

was a shame that the JHU had misused Buddhist flags, the Great Bodhi tree and Buddhist terminologies in their political campaigns to achieve political power – Ven. Elle Gunawansa Thera³

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PEACE PROCESS IN SRI LANKA AND JATHIKA HELA URUMAYA: A SPOILSPORT?

Abstract

The emergence of Janata Hela Urumaya (JHU) has vast impact on the peace process in Sri Lanka. In the given situation, the JHU has two options vis-à-vis the current peace process, either it can play the role of a spoilsport as done in the past by the Sinhala hard-liners and their outfits, or it can contribute positively towards a successful conflict-resolution. However, as of now, all the activities of the JHU and its vehement opposition to the peace process indicates that it is all set to disrupt the peace process at any cost. Unfortunately, if this happens, then Sri Lanka will be back to the square one, where the innocent people would continue to suffer as before. Till then, the peace process will continue to be a difficult and challenging task, with a political situation fluid and uncertain in times to follow.

The declared intention of JHU is to “cleanse” parliament and establish a Dharmarajya or a State based on the teachings of Buddha, in which minority parties of Tamils and Muslims will not dictate terms to the government.²

Why enlist yourself among politicians when you [JHU] can guide them from a higher level from existing position as their advisors... it

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² Nirupama Subramanian, “The Bhikhu Effect”, *The Hindu*, April 11th, 2004.

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The successive peace talks in Sri Lanka have raised hopes among the people of this nation for a peaceful resolution of the decades old ethnic strife, which has already taken around 65,000 lives – half were civilians with majority aged between 20-35 years, and left thousands permanently disabled. An estimated 130,000 families were internally displaced and about 750,000 fled the country and sought asylum abroad.⁴ In this regard, the cease-fire agreement (CFA) reached between the UNP-led government by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and the leader of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Velupillai Prabhakaran⁵, which came into effect from February 24th, 2002 set the ball rolling for a no-war situation. However, this euphoria did not last long or lead to any meaningful conflict resolution in the face of frequent political uncertainty, particularly due to the unilateral pullout by the LTTE on April 21st, 2003⁶ from the peace talks and the political standoff between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe. The taking over of the three crucial ministries Defence, Interior and Mass Communication by President Kumartunga in November 2003, this has exacerbated the prevailing political uncertainty. In response to this, the Norwegian facilitator on November 7th, 2003 formally put the peace

³ “Ven. Elle Gunawansa Thera lashes out at JHU”, *Daily News*, November 8th, 2004

⁴ Approximately 66,000 are living at various camps in India, 40,000 live outside camps in India and more than 200,000 live in the Western countries. National Peace Council, *The Cost of War: Challenges and Priorities for the Future* (Colombo: Marga Institute, 2003).

⁵ For profile of Velupillai Prabhakaran see M.R. Narayanswamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerilla* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001) and R. Rajagopalan, “Velupillai Prabhakaran: LTTE” in *Most Wanted: Profiles of Terror*. (New Delhi: Lotus Collection and Roli books, 2002), pp.95-119

⁶ LTTE withdrew from the talks on the grounds that the resettlement of displaced persons would not be possible until the Sri Lanka Army relocated from the High Security Zones (HSZ) in Jaffna. But many suspect that the real reason was its demand to recognize the Sea Tigers as *de facto* naval unit.

talks on hold until political clarity was reached between the two offices.

However, this uncertainty, a common feature in Sri Lankan politics, seems to have cleared to a certain extent with the parliamentary elections held in April 2004. The election led to the forming of a minority government led by the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), consisting of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front or the JVP) along with the support of nine Members of Parliament (MPs) from the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (National Heritage Party or the JHU), a party consisting of Buddhist monks that won seven seats and gained two seats due to proportional representation.⁷ Subsequently, the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) requested the Norwegian facilitator to resume the peace talks between the government and the LTTE, and since then the Norwegian Government begun the process for resuming peace talks. This came as a great relief for the displaced people, economy and for the international community as Sri Lanka has a track record of a sudden break down of peace process and resumption of civil war.

On the other hand, the rise of the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinistic parties like the JVP and the JHU during the 2004 parliamentary elections has a vast impact on the prospects of the ongoing peace process. Since they are opposed to any kind of compromise over the nation's [Sinhala] interest regarding the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Both parties are supporting the UPFA Government led by Mahinda Rajapakse and would be deciding the fate of peace talks with rebels. In this regard one is surprised over the sudden rise of JHU just few months before the elections. Thus, before identifying the reasons for the rise of JHU, it is important to address the motivating factors for the monks to enter politics.

⁷ The proportional representation in Sri Lanka favors small parties, as any party that obtains minimum of 5 per cent of votes in a given electoral district qualify for seats at the expense of major parties.

Monks in Politics: Guiding factors

Generally, there is no consensus among the members of Buddhist *Sangha*⁸ over the role of monks in politics, as some argue for a limited participation while others for a more direct role. Ironically, amongst the various sects of monks itself there is a division of opinion, which further complicates the issue. Despite these differences, some of the guiding factors for the monks to involve themselves in politics are – they urge to re-create the lost social order, were Buddhism and *Sangha*'s played a vital role in the nation-building process and which is seen to have ensured prosperity in the past. They also perceive that they have a role to play in the polity, particularly as a guiding force in governance. Monks see themselves as the true representatives of people and not the politicians, as the latter are more corrupt, opportunistic and so on. Monks claim that their authority to advice and influence the government comes from the peoples who follow their religion [Buddhism]. Also, when the political forces fail to perform their duties, monks consider it their duty to influence the government decision.⁹ Thus, many monks based on these arguments justify their intervention in politics to defend and promote their national interests of common people.

On the other hand, from time to time many monks, politicians, Buddhist scholars and media have criticized the monk's participation

⁸ The Buddhist *Sangha* mainly consists of all 'Bhikkhus' (monks), 'Bhikkhunis' (nuns), 'Upaskas' (male lay devotees) and 'Upasikas' (female lay devotees). It also forms the third component of the triple Gems of Buddha's teaching, that is "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the *Dhamma* (Doctrine), I take refuge in the *Sangha*". See Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Major World Religions: From Their Origin to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.66 and Urmila Phadnis, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1976).

⁹ For further details on monk's involvement in politics, see, Emile Sahliyah, (ed.), *Religious Resurgence and Politics in the Contemporary World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, (eds.), *Fundamentalism Comprehended*, Vol-5, (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.135-152 and Urmila Phadnis, *Religion and Politics in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1976).

in politics. They considered that the decline of the essence of Buddhism is largely due to the result of monks willing sub-ordination to politicians.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, even the JHU received mixed reactions from the members of *Sangha* on the issue of contesting elections. The Mahanayake of *Malwatta and Asgiriya* chapter declining to meet monks contesting on JHU tickets and stated that, “they were dismayed and warned that it posed the danger of a grave calamity to the Buddha *Sasana*”.¹¹ Since then many senior monks have criticized the JHU for receiving funds from rich industrialists for contesting elections who with a vested interest are supporting the entry of JHU into electoral politics. Ironically, the Mahanayaka of *Amarapura Nikaya* gave blessings to JHU as they intended to “clean the mess in parliament”. Despite these division and varied reactions to the monk’s involvement in politics the JHU with its nine MPs is likely to play pivotal role once the peace talks resume.

However, the division of opinion could not prevented monks from entering into politics. Since independence the monks have been sharing platform with politicians, blessing them and participating in activities sponsored either by a political party or the government. In addition to this, there are instances where monks have been involved in intensifying ethnic conflict and in instigating violence against the minority ethnic Tamil community.¹² However, when it came to contesting elections, it was the *Sinhala Urumaya* that contested the 2000 elections and won just one seat and that too by a lay Buddhist. In fact for the first time a leading figure [monk] Baddegama Samita from People’s Alliance (PA) party was elected as a MP during the

¹⁰ See, for details, H.L. Seneviratne, *The Works of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Stanley. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹¹ *POTS*, Sri Lanka Series, Vol-X, No-16, April 15th, 2004. Also see “Ven. Elle Gunawansa Thera Lashes out at JHU”, *Daily News*, November 8th, 2004

¹² For further details, see, K. M. de Silva, “Religion and the State”, in *idem* (ed.), *Sri Lanka: Problem of Governance* (New Delhi: Konark, 1993). Mark Juergensmeyer, “What the Bhikkhu Said: Reflections on the Rise of Militant Religious Nationalism”, *Religion*, Vol. 20, 1990, p.58.

December 2001 elections.¹³ Significantly the monk’s entry in to Parliament went up with the successful entry of the JHU. As a result of all this, the JHU has emerged as a major player in deciding the destiny of the island’s protracted conflict.

Emergence of the JHU

The JHU is the offshoot of two Sinhala-Buddhist organisations – *Sinhala Urumaya* and *Jathika Sangha Sabhava* (JSS), which worked for the welfare of Buddhism in the Island. The founders and supporters of JHU cite socio-political, economical, cultural and social reasons for its emergence. According to them it was: (a) due to “non-representation of Sinhala-Buddhist in Sri Lanka”, as the successive governments failed to safeguard the interest of majority community [Sinhala-Buddhist]. (b) the spread of Christian evangelism by foreign missionaries and the activities of their foreign funded organization leading to the conversion of poor Buddhist which the JHU considers anti-Buddhist. (c) in reaction to the emergence of radical groups and political parties representing Tamils and Muslims. They justified by stating that there is no political party representing the interest of Sinhala Buddhist population, which make up to 76 per cent of the country’s population.¹⁴ They also believe that the present Sinhala political parties are involved in corruption, misconduct and do not deserve to represent Sinhala population. (d) the UNP Government appeasing the LTTE by recognizing the latter as sole representative of the Tamils and assisting it in gaining international acceptance.¹⁵ At the same time the UNP’s disapproval of Sinhala-Buddhist interests while

¹³ R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, “Roots of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.10, 2003. See www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/bath-conf.html

¹⁴ Although, according to the Department of Census and Statistics (Census 2001), Sinhalese consists of 81.89 per cent of the total population, for details see www.statistics.gov.lk. Also see Nirupama Subramanian, “Arithmetic and Alliance”, *The Hindu*, March 27th 2004.

¹⁵ Shantha K Hennayake, “Why did JHU emerge”, *The Island*, 19th May 2004. Also see Shantha K Hennayake “Sri Lankan Politics, 2004 Election and JHU”, May 18th, 2004, <http://members.tripod.com/amarasara/jhu/jhuarticles/jhua-sk-20040518.htm>

negotiating with the rebels was also cited as a reason for their entry in politics. But the triggering factor was the demise of a leading figure, Ven. Gangodawila Soma Thera on March 23rd, 2004. His funeral ceremony served as an inspiration to monks for future mass mobilization. As Soma Thera's had pointed out the diminution and erosion of Buddhist values, the problems of the family, alcoholism, drugs and violence against women were popular with the lay people.¹⁶ Thus, in order to fulfill to the dreams of Soma Thera, the JHU was formed.

Against this backdrop, for the first time in the history of Island, more than 280 monks contested the parliamentary elections in April 2004, with even the members of *Sangha* participating directly in politics. Although the outcome of the elections was not as encouraging for the JHU as it was expected, but interestingly it secured 6 per cent of the total votes polled. They fared well in the western provinces, winning seven seats, mainly one from Kalutara District and Central province—one from Kandy District, two from Gampaha District and three from Colombo District.¹⁷ The JHU also made inroads into the UNP vote base, as the people were unhappy with the performance of the UNP government, on the economic front. Hence, the overall support base of JHU comes from the urban and sub-urban areas, however they have no hold in rural areas. Ironically, the JHU could not make inroads in the areas considered to be Sinhala-Buddhist heartland, like the Anuradhapura and Galle. It is here that the Buddhist population is higher than the national average, where the JHU secured less than 5 per cent of votes, Kalutara District remains an exception in the region.¹⁸ Thus this undermines the JHU claim of representing the Sinhala-Buddhist interests.

¹⁶ Kumar Rupesinghe, "Elections are over, Back to Reality" *The Island*, April 11th, 2004.

¹⁷ *The Island*, 5th April 2004, pp.2-3

¹⁸ Tisaranve Gunasekara, "Electoral Revelations", *The Island*, April 11th, 2004, p-10.

JHU's position on vital issues

For	Against
➤ Unitary State	➤ Traditional Tamil homeland
➤ Equality of Status to all Ethnic Groups	➤ [So-called]Unethical conversions
➤ Freedom of Religion	➤ Foreign interference
➤ Separation of northeastern provinces	➤ Interference in local politics by unaccountable foreign funded NGOs
➤ Mixed Economy	➤ Constitutional changes if they do not safeguard national interest
➤ Declare Buddhism as State religion	➤ LTTE's present proposal of Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) for the northeast
➤ FDI without harming national interest	➤ Post-Tsuanmi Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS)
➤ Reforms for good governance	

JHU and the Peace Process: The Irritants

History has been repeating in Sri Lanka, specifically in terms of the failure of successive peace processes due to the intense pressure from the Buddhist monks along with other chauvinistic Sinhala-Buddhist organizations. From time to time the Buddhist monks have opposed the 1956 Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact, Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1965, the All Party Conference in 1984, Thimpu Talks in 1985, the Indo-Lanka Agreement of 1987, Premadasa and the LTTE negotiations in 1989-1990.¹⁹ This impediment continued all through the 1995 peace process, the monks kept up pressure on the GOSL to not to reach a compromise settlement with the Tamils at the cost of Sinhala-Buddhist interest. In 1997, one of the leading monks decided to withdraw from the Supreme Advisory

¹⁹ For more details, see, S. D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lankan Ethnic Crisis* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1993) and J. N. Dixit, *Assignment Colombo* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1998).

Council in protest against President Kumartunga's plans for devolution of powers to resolve the ethnic conflict.²⁰ Thus, to a certain extent most of the monks not only became stumbling blocks to successive peace processes, but also emerged as key players in future peace talks. It is noteworthy that before the launch of 2002 peace process, the top officials of the Norwegian Government had to first consult the prominent personalities of the *Sangha* and then proceeded with facilitating talks between the GOSL and the LTTE.

Thus, the emergence of JHU holds the key to the success of current peace process. Since its formation, they have been expressing dissatisfaction against the way in which the peace process has been initiated by the GOSL. Their activism has been a hindrance to the government's efforts towards building consensus for resolving the bloody war. The vital issues on which JHU has been opposing the successive peace talks are as follows:

Current Peace Process: Anti- Sinhala Buddhist

The JHU is dissatisfied over the UPFA Government pursuing the peace process in a similar fashion, so-called pro-LTTE and anti-Sinhala, as the previous UNP Government. They have been opposing the 2002 peace process on various grounds. Firstly, they considered it to be anti-patriotic which they justified by stating that even the people were against the 2002 peace process, as a result of which the UNP Government was voted out during the 2004 parliamentary elections. However this is a weak argument, as majority of people were happy with the peace process but ousted the UNP government over its failure to deliver goods on the economic front in a short span.²¹ Secondly, the main concern of the JHU has been that the peace talks have always been confined only to GOSL and the LTTE, and it did not involve other parties and groups from the Sinhala and the minority communities. They believe that these close door peace talks will only

²⁰ Partha S. Ghosh, *Ethnicity versus Nationalism: The Devolution Discourse in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Sage publications, 2003) and Kenneth D Bush, *The Intra-Group Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (New York: Plagrave Macmillan, 2003).

²¹ Larry Marshall, "Sri Lanka: From Cease-fire to Conflict Transformation" *Global Change, Peace and Security*, Vol.16, No.1, February 2004.

lead to the division of the country and perpetuate the conflict. This argument does not hold good, as the GOSL from time to time have been consulting the various Sinhala parties and the *Sangha*. Instead, the GOSL have not been able to build consensus on issues to be discussed during the peace talks, mainly due to the maximalist position adopted by the Sinhala-Buddhist outfits. Against this background, the JHU has been opposing the peace process by frequently organizing processions, demonstrations and by carrying out signature campaigns in southern parts of the island. The Inter-University Bhikkhu Federation launched a signature campaign on a post card addressed to the President Kumaratunga, requesting her not to resume talks with the LTTE on the basis of ISGA proposal.²² So far they have collected one million signatures to oppose the talks as against the targets of 10 million.²³ Despite the JHU opposition, the GOSL has expressed its readiness to resume talks with the rebels on the basis of ISGA but along with the 'contours of a final settlement', which the LTTE has been outrightly rejecting and sticking to their maximalist [Eelam] option.²⁴

Apart from this, the JHU even boycotted the National Advisory Committee on Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR) created by the President Kumaratunga for the "openness and inclusiveness" of the peace process. The JHU justified its non-participation on the ground that "the LTTE is a terrorist outfit and a legitimate government should not talk with a terrorist group unconditionally... if the government

²² The LTTE's proposal ISGA was submitted to the GOSL in October 2003, which seeks complete autonomy – political and economic life of the northeast people. It also calls for separate institutions to be set up for the north-east in respect of police, judiciary, elections, taxation, local and foreign grants and loans and trade among others. If this policy implemented the LTTE will have absolute majority in the northeast. Jehan Perera, "Recent Trends in Sri Lanka's Peace Process and Regional implications", This paper was presented at Seminar on *Collective Security in Asia*, organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and held in New Delhi, December 14-17th 2004.

²³ *The Island*, November 26th, 2004, p.1

²⁴ This was reiterated by the Defence Minister Ratnasoro Wickremanayake. *The Island*, December 7th 2004, p.1

talks, it is immoral".²⁵ Ironically, in this case the JHU is asking for too much and ignores the hard fact that the LTTE is a key player, without which there cannot be any peaceful resolutions of the conflict. Giving less importance to the JHU opposition the GOSL in near future will start negotiating with the rebels as they cannot brush aside the pressure from the international community and people of the island for early resumption of talks.

Norway: The White Tiger

The JHU are against any foreign interference in the affairs of the island and thereby opposes the Norwegian facilitation and calls it as *Sudi Koti* (White Tiger). However, on the other hand the JHU have been seeking India's involvement for resolving the conflict, which the latter has refused to do so. The JHU accuses Norwegian facilitation excessively sympathetic and partial towards the LTTE activities. This argument is true to a certain extent, as was evident during the cease-fire. The LTTE, on various instances, violated the norms of cease-fire and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) failed to take any action due to the fear of break down of peace process.²⁶ The JHU also claim that the Norwegians have now arrogated to themselves role of mediator from mere facilitators. In order to register its opposition, the JHU along with few JVP supporters have been carrying out demonstrations in front of the Norway Embassy in Colombo and launched many rallies to warn the people of what the monks see as a

²⁵ The JHU's main conditions for its participation at NACPR meeting are: the LTTE should give up the idea of Eelam; should except the territorial integrity and legal framework of the island; hand over all weapons in their possession; and stop atrocities against Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim community. *The Island*, 2nd October 2004, p.1. However, Maha Nayake Theras including the Malwatta and Asigiriya and other religious dignitaries participated the NACPR meetings ignoring JHU request not to participate. Even the UNP and TNA boycotted the NACPR meeting. See *Island*, October 10th, 2004, p.11.

²⁶ Even from time to time most prominent monks like The Mahanayake Thera of the Malwatta Chapter expressed his dissatisfaction to GOSL and international community over the SLMM failure to halt the LTTE's continued atrocities on civilians and recruitment of Child soldiers. *The Island*, November 27th, 2004, p.1.

farce in the name of peace. At the same time, it is exposing the division of opinion among the members of alliance, by questioning the credentials of the JVP and the SLFP, who were earlier a staunch critic of the Norwegian facilitators and now appeared to be going along with them.²⁷ The JHU even passed a motion in the Parliament demanding the end of the Norwegian facilitation on the ground that its presence threatens the island.²⁸ However, the JHU fails to consider the wishes of Sinhala and Tamil people who support the role of Norwegian. Reports indicate that around 63 per cent of the people support Norwegian involvement and among them around 90.2 per cent of Tamils believe that SLMM is necessary.²⁹ Thus, supporters of the JHU's views are marginal, but once the talks being under the facilitation of Norway, the protest by monks is likely to intensify posing a hurdle for the GOSL.

LTTE as Sole Representatives?

Successive governments have recognized the LTTE as sole representatives of the Tamil people and have held negotiation with them. The Sri Lankan Foreign Affairs Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar at various national and international forums reiterated so.³⁰ The GOSL has been not unoften opposed by the JHU on the ground that the legitimization of the LTTE as true representatives of the Tamil community is unfair. They contend that views and freedom of other

²⁷ Ironically, despite JVP being part of the government, its activist have been consistently organizing rallies and demonstration opposing the role of Norway in the peace process, but JHU wants more rigorous action from JVP to block this so-called anti-Sinhala peace talks. *The Daily Mirror*, 12 May 2004. And also see, *The Island*, November 26th, 2004, p.1.

²⁸ *The Island*, 23rd October 2004. See "Parliament debates JHU motion against Norwegian facilitation", October 23rd, 2004, www.tamilnet.com/art.html

²⁹ *Peace Confidence Index* (Colombo: Social Indicators, Center of Policy Alternative, 2003), p.26. As quoted in Larry Marshall, "Sri Lanka: From Cease-fire to Conflict Transformation" *Global Change, Peace and Security*, Vol.16, No.1, February 2004, p.67.

³⁰ "Interview: Lakshman Kadirgama", *Frontline*, May 8-21, 2004, pp.36-38.

Tamil political parties and various civil rights groups stands curtailed by the LTTE. In this regard, the JHU argument is to an extent valid but not realistic as it fails to recognize fact that the GOSL has a limitation but to recognize the LTTE as representative of the Tamils. It is to be noted that from time to time all those who challenged or questioned the LTTE's eminence have been brutally assassinated. Even the elected 22 MPs of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) are nothing but a mouthpiece of the LTTE, the latter has always set the demand of its been recognized as representatives of Tamils as a pre-condition for resuming talks. Apart from this one cannot ignore the fact that the LTTE has been able to sustain its struggle and win the support of Tamils against the Sinhala extremist policies. However, for the first time LTTE's claim as the sole representative of Tamils was seriously challenged [politically and militarily] from within its ranks by the most efficient military commander in eastern province, V. Muralitharan (Col. Karuna), in April 2004.³¹ Col. Karuna went one step ahead and launched a new political party, *Tamileela Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal* in October 2004 and even made his maiden "Hero's Day Speech" on November 27th, 2004.³² However, one cannot rule out the possibility of role played by the GOSL in the emergence of Col Karuna. This sudden development has strengthened the JHU argument of not recognizing the LTTE as sole representatives of the Tamils. Thus, what strategies the JHU adopts once the peace talks resumes is yet to be seen.

³¹ Col. Karuna stated the main reason for his revolt against the LTTE hegemony was the discrimination adopted by the LTTE leadership against the Tamils of eastern province. Since the revolt breakout, the LTTE has lost 72 cadre, the highest number since it signed the cease-fire in 2002. It is estimated that around 150 cadre from both sides of the LTTE divide have been killed. V.S.Sambandan, "The Stalemate in Sri Lanka", *Frontline*, December 31st, 2004, pp.52-54

³² In the Hero's day speech, Col. Karuna attacked the leadership of Prabhakaran as "unfit to lead the Tamils... and responsible for large scale killing Tamils. Subsequently, questioned the LTTE as sole representative of Tamils. Subsequently, describe India as a better suited to resolve the conflict and it was latter responsibility to help the Tamils. V.S.Sambandan, "Another Heroes' Day speech", *Frontline*, December 31st, 2004, p.54.

No to Eelam: Maximalist Position

Most of the Sinhala-Buddhist outfits and political parties are dead opposed to *Eelam* (Tamil homeland). The JHU among them considers itself to be the only force which could stop the creation of *Eelam* as it will lead to a division of island. As an alternative to *Eelam* they advocate administrative structures and powers to be decentralized within a unitary State. They also reject federalism on the ground that it is totally inappropriate here, as Sri Lanka has always been a unitary State.³³ This argument by JHU is as usual opposed by the LTTE, which is not going to compromise on anything short of *Eelam*. This was very much evident in the LTTE's ISGA proposal, which is nothing but a stepping stone for achieving *Eelam*. As its proposal makes no provision for integration with the nation prevailing structures. In this context, as expected, the GOSL has adopted a cautious and a restrained position. This stalemate is a boost for the JHU's opposition to the peace process.

No to P-TOMS: Maximalist Position

The *Tsunami* [Harbour waves] struck the island on 26th December 2004, this tragedy devastated the coastal island. As a result more than 2 Lakhs families were displaced, 30,000 deaths, 4,000 missing and 645 camps been set up.³⁴ In this regard, the international community emphasized for a joint administrative mechanism as a condition for releasing aid to provide humanitarian relief in the region. As a result after must heated negotiations [six months and 13 drafts] on 24th June 2005 the GOSL and the LTTE signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for establishing P-TOMS, also known as Tsunami Relief council (TRC).³⁵ At the same time, MOU envisages to involve LTTE for ensuring equal distribution of resources, project allocation for the reconstruction of the island. Thus, this MOU has vast impact on the peace process, as it legitimizes the LTTE's role in administrative affairs.

³³ Tamil Net, April 11, 2004. See www.tamilnet.com

³⁴ The Data is as of 6th January 2005. For details see, V. S. Sambandan, "Life on the Shores of Death", *Frontline*, 28th January 2005 p.29.

³⁵ The aim of P-TOMS is to ensure equitable distribution of international assistance for reconstruction of devastated coastline. Subsequently, the MOU is for one year and may be extended for an additional period by consensus.

It is this aspect on which the JHU along with JVP and other Sinhala-hardliners has been staunch opponents to this mechanism which they considered would ultimately divide the nation. They also argue that the joint mechanism “as selling out a part of the land to the terrorist [LTTE]” and a stepping stone to achieve *Eelam*.³⁶ The mechanism would lead to formalization and expansion of the LTTE’s role in those areas which it did not have any control earlier. Subsequently, it would grant the LTTE the status of sole representative of Tamils, which the Sinhala hardliners have been opposing outrightly. In process, the JHU along with the other Sinhala outfits have launched protest campaigning like fast unto death, rallies and demonstrations to ensure the joint mechanism be dropped. Ironically, the JHU fails to accept the fact that this mechanism creates an conducive atmosphere for peace talks and this will also allow the concern authorities to begin the task of repairing the extensive destruction caused by *Tsunami*. Thus, the JHU opposition to mechanism indicates its majoritarian mind-set and chauvinistic approach towards the resolution of conflict. Thus, as long as this stand is not compromised by JHU, the P-TOMS will face further hurdles in the near future.

The Way Ahead

One of the biggest challenge before the Mahinda Rajapakse Government is dealing with JHU’s opposition, which has extended issue based support to the former from outside. There are chances of JHU withdrawing the support if the government does not take JHU demands seriously, thereby leading to further political instability. The JHU has been consistently opposing the GOSL on the issue of devolution of powers, Norwegian role, treating LTTE as sole representatives of Tamils and so on. This difference of opinion is a hindrance to the government’s initiative for building consensus over peace talks. At the same time, with the amendment of JHU constitution paving the way for laymen to join the party has not only resulted in an increase in strength but has also intensified its political activities in fulfilling its chauvinistic agenda. Moreover, it has the

³⁶ V.S. Sambandan, “The Politics of Reconstruction”, *Frontline*, July 1st 2005, p.46.

support from the JVP in its struggle to safeguard the interest of Sinhala-Buddhist people. As a result, the JHU, along with other outfits with similar ideologies, has begun to agitate, organize large-scale rallies and demonstrations against the peace process and government’s policy towards it.

For the JHU too there is a bumpy road ahead for its progress. There has been difference of opinion among the Sinhala-Buddhist lay members and monks over the proposed amendment to its constitution, which minimizes the role of lay members and provides veto powers to monks.³⁷ If this difference is not resolved amicably, then there are chances of lay members launching a new party or joining *Sinhala Urumaya*, which will be a big blow to JHU’s political prospects.³⁸ Moreover, since the emergence of JHU, many prominent members of Buddhist *Sangha* have been criticizing the activities and questioning the credentials of JHU as a crusader of Sinhala-Buddhist. This difference of opinion within and outside JHU will affect its support base and political survival in times to come.

Thus, the emergence of JHU has vast impact on the peace process, which the GOSL cannot ignore. In the given situation, the JHU has two options vis-à-vis the current peace process, either it can play the role of a spoilsport as done in the past by the Sinhala hard-liners and their outfits, or it can contribute positively towards a successful conflict-resolution. However, as of now all the activities of the JHU and its vehement opposition to the peace process indicates that it is all set to disrupt the peace process at any cost. Unfortunately, if this happens, then Sri Lanka will be back to the square one, where the innocent people would continue to suffer as before. Till then, the peace process will continue to be a difficult and challenging task, with a political situation fluid and uncertain in times to follow.

³⁷ The three prominent persons Prof. Buddadasa Hewavitarana, Prof. Chandra Wikremage and another member were involved in preparing amendments to the JHU Constitution. *Sunday Observer*, November 14th, 2004.

³⁸ *Asian Tribune*, “Sri Lanka’s Jathika Hela Urumaya – Storm in the Alms Bowl”, November 10th 2004. Also see P.G.G Pulihapitiya, “Sinhala Urumaya and Buddhist Monks in Politics” www.lankaweb.com/news/items04/030304-5html