

Vibhasha

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Violation of the Official Languages Policy: The Official Languages Commission receives Eastern Police Heads' observations

According to the Chairman of the Official Languages Commission Nimal Ranawake, his organization has already taken the necessary first steps in relation to the complaints received by the Centre for Policy Alternatives regarding several incidents of language policy violations, and he was at present in receipt of observations from the Batticaloa and Mannar Senior Superintendent of Police Divisions regarding the same.

The above was stated in a letter sent by the Chairman of the Commission, informing the Centre for Policy Alternatives of the action taken in relation to its complaints.

According to observations presented by the Assistant Superintendent of the Batticaloa Police Division, 12 Police Stations fall under the Batticaloa Division, and Tamil and Muslim Police Officers have been appointed to these stations in order to record statements made by the Tamil speaking citizenry, as well as to assist with traffic duty. Additional Sinhala Officers who have received Tamil language training have also been appointed to these Stations according to the Senior Superintendent of Police Batticaloa Division. The observations sent by the Senior Superintendent of Police Mannar Division

to the Official Languages Commission are as below.

- » 70 Tamil and 15 Muslim Police Officers with Tamil language skills have been employed to serve at all stations within the Mannar Police Division
- » There are only two Woman Police Constables with Tamil language skills – there is a shortage of WPCs within Mannar Division
- » Officers In Charge of Police Stations within the Division have been informed to record statements and conduct investigations utilizing Officers with Tamil language skills – the recording of statements

and conducting investigations in Tamil is already underway

- » A Police Officer proficient in Tamil has been made available at the location where complaints are recorded for the ease of Tamil speaking citizens
- » Complaints and statements are recorded in the information book in both Sinhala and Tamil by way of Police Officers who have skills in both languages
- » A Tamil language training program is being conducted in order to improve the Officers' level of proficiency

To page 12

The Public Consultation on Language Rights in Sri Lanka commences



Minister of National Languages and Social Integration
Vasudeva Nanayakkara



M.A. Sumanthiran, Attorney at Law and
Member of Parliament



A group of participants

The Civil Society Collective for the Promotion of Language Rights recently conducted a Public Consultation on Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka in commemoration of the International Human Rights Day which fell on the 10th of December.

The participants at the Public Consultation, which was held on the 12th of December at the Mahaweli Centre, were from countrywide and represented a range of Community Based Organizations.

The Centre for Policy Alternatives, Eastern United

Women's Organization, Movement for the Defense of Democratic Rights, National Fisheries Solidarity Movement, People Help Foundation – Mannar, Rural Development Foundation – Vavuniya, Foundation of Rural Economic Development – Panama and

the Trincomalee Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, act as members of this collective.

A few ideas that were expressed at this Public Consultation are presented in this issue of Vibhasha via the inside pages.

The Colombo Municipality also violates language rights

A complaint to the Human Rights Commission

The Centre for Policy Alternatives has submitted a complaint to the Human Rights Commission regarding the building permit applications issued by the Colombo Municipal Council not being made available in the Tamil language.

The complaint, made on the 1st of February 2012 bearing the number HRC 636/2012 alleges that the Colombo Municipal Council is in violation of the Fundamental Rights set out via Article 12(1) of the Constitution with regards to the Tamil speaking citizenry, and requests that an order to this effect be made and due redress provided.

The complaint also



Colombo Municipal Council

states that according to the Department of Census and Statistics, over 50% of the Colombo Municipality's

residents are Tamil speakers.

The complaint also requests that an order be issued to make available the

building permit application forms in Tamil in order to prevent this continued violation of rights.

Sinhala-Tamil Writers' Association to build a National Writers' Centre

The Sinhala-Tamil Writers' Association established in 2009 with the intention of building amity and mutual understanding amongst writers from the different ethnic communities in Sri Lanka, has decided to build a National Writers' Centre. It is reported that this decision to build a National Writers' Centre, along with the decision to implement a program

encompassing several areas related to national languages and social betterment, was taken during a recent discussion held between representatives of the Sinhala-Tamil Writers' Association and the Minister of National Languages and Social Integration Vasudeva Nanayakkara. According to a spokesperson of the Sinhala-Tamil Writers'

Association, the program covers several activities including the establishment of a translation unit to identify and translate selected works of literature published in the Sinhala and Tamil languages, and a ceremony to honour Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim writers who have made significant contributions to languages and literature.

Hindi is a Foreign Language, an Indian Court decides.

An Indian Court recently made a ruling that amply illustrates the priority given to languages rights in the Indian Constitution.

A news item published in the Divayina newspaper of Monday the 2nd of January stated thus.

"The Gujarat State High Court decides that Hindi is a foreign language."

The above was stated during the decision on a case filed by a citizen of Gujarat against the National Highways Authority of India.

While the National Highways Authority of India had sent a letter in Hindi to the citizens of Gujarat, the Judge in providing the decision on the case had stated that this is a foreign language that is not understood by the citizens of Gujarat.

Wishes for a Happy New Year in which language rights are protected

2012 dawns showing signs of a new enthusiasm regarding language diversity and language rights within the country. Several items that made the headlines along with the dawn of the New Year, illustrates this fervor.

* The declaration of 2012 as the Year for a Trilingual Sri Lanka

* The launch of a 10 year plan (2012 – 2022) towards a trilingual Sri Lanka

In addition, while the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learned and Reconciliation, published at the end of last year, presented several discourse generating factors via its observations and recommendations, several suggestions towards ensuring language rights were also presented even earlier via the proposals of the All Party Representatives Committee which preceded it. Meanwhile, the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, was also showing new fervour in its activities, via providing leadership to a new program aimed at creating a network of Language Committees, through which to carry out language teaching activities and seek solutions to language related problems, which is currently underway.

While the above took place, several Non Governmental Organizations and Community Based Organizations including the Centre for Policy Alternatives also launched a number of programs aimed at the establishment of language rights within this country. The raising of awareness regarding language rights amongst the citizenry, and thereby prompting them into action towards obtaining these rights, have been ongoing continuously.

While appreciating the keenness evidenced by the combination of all of these activities, on the other hand, it is also important to pay attention to the question of how to take this enthusiasm towards an ending in which results are obtained.

It is important here to identify the fact that there are two avenues related to the present zeal.

One of them is an avenue of education, based on the belief that the problem can be solved via teaching Tamil to the Sinhalese, and Sinhala to the Tamils. Presently, with the addition of English, it has now become a trilingual project.

Language education is intrinsically fruitful. There is no debate as to its ability to solve many a problem.

However, in examining the origins of the language rights issue within the history of Sri Lanka, it is also not difficult to understand that it is not a problem related to language education alone.

It is a fundamental necessity to also understand it politically as a human right. This is the fundamental truth that should be understood, particularly when looking back from within a post war society.

It becomes a fundamental necessity here to accept it as a human right, deeply understand the social aspirations articulated therein, and provide due respect and acceptance.

It is through the right combination of these two avenues, that the full benefits of this new interest in languages seen with the dawning of the New Year can be reaped. It is the responsibility of all citizens of this country who are sensitive to language rights, to prepare the newly dawned year for this task.



Public Consultation on Promoting Language Rights

A few ideas expressed at the Public Consultation on Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka, conducted by the Civil Society Collective for the Promotion of Language Rights on the 12th of December 2011 in commemoration of the International Human Rights Day which fell on the 10th of December, are presented below.



Onwards and upwards

Lionel Guruge
Coordinator, Outreach Unit
Centre for Policy Alternatives

This Public Consultation on Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka was organized over a period of several months following a study that examined language rights issues via several avenues.

We chose to conduct this Consultation on this day as language rights is an important topic that should be discussed on Human Rights Day. We have three objectives. They are;

- » Coordinating Civil Society Organizations and ensuring their language rights
- » Taking a coordinated stand regarding language rights
- » Legally ensuring the right to work in Sinhala and Tamil

During this journey, we have noted that persons on both sides bear narrow views regarding language rights. It is apparent that there has not yet been a systematic discourse on what language rights are. However, we should keep moving onwards and upwards.

A few language lessons to be learned

Based on the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation

“

It is language that unifies and binds a nation. Therefore, it is essential that policies relating to language are formulated towards this end. It is imperative that the official languages policy is implemented in an effective manner to promote understanding, diversity and national integration.

”

The report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation was handed over to President Mahinda Rajapakse by former Attorney General C.R. de Silva on the 20th of November 2011.

The Commission conducted inquiries into events that unfolded in both the North and East as well as the South of the country from the 22nd of February 2002, when the Ceasefire Agreement signed by the then United National Party Prime Minister and the LTTE took effect, up to the cessation of the conflict on the 19th of May 2009 with the assassination of Velupillai Prabhakaran and several high ranking members.

The Commission commenced its investigations on the 11th of August 2010, and

sought representations from persons engaged in a variety of fields.

Along with Chairman C.R. de Silva, Attorney at Law Manohari Ramanathan, former Secretary to the Treasury C. Chanmugam, former Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs H.M.G.S Palihakkara, former Legal Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Rohan Perera, International Terrorism Observer and expert in Criminal Law Professor Hangawatte, former High Court Judge Maxwell Paranagama, former Ambassador S.B. Atugoda, and senior Attorney at Law M.T.M. Bafiq served as members of this Commission.

A summary of observations and recommendations from the Commission report was submitted to Parliament on the 16th of December 2011.

A summary of key observations and recommendations included therein related to the language policy of this country are presented below.

9.238 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.

9.239 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.

9.240 Whilst acknowledging

the work in progress for recruiting Tamil-speaking Police officers, the Commission notes with regret that recommendations on urgent measures made by the Commission in its interim communication to the President on these matters have yet to be implemented.

9.241 The official bodies for executing the language policies and monitoring performance should have adequate representation of the Tamil speaking people and Tamil speaking regions. The full implementation of the language policy should include action plans broken down to the community level, and appropriately covering the Divisions and Local Bodies with targets that can be monitored with citizen participation.

9.242 The people of the North and East are separated from the people of the South due to communication barriers. Every attempt must be made to create a sense of belonging among all the citizens irrespective of race, religion or social status. It is language that unifies and binds a nation. Therefore, it is essential that policies relating to language are formulated towards this end. It is imperative that the official languages policy is implemented in an effective manner to promote understanding, diversity and national integration.

9.243 The learning of each others' languages should be made a compulsory part of the school curriculum. This would be a primary tool to ensure attitudinal changes amongst

the two communities. Teaching Tamil to Sinhala children and Sinhala to Tamil children will result in greater understanding of each other's cultures.

9.244 The proper implementation of the language policy and ensuring trilingual (Sinhala, Tamil and English) fluency of future generations becomes vitally important. A tri-lingual education will allow children from very young days to get to understand each other.

9.245 The Commission welcomes the government initiative for a trilingual nation by the year 2020. To this end the necessary budgetary provisions must be made available on a priority basis for teacher training and staffing.

9.246 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.

9.247 It should be made compulsory that all Government offices have Tamil-speaking officers at all times. In the case of Police Stations they should have bi-lingual officers on a 24-hour basis. A complainant should have the right to have his/her statement taken down in the language of their choice.

9.248 The Official Languages Commission is centralized and based in Colombo and not easily accessible to rural citizenry. The Language Commission should be an authority with effective powers of implementation, and also with branches in every province.

To the next issue

Published below are a few news items related to bilingualism carried in the Sinhala and Tamil language newspapers. This segment looks at how language rights issues are depicted in the local media. The segment also examines local mainstream media's effectiveness in identifying the true issues related to language rights.



மொழியைப் பாதுகாக்க வேண்டியது எமது பொறுப்பு

மொழி ஒருங்கு சூழ்ந்த தொகுப்பெய்திற்கு இந்திய அரசு சமஸ்கிருதத்துடன் சேர்த்து 22 மொழிகளுக்கு இடம் ஒதுக்கியதாம். இதில் தமிழ் மொழிக்கு 129 இடங்களை மேற்குறித்த தொகுப்பெயர் ஒதுக்கியது ஆனால் தமிழுக்கு 350 இடங்கள் தேவையான தமிழறிஞர்கள் கோரிக்கை விடுத்திருந்தனர். இதேவேளை காஞ்சிபுரம் சங்கராச்சாரி மடத்தைச் சேர்ந்த இரமண சர்மா என்பார், சமஸ்கிருதத்திற்கென்று இருந்த 68 எழுத்துக்களில் (இதில் 41 எழுத்துக்கள் தமிழ் - சமஸ்கிருதத்திற்குப் பொதுவானது) 27 சமஸ்கிருத எழுத்துக்கள் நாட்டில் மட்டுமே

Tamil and Sinhala language teacher reserve for training government officials

Shriyani Wijesinghe

Lakbima, 04.08.2011, page 19

The National Institute of Language Education and Training has taken steps to create a reserve of teachers with the objective of teaching Sinhala and Tamil to government officials.

According to Mr. Prasath Herath, Director General of National Institute of Language Education and Training, a teacher training program has also been launched as the current approximate 600 teacher total is inadequate to meet the need.

As such, preparations have been made to conduct a 10 day residential training, commencing on the 8th of August, at the National Institute of Language Education and Training in Agalawatte. The program will be conducted in two phases, with each phase training approximately 80 persons, thereby training 160 persons per year.

The program intends to use scientific and enjoyable methods by which to teach the officials.

Those who are A/Level qualified and able to teach Tamil, as well as those who have received a Credit pass for Tamil in their O/Levels are qualified to apply.

In addition, steps have also been taken to conduct a 10 day residential training program to increase the Sinhala proficiency level of Tamil language teachers within the Jaffna District.

The training program will be held at the Kopai Teacher Training School in Jaffna from 20th to the 30th of August. 80 teachers have been chosen for this.

It is our responsibility to protect languages

N.M. Kumaravelan

Vavuniya correspondent

Weerakesari, 17th August 2011

Via a special program to protect languages, the Indian government has set aside provisions to computerize and compile a codified volume of languages including Sanskrit and 22 other scheduled languages. Though Tamil has been allotted 128 character slots in this system, Tamil linguistics experts point out that Tamil needs 350 character slots in order to place it appropriately.

In addition, Iramanu Sharma of the Kanjipuram Sangarachariy Ashram has suggested that 27 of the 68 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (the remaining 41 letters are already shared by Sanskrit and Tamil), should be amalgamated with Tamil letters. However critics point out that this is an effort to destroy the Tamil language.

The long term damage caused to the Tamil language as a result of intermittent amalgamations with Sanskrit, has been immense. It has also been a reason behind the destruction of the Tamil language in many ways. Such amalgamations lead to the loss of independence of a language. A situation of disuse and eventual extinction of a multitude of world languages has also arisen as a result of such amalgamations with

other languages. In such a setting, Tamil should be given its due place within the compilation and have its longevity assured.

While the securing of an existing language happens on several levels, steps should be taken to ensure the independence and identity of Tamil within a multi lingual setting.

This compilation will include Tamil along with several other languages. It will also include the over 70 different symbol characters that belong to these languages. This is a language project that has its creation based in history. While it should be adequately controlled and its benefits reaped, steps should also be taken to protect its historicity. The effort should move forward with an adequate understanding of this historic responsibility.

Further, in your paper dated 17.07.2011, in the article titled "The world quaking enigma", the French word "theyava" is given an amazing Tamil description by you.

Such matters should also be considered part of the effort taken to destroy Tamil via the infusion of Sanskrit. It is the identity and antiquity of Tamil that is harmed by such acts. As such I would like to state that the responsibility of protecting it falls on the speakers of the language and on the media.

A program to provide bilingual skills free in concurrence with the President's 2nd term

Gayathri Geeganaarachchi

Lakbima, 13.12.2011, page 17

A program to provide bilingual skills to Sri Lankans for free, in concurrence with the President's 2nd term in office, has been launched by the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration. The program is conducted with the aim of providing bilingual skills to all government officials, students, and the general public by 2016.

While this program will be conducted at the District level, its Monaragala District workshop commenced recently in the Thanamalwila Hambegamuwa service area. Tamil Level III classes were launched herein for officials of government and private institutions, and students. Those who complete this continuous course will then be eligible to follow the Tamil Level II course. More information about this course can be obtained via contacting the National Integration Promotion Assistant of the Monaragala District.



Disrespecting language rights is an insult to a people

Dr. P. Saravanamuttu

Executive Director, Centre for Policy Alternatives

Dr. Saravanamuttu welcomed participants to the consultation, and went on to say that language rights could be considered a human right that affects the largest number of people in the country, in practice, as well as being perhaps arguably the least interesting in terms of state or political actors. He pointed out that one can even say that this apathy or lack of regard to

language rights could have a certain political potential, which can be exploited.

He went on to say that better attention to language rights could make an important difference to the people of this country. Outlining the history of language rights in Sri Lanka, he pointed out that the Official Languages Commission was in place from 1990.

“Yet many challenges,

obstacles, inconveniences and embarrassments were faced by people in their day to day lives due to the failure to implement the Official Language Policy of the country. This could be due to a lack of prioritization by the Legislature as well as the Executive of the issue of language rights. The fact that we still hear of the obstacles and humiliations faced by citizens, coming from this failure, shows the lack of commitment, and sincerity on the part of the powers that be in this regard.

In this post war situation, our main challenge now is to move to a post conflict situation, where the sources of the conflict are not sustained and not reproduced. Those sources arise from the simple fact that our architectures, institutions and processes of governance do not convince all the people of this island that they belong here, that they are part of this, that they are stakeholders and not hapless bystanders.

If we are to move into being a trilingual society we need, as civil society and as ordinary citizens to put as much pressure on such moribund institutions to make sure that language rights are respected and fully

implemented.”

Dr. Saravanamuttu stated the below in closing.

“Language is the means of communication of people. If people cannot communicate they will live in isolation without understanding or sympathy. It also underscores the identity, culture, and aspirations of a people. If it is not respected and given a place in society, this is an insult and a rejection of the people who speak that language, and will not contribute to reconciliation and to the robust national unity needed for this country to move forwards towards a post conflict situation.”



What is needed is a change of attitudes

M.A. Sumanthiran

Attorney at Law, Member of Parliament

“Often it was said that language was the root of the conflict, but maybe that was

only the visible source. After Tamil was made an Official Language, some problems were

actually greater than before. For example as recent as 2010, after the war ended and after a Minister was appointed for National Language and Social Integration, the currency notes issue came up. The Indian rupee has thirteen languages written on it. Our currency note previously had the ‘promise to pay’ section in Tamil.

I disagree with people who say we must all get together and implement the Language Policy. No. The Language Policy has to be implemented by the government. Just preparing a policy, adjusting the Constitution and making Tamil a National Language means nothing. You can say trilingualism is a state policy – that means nothing.

Six months ago I had to

make a statement in Jaffna at the Thellipalai Police Station in Sinhala, and I told the officers that this was a violation of my rights - soldiers in full uniform had stormed a meeting and dispersed it. In any case whatever language I had put it in, there would not have been any redress. Language is not really the important issue here. There has to be a shift in the thinking of the governors. People should be ready for it. There are enough circulars; there must be a fundamental change of attitudes. People have to understand that it is a plural society, and the majority has to be able to live with that comfortably. Until then no amount of complaints, circulars or policy changes will do.

To page 14



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**Consultation on
 Language Rights in Sri Lanka**
 December 12th 2011
 Coomaraswamy Mawatha, Colombo 07
 society collective are
 ation, Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights (MDDR),
 Foundation - Mannar Rural Development Foundation - Vavuniya,
 nama & Sarvodaya Sramadana Sanigamaya

Usage is necessary for learning a language

D.L.F Shamila
 Lecturer, University of Colombo

Language is a more emotional thing than a mere tool used to express ideas. As such, a language is considered both a fundamental right in a country as well as a human right. Next to religion, it is the language he speaks that a human focuses on the most. Various problems will arise as a result of attempting to force a language other than his or her mother tongue on a person.

Language is a subject that is different to others. To learn it well, it must be used.



All parents should teach their children that if they learn two languages they become not one person but two people. Similarly if you know many languages you can become many people.

We can be happy if all Sri Lankans receive the opportunity to work in all three languages.



Language has no high and low status

Sanoji Perera
 Assistant Commissioner, Official Languages Department

Circulars 3/2007 and 7/2008 have mandated that all government officials should acquire proficiency in both Sinhala and Tamil in the near future. As such, the Official Languages Department is conducting classes to develop government officials' bilingualism as well as English skills. Further, as per circular 7/2008, all government officials should also obtain language proficiency certification.

Finding translators can be difficult. As such, as a solution to this problem, we have taken steps to form a collective of translators that are spread out island wide and make them available through our department. As at now we have a 150 strong reserve

of translators. A newspaper advertisement was placed calling for applications from persons with Sinhala and Tamil skills. We received 300 applications and we expect to add them to our reserve. If bilingualism develops within the government service, we would be able to provide a good service to those who come to us. Learning a language enables us to utilize the contribution of those peoples. There are approximately 4000 languages in use around the world. Linguistically speaking one language cannot be considered higher or lower than another. What we need to do is to design a better government service via the development of trilingualism.



The role of Civil Society Organizations in the promotion of language rights

B. Skandakumar
 Senior Researcher,
 Law and Society Trust

Mr Skandakumar began his speech by sharing some of his more recent experiences related to work in this area. He pointed out that their anticipated role is to raise understanding and awareness amongst the citizenry of their rights, with a focus on affected persons with the aim of prompting them to claim their rights. An extract from his speech is presented below.

"Beginning with the idea of recognizing that we have rights, how do we understand that what we have experienced is discrimination? Then it is important to recognize for example that you have a right to transact with public servants in a language of your choice. Linguistic rights are fundamental rights and

human rights. Who is to blame for these rights being denied, are they just prejudiced insensitive officials, or institutions which lack capacity, equipment etc, or is it a systemic, structural, or social problem? After you find out what the cause is where do you go to seek redress? We are fortunate that we do have a mechanism where those who have suffered a violation, can go, and submit a complaint. This brings us to the next important issue, which is, why then is it that Tamil speakers, even though they recognize that they have these rights, choose not to enforce them; why do they not demand this justice? That is a much bigger issue which cannot be addressed by looking at language rights itself in a vacuum.

It is important for civil society to be watchdogs, and to be alert and give voice on behalf of those who have no voice."

Addressing the Public Consultation on Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka, Mr. S.G. Punchihewa, Attorney at Law stated that while the problems faced by Sri Lankan citizens, resulting from the violation of their language rights, cannot be solved by Circulars alone, it was a tragedy that efforts that had commenced in at least this manner were not being carried out appropriately.

To support his ideas expressed at the Consultation that was held at the Mahaweli Centre in Colombo in commemoration of the International Human Rights Day, Mr. Punchihewa cited the findings of a study regarding the implementation of language rights in the Ampara, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Mannar Districts, conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in 2011.

Of these, a few findings that arose from the Vavuniya District were as below.

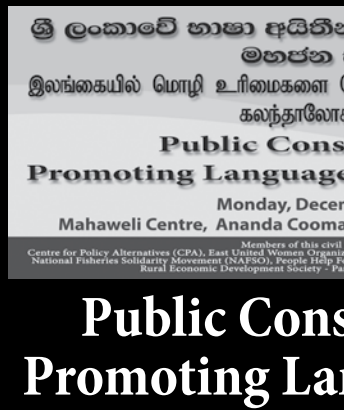
- Complaints that are made by Tamil citizens are recorded in Sinhala at Police Stations, and the complainants are subsequently asked to sign these statements.
- Urban Council officials using the Sinhala language when transacting with Tamil citizens.
- Letters issued from Colombo being sent in Sinhala alone to Tamil citizens, and letters issued from regional offices being sent in Tamil alone to Sinhala citizens.
- Letters issued by zonal education offices being sent in Sinhala alone.
- Sinhala officials at certain zonal education offices distorting Tamil wording {(Kalvi = education) - (Kalavi = raping of women)}.
- Tamil citizens facing difficulties as a result of the majority of doctors and nurses being Sinhala.
- Tamil citizens being questioned in Sinhala at check points.
- Government institutions in the North sending letters in Sinhala to Tamil citizens.
- Street signboards being mostly in Tamil alone.
- Signboards on busses travelling from Vavuniya to



Language problems cannot be solved by Circulars alone

S.G. Punchihewa, Attorney at Law

- Colombo being in Sinhala alone.
- Banks operating in English alone (names such as "Sisu Udana" and "Isuru Udana" are not available in Tamil)
- A roadblock was marked stop in Sinhala, but its Tamil counterpart was marked stop with an insulting and derogatory connotation ("Navathinna" in Sinhala and "Navaththapang" in Tamil).
- The name "Kalubanda", was translated to Tamil as "Karuppu (black) Banda".
- A translator's assistance is required even when selling a car. If not there is no ability to provide or receive information.
- The same birth certificate and identity card had to be changed 3 times as a result of language problems.
- The Traffic Police issuing tickets in Sinhala alone.
- The majority of doctors use Sinhala alone even when providing specialist services that are charged for.
- During a discussion with the Government Agent regarding disaster management, the Provincial Secretary asking persons present if they spoke English as they did not speak Sinhala and the Government Agent did not speak Tamil.
- Tamil teachers in Ampara have also been sent Teaching Guides in Sinhala. Translations are sent late.
- Only a few trained Tamil and Sinhala teachers have been appointed to these Districts.
- The subject matter in Tamil science text books is entirely different to that in the Sinhala science texts. However the examination papers set for both are the same.
- Publications by the National Institute of Education are either not sent in adequate numbers in Tamil or are sent late.
- Certain courses at the Colombo University are conducted in the Sinhala language alone.
- Tamil medium applicants have received examination applications in Sinhala.
- Tamil citizens in the Eastern Province receive summons in Sinhala.
- Court transactions and case hearings are conducted in Sinhala or English.
- Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Establishment Code are issued in Sinhala alone.
- While there is a Tamil translation of the 1971 Establishment Code, there isn't one of the 1985



amendment. The amendment extends the leave available to those traveling abroad from 3 months to 6. However as there is no Tamil version of the amended Establishment Code of 1985, Tamil persons receive only 3 months of leave based on the 1971 version.

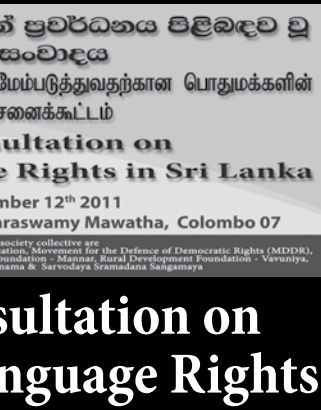
- The 141 form, common in medical records, is only available in Sinhala
- Circulars of Line Ministries are in Sinhala.
- Labels of the majority of consumer goods are in Tamil.
- When attempting to obtain electricity, a Tamil form alone is provided. In some areas it is a Sinhala form alone that is provided.
- Even in areas such as Vavuniya and Mannar, the Census and Statistics training has been provided in Sinhala medium.

In conclusion, Mr. Punchihewa passed around a few monetary notes amongst the participants and drew their attention to 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".

This phrase was not printed in Tamil.

The notes were issued in 2010, subsequent to the issue of numerous Circulars and Acts on language rights.

As such, Mr. Punchihewa closed his remarks by pointing out that there are still problems in implantation though the legal framework exists, and emphasizing the fact that what is necessary is an attitudinal change with regards to language rights.



Public Consultation on Language Rights

“ We work on raising awareness, but the changes are not in proportion to the awareness raised. Let us begin by prioritizing focus on one aim. Let us join hands to make our program one which is more widespread. I invite all organizations that are interested in this to join us

”

The language problem is a longstanding problem faced by Sri Lanka. Canada too has been facing this problem for the last 40 years. In a country that has more than one language, the learning of a National Language, Official Language, State Language and Link Language, occurs. Sri Lanka does not have states. The Central Government holds the responsibility for the majority of tasks here. Both languages should be used when the Central Government is transacting. Then we will be able to establish a level of stability that Canada doesn't have. This is to say that even though we do not have features of States, the Provincial Councils should also transact in both languages. This is the law. However the fact that it is not implemented this way is a problem. As such our responsibility is in ensuring its implementation and usage.



Though slow, a change is taking place

Minister Vasudeva Nanayakkara

Based on the views expressed by Minister of National Languages and Social Integration Vasudeva Nanayakkara, while addressing the Public Consultation on Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka, held in commemoration of the previous International Human Rights Day.

First we faced the problem of not having Police Officers who spoke both languages. As such, with new appointments we chose persons who had proficiency in both languages. We also created a book of phrases necessary for the Police. That book contains the phrases that are frequently needed for Police work in Sinhala, Tamil and English. We need more officers who speak Tamil in the Police. That is a major step.

We faced a war for a long period of time. During that time the focus was on obtaining what was necessary for the war and not on matters such as the implementation of the Official Languages Policy. It did not receive the government's attention. During that time, there were also no appointments made on the basis of ethnic proportions. There were Ministries and Departments. While certain activities did take place, action regarding the overall problem was not taken. The Tamil language issue took a backseat to the war. As such the steps necessary to face this major challenge were not taken. Steps were taken to some extent to raise awareness amongst the Sinhala community that the Tamil community has

the right to be able to transact in their own language. Steps were taken to create a background of consensus amongst the Sinhala populace in order to arrive at a solution.

The documentation sent to areas in which the majority population was Tamil, not being available in Tamil, was a major problem. Forms sent from Colombo were not available in Tamil. That was a common complaint. If these complaints are received with certainty we take action. Surveys regarding the matter are still in the initial stages. The capacity we have for this is low. Persons have to be appointed to conduct an island-wide survey. The final stages would be to conduct the survey, analyze findings and provide solutions. A survey is necessary. Various efforts need to be taken. For example, there are no Tamil speaking guides at the National Museum. Though it is not under my Ministry I am working on it. The reason for this is because it is a place of great significance. However such action has been delayed due to the inefficiency of government institutions. Even documentation that is sent to the North Eastern Provincial Councils

is sent in Sinhala. All Police Stations work in Sinhala. This is the general situation. But this general situation is in the process of changing in certain areas.

For example, a Christian religious leader complained approximately two years ago that all transactions at the Mannar Police take place in the Sinhala language alone. But last week he stated that a complaint was made in Tamil.

This is a slow process. But a conversion is taking place. However, going at this tortoise pace is of no use. If both Sinhala and Tamil are not used in Sri Lanka, a gap will exist everywhere; or an opposition. If we receive specific information regarding problems we can take action. At times we face problems of inefficiency and opposition. In order to build one nation everyone should be of the feeling that we are one nation. The issue is not whether a language is known or not, but whether a language is accepted and respected or not; if it is given equality or not. We should free ourselves of attitudinal misconceptions and ignorance regarding language rights. We have opposition and opposing attitudes within us. All these facets should be remedied. Together we are in the process of establishing public committees. If the Language Committees program becomes popular in Sri Lanka, an avenue through which to increase awareness will be created. Share your findings. We will provide solutions.

We intend on establishing a "Language Assistance Window" at all major public locations. We intend to establish a common Call Centre particularly in areas in which many persons are bilingual. There will be problems during implementation. But we plan to launch this program in the North and East, the Plantation Sector, and in other areas that are bilingual.

We work on raising awareness, but the changes are not in proportion to the awareness raised. Let us begin by prioritizing focus on one aim. Let us join hands to make our program one which is more widespread. I invite all organizations that are interested in this to join us.

How to seek redress in the event of a language rights violation?

Official Languages Commission

Through our previous issues, we published two articles examining the mechanisms through which to seek redress in the event of the violation of a language right in Sri Lanka. While we discussed The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka through our preceding issue, in this issue we introduce the Official Languages Commission.

Citizens' participation is an essential element in seeking solutions against the violation of a citizen's rights, and citizens' awareness is a key factor in promoting such participation.

As such, this series of articles aims to create and further such awareness.

The Official Languages Commission is a statutory body established by Act No. 18 of 1991. The Commissioner of the Official Languages Department shall be the Secretary to the Official Languages Commission, according to the Act.

Objectives of the Official Languages Commission

1. To recommend principles of policy relating to the use of the Official Languages and to monitor and supervise compliance with provisions contained in Chapter IV of the Constitution (which lays down the Official Languages Policy of the state).
2. To promote the appreciation of the Official Languages and the acceptance, maintenance, and continuance of their status, equality and right of use.
3. To conduct investigations, both on its own initiative and in response to any complaints received, and to take remedial action as provided for by the Act.

Powers of the Official Languages Commission

1. Initiate reviews of any regulations, directives, or administrative practices, which affect, or may affect, the status or use of Sinhala, Tamil and English.
2. Issue or commission studies or policy papers on the status or use of these languages as it may deem necessary.
3. Undertake public educational

activities.

4. Do all other things necessary to attain the objectives of or exercise the powers of the Commission.

When a complaint can be made to the Commission

1. When the status of an official language is not being recognized.
2. When the use of language is not in compliance with the Official Language Policy set out in the Constitution.
3. When a provision of an Act, regulation, rule, order, notification, by-law, directive by a public institution or administrative practice thereof, implementing the Official Language Policy, is not being complied with.
4. When the objectives and intent of Chapter IV of the Constitution is not being respected or complied with.

A complaint may be made to the Commission, by any person or groups of person who may be directly affected by an act or omission, or by an organization or parties acting bona fide to bring to the attention of the Commission, an act or omission which requires investigation. The complaint will be treated as a confidential communication by the Commission, and the identity of the individuals concerned will not be revealed without prior consent.

The investigative procedure

1. Determine if the complaint should be investigated.

2. Notify the head of the public institution to which the complaint relates of its intention to conduct an investigation.
3. Afford such individual and institution the opportunity to respond to any comments or criticisms.
4. Summon witnesses and conduct the investigation.
5. Issue a final report containing recommendations and directives as the Commission thinks fit (within 120 days of the making of the complaint).

Investigative powers of the Commission

When conducting an investigation or review under this Act, the Commission has the power to -

1. Summon witnesses.
2. Compel the production of all documents that it may deem necessary.
3. Administer oaths and compel witnesses to give oral or written evidence under oath.
4. Accept and consider any other form of information or evidence as the Commission sees fit at its discretion, regardless of its evidentiary value in a court of law.
5. Conduct such investigations in the premises of any public institution as it may deem fit.

Utilizing these powers, the Commission should make available its report within sixty days of the making of the complaint. If the investigation cannot be concluded due to reasons beyond the control of the Commission, and a final report cannot be issued within 60 days, the Commission should file an interim report within the 60 day period outlining the reasons for the delay. Irrespective of any aforementioned delay, the Commission is required to issue a final report within 120 days of the making of the complaint.

If a violation by act or omission is revealed via the investigation

- » The Commission may make recommendations via a report, along with reasons for the same, to the public institution, to alter or discontinue any directive or practice that leads or is likely to lead to a contravention of the Official Language Policy.
- » The Commission may make recommendations via an interim report, and direct the head of the public institution concerned to notify the Commission within a specified period of time, of the action the institution proposes to take to effect its recommendations.

Enforcement of recommendations

- Where the public institution has not given effect to the recommendations of the Commission within a 90 day period from receipt of its report, the Commissioner of the Official Languages Department, or the complainant, after informing the Attorney General in writing, may apply to the High Court of the Province the complainant resides in, within 90 days of the expiry of the period within which the recommendations were to be given effect. (Section 25 of the Act)

Where any person has made a complaint to the Commission and has not been informed of the results of the investigation within 120 days of the making of the complaint, or where the Commission has informed the complainant of its decision to refuse to investigate or to cease investigations, the complainant may apply to the Supreme Court within 30 days of the expiry of the 120 day period, or from the date of receipt of the communication regarding the refusal to investigate or cessation of investigations.

Special powers of the Commission

The Commission may on its own initiative, conduct investigations in to a particular incident. Further, as per Section 28 of the Act, when a public official who is required to use an official language in the performance of his official duties, willfully fails or neglects to do so in such relevant language, he can be taken to summary trial before a Magistrate.

Organizations that fall within the purview of the Commission

According to the Act, the Commission may only investigate violations by public institutions. As such, public institutions include;

- » Any Ministry or department under such Ministry
- » Any public corporation or statutory institution
- » Any Provincial Council or local authority
- » Any business undertaking, firm, company or other institution vested in the Government or owned wholly by, or on behalf of the Government

The address and phone number to be contacted in the event of a violation is as below.

Chairman,
Official Languages Commission,
4th Floor, "Bhasha Mandiraya",
341/7, Kotte Road,
Rajagiriya.
Telephone 0112 871378

Note
Jagath Liyana Arachchi
Attorney at Law (L.L.B)

In studying the language policy of Sri Lanka, its history is an important factor that should be paid attention to. The final in a series of articles that examined the history of Sri Lanka's language policies, from the colonial period onwards, is presented in this issue of Vibhasha.

Then and Now Language Policies

S.G. Punchihewa, Attorney at Law

This convention was signed by Governor Robert Brownrig on behalf of the King of Britain and Adigars, Government Agents and Aristocrats on behalf of Sinhalese citizens.

Accordingly the methods of capital punishment and corporal punishments including chopping of hands, legs, nose and ears that prevailed at that time were abolished.

British rule was implemented. Areas were administrated by Government Agents.

Though the honouring of the leaders continued, prostrating, worshipping and kneeling before the Governor and the aristocrats was abolished. However, when a leader travels on a road, people should get on to a side. When a leader arrives, people should get up from their seats and

1815 (2nd March) Kandyan Convention

greet him.

Among a host of other issues, the above conditions were put in to practice. It is certain that common people were happy to accept these conditions. They were relieved that they are now free from painful corporal punishments, fines etc.

Thereafter on an order issued by the Governor on 21.11.1818, any fees or payments to Government or its leaders for any appointments was prohibited. Giving gifts to Governor or officers was also prohibited.

But paying of various taxes to the government prevailed.

The above issues are highlighted to show that most citizens were happy regarding the way they were ruled. During this period there were no communal feelings. The concessionary situation was accepted by all as human beings. It was the cruelty

and the inhuman treatment they suffered at the hands of the King and the aristocrats which made people to enjoy the British rule. Such a pleasing administration was done by the British in English Language. Honouring the British continued and it was automatic that the language was also honoured. Paying homage to English Language which started then, continues to date. There was consent to suppress our own language and the habit of suppressing the Tamil language which was in use then, also stated. Judging by the conditions that prevailed it was anticipated that a better status could be achieved. But the result was that we became slaves to foreign dominations. The malefic practices we acquired regarding the language are displayed and proved in the history thereafter.

(Extract from the publication "Language and Humanity")

Global struggle to protect languages 200 languages extinct 2,500 more in the red

The majority amongst us still view a phrase such as "securing the language rights of ethnic minority communities" with feelings of suspicion.

However, the majority of academics that study linguistics as well as international organizations such as UNESCO are of the view that the languages of ethnic minority communities are a valuable heritage that should be preserved for future generations as well. A study of New Guinea languages conducted by Yoseph Wally,

an anthropologist at Cendrawasih University in Jayapura, has revealed several findings in this regard. He points out that many languages of New Guinea - the world's greatest linguistic reservoir - are disappearing in a tide of indifference.

According to his findings, New Guinea is home to more than 1,000 languages. Of these, approximately 800 were spoken in Papua New Guinea and 200 in Indonesian Papua. However, what is unfortunate is that the majority of these languages



understand a word of the traditional language.

"Certain languages disappeared very quickly, like Muris, which was spoken in an area near here until about 15 years ago" Yoseph Wally explained.

have fewer than 1,000 speakers.

The majority of New Guinea's people live in rural areas, and many tribes, especially in the isolated mountains, have little contact with one another, let alone with the outside world.

According to Yoseph Wally who focused on their language usage, Indonesian is increasingly spoken more and more. Only the oldest people still speak in the local dialect. He added that in some villages he visited, not a single person could

Cut off almost entirely from the external world, these communities lead an isolated life. The most widely-spoken language is Enga, with around 200,000 speakers.

Next to Indonesian, this community is mostly influenced by the English language, resulting from its proximity to Australia. As a result the use of English is increasing while traditional languages are being reserved for celebrations and festivals.

Violation of the Official Languages Policy... From page 1

In addition to the above, the Chairman of the Commission has also informed the Centre for Policy Alternatives of all action taken by the Official Languages Commission regarding the submitted complaints.

Action taken by the Official Languages Commission regarding the Centre for Policy Alternatives' complaints

Complaint	Action
Complaints and statements made by Tamil speaking persons being recorded in Sinhala at certain Police Stations within the Batticaloa Senior Superintendent of Police Division	Requested information from the Batticaloa Senior Superintendent of Police via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/178
Street signboards within the Kalmunai Municipal Council not containing the street name in the Sinhala language	Requested information from the Municipal Commissioner via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/179
The Embarkation Cards issued at the Bandaranaike International Airport by the Department of Immigration and Migration not being available in Tamil	Requested information from the Controller General of Immigration and Emigration via a letter dated 22.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/180
Complaints and statements made by Tamil speaking persons being recorded in Sinhala at certain Police Stations within the Vavuniya Senior Superintendent of Police Division	Requested information from the Vavuniya Senior Superintendent of Police via a letter dated 22.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/181
Street signboards within the Thirappane Pradeshiya Sabha not containing the street name in the Sinhala language	Requested information from the Secretary of the Thirappane Pradeshiya Sabha via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/182
Complaints and statements made by Tamil speaking persons being recorded in Sinhala at certain Police Stations within the Trincomalee Senior Superintendent of Police Division	Requested information from the Trincomalee Senior Superintendent of Police via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/183
Complaints and statements made by Tamil speaking persons being recorded in Sinhala at certain Police Stations within the Ampara Senior Superintendent of Police Division	Requested information from the Ampara Senior Superintendent of Police via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/185
Street signboards within the Thirukkivil Pradeshiya Sabha not containing the street name in the Sinhala language	Requested information from the Secretary of the Thirukkivil Pradeshiya Sabha via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/186
Complaints and statements made by Tamil speaking persons being recorded in Sinhala at certain Police Stations within the Mannar Senior Superintendent of Police Division	Requested information from the Mannar Senior Superintendent of Police via a letter dated 21.11.2011 bearing my reference number OLC/C/189

Global struggle to protect... From page 11

Though the influence of English is systematically spreading in Papua New Guinea, it has made little headway with some tribes, particularly those living in the isolated highlands.

The authorities are sometimes accused of inaction, or even of favoring the official language to better integrate the population, particularly in Indonesian Papua.

Some researchers have suggested recording the languages that face extinction as a means of preserving this valuable heritage for future generations. However this

becomes a difficult task when many are exclusively oral.

The Oxford University has launched a special program through which such languages will be recorded via its speakers. At present, there are only 3 persons, Emma, aged 85, Enos, 60, and Anna, also 60, who are the three last Papuans to speak Dusner, a language that presently faces extinction. The University has begun a race against the clock to record Dusner with the assistance of Emma, Enos and Anna, and believes that this effort would help preserve for a future

generation, a language that faces extinction at present.

Further, anthropologist Wally believes that art and culture are mediums which can be utilized to conserve – in the truest sense of the word - Papuan languages that have fallen into disuse and are no longer spoken in everyday life.

According to Wally, Papuans love to sing and celebrate, and it is his view that they should engage in these activities in their traditional languages. He believes that by doing so, the younger generations' interest in the language can be sparked as they would want to discover it in order to understand the meanings of the songs et al, thereby intrinsically conserving the language.

However, according to UNESCO, more than 200 languages have become extinct around the world over the last three generations. Of a total of 6,000 remaining world languages, a further 2,500 languages are under threat according to a UNESCO list of endangered languages.

It is up to those of us alive today to take on the responsibility of not letting these languages merely lay fading away in the UNESCO endangered list facing eventual extinction, but instead to preserve them in order to pass on this heritage to future generations.

Based on an AFP news item

In the previous issue of Vibhasha, we discussed the language and cultural problems faced by the indigenous community of Vakarai, located in the Eastern Province. Influenced by the Tamil language and culture, they are commonly known as the Tamil Veddahs. In this issue, we focus our attention on the problems faced by the indigenous community residing in the Rathugala and Pollebedda areas, which is influenced by the Sinhala language and culture and are thereby mingling with a Sinhala identity.

The ancestors of the Rathugala indigenous community, who are the descendants of Maha Bandara of Danigala, had lived in caves. Subsequent to the commencement of the Galoya project, a portion of them migrated to Pollebedda, while the remainder moved to Rathugala. One hundred and one indigenous families reside in the Rathugala area at present. They had received 20 houses during the Ranasinghe Premadasa era.

While some have received Jayabhoomi deeds from the Madulla Provincial Secretariat, others have received licenses under the Land Development Ordinance. Though they have been encouraged to engage in farming, they have been shifting away from agricultural activities as a result of the drought that prevails throughout the majority of the year, the lack of an irrigation system, and their disinterest in farming.

Several high ranking officials, led by the President, had attended the discussion held at the Presidential Secretariat on the 12th of April 2008 in order to address the longstanding grievances of indigenous communities.

Vannila Aththo of Dambana had made several key requests on behalf of indigenous communities during this discussion. Twenty requests were presented therein, which included the formulation of laws to preserve the ancestral identity and heritage of indigenous

Telling the world of a generation's tragedy – the indigenous people of Rathugala and Pollebedda



communities, the provision of water facilities to indigenous villages for drinking and agricultural activities, the commencement of a program centered around an agricultural lifestyle in order to raise the standards of living, the provision of housing, provision of land to the landless, confirmation of their indigenous identity, the provision of access to forest conservation areas in order to worship at their ancestral sacred places of worship, and the inclusion of a symbol on the National Identity Card by which to be identified as indigenous peoples.

In keeping, several important decisions were taken therein, including the provision of 100 acres of land from B2 Wewatte plot of the Bibila Nilagala area.

"We object to being given land where the trees have been cut down. We cannot maintain our lifestyle on an empty land".

When we addressed the above allegation by Sudha Vinniyalaaththo, the leader of the Rathugala indigenous people, to Mr. R.K. Dayaratne, the Forestry Officer of Nilgala, Bibila; his response was as below.

"Initially they had requested 100 acres for farming. The land you refer to is not 100 acres. It is only 58. The handing over of forestry conserved from the time of King Buddhadasa for personal use is against circulars. When a land is being released by the Department of Forest Conservation for farming purposes, the responsibility of cutting down and removing the trees in it falls on the State Timber Corporation."

It appears that the indigenous peoples' requests are stuck in circulars. Forestry Officials level allegations that the indigenous people show no interest in farming and that they have cut down and sold off the trees on their land. It comes as no surprise that a people traditionally engaged in the livelihood of hunting and gathering honey comb, show little interest in farming.

The allegations arising from the Pollebedda area, where the rest of Maha Bandara of Danigala's descendants reside, are no different to those arising from Rathugala. According to Goba (87), the leader of the Pollebedda indigenous community, though a land of 2,500

acres has been requested for the purposes of hunting, gathering honey comb and "Kenniya" comb (a comb built in the hollow of a tree trunk by an animal smaller than a Bee), it has not been received so far. The Pollebedda community adds that they have lost their traditional livelihood, and that they do not have a land, nor irrigation facilities suitable for farming.

There are 422 students registered at the Pollebedda school. Approximately 150 of them are children of the indigenous community. According to the Principal of the Pollebedda school, though steps have been taken to provide uniforms, books and lunch (up to grade 5), the majority of students dropout after grade 7 or 8.

According to many, not only the school but the entire village is drastically affected by a lack of water, and the water distributed via the Pradeshiya Sabha bowser does not suffice.

Having to live in one house along with several extended families is another problem faced by

Telling the world of a generation's tragedy...

From page 13

both the Pollebedda and Rathugala indigenous communities. The housing program carried out both in Pollebedda and Rathugala are rife with grave shortcomings.

Though 20 houses were distributed under the initiative of Minister Ferial Ashraff, the recipients complain that many houses do not even have doors as a result of the shoddy construction work.

According to Mr. Saman Bandara (32), Cultural Officer of the Mahaoya Divisional Secretariat, "the Divisional Secretary has taken steps to provide 1 1/2 acres of land each when the Rambakan Oya project commences. The distribution of land deeds and licenses has already begun. As such there will be better results in the future".

According to Mr. Sandaruwan Lokuhewa, a journalist with significant experience regarding the Pollebedda indigenous community, a long term plan is necessary in order to uplift the standard of living of the indigenous peoples. He is of the opinion that providing them with vocational training is more important than providing land due to their low enthusiasm towards farming.

"It is a sad fact that some of the younger members are addicted to drugs, are involved in prostitution, and activities such as brokering cows for Muslims. Their social isolation is one of the causes" Mr. Sandaruwan Lokuhewa added sorrowfully.

'Vedirata', an area that includes the Ampara,

Monaragala and Mahiyangana Districts and the southern portion of the Polonnaruwa District, was home to indigenous communities from well before the arrival of the Aryans. In "A Grammar of the Sinhalese Language", Professor Wilhelm Geiger states that the indigenous communities of Nilgala South and Seethala Wanniya showed residual unassimilated traces of the original inhabitants of Lakdiva. An 1863 report by John Bailey contains information on how the indigenous community lived in the forests of Nilgala. It is Professor Seligmann that subsequently studied the indigenous peoples. Ten years after Seligmann's study, Dr. R.L. Spittel's journey into Seethala Vanniya in order to treat the indigenous community, ended with his becoming their "Dukannarala" (a confidant and counselor of sorts).

"It was Spittel hura that brought about 6 families here. After him, no one looked in on us as much as he did" Thala Bandaralage Gunawardena says with respect.

"When Spittel hura met us, three of us had the Parangi illness" (believed to be either Syphilis or Yaws).

There were no hospitals then. Two of them died. Spittel hura brought us to the village. I was losing my baby teeth when we came here. Poramal Saka was my uncle. When he died the leadership was passed on to me. I can no longer see. There were people from high places that came to take me away and help



me given my condition. But I cannot leave my people".

It is with a heart laden with sorrow regarding the loss of his heritage and the pain of his people that Goba, the leader of the Pollebedda indigenous community states the above.

Randunu Wanniya, the leader of the Rathugala indigenous community passed away several years ago from cancer. He, like the majority of the community often went hungry, and was only able to have a meal at night. Poramal Saka too had died of starvation. That hunger still burns proud Goba's body. His clansmen's hunger burns his heart. During their cave dwelling days, their main food sources were hunted meat, honey and yams. At present, that place is taken by rice, corn thalapa and kurakkan thalapa. Pani malu (honey and meat) has been entirely removed from their cuisine at present. What is sad is that they are presently in a situation of "neither here nor there". The law obstructs those who enter the forests of Nilgala in order to gather honey. Their

bows and arrows have been retired. At present they often engage in gathering and selling Kudumberiya leaves used in the production of Beedi cigarettes, and also in selling Gal Siyambala (Velvet Tamarind). While the indigenous peoples' bows and arrows lay retired within their huts, those dressed in boots and bearing T-56s hunt in the jungles of Nilgala, and it is apparent that the rules that apply to the indigenous communities do not apply to them.

The challenge today is to find a means by which to protect not only the forests that are rich in biodiversity, but also the ancient livelihoods of the indigenous peoples who are the ancestral owners of the land. While hunger and personal hardship should be eradicated, it is inhuman to disrespect the pride of a generation.

Based on extracts of an article titled "The unending hunger" carried in a study report on several marginalized communities in Sri Lanka.

Note - **Thimbiriayagama Bandara**

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**Public Consultation on
 Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka**
 Monday, December 12th 2011
 Mahaveli Centre, Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha, Colombo 07

**Public Consultation on
 Promoting Language Rights**

What is needed is a..

From page 6

A few years ago, in a case where I was counsel, a trade union from the upcountry

filed a Supreme Court petition. Where more than 20% are Tamil speaking persons, the voters list was displayed only in the Sinhala language. This resulted in several thousand people being unable to register, since they were not sure if their names were there. The Supreme Court granted leave, the Attorney General's Department agreed that there was

a violation, but said that there were no resource. So the Supreme Court merely instructed 'when resources become available please ensure this'. It seems to have been addressed, which is a significant development. Last week, I saw the letterhead of the Honourable Chief Justice. It is in English and Sinhala, not in Tamil. In the west of the A9 in

Kilinochchi, Santapuram etc, street names are only displayed in Sinhala - I have photos. These came up in recent years, so the war ending and making Tamil an Official Language has not really helped at all. Pushing a bilingual policy for social integration is really not the answer, there has to be an attitude change."



Response

We have thus far received numerous responses from the readers of the previous issue of the Vibhasha Newsletter.

Along with well wishes for its continued journey, were also many ideas and suggestions for its further development.

A few such selected responses, suggestions and ideas are presented below. We greatly value all your responses, and anticipate continued feedback with the issues to come.

Editor

I Wish you strength to keep up the pressure

A new found enthusiasm to learn another language in addition to their own can be seen amongst Sri Lankan citizens of late. However, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims all show a greater enthusiasm to study English.

Being an international language, this enthusiasm to learn English is understandable. However, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim citizens showing a greater enthusiasm for learning Sinhala and Tamil as a language of friendship is a great social necessity at present.

We should understand that a great benefit to society at large as well as the country as a whole is received from such language learning in addition to any personal benefit received. It will undoubtedly go a long way in bridging the gap that presently exists between the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim ethnic communities, which is the biggest hurdle to this country's journey ahead.

As such it is my belief that the government and responsible parties should take a greater effort in popularizing the learning of Sinhala and Tamil amongst the general populace.

In keeping, I wish the Vibhasha Newsletter the strength to keep pressuring responsible authorities towards action, as well as to popularize this policy amongst the citizenry.

Ananda Wijesiri
Malabe

A public platform for intellectual discourse

There was an era during which much debate and discussion took place regarding language rights. There was also an era of death and battle. The present situation is not so dangerous. Yet there remains much to be done regarding language rights.

These objectives cannot be achieved by protests and slogans alone. There may be a time when they too become necessary. However what would be far more productive is an intellectual discourse on what action to take in order to achieve these objectives. In particular, the recent advances in the fields of information technology and language learning can be greatly utilized towards achieving these objectives.

The Vibhasha Newsletter should therefore become a public platform for a new discourse built on knowledge.

M.H. Hassan
Mawanella

Services of the translation reserve available to all

According to the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, everyone can now have their translation needs met accurately and speedily via the language translator reserve attached to the Official Languages Department. All information regarding this facility can be obtained via the website www.languagesdept.gov.lk.

Payment for these translations, are subject to control via government administrative circulars.

According to the Ministry, public response to this facility, provided with the aim of strengthening Sri Lankans' right to work in their mother tongue, has been very positive.

Information regarding this facility can also be obtained via telephone on 011 288894.

English to Sinhala translation software in the making

Mr. Buddhika Hettige, a young researcher has developed a software capable of proving grammatically accurate translations to help alleviate the language related problems faced by Sri Lankans.

According to Mr. Hettige, this software, named BEES (Bilingual Expert for English to Sinhala) will be very useful not only to researchers engaged in linguistic studies, but also to translators.

Mr. Hettige, presently a lecturer at the Statistics and Information Technology Department of the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, has presented a study report related to the software at the 67th annual conference of the Science Development Committee.

According to Mr. Hettige, this software, unlike other translation software, converts entire sentences from English to Sinhala as opposed to translating word by word.

While over 400 sentence structures can be translated via this software at present, Mr. Hettige added that he intends to develop on it in the future using Multiagent technology, thereby enabling the translation of even more complex sentence structures as well.



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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The Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration is also in the process of implementing various programs to ensure language rights within the country

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Getting the chance to write a news item of praise even infrequently is cause for joy. This is because, often, we only have the opportunity to write news items of allegation and complaint alone.

This praise is in relation to a positive response received, regarding an allegation we presented via our previous issue.

It is with great pleasure that we state here that a positive response has been received with regards to our complaint in the previous issue related to the “Let’s keep our children happy” billboard displayed at the Eye Hospital Junction in a manner visible to the Lipton Circus.

Our complaint was that the message given by the billboard was only presented in the Sinhala language. The Official Languages Commission had also informed the Mental Health Unit of the Ministry of Health to rectify this error.

As a result of all of this, the “Let’s keep our children happy” billboard displayed at the Eye Hospital Junction, is also now



"Let's keep our children happy" - The notice which has been translated to Tamil

Keeping all Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim children happy

displayed in Tamil in close proximity.

As such, this valuable message, that was previously accessible only to Sinhala children and their parents, is now equally accessible to all Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim persons.

As we had mentioned in the previous issue, another billboard on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, constructed a few feet away from the said billboard, is also displayed in both Sinhala and Tamil languages.

This is an important sign of the fact that the Ministry of Health is concerned not only regarding public health within the country but also regarding language rights.

While thanking the Ministry of Health for the above, we also respectfully request that steps be taken to replicate this policy island-wide.

For example, though the “Let’s keep our children happy” billboard displayed at the Eye Hospital Junction has now been rectified, the billboard

located at Rajagiriya in close proximity to the Castle Street Hospital is still displayed in Sinhala alone.

As the bilingual policy is a national policy, it should be implemented not in one or two places, but across the whole country in the same manner.

It is no secret that people face language related problems not in respect to billboards alone, but also when exchanging ideas with medical staff while seeking treatment. It is also not a problem that is limited to Colombo alone. Various communities based outside of Colombo also face these problems.

It is also true that this is not as simple a problem as is the case of the billboards. Seeking solutions to it is no simple matter. It is also unfair to lay the responsibility of seeking solutions to this problem on the Ministry of Health alone.

The Central Government is at present in the process of implementing a range of programs towards effecting

of the trilingual policy within the country. The Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration is also in the process of implementing various programs to ensure language rights within the country.

The aim of all such programs should be to help alleviate these problems faced by the public at the grassroots level.

It is for this reason that we say that this combined effort is needed in order to help find solutions to this problem faced by the Ministry of Health.

It is in order to solve problems faced by citizens on a day to day basis that bilingual and trilingual policies are necessitated. When a patient seeking treatment cannot exchange ideas with a doctor in his or her language, it then becomes not merely a problem of language but rather a problem of life.

As such we trust that all responsible authorities will pay attention not only to language rights, but also to the right to life, and take the necessary steps to solve this problem at the national level.