

Vibhasha

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Trilingual sign boards set up in the region, during the “Vilaasam” programme. This programme safeguarding the civil rights of Estate workers, also provided addresses for around 3000 estate sector workers who did not have individual home addresses.

Supreme Court decrees: All required sections of the currency note should appear in the three languages

All the required statements in currency notes should be in all three languages, according to an order from the Supreme Court, following a complaint by the Centre for Policy Alternatives that language rights were violated in the printing of currency notes.

The Supreme Court which examined this case, ordered that the important sentences in the currency notes designed and printed in the future should appear in all three languages. Whereas previously the Centre for Policy Alternative had submitted a complaint to the Sri Lanka Human Rights



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The Sinhala -Tamil National Identity Card is produced

On the 28th of February for the first time in the history of this country, the National Identity Card was produced in the Sinhala and Tamil languages, bilingually. The Supreme Court which investigated a petition submitted by a student of a school in Maharagama, had given an order in October last year, that the National Identity Card should be produced in both languages.

Although the order stated that the National

Identity Card should be produced in both languages from the 1st of Jan 2014, this had been delayed until the end of February.

Many media institutions that had published reports of the production of bilingual National Identity Cards, had not clearly mentioned the background reason for it. One newspaper had stated that these identity cards had been produced based on an idea of the Commissioner General of the Department of Registration of Persons.

Although the media had suppressed it, analysts say that this bilingual national identity card will join history as citizens' victory brought about by the action of a citizen.

(A special letter about this is published in page 3).

Consumer activism to the fore

The Official Languages Commission states that they had received many complaints regarding the violation of bilingual language rights, due to the instructions and the information about the use of consumer goods, which are on the packaging of the consumer goods.

The Official Languages Commission further stated that those complaints have been recently submitted to the Consumer Protection Authority, and in future discussions will be held about these complaints with representatives of this authority and arrangements will be made to implement a future course of action.

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Debate contest on language policy among selected schools in the North.

The Schools debate competition which was held in both Tamil and Sinhala mediums, in the Northern region under the theme of the bilingual Language Policy of Sri Lanka, had been successfully completed. “Official Languages Policy, the Use of the Policy and National Reconciliation” were the themes of this competition

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Interviews that disregard language rights will not be valid

A decree from the HRC to the Department of Irrigation

According to an order from the Human Rights Commission the interviews that were to be held for the post of Laboratory Assistant at the Department of Irrigation, have been suspended. The reason being that letters sent to the applicants regarding these interviews had been issued only in the Sinhala language.

The Commission states that due to this reason, the Tamil applicants had been facing a serious difficulty and also according to the Constitution of Sri Lanka this violates language rights.

The Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission had issued no less than three orders to the Director General of the Department of Irrigation, to correct the above mentioned error regarding issuing of applications for interviews in the Sinhala Language only.

According to this the Human Rights Commission had ordered the Department of Irrigation's latest interviews to be suspended and a reissue of application letters calling for the interviews, in the Tamil language for the Tamil candidates, so as to hold these interviews again.

432 complaints concerning violation of the Official Language policy

The Centre for Policy Alternatives has presented 432 complaints of instances of violation of the Official Languages Policy from 2011 to 2014.

Among the 432 complaints of violation of bilingual language rights, which had been submitted to the Official Languages Commission, and the Human Rights Commission, it had been possible to get several satisfactory results, and meanwhile many complaints continue to be investigated.

Apart from complaints regarding a number of important sections of the currency notes, not being available in the Tamil language, and information in the national identity card not being in Tamil language, were complaints of the packaging of manufactured goods that are being sold in the local markets having essential information only in the English language, the bank documentation only being in the English language, the announcements of trains being only in the Sinhala language, and similar complaints which have been received by the Official Languages Commission.

Convention on National Unity in April

Arrangements have been made for the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, with many community organizations, to hold a Convention at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, on the 7th of April 2014.

The Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration states that more than a thousand people, including the representatives of various social strata and intellectuals from various fields, will participate in this convention. The

Ministry states that the President Mr Mahinda Rajapakse is scheduled to participate in this conference, and it would be possible for a more fruitful and profitable discussion to be built up.

This is based on the launching of the National Policy Framework on Social Integration (NPFISI), in July of the year 2012. When compiling this policy framework, attention was given to the necessity of a collective effort to be made to strengthen the Sri Lankan identity. In order to build a peaceful society, the ideas from

various establishments and people were invited, based on good qualities such as the values of the common human values, mutual respect, the feeling that one is part of the society, and being socially included, as well as responsibility.

The Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration states that the goal of this convention is to obtain solutions for the problems that had been identified, encouraging participation and strengthening the beginnings of a pluralistic and cohesive society

Debate contest on Language..... from page 1

The main goal of the debating contest was the building of positive attitudes on the value of bilingual usage among the future generations of the students in this country. This contest had been held so that all five districts of the North region were represented. The Education Ministry of the Northern Provincial Council had recommended 16 Tamil medium schools, and 6 Sinhala medium schools for this debating competition. After four rounds of this completion, which had commenced in 2013 - 10 - 18, had taken place, the schools that showed winners and runners up were as follows.

Accordingly, the Sinhala medium winners were the Vavuniya Parakum Maha Vidyalaya, and the runners up were Vavuniya Alagalla Vidyalaya; and Tamil medium winners were Mulaithivu Vidyananda Vidyalaya, and runners up were Mulaithivu Pudukudurippu Central Vidyalaya.

While the Best Orator title (Sinhala Medium) was won by a student Shehan Jayaratne of Parakum Maha Vidyalaya, student M. Thamila Rasan of Mulaithivu Vidyananda and student N. Elie of Mulaithivu Pudukudurippu Maha Vidyalaya were the two best orators in the Tamil Medium.

Jaffna Hindu Vidyalaya, Jaffna Vidyalaya, Nelliadi Madya Maha Vidyalaya, Kilinochchi Maha Vidyalaya, Siththi Vinayagar Hindu Vidyalaya, St Xavier Boys School, Kanangarayam Kulam Maha Vidyalaya, Vavuniya Tamil Maha Vidyalaya, Kilinochchi Central Maha Vidyalaya, Mankulam Vidyalaya, Yarlton Vidyalaya, and Vipulananda Vidyalaya were schools that participated in this contest in the Tamil medium. Vavuniya Parakum Vidyalaya, Vavuniya Alagalla Vidyalaya and Vavuniya Dharmapala Vidyalaya participated in this contest in the Sinhala Medium.

The special celebration for the presentation of gifts and trophies for the contest was held on 2014 - 01 - 28 at 1 p.m. in the Kailasapathi Hall with the Minister of National Languages and Social Integration, Hon Mr Vasudeva Nanayakkara as the Chief Guest. Trophies were presented here for the winners and runners up as well as the best speakers, while certificates were presented to all the schools that participated. A special feature during the certificate presentation ceremony was the participation of two teams consisting of the Tamil and Sinhala medium students, in a friendly bilingual debate. Here, communication took place between the Sinhala Medium students and the Tamil Medium students with the assistance of translation equipment. This was a an uncommon experience not previously observed in a debating context, and the interest of many people were aroused by this.

“The Sinhala Tamil National Identity card Whose victory is this?”

The Island Newspaper of 1st March 2014 published an article in the front page, with a photograph saying that a newly printed Sinhala and Tamil, Bilingual National Identity card including personal details was introduced by the Department for the Registration of Persons on the 28th February 2014.

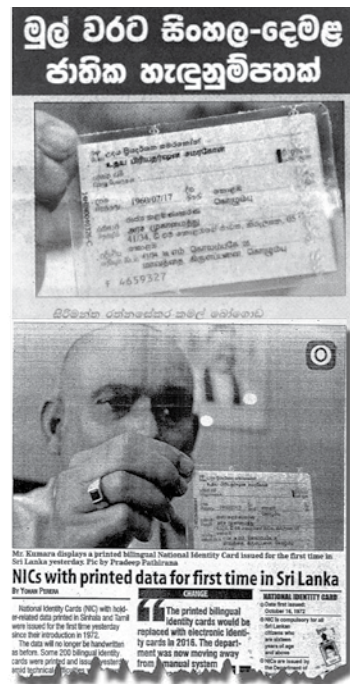
Other than the Island newspaper many other newspapers had published this news with some prominence. Some newspapers had shown an interest in this previously too. For example during the 1st week of February the Lakbima newspaper had published a report, with a photograph, that work was in progress those days in the experimental stage of producing a new National Identity Card.

All these newspaper reports publicized an idea that the introduction of the new National Identity Card was due to a requirement by the Department of Registration of Persons. This is how the Lakbima newspaper had reported this fact: “In order to prevent the problems that are incurred with the present National Identity Card work had commenced rapidly these days in the Department of Registrations of Persons to issue a new identity card using modern technology according to the idea of the commissioner General Mr. R.M.S Sarath Kumara”.

The Divaina newspaper reported the following about this on 1st of March.

“The newly printed Sinhala and Tamil bilingual National Identity Card including personal details had been introduced yesterday (28th February) by the Department of Registrations of Persons.”

These newspaper reports indicate that the issuing of the new identity card was initiated due to the requirement of the Commissioner General of the Department of Registrations of Persons Mr. R.M.S Sarath Kumara. None of the reports that were published in the media stated that there had been any other citizen's actions behind this. Therefore it is natural that the ordinary citizens of this country come to this conclusion. This is because they get news from reports that are published



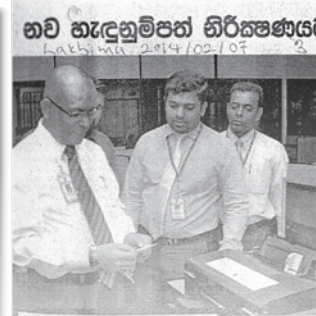
Reports about the new NIC

by the media. Yet, is it the truth? What actually happened? It is the right of the citizens of this country to know the correct information. By knowing this, the citizen gets an opportunity to realize the strength of the citizens actions in this country.

The need for an Identity Card including bilingual personal details, has been prevalent for a long time in this country. This is because when the Sinhala language and the Tamil language are the Official Languages of a country, it is a violation of the language rights of that country, when the primary letter that a citizen possess, being the National Identity Card is issued in a single language.

Due to this reason, although the citizens of this country, who had been persevering about language rights had published various ideas, there had been no decisive citizen action taking place about it.

In the year 2013, an Advanced Level student took part in a decisive intervention. That student is Anuradha Prasad Dananjaya Guruge from Maharagama who is an advanced level student in Ananda Vidyalaya Colombo. This student submitted a petition to the Supreme Court asking



"the issuing of Sinhala -Tamil bilingual National Identity Cards is a victory for the citizens of this country... yet when it is reported incorrectly it shows the media has abandoned their responsibility to give credit where credit is due..."

for the National Identity Card to be issued in both the Sinhala and Tamil languages.

Anuradha Prasad Dananjaya Guruge, submitting his petition, to a three member bench including Chief Justice, Mr Mohan Pieris, stated that, because the National Identity Card is issued in Sinhala only, immense difficulties are faced by him, when he travels to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, on official business, where administrative work is done only in the Tamil language.

When this petition was heard again on the 21st October last year, the Supreme Court issued an order to the Department of Registration of Persons to issue all National Identity Cards in both languages, from the 1st of January 2014.

Furthermore according to orders issued by the Supreme Court regarding this petition (STFR 93 of 2013) the Department of Registration of Persons should take steps to issue National Identity Cards in all three languages within the next three years.

Yet the Commissioner General of the Department of Registration of Persons had been unable to fulfill the prescribed order. Although this

order had stipulated that the bilingual National Identity Card should be issued from 01st January 2014, the Vibhasha Newsletter on investigation found out that those arrangements had not been completed by the month of February.

Clearly it meant that the order from the Supreme Court had been disobeyed. In any case, the fact that the Commissioner General had made a great effort to publicize himself as victorious in issuing such National Identity Card even two months later than the stipulated date was evident from the news reports that were published later.

The Commissioner General should honestly think about how ethical this (publicity) is. On the other hand, the manner in which the media acted in the matter is also clearly problematic. The issuing of Sinhala Tamil bilingual National Identity Card is a victory for the citizens of this country.

Yet when it is reported incorrectly it shows the media has abandoned their responsibility to give credit where credit is due. It is a clear that the English media, as well as the Sinhala media had reported about this, without researching facts properly.

This may not have been a wrong that was pre-planned. Yet when incomplete reporting has been done, knowingly or unknowingly it is the reader who has to suffer the bad consequences.

When observing this situation, the most important part of this story has been deleted from the reporting. The fact that knowledgeable citizens intervened and their rights were obtained by the action of citizens, are facts that were thus missing.

In particular, the fact that a national policy had been changed by the intervening of a school student shows a milestone in the history of this country.

It is natural for the reader to have a new enthusiasm for his/her rights after reading this news. Such reporting would encourage the ordinary citizen to stand up for his / her rights. This is why it is a social duty of the media to report such news correctly.

- GAVESHI

A raise in interest in bilingual rights. A flood of complaints from citizens...

The Sinhala language and Tamil language had both been established as the official languages of Sri Lanka in order to correct a great injustice that had occurred in the history of this country. Yet, there does not seem to have been a solution to this problem. The work that is being performed in many government establishments is still in one Language. Although new departments had been established and many circulars had been produced in order to correct this situation,

as yet there is no solution to this problem.

This is the reason a necessity has arisen for some action by citizens regarding this matter. Realizing this situation many programs have been implemented, such as "The programme promoting language rights of minorities," which has joined a number of other organizations now, in order to convey a knowledge about language rights to the citizen.

There are a number of reasons why the programmes aimed

to increase the knowledge of citizens. One main reason was so that citizens themselves could come forward regarding their own rights

Although there are rules, one main reason they are inactive regarding these is because citizens do not have sufficient knowledge and interest about it.

The goal of the programmes that imparted knowledge, was for the citizens to acquire an interest and enthusiasm about it. From the growth in the number of complaints from the public in

the recent past one can imagine the amount of interest and enthusiasm that is increasing. Of the number of complaints which had been received regarding this, from the people, the following complaints which had been presented to the Official Languages Commission are shown below in condensed form, representing information about various regions and various establishments of the country, as a sign-post showing the way for more advancement of the interest shown by the people.

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Although there are rules, one main reason they are inactive regarding these is because citizens do not have sufficient knowledge and interest about it. The goal of the programmes that imparted knowledge, was for the citizens to acquire an interest and enthusiasm about it. From the growth in the number of complaints from the public in the recent past one can imagine the amount of interest and enthusiasm that is increasing.

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• Letters and complaints

- A complaint about the documents sent to local government institutions by the Archaeological Department being written only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint about the documents that have provided by the Department of Registration of Persons being written only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint about the documents provided by the Ministry of Justice regarding the Justice of Peace, for the issue of identity cards being written only in the Sinhala Language .

- A complaint about the letters provided by the Thrift and Credit Co operative Society to the officers who are engaged in the Limited education service, being written only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint that the license provided by a Wildlife Conservation Department allowing removal of timber from private /state lands, was issued only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint about the documents that are sent to the Walikkaman Pradeshiya Sabha, from the Ministry of Finance and Planning being available only in Sinhala Language.

- A complaint that the documents regarding pensions, being sent from the Department of Pensions to the offices in local Government departments, being written only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint that letters documenting the first session of the Northern Provincial Councils Planning Committee , that was sent by the National Physical Planning Department to the provincial council were available only in the Sinhala Language .

- A complaint that the letters sent by the Department of Inland Revenue to the Walikkaman Pradeshiya Sabha being printed only in the Sinhala language.

- A complaint about documentation sent by the Ministry of Economic Development under the Northern Emergency Rehabilitation Project to the Assistant Commissioner of Local Government, being written only in the English Language. (2013:02:05/2013:03:17)

- A complaint that information about usage of pesticides, supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture was dispatched to the local government institutions and provincial councils only in the Sinhala Language

- A complaint about a special notice document dispatched by the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources being sent only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint that application forms produced by the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources for fishermen in order to obtain identity cards, were only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint about the letters that was sent by the office of the Superintendent of the Kankasanturai Police to an officer of the North Walikkaman PS being written only in the Sinhala Language.

- A complaint about the letters sent by the Jaffna Assistant commissioner of Elections office to the local authorities of the Northern Province being written only in the English language.
- A complaint about the service brochures produced by the Dehiwala/Mt. Lavinia Municipal Council for citizens, being printed only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint that the forms for claiming travel expenses, issued by the Addalachenai Pradeshiya Sabha were only in the Sinhala language.
- A complaint that documentation regarding the Northern Road Rehabilitation Project in the North, which was sent to District Secretaries of the Northern PC, were issued only in the English language.
- A complaint that the letters issued by the Department of Education regarding the All island Schools Sports Competitions, had been sent only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about correspondence issued by the Vavuniya Urban Council not being available in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about the letters sent to local authorities by the Ministry of the Health, regarding selection of the local government authority that had conducted the best dengue eradication program being only written in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about letters produced by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka regarding the Employees Provident Fund being written only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint that letters sent by the Registrar General's department to local authorities were written only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about the letters regarding housing loan applications being sent by the Kankasanturai Peoples Bank to government employees, being written only in the English language.
- A complaint about the letters regarding the sales of flags that were produced by SL Council of Visually Impaired Graduates being sent, written only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint that letters sent by the Department of Agriculture regarding the use of insecticides, to all the Secretariat's of the local government authorities were sent only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about the letters produced by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, about the Employees Provident Fund, sent only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about the letters sent by the Registrar General's Department, to local authority departments, being available only in the Sinhala Language.

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Of the number of complaints which had been received regarding this, from the people, the following complaints which had been presented to the Official Languages Commission are shown below in condensed form, representing information about various regions and various establishments of the country, showing the way for more advancement of the interest shown by the people.

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- A complaint about the letters sent by the Kankasanturai branch of the People's bank regarding housing loans for government officers, being sent only in the English language.
- A complaint about the letters sent by the Lands Commissioner General's Department, Local Government institutions being written only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint about the letters sent by the Ministry of Finance and Planning to Ministry Secretaries and chairmen of government programmes being available only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint that letters sent to the Northern Province District Secretaries regarding the Northern Road Rehabilitation Project were printed only in the English Language.
- A complaint that the office of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths in Trincomalee had issued birth certificates in only the Tamil Language.

Complaints about signboards

- A complaint about the signboard of the Colombo University not being shown in Sinhala and Tamil medium.
- A complaint about the signboards of the Colombo Municipal Council not being shown in the Sinhala and Tamil Language.
- A complaint about the notice board showing the weather report, situated in front of the Department of Meteorology, not being shown in the Tamil and Sinhala medium.
- The complaint that the signboard of the Department of National Library and the Information Science is not shown in the Sinhala and Tamil medium.
- A complaint about the signboard of the Maritime Police, not been shown correctly in the Tamil Language.
- A complaint about the signboard of the Department of Neurological Science not being shown in the Tamil Language.
- A complaint that all the signboards in the Kuruvita Prison are shown only in the Sinhala Language.
- A complaint that the signboard exhibited for the people visiting the Wild Life National Park in Kumana, is not shown in the Tamil Language.
- A complaint that the word "Police" is not shown in the Tamil Language on a police vehicle in Narahenpita.
- A complaint that the signboard in the Colombo College of Nursing, is not shown in the Tamil Language.



Vilaasama

A community gains an identity

A person's address seems to be a simple thing on the face of it, but the following experience will show how complex the concept really is. This becomes a serious problem because the attention of those responsibilities had still not focused on finding a solution for such a complex problem. Trough a project Safeguarding the civil rights of estate workers the Centre for Policy Alternatives, through its Outreach Unit, undertook to solve this issue for a number of families in the Uva Province.

There are more than 50,000 families in the Estate sector without an address of their own, and the attention of those responsible is not yet focused on finding a solution for this problem. A person's address seems to be a simple thing on the face of it, but the following experience will show how complex the concept really is. This becomes a serious problem because the attention of those responsibilities had still not focused on finding a solution for such a complex problem. Trough a project Safeguarding the civil rights of estate workers the Centre for Policy Alternatives, through its Outreach Unit, undertook to solve this issue for a number of families in the Uva Province.

H. Dunilraj who studies in the Agarapathana Tamil Vidyalala, received letters until now, to the line number. There was no way for their house to receive letters. He explained the situation as follows.

"Our 'line' number is 15. Always our letters come to the line number. As we don't

have our own address, we have faced many problems. It is also a matter of shame for us. If each of our houses is given a number and a simple address what a great happiness it will be for us."

The Post Master of the Passara Kitulgala Division, explained clearly the course of action that had taken place, so far, for delivering letters to the estates.

"A postal worker who has been appointed by the estate, takes the bag of letters. A small payment is made annually as a special payment for this. The information about all letters that came to the estate is recorded in a book. All ordinary letters other than registered letters, are put in a bag and sent to the estate superintendent.

But the delivery of letters is unsatisfactory. The letters are sorted according to various divisions in the main office of the estate, by the person who takes check rolls and the field officer deliver the letters to the correct person, at the morning assembly. This is unsuccessful. The correct



persons do not receive the letters. If he does not arrive, the letters are kept there.

Even if a notice is put regarding registered letters, they do not see that even. Therefore often about 200 to 300 registered letters are collected often with us. We send notices repeatedly, we have no power to keep them for months for humane reasons. Then we are compelled to return them.

There are instances when we are blamed due to the fact that persons have the same name and no address. Therefore it is a time that every worker's identity is established, by making arrangements to give him a correct address."

In order to clear the complexities of this problem, the ideas of the postman who delivers letters in the estate

are useful.

Dayalan, who delivers letters in the estate, has this to say. "Here are four people with the same initials to their names. When going to deliver the letters to four of them, there are no house numbers. I question each of them. When I question four of them in that way, suspicions occurs as to who it is, out of the four. In such a situation the relevant four are called to the office. Then that letter is opened in front of the Post Master, and this question is solved in front of him. This is serious shortcoming.

Because even if the person who delivers letters comes to the house and gives the reason, bus fare has to be spent, to go to the post office in order to receive the letter.

There are two persons called P. Rajendran. It takes

a number of hours for them to be summoned to the post office, be questioned, the case solved and the letter requesting one to be present for an interview, to be received. He should go to Ampara the next morning to be present at 10 am. He faces tremendous difficulties.

A large number of parcels containing cheques are received. It is very difficult to deliver them as there is no numbers for the houses. We have been compelled to deliver all those cheques to the office. It has to been necessary to open the letter in the office, check the E.P.F. number, and hand over the cheque to the relevant person. This is a serious problem although this has been done with safety measures; the rights that they should receive have been violated.



The delivery of the voting card is also through us. We sort them out in the pillai maduwan (creche) and in the office and in common places in the estate, call everyone, check whether their names, initials and other papers are in order, and if its is correct, the voting card is given.

When looking at this problem through another sensitive angle, the principal of Passara Tamil National School, Mr G. Arumugam states this, according to his experience, "Letters arrive selecting the children for university education. Letters come for jobs or for interviews in the College of Education.

For some children the letters arrived much later than for others. A peon goes and brings these to the Estate Offices. These are sent to them later through someone. It had been the same, during the time that I was in the estate. This method had not changed to the best of my knowledge, I think.

One thing is that, it is not received in time. Some children come and say, 'Sir, I have an interview tomorrow morning and I need certificates.'

Recently, I was absent for a month. After I returned, three children came their interview was in Vavuniya on Monday morning. They had to leave on Sunday. They had got the letters only on Saturday evening. They came on Saturday night asking for certificates. So they came on Saturday night as I was in my quarters. I gave them the necessary certificates. After

that, they went on Sunday and faced the interviews on Monday.

The Officer in Charge of the Madolsima Police station has this experience.

"One day a complaint came, and while investigating it, Rajendran's wife comes and puts a complaint stating that Sivalingam had hit her. Later, while this was being investigated, Rajendra, his wife and Sivalingam came, and peace was restored. When looking at this later, what had happened? The name of the person who put the complaint is the same. The name of the woman who had been beaten was the same. She came to the police station saying this was her husband and was reconciled. Later the woman who had put the complaint, came to the police station and asked us how the reconciliation took place, without her presence. How can a complaint be investigated without anyone? Why did you do that, Sir? She asked

Later we went with the defendant in search of the complainant, and the investigation had to take place again. We have to face many situations such as this.

Similarly, a few days ago, I sent a message to a complainant in the estate to come. Later that police informed me that there are three people with the same name, and that all three were married. Then who is this woman's husband? They say Rajendran from the Upper Section. When they say upper section, there are a

large number of people there. When we searched there, there were four or five Rajendrangs. Then we have to wait till that person gets discharged from hospital and comes. Till then we can't complete the investigation service examine a complaint, or take a person into custody.

Although from the surface, a person's address seems to be a very simple thing, it is clear from the above experiences, how complex the connection to a person's life is.

This is why there should be serious involvement of those responsible in the search for solutions for this severe problem.

Centre for Policy Alternatives undertook to search for a solution to this complicated problem, in this background. There, they joined their partner organization, the Uva Shakthi Foundation and formulated a pilot project to find a solution for this problem. This programme was implemented in the Passara region of the Badulla District, in the Uva Province.

This programme was implemented with the assistance of the Australian High Commissioner's office, with the involvement of many establishments including the Passara Pradeshiya Sabha, the Passara Divisional Secretariat office, the Grama Niladari of the relevant sections in Passara and the Passara Police.

The goal of this programme which was named Vilaasama, was not

only to provide a person with an address, the goal of this programme was to also provide beneficiaries with the dignity and honour that belongs to humanity.

It was possible to provide permanent addresses to about 3000 families, by the implementation of this programme during the last six months of 2013.

Some other outputs that were organized under this project were delivery of letters, the fixing of permanent post boxes in 20 safe areas to collect letters, fixing sign boards, the names of which had been selected having chosen upto 40 minor roads in the estates, a mobile clinic organized to speed up sending applications for about 300 National Identity Cards which took place under this.

Accordingly Vilaasama has solved more than just communication of their vital personal correspondence which is an important requisite for the estate sector people but beyond this also their hard won fundamental rights to an identity as demonstrated by an individual address.

During the implementation of this pilot project by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in the Badulla District, the chairman of its main partner organization Uva Shakthi Foundation, Mr Nadesan Suresh gave his ideas about the future of this collective course of action:

"In this country, there is talk about the enhancement of various fundamental rights,

Accordingly Vilaasama has solved more than just communication of their vital personal correspondence which is an important requisite for the estate sector people but beyond this also their hard won fundamental rights to an identity as demonstrated by an individual address.

especially they talk about human rights, But, we have still been unable to implement a course of action about a man's identity. Some effort is made to solve the identified problems of the community who have lived in these houses which may be almost 100 years old.

That effort is to change the name of these from "line room," for every house, to provide a name for that house, a number for that house, a respected address, in order for them to live freely, for others to respect that house and when that house receives a letter what happiness there will be. So we implemented a programme through this that protected their identity honorably.

We hope that, through this programme which provides them with addresses, that specially the regional political units, also the establishments that provide local official services, will build a good relationship with these establishments, especially with the police, the post offices, also the estate superintendent, Grama Seva officials, civil organizations, all these getting together and implementing this scheme.

I think that through this programme, there will be some change in the estate, and also their trust, honour and benefits will be built and that there will be an opportunity to commence living happily and peacefully with the majority population, we hope,"

Lionel Guruge is Co ordinator of the Project Promoting Language Rights, which, in its latest phase is conducting a language audit in the North and the East to reach an understanding of the extent to which language policy is implemented in these areas. Below, from a recent interview, are some of his observations from the field

Recommendations for the promotion of Language Equality in Sri Lanka



by C De Silva

The background situation

Historically, the issue of language divided this country, and over the last 30 years the importance of ensuring language equality in Sri Lanka has come to be gradually accepted by policy makers and stakeholders alike. The Constitution in Section 12 (a) and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka have ratified the right to language equality. Similarly following the cabinet decision on 2009/2/3, the 2009 /9/ 25 Gazette notification number 1620/27 declares that it is compulsory that all state institutions must carry out work and make available documents in both languages. Much publicity has been given to the LLRC Report which also sets aside substantial sections on the subject of Language.

Nevertheless some state institutions and officials do not take into consideration either this Gazette or the Language Policy but work in Sinhala and some English, some Local Government instructions and Provincial Councils do not work in Tamil. In the North and the East, in practice, there is a situation where they work in Tamil or English, so people on both sides, (in the south, Sinhala only and in the North, Tamil only,) including state officials and political parties in power continue to violate this language policy. This is the findings of substantial research carried out by us (during the course of the PLRM project.)

In some institutions, granted, there is respect for official language policy. However, state officials in the South in particular do not consider that there exists

another language , they continue to flout these laws and regulations outright for example the Police, the Road Development Authority, Fisheries Ministry, indeed this problem exists in almost all ministries. In fact if you consider the Supreme Court, itself, even the signage is in English or Sinhala eg Don't sit on the Stairs, the Inquiries Counter, Push this door, Silence !, upto the "Do Not Spit" sign is in Sinhala/English only.

All we can conclude from this is that the authorities responsible for implementing Language Policy have not been effective, and also people have no habit or attitude of accommodating the language rights of other peoples. Consider the law, there is the Constitution, a number of gazettes notifications and circulars and an Act. If the violation of

these is continuous and there is no one to prevent this, this has to be considered a common malaise.

Speaking on the GOSL report on implementation of language Policy

There is some improvement, the situation is better than it was previously, but this is just not enough. For example on the subject of the police, it is not enough to say you are enrolling police officers and things will change ; for example on principle the order to work in both languages , should be common to all police stations, regardless of where they are, eg Maharagama, since if a person is in trouble and needs the service of the police station, it applies even if there is just one person who needs help in their own mother tongue. For example if you look at

just the signage, “Crimes Section”, “Minor Complaints”, “Charge Room” where you obtain extracts of complaints, “Traffic Department”, various departments, when you look at every police station you don’t see that even this signage is available tri-lingually or bilingually. In the case of notices, exhibitions, Criminal investigations, Complaints, all these and more, the information is available in Sinhala only/or Sinhala and English. So apart from claiming to recruit so many personnel, there has to be a tangible change in the Police/ Military, something that shows you that Language rights are respected (this has not happened- we do not see such a situation). At least the visible items have to be in the three languages.

Also I emphasize that this is not regarding the population of an area, or the percentage using a language. The country has two official languages and these should be facilitated anywhere in the country. We do not see such a situation at all.

In the case of police stations, I can give the clear example of MrGuruparan’s case in Batticaloa, and similar cases. I have submitted about 20 cases to the Human Rights Commission; for eg Mannar there are so many police stations without even a single Tamil speaking officer. Some of the officers trained have not been deployed to the areas where they are really needed.

Leave aside the police, all institutions are supposed to be working bilingually (or even trilingually) but this situation does not exist in practice, it is not apparent . Just one example is the Land Action Procedure Code which has no Tamil

translation. When you ask why, they say they don’t have funds to translate it! These are very important documents. If you visit a hospital the boards are in Sinhala and perhaps English, these problems are seen very often. Im not sure how Ms Navi Pillai could have been happy about the situation, people may have shown her only the good side. Yes there is some improvement , in language classes, training , translations, etc, but this is proceeding at a very slow rate, not at all commensurate with the scale of the problem. I can only see about a 10 % improvement in the situation with 90% remaining to be done, according to our experience.

To properly analyse the extent of implementation it is important to carry out a nationwide Language Audit. All state institutions, all private enterprises, all common areas, have to be audited, only then will we be able to reach a correct conclusion on the state of implementation of language Policy.

At the moment (as part of our project) we are trying out a pilot programme, auditing 21 Divisional Secretariat Divisions. This initial exercise can be expanded to other areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Most importantly the Human Rights Commission and the Official Languages Commission, currently do not/cannot exercise their authority and need to be given more manpower, more resources more area to act. The power/ effect and reach of the OLC is not sufficient, the power to issue orders, to implement language policy and its legal clout

need to be strengthened, and setting up of District level offices can be recommended as it is currently a Colombo centric institution (since its attention is more required in the provinces than in Colombo) State institutions do not currently recognize the OLC and the latter is not assertive enough. The LLRC recommends various commissions to be set up but they are useless if they have no authority.

2. A comprehensive nationwide language audit, is required and resultant recommendations for short term and long term solutions. The state institutions should be audited. Beginning at the Divisional Secretariat Level there should be discussion and a practical plan of action formed. This is how you can reach a realistic estimate of the situation
3. An addition to Education Policy/ Syllabi . A common paper on Language Rights should be included with the three Language subjects for children from grades 6-11(O levels) -a gradual education of children so that at least the next generation will understand the importance of the issue, including the recognition given to language in the constitution and by gazette notifications , circulars, laws and regulations etc. This is a way to bring about attitude change and make sure that future generations respect each other’s languages, just as much as they learn their own language.

A comprehensive nationwide language audit, is required and resultant recommendations for short term and long term solutions. The state institutions should be audited Beginning at the Divisional Secretariat Level there should be discussion and a practical plan of action formed. This is how you can reach a realistic estimate of the situation

4. Support for language Teachers. As there are Training Colleges for English teachers; there should be Training Colleges for teachers of Tamil and of Sinhala., who teach these languages in Sinhala and Tamil schools respectively . Special arrangements and co ordination need to be arranged among training Colleges to meet the need for training the cadre required for teaching Tamil and Sinhala languages
5. A media strategy promoting language rights. The media has a very important role to play in raising awareness on Language Rights among the people as well as in promoting social cohesion. For example Sinhala audiences should understand and be able to reach the media that Tamil audiences read. Again reaching out to Tamil audiences for example is something local media can work on, rather than having Tamil viewers continually seek out Indian Channels. This needs careful analysis and attention.

Establishing language rights, from village to village...

To date three phases of the programme, promoting the language rights of minority communities have been successfully completed. From this programme, different phases, were implemented in order to promote and establish the language rights of this country.

These programmes have spread in a wide scope from programmes that give information to government officials and to citizens, to implementing legal action against responsible government establishments and other actions.

The main programmes from these were the programmes building languages societies, building civil groups, investigating information about language rights being violated, reports revealing information about the implementation of these, building good relationships with the Pradeshiya Sabhas, training the trainers about language rights, fixing of street sign boards and sign boards of establishments. Among these, the programmes of training the trainers to protect the language policy of the village, were the most effective.

A quick spreading of knowledge at the village level was a result of these programmes. These programmes which provided information, resulted specially in the broadening of the submitting of complaints regarding the violations of language rights to the official languages rights Commission and the Human Rights Commission.

Following are photographs of several such programmes that had been implemented during the last few days, at a national level, which had been caught by the Vibhasha Camera eye.



The programme that had been held on February 6th at the Matale Divisional Secretariat for government officials and language Society officials.



The language rights training programme that was held on the 8th of February at the Monaragala Sanasa Development auditorium for government officials and language Society officials.



An information session regarding languages and the law, was held on the 7th of February, in the afternoon, at the Kandy City Mission hall at Kandy, with languages society officials.



The training programme that was held on the 7th of February in the Hatton (Dikoya) region for government officials.



The programme that was held on 6th February at the Raththota DS, for government officials.



The languages training workshop that was held on the 8th February at the auditorium of the Passara Pradeshiya Secretariat for government officials and languages society officials.

We have made an effort to build a discourse about the way the media of this country acts regarding the bilingual rights of Sri Lanka and the manner in which the media is spreading that knowledge to society. In order to get some ideas about it, we directed our attention upon key figures in society including news reporters, artists and politicians who showed interest about bilingual rights in this country. Following are some of those ideas.

Media as a main tool for Language Rights

Journalist Nilar M. Cassim



There is hardly any sensitivity about Language rights, by the media that we can see today. There are only a few journalists that we have who have acted with such sensitivity to Language Rights.

I think that the reason for this is the fact that most journalists and media establishments don't have a sufficient knowledge about it. It can be seen that those who have that knowledge and understanding, are acting with great dedication in

this regard. But that is a very small number.

It can be said that the main tool that can be used to impart knowledge about language rights to the people, and to establish their language rights, is the media. The media can fulfil a decisive support role by changing the attitude of ordinary people. The main duty of the media is to impart knowledge about various regulations and acts under this, through circulars giving

published facts and the rights therein to the people. There are only very few opportunities that the media has used to give a general knowledge about languages rights to society.

There are several facts here that our attention should be directed to. Sri Lanka is a country which is diverse in terms of culture, languages and religions. The support that can be provided by the media is great, from giving a broad knowledge of such varied languages

and religions at the official level, at the personal level, to people, establishments and to every citizen. We had been dragged into a 30 years lengthy war by the distorted history and miscommunications of our country. But by now all communities are making an effort to live in brotherly co-existence, leaving that all behind. My theory is that many problems could be solved, if those responsible would work with an open mind towards a peaceful society considering that as the main goal. There are many things that can be done by artists, writers and journalists in regard to this problem.

They should encourage the Sinhala people to learn the Tamil language, and the Tamil people to learn the Sinhala language, and learn about each other's cultures. I would agree that the media of this country should set about this with sensitivity and consider it a duty and responsibility.

Language Rights and the use of media today

**Media with an in-depth
understanding is necessary**

Senior Journalist Kamal Perera



When giving information to society I observe that making society realize the value of learning the main languages that are being used in this country, Sinhala, Tamil and English should be a primary task that media should implement. I believe that Sri Lankan society will consider themselves a Sri Lankan race, if the Sinhala people will learn Tamil, and the Tamil and Muslim people will learn Sinhala, and if all Sri Lankan communities will learn the English language.

Similarly I think that the media

can take a number of steps such as commencing mixed programmes in the media, teaching new generations of children to respect other languages and cultures, organizing varied contests that measure knowledge of languages.

Bilingualism is important in a country like Sri Lanka because only good communication can dispel the suspicion and misunderstanding that is still prevalent among the ethnic communities.

A great impetus to build communal harmony could be achieved if the media of this country can create various

programmes where we who live in the South can show our regard if we address the Tamil and Muslim people living in the North in the Tamil language. The Tamil media should similarly implement such special programmes in the Sinhala language.

We should understand that language, culture and art are interconnected media. Although there are characteristics that are special to each, individually during development of these, an interconnection between each of them is observed. Within the culture or art of the Tamil people, it

is impossible not to show the reflected likes and dislikes of the public. It is fair in relation to the Sinhala community. The media should build association among other communities in order to respect the cultural arts of other communities. Yet it is a problem, whether this is being correctly implemented. For example, in some current teledramas and in some movies, some acts can be observed showing disrespect towards the use of languages, costumes, and customs of other communities. When such activities are implemented without being far-seeing, the harmony between races is continuously dented. In our media, while appreciating the various linguistic, artistic and cultural identities that are due to the various ethnic groups living in the country, I think that it is important to give attention to and to show the way to highlight the Sri Lankanness of all through an equal mix of these. While the people living in Sri Lanka make famous the Sinhala Tamil or Muslim identities, it is important to convert them to a community which think as a Sri Lankan nation.

Such a broad based national work endeavour can be commenced only by the intervention of intellectuals including journalists, and artists who live in this country.

Language diversity is a Sri Lankan heritage

Lead writer of "Aththa"
Micheal Fernando

My analysis is that many Sri Lankan media are acting in a racist, nationalist manner. On the other hand it is also observed that a handful of journalists are attempting to give publicity to bilingual rights, even in a small way. I can also see that, the media is attempting to give some general publicity to some events and initiatives that happen under the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration. Yet, I cannot say that any of this is done knowingly or in a systematic manner. I can see from among the media that the newspaper "Ravaya" and "Aththa" are attempting to give information about it. There isn't sufficient space given in the state media for topics like 'language rights'. The lack of information about this may be due to this reason. Most of our journalists are indeed progressive. Therefore, I see that it is crucially important to make them knowledgeable about it. It is very clear that until now, their knowledge is not sufficient.

There are at least a few actions that can be taken regarding this. For example the instant hot line number 1956 that had been introduced by the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, can be published through all media. Through this an enthusiasm can be created among the people, about this solution. All printed media can publish

often, such items as "what are language rights and language policies?" There are professors and intellectuals in language in our country. Letters that are written by them, with their advice on language rights can be published.

Taking the electronic media, the Sinhala people can be given a Tamil course of lessons in it, and the Tamil people given a course of lessons in Sinhala. Assistance could be given also by publishing these lessons by the state newspaper institutions (like LakeHouse) Results for these in other ways, can be expected for media establishments.

Recently the Language Ministry has conducted such classes. The CDs of those classes maybe still available. Even now, the media can broadcast them. It is very easy to give knowledge to Sri Lankan society about language rights. This is an inherent characteristic of this country's culture.

The (appreciative) phrase 'shad basha parameshwara' (meaning one who knows six languages) is a well known saying that is used often in the culture of this country. The knowledge of language is widely accepted to be a privilege in the culture of this country. It is very helpful towards building reconciliation among communities by the knowledge of languages.

Going beyond all this, all media can be used to establish the importance

of various language rights among the people.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, Ministry of Media and Communications, and Ministry of Cultural Affairs, should get together and make arrangements to initiate various programmes to give knowledge of language rights to the people.

Other than about language rights, the media can assist greatly regarding art and culture.

The readers should be presented with articles about writers, poets, movie actors and actresses, singers, politicians of our country, in both languages. Translated articles can be published in the newspapers and the electronic media could present special programmes regarding languages, culture and art in both languages.

The responsible officials of the media have the ability to give publicity to various programmes featuring stories, poems and movies and so on, in order to give knowledge about bilingual language rights. Finally I propose that primarily before everything a designation like Inter Language Co ordinator be appointed, in this country, and through this a way should be found to give people the knowledge about language rights.

A pioneer service can be initiated by the media

Minister of National languages and Social Integration,
Vasudeva Nanayakkara

We are implementing various programmes to impart knowledge about bilingual rights to the people. The support by the media for this is very important. Therefore we are always trying to obtain the assistance from the media for our course of action. Yet, it is a pity that we don't get the assistance that we hope for.

We can see that instead the media keeps a large space for reporting facts that are detrimental to society. It gives considerable coverage to violent acts including suicides, murders and gossip that has absolutely no reporting value, but it is reluctant to give sufficient space for news regarding languages rights which is a main fundamental right of the people. This is the actual situation that is present in the media today. Sometimes we hear that this is because readers have no particular liking for news relating to themes like language rights.

Yet we have to state that we are thankful that some programmes have been given a special assistance from the media. For example we should appreciate very much the special assistance that had been given by the media in introducing the '1956' instant hot line service that we initiated recently regarding languages rights of the people. This instant hotline was introduced by us for the purpose of reporting instances of violations of language rights, and complaints about language problems. The main reason that it is being successfully implemented is the wide coverage that was given by the media which was behind it.

It is observed that the media knowledge of language rights has risen up to a certain degree, relative to the recent past. The reason maybe due to the fact that the media had been involved during programmes about language rights. Therefore, it is the duty of the media to carry on imparting knowledge to society. The Ministry is implementing a course of action where Language stalls would be established in every main town at the regional level.

A many faceted course of action is being followed in order to give awareness (on language policy) to government officials at the district level, and society in general. It is wrong that space has not been given through the media to allow society to see these things. If the publicity that is being given to education, health and commercial advertisements, is being given to the dignity of the languages and to language rights too, society would have a much deeper understanding of it.

The media can also give a great service in establishing a cultural variety including language rights. The media has the ability to provide a pioneer service to establish harmony among communities through culture and art. It is the responsibility of the relevant government establishments to work amicably with the media regarding this.



Evaluation of the Second Phase of the Project Promoting Language Rights

By Prof

S.H Hasbulla

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In one area however, there is a marked change which could be observed in the country as a whole, this is the area of language rights implementation. This is a positive change considering historic injustice experienced by speakers of the Tamil language in this country. The denial of the Tamil language was also seen as the denial of rights of the Tamil minority which many would agree led to the ethnic war which lasted for last 30 years.

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This exercise by Professor SH.

Hasbulla evaluated a project on promoting language rights which was launched and implemented by a leading civil rights organization, the Centre for Policy Alternatives, (CPA) in Sri Lanka. The main objective of the project was “To secure fundamental rights of minorities with a focus on language rights in Sri Lanka.”

The project was launched at a time the country was going through a transformation from war and ethnic animosity towards peace and stability. What was achieved during the last four years after the end of the last war is subject to debate. The victims of war and conflict, especially the minority communities of the country have not recovered from the pain of discrimination and marginalization that has been going on in the country for several decades.

In one area however, there is a marked change which could be observed in the country as a whole, this is the area of language rights implementation. This is a positive change considering historic injustice experienced by speakers of the Tamil language in this country. The denial of the Tamil language was also seen as the denial of rights of the Tamil minority which many would agree led to the ethnic war which lasted for last 30 years.

There have been a number of positive changes in the rights and use of both major languages including the language of the minority in the country. Credit must be attributed to the overall change in the approach used by the state, and the timely implementation of this project by CPA. At the same time there is an increasing awareness among individuals and

communities about the rights of their own language and the rights of others to use of their own language.

Many factors have contributed to the present state of the language use and language rights in the country. Projects mainly focusing the promotion and protection of language rights have played a key role - of these projects, a project by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (hereafter CPA) on Promoting Language Rights in Sri Lanka, whose purpose was to secure fundamental rights of minorities with a focus on language rights in Sri Lanka, was remarkably effective and commendable.

CPA's commitment, past experience, and track record on projects involving language and similar issues, as well as its ability, capacity, and determination in implementing this project, was a primary contributor to the success of

this program.

A number of lessons have been learned through this project. Launching a project of this nature right after the end of the war, motivating the state to enact necessary legal instruments, challenging the violations of language through proper and accepted forums and taking the message of language rights to grass root level with a clear project vision are some of the positive outcomes of this project.

The message of the project on the need for further improvement in the promotion of language rights is essentially understood and accepted in the larger community, however, the promotion of language rights must be further strengthened through a number of ways including providing necessary resources for the proper implementation of the project at all levels throughout the country.

This evaluation recommends the continued protection and promotion of language rights, taking into account the lessons learned during the implementation of the project in both stages.

The evaluation found evidence that the project fulfilled its expected objectives during implementation. Therefore, the evaluation strongly recommends the project to be carried forward with necessary modifications.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUITY

1. Basic language right issues that were identified by the project for intervention, such as translation of name boards, circulars, etc. are timely and appropriate. For the future however, language issues could be identified using more innovative means and ways have to be found as how to incorporate those newly emerging language issues for intervention.

2. Language Societies: Established by the project at the grass-roots levels to engage independently on language right issues, this was an innovative initiative. The performance of Language Societies were mixed; some performed up to expectations and others seemed unsure as to their reason for existence. The possibility of reviving and

strengthening already formed language societies exists, for which there is a need for external assistance, training and monitoring. The question is whether those needs could be fulfilled and by whom?

3. Training of Trainers: Most people involved in the project gained tremendous experience and awareness in working for language rights. Those who went through the training say that they gained knowledge through training and they need further training to continue the task, with or without the project.

4. Network: the project aimed for a language rights network that came about as a result of the project to take care of remaining language right issues in a mutually shared manner. Unfortunately, what was planned did not happen. However, there is always a possibility of reviving and strengthening the network to engage in language right related activities - where government language officials, government established language societies and other interested parties such as media, etc. could be linked for future networking on this issue.

Suggestions for the next phase/for continuity:

- Certain issues that were already addressed need to be kept fresh and revisited.
- New and emerging issues need to be addressed with more attention.
- New areas and communities should be given awareness and opportunities to engage in language right promotion
- A logical next step would be the carrying out of language audits in the relevant areas.
- Scope: there are more than 3000 GN divisions in the N& E, and the project worked in only 150 so far, through its two phases. The project so far has also not worked in Mullaitivu or Kilinochchi. An effort to reach at least 1/3rd of these or 1000 GN divisions through the project would contribute to its effectiveness on a national scale.
- A logical next step would be to organize systematic language audits of regions covered to ascertain the status of language rights in these areas

Building a brotherhood by reconciliation and language rights

The North and East region can be recognized as being predominantly occupied by people who are suffering due to violation of language rights. A network of civil organizations in 6 districts of the North and East region, as well as the Colombo district, was established for these long suffering people and their language rights in 2011.

In 2012, our organization (NCDF) obtained membership in it, in order to represent the Trincomalee district. While we are working for language rights with

30 Language Societies and with government, private and many common organizations, we can share our experiences with other linked organizations in other districts. In a very brotherly fashion, we are building up a group of people who are sensitive towards the speech and language of the other community. Our organization has a wealth of research data about problems in languages from all the district's government, private and common establishments. Our organisation and other sister organisations

districtwise are using this data towards the solution of such problems, and winning social attention. Therefore the programme "Promoting the language rights of minorities" provides us with great strength. We have established that brotherly reconciliation and communication should be used as a bridge by language.

There is a majority of people who say that there is no freedom of speech today. Yet, we have to speak up that even in places where freedom of speech is possible, people

don't speak strongly enough about freedom of speech..

Is the language that you speak Sinhala or Tamil? If you are Sinhala wherever you go in order to get some work done, to speak more and to listen more, you like the Sinhala language. If you are a Tamil, it is the same. If those wonderful set of words are to become a true social definition. You should honor the others' language. They should be helped to establish their language rights. We should understand how the national problem

became more adverse due to language. A broad social debate should be built for this. Our organization is dedicated to this. The programme for promoting the language rights of minorities has produced a network of many organizations similar to ours, which is implemented throughout the country.

This network organization can implement a pioneer social service transforming the future having learnt lessons from our dark history.

Suranga Rupasinghe.

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

In the early years of the 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 society 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.

- (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 any lethargic attitude in any Ministry/Dept. for action that the President may deem fit.
- (j) Presidential directions may be made as appropriate under Section 22 (1) of the Constitution, introduced through the Sixteenth Amendment, which reads as follows:

Strengthening Bi-lingual Schools through a new Education Policy



Dr Devanesan Nesiah

Mutual understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural diversity of different communities should be inculcated in the minds of school children and youth so that the process of reconciliation takes firm root in the social fabric of the country.

“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. It is suggested that in any province in which the language of administration and public record is Sinhala, Tamil is declared as an additional language of administration and public record in those A.G.A. Divisions of the province in which the proportion of Tamil speaking persons is not less than 12 1/2 percent and, likewise, in any province in which the language of administration and public record is Tamil, Sinhala is declared as an additional language of administration and public record in those A.G.A. Divisions of the province in which the proportion of Sinhalese is not less than 12 1/2 percent.

LONG TERM MEASURES

The team has not visited any offices in the North East or in the Central, North Central or Southern Provinces, and is not in a position to report in respect of these regions. Our survey has covered many offices in the Western, North Western, Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces. A consistent pattern has emerged of a glaring lack of Tamil language proficiency in virtually every office audited at all levels, although many of those offices serve populations of which very substantial proportions are Tamil speaking.

The highest priority should be given to correcting oral, reading and writing language deficiencies. Unless this is done, the legal requirements in respect of using the Tamil language in administration cannot be met. It is essential that the specific language capacity of each unit of the public services must be such as to meet the needs of the population in the language medium they are most comfortable with.

While all citizens have the same rights in all parts of the Island, it may not be pragmatic to seek to ensure that every office in every A.G.A. Division has the same level of competency in all three languages. Most offices may have Sinhala or Tamil as the language of official record; many may have both; a few may have English too. But all offices need to have minimum competency to transact office business in all three languages. We therefore make certain proposals below to ensure that these requirements could be met.

To the next Issue

Bilingual "Ada" paper wins Gold for Sri Lanka at ADFEST 2014

Sri Lanka won Gold Lotus in the promotion category for the best use of Print/Conventional Outdoor for the Ada, Unity Paper from ADFEST, Asia Pacific's premier advertising festival and awards show, held annually in Pattaya, Thailand.

Leo Burnett won the gold award showing Sri Lanka's strength as a marketing communications agency in the region. This year's theme at ADFEST is to "Co-Create the Future". The festival hosts delegates from Asia Pacific to the Middle East to celebrate creativity.

The 'Unity Paper' was created to remind every Sri Lankan of the importance of national unity and integration in a country such as Sri Lanka which suffered many setbacks due to the 30 year civil war. This initiative was further driven through social media with a joint alphabet where letters from the Sinhala and Tamil alphabet which represented the same letter were interlocked.

This innovative breakthrough in the Sri Lankan media was created by the Leo Burnett team in collaboration with Starcom the media buying arm of the Publicis Group in partnership with the team at Ada.

"If faults are shown we will remedy them: "We apologise for the wrong done."

says Vasu, the Minister of National Languages and Social Integration.

Minister of National Languages and Social Integration, Vasudeva Nanayakkara stated recently, that he asked forgiveness from the Tamil-speaking people for any faults that are seen in the name boards and the notice boards that had been written in the Tamil language.

"Whenever our attention had been directed towards any faults, we have rectified those faults. Also we accept the responsibility for those faults," the minister declared.

He made this statement when interviewed by the media regarding a complaint about a fault seen in the bus written in the Tamil language.

Although the sign board stating, "for pregnant mothers only" had been written correctly in the Sinhala and English languages, the Tamil translation that should have been "karpini thaimar galukkaga" (Reserved for pregnant mothers only) was written as "karpini naimar galukkaga" This reads as "Reserved for pregnant dogs".

One letter had changed the meaning. That is the Tamil letter "tha" (the word had been replaced by the Tamil word "na"). The minister further stated that this type of mistake could occur sometimes as the person who had written the sentence would have known Tamil, but the person who created the notice may not have known it.

The Daily Mirror newspaper had stated on the 7th February 2014 that the BBC had stated that the Minister had said a mistake like this had occurred in the parliament too. But that it had been rectified.



Showing how state buses have used the Tamil Language incorrectly

In the bank note..... from the first page

The Central Bank had agreed to rectify the mistake and give equal recognition to all three languages, when next printing new currency notes.

This agreement had been reached on the 16th July last year, in the presence of the

Human Rights Commission.

On that day, the Exchange Controller participated during the investigation of the complaint in place of the Governor of the Central Bank, together with the Chief Legal Officer of the Central Bank.

Although the Constitution of Sri Lanka recognised that the Tamil language was the official language and a national language, the complaint to the Human Rights Commission stated that the bank notes that had been printed recently did not have the sentence. "This bank note had been produced for the government of Sri Lanka is valid for any money transaction within Sri Lanka" in the Tamil language. Although agreement had been reached on the July 16th 2013, the LKR 500 currency note that had been printed thereafter for the CHOGM conference which was held later had been simply printed as previously without giving the proper place for the Tamil language.

The Centre for Policy Alternatives submitted a complaint to the Supreme Court of Justice later. The Supreme Court of Justice which examined this complaint on the 10th of March 2014 gave an order that all bank notes that are printed in the future should be in accordance with the Official Languages Policy

A bilingual problem in the Uva Post Offices

Weegoda Hemapala, Bibile

The Tamil people who are living in the Badulla and Monaragala districts who have no knowledge of the Sinhala language are facing great difficulties, due to the fact that the notices that are shown in the post offices in these districts are printed only in the Sinhala language.

A majority of people who live in the vicinity of the towns specially in the Badulla and Monaragala are Tamil, yet notices appear in both these post offices mostly in the Sinhala language.

Therefore, the Tamil Muslim people who are living in these places are requesting those responsible to get this notices printed in the Tamil languages for their convenience. This problem is quite serious among the Tamil people living in Passara, Lunugala. Therefore, the people living in these areas are requesting those responsible to give attention and to implement a course of action to get these notices printed in both the Sinhala and Tamil languages.

Trilingualism should not be a strain on the brain

continued from the previous issue

The national trilingual programme and the implementation – part 4.

The skill in the English language is not useful for a person to speak with people of this country. It may be useful to know the language of English speaking countries when tourists and businessmen from those countries come to our country. Yet, people who come from Europe speak only a little English and although the French people know English, they are reluctant to speak in English.

Actually the citizens of our country speak in English among themselves because it may be maybe a habit that they cannot let go, or because they are snobbish. If a person speaks in English in a political establishment like the parliament in one way, it is for the people to be attracted towards that person. Also to gain popularity internationally. This sort of attitude is taken by the lawyers in the courts that is, to show their clients their importance.

Actually every member who is in a place like the parliament should be able to understand the swabhasha ("own language") speeches that are heard there. And there should be a tradition that the reply to this should also be in the swabhasha that one speaks. It will be helpful if primarily the President and the Prime Minister and secondarily the Board of Ministers and those who help in governing the country and in formulating laws as well as speaking with the English speaking foreigners, are

“ It will be helpful if primarily the President and the Prime Minister and secondarily the Board of Ministers and those who help in governing the country and in formulating laws as well as speaking with the English speaking foreigners, are trilingual.

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Such activities are not relevant to the farmers, fishermen and workers. Generally what politicians try to do is to save themselves and evade the issue of trilingualism and put it onto the general public, who do not really need it.

In the same tone, a question arises about trilingualism. Is there a frequent opportunity for a Sinhala speaking farmer to speak with the Tamil speaking farmer? As they are both trilingual can they not speak with each other in English instead of Sinhala or Tamil? Also, cannot the Sinhala or Tamil farmer acquire a skill in speaking In English with his son, daughter, using the social mobile?

When an elderly farmer could not even speak bilingually, let alone be trilingual, in 2012, when trilingualism was first introduced, can a child of 15 years, at that time explaining in English to his father, his knowledge of farming that

he had learned from English books (in 2022) at the age of 25? If not, can he only say “good morning, “and “how are you?”

If a 40 year old housewife today goes in 2022 to a government office, can she speak in English which will be widely spoken and solve the problem about fertilizer subsidies? Should not the government give a hand to let a farmer carry out his occupation, in peace and quiet instead of straining his brain with trilingualism, and not waste his time and efforts, causing him difficulties?

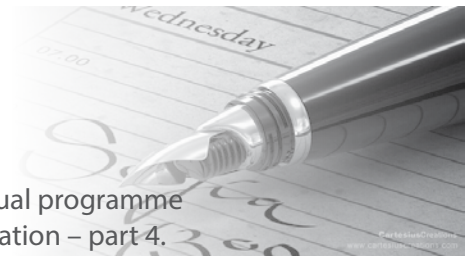
If the common citizen does not want tri-lingualism, it can be forgotten. The government cannot force him, similar to paying income tax. But a student in a school cannot do so. He cannot evade it due to many reasons. According to this draft, his life of languages commences in the grade 5 with the scholarship examination. First of all he cannot evade his family at home. Next is the school, followed by the

Tuition master, and finally society. All of them seem to be waiting like a devil, with the mouth open, to swallow him.

Everything goes wrong for parents when their sons and daughter do not pass with flying colours at this scholarship examination. Therefore the child is sent to the “tuition” class. The word “tuition” is used to show that it is more detrimental to the child than being helpful. Although we observe the trauma that small children undergo due to these reasons, we tend to look away as if no such thing is happening because of the mentality of their parents that had been fashioned by society. In any position, all parents whose hopes could not be fulfilled in society want their hopes to be realized through their children. The first step in doing so is this scholarships examination.

Continued in the next issue

Amaradasa Weerasinghe
Extract from Cultural magazine
2013, February issue.





Readers Responses

Readers Responses

Blessings for a valuable service

Chief Incumbent of the Sri Bodhirukkarama Maha Vihara, Panama, Ven Sugatha Sasana Vangsha Vibushana Deshabakthi Sadhamakeerthi Sri Sumanasara Saranapala (M.A)Prelate of the Dedasawe of Panama Sri Chandarathanabhidana Wellassa Digamadulla.

It is no secret to knowledgeable people that language takes a vulnerable place in assisting people to protect their honor and their identity internationally as well as a country

as whole. As long as this fact is not understood well, ethnic problems as well as language problems will continue to arise.

We appreciate the fact that the Centre for Policy Alternatives, understanding the need for implementing the language policy, under this situation, had come forwards again, to create an environment where all the communities, of this country could work together in one place.

Not only that, at a time when an ethnic problem had been eradicated from this country, as all people can live and move in any area of this country without

obstructions, it is a yeoman service if sign boards letters, documentation, news, and presentation of ideas are ensured in the Sinhala and Tamil languages in all areas.

It is a great strength to prevent a re-occurrence of the ethnic revolt in the future. Therefore our good wishes/ blessings are for the Centre for Policy Alternatives for implementing this programme with these good intentions.

"If a community is to have their identity and their freedom, they should have the fundamental right to use their mother tongue as required".

A lack of Tamil language teachers in Vavuniya

Due to the fact that many schools belonging to the Vavuniya South Divisional Secretariat division have no teachers present to teach subjects in the Tamil medium, the girls and boys who are studying in these schools, are facing serious difficulties.

Among the schools that are facing this problem are the Algalla, Mahakachchikodiya and Pavakkulama schools and although several appeals had been made to the Vavuniya South Zonal Education office to rectify this problem, solutions have not yet been obtained.

Good wishes to the Vibhasha Newsletter from Uva South

Secretary

Uva South Association of Journalists
Bibile

Although the Vibhasha magazine is small in size, it is a very useful magazine, which should be much appreciated. Through this, strength is given to all the ethnic groups in this country to build peace and friendship amongst them. This provides a guide showing the way for the minority communities of this country to solve problems regarding their language rights. Already the Tamil language has been made a compulsory subject even in Sinhala schools. This is a good thing, but it should not be confined only to schools. The whole country should understand the value of a bilingual education. The Vibhasha newsletter is able to implement a considerable service in action towards broadening this understanding. We send our best wishes to Vibhasha which is making this effort.

Awareness raised for Members of Language Societies and Government Officers in 5 districts

Outreach Unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives reached a target of successfully concluding programmes raising awareness of the members of Language Societies, as well as government officials in 5 districts from the 6, 7, and 8th of last February.

More than a thousand people participated in the programmes giving information about languages that were held in the Kandy, Matale, Moneragala, Badulla and Nuwara Eliya Districts. Other than the topics of the

official languages policy and language and law, the multiple problems that the government officials linked to Language, and the communities are facing were also discussed during these programmes. Instances where bilingual policy was not implemented or was not implemented in the correct manner, causing the people to undergo many problems and irregularities, were among the issues discussed here. The workshops were conducted by the senior researcher of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Lionel Guruge and Attorney-at-law S.G. Punchihewa.



Report by : Sudarshani Damunupola

Write to us..

Language policy of Sri Lanka is a controversial issue. Our aim through Vibhasha is to broaden further and to enrich this dialogue. We believe your contribution in this respect is crucial.

Send us your ideas, opinion and information. Vibhasha news letter is open for all of you in the debate on languages rights in this country.

Send us your ideas, response, problems and proposals on language rights



Editor,
Vibhasha Newsletter,
Centre for Policy
Alternatives,
24/2, 28th Lane,
Flower Road,
Colombo 07.
TP 0112 370801/4
Fax: 0112 370802



The happiness of a girl who received an address for her home for the first time



Vilaasama Through the Camera Lens

Following are the photographs from the Vibhasha camera lens, showing the implementation of a programme safeguarding civil rights, that was held in the Passara region in order to provide permanent address to the families of estate workers.



After erecting the Vinayagar Puram Signboard



Some of the local recipients of unique addresses being visited by representatives of the High Commission



An exchange of ideas, among beneficiaries of the "Vilaasama" programmes.



A public meeting as part of the Vilaasama Project