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On October 7th we phoned the Sri Lanka Embassy in Washington, D.C., and spoke to First secretary, Mr. Kalayananda Godage.

New Saivite World: Can you share with us the September 30th visit by members of Amnesty International to the Embassy?

Mr. Godage: It is a fact that Sri Lanka was commended for human rights in 1976. Accusations that have made and the problems that have arise have all come up as a result of massive terrorism, mindless terrorism which has taken no less than 87 lives in Sri Lanka. Terrorists quite recently burned a train, they blew up plane, and have damaged building and government vehicles. Mr. Schell, a layer and president of NY Lawyers Association, admits that although there have been excesses by the armed forces that these are the result of frustrations in dealing with the terrorists and that Amnesty is looking at only aspect but at the impact within the country to terrorism that has torn the county apart really by terrorists supported by expatriate troops. It is difficult for Amnesty to be objective.

Q: Have there been instances of torture to your knowledge?

A: The U.S. State Department in its report in 1972 does admit that there have been instances of torture as a result of interrogation. It is part of the interrogation process. Not many, but if there were such instances, as Mr. Schell alleges, then they were part of the interrogation process. As far as prison conditions go, conditions in prisons are bad in third world countries. There is overcrowding, because these government don't have money to spend on criminals and prisoners when there are so many other things to do.

Q: Does the Sri Lanka government disagree with the accusations by Amnesty International that violations have taken place?

A: Oh, no, we don't totally disagree. What we say is that there may have been few cases of torture, but those have been a part of the interrogation process. Of course, police don't speak gently to terrorists to get information. No way in the world is this possible. In normal situations, OK, but here...it's almost a war situation. Should we expect the police in dealing with suspected terrorists as they would treat a pickpocket or some chap who is caught for burglary? I think it is an unrealistic expectation of Amnesty's to expect so much. Then there is yet another thing which is important,. You know, Amnesty has a fine reputation as a well respected international organizational. But if you will just check into who is with Amnesty International in Sri Lanka, you would be horrified. It is in the hands of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka.

Q: Would you say there is any racial/religious dimension to this?

A: No, I don't think this is true. The Sinhala Buddhists also worship Siva. You can ask this of any Hindu. He worships Vishnu and Karttikeya. These are very important to the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Look at Kathiragama. There is much more in common between the Sri Lanka Buddhist, not the normal Buddhists, and a Hindu than there is between a Buddhist and a Christian. This is not a Buddhist-Hindu matter at all. It is separatism versus unitary thought.

Q: Would you care to share any further thoughts with us?

A: It is a horrible thing that has happened. We are very sad that the Sinhala extremists reacted so violently. But there has been blame on both sides. We have to pick up and rebuild now. We may have had our clashes, but we also have a lot in common...For 400 people to have been killed is a horrible thing. For 75-80,000 people to have been rendered homeless, that is absolutely horrible. And the deaths in the prisons - nothing can justify that. Nobody will ever try to justify that. I think every sensible Sinhala person is horrified. But a small group of criminals did these things.

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