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Father S. J. Emmanuel, President GTF, upbeat after Sri Lanka visit

By Easwaran Rutnam

(ColomboGazette.com) - The change in the political environment in Sri Lanka recently saw the head of a leading Tamil diaspora group visiting the country, his first visit since a ban on him was lifted.

The President of the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) Father S. J. Emmanuel told The Sunday Leader there are some 'good changes' to be seen in the country, yet a lot more needs to be done.

He also called on the Tamil diaspora to not just visit Sri Lanka for a holiday, but seriously contribute to the rebuilding of the country.

Q: How did you feel, returning to Sri Lanka after so many years?

A: My last visit was in Feb 2005 soon after the Tsunami to distribute help to all coastal areas from Point Pedro to Kalmunai. Since I scan all newspapers of Colombo daily, I was not surprised to see some good changes, such as freedom of movement and of views. After the long conflict and war, a lot needs to be done. I think the present government has a unique chance to build up all that was lost.

Q: Do you see and feel real change on the ground?

A: I have not visited the South, but the North devastated by war has some form of peace mixed with fears, frustrations and uncertainty. Fears, because of the large

military still withholding people's lands and limiting livelihoods of people; frustrations are seen through prolonged protests against promises unfulfilled with respect to missing persons and incarcerations of innocents without trial.

Q: What led you to visit Sri Lanka when some others in the Tamil diaspora still feel it's not safe?

A: My long self-exile was caused by the then-media misunderstanding my role as a Catholic priest giving voice on behalf of my victimized people. When churches and schools were bombed and innocent people were dying in large numbers, as a Christian priest and vicar general, I spoke out against the bombings. This was seen as supportive of the LTTE which was fighting a war against the state forces. But the South and all media saw it as supporting terrorism, and abused me with all lies.

Now there is a change of government for the better. The former government had even a web page in which I was falsely portrayed as a terrorist and an enemy of Sri Lanka. But the new government, supported to power by us too, invited me to come back and help Sri Lanka towards recovery and reconciliation. It has delisted some in the diaspora but not all. I wish soon others too be delisted to enable the diaspora in rebuilding Sri Lanka as an

island of peaceful coexistence.

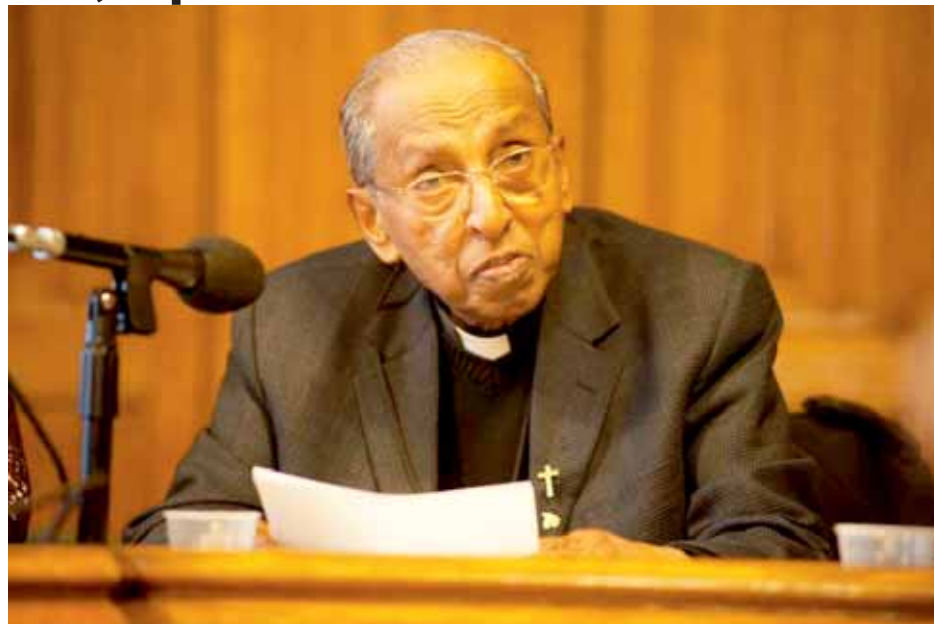
Q: Could you tell us who you met while in Sri Lanka and what key message you conveyed to them?

A: I met government leaders, some High Commissioners, Church leaders and some civil society leaders who I thought will help towards reconciliation and peace. In all meetings I asked their help not to lose this unique chance towards a solution of the national conflict and pave the way for a peaceful coexistence of all people.

Q: There is a concern among some groups in the North that the process to

draft a new Constitution has ignored the aspirations of the Tamils. What is your understanding of the situation?

A: The drafting of a new Constitution undertaken by the ... **CONT ON P12**



Father S. J. Emmanuel, President of the Global Tamil Forum (GTF)

SA'ADI THAWFEEQ reporting from Dubai

(DailyNews.lk) - Sri Lanka inflicted on Pakistan their first Test series defeat since they made the UAE their home venue in

Lankan cricketers create history in UAE

2010 when they beat them by 68 runs with more than two sessions to spare on the fifth and final day to win the second Test played at the Dubai International Stadium and thereby clinch the two-match

series 2-0. Pakistan chasing 317 for victory lost half their side for 62 but were given a new lease of life by their sixth wicket pair Asad Shafiq and skipper Sarfraz Ahmed who

figured in a record sixth wicket stand of 173 to raise their team's hopes of a series levelling win.

But with the match in the balance going into the final day - Sri Lanka requiring five Pakistani wickets and Pakistan 119 runs with Shafiq and Sarfraz at the wickets the Test was set for an enthralling finish. However batting on a fifth day wicket was always tricky and so it proved as Pakistan were bowled out for 248 with off-spinner Dilruwan Perera taking over the role of destroyer from the great Rangana Herath by finishing with figures of 5 for 98 - his fifth five-for in his career and his second against Pakistan. As in the first innings it was a concerted performance by their bowlers that brought Sri Lanka this memorable win. It was Sri Lanka's first win over Pakistan in an away series since 2000 when they won 2-1 under the captaincy of Sanath Jayasuriya in Pakistan. What a turnaround of fortunes it has been for Sri Lanka on this tour. **CONT ON P24**



Sri Lanka cricketers savour their series win over Pakistan with the series trophy. AFP

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