

# Vibhasha

VIBHASHA December 2012 - January 2013

A publication of the Centre for Policy Alternatives

Volume Two - Seventh Edition

## Why are some bank documents only in English?

Sandamali Seniviratne

State banks, private banks and financial companies often prepare their agreements and other loan related documents only in English; the Centre for Policy Alternatives submitted a complaint against this to the Human Rights Commission on the 20th December last year. The plaintiff claimed that due to the unavailability of these

### A complaint before the human rights commission



documents in other languages, the fundamental rights assured by the provision 12 (1) of the constitution are violated. Based on this, the plaintiff has requested the Human Rights Commission to take measures to ensure that trilingual policy is implemented in the field of banking.

*Continued to page 11...*

## An essay competition on Language Rights

The Outreach Unit of Centre for Policy Alternatives commenced groundwork to hold an essay writing competition on the theme of Language Rights, among the O/L and A/L students of the North and Eastern provinces.

The number of the words of the essay should be between 750 and 1000 and it should be written on the A4 sized papers (single side). The completed essays should be submitted on or before 10th

March 2013. Proposed topics for the essay.

1. Sri Lanka's Ethnic problem and Language rights.
2. Language Rights are also human rights
3. Language rights and the understanding among different ethnicities.
4. Language rights as a fundamental element of cultural diversity
5. Respecting Language Rights.

The five best essays will be chosen at district level and the winners will be presented with valuable gifts.

More details could be obtained from the below address. Please write with a self addressed envelope to.

**Programme Coordinator**  
**Centre for Policy Alternative**  
**105, 5th Lane**  
**Colombo 03.**

*For further details, go to page 13*

## Deyata Kirula Exhibition site

### A Merit Award for national language proficiency

Chairman of the Official Languages Commission lawyer Nimal R. Ranawaka told Vibhasha newsletter that the Commission has taken measures to present an Award of Merit to the three stalls at the exhibition who implement the Official Languages Policy to the fullest.

Exhibitors should present all the details and name every item displayed in the stall in all three languages.

Mr. Ranawaka went on saying that the decision to present such an award was taken based on the results of the language survey carried out in the exhibition site of Last year's Deyata Kirula event.



A programme to share the experiences of the representatives of Language Societies was held in Panama, Ampara district, on the 11th, 12th and 13th of last December as a part of the programme to promote the language rights of the minorities.

Representatives of the Language Societies of Jaffna, Mannar and Vavuniya are seen sharing their experiences with the representatives of Ampara district.

## For the first time in Sri Lanka, a "Bilingual Position" : from next year...

**Sadamali Senevirathne**

As an outcome of discussions held between Ministry of Public Administration and the Official Languages Commission, a new position called the "Bilingual Position" will be introduced from next year. Elaborating on

this, the Chairman of Official Language Commission, Attorney at Mr. Nimal R. Ranawaka said; "Officers including the secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration took the decision to introduce this position to Sri

Lanka. 71 Divisional Secretariat division have been identified as bilingual areas. The "Bilingual Position" was established in these 71 Divisional Secretariat divisions. Recently the government gave appointment

to 50,000 graduates. According to Mr. Nimal R. Ranawaka, the people who qualify for this "Bilingual Position" will be selected from these newly recruited graduates.

## Successful Conclusion of the Tamil Language Course in Millaniya

The first phase of the Tamil Language Training Course conducted free of charge for the youth of Millaniya area in the Kaluthara district was successfully completed. This was the first batch of this course for the year 2012. The final ceremony which marked the completion of the course, was held with much fanfare at the Kankankudawa Winro Reception Hall.

This was a training course voluntarily conducted by the officer for Community

Estate Infrastructure in Millaniya, Mr. Wanaraja under the supervision of the GA officer of Millaniya Mr. Wimal Ranathunga.

The Chief Guest at the passing out ceremony was Member of Parliament Hon Mr. Janaka Priyantha and this was a grand ceremony with dancing and singing items. Representatives from the government institutions and community organizations in the area and a large crowd of villagers participated in the event.

## An English only Administration in Galmetiyawa?

Villagers in Galmetiyawa expressed their disapproval regarding the fact that the name board of the village's Health Care centre is only in English. This Health Care centre is located in the Galmetiyawa North Gramaseva division in Thambalagambuwa in the Trincomalee district. The villagers have informed the relevant officers about this issue of the name board, but so far no solution has been offered. The residents of this area request the relevant authorities to have this name board in Sinhala and Tamil languages as well.

## Documents available only in Tamil

As all the official work of the Trincomalee Municipal council and Kadawan Pradeshya Sabha office is conducted only in English, the Sinhala speaking population in this area face severe difficulties.

The Sinhala people have even informed the President about issuing all

the documents and notices only in Tamil Language. Nevertheless the problem persists.

About 1200 Sinhala families and 500 Tamil Muslim families live in this Pradeshya Sabha area. People hope that the authorities will look into this matter immediately.

## Teachers trained to teach Sinhala / Tamil to government officers

1976 teachers representing all the provinces have been trained to teach Sinhala and Tamil as a second language to government officers. This training has been provided by the National Institute for Language Education Training (NILET). These teachers have then been incorporated to the language promoting courses

conducted for government officers. Apart from this a special programme has been launched to teach English. According to the chairperson of the National Language training institute, Mrs. Seetha Withanarachchi, a residential training programme has been carried out to teach English to 150 government officers.

## Is there an issue regarding your language rights? Dial 1956

The Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration has introduced a new hotline service, in order to assist and guide the public towards getting their language problems solved without delay. The hotline number is 1956. It was introduced on the 28th November 2012.

At a press conference held at the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, officers said that this centre will be opened during the office hours and people can make their complaints over the phone, whenever they encounter language related problems in public institutions.

## Legal Action to be taken, if language policy is violated

**Sadamali Seneviratne**

According to the chairman of the Official Languages Commission Attorney at Law Mr. Nimal R. Ranawaka, it has now been made compulsory that passenger buses and the state banks and financial institutions implement the tri lingual policy. Those who don't abide by this could be brought to the court. Mr. Ranawana further stated that this has been discussed with the DIG and other officers.

## In the name of your language rights

If the police officers in the police station are unable to record your complaint in your own language, you have the right to demand to write it yourself on a piece of paper and request it to be pasted in the information book.

Any citizen can make a complaint to the Official Languages Commission if his or her language right is violated.

Direct lines for making complaints are as follows:

0112878687  
Official Languages Commission OLC  
Chairman/Secretary  
Fourth Floor, Language Mandir,  
341/7, Kotte road  
Rajagiriya  
E mail : olc@sltnet.lk.

# Language Rights are human rights too



Nadeesha Paulis

International Human rights day is commemorated all over the world on the 10th of December. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was ratified by the United Nations in 1948. 48 member states voted in favour of it and there was no votes against it. However Russia, Poland and South Africa, where apartheid policy was in effect those days, abstained. By 1978, the majority of the member states had ratified this declaration and it took on legal force under international law.

What are human rights? Why would anyone need them? If there were no human rights, what will our world be like?

The ancient Maya and Egypt civilizations were brutal and there were almost no human rights. Poor villagers were sold off as slaves and they were treated worse than the animals. Widows had to kill themselves by jumping to the pyre of their dead husbands. People infected with skin diseases had to leave the city and live in the jungle. Children were sold and bought as mere commodities. It took mankind thousands of years to get over

this situation. Even at the present time, these horrible things do happen, but only illegally. For instance, even in the present children trafficking take place, but it is considered a crime and the perpetrators are severely punished if they get caught.

In the modern age it is not out of genuine concern and commitment that some countries have ratified the human rights declaration and other international agreements, but only because it is a precondition to apply for the foreign aid. Sri Lanka is one of the countries who have ratified the human rights declaration. One of the fundamental rights established by the Sri Lankan constitution is Language Rights.

Provision 12(2) of the Constitution states: "No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, cast, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any one of such grounds"

This is very similar to the 2nd provision of the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Accordingly: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without

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to use either Sinhalese or Tamil language, when they communicate with public institutions. Accordingly, all sign boards of the public institutions, public transport services, public utility facilities should be displayed in Sinhala and Tamil. Furthermore they have the right to obtain the information from these bodies in any language they prefer, and the documents issued, also should be available in all the languages. They have the right to communicate with officials in any language they prefer.

Respecting languages rights should be promoted.

There are many ways in which an ordinary citizen can contribute to promoting language rights.

- If you see that the notices and the prices of the goods in a supermarket or a grocery in your area are displayed only in one language, you can politely make a request to display a translation.
- If the notices and forms of a school library or a pre school is only available in just one language you can mediate and offer to provide a translation.
- When you notice that information of state websites are not available on all the national languages, you can send a polite email requesting to include a translation.
- In the case of a severe violation of the language rights of citizens, you can dial the 1956 hotline number and inform or you can submit a complaint with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka or the Official Languages Commission.

These are just a few positive measures we can take on our own as the peace loving citizens of this beautiful country.

distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status"

Hence, language rights are fundamental rights assured by the constitution. This has been further strengthened by the 13th Amendment and other related legislation such as the 1956 Official Languages Act, 1620/27 June special Gazette notice, State administrative circulars etc. A ministry called the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration has also been established to further promote language rights. Official Languages department, Official languages commission and National languages training institute are other bodies that deal with language related issues. It is commonly accepted by the mandates of all these bodies that it is imperative to overcome the barrier of language in order to make Sri Lanka a conflict free society.

In this context what is really meant by "Language Rights"? In Sri Lanka language rights mean that any Sri Lankan citizen has the right



# Language societies and mass media work collaboratively

**“Our objective is to give media exposure to instances where language rights have been violated”**

Phase two of the Programme promoting Language Rights, initiated by Centre for Policy Alternatives last year, focusing on the North and Eastern province, is now being successfully implemented from village to village. Recently, an event was launched under this programme in order to build up stronger networking between the representatives of the language societies and journalists in Ampara district.

The Central Camp Language Society, Ampara, states that the Tamil Community in their area face grave difficulties due to the fact that documents issued by public bodies are available only in Sinhala Language.

It is reported from Damana, Ampara that when a Tamil speaking woman went to the police to make a complaint, the police officer, who doesn't know Tamil, took down her complaint in Sinhala and then compelled her to sign it. She has made a complaint about this to the Official Language Commission.

The Kalmunai Language Promoting Society stated that the Tamil people face difficulties as police officers are unable to communicate in Tamil. The police officers merely pretend that they understand Tamil and take down the complaint! People who go to the police to make the complaints, don't dare to question this. In particular when people go to the police to lodge complaint in the case of emergency accident they face lot of difficulties. It is reported that a woman who visited the Economic Centre in Hingurana

The primary objective of this network building is to motivate the media to report the discriminations faced by minority communities in those areas, in issues pertaining to language rights.

At this workshop held in the Ampara district, Attorney-at-Law, S.G. Punchihewa explained the legal background

**Here are a number of issues relating to Language Rights as put forward to journalists by representatives of various community organisations**

## Language issues through the eyes of media



had to spend hours there, as she was not conversant in the Sinhala language. There had been only one Tamil speaking officer at that institution, and at the time this woman went there, that person had not been in the office. So, she had had to wait for a long time till he came.

It is reported from Ampara that there is a shortage of Tamil teachers in Sinhala schools. Because of this, the Sinhala speaking students face inconveniences. The villagers are of the opinion that it is very important to make arrangements to teach Tamil to school students, in order to achieve sustainable peace.

The residents of Danama in Ampara stated that the Tamil people who visit the Damana government hospital



in Sri Lanka related to the language rights and what can be done when they are violated. Local participants contributed to this discussion by talking about their own experiences.

Journalist Thimbiriyagama

Bandara spoke on how the media could expose incidents related to the violation of language rights. It was discussed how media could gather and document the information pertaining to the violation of language rights, apart from reporting them.

Damana, find it hard to do their business as they are not able to communicate in Tamil.

Mr. Kalupahana, of the Hingurana Language Society, states that the private and public buses start from Ampara town display their destination boards only in Sinhala language putting people who cannot read Sinhala into serious trouble. Mr. Kalupahana further states that although the name boards in Tamil speaking areas are displayed in both languages the non Sinhala speaking people who come to take buses destined for areas like Kithsirigama, Pansalgama etc, face difficulties.

Ms. Shiva Nandani, a resident of Thambaluwila reported that the most embarrassing and difficult situation she faced in her life was when she had to visit the Ampara District Secretariat office to get an official matter sorted. She said that from the instant she got off the bus she started feeling worried and alienated. She had to go looking for the DS division Office and there she felt so

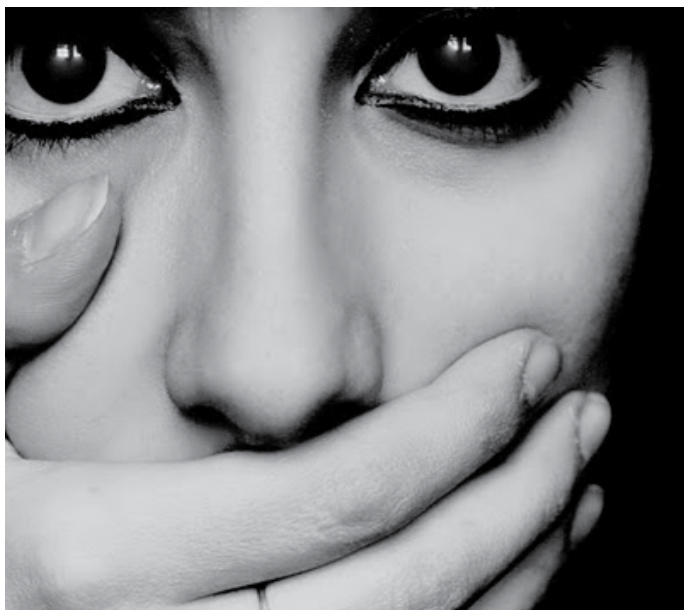
experience inconvenience as the doctors only speak Sinhala.

They also said the students are put into a difficult situation, as there are not sufficient teachers to teach Sinhala language in Tamil schools. The students who sit the grade five scholarship exam, are required to answer a section of the test paper in the Sinhala language, which results in serious injustice. In this context, this lack of Sinhala teachers has become a serious problem.

Road sign boards in Ampara district, are displayed only in the English language and this has made the Sinhala and Tamil speaking communities face inconveniences.

The villagers say that the vendors who come to Trincomalee town, from

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It is unfair and insulting to make a citizen in this country communicate with the government or public officers in a language that they don't comprehend. It is unfair and insulting if a citizen in this country has to communicate in a language they don't understand in a court or a police station.

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*Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu*

**Just as you understand the importance of your own language rights it is vital that you also recognise the language rights of others**

## Violating language rights is an insult to humanity

**This article is based on the opinions expressed by Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, addressing a series of meetings organized by representatives of language societies and journalists collaboratively in several rural areas in the North and East.**

"As you know, present Sri Lanka is in a post war situation. It is not a post conflict situation. This means that remedying the causes that led the country to a war has not yet been done. This is related to ability of the all populations in Sri Lanka to live with the same dignity and self esteem in this state. The basis for that to happen is to accept that Sri Lanka is a multi ethnic country."

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu voiced this opinion, addressing a series of meetings organised by representatives of language societies and the journalists in several areas in the North and East. Elaborating on the above he further said that there were

a number of conditions to be established, in order to achieve such.

He said that militarization and the involvement of the military in the economic process was a major problem. Land issues and issues pertaining to the situation of the internally displaced people are also among these problems. Issues related to the authority of the fundamental law of the country and rule of law also should be addressed. For instance at this time, an impeachment has been brought to the parliament against the Chief Justice. In the past there are many incidents of violation of human rights. Nothing has happened about them. Such things happen in the present too. But nothing is being done (to bring the perpetrators to justice) The LTTE and the government are charged for committing war crimes. But nothing has happened regarding these. This raises the question of what does our country need today. He suggested that it is national harmony that Sri

Lanka needs at this moment. We should ask ourselves if it is possible to achieve peace without building reconciliation among all ethnicities in the country. We should ask ourselves if it possible to achieve reconciliation without being accountable, or basically without accepting responsibility for what happened and what is happening.

Getting the relevant parties to be accountable regarding what has happened is not the only challenge. It is the sharing of information of what is happening and what is being done. It is not a problem only relating to the past. It is also a problem about the present day. And more importantly it is a problem relevant to the future as well.

Despite the difficulties in using the two national languages in this country, I always believed that it is imperative to accept and assure language rights in Sri Lanka in order to achieve reconciliation, national dialogue and national unity.

It is clear that Language is an organic element in identity. It is a part of identity. It is a means of access to the enrichment of the culture and the future. Accepting language rights is an important indication of accepting equality and dignity among the peoples. To put it simply, it is unfair and insulting to make a citizen in this country communicate with the government or public officers in a language that they don't comprehend. It is unfair and insulting if a citizen in this country has to communicate in a language they don't understand in a court or a police station. When culture and civilization is concerned, there are common elements to the all communities in this country. There are many things that bind us together. We cannot go forward if mistrust, unhappiness and miscommunication exist among ourselves.

We have an Official Languages Act since 1990. But, to date the issue of language rights is in a tangled and confused state. The best first step towards reconciliation and

*Continued to page 15...*



Dr Devanesan Nesiah is a reputed former civil servant and a senior officer in the Sri Lankan public administration who has gained a lot of experiences by working as a Government Agent in the districts of Jaffna, Mannar and Batticaloa.

In the early years of 80's he served as the GA in Jaffna and later became the secretary of the Ministry of Environment. He was in that position until retirement.

At present, he is contributing to society as a reputed intellectual and a civil social activist.

In this article he focuses on several long term and short term measures that should be followed to assure Tamil language rights.

In this article the emphasis is given to the short term measures.

The commitment of public servants is an essential factor to implement the Official language policy.

(a) Identify the Departments and the Service Grades that need fresh recruitment of Tamil speaking officers to enable full implementation of the Language Policy of the Government. This Identification may be done by the Ministry of Public Administration in consultation with the Official Languages Commission within a three or four month's time frame.

(b) The Official Languages Commission could seek government approval for the special recruitment of the required numbers of Tamil speaking cadres. The new appointment may be set off against existing vacancies and, if there are not enough vacancies additional posts could be created on the understanding that other recruitment would be suspended till the excess disappears through natural wastage.

### Part three of an article series on Tamil Language Rights in Sri Lanka



## Productive Strategies to get language policy implemented

(c) Thereafter the Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration could call for applications from suitable candidates, specifying the special Tamil Languages provisions required in respect of oral, reading and writing skills at the point of recruitment. In this recruitment, preference should be given to those with skills in a second or third language.

(d) The Ministry of Public Administration should post the officers according to the needs of each Department. The Official Languages Commission should, before postings are made, be consulted in working out the rules governing language competency in the respective offices. It should be possible to complete this process and make necessary appointments within 1999.

(e) Training programmes in Sinhala, Tamil and English should be initiated island wide to enable all categories of officers to gain proficiency in at least two and, if possible, all three languages.

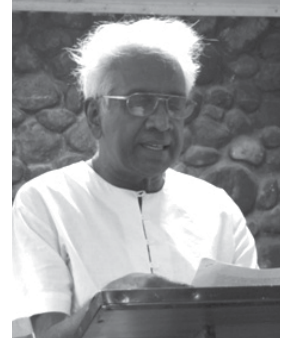
(f) All induction and selected training courses should incorporate modules relating to the language policy of the state and awareness of relevant provisions of the Constitution.

(g) Public awareness should be built up of the right of every person to transact business with any government office in

any part of the Island in Sinhala, Tamil or English, and of the obligation cast on the offices and officers concerned to provide such services including replying letters in the language used by the writer and issuing any extract or translation of any record, registration, publication or other document in the language chosen by the applicant.

(h) In order to motivate officers to gain proficiency in all three languages, a new incentive scheme should be introduced consisting of fixed sums on passing the relevant examinations and a monthly allowance for using the additional language in day to day work. The incentive allowance must be paid only to those officers who work, in addition to their normal duties, in a language other than their first language. There should be a strict check on this payment and appropriate norms should be established. Those who draw the monthly allowance should be available for posting outstation as required.

(i) After providing the staff, there should be periodic monitoring. Due consideration should be given to public complaints. The Official Languages Commission should bring to the notice of the President any shortcomings or lethargic attitude in any Ministry/Dept. for action that the President may deem fit.



**Dr. Devanesan Nesiah**

(j) Presidential directions may be made as appropriate under Section 22 (1) of the Constitution, introduced through the Sixteenth Amendment, which reads as follows:

"Sinhala and Tamil shall be languages of administration throughout Sri Lanka and Sinhala shall be the language of administration and be used for maintenance of public records and the transaction of all business by public institutions of the provinces of Sri Lanka other than Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamil shall be 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 of 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 the Languages of Administration for such area".

It is noted that both Sinhala and Tamil are Languages of Administration throughout Sri Lanka but only one language or the other may be the language of public record in a particular province unless there is a Presidential declaration to the contrary. It is suggested that early action should be taken under the above paragraph to proclaim the appropriate areas in which a second or third language should also be used as languages of public record so that effective strategies for implementation of the Official Language Policy of the Government can be worked out.

Year 2012 was named the "Trilingual Year". Now we have come to the end of the year 2012. When you look back, what is your assessment about the changes that have come out as a result of naming the year as the "Trilingual Year".

As the Official Languages Commission, our legal mandate falls within the range of implementing the two language policy. Basically, the commission's responsibility is to monitor how bilingual language policy is being implemented in public institutions, and the compilation of new policies in this regard. When we consider, Trilingual policy, English is different from the two language policy. It implies something beyond mere usage of languages. There are two peoples in this society, who have been living together since a long time ago. Those two peoples are the Sinhala speaking community and the Tamil speaking community. Our objective is to build up cultural harmony between these two communities and to create an environment in which any citizen of this country, who speaks any language could get their needs fulfilled without any obstacle. Here there are expectations that go beyond the language (through bi-lingualism). The 'two languages' policy is being implemented with the objective of building up social reconciliation and cultural linkages. It is with this objective that all our activities were designed and policy decisions were made in the year 2012.

#### **What are the benefits reaped from the Trilingual Year so far?**

Through the programmes we launched, we could do a language survey and a language audit. The fundamental problems pertaining to implementation of the language policy in public institutions have been identified through the language surveys and audits. We have analyzed the nature of those problems and accordingly taken measures to launch programmes to gradually implement the language policy in these institutions. By the end of this year we have carried out language audits in nearly 140 public institutions. Many public bodies including GA offices, district secretariats, government hospitals, courts, etc have been monitored under these language surveys and audits. Based on the results of these surveys and audits, we implemented several

## **There will be many changes in the New Year**

**A discussion with the Chairman of the National Language Commission, Attorney at Law, Mr. Nimal Ranawaka.**

programmes last year.

In implementing the state language policy in public institutions, the most important responsibility lies with the chief of that institution. It is important to make him or her aware of this responsibility. Language rights are rights of citizens, and it is a responsibility of the public officers as well (to ensure these). Both the citizens and the officers should understand this. If not, most of the time, citizen's needs become less important and officer's needs become the priority.

However, it is very important that the citizens claim their right. Over the year we implemented several programmes through print, broadcast and television media to raise awareness among citizens and now we can see the positive results of these. For instance, the citizens whose awareness on the language rights was improved through these programmes continued making complaints to the (Official Languages) Commission on various types of language issues. In this regard the awareness among society of issue of language use is most important. We expect to allocate more resources for supplementing these kind of awareness programmes in the next year.

#### **What kind of support have you receive from the government in this regard?**

In January of this year, a special state ceremony was held to name the Trilingual Year. That was the first time, that the government in this country extended such significant support for this kind of programme. It is expected that Sri Lankan society will become a society, enriched with language skills, including English, within

“ When three facts are considered I feel that all the citizens in our country are now motivated with the thirst to learn language. The bad consequences of the war which was prolonged for more than thirty years must have been one of the reasons that affected this situation. ”



Attorney at Law  
**Mr. Nimal Ranawaka**

**By the end of this year we have carried out language audits in nearly 140 public institutions.**

the next decade. Officially, government's sponsorship was received at the very beginning of the year. This support was a great encouragement for us. Since the government came forth to assure the implementation of the Trilingual policy, a wide discourse was generated in society. Through this, our interventions were strengthened.

#### **Have you identified the sections in society, who have a tendency to study a second or third language?**

Yes indeed. Under programmes launched by the Ministry of National languages and Social Integration, language counsellors have been provided to 1000 language societies in order to enhance their language skills. In the year 2012, a body of nearly 16,000 people have been provided as language representatives by the National Institute of Language Education Training which is a institution functioning under the Ministry.

When these facts are considered I feel that all the citizens in our country are now motivated with the thirst to learn languages. The bad consequences of the war which was prolonged for more than thirty years must have been one of the reasons that affected this situation. It would seem that people are now realizing that acquiring the language skills

is a long term solution for this war which went on for decades, and the negative Consequences of it. The Official language commission has initiated the forming of language societies all over the country. In particular, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, (LLRC) in their report has clearly recommended that the Official Language Commission should implement its activities at the village level. But they are still confined only to Colombo. We have to prepare a strategy to gradually take these activities to the village level. However this process will need time. As a first step towards achieving this we are now in the process of obtaining reports on the progress of implementation of the national language policy in public institutions in the village level. We are doing this through language societies in the villages.

This has been very successful. By 31st December, we have issued recommendations to have all the CTB and private buses display the name boards of the destinations in all three languages. Now a post monitoring process is going on and it is the language society officers who render the fullest support for this. So far we have received a very good response. We think that there is significant interest and enthusiasm in society about language policy. Today, it is not something confined only to government employees. Students learn languages for educational purposes. Government employees learn languages in expectation of getting promotions. But we should know that there are people who are aware of the social opportunities beyond these personal goals.

**Interview by  
Sandamali Seniviratne  
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# Language issues are created due to the faults of the heads in the public institutions

Lakbima - 29.11.2012  
Mihiri Foneska

A hot line service was officially launched in the morning of the 28th November 2012, for citizens to make complaints against the violations of language rights in public institutions.

This national language call centre, which is located in the premises of the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration at Buthgamuwa Road, Rajagiriya was opened by the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, Hon. Wasudeva Nanayakkara.

Officers who can communicate in all three languages are employed at this national language calling centre, which will be kept opened during the office hours.

This language call centre equipped with state-of-the-art communication technologies and tools, has been built with the cooperation of the Telecommunications Regulations Commission

## The National Language Call Centre opens...

and ICTA. This centre is the most advanced of call centres established in most of the institutions in Sri Lanka, to date.

Providing information pertaining to language problems, usage of languages, opportunities to learn languages and directing callers to the relevant heads of the institutions when they complain about the language issues, are the primary tasks assigned to this call centre.

Speaking more about this call center, Minister Vasudeva Nanayakkara stated the following.

"Citizens who are put into embarrassing situations due to the fact that they are forced to use some other language other than their mother language in the public offices, can now make complaints to the call centre. Legal action will be

## Minister Vasudeva Nanayakkara

taken against the heads of the institutions who ignore these complaints.

Year 1956 is the year that we were released from the domination of the English language. But then only Sinhala language was made into the state language. It was a mistake. Somehow that mistake was corrected later. We selected the number 1956 as our hot line number as it has a meaningful story behind it. It was in that year that our vernacular language gained the due dignity. It is important that we learn English. Knowing English is an extra qualification. We should not try to imitate white people when we speak English. We should speak it in a manner that suits our country. But don't let the vernacular languages become second to English. Knowing English is not an indication of being knowledgeable, or wise. Anyhow not knowing Sinhala and Tamil is an indication of lack of knowledge and wisdom.

A language issue had

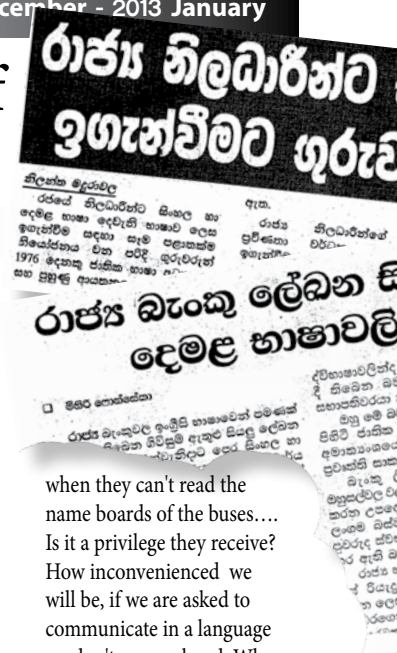
emerged in our country because the citizens didn't know vernacular languages. It is because of the faults of the heads of the institutions that people face language problems.

Through Gazette, the responsibility of implementing the Official Language policy has been assigned to these officers. Some high ranking officers just sign the letters even without thinking if the receiver of that letter could read the language. Because of this situation, I had to send a letter to the chief ministers, ministers and secretaries of the ministries, asking them to think twice about the letters they sign, and send a translation along with it.

Some ask what special problems do the Tamil people have. Just imagine, how helpless they may feel when they can't communicate in their mother language. In the public offices, when they don't hear the announcements of train schedules in their language,

when they can't read the name boards of the buses.... Is it a privilege they receive? How inconvenienced we will be, if we are asked to communicate in a language we don't comprehend. Why don't these gentlemen in the high positions don't think about this?

The Secretary to the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, Mrs. Malkanthi Wickramasinghe, Chairman of the State Languages Training Centre Mrs. Seetha Wanniarachchi, Commissioner of National Languages Mr. J.D. Jayasingha, Chairman of the Official language Commission Mr. Nimal Ranawaka and Advisor to the Ministry Mr. Sanjanya Nanayakkara also participated in the occasion of the opening of the call centre.



## Bank documents in Sinhala and Tamil

Lakbima - 29.11.2012  
Mihiri Fonseka

Chairman, Official Languages Commission, Mr. Nimal Ranawaka says that it is compulsory that all the documents including the agreements of the state banks which have been so far produced only in English be printed in Sinhala and Tamil languages as well, by the 31st December.

According to the constitution, any citizen has a right to communicate either in Sinhala or Tamil when they go the public offices

to get things done, the Official Languages Policy states. "But nearly sixty percent of the public bodies in Sri Lanka don't fulfill this requirement" says Mr. Nimal Ranawaka.

To avoid language problems the citizens face in the banks, in particular a decision has been taken that all the state banks issue their documents in vernacular languages as well.

Mr. Ranawaka said this at a press conference that was held at the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration in Rajagiriya

yesterday morning (28th)

He said that it is compulsory that not only bank documents, but also the instruction leaflets issued along with the medicine in pharmacies, and the destination name boards of the CTB and private buses are produced in vernacular languages.

Mr. Nimal Ranawaka further stated that they have informed the Inspector General of Police to take legal action against the bus drivers who violate the Official Language policy.

## Drama workshops for English teachers

Dinamina - 17th  
November 2012  
K.K.S Ariyadada

A programme has been initiated by the Educational Secretariat, to give a practical training on English Drama and English Elocution to English medium teachers who teach in schools in the Gampaha education Zone Assistant Director of English Education in the Gampaha Education

Zone, Mrs. Chandrani S. Ganepola said that this programme was initiated with the objective of promoting English medium theatre among the students who already study English Drama as a subject. A large number of English teachers attended the first training workshop held at the Education Training and Resource Development Centre in Nittambuwa.





## 3 Translations launched

**Weerakesari**  
08.01.2013 (page 8)

A book launching ceremony which was hosted by an Australian organization affiliated with the Tamil Writer's Alliance, was held on the 08th January at 5 p.m at the BMICH.

The event was chaired by Dr Rajasingham Narendran. Sinhala translations of a book written by Dr Noel Nadesan and a book written by L. Murugapubathi were launched at this ceremony. Both these writers live in Australia.

Nadesan's Tamil novel titled "Wannaththi Kulam" has been

translated into Sinhala by Madulugiriye Wijerathna as "Samanala Wewa". Another novel written by Nadesan titled "Unaye Mayal Kondu" has been translated into English by Dr. Parvathi Wasudeva. The English translation is titled as "Lost in You".

A short story collection authored by L. Muruga Pubhathi has been translated into Sinhala by A.C.M. Karamath. He has titled it as "Mada Sewaneli". Well known critic K.S. Sivakumaran, Madulugiriye Wijerathna, Dikwelle Kamal, Hemasiri Kuruppu, Sydney Marcus Dias, and Karamath made short speeches at this event.

## Submit your complaints to the Human Rights Commission, if your language rights are violated

### Inform Centre for Policy Alternatives

**Sudaroli - 17.01.2013 (page 8)**

The Centre for Policy Alternatives has informed that Tamil people whose language rights are violated in hospitals in the North can visit the Human Rights Commission and make direct complaints. In some hospitals in the Northern province, doctors, nurses and other officers who only know Sinhala (and who cannot speak Tamil) have been posted. Because of this citizens who speak only Tamil, face

considerable difficulties and are put in a very embarrassing situation when they are forced to explain symptoms to doctors in Sinhala.

There is no problem if the Sinhala officers can speak Tamil. But when these officers are unable to communicate in Tamil, it becomes a big issue.

Language Rights are a fundamental right of the citizens. When this rights cannot be enjoyed, it can lead to a serious crisis and contributes to a violation of

fundamental rights.

When their language rights are violated, people can make a written complaint to the nearest Human Rights Commission office, stating the date, time and the nature of the violation. In addition to this, the Official Languages Commission has lately introduced a hot line number 1956. People can call this number and make complaints. People have to be pro active, if they are to protect their language rights.

## The Bi Lingual policy is being implemented through Language Societies

**Thinnakural**  
03.01. 2012 (page 9)

National Language Societies in the Kalmunai Tamil Division have started classes to teach Sinhala. The Ministry of National Languages has launched a programme to teach Tamil in Sinhala speaking areas and Sinhala in Tamil speaking areas. The ministry has initiated this programme with the objective of implementing the Official Language policy.

Language societies have been created based on the divisional secretariats. So far there are nearly 98 language societies in the Kalmunai Tamil DS. Provisions have been made to teach Sinhala through these language societies since 2013.

## Measures taken to send 8091 children to schools

The Ministry of Child Development and Women Affairs, has taken measures to immediately send 8091 children of school-going age to schools. Due to various reasons, these children are not currently attending schools.

Child Development and Women Affairs Minister Tissa Karaliyedda told Divaina, that it has been revealed by a survey that there were 8091 children across the country who don't attend schools due to various reasons such as financial constraints, being orphaned or abandoned by their fathers, problems persistent in schools, transport problems etc. The ministry had intervened to find solutions to their problems, and send them to

schools immediately.

The minister further said that after obtaining relevant information about these children through the child rights promotion officers in divisional secretariats, the Ministry had taken steps to give Rs. 1500 to each child of a school going age and Rs. 2000 to children who are studying for the Advanced Level examination.

Ensuring the children were sent to children to schools was being coordinated by the Probation and Child Care department and the Ministry has already deployed Rs. 11 million for this.

According to the minister, identifying the children who don't go to schools is still in process.

# Inhumanity of language oppression

"The wrong was not committed by us. The culprit is at large. We were punished...this injustice has been happening continuously..."

This is a statement made by Suresh Kumar, a youth who lives in Eravur. The incident he refers to is as follows:

Suresh Kumar and Ramesh Kumar were travelling on a motor bike. A police constable, who was on duty by the side of the road, stopped the bike on the pretext of carrying out a "routine checking". Said police officer questioned them in the language he knows, which is Sinhala. Answers were given in the language they know, which is Tamil. The police officer became very angry and Suresh and Ramesh were put in the remand! They were fined Rs. 10,000 for going against the instructions of the police officer.

"This problem was made more complicated as there was no police officer who could take down their statement in Tamil" says the reporter from Eravur. The President of the Language Society of Kaththankudy, Mrs. Saundaryarani has a similar story to tell.

"A resident of the village, made a complaint, in Tamil about an injustice happening to him. This statement was taken down in Sinhala. The complainant didn't know what he put his signature against. No inquiry was made. Finally we intervened and wrote

the complaint properly and sent it to the OIC by post. Three weeks have passed. We have not received any response yet" Mrs. Saundaryarani says. In a discussion held to discuss the language problems faced by Tamil people living in Batticaloa, many similar stories were revealed. The issues such as using only one language on the name boards in public institutions like schools, hospitals etc, issuing the circulars and other documentation of the public offices only in either Sinhala or English, and not having Tamil speaking police officers in the police stations in Tamil speaking areas were discussed at these meetings.

## Ammunition and Explosives

"Our country faced a thirty year long war. Now the war is over. But nobody won it. The victory of the war should start with addressing the language problem. If Sinhala or Tamil languages will continue to be discriminated against by the administrative and executive processes, it will be like gathering ammunition. These kinds of disastrous administrative and executive processes then become explosive one day."

This wise statement which warns about the explosive situation which results from the pressure language puts on citizens,

was made by Lawyer and author, S.G. Punchihewa.

The Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration was established on the 25.11.2010, to implement the government's language policy. Prior to the establishment of this ministry, a large number of circulars had been issued in order to implement the official language policy. According to these circulars, responses must be sent in Sinhala, Tamil or English. If the officer doesn't have sufficient knowledge of that language, it is compulsory to send a translation along. Common documents such as circulars should be issued in all three languages. If the officers have not abided by these requirements, in spite of having all the facilities, legal action should be taken. If such facilities are not available, the government should be responsible.

Implementation of these circulars took place rather sluggishly which is why the ministry role was deemed important. There are three main bodies which deliver the functions of the ministry, namely the Department of Official Languages, the Official Languages Commission and the National Institute for Language Education Training in Agalawatte. By assigning this ministry to Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara who has

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Common documents such as circulars should be issued in all three language. If the officers have not abided by three requirements, in spite of having all the facilities, legal action should be taken. If such facilities are not available, the government should be responsible.

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been a leftist politician, the government made a very wise decision. Although the process seems slow the ministry is delivering an important workload, it can be seen. However from reports from the village level, it may appear that community activity intervention has not been given sufficient attention. When even a simple task such as getting the name boards of the buses changed has not been successfully implemented, it has to be assumed that the process is too slow.

We should now give our attention to the recommendations of the LLRC, which was appointed by President Mahinda Rajapakse.

In provision number 9.239 of its chapter on Language Policy, it is mentioned that even in the present the minorities have to use a language other than their own, in getting things done. The provision 9.241 states that in order to fully implement the Language policy, activities designed for the village level

should be included in the strategic plans.

We should remind the so called patriots and those in yellow robes, who got to streets against the LLRC, that these recommendations were made, not by the traitors through an international coup, but by a group of experts appointed by the president himself.

Mr. Sundaralingam didn't receive a fair and just treatment by the police when the bus he was in met with an accident, because his right to claim for the assistance of a Tamil speaking police officer was violated. How come claiming that right and revealing his grievance to a body that fights for that right, becomes an international coup? Is it fair to interpret it as supplying oxygen to the Tamil Diaspora?

According to the composition of the population in the eastern province, the ratio of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim peoples are



almost same. But since both the Tamils and Muslims use Tamil as their mother language, the Sinhala speaking community is actually the minority. However the pressure of language put on the people when they go to private and public institutions to get things done, is still persistent.

It should be appreciated that the name boards which have been set up recently are in all three languages. But in most places we can see the name boards written only in one language. Some of them are in Tamil, and some are in Sinhala. It should be compulsory to have either Tamil speaking Sinhala officers or Tamil officers in every state institution in the Northern province. There is not a single Sinhala speaking officer in the Pottuvil bank. When Sinhala people residing in areas like Lahugala, Singhapura and Ulla visit the bank, they face problems. Mr. Gunasekera, who lives in the area says that although this has been informed to the relevant authorities, nothing has happened so far.

The language problem faced by the Sinhala people in an area where the Sinhala community is the minority is such. What does the Sinhala Diaspora living in London have to say about this? Those people who are living in London have claimed that recommendation of the LLRC is a part of an international coup against Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

Now it is the time to get over the coup phobia and be sensitive to the real ground situation.

**Thimbiriyagama  
Bandara**

## Why bank documents..... From Page 1

Representatives of the Central Bank of Ceylon told the commission that the right to obtain information in any language the client prefers is assured by the provision No: 08, 2011 and the customer charter of its 1st schedule issued on the 05.10.2012 by the Finance board of the Central Bank.

They also stated that licensed banks are required to maintain all the business related documents in Sinhala, Tamil and English and the Central Bank monitors if these banks act in compliance with the above mentioned provisions.

Meanwhile, the group of defendants who represented all the banks, said that since there is a separate authority to handle language related complaints, in future these kind of complaints should be directed to the Official Language Commission.

However, the plaintiffs disagreed and explained

at length that on previous occasions, complaints pertaining to the Official Language Policy have been directed to the Official Language Commission, but, since no effective action was taken, those complaints had to be redirected to the Human Rights Commission.

The inquiry was carried out under the complaint numbers HRC/3613/12, HRC/3614/12 and HRC/3615/12 before the director of Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission (Monitoring and Reviewing) lawyer Thisitha Samarasekera. The director of the Department monitoring Banks Mrs. T.M.J.Y.G Fernando and the director of the department to monitor the financial institutions Mr. H.M. Ekanayake represented the defendant.

Representing Centre for Policy Alternatives, the

Coordinator of its Outreach Unit, Mr. Lionel Guruge and lawyer S.G Punchihewa attended the inquiry.

Following consideration of all facts presented by both parties, the commission concluded that this nature of language related matters should be directed to the authority which is empowered to take measures regarding the issues pertaining to the official Language policy.

The commission therefore decided that this complaint and the other complaint pertaining to the implementation of the Language policy previously filed by the plaintiffs should be directed to the Official Language Commission.

The Human Rights commission has decided to submit its decision and the related documents to the Official Language Commission.

## Language issues through..... From page 4

helpless due to her inability to speak Sinhala and she had to get an officer who knew Tamil to translate what she had to say. She says that if the name boards of the roads were in all the languages and if there were alternative programme to cater the needs of the Tamil speaking people in government officers like GA office, she would not have faced such a problematic situation. She said she does not face this kind of situation where she lives.

It is reported that the project to

protect and assure the language rights of the minorities which is being implemented in five AGA divisions in Ampara district has borne successful results. We were convinced of this when we met the members of the 30 language societies of Akkaraipattu, Samathura, Kalmunai, Pottuvil and Lahugala. M. Swarnathilaka, who is a resident of Lahugala AGA division stated as follows: Earlier there were only Tamils and Muslims working in the Bank of Ceylon here. So, Sinhala speaking

people experienced many difficulties. But, as a result of the intervention made by CPA, now a Sinhala speaking employee has been allocated to the branch, which is a great relief to us.

The Language promoting society in Paranagovipala says, that the name board of Paranagovipala Junior school, Ampara and Lahugala Maha Vidyalaya, Ampara within the Ampara provincial Educational Office area are displayed only in Sinhala. The ratio of the Sinhala and

Tamil population in that area is 50: 50. There are sixty students in Paranagovipala Junior school and Lahugala Maha Vidyalaya consists of more than 1000 students. The Chariman of the Paranagovipala Language Society, Muttulingam Wijayalakshmi reported that since there is no Tamil Teacher in the Junior school, children face serious difficulties.

According to her foreign tourists also visit this area, and the sign boards are a problem for them too. She said that the relevant public officers have been informed about this situation.



This is an article presented by former Chairman of the Official Language Commission, Mr. Raja Collure. He explains the challenges and opportunities of making the public service bilingual. He is of the opinion that the main obstacle the government faces is the lack of skilled human resources. In an article appearing in the previous volume, he explained that there is not a sufficient number of Tamil speaking officers compared to the percentage of the Tamils in the population. He explained this based on the results of the surveys conducted by the Census Department. This is the second part of that article.

# Language training should be systematic

**Raja Collure**

In both tables the percentages that relate to the Provincial Public Sector are higher than in other sectors. This is because the administration in the North-East is carried out in Tamil and consequently the number of public servants proficient in Tamil in that province is higher.

There is an increase in the overall number of Tamil speaking public servant according to the 2006 survey-8.31 percent in 2001 increases to 15.7 percent.

Remedying the shortage of the employees who are competent in Tamil Language

The shortage of the Tamil speaking government employees should be fulfilled immediately. This is why we insist that more Tamil speaking people should be recruited to the public service.

## Ramupillai incident

A court case was filed against Mr. Ramupillai by Public Administration,

Local councils and internal affairs minister and others. According to the Supreme Court ruling given by a seven member jury including a member belonging to the minority, the seniority and the excellent service he had rendered had been ignored at a selection for a high position based on the fact that a specific quota should be allocated for the minorities.

Therefore it is clear that since the promotions are offered in compliance with a quota system based on the ethnicity of the candidates, the provisions in the chapter 12 are violated. The Official Language Commission is aware some legal issues emerged in this regard. Nevertheless, this incident cannot be applicable when qualified employees are recruited for the essential tasks in the administration. The Official Language Commission suggests that a new position should be introduced to the public administration in order to make it easy for the Tamil people to get

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The human resources required to implement the bilingual policy in the public service could be strengthened by providing opportunities for the public employees to achieve competence in their second language.

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things done. Although the examinations held to select the employees for public service are conducted both in Sinhala and Tamil, for some reason, Tamil medium examinations seem to be less competitive. As a result the recruitment of Tamil speaking employees is less. This adversely affects the administrative tasks performed in Tamil. This is not a good situation. This is the reason that drastic steps such as making working in Tamil Language as an

extra public service are required to be taken.

The human resources required to implement the bilingual policy in the public service could be strengthened by providing opportunities for the public employees to achieve competence in their second language.

According to the 2005 recommendations of the National Languages Commission, 3 levels of language training were identified for the public sector employees.

1. Fluency (For professionals like doctors and nurses who handle administrative level tasks)
2. Competency in spoken and written language. (For employees in the assistance managerial positions)
3. High competency in both spoken and written language. (For professionals in administrative and executive level grades)

In the beginning of the year 2007, two text books used for teaching

Tamil language to the above said first two levels were designed by two boards of expertise headed by veteran linguist Professor Sisendaraja (of the Jaffna university). Professor S. Thillainadan of University of Peradeniya and Doctor Abeyasinghe Jayakodi of the Open University were the other members of the panel. These are the text books presently used by the Department of Official Language which is authorized by the Government to carry out language training for public servants and to hold examinations to judge their competence relevant to the different levels.

## Language Training for Public Servants

The OLC has found that the Official Language Department (OLD) cannot cope with the growing demand for language training as it lacks the necessary human resources and the infrastructure to carry out such a massive task. It is for this reason that the OLD has delegated the function of organizing language programs to Provincial Councils. The OLC observes that the provincial councils have failed in carrying out that function effectively.

On the other hand sufficient funds are not allocated to the OLD and the OLC (which engage in Language training for



*Continued page 14*



# Language Rights and Humanity

## Student's essay writing competition

Write an essay on Language rights and be a winner

A baby comes out of the womb and the very first thing he smells is the smell of mother's milk....The baby grows by sucking the milk and absorbing all the nutrients in the milk. Then the baby hears the lullabies...and it starts to feel the rhythm of it's mother's language..Then he learns to communicate through his mother language. It learns about the culture it belongs to. He cultivates civilized behavior. Hence, mother language is an integral part of the life of a human being, from it's birth to death. It is important as much as mother's milk...May be more important than mother's milk. So, it is not hard to understand the pain, frustration and the desperation one may feel when he or she is deprived of the right to communicate through his/her mother language.

Depriving the people of the opportunity to use their own mother tongue, or making restrictions on it is a clear violation of rights. It is an indication of not respecting human's need and interest to live a harmonious, dignified life.

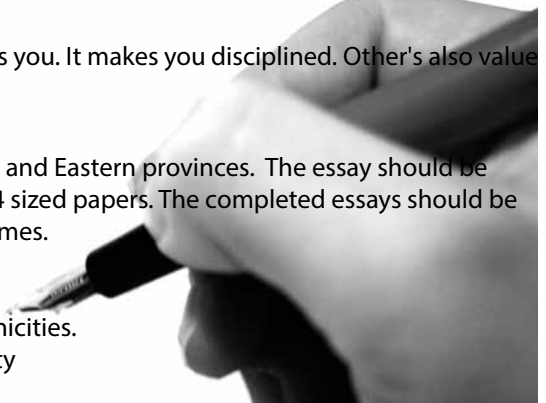
What do you feel about this? How much pain you will experience if your right to use your mother language is violated? The experiences from many countries of the world have proved that the utter frustration experienced by peoples who have been victims of the violation of language rights, can lead to disastrous conflicts. Nobody will disagree about the fact that reconciliation and non violence should take priority over conflict and killings.

Therefore, you, may also have ideas to share about the mother language, it's importance and the frustration of being victims of deprivation of it. If those ideas are substantial and they can contribute to make the human society a better one, we would like to create an opportunity for you.

Your language is beautiful to you...It sounds nice to you. It protects you. It makes you disciplined. Other's also value their own language as you value yours. Let us respect that right!

This competition is open for the O/L and A/L students of Northern and Eastern provinces. The essay should be between 750 to 1000 words. It should be written on one sided A 4 sized papers. The completed essays should be submitted to us by 01st March 2013. Below are the proposed themes.

1. Sri Lanka's ethnic problem and Language rights.
2. Language Rights are also Human rights
3. Language rights and the understanding among different ethnicities.
4. Language rights as a fundamental element of cultural diversity
5. Respecting language rights



**The best five essays will be selected from each district.**

1st prize – Rs. 7500, 2nd prize – Rs. 6000, 3rd prize – Rs. 5000, 4th prize- Rs. 3000, 5th prize – Rs. 2000  
Certificates will be awarded with these cash prizes. Certificates will be awarded to the winners of from the 6th to 10th places.

For further details and submission of the essays:

Unit Coordinator, Centre for Policy alternatives, 105, 05th Lane, Colombo 03.

School students should get their essays certified by the principals of their schools. Mention " Essay Competition" on the top left hand side of the envelop.

Your language is beautiful to you. You treasure it.

We understand and respect the importance of being able to speak in ones language.  
Let us protect that right !

An initiative of the outreach unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives

## Language training... from page 12

police officers and health personnel) to expand their language training programmes.

The 2005 recommendation of the OLC proposed the conversion of the OLD into an independent institution with divisions at the Centre and branches in different areas so as to effectively handle the training of public servants in the official languages and the link language. In our view it is also absurd for a department to be put in charge of such a subject which should be the preserve of a training institute.

There is much to learn from Canada which has been involved in developing a bilingual administration at the federal level. The federal administration in Canada has set up institutions where full time course are in place to train public servants in the second Official Language. We have recommended the adoption of a similar system so that groups of public servants are given intensive trainings in the second Official Language every year under such programs.

The training of Public Servants, both new entrants and old, in the second Official Language is a time consuming exercise. Every year about 4 to 5 percent of public servants retire or go out of service. They are replaced by the new hands needing training according to our estimates even if this policy is faithfully carried out it would take a minimum 20 years to build a public service in which all are bilingually

profession may be in about 10 years a dent can be made.

### Translators and Interpreters

What should be done to meet the immediate problems like translation and interpretation? The gravity of the problems relating to translators can

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There is much to learn from Canada which has been involved in developing a bilingual administration at the federal level.

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Government Translator Service (2004)

Total	Sinhala/Tamil Tamil/Sinhala	Sinhala/English	Tamil/English
166	44	108	14

be understood from the following table.

There are two aspects in regard to solving the problem. One is training the necessary personnel. The other is to make maximum use of those who are already competent and available.

In regarding to the trainings of translators and interpreters we have proposed that the university system which has the human resources relevant to such a task and the necessary infrastructure should be made use of. These resources can be used to train competent translators and interpreters. We have also suggested that the universities which teach Sinhala, Tamil and English language commence courses of a job oriented nature by coupling another language to their courses.

As regards the second aspect we have proposed the setting up of a National Translation Centre (2006 OLC

recommendations) where translations can be assigned to selected members of panel through electronic means (email and faxes) and obtain the product also by similar means. Thereafter the Centre could go through the translations, edit them if necessary and authenticate them. This dispenses with the need for each and every ministry of department to employ translators of their own. This could be modeled on the translation bureau of Canada.

Teaching Sinhala and Tamil in Schools

From a long term point of view the OLC's proposal to make Sinhala and Tamil apart from English as compulsory subjects in the secondary schools is of far reaching importance. If this proposal is implemented nationally within a period of about 10 to 12 years there would be a generation of citizens who will not need translation or interpretation.

### Language Audits

The official Language Commission conducts Language audits to ascertain the extent of implementation of the Language Policy. This exercise is not very rewarding as at almost every government office or public institution visited, we are told that the authorities (the Ministry of Home Affairs

appreciate the need for services in the second Official Language.

### Violation of Language Rights

The OLC is also empowered to inquire into violation of Language rights, unfortunately the complaints are few. This is not a reflection that the situation in this regard is satisfactory. A person whose Language rights are violated may be more interested in getting his job done than making complaints. The OLC has found that where services in Tamil are not available certain number of the public who are not proficient in Sinhala get their letters written in Sinhala by third persons (often paying a fee) and go to offices with persons who could help interpretation. The OLC has made every effort to promote to public to make complaints. It has on a number of occasions initiated inquiries on its own motion.

### Conclusion

All these facts reveal that enforcing language rights in Sri Lanka is a task of a complex nature. Although the requisite legal framework is in place human resources required for the purpose are not available. This is the main aspect of the problem. It can be solved only through direct recruitment and Language training. All these are time consuming.

In Canada the process of bilingualisation has already taken over forty years. If the recommendations of the OLC are implemented swiftly Sri Lanka will be able to boast of a bilingual administration in less than fifteen years.

### Awareness Programme

The awareness programmes carried out by that OLC have generally been productive. This is because we have been able to convince the public servants in places where the awareness programmes have been held of the need to adhere to the official Language policy. Such awareness programmes have helped to enlist large number of public servants to follow courses in Language training, particularly in Tamil. The OLC observes that after its awareness programme the public servants generally



# There will be many changes in the New Year

From page 7

**It is said that language policy is being implemented at public places such as bus stops, train stations etc., Are you satisfied with its success? Are you carrying out any post assessment regarding this?**

When we tried to implement language policy in the public institutions, we realized that some basic requirements have not been fulfilled. Some institutions don't have financial capacity. Some lack the knowledge. Sometimes there is no legality. For instance, over the past year, we tried to push for the announcements at the train stations to be made in all three languages. But, then we realized that making announcements was not in the job description of any employee on the duty at the station. It was not a task officially assigned to anybody. Announcements are being made by the employee who is in the lowest scale of that department. So, what we did was to take measures to give them a training in using the Tamil language. A very short course was started under the coordination of Professor Abeysinghe, of the University of Colombo. So, far we have trained over hundred employees. They made the best use of the training in making the announcements in Tamil. But the problem is that even these trained employees have other duties to perform. They have to attend to other duties during the day, while making the announcements from time to time.

The main problem here is about the administration. For this it is needed to seek the assistance of public institutions related to administration. It was essential to introduce

a new position as "Announcer of the train schedules". With effect from 31st December, It has been made compulsory that the destination name boards of the buses are displayed in all three languages. Legal action will be taken against those who violate this.

In the meantime, issuing bank documents in all three languages will be made compulsory. This will be applicable to all state banks in the country, and we hope to implement this in the private banks as well, in the future.

**Do you think that the powers vested in the Official Languages Commission are sufficient to take these initiatives forward?**

Despite the fact that there are many police stations and courts across the country, we don't see any decrease in the number of crimes committed. They continue happening every day. In the case of the Official language policy, I don't think that we can find a solution for this only by enacting the law. Merely by becoming a body that chases the people who violate the language

policies, we cannot get the official language policy successfully implemented. The most important thing is to make an attitudinal change in the Sinhala and Tamil speaking people's mindset. The background has been laid for this now. But there is a lack of resources. Since this has been ignored for a long time, there is a shortage of persons who are competent in both languages. Actually the Official Languages Commission should be vested with more powers than it possesses currently. Institutions like labour department and tax department, can themselves make complaints against the people who violate their rules.

There is a simple strategy for this. If we are allowed to follow such a strategy, we can intervene to implement language policy more effectively. If we are given quasi-judicial powers, we can make a stronger influence. However, all considering, when implementing the two language policy, the most important factor is the attitude of the citizens. At the same time the assistance and

contribution of the private and state media and all the public bodies is needed to achieve this.

**On the 28th November, the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration introduced a hot line number to solve language issues immediately. How does it function?**

It is a very good move. Our citizens were accustomed to silently tolerating it when their language rights were violated. They were not aware that it is one of their rights and that they can complain about such violations to the Official Languages Commission. Citizens were not aware that they can even take such issues to the Supreme Court. So, creating a space for the people to instantly intervene to take action when their language rights are violated, is a giant step.

**Finally, could you please explain the plans of the Official Language Commission for the year 2013.**

At the onset of the year 2013, we held a discussion with the Ministry of Public Administration, about the possible steps

to be taken to implement the recommendations of the LLRC. We came to an important decision at that discussion. We are going to establish a position of a bilingual officer for the first time in Sri Lankan history.

71 bilingual Divisional Secretariats have been identified by now. For 42 Divisional Secretariats out of those 71, this position has been already gazzetted. The Secretary to the Ministry of Public Administration has promised to establish this Bilingual officer post in these 71 DS divisions. We will take the necessary measures for this in the year 2013.

Further, we hope to take measures to get the birth, marriage and death certificates to be issued in both languages.

When the best DS Division is selected, the extent to which they implement the language policy will be used as one of the criteria from the year 2013 onwards. We have already taken steps to make the DS Division aware of this. We believe that this will also be a good start for the coming year.

## Violating language rights..... From page 5

humanity is to clear this confusion.

It is important for the people belonging to the different ethnicities to ascertain their own language rights and accept the other's language rights at the same time.

There is nothing better than achieving the ability to communicate in both languages. I don't see any reason for not being able to use both languages in our communications. I don't see a reason for not being able to maintain the identity and the dignity of one's own language while communicating in both languages.

When taking measures to assure language rights, It is very important that the government accept the fact that there is a serious issue which

they should find remedies to. This is why there should be an interrelationship between the media and the general public. It is the media who can reveal the difficulties people face pertaining to the language issues. It is the media who can generate a dialogue on what can be done and what should be done.

Finally I request you to respect language rights in your day to day life. Please don't give up the opportunity to respect your own mother language and the language of others too. You should work towards building a better future for this country. Your children should have a better future in this country. I hope that you will keep protecting and respecting language rights, in order to make this a better country for your children.

# Language rights – From village to village



The name board of the St Anthony Church in two languages (Pothuvil)

The victory of the bilinugal policy is assured by its usage. However some language rights are still confined only to the books.

But in some areas, changes are beginning to taken place! Activities to practically implement language rights, are now underway in the Ampara district. The Programme to Promote the Language Rights of the Minorities initiated by Centre for Policy Alternatives focusing on the Northern and Eastern provinces, provides guidance for these activities.

The below photographs show how they have taken steps to have the name boards of the places and the price lists of the groceries in all three languages, in Ampara district.



Price lists are displayed in all three languages (Ulla, Pothuvil)



A board that displays the hotline number for complaints about language issues (At the clock tower roundabout, Potuvil)



Name boards of the Ulla Sinhapura Samudragiri Temple and Ampara Sinhapura Sinhala School in both languages



The name board of the Lahugala ancient Mangul Maha Viharaya displayed in both languages



Name board of Panama Shri Seelarithana Sunday school displayed in both languages



The new name board sponsored by Language societies (Shri Mahindarama Viharaya, Kurullanpokuna, Panama)



How the name board of Angpitiya Shrine depicts language diversity