discussion series has thus far been conducted in the Ampara, Batticaloa and Tricomalee Districts of the Northern Province, a few moments of the Batticaloa District discussions are depicted herein.

## Same of the participants ▼



▲ Attorney at Law Mr. S.G. Punchihewa addressing the gathering

