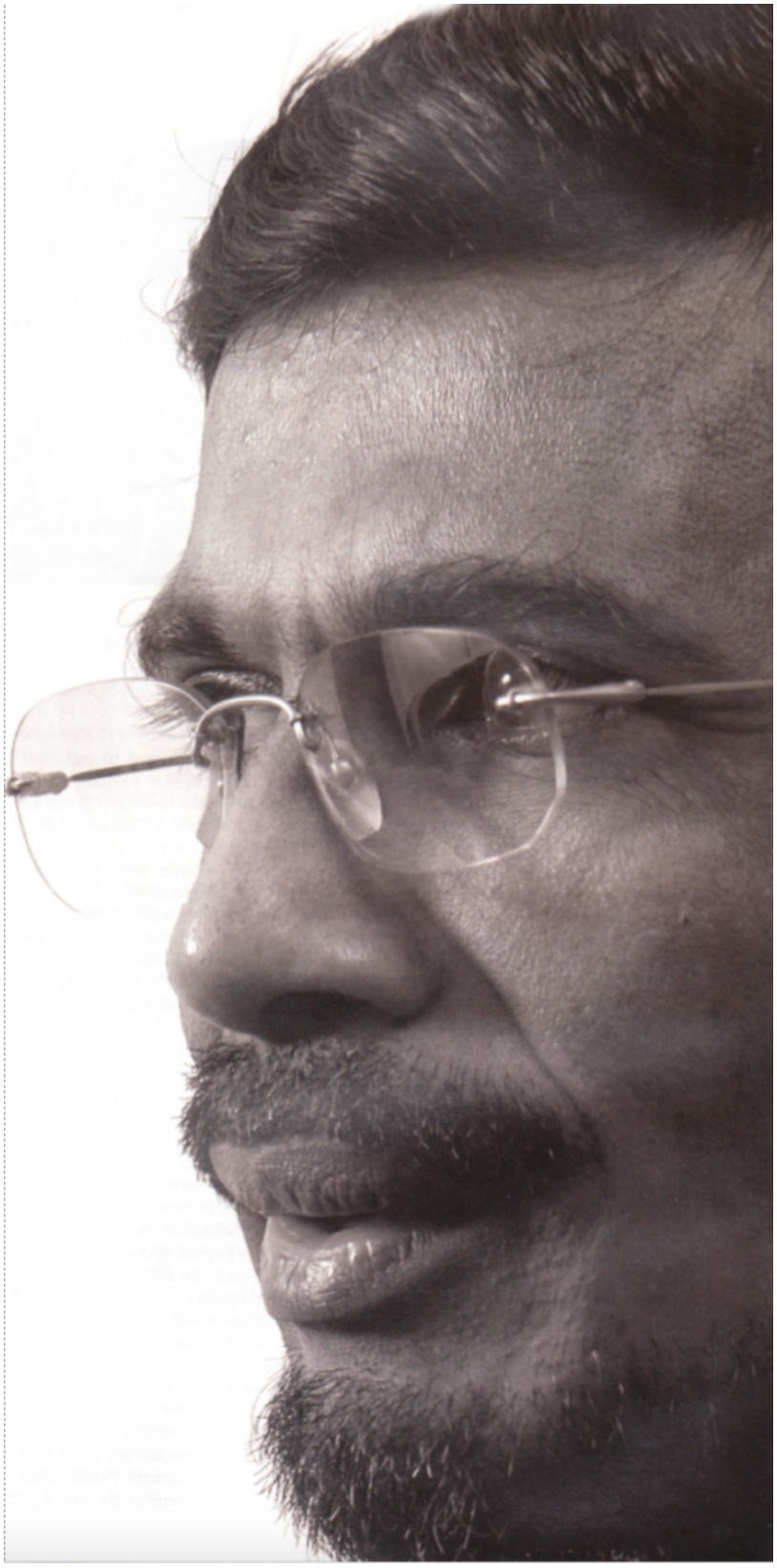


Village and the City to the JVP

The JVP is the only single political party to field 4,914 candidates for 277 local government bodies in 22 districts in the country. By this measure alone the JVP has every claim to be onsidered as a national political party, says Tilvin Silva, General Secretary of the JVP. In the light of this, he dismisses as absurd the propaganda directed against the JVP that it is a party that represents only Sinhala opinion, or that it is a Sinhala radical or extremist party. He stresses the importance of strengthening national political parties and deplores the presence of regional parties based on narrow sectarian interests. While welcoming the decision to continue discussions between the Government and the LTTE in April this year, he says the very fact that the talks were held and the decision to meet again is a victory for the country. In his view the very fact that talks were held was a major success for President Mahinda Rajapaksha, because during the presidential election his opponents warned that a victory for him would make war inevitable, and that the JVP's support for him would make it impossible for a government headed by him to have talks with the LTTE. All this has been proved wrong, he says. However, he stresses that the JVP does not agree with the Joint Statement prepared with Norwegian intervention after the conclusion of the Geneva talks. As for the policies of the Government and the Mahinda Chintana, Silva is of the view that so far President Rajapaksha has done nothing harmful or detrimental to the country. He

expresses serious concern about President Rajapaksha not having the entire support of the SLFP, and sees several obstacles from within the SLFP; those working with the President; and some sections of the bureaucracy in implementing the Mahinda Chintana with the speed that is necessary. He sees these as issues that require early address by President Rajapaksha, if the Mahinda Chintana is to be properly implemented.

By a Special Correspondent



What is the view of your party with regard to the latest development, which is the conclusion of the talks between the Government and L TIE in Geneva?

We observe that the talks have concluded with agreement being reached to have another round of talks in Geneva in April this year. The agreement to have another round of talks I believe is a victory that we have won as a country. I say this because there were doubts in the minds of many that these talks would be a failure; that the LTTE would walk out of them or that in any event the talks would collapse and would not proceed further. It is now clear that the talks will proceed further. It is not yet time to comment on what was good or bad about the actual talks because they have only just been concluded. That will need further evaluation. However, we see the very fact that the talks were held as being good in terms of the country. When President Mahinda Rajapaksha contested the election for the presidency, his opponents, especially the UNP and certain NGOs sought to drive fear into the people that if President Rajapaksha is elected the LTTE will definitely go to war. They empnasized that this would be so because of the support that the JVP gave to President Rajapaksha's campaign. They also gave the impression that an electoral success for Mahinda Rajapaksha, in alliance with the JVP, would make it impossible to bring the L TTE to talks. However, there is cause for satisfaction that the talks with the L TTE which broke down during the time of the UNP government and which the UNP government was unable to resume, were in fact revived after President Mahinda Rajapaksha was elected President. I think we should consider that as a major achievement for the country. Also, it is important to note that the talks were not revived by giving in to or appeasing the Tigers, or by carrying out acts of betrayal of the country, but were based on the clear policies of the government and principles in the Mahinda Chintana. The observations made by the members of the Government delegation in their opening statements are also extremely significant, in that they highlighted the faults of the LTTE, how it had persistently violated the CFA, and the many acts of violence carried out by it and also emphasizing that if talks are to be pursued further there should be a meaningful ceasefire. This round of talks has now ended. The next round is to be in April, and we must consider the actual progress of events after these talks. However, the JVP had a clear position that these talks should be conducted in accordance with the agreement that President Mahinda Rajapaksha entered into with the JVP. This is included in the Mahinda Chintana, and the JVP will certainly support talks that are based on these principles. Although the Government's representatives stated their case from a very correct position, the Joint Statement agreed to by both sides weakened the correct

and strong position taken up by the Government delegation at the beginning. This should not have been the case. That Joint Statement was prepared by Erik Solheim. It makes clear his partiality to the L TIE. However, while we of the JVP reject this Joint Statement, we believe that the Government should take necessary action to correct the wrongs caused by this statement.

Almost coincident with the beginning of these talks, it was announced that Norway would give up leadership of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, the official ceasefire monitors, and hand that work to Sweden. What is your view of this development?

talks were about to resume, we see as an early sign of movement towards a better direction. But, the replacement is Sweden, another Nordic or Scandinavian country. We cannot make predictions as to the behavior of Sweden in this matter. But we hope that having seen and observed the situation faced by Norway in this country due to how it functioned, Sweden would have learnt the necessary lessons and would carry out its duties and obligations in the proper manner. We cannot make any forecasts about that. However, we do see this as a very small change for the better.

To come to the other issue that is high on the national political agenda, what is the role of the JVP in the upcoming local government elections, and how will you carry out your campaign for these elections?

You already know that the JVP is contesting these elections as a separate political party. It is not part of any electoral front or alliance. The main reason for this, which requires explanation, is that as we have for some time been part of government in the UPF A, and also was in a broad alliance that supported the election of Mahinda Rajapaksha, the question is asked why we are going it alone now. The fact that we are contesting the LG polls separately has not caused any problem for the understanding we have with President Rajapaksha. We are committed to support the Government of President Rajapaksha both today and tomorrow, as long as it acts in accordance with agreements reached with us. However, we see the LG elections as something different to national politics. These involve so many small local bodies that have not been of service to the people. The basic rights that our people expect from these local bodies have been denied to them. Further, this round of elections is not one that is linked with the main political issues of the country. These are linked to the day to day services and facilities, and social rights of people both in villages and towns or cities.

The issues are the removal of garbage, the building of roads and drains, public health services and such very basic and simple needs of the people. What we have seen is that these local bodies have a long history of corruption, waste, rip-offs of public funds, the absence of service to the people, the failure by municipal councils and other local bodies to work out a proper system of garbage disposal, and the failure to provide proper roads etc. Therefore, we in the JVP desire and see the need to have a new system of administration in these local bodies, as we hay.e a plan for their better management, providing actual service to the people. We state this particularly because of the success we have had in the Tissamaharama Pradeshiya Sabha, which we won in the LG elec-tions of March 2002. Since then we have transformed this local body into an exemplary institution in local government. In 2004, it was chosen as the best administered Pradeshiya Sabha in the entire South. It is a very poor local body functioning in a difficult area. But we have been able to raise this to the level of a local body that gives the highest possible service to the people. We wish to implement this experience and example in the other local bodies in the country too. In this context it is our belief that the best way to achieve this is if the JVP contests as a separate political party. We have therefore come to this campaign with the slogan of “The village is for the JVP”. By this it does not mean that towns and cities are excluded. It is a slogan put out in the context of “small government” in each area. What we seek is to bring a new tradition or style into the administration of local government affairs both in the villages and towns. We wish to be able to provide the necessary services and facilities to the people, and make these local bodies examples of small governments, directly impacting on the people, with good and efficient management and service. Recently we carried out a research study on these local bodies, and based on the findings of this research we have worked out a plan for the better administration of each local body. We will go to the people with this plan, with the promise and determination that we will provide the people with a much better local government administration, and take the message and example of Tissamaharama to other parts of the country. As a socialist party the JVP has a commitment to protecting the environment.

From this point of view what will your party do with regard to the destruction of the environment in the name of development, by the municipalities of Colombo, Dehiwela, Moratuwa, Kotte, Kandy and other local authority areas?

This is a very valid question, and we have provided the answer to this at Tissamaharama. When we took over the administration there, among the first things we did was to take a large number of environmentalists over there and do

carry out an environmental study of the area. Based on the findings and advice of these environmentalists we launched a new environmental protection plan there. New trees were planted, a new garbage and waste disposal system was put in place, drainage facilities were greatly improved. The results of these steps taken to protect the environmental are there for everyone to see. We do not believe that changing or damaging the environment in the name of development amounts to genuine development. What is being increasingly accepted in the world is development that is environment friendly. There is today a more humane aspect to development. Large buildings and industries alone do not necessarily mean development.

We notice this problem as being very acute in the cities and urban areas. Therefore, our programme of action is to develop these cities and other places in a manner that is both environment and people friendly. Even in our activities as a political party we have taken initiatives to prevent harm to the environment. For example, we have contested several elections but in all of these we have as a matter of policy avoided the use of polythene for campaign purposes, as it is harmful to the environment. We use cloth or paper which are ecofriendly and are recyclable. It is the same in this election too. We have told all our candidates not to use polythene for campaign work.

Similarly, we have observed that particularly in the larger local authorities such as Colombo, Dehiwela-Mt. Lavinia, Kotte and Moratuwa to name a few, the problems of garbage disposal and the breeding of mosquitoes that are related to environmental pollution exist on a large scale. We believe that it is necessary to launch programs to tackle these problems that involve participation of the people. If anyone believes that these problems can be solved by pushing the people to a side that will be impossible. The protection of the environment is not possible without the participation of the people. Therefore, it is necessary to build awareness among the people, and obtain their participation in carrying out these activities. It is only by such a program that success can be achieved in this field, we have a plan worked out to achieve this in each area and through these means we will be able to move towards genuine development that is environment friendly.

The JVP extended its support to Mahinda Rajapaksha for the presidency on the basis of an agreement reached with him, which is included in his policy statement, the Mahinda Chintana. With three months having passed since Rajapaksha’s election as president, what are your views with regard to the implementation of policies in the Mahinda Chintana? Are they in

fact being implemented?

A very clear answer to this question is that since President Mahinda Rajapaksha took office as President several steps have been taken to implement the policies in the Mahinda Chintana. One very significant thing that has to be said is that so far Mahinda Rajapaksha has done nothing that is harmful to the country. The next is that the pace of implementing what is in the Mahinda Chintana has not been as speedy as the country or the JVP expected it to be. There is a certain slowing down in the process. In addition, even at a different level, things have been done that the people do not accept. It is well known that there is dissatisfaction with the size of the Cabinet sworn in when the new government was formed. We have been open in our criticism and opposition to this. Similarly, the allocation of functions among ministers or ministries has not been done on any scientific or rational basis. We think this is a damage caused to the President from the very beginning. There are several such shortcomings. One reason for this is the genuine cause for doubt whether all those who are working with President Mahinda Rajapaksha are persons who have an understanding of the Mahinda Chintana or have a commitment to it. We must take note that there are large numbers of officials \,·ho have been used to working in a set manner for many years. There are some good officials among them too, but others work according to the norms they have been used to. There are also those within the government who are working according their old beliefs, making no effort to understand and implement the Mahinda Chintana. In addition there are the actions of the President's opponents and the various obstacles placed against the implementation of the Mahinda Chintana. For example, there are those within the SLFP itself who do not agree with these policies. These obstacles ha,·e not yet been removed. They stand in the way of implementing the policies of the Mahinda Chintana with the necessary speed and effectiveness. We regret the presence of these obstacles. But despite all this, what we have observed is that so far nothing damaging or disadvantageous to the country has been done by the Government of President Rajapaksha.

You said that crises within the SLFP are obstacles to the implementation of the Mahinda Chintana. I will not ask you for solutions to any problems within the SLFP. However, what do you think should be done to get over these obstacles in the interests of the proper implementing of the President's policies?

The crisis within the SLFP is no secret to the people. It is a situation where the leader of the SLFP did not give her blessings to the campaign for the Presidency

that Mahinda Rajapaksha carried out together with the JVP, based on the Mahinda Chintana. On the other hand many efforts were made to break up the relationship between Mahinda Rajapaksha and the JVP. We saw many obstacles during the presidential election campaign too. Even after the election we notice that there is no cooperation extended to the President. We observe that he has to function without the whole hearted support of his own party. This is a problem that has to be resolved by the SLFP. However, even though it is not our problem, to the extent that problems within a political party affect the people adversely, it becomes a people's problem too. Particularly with regard to the national issue, Mahinda Rajapaksha took a new position, which is the resolution of the issues of race or ethnicity within a unitary Sri Lanka. There was considerable opposition to this from the SLFP's leadership under the former president and the UNP. We believe it is the responsibility of President Rajapaksha to control this situation and move forward. We believe he will do this. In carrying out the policies agreed with the JVP we will extend our fullest support to him. However, it has become his own task to resolve the other issues that stand in the way of his progress.

Is there any estimation you have made about your performance in the local government elections?

Yes, we have an understanding of this because it is after four years that we have sought the vote as the JVP. The last occasion when we contested alone was in the LG polls of March 2002. Since then we have been functioning as members of an alliance. We believe that in the past four years we have done a great service to this country. At a time when it was thought that the UNP government could not be defeated we took our campaign to the people, worked very hard and saw to the defeat of the UNP and saved the country from the tremendous threats. We helped establish the government of the UPFA. Within the UPFA government we worked for one year, handling four important ministries in an exemplary manner. I would not be wrong in stating that the only party that carried out such exemplary administration of ministries in the county was the JVP. Next, when President Kumaratunga set about establishing the P-TOMS with the LTTE for Tsunami relief, which was not favorable to the people and in fact was a threat to the people and the country, we gave greater consideration to the interests of the people and left the UPFA government. Similarly, when Mahinda Raapaksha came forward as the presidential candidate we helped avoid the dangers to him and the country and extended our support to him with no conditions attached. We put our entire strength behind him and assured him of victory. Yet, we did not expect anything

from that. We did not accept any portfolios. On the other hand we have served the people in every way possible. We did this through the ministries that wc had, when we were part of the government. At the time of the Tsunami, we came forward to bring immediate and much needed relief to the people. The people affected by the Tsunami are well aware of the tireless role that our volunteers played in bring help and relief to them. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that in the past four years we have served the people both politically and in the areas of welfare, relief and assistance.

A large number of the people are aware of the exemplary work we have done in the field of local government through the Tissa Pradeshiya Sabha. Therefore, we have great confidence that in these local government elections the JVP will have remarkable success. Also, at the very beginning of this election campaign, there are indications of our success. We are seeking election in 277 local bodies in 22 districts. In the North, we are seeking election in the Vavuniya and Mullativu districts. We have nominated a total of 4,914 candidates, and by this we remain the only single party in Sri Lanka to field such a large number of candidates. Others such as the UPFA are fielding large numbers in alliance with others. At the very beginning of the election, large and well established political parties, who have the best legal advisors with them, have had their nominations lists rejected for various reasons, but none of the 277 nomination lists submitted by the JVP were rejected. This gives us great initial encouragement and good expectations for success at the e elections. We believe that we will receive a large number of votes; will have a large number of our candidates elected, and we are confident that the JVP will be able to control several local government bodie in every di trict we are contesting. Especially in view of the examples of our acti,·itie in the people’s interests, and our record of good administration wherever the task was given to u in the pa t four years, we belieYe that the people will entrust the responsibility of building the village and the town to the JVP.

There could be many legal or technical reasons for the nomination lists of the two main parties, the UNP and SLFP, being rejected. However, looking at it from a political and organizational point of view what do you think is the reason for these rejections?

The principle difference between the JVP and these parties is that we are a properly organized and disciplined party. All our members work for common goals and not for personal benefit. The other parties do not have this common purpose, discipline and organization. ext, they have not paid due attention to the laws with regard to

nominations. The Elections Commissioner sent to the secretaries of all political parties very clear details as to how the nomination papers should be filled, many weeks in advance. What we did was to follow these instructions. But these other parties did not act according to these instructions because of the large contest that was going on to get the names of the spouses, children, relations or friends of various persons into the lists of these parties. In this situation many did not follow the instructions of the secretaries of the parties but prepared several different sets of papers to suit various personal needs of leading members or other special interests. This is what led to the present situation and it demonstrates lack of discipline, disregard for the rules and the attempts to gain personal advantage. We do not think it to be a very good precedent to appeal to the Courts for help once such a situation has arisen due to the reasons that I explained. We do not deny anyone the right to seek redress in Courts when faced with a problem that comes within the jurisdiction of the Court. We respect that. However, in a situation when one has not followed the laws and regulations covering nominations, to seek redress in the Courts, we think leads to the degrading of the functions and duties of the Commissioner of Elections and the respective Returning Officers.

> “We are also a party that gave a place to those other than the Sinhalese whenever we had the opportunity”

What do you have to say about media reports, that have not been contradicted, which stated there were financial and other powerful forces seeking to influence the nominations lists of these parties, particularly the UNP?

We do not know what exactly happened, but from the reports published and the various inquiries that are said to be conducted, it appears that there was some stealthy action taken to deliberately have some names deleted from the nomination lists or to have these lists rejected. Consequently, some members carried out protests and even picketed near the office of a party leader against senior members of that party. There were many such inner squabbles which came into the open. In any event these are not matters that one expects from democratic political parties. The JVP had no such problems. The reality is that although these parties claim they wish to work for the people, within them it is a struggle to somehow obtain power. In this struggle they abandon all ethics of democratic politics, disregard the law and descend to the lowest levels of political squabbling and back stabbing. It because of

such action that these parties are faced with the crises they do today. However, the real losers in this are not the members squabbling to grab power, but the ordinary members of these parties and the people whose votes these parties seek.

There have been many efforts to depict the JVP as a party that is representative of Sinhala opinion only, and that you are a party that represents radical or extremist Sinhala opinion. However, from the number and spread of districts you are contesting in and the number of local bodies you are seeking election to, do you consider this image of the JVPvalid?

The truth is that the JVP from its very inception has been a national political organization and movement that represented the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay and all sections of the Sri Lankan people. We have always carried out our politics at a national level. We are not a regional party. The JVP is the only political party in this country that has not caused any trouble or harassment to any group because of community, language or religion. We are also a party that gave a place to those other than the Sinhalese whenever we had the opportunity. When we were able to appoint members to Parliament on the National List after the 2000 elections, we gave one seat to Anjan Umma, a woman from the Muslim community. By this the JVP be came the first party to bring a Muslim woman to Parliament. We also brought Chandrasekeran to Parliament from the National List, because we felt the need for Tamil representation. Today in Parliament and in the local bodies where we have members, there are Tamil and Muslim representatives. In the present LG polls, we were unable to field candidates in the Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mannar Districts, due the conditions prevailing in these places, which make political activity difficult. However, in the predominantly Tamil Mullativu District we are contesting this election. You will see that we are contesting in Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim areas, and that our lists of candidates are drawn from all these communities. Therefore, we do not stand for the Sinhala community only, but for all communities in the country. We ask those communities to accept us as their political representatives.

It must be stated that in the false propaganda carried on against us by our opponents, one aspect is to accuse us of being racist or communalist. The other is that the statement that the JVP is opposed to the business sector and if the JVP is elected there will great cause for concern to the business and corporate sector. This has turned out to be a complete falsehood. The JVP was in government for one year, holding four important portfolios. Can anyone point out to any harm that occurred to the business sector from these ministries? The most work to help and serve the

actual Sri Lankan entrepreneur and business organizations, was done by the JVP. Today too our position is one of being of maximum service and assistance to the genuine Sri Lankan entrepreneurs, industrialists and investors, and that the development of this country is only possible together with their cooperation. We proved this in practice when we were in the UPFA Government. In the Presidential Election when we supported Mahinda Rajapaksha we made it clear that what we wanted was to build a strong national economy. For this purpose there is the need for a strong public sector and an equally strong private sector. There is no question of our being opposed to the private sector or the business community. However, it must be stated that we are certainly opposed to those who do not in fact belong to the genuine business community, but bring disrepute to it and loss to the country by their being engaged it large scale fraud, corruption and serious malpra<stices. We are aware of these groups too and of the damage they do the genuine business sector. We are against robbing of our national wealth, but we will always be in favour of the entrepreneurs, investors, industrialists and others in the business sector actually helping to build and strengthen our economy and help in national development. We wish to emphasize to the business community that the JVP is not the enemy of the business community, but in fact its actual friend and that they will obtain justice and fair play only from the JVP.

When looking at the number of candidates that the JVP is fielding, and the areas it is contesting, is it correct to assume that this shows the JVP to be emerging as a national political party, and that there is shrinking space for regional parties in the country?

I think it is wrong for political parties in this country to be based on region, ethnicity, community or religion. Political parties are required to serve the people, irrespective of region or community. Whatever differences we may have on policies with it, we consider the UNP to be a national political party as it has members from the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and other communities. Similarly, the SLFP is also a national political party irrespective of policy differences we may have with. By the same measure the JVP is also a national political party and movement. That is why we have been able as a single political party, without alliances with any smaller parties, to contest in so many districts, seek election to so many local bodies and field such a large number of candidates. We have no candidates only in three districts, where the activities of the LTTE prevent us from carrying out political activity. If not for that we would have contested there too. It is necessary to recall that in the Presidential Election of 1982, the JVP candidate Rohana Wijeweera obtained votes

from Jaffna. We held public meeting in Jaffna. When I recently went to Vavuniya to hand in nomination papers, the media people there said that a leader of the JVP had come there after 24 years. We like to go to those areas and carry out political activity there, because the JVP is a national political party. We believe that national political parties and movements should gain more strength, in place of parties that are based on narrow regional goals, with little concern for the larger national interest.



