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Communication for Development:  
A Review of Sri Lanka's Press  
and Radio Broadcasting Policies

Richmond R. Peiris

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Media Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## **Abstract**

### **Communication for Development: A Review of Sri Lanka's Press and Radio Broadcasting Policies**

**Richmond R. Peiris**

Since Independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has endeavoured to use mass media to facilitate national development. As has happened elsewhere in the 'Developing World', media policies officially endorsed in this endeavour have encountered contradictions, discrepancies and gaps at the level of implementation. The outcome has been a mélange of success and failure with an inclination toward the latter. Referring to the current literature on the concept of development communication policy, and reviewing the goals and roles of Sri Lankan Press and Radio broadcasting during the period between 1948-88, this study suggests that Sri Lanka's communication policy planners, in their ambitious attempt to define, design and reform the structure of these media, have largely resorted to alien models of development communication. They have also increasingly politicized or more precisely governmentalized the entire process. Sri Lankans, including policyplanners, should be confident that it is the democratization of the communication process which will facilitate development. This will happen, first and foremost, if there exists the political will to do so.

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### **Dedication**

To my parents, Mr. & Mrs. M.W.L. Peiris, who persistently encouraged me to pursue higher education.

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## Introduction

Research analyses of communication policies are relatively rare in the scholarly literature of Sri Lanka. This is particularly true of the policies that were supposedly designed to achieve the nation's development goals. One of the consequences of this situation has been the gradual deterioration of the quality of services rendered by the communication media. This deterioration brings into question the country's development communication policy which has guided the entire communication system over the past forty years of political independence.

Using a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach, this study will review Sri Lanka's development communication policy, which encompasses mainly the press and radio broadcasting. The focus on mass media and the limitation of this study to only two media may be generally justified by the fact that Sri Lanka, since independence, has been following a 'mediacentric' policy toward development dominated by the press and radio broadcasting.

This study will rely largely on provisions stipulated in explicit policy documents (Parliamentary Acts, Laws, regulations, official statements, minister's speeches etc.) as well as on evidence generated from observing the results of policy decisions and practices.



Chapter 1 will review the concept of communication policies as an issue in society and its relation to development, with particular emphasis on the past experience of the Dominant Paradigm and the alternative approaches to development communication currently in practice in 'developing countries'. Chapter 2 will introduce the Sri Lankan case through a review of its communication/media policy environment. Chapter 3 will observe how Sri Lanka gradually began to rely on a 'mediacentric' communication policy in its national development effort. Chapters 4 and 5 will be devoted to examining different interpretations and strategies of the press and radio broadcasting policies, and the structural and institutional reforms instituted by the post-independence governments of Sri Lanka. Concluding remarks in Chapter 6 will be an attempt to re-emphasize the plea rather implicit within the study, i.e. why development communication policyplanners in Sri Lanka should critically rethink past models, policies, practices, and experiences, along with their origins, environments, and real performance, as a pre-condition for the planning of a new policy based on an indigenous model.

(Please note that, throughout the study, emphases made within quotations in bold script are mine, and those underlined are by the authors themselves).

## Chapter One

### COMMUNICATION POLICIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

#### The Issue

Communication policies have long been a much-debated issue. The concept itself is the subject of considerable controversy and even polemic and we are bound to recognize that there is still little unanimity concerning the importance and necessity of framing instruments of this kind, designed to give structure and consistency to overall action.<sup>1</sup>

Such were the opening remarks of the Chapter on 'Communication Policies' appearing in 'Many Voices-One World', the Final Report of the UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, first published in 1980. Given the level of "representation of all major views on communications and development and the high professional quality of its members and consultants",<sup>2</sup> the above remarks may be well considered a summative verdict of contemporary world views on the subject. At the international level, these views have been well exemplified by the UNESCO debate (particularly at 22nd and 23rd General Assemblies) on the New World Information and Communication Order, and also by its aftermath.<sup>3</sup>

The situation indicates the fact that communication policies are a problem; a problem, as Frederick T.C. Yu pointed out, that has been "not really fully understood in any

country".<sup>4</sup> This lack of understanding is justifiable because 'communication' itself as an issue in society is a relatively recent phenomenon. The International Institute of Communications vividly observes the situation:

Our increasing consciousness about communications has led to them becoming an issue per se. ... The new attitudes and concepts which are emerging have, however, not resulted in a generally acceptable let alone accepted framework or theory. On the contrary... We have not even been able to agree on what we are talking about. A recent count of currently used definitions of 'communication' results in a figure well above 100. Not only do approaches differ, according to political and ideological differences, but engineers, social scientists, communications practitioners, lawyers and policymakers have not yet found a common language.<sup>5</sup>

It is within this controversial and challenging atmosphere that the concept of communication policies has come to the fore. Today, the emergent Communication Policy Science and policy research view the question of how communication problems ought to be solved largely as a policy-related phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly so with regard to developing countries, where attempts have been made during the past four decades, to use mass media for facilitating national development. Ithiel de Sola Pool, writing about 'The Rise of Communications Policy Research', pointed out in 1974 that "the policy issue most urgently in need of study" in these countries has been "the role of Communication in development".<sup>7</sup>

The role of communication in development has indeed raised a number of controversial issues related to media structure, performance and regulations. 'Transplantation' of media technologies (both hardware and software) has resulted in peripheral societies being more dependent on the centre. Accordingly, there has been a growing consciousness that communication technologies have not served the interests of the receiver but those of the owner and the supplier. However, since new means of communication cannot be totally abandoned by any nation interested in overall national development the situation has demanded a clear 'course of action' to deal with these issues without impeding or violating the fundamental communication rights that are essential to the qualitative development of human life and societies.

Today, communication and development are treated as closely interrelated processes operating at both micro (individual) and macro (societal) levels vis-a-vis unique characteristics of different societies. This interrelationship is further identified as more subtle and complex than had originally been assumed. For instance, Narula and Pearce<sup>8</sup> argue that communication is not a more or less important component of the development process, but on the contrary, development itself is (a form of) communication. Whatever may be the logical exactness of this kind of argument the obvious fact is that increasing knowledge of the way communication functions in society has

become a central concern of those who rely on "planned action" to change and improve the nature of society.

Development implies and involves change: a change from what a society is to what it aspires to be.<sup>9</sup> Communication, as a fundamental social process, is considered to play a pivotal role in facilitating or bringing about change through enlightenment of those who participate in the process. Though how communication interfaces with change is still controversial, its ability to enhance public awareness, empathy, participation and mobilization at the macro level has been well recognized as a change-contributing attribute. It has also been argued that communication may occur without change and vice versa, or it may bring about undesired and unexpected changes.<sup>10</sup> At the micro level, functions such as satisfying individual and community needs for information, emotional support, integration, cultural continuity, self-education and psychological escape may facilitate or obstruct desired changes.<sup>11</sup> The complex interplay of communication and change is also determined by or related to such factors as politicoeconomic structure, sociocultural linkages, media ownership patterns, the level of attention paid to indigenous communication systems and traditional development concepts, and the nature of public participation in decision making. Similarly, different sectors of development, i.e. culture, education, economy, commerce, science, technology, and even the information industry largely depend on communication

for horizontal and vertical integration as well as public support. Given these differing, complex functions and their modus operandi, particularly within developing societies, what has been of utmost importance is a well-defined and designed 'plan of action' which can establish rational and dynamic links between communication and overall development objectives. Its prime aim has been to facilitate development-oriented changes and minimize disfunctions within the sphere of development communication. The task has been extremely controversial and polemic, and what lies at the complex issue at the core of all discussions and debates on this subject has always been the concept of communication policies.<sup>12</sup>

#### What are Communication Policies?

In 1972, a group of Unesco 'Experts on Communication policies and Planning' attempted to provide the first 'official' description in this regard.

Communication policies are sets of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems. Their orientation is fundamental and long range, although they may have operational implications of short-range significance. They are shaped in the context of society's general approach to communication. Emanating from political ideologies, the social and economic conditions of the country and the values on which they are based, they strive to relate these to the real needs and prospective opportunities of 'communication'... Communication policies exist in every society, though they may frequently be latent and disjointed, rather than clearly articulated and harmonized. What is proposed, therefore, is not something radically new, but rather an explicit statement and

deliberately prospective formulation of practices already established in society.<sup>13</sup>

This 'definition' delineates what is basically meant by communication policies. It reveals their existence in every society and their wide relationship to the existing socio-economic and political structure within which they originate, are shaped, and operate even when not clearly enunciated. Several criticisms have also been levelled at this definition, among which two are of particular significance to this study: a) the notion of policy within this 'definition' is 'too restrictive' since it concentrates heavily on mass media channels; b) the concept (as defined) is 'too linear': UNESCO experts see "policy in a one-dimensional way, as a statement of intent to be agreed and formalized, then translated into practice".<sup>14</sup> Cees J. Hamelink attempts to make his definition more future-oriented than one of rationalizing the existing practices:

A systematic, organic and specific set of principles of organization, action, control, evaluation and re-orientation, intended to direct the public planning of systems and social communication processes within a specific political framework and according to a model of economic and social development.<sup>15</sup>

What is clear in this definition is that communication policies are more than some guiding principles; they are in themselves courses of action; their relationship with planning

should be 'direct and functional';<sup>16</sup> the inclusion of a specific political framework and a socio-economic development model is timely and appropriate since they are widely related to existing socioeconomic and political structures. The problem arises however, with regard to the nature of 'framework' and 'model' because nations, among and within themselves, are widely divided on such matters. So are policymakers and scholars. The simple fact is that societies differ uniquely according to their socioeconomic structures, political and cultural beliefs, historical experiences, international relations, geo-political situations, availability of communication and other resources, and the level of national development. Therefore, communication policies cannot be defined or designed according to a universally applicable model. What remains universally valid are only certain fundamental principles such as democratic control and its extension, because they are grounded in universally recognized human rights.<sup>17</sup>

At the national level, the concept is no less a controversial matter because communication policies are often condensed, (particularly where they are included in the public policy category), to a mere 'choice' of government.<sup>18</sup> Since this has become inevitable, particularly in developing countries what is needed is a well-thought out 'policy philosophy' from which an acceptable 'course of action' can be derived to suit the aforementioned political framework and development model. This



philosophy should entail and reflect the socio-economic, cultural and political realities and necessities of the nation concerned. According to UNESCO documents, such a 'new philosophy' is also a prerequisite for the reshaping of both national and international communication and social structures.<sup>19</sup>

Viewed in this perspective, communication policies are largely of national dimensions and can no longer be regarded as mere sets of regulations as the term has been often 'misused'; the simple fact is that "it is a policy decision whether to regulate or not and a decision not to act is as much a policy decision as a decision to act".<sup>20</sup> Even according to dictionary definitions, 'policy' means 'a course of action' or 'a plan of action', and is not synonymous with 'regulations'. The International Institute of Communications also uses this dictionary definition - 'course of action' - as the 'main living sense' of the concept. Therefore, the obsolete attitude toward communication policies as a set of regulations or rules that would dictate the content of communication and restrict the expression of diverse views has been refuted. Instead, the concept can be identified, particularly for the purpose of this study, as a complex, development-related set of principles aimed at the democratisation of communication through a deliberately chosen course of action, based on a clearly articulated policy philosophy. These policies should carefully direct communication

planning and subsequently plan implementation according to a preferred development model with the understanding that communication planning can take place only within the context of communication policies though policies may exist and be discussed without planning.<sup>21</sup> The central locus should be the full-media system, which includes modern media as well as indigenous communication systems. Recent history of development communication policy illustrates that this new vision of communication policies is based on the experience of most developing countries where both development and communication policies have been defined and designed according to alien models such as the so-called 'dominant paradigm'.

#### 'The Policy' within the Dominant Paradigm

The development model which elevated the industrially advanced countries to their present position and was introduced to the then non-industrialized countries, particularly after the close of the Second World War is popularly known to communication scholars as the 'Dominant Paradigm'. Based on orthodox theories of development,<sup>22</sup> this model assumed that poverty was equivalent to underdevelopment and therefore economic growth through capital intensive technology and centralized planning, supported by mass media, would bring about desired economic prosperity, whereby all basic problems would be satisfactorily solved. The performance of this 'economic

growth model' was quantified in Western economic indices such as GNP and per capita income. Though the objective of the model was often publicized as 'modernization', it reached developing countries in the form of 'Western Industrialization' or mere 'Westernization'. The practical philosophy behind the 'modernization model' was undoubtedly based on the Western experience of material advancement. However, the model was never empirically tested in any developing country and only a fragmentary model of similar kind prevailed in certain countries under the Western colonial rule but obviously not with the consent of their majority people. On the other hand, it was later suggested through world system analyses that no nation, including Western, achieved material development by itself, in fact, only achieved it by the interplay of economic and military might in an international context. By the mid 1970's, the performance of the dominant paradigm was calculated as 'disappointing'<sup>23</sup> though certain countries had achieved substantial economic growth and progress in material standards of living, literacy, international relations and technology use. In short, the dominant paradigm emphasized two themes: a) material advancement to alleviate 'underdevelopment'; b) the demise of traditional attitudes and folkways ill-suited for the demands of 'modern society'.<sup>24</sup>

In order to bring about this 'modern society', a unilinear policy based on the Aristotelian metatheory of communication<sup>25</sup>

was implied by the paradigm. The implicit policy philosophy was that modern mass media should facilitate modernization. Daniel Lerner, among other pioneering development communication theorists, was optimistic about how mass media would contribute to this process:

The Western model of modernization exhibits certain components and sequences whose relevance is global. Everywhere, for example, increasing urbanization has tended to raise literacy; rising literacy has tended to increase media exposure; increasing media exposure has "gone with" wider economic participation (per capita income) and political participation (voting). The model evolved in the West is an historical fact. ...the same basic model reappears in virtually all modernizing societies on all continents of the world, regardless of variations in race, color, creed...<sup>26</sup>

Dominant paradigm theorists envisioned mass media as an indispensable tool for transforming traditional societies into modern, Western-style, urbanized settlements. Mass media's might was overcalculated, exaggerated. They were seen as "magic multipliers",<sup>27</sup> "inculcators of individual modernization",<sup>28</sup> and 'bullets' that hit a target with precision.<sup>29</sup> They were expected to convey the modernization message to the masses in the form of a 'commodity', replacing their values and attitudes with those of the new model. The intent was for people to adopt innovations and participate passively in a modern industrialized economy. 'Psychic empathy'<sup>30</sup> was the key factor which was supposed to motivate the rural masses to compete for the luxury life conjured by mass media. The policy explicit in the dominant

paradigm can thus be termed precisely a mediacentric communication policy.

This 'dominant policy' had been formulated with the idea that the role of communication would be a) "to transfer technological innovations from development agencies to their clients", and b) "to create an appetite for change through raising a 'climate for modernization' among members of the public".<sup>31</sup> In order to facilitate these functions and link them to the main objective of the paradigm, i.e. modernization, the 'dominant policy' took for granted the one-way flow of messages from the centre to the periphery in a downward hierarchical manner. It promoted the concept of a free flow of information, free market, and free press to suit this top-down flow. The so-called 'trickle down' theory fitted well with this free flow idea, which in the West and now in the developing world, would promote consumerism through advertising. The institutional and structural frameworks were also formulated in such a way that they served the 'centre' by using the mass media freely to convey their 'informative and persuasive' messages to the public. Communication planning based on this policy was ad hoc, and often limited to the introduction and expansion of technological infrastructure and the importation of software. In other words, the 'dominant policy' encouraged 'media transplantation' along with their policies in order to safeguard media supremacy over indigenous communication systems. It placed

great emphasis on the concentration of new media in the hands of pro-western governments or the elite class to maintain a 'uniformity' of the development message. Accordingly, almost all major mass media automatically became pro-government and elitist in nature, dominated by bureaucracies with highly centralized, hierachical patterns.

Because of this, the dominant paradigm, with its explicit mediacentric communication policy was accused of having attempted to westernize developing societies through the replacement of national cultures, traditions and indigenous development concepts by those of the West. Its firm intention to keep Western - trained economists in the driver's seat of development programs also connected "the New International Economic Order with the questioning of Western assumptions about the logic and control of the international economic system".<sup>32</sup> However, it took considerable time for developing countries to realize that they have been becoming increasingly dependent on 'others' and comparatively poor under the (policy of the) dominant paradigm, because, according to Rogers:

It was less obvious that the industrially advanced nations largely controlled the 'rules of the game' of development. That most of the scholars writing about development were Westerners. That balances of payment and monetary exchange rates were largely determined in New York, London, and Washington. And the international technical assistance programs sponsored by the rich nations, unfortunately made the recipients even more dependent on the donors. These gradual lessons took some time to emerge and to sink into

intellectual thought.<sup>33</sup>

Eventually, they did; the concept of development necessitated a thorough reassessment and began to undergo some notable modifications providing new ingredients for a possible new development model.

#### Toward a New Development Model

The disappointing performance of the dominant paradigm, coupled with several world events<sup>34</sup> invited a possible new model to cope with the problems of development since the early 1970s. Development was no longer regarded as mere material (economic) growth, instead more human aspects of the concept, (participation, equality, quality of life, freedom etc.) along with social and political reforms, were emphasized. The attempt to give a humanistic flavor to development has allowed most developing nations to focus their attention on the local scene, where the concept of development has a different connotation. Most traditional civilizations, particularly in Asia (e.g. Sri Lanka, India) do not envision development as the acquiring ability or purchasing power of material wealth; they measure it mostly by a society's collective strength to alleviate the level of human suffering in peaceful ways, without doing violence to the culture, and the nature of the environment with which they live. Since societies differ uniquely within and among

themselves and cannot be grouped to a monolithic bloc (as was done under the dominant paradigm), a general consensus has been made that there exists no universal model nor single pathway to achieve development goals. Each nation must develop in its own way. This means that indigenous cultures and traditional concepts should be renewed and reconstructed in order to tackle development problems and contradictions, with due attention to valid observations of social sciences and technological know-how developed perhaps by other countries. Given such a complex and ever-widening jurisdiction no single formula can be drawn that cuts through the dimensions of time and space in every society.

So what should be the principle ingredients in a new model of development? As yet there is no formal consensus, but the shape of such a model - its premises and priorities radically different from what has gone before - is now emerging from many strands of research, analysis and discussion.<sup>35</sup>

Recent attempts of development theorists have charted the premises, priorities and fundamental characteristics of a possible new model. Most of them emphasize:

a) **The democratisation of the communication process.** Since development is 'a participatory process of social change',<sup>36</sup> people themselves are expected to be involved in both planning and execution of development programs. They are the decision



makers, and the initiators of what is feasible and what should be prioritized as development. People or peoples cannot be developed, they can only develop themselves!

**b) Equality in the distribution of development benefits.**

Since the 'trickle-down' theory failed to percolate even economic benefits to grass-root levels, new theories beyond ideologies are expected to encourage equal distribution of socio-economic benefits in order to improve the quality of life of the neediest. The 'distribution justice' of economic gains can be expected to decrease the gap between the rich and the poor.

**c) Indigenous development concepts.** These are to be revived and re-employed in accordance with current development feasibilities and requirements. In this regard, measures are to be taken to discourage the antagonistic characteristics of rather alien cultures. For example, Western consumerism, the theory and practise of absolute interdependency, i.e. the conditions of foreign donors, terms of trade, and the size of multinationals should be carefully re-examined. Self-development, self-management, and a realistic level of self-reliance and 'dissociation'<sup>37</sup> with regard to economic and cultural activities should be thoroughly evaluated, in order for the new model to be a lasting and affordable one.

d) **Labor-intensive technology.** The massive labor force in developing countries should be employed through labor intensive, intermediate level, appropriate technology.<sup>38</sup> In introducing new technologies, the 'catching up to the West' mentality promoted by the old paradigm should be totally discouraged.

e) **Integrated development.** Efforts are to be made to define and establish interlinks between various development objectives, and activities of different sectors by encouraging all the actors of these sectors to focus on the same ultimate goal: national development.

f) **The role of culture.** Within the new development model culture plays a pivotal role through managing the process of change: it may reject, revert, or expedite change; this characteristic of indigenous cultures was ignored by the dominant paradigm. Modern cultural critics observe tradition and modernity as two aspects of one entity, i.e. culture. According to new concepts of development, the apparent dichotomy of tradition vs modernity should be synthesised in such a way, as Goulet noted,<sup>39</sup> that the alien rationality implicit in modernization can be reinterpreted in terms of traditional existence realities. Explaining this apparent dichotomy Clifford Geertz emphasizes the importance of striking the right balance between what he termed epochalism - 'The Indigenous Way of Life', and essentialism - 'The spirit of the Age'.<sup>40</sup> "The most

productive agency, Wang and Dissanayake wrote, through which this balance can be affected is, of course, culture".<sup>41</sup>

g) **Structural transformation.** A Dag Hammarskjold Foundation Report emphasizes that this 'Another Development',

requires transformation of socio-economic and political structures that have long been identified. They include such fundamental steps as agrarian reforms, urban reforms, reforms of the commercial and financial circuits, redistribution of wealth and means of production as well as the redesigning of political institutions through, inter alia, decentralization with self-management and curbing the grip of bureaucracies. As history shows, few of these transformations can be achieved without changing the power structure itself.<sup>42</sup>

In this regard, a thorough re-analysis of internal and external causes of underdevelopment along with the 'after-effects' of the dominant paradigm will be a pre-requisite.

h) **The shift of quantification measures from Western economic indices to non-economic or mixed indices.** Some development theorists have favored newer indices such as PQLI, Gini ratios, level of unemployment rate, income inequality, and consideration of widening gaps, or a combination of two or several of them.<sup>43</sup> Since most features of the new model are related to non-material aspects of development such as culture, freedom, participation, and human needs, no single formula has so far been fully effective in this regard. According to Sharp:

A prime difficulty is that: the most important distinguishing features of this model relate to intangibles: the nonmaterial dimension, which is anathema to development classicists because it cannot be quantified and because it simply doesn't show up on their intellectual radar.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the new model has suggested a number of reforms and brought forth possible solutions as well as new problems for which development planners have not yet found satisfactory answers. One such key problem related to communication is the abstract nature of the concept of participation. As Narula and Pearce pointed out:

In the rush to extol the virtues of participation and incorporate it into development projects, there is, however, a disturbing fact; there is little agreement on what participation is or what its basic dimensions are. This problem is manifest in different forms: Definitions of participation are internally inconsistent; participation is often described very abstractly, thus producing ambiguity at more concrete levels; efforts to explain participation deal with its causes rather than its consequences.<sup>45</sup>

Since the emerging model relies largely on the people's participation for its successful design and operation, the crucial problem is how this still ill-defined process of participation could be facilitated through communication. Mass media no longer dominate the new process: the role of mass communication in development is now identified as 'often indirect and only contributory rather than direct and powerful'.<sup>46</sup> Attention is therefore, focussed on indigenous

communication systems and interpersonal and group communications as a corrective as well as an alternative. Integration of different communication systems with the participatory process is obviously a policy issue. Referring to such issues within the 'new development' the MacBride commission reported;

The crux of the matter then is to determine the implications of the new development approach to communication policies. What are the changes in communication patterns needed to reflect the change from a foreign to an endogenous development model? What type of communication practices and structures are needed to institute truly active involvement by the people in making global, overall development their responsibility. What is the meaning of 'another' communication order for 'another' development?<sup>47</sup>

It is important, therefore, to examine what options developing countries have at their disposal to deal with these policy related issues.

#### Alternative Approaches to Communication Policies in Development

In recent years, particularly after the downfall of the dominant paradigm, three distinct approaches to communication policy and research in development have been identified.<sup>48</sup> Two of them - the Diffusionist Approach and the Radical Approach - have been in practice for a while whereas the third, the Convergence Approach, still remains comparatively at a stage of infancy.

**The Diffusionist Approach** is a clear reincarnation of the old paradigm, which did not (or could not) entirely abandon the practical objective of its former life: modernization. As the title itself suggests, the intention of this approach is to achieve a country's development through the diffusion of innovations, and communication policies are designed to suit this purpose. It has revised the strategy of the old paradigm with certain concessions to interpersonal communication, apparently because diffusion research in the 1960's had categorically proved that:

When individuals in developing nations who had adopted an innovation like a weed spray, a new crop variety, or family planning, were asked the sources/channels through which they had learned about the new idea, the mass media were almost never reported. Interpersonal channels with peers totally predominated in diffusing the innovation.<sup>49</sup>

What the diffusionist researchers found as a possible explanation for this anomaly was 'inattention to media content' and they emphasized mainly content analyses of media messages to understand the role of mass media in development.<sup>50</sup>

The diffusionist approach has also identified the need for structural changes, but espouses mostly **an incremental change**, in which change is promoted within the existing structure, particularly at the bottom of the hierarchy. It also encourages self-development, which includes many of the characteristics of

newer concepts of development such as participation, mass mobilization, and group efficacy. It expects mass media to play major roles in:

a) providing technical information about development problems and possibilities, and about appropriate innovations in answer to local requests; b) circulating information about the self development accomplishments of local groups, so that other such groups may profit from others' experience and perhaps be challenged to achieve a similar performance.<sup>51</sup>

This approach also identifies the importance of "traditional mass media, opinion leaders, change agent aides, special development agencies that work only with the disadvantaged audiences",<sup>52</sup> but seems to limit these 'reforms' only to grass-root levels. It has been criticized in that it does not give a balanced attention to indigenous development concepts and traditional communication systems at the national level; instead, it speaks of "translating traditional symbols into the language and framework of modern communication systems without considering the autonomous role of existing traditional networks".<sup>53</sup>

Policies designed according to this approach tend to favor mass media and western development concepts, make deterministic assumptions about both communication and development, and lead grassroot level participants of the development process to depend on mass media for 'advanced lessons' of how to self-

develop even upon their own request.

**The Radical Approach** views existing communication policies in most developing countries as a product of a 'capitalist conspiracy', which accompanied the transplantation of modern communication technologies. Radical analysts suggest that the policies thus 'imported' were then adopted according to what media owners and suppliers expected to do in host countries rather than what these countries wanted to do with mass media. This approach draws on one of the most salient features of the post World War II era: the emergence of an 'international business community' headed by American multinational corporations, which compelled almost every newly independent nation to follow their advice as a tactic of political self-defence and socio-economic development. However, their latent objective, according to radical theorists, was to maintain dependence and dominance with the same intention of exploiting former colonies.<sup>54</sup> Many see a disturbing historical parallel of asymmetrical international relations leading to cultural replacement.

In previous centuries the armies and navies of the world's most economically and militarily powerful nations swept across the world creating colonial empires... Many of the nations now receiving massive doses of foreign-produced mass communication are only a few decades out of the political and economic grasp of imperialism... With this historical experience still vivid, many in these nations see a parallel in the worldwide dissemination and domination of mass communication by an oligopoly of producers. This imperialism is not directly political,



economic, or military. Its potential power and influence lies not in the physical domination of a people, but rather in their intellectual domination. For many, political imperialism has been replaced by cultural imperialism.<sup>55</sup>

What they suggest by this approach is a structural rearrangement in international (particularly economic) relationships along with drastic reforms in communication (particularly media) policies, which would presumably control the influence of multinationals. Critics of the radical approach appreciate its dedication in unravelling international and precolonial realities, but they also see its inherent weaknesses such as a) treating the world as one global economic and political system, and mass communication as a monolithic, powerful social instrument of manipulation; b) the neglect of local factors; c) the assumption that liberation by itself can increase mass media's contribution to development. In sum, radical theorists ironically share the assumption promulgated by the dominant paradigm that mass media are all-powerful and therefore, a country's communication policy should be centered around modern mass media.

**The Convergence Approach** advocates a balanced treatment of both tradition and modernity in designing communication policies, particularly within the context of national development. Its significance is the unprecedented attention focussed on the interplay of a variety of factors operating

within developing societies: the dynamics of modern and traditional communication systems, social structures, indigenous development concepts, cultural values, and institutional linkages, as well as foreign influences and internal constraints that have been disproportionately emphasized by other approaches. The Islamic Revolution in Iran gave a considerable fillip to this approach, exemplifying the fact that the mythical ability of modern media to mobilize people toward a desired end could be successfully challenged by hitherto unexplored, non-sophisticated traditional media.<sup>56</sup> What the Iranian case teaches Third World policymakers is that:

traditions of civility are inextricably tied to a country's myths, legends, archetypical heroes, religious beliefs, and yes, superstitions. To debunk them altogether in the process of modernization is to reject the possibility of all communication and all civility.<sup>57</sup>

Due to this sort of observation the MacBride Commission acted as a strong advocate of enmeshing both traditional and modern forms of communication though it failed to keep the balance in its own work, particularly with regard to communication policies.<sup>58</sup> Recent cultural critics, such as Clifford Geertz,<sup>59</sup> have largely contributed to identifying the main features of the approach. Summarizing most of them Shinar,<sup>60</sup> notes that the convergence approach: a) views change and development as the 'interplay between institutional change and cultural reconstruction'; b) advocates no mythically

predetermined paths, requirements, or results; c) is a convergence of social dynamics which involves a series of simultaneous, multidimensional interactions between internal and external forces; d) considers 'essentialism' and 'epochalism' as forces at work in relation to ideological, technological, economic, and other influences; e) expects both functional and dysfunctional results through these interactions, depending on the ability and the willingness of a society to develop mechanisms for dealing with the symbolic and structural implications of these processes. These features delineate the distinctiveness of this approach and imply its intangibility by existing Western research traditions. Application of the convergence approach in defining and designing communication policies can assist developing countries to take a holistic outlook of the entire policy planning and implementation process, including some factors favoured by previous approaches. Thus, it may help:

avoid planning and management of partial communication systems and efforts - limited to the modern mass media alone - which are doomed to failure in promoting change by spreading modern concepts and fostering rational identity by disseminating traditional or pseudotraditional symbols. Good examples of such failures include the shah's abortive injection into Iranian society of revived and invented symbols of Aryan heritage, primarily through the mass media and spectacular ceremonies, and the failure of the 1968 Peruvian left-wing revolutionary government's attempt to mobilize the masses through the contrived resurrection of ancient traditions, such as Inca socialism.<sup>61</sup>

The convergence approach has had the opportunity of capitalizing the empirical experience of previous two approaches. However, it may also be seen by hyperscientists as having emerged from nowhere - from no consistent social philosophy. In fact, the complexity lies in its attempt to incorporate a number of conflicting realities, views and trends without excessively isolating or dissecting them in planning and implementation of communication policies for development. Viewed in this perspective the convergence approach seems to widely agree with most of the main features of the new conceptions of development.

Nevertheless, it is the former two approaches that have so far been widely consulted by communication policymakers of developing countries, with no or only mediocre attention to the latter. In fact, most policymakers still believe in a media policy based on the dominant paradigm, (obviously with some modifications!)<sup>62</sup> A realistic way of examining communication policies for development in these countries is therefore to view the whole domain as a mélange of the old paradigm and the recent approaches briefed above. Among them, perhaps traditional models prevalent prior to the transplantation of modern media have also been at work. In this regard, the succeeding review of Sri Lanka's Press policy and radio broadcasting policy toward development would be a timely case in point.

## Notes for Chapter One

1. Sean MacBride et al, Many Voices, One World: The Final Report of the UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), p.203.
2. The Commission consisted of 16 members chaired by Sean MacBride, a Nobel and Lenin Peace Prize winner. It produced an Interim Report and a Final Report based on more than hundred supporting papers prepared by communication experts from almost all over the world. The above compliment appears in D. Shinar, Palestinian Voices: Nation Building in the West Bank, (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. 1987), p.165.
3. T.L. McPhail, Electronic Colonialism, (California: Sage Publications Inc. 1987), pp. 251-283.
4. F.T.C. Yu, "Problems of International Communications Policy Research", A lecture at the 4th Annual Communication Seminar of the Communication Institute of the East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii. June 28, 1983. p.13.
5. CIC Document No 28: Comparative Account of National Structures For Policy and Decisior-making in the Communication Field (The International Institute of Communications), p.2.
6. L.S. Harms, "An Emergent Communication Policy Science-Context, Rights, Problems and Mothods" in Communication, Vol.5, 1980, pp.65-87; I. de Sola Pool, 'The Rise of Communications Policy Research' in Journal of Communications, Spring:1974, pp.31-42.
7. Similar reasons have been given for the necessity of establishing National Communication Policy Councils. See M.A.R. Dias et al, National Communication Policy Councils: Principles and Experiences, (Paris: UNESCO, Doc. No.83, 1979).
8. U. Narula and W.B. Pearce, Development as Communication (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).
9. Inayatullah defines development of a society as "a process of moving from what it is to what it aspires to be", See his article on "Western, Asian or Global Models of Development - The Effect of the Transference of Models on the Development of Asian Societies" in W. Schramm and D. Lerner (eds), Communication and Change: The Last Ten Years and the Next (Honolulu: University press of Hawaii, 1976), pp.241-252.

10. G.C. Whiting, "How Does Communication Interface with Change?" in E.M. Rogers (ed), Communication and Development: Critical Perspectives, (London: Sage Publications, 1976), pp.99-120.
11. Communication functions are variously listed in the communication literature. Major functions relevant to this context are from S. MacBride et al (1980), op.cit. and particularly D. Shinar (1987), op. cit.
12. S. MacBride et al (1980), op. cit. p.203.
13. UNESCO Report of the Experts on Communication Policies and Planning: COM/MD/24, (Paris, 1972), p.8.
14. A. Hancock, "Policies Begin with People" in Media Development, Vol.34, No.1 (Journal of the World Association for Christian Communication, 1987), pp.2-4.
15. C.J. Hamelink et al, Communication Research in Third World Realities, (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1980), p.26.
16. J. Servaes, "Policies for Development - The Real Issues" in Media Development, Vol.34, No.1, 1987, op.cit., p.5.
17. S. MacBride et al (1980), op. cit. p.210.
18. Thomas R. Dye defines 'Public Policy' as "Whatever governments choose to do or not to do" in Understanding Public Policy, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall, 1978), p.3.
19. UNESCO, COM/MD/24, op. cit; J.A.R. Lee, Toward Realistic Communication Policies, UNESCO Doc. No.76, (Paris: 1976).
20. CIC Document No 28, op cit.p.1.
21. UNESCO Report on Management and Planning of New Communication Systems, COM/MD/29, (Paris, March 28, 1974); A. Hancock, Communication Planning for Development : An Operational Framework, (UNESCO, Paris, 1981), p.13.
22. M. Teheranian includes orthodox theories of modernization in one or a combination of the following four categories: a) stage theories; b) index theories; c) differentiation theories; and d) diffusion theories. See his article 'Communications and National Development: Reflections on Theories and Policies, in Teheranian et al, Communication Policy for Development, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1977), pp.17-50; G. Wang and W. Dissanayake (eds) categorize them into five approaches with their principle

proponents: a) historical, b) psychological, c) economic, d) structural, and e) value-centered. See "Culture, Development, and Change: Some Explorative Observations" in their edition Continuity and Change in Communication Systems: An Asian Perspective (Ablex, 1984). pp.3-20.

23. For details of this literature, see D. Lerner, The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East (Glencoe, Free Press, 1958); W. Schramm, Mass Media and National Development: The Role of Information in Developing Countries, (Stanford Univ. Press, 1964); E.M. Rogers and F.F. Schumacher, Communication of Innovations (New York: Free Press, 1970); Subsequent Critiques appear in W. Schramm and D. Lerner, (eds), (1976), op. cit.; E. M. Rogers, "Communication and Development, The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm", in his edition (1976) op. cit. pp.121-148.
24. U. Narula and W.B. Pearce (1986), op. cit. pp.25-26.
25. W. Dissanayake, "The Need for the Study of Asian Approaches to Communication" in Media Asia, Vol.13, No.1, (AMIC: Singapore, 1986), pp.6-13; See also Chapter 3 of this study for differences schematically presented between the Aristotelian Model and the Buddhist Model.
26. D. Lerner (1958), op. cit. p.41.
27. D. Lerner (1958), op. cit.
28. A. Inkeles and D.H. Smith, Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Deveoping Countries (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.146.
29. W. Schramm, "The Nature of Communication Between Humans" in W.Schramm and D.F. Roberts (eds) The Process and Effects of Mass Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp.3-54.
30. D. Lerner, (1958), op.cit.
31. E.M. Rogers, "The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm: Reflections on Diffusion Research" in W. Schramm and D. Lerner (1976), op. cit. p.49.
32. T.L. McPhail (1987), op. cit. p.46.
33. E.M. Rogers (1976), op. cit. p.125.
34. E.M. Rogers "New Perspectives on Communication and Development: Overview", in his edition (1976), op.cit. p.8.

35. R.Sharp "Towards a New Model of Development" in Populi, 6: 2, (1979), pp.15-20.
36. E.M. Rogers (1976), op. cit. p.133, includes some of the characteristics summerized here, in his definition of development: "a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment".
37. C.J. Hamelink, Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications (New York: Longman Inc. 1983) pp. 95-100; For details of 'New Perspectives of Development' see Goran Hedebo, Communication and Social Change in Developing Countries: A Critical View (Iowa, Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1982).
38. E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
39. D. Goulet, The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development (New York: Atheneum, 1971).
40. C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 240-241.
41. G. Wang and W. Dissanayake (1984), op. cit. p.18.
42. Dag Hammarskgold Foundation, What Now? Another Development (Upsala, 1975).
43. E.M. Rogers (1976), op. cit. p.125, Dudley Seers suggested a combination of three of such factors. See his article 'The Meaning of Development' in International Development Review, 11 (4), 2-6, 1969.
44. R. Sharp, (1979), op. cit. p.19.
45. U. Narula and W.B. Pearce, (1986), op. cit. p.36.
46. E.M. Rogers, (1976), op.cit. p. 135.
47. S. MacBride et al, (1980), op.cit. p.205.
48. D. Shinar, (1987), op.cit. p.136.
49. E.M. Rogers, (1976), op.cit. p. 136.
50. P. Golding, "Media Role in National Development: Critique of a Theoretical Orthodoxy" in Journal of Communication (Vol.24, 1974), pp.39-53.



51. E.M. Rogers, (1976), op.cit. p.141.
52. Ibid, p.142.
53. D. Shinar, (1987), op.cit. p.168.
54. H. Schiller, Communication and Cultural Domination (New York, International Arts and Science Press, 1976); K. Nordenstreng and H. Shiller, National Sovereignty and International Communication (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Company), 1979.
55. M.E. McCombs, "Assessing the Impact of International Communications" in Jim Richstad, (ed) New Perspectives in International Communication, (East West Communication Institute, Hawaii, 1979), p.71.
56. A. Fathi, "The Role of the Islamic Pulpit" in Journal of Communication, 29, No.3 (Summer and Autumn, 1979), pp.102-106.
57. M. Teheranian, CIC Document, No:41, Communication and International Development: Some Theoretical Considerations, p.6.
58. S. MacBride et al, (1980), op.cit. pp.203-210.
59. C. Geertz, (1973), op.cit. pp.240-241.
60. D. Shinar, (1987), op.cit. p.170.
61. Ibid. p.171.
62. For a summary of the modified model, see "Modernization Revisited - An Interview with D. Lerner" in Communication and Development Review, Vol: 1, Nos. 2 and 3, (Iran Communications and Development Institute, Summer and Autumn, 1977), pp.4-6.

## Chapter Two

### SRI LANKA'S COMMUNICATION/MEDIA POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Communication policies evolve and operate within what Lorimer and McNulty call a 'policy environment', which is generally defined as:

those factors outside the policy field itself that influence the structures, processes and ideas at the core of policy but which are more appropriately seen as part of the society as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Lanka's media policy environment constitutes certain notable characteristics of the society, polity, and economy as well as the country's major historical forces such as Sinhala-Buddhist Culture and colonialism.

#### Society

The ethnic composition of the society has always been a determining factor that contributed to the complexity of Sri Lanka's mass media policy. According to 1981 Census,<sup>2</sup> Sri Lankan society comprises four ethnic groups: the Sinhalese (74%), Sri Lankan Tamils (12.6%), Moors (7.1%), Indian Tamils (5.5%), and others (0.8%). They are further categorized, according to their religious beliefs, as Buddhists (69.3%), Hindus (15.5%), Muslims (7.5%), and Christians (7.5%). The Sinhalese who make up the

majority speak an Indo-Aryan language - Sinhala - and are mostly Buddhist. The Tamils who are mostly Hindus speak a South Indian (Dravidian) language called 'Tamil'. Moors, whose religion is Muslim, use either Sinhala or Tamil as their mother tongue. While both religion and language have become the major dividing factors among Sri Lankans, English, the most influential legacy of British colonialism, has evolved as the working language of the elite. However, English, has failed to achieve the status of a 'lingua franca' mainly due to the richness and stability of both the Sinhala and Tamil languages, as well as Sinhala-Buddhist culture.

Though the above composition of the society has not widely changed since 1948,<sup>3</sup> the Year Sri Lanka gained Independence from Britain, tension has grown between the majority Sinhalese and the separatist Tamils, which, in 1987, brought English back to the Constitution. Consequently, while Sinhala remains the major official language, Tamil has also become an official language, and English has been made the 'link' language.<sup>4</sup> This complex language situation which is a manifestation of the nature of the ethnic composition has resulted in two practices which have affected the core of media policy formulation and implementation: a) at the higher (macro) strata of the policy formulation process, English with its related 'wisdom' has gained a strong foot-hold; b) at the medium and lower levels Sinhala or Tamil has become the medium of policy implementation.

Certain other characteristics which serve as major elements in the policy environment illustrate the fact that Sri Lankan society has simultaneously been both a typical and an unusual member of the so-called 'developing' world. Typically, it has a dense population: 16.1 million in 1988, which was only 6.6 million in 1946. The annual growth of population has, of late, decreased to 1.5%, but is still regarded as a high figure. Approximately, 4/5 of the population (78.5%) live in rural areas where agriculture is the predominant form of livelihood. Since urbanization is comparatively low,<sup>5</sup> the central dynamic of the rural sector has always been an influential factor in media policy formulation and implementation for development. Referring to its structures, Neville Jayaweera, a prominent Sri Lankan administrator and researcher has pointed out:

The rural social structures, even though denuded of their monolithic and undifferentiated quality, continue to manifest an institutional network and value systems of a traditional nature and are resistant to change.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these 'traditional', 'typical', and 'resisting' characteristics the society has been unusually different from its Third World counterparts in such aspects as literacy rate (87.2%), life expectancy (70 yrs), and daily media consumption (56%). The literacy rate, which has always remained at a high level (69% in 1953; 77% in 1963; 78.5% in 1971; and 87.2% in 1981), has been a particularly influential factor in shaping the

country's press policy.

### Polity

Sri Lanka is one of the oldest democracies in South Asia, where people have been enjoying universal suffrage since 1931, seventeen years prior to gaining Independence from Britain. This experience in the exercise of democracy, along with civil liberties that Sri Lankans had enjoyed under their traditional socio-cultural system,<sup>7</sup> has led them to expect democratic practices with regard to formulating communication policies.

However, the country had to undergo a series of political reforms between 1972-88, apparently as a response to disappointing performance of its past national development efforts. The present system of government, which is constitutionally similar to that of France<sup>8</sup> shares power between the elected Executive Presidency and the 225-member Parliament.

A post-independence characteristic of the polity which has often affected media policy is its increasing failure to integrate the four ethnic groups and cultures into acquiring the consciousness of a single national entity. However, the sharing of power between the Executive Presidency and the Parliament since 1978, has had a balancing effect on media policies dealing with such issues as Sinhala nationalism and Tamil separatism,

and, more specifically press censorship, cordination of media institutions, imposing Emergency Regulations on mass media etc. Despite such issues related to the polity, Sri Lankans have manifested the characteristic of a phenomenally active political force. The rate of voting in general elections has, under normal circumstances, been among the highest in the world.<sup>9</sup> This has had great potential for communication policy planners since the political consciousness of a people is directly related to mass media through the information component of the communicated message. However, one of the side-effects of this relationship is the over-politicization of mass media which has resulted in many discrepancies and contradictions between policy goals and actual policy decisions. While mass media policies are to be designed in conformity with the political ideology of the government, policy planners cannot afford to ignore the serious implications of this particular factor in an effective media policy. Thus, high political consciousness has had great potential but has also put constraint on policy formulation and implementation.

#### Economy

This factor has always exhibited characteristics both similar to and distinctive from both the developed and developing countries. This duality was well revealed by a comprehensive country study undertaken by University of Bergen,

Norway.

In relation to the economy as in relation to society and polity, Sri Lanka in many respects appears to be a rather highly-developed country which is at the same time very poor. With per capita GNP at only \$360 (1984), it ranks among the poorest thirty countries in the world. Yet the economy itself is relatively sophisticated. Economic roles are relatively specialized, and market relations permeate virtually throughout the economy, including almost the entirety of the small-scale farming sector. Non-cash economic transactions are rare even in the rural sector. The urban sector contains a well-development of 'modern' financial institutions - banks, finance houses, insurance companies, etc. - and large numbers of Sri Lankan business houses have close connections with foreign and transnational enterprises... A dense population, high levels of education and literacy and a relatively high level of development of transport and communications infrastructure make the general population relatively well informed and mobile. Rates of newspaper readership are high; and Sri Lankans travel by public transport with exceptionally high frequency. Markets for goods and services of all kinds are thus relatively competitive and efficient. The Sri Lankan economy is, and always has been, relatively closely integrated into the international economy.<sup>10</sup>

This economic integration which took place in the colonial period has not contributed enough to develop the country even in Western economic terms. As the study reported, the country still has one of the lowest income economies in GNP per capita terms. Its industrial sector (manufacturing) contributes only 15% to GDP, whereas the national economy continues to depend on the export of three primary commodities (tea, rubber, and coconut), and a recently introduced substitute (textile & garments), for over 90% of its foreign income. The pricing policy of purchasing rich countries toward these raw materials

and finished products has been so adverse that the trade imbalance (exchange deficit) has caused acute foreign exchange difficulties. The colonial economy which served the country 'so well' at independence has thus failed to do so since the early 1950s, though it continued to develop in certain aspects such as those pointed out by the above study.

The dual characteristic of the economy has, on the one hand, encouraged the transplantation of modern media. A recent example is the case of television; Sri Lanka successfully blocked the transplantation of TV in 1953 and 1967, but allowed it in 1979, apparently because the 'developed aspects' of the economy could no longer postpone the services of such a lucrative medium for their survival and effective operation. On the other hand, the deterioration of the economy has compelled media planners to make their policies in a manner that their organizations would become financially independent. Accordingly, almost all mass media have become institutionalised along economic (profit-seeking) lines, although many of them (e.g. radio and television broadcasting, and a part of the press since 1973) have been owned by the public sector. Accordingly, most media have been wrestling with a dichotomy which had necessitated them to operate as a public service while being increasingly dependent on advertising revenue and imported software. In the case of the press, which was totally owned by the private sector before 1973 (later by both sectors), the



situation had/has become an 'invisible tool' that could be manipulated in controlling the editorial policy of a given newspaper particularly by the main advertiser, i.e. the government.

### Sinhala Buddhist Culture

Culture has become an important factor within the policy environment because development or 'planned change', which is expected to be brought about through effective implementation of media policies, does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it occurs within a certain socio-cultural system that has its unique features and past history.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Lanka has inherited strong cultural values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns from its long traditional past. The country possesses one of the oldest, uninterrupted, written histories in the world.<sup>12</sup> According to the Mahawansa chronicle, the present civilization dates from the 6th century BC, with the legendary arrival of the ancestors of the majority Sinhalese, who later became Buddhist in the 3rd century BC. The Sinhalese Buddhists who, amidst a number of South Indian invasions, built a chain of magnificent, 'self-sufficient' kingdoms strongly believe that it was Buddhism or Buddhist concepts of human development that led them to those glorious historical and cultural achievements.

requirements and spiritual expectations.

The important point is that rural villagers' social beliefs, language expressions, customs, institutions, and the major occupation - paddy cultivation, are still closely related to this simple way of life. Media policy planners cannot totally debunk these 'traditions of civility' in any development communication effort. To do so, as was noted in Chapter 1, is to 'reject the possibility of all communication and all 'civility'.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it is primarily this traditional culture that prevented Sri Lanka from becoming a slavish follower of alien models of development communication.

### Colonial Heritage

Sri Lanka's history since 1505 is one of struggle against Western colonial exploitation. The country entered a new era of optimism in 1948 with Independence, but it had already inherited strong socio-economic and cultural bonds from the colonizer, which it could not give up easily with a mere transfer of political power. This colonial heritage has influenced in several ways the shape of country's mass media policy. First of all, it was the integration of the domestic socio-economic system into a colonial import-export economy that paved the way for transplanting mass media and their policies into Sri Lanka. Second, it was the elite class created by the colonizer who took

Thus, Sri Lanka's traditional history came to bear the unmistakable imprint of 'Theravada Buddhism', though it was occasionally mixed with South Indian Hinduism. Since Buddhism and Hinduism were two products of ancient India, the Sinhalese Buddhists found, in spite of their fundamental differences, many common characteristics that could be assimilated into the mainstream Sinhala Buddhist culture.<sup>13</sup> This has led to create a unique traditional culture that was shared even by the non-Buddhist and non-Sinhalese, though it was often called the Sinhala-Buddhist culture.

According to this traditional culture, human development at the individual level is based on certain Buddhist principles, mainly 'freedom of thought', followed by 'persistent effort' (utthanasampada) and 'balanced livelihood' (samajeevikata). At the societal level, another important principle - 'peaceful co-existence' along with 'sharing' (dana), 'pleasant language' (priyavacana), 'wholesome activity' (arthacariya), and 'non-partisanship' (samanatmatha) - comes to the fore. Buddhist ethics expects lay-men to lead simple lives without falling into two extremes: one indulgence, the other, abnegation. Therefore, traditional villagers strongly believed that the accumulation of more and more wealth would not bring happiness (development); instead, the simple way of life symbolized by 'Weva' (man-made tank), and 'Dagoba' (temple) and guided by 'Raja' (king or ruler) and 'Sangha' (monks), would satisfy one's basic

over the political power and became the policymakers at Independence. Since they had been well Westernized with an English education and a 'modern way of life', the epistemological aspects of media policy formulation continued to be shaped according to the wisdom of the West. Third, since "Ceylon (Sri Lanka) had been more influenced by English culture than any other Asian colony",<sup>15</sup> the 'modern way of life' had become a common dream in almost every individual, that had to be cautiously dealt with when formulating media policies for developing the predominantly traditional Sri Lankan society. Fourth, English -the most influential legacy of British colonialism - continued as the medium of macro-policy formulation in all sectors of development, including communication. The impact generated by colonial inheritance on mass media policy was well illustrated by M.A.de Silva, a member of the Broadcasting Commission of 1971 with regard to the question of political broadcasts:

At present, the Radio gives a few minutes to the reporting of Parliament and the public don't read the Hansard. But why should Parliament be kept out of the way of the people for whom it is meant? Why should not the proceedings in Parliament be broadcast for everyone to hear? Because it is not being done in Britain. In those details of procedure Ceylon is more British than even the British Dominions of Australia and New Zealand, where Parliamentary proceedings are broadcast regularly and have proved a success.<sup>16</sup>

The impact of colonialism has been a dominant factor which served both as a constraint and a potential in media policy

formulation and implementation. It is with these complex and contending factors in the policy environment that Sri Lanka's press policy and radio broadcasting policy toward development have evolved and operated after Independence to the present-day.

## Notes for Chapter Two

1. R. Lorimer and J. McNulty, Mass Communication in Canada, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Publishers, 1987), p.201.
2. Statistical data on Sri Lanka are taken from varied sources. See Appendix 'A' for a systematic compilation of both data and related sources.
3. The only notable change is that most non-traditional Sri Lankans (those who were of European, South Indian, and Malay origin) have emigrated, and the gap has been bridged by all major ethnic groups. See Appendix 'A'.
4. Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, November 14, 1987.
5. The increase or decrease of Urban population has been as follows since Independence: 15.37% (1946); 15.30% (1953); 19.05% (1963); 22.44% (1971); 21.50% (1981).
6. N. Jayaweera, "Some Problems of Communication Strategies in a Developing Society - The Sri Lankan Model" in P.R.R. Sinha (ed), Communication and Rural Change (Singapore: AMIC, 1976), pp. 25-38.
7. Certain aspects of this socio-cultural system are summarized under 'Sinhala-Buddhist Culture', see Chapter Two.
8. See details in A.J. Wilson, The Gaullist System In Asia: The Constitution of Sri Lanka, (London: 1980).
9. J. Jupp, in Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy (Frank Cass Co.Ltd., Great Britain, 1978). makes the comparison as follows: (p.189)  
  
"Over the years since independence Ceylon (Sri Lankan) voters became among the most dutiful in the world. Even in 1947, 61.3% of the electorate turned out to vote. This had risen to 77.6% in March 1960, to 82% in 1965 and to 84.9% in 1970. This marked a greater participation than in almost any competitive democracy with voluntary voting and exceeded the highest turnout ever recorded in Britain".
10. Sri Lanka: Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review. University of Bergen, Norway, April 1987. p.13.
11. G. Wang and W. Dissanayake (eds), Continuity and Change: An Asian Perspective (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984), p.13.

12. The first part of Sri Lanka's history was recorded in Pali verses in the Mahawansa Chronicle, written around the 7th century A.D., (no exact date is available), by a Buddhist monk called Mahanama. Since then, history has been recorded chronologically to date in the same language. A recent American writer pointed out that Sri Lanka had the World's second oldest continuous written history. (Weaver:1988,p.39)
13. M. Wickremasinghe, Buddhism and Culture, (Tisara Prakasakayo Ltd. Dehiwala, 1981), pp.65-67.
14. M. Tehranian, Communication and International Development: Some Theoretical Considerations, CIC Document No.41, p.6.
15. J. Jupp, (1978), op.cit. p.3.
16. M.A.de Silva, A Report on the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation and Mass Media, (1971), para 200.

## Chapter Three

### MEDIACENTRIC POLICY FOR DEVELOPMENT

#### The Beginning

Modern mass media (except TV), along with their policies, were first introduced to Sri Lanka during the British colonial period (1796-1815; 1815-1948): The Press in 1802, Cinema in 1903, and Radio Broadcasting in 1923/25. Prior to these introductions, there existed a village-centred public communication system based on traditional oral culture which embraced the whole community. Robert Knox (1681), a British sailor who lived among average Sri Lankans for 18 years as a 'free prisoner', testifies to the richness and liberal nature of certain aspects of this oral culture through which people in the 17th century received information, discussed their affairs and formed public opinion.

At their leisure when their affairs will permit, they commonly meet at places built for strangers and way-faring men to lodge in, in their language called Ambloomb, where they sit chewing Betel, and looking one upon the other very gravely and solidly, discoursing concerning the affairs at Court, between the King and the great Men; and what Employment the People of the City are busied about. For it is the chief of their business to serve the King, so the chief of their discourse is concerning such matters. Also they talk of their own affairs, about Cattle and Husbandry. And when they meet with Outlandish-men they inquire about the Laws and Government of their Country, and if it be like theirs; and what Taxes and Duties we are bound to pay, and perform to our King, & c. And this manner of passing their leisure time they account the greatest Recreation.



Given the fact that they enjoyed 'freedom of thought' and other civil liberties under this oral tradition nurtured by the Sinhala-Buddhist culture, Silva and Siriwardene argue that:

there existed a public opinion which related the people to the affairs of State and which, during times of social and political crisis, could bring popular pressure to bear on the rulers, even to the extent sometimes of toppling kings and dynasties.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, it was just such 'pressure' preceded by a social and political crisis, which toppled the last king of Sri Lanka. This resulted in the signing of the Kandyan Convention of March 02, 1815, between the Sri Lankan chieftains and the British. Following the 1817-18 'Uva Uprising' (The Great Rebellion), the British unilaterally abrogated the Convention and decided to bring the entire island under a single socio-economic and political system connected through a modern network of communication.<sup>3</sup>

The British, as any other colonizer, unleashed the dual forces of destruction and construction to seek political consolidation and economic exploitation. To realize these objectives their strategy was to replace the 'self-sufficient' agricultural economy with an import-export (plantation) economy,<sup>4</sup> and the indigenous culture and social values with a Western style 'modern way of life'. It is for this purpose that they needed a 'modern network of communication' (roads,

railways, telecommunication systems, postal services, and mass media).

The colonial communication policy was clearly a one-way, mediacentric policy which carried news and information 'from the centre (Government) to the periphery (Public)'. It was an ideal policy for them to achieve their political and economic objectives. While introducing Sri Lanka's first newspaper, the Ceylon Government Gazette, then Governor, Frederic North announced in the inaugural issue of March 15, 1802,

This Paper is to contain Proclamations, General Orders, Government Advertisements, Judicial and all other notifications that it may be deemed to be beneficial for the Public to be informed of.<sup>5</sup>

This 'policy announcement' illustrates the fact that the initial communication policy of the colonial government was to convey messages 'from the government to the public' in order to inform of what it deemed 'beneficial' for 'them'. Since the paper was published only in English, the 'news' was exclusively aimed at the European and the English-educated natives who were interested in plantation and mercantile activities. The government approved several other newspapers with commercial objectives such as the 'Colombo Observer and Commercial Advertiser' (est. in 1834), and the Ceylon Times (1846), but ordered independent, non-commercial newspapers such as 'Colombo

Journal', established in 1833, to close. (1834)

The colonial government followed a similar policy in introducing radio broadcasting to Sri Lanka in 1923. For the purpose of convenient control, it kept a heavy hand on it, despite the recommendations of the Committee of Broadcasting appointed to examine the introduction of radio to Ceylon. For example, the Committee, while accepting the timely necessity of keeping it under State control, recommended that, under normal circumstances, it be left to private enterprise.<sup>6</sup> This recommendation was never accepted by the colonial government.

Thus, the initial communication policy of the colonial government was primarily based on what one may call the Western Orthodox Model or Aristotelian Model of (development) communication. Its major characteristic was to convey messages from the 'centre (government) to the periphery' (public) without facilitating the periphery to express itself as an active participant in the communication process. This contrasted sharply with the traditional Sri Lankan Model, or as Wimal Dissanayake names it, 'the Buddhist Model' on which traditional Sri Lankans developed their oral culture, discouraging 'manipulation' while encouraging notions of 'sharing and mutuality'; Dissanayake schematically presents the differences.<sup>7</sup>

### **Aristotelian Model**

- 1.Emphasis on communicator
- 2.Influence a key notion
- 3.Focus on control
- 4.Emphasis on outward process
- 5.Relationship between communicator and receiver asymmetrical
- 6.Stress on intellect

### **Buddhist Model**

- 1.Emphasis on receiver
- 2.Understanding a key notion
- 3.Focus on choice
- 4.Emphasis on both outward and inward processes
- 5.Relationship between communicator and receiver symmetrical
- 6.Stress on empathy

The differences between the two models were the basic challenge encountered by post-independence policy planners who were determined to use mass media in Sri Lanka's development effort.

### Development Effort (1948-88)

The prime objective of post-independence Sri Lanka was 'development' - an abstract term which received its impetus from the 'glorious traditional past' and its vague identity from the modern West.

At Independence, the average Sri Lankans had fair hopes of the revival of the traditional past. In fact, they had experience of both the simplicity of their traditional life and the incomprehensible complexity and high cost of the 'modern way of life' introduced by the colonizer. The traditional past encouraged them to lead a simple life, whereas the 'modern life' was compelling them to accumulate more and more wealth, without

which survival was impossible within the new system. The National Independence Movement which took the form of a religious-cultural and politico-economic renaissance had repeatedly reminded them of this difference.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Sri Lankans had already witnessed and were convinced of the comfort of the 'modern way of life' which had been designated as superior to 'tradition' under the aggressive development policy of the colonial regime. By regaining political independence, people hoped it would be possible for the average Sri Lankan to achieve the benefits of modernity. However, the concept of 'modernity' had only a vague identity. For the colonizer, it meant 'Westernization', but the native openly resisted the 'Westernness' or Western features of the concept. At Independence, Sri Lankans or their national leaders had possessed neither a clear vision of the concept nor an effective strategy of their own to achieve whatever they vaguely meant by 'modernity'.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the Western modernization concept - with some modifications - continued to appear, along with the idea of revival of traditional past, on the top of the development agenda.

The colonial government had played the dominant role of 'development' during the pre-independence era; now it was the governments of post-independence Sri Lanka that took the responsibility of achieving new development goals. However, revival of the traditional past and the promotion of modernity

were not regarded as development goals; rather, they were basic guiding principles which pre-empted the post-independence development agenda. The general development goal was (and still is) social and economic progress which was expected to be achieved in a manner that would comply with both tradition and modernity.

Social progress encompassed such non-economic objectives as the promotion of universal education, health, and the safeguarding of culture and religion, all of which were expected to be achieved through **social welfareism**. Economic progress was often defined as the **growth of GNP per capita**, or 'achieving higher standards of living'. Both aspects of development were more or less the focus of all national development plans - from the First Six-Year Plan (1948-54) where no 'scientific planning' of development was involved,<sup>10</sup> to most modern 'Rolling Plans' of the 1980s.<sup>11</sup>

Social Welfareism was mainly a revival of the Buddhist concept of the 'Welfare State' or social service state which had to be financed by the economy.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, it was economic progress - the growth of GNP per capita - that post-independence Sri Lanka was mostly interested in, as the panacea for most national ills. Socio-economic inequalities, lack of national integration, material poverty, technological backwardness, ethnic disharmony, social unrest, population explosion,

imbalance between government income and expenditure, unemployment, political partisanship, were all assumed to be manifestations of the deterioration of the economy.<sup>13</sup> Symptoms of most of these 'ills' were indeed conspicuous since early the 1950s, though they appeared in different forms such as 'Hartaal', 'Satyagraha', strikes, and finally, armed struggles.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that Sri Lanka has given priority to economic growth in its national development plans. For instance, the Five-Year National Plan of 1972-76, designed and implemented when the country was suffering from many of these 'ills', set these objectives in prioritizing the economy:

1) to carry through the structural changes in the economy necessary for long-term growth... 2) to implement the short-term measures necessary to correct the growing imbalances in the economy... 3) to reduce social tensions by the elimination of wasteful consumption and by redistributive measures... 4) to raise the living standards of the low-income groups... 5) to take measures to regenerate rural society and to make it more attractive to the young by modernising agriculture and by siting agro-based industries in rural areas.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, while economic growth came to dominate national development plans, Sri Lanka attempted to follow two different (but similar in many respects) economic development policies to achieve its development goals. The Norwegian Aid Report summarizes them as follows:

...governments of the United National Party (UNP) (1947-

56; 1960; 1965-70; 1977-to date) have adopted a more 'laissez-faire' approach, minimised restrictions on private sector economic activity, welcomed international economic links, and at least until recently, favoured agriculture rather than industry. By contrast, governments led by the Sri Lanka freedom Party (SLFP) (1956-60; 1960-65; 1970-77) have adopted a more statist economic policy, placed more restrictions on the private sector and paid special attention to development of manufacturing industry.<sup>16</sup>

In pursuing these two (economic) development policies Sri Lanka was determined to go through a multitude of new experiences and experiments. This 'development effort', as Tehranian has noted with regard to developing societies, can be summed up in terms of five effects:<sup>17</sup> a) **Demonstration effects**, whereby the country tried to 'catch up' with the 'more developed' by adoption of their methods; b) **Fusion effects**, whereby the country tried to combine the 'best features' from several different social systems that may be characterized as developed. c) **Compression effects**, whereby the country attempted to accomplish the task of development in less time than it had taken the more industrialized countries. d) **Preventive effects**, whereby the country tried to do all of this at less human, material, and environmental cost than had been paid by the presently industrialized countries. e) **Stylization effects**, whereby the uniqueness of national identity and culture were expected to be maintained and enhanced as development proceeded.

Since the government had taken the responsibility of bringing about these five 'effects', development of post-



independence Sri Lanka became a highly centralized government activity. One of the crucial factors upon which the government development activity largely depended, (as the Five-Year Plan of 1971-76 put it), was "the manner in which the people (would) respond to the challenge posed in the carrying of" a particular development plan.<sup>18</sup> Since all governments operated within a democratic framework, they were very much concerned about the people's attitudes, consent, and participation in dealing with this challenge. In other words, it was imperative that reliable and dynamic links be established between the government and the public to facilitate the overall development effort. For numerous reasons, Sri Lanka gradually came to believe that the most convenient and effective way to accomplish this task would be to rely on the available mass media, (particularly the Press and radio), and a mediacentric communication policy.

#### A 'Mediacentric' Communication Policy

Sri Lankans inherited two networks of communication from the British, which have, since independence, been widely used for development activities. The first is the Government Administrative Machinery which presently extends from the capital to almost all 24,000 villages. It has employed a huge cadre of officers, many of whom at the village level, operate as 'extension officers' in facilitating the government development message. The second is the country's mass media

system, notably the press and radio.<sup>19</sup>

The Administrative Machinery has often been criticised for its bureaucratic behaviour, political bias and above all, for its failure to put across the development message as was expected by the government, particularly at the village level. It was apparent by 1970s that "the multiplicity of village level extension officers and their disparate communication efforts" had confused and disoriented the villager with regard to the government development message.<sup>20</sup> Symptoms of this confusion and disorientation, diagnosed from the very beginning of the development campaign, seem to have led most governments to rely more on mass media and a mediacentric communication policy. Most recent governments have strongly believed that such a policy will ensure the uniformity of the development message, thereby not confusing or disorienting the villager. Sarath Amunugama, who, once held the highest executive post of the communication sector (Secretary of State) notes:

The justification for this approach which was in legal terms unconstitutional and carried out under the cover of State of Emergency was that such a uniformity in the message was necessary for the development effort. Mass media was looked upon as means by which the attitudes of people could be influenced, their values changed and their co-operation obtained for larger social and economic purpose.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that Sri Lanka was gradually turning to a mediacentric communication policy has been bolstered by the very nature of the country's development planning structure. Since Independence, macro planning of development has remained a function of the Cabinet, or (after 1956) the National Planning Council, which comprises the Cabinet's most responsible members. Communication policy planning, being an integral part of overall development planning, has always taken place at this highest level. At micro levels, it has been a responsibility of individual ministries and media institutions, co-ordinated by the Ministry in charge of communication and information.<sup>22</sup> The Department of Information, which came under this Ministry before the Ministry of Information was set up in January 1988, was the most active player in these activities since its inception in 1967. The Subjects and Functions assigned to the Department of Information indicate the fact that almost every government has been concerned about a mediacentric, uniform publicity and information dissemination process. For example, these Subjects and Functions include:<sup>23</sup> **Distribution of official news** to the press; **Preparation and issue of publicity literature**; **Advice on publicity** to other Government Departments; **Dissemination of information** about Sri Lanka generally, and to individual inquiries; **Information and publicity material** for Sri Lankan missions abroad; etc. The Department has deployed a specialized team of officials, namely Information Officers and Press Officers, most of whom are attached to Ministries that have

undertaken major development projects. Their main function has been the dissemination of 'official news' to the media through press conferences etc. In order to ensure the uniformity of the message and prevent certain 'hostile' media from trivializing or overshadowing 'important news', they used to issue a 'hand-out' at almost every press conference. The situation in the 1970s was documented by the then Director of Information, Anura Goonasekara as follows:

At such press conferences, the journalists have an opportunity of raising questions regarding the subject under discussion. There is a general feeling among government publicity men that unless a hand out is also given at such press conferences the important issues that the government wishes to clarify may get overshadowed by peripheral and particularistic issues that may be of interest to only sections of the media. For example, clarification of budgetary issues at a press conference may not be fully reported because emphasis is shifted to price increase or concessions which overshadow the long range implications of budgetary proposals.<sup>24</sup>

Among other factors that contributed to a mediacentric policy toward development were the '**compression effect**', and time factors whereby various governments attempted to accomplish the task of development within the limited period allocated them during a given mandate. In this regard, mass media's quickness, readiness, popularity, pervasiveness, as well as their symbolic value, were also taken into consideration.

In order to make best use of this mediacentric policy every government has been equally interested in: a) the development of media infrastructure, i.e. finding out the most effective and economical means of improving media technologies and making them available to the public; and b) the institutional and structural framework of mass media, to which changes have been made in accordance with explicit policy goals set for development.

It should also be noted that, despite a number of Acts, Laws, Commission Reports, and official statements, no government has been successful in developing a discrete and explicit national communication policy which would integrate major mass media and other communication systems through a systematic set of norms and principles thereby establishing 'rational and dynamic links' between communication functions and overall development goals. A few policy statements, made in general to bolster the available legal documents, point out the ways in which the mass media have been expected to 'behave' and act in facilitating the country's development.

In April 1960, then Minister of Broadcasting and Information J.R. Jayawardene, later the President of Sri Lanka (1978-88), stated:

It is essential for a healthy administration under a democratic system that the Government of the day should use the media of mass communication to keep him (the citizen) informed of Government policy, to explain legislation and

to seek his co-operation in national policies. The citizen both at home and abroad has a right to know and his Government a clear duty to tell him fully, promptly and as regularly as possible what it is doing in his name, with his money and why.<sup>25</sup>

These objectives were expanded, with more emphasis on development by the Broadcasting Commission of 1971, under the theme 'Mass Media and Social Progress':

It is only by the skilful use of the different channels of mass communication media that leaders can reach the people, can give and get the guidance which determines national policies and points the way to national progress. Only through the two-way process of communication can the understanding and co-operation of the people be enlisted to achieve community and national goals. It is through mass media that conviction can be brought to bear so that traditional ways of living and working may be changed and the people motivated towards development.<sup>26</sup>

After 1977, a more explicit media policy with detailed objectives came into effect. In a statement made by the Minister of State who was also in charge of the communication portfolio 'the bedrock of Sri Lanka's communication policy' was re-emphasized as 'freedom' - (freedom of speech and press freedom) - accompanied by 'credibility' and 'quality' in programmes. The statement further clarified: 'Political party affiliations of artists cannot be a determining factor' in selection and production of good quality programs; Media must be used in the service of national needs, - e.g. 'the unfortunate estrangement between the Sinhala and Tamil communities' can be 'minimized'

by the 'imaginative use of communication resources'; and 'the development needs'- e.g. in agriculture, media must be put at the service of the farmers: "Our policy... is to talk, say, to the farmers as well as to give them the media to talk back to us".<sup>27</sup>

What is obvious in these periodic statements is that the prime goal of Sri Lanka's mass media policy has theoretically been the democratization of the communication process, basing it on a two-way information dissemination system within which the relationship between the centre (communicator) and the periphery (receiver) would be symmetrical. This was indeed what the Buddhist model had advocated and emphasized within the oral cultural tradition. It was expected that such a democratic communication policy would a) facilitate socio-economic progress through essential attitudinal change and mobilization of the masses etc; b) guide and reflect public opinion in a responsible manner, indicating priorities, trends, issues and possible repercussions of development; c) enhance national integration; and d) promote culture, and education in its wider sense.

As will be observed later, some of these objectives have been further defined in separate policy documents related to major mass media. The significant fact however is that, since independence, they have remained quite constant as implicit or explicit policy objectives. Succeeding chapters of this study

on the press policy and radio broadcasting policy will examine:  
a) to what extent these policy goals have been accomplished through revision of policies and restructuring the system during the period 1948-88; b) to what extent actual policy decisions and practices have been compatible with them; c) the problems related to the implementation of such goals through a mediacentric policy; and d) possible recommendations leading to solutions of these problems.



### Notes for Chapter Three

1. Robert Knox (1681). An Historical Relation of Ceylon. Chapter 8, quoted by M.A.de Silva and R. Siriwardene, in Communication Policies in Sri Lanka. (UNESCO, 1977).
2. M.A.de Silva and R. Siriwardene, (1977), op.cit. p.16.
3. A.J. Wilson, Politics in Sri Lanka: 1947-73. (Western Printing Services Ltd. Great Britain, 1974), p.10.
4. A number of studies show how this attempt of replacement occurred and how the Sri Lankans reacted by resisting to and sometimes tolerating its merits and demerits. See N.K. Sarkar and S.J. Thambaiyah (1957:pp.X1-X11); S. Ponnambalam (1981); Colvin R. De Silva (1962); T. Vimalananda (1963).
5. The Ceylon Government Gazette. The inaugural issue of March 15, 1802.
6. Report of the Special Committee on Broadcasting in Ceylon, 1941, Government Press, Colombo. p.6.
7. W. Dissanayake, "A Buddhist Approach to Development: A Sri Lankan Endeavor" in G. Wang and W. Dissanayake (eds) Continuity and Change: An Asian Perspective. pp.39-51.
8. Sinhala newspapers, particularly 'Sarasavisandaresa', founded in 1880 and 'Sinhala Bauddhaya', founded in 1906, both of which were banned in 1915, had launched this campaign. The Temperance Movement, supported by both papers was not only critical of the Western cultural habits but compared them and their social repercussions with those of the 'glorious traditional past'. See Anagarika Dharmapala's major work, Return to Righteousness (ed) A. Guruge, Colombo, 1965.
9. For instance, the First Six-Year Plan is described as a 'pro-forma' exercise which had no emphasis on 'planned development' (Snodgrass: 1966,p.110). Its emphasis was on social welfare and paddy cultivation in the Dry Zone, while maintaining the Western modernization concept.
10. A.J. Wilson, (1974), op.cit. p.112.
11. 'Rolling Plans' are characterized by their flexibility to 'roll' toward the future vis-a-vis the changing circumstances of the development environment. Sri Lanka has opted for this method since early 1980s, due to such issues as inflation.

12. A.J. Wilson, (1973,p.127), op.cit. points out: "The Buddhist concept of providing alms to gain merit and the acceptance of these 'danas' as a normal feature of Sinhalese social life has also contributed to the widespread notion that the state is and should be the supreme almsgiver. This, when translated into contemporaneous idiom, implies nothing more than the social service state".
13. Sri Lanka: Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review, (University of Bergen, Norway: April, 1987), This Report deals with briefly certain related aspects of the current socio-economic and political turmoil with particular reference to the ethnic issue.
14. 'Hartaal' is similar to work-strike followed by demonstrations; 'Satyagraha' means 'passive resistance' or 'peaceful protest'; Armed struggles have taken different forms such as political (1971), ethnic or separatist (1977, 1983-1987), and ultra-nationalist (1987-88).
15. The Five Year Plan: 1972-76, Ministry of Planning and Employment, Colombo, Nov.1971. pp.11-12.
16. Sri Lanka: Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review, (April, 1987). op.cit. pp.15-16.
17. M. Tehranian, Communication Policy for National Development. Iran Communications and Development Institute, (1977), pp.26-27.
18. The Five Year Plan: 1972-76. op.cit. p.12.
19. TV was introduced to Sri Lanka belatedly in 1979.
20. A. Goonasekera, Communication Policy and Planning in Sri Lanka, (Mimeo, Colombo, 1978, p.47), points out this fact, rather indirectly, generalizing it as a common phenomenon in the Asian village.
21. S. Amunugama, "Approaches to Communication Planning" in Media Asia, Vol.6 No 4. (Singapore, 1979) pp.185-240.
22. The communication portfolio has been shifted, under different names, from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to the Ministry of State and vi versa, during the period 1948-88.
23. With the creation of the new Ministry of Infomation, these Subjects and Functions have been categorized under those of the new Ministry.(See Appendix 'B').
24. A. Goonasekera (1978), p.51.

25. Quoted from his speech delivered at Radio Ceylon in April 1960. See details in A. Goonasekera (1978), op.cit. p.94.
26. Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation of 1971. para 291.
27. Quoted from the Minister's speech appearing in A. Goonasekera (1978), op.cit. p.77.

## Chapter Four

### THE PRESS POLICY

With the rise of literacy, particularly since the late 1940s, the Sri Lankan press has remained a major source of information in both urban and rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Despite the rising price and the geographical barriers which constantly deterred its expansion, it ranked the second most popular mass medium, even within the competitive media atmosphere of 1982.<sup>2</sup> This popularity can be attributed to readers' eagerness to be exposed to differing views and interpretations of news which could help them choose freely between a variety of contending opinions within an already politically active society where broadcasting has been a government monopoly. Since the press had proved a considerable success in this respect during the National Independence Movement,<sup>3</sup> Sri Lankans have genuinely expected that it would act responsibly in the course of national development as well.

Thus, since independence, the prime goal of the press has remained the facilitation of socio-economic development initiated by the government. Since this was to be achieved within a democratic framework, the press was to act as an impartial informational channel between the government and the public, which would guide and reflect the public opinion, mobilize the masses through attitudinal change etc., and enhance

public corporation and participation in the development effort. How far have these objectives been realized during the past forty years?

#### The Initial Policy (1948-56)

At independence, the basic structure of the Sri Lankan press was simple. Major dailies were owned by two private newspaper groups. Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. published 'Dinamina' (founded in 1908) and the 'Daily News' (1918), and its main competitor, the Times of Ceylon Ltd. published 'Lankadeepa' (1947) and the 'Times of Ceylon' (founded originally in 1848 as 'Ceylon Times'). Government regulation of the press was deemed 'irrelevant' and was therefore limited only to formal administrative activities such as the registration of new newspapers, the facilitation of infrastructure development and circulation etc. This 'laissez-faire policy' by which the press received a virtually 'open mandate', derived from the Westminster model Constitution (1947-72), guaranteeing 'freedom of expression and publication' within the jurisdiction of democratic principles and liberal theory of politics.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, newspaper owners developed their own opinions, to deal with policy matters related to development of the country as well as the press. For instance, D.R. Wijewardene, the owner of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, (the Lake

House), was so concerned about his own policies that he was ready to sacrifice "friendships and even relationships... if they interfered with the policies which he thought were best for the newspapers and the country".<sup>5</sup> However, their policies did not fundamentally contradict with those of the early governments (1948-56) because they shared a 'common vision' on how to develop the country and how the press should contribute to it. Since these governments were dedicated to promoting the traditional agricultural economy in the rural sector, the press was expected to mobilize the people toward these ends by conveying information 'from the government to the public'. Since not much 'feed-back' was involved within the process, this one-way policy failed to identify the contradictions within the government development effort, which on the one hand promoted 'tradition', but on the other, favoured a 'modern way of life', represented by the elite class. The press owners were themselves a part of the elite and were thus isolated from directly experiencing these contradictions. This set them apart from the new social forces, i.e. the rural masses and the urban lower middle class. According to Silva and Siriwardene:

... the newspapers in the post-independence period were isolated from the new social forces that were emerging to challenge the dominance of the old land-owning, mercantile and professional élites, tied to a colonial way of life, who had dominated the national life up to that time.<sup>6</sup>

The failure of the press to 'guide and reflect public

opinion' on government development efforts was well exemplified by the coming into power in 1956 of a new government with a new 'development vision' which the press had not favoured during the general election. According to the same authors,

(The) 1956 general election demonstrated conclusively the meagreness of the influence on popular opinion exercised by the press. In the pre-election period the press, which was now virtually a monopoly of two powerful newspaper groups, the Lake House and Times groups, threw its strength entirely behind the ruling party... The support given to the government by these two groups which dominated the newspaper field, ... extended not only to editorial comment but also to the presentation of news in a manner conducive to the interests of the government. Since the radio was also State controlled, this meant that all major mass media were ranged on one side. This, however, did not prevent public opinion from turning decisively against the ruling party. What was particularly striking was that this major shift in popular opinion found no reflection in the dominant mass media up to the very day of the general election.<sup>7</sup>

It was through traditional oral culture, specifically mass meetings and interpersonal communication, that the Opposition had convinced the public of major contradictions within the government development effort, in spite of the latter having been uncritically bolstered by the press and other media.

Thus, the laissez-faire policy proved itself ineffective and incapable of facilitating the country's development effort without being regulated, revised and restructured in accordance with the major policy goals set for the press. Since the failure was attributed mainly to structural imbalances typified by press

monopoly and to institutional framework based on unregulated freedom of the press, the issue was further discussed during a lengthy policy debate.

#### The Debate (1956-73)

The head of the new government, Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, openly declared the existence of a 'press monopoly'- a 'press dictatorship'- which he termed as 'one of the most unhealthy features' in Sri Lanka's democracy.<sup>8</sup> He illuminatingly pointed out that a press dictatorship, disguised under the principles of freedom of expression and press freedom, could be more harmful to the public than a political dictatorship because, unlike life under a political dictator, "the public do not know where they are with Press dictatorship... It is something impersonal and therefore has a greater force". Thus, the basic issue was whether a legitimate government dedicated to socio-economic progress of the country, could function satisfactorily without the blessings of the press; if not, how it could deal with such a situation without making the slightest harm to the universal values of press freedom.

The Press Commission of 1964 viewed the basic issue as a part of the economic domination exercised by a 'privileged minority' who also owned the press.



With the grant of independence... the political power passed into the hands of the masses but the economic control continued to remain in the hands of a privileged minority. The press has proved to be one of the very few bastions still in the possession of that minority. As expected of it the Press has resisted and continues to resist the attempts of the majority to regain their due rights... **The elimination of a venal press is a prime requirement in the solemn undertaking to bring about the well-being and happiness of the people as a whole.**<sup>9</sup>

Thus, it was declared that there existed a latent relationship between economic poverty, lack of overall development of the country, and the concentration of ownership in the press. The Commission's major recommendations were a) the break-up of the existing concentration of ownership and establishment of newspapers owned by co-operatives and broad-based public companies; b) the establishment of a Statutory Press Council, 'not with the slightest intention of curbing the freedom of the Press thereby, but in order to preserve its real independence undiminished'.

However, this policy debate still failed to convince the public of the nature of press freedom, particularly under the proposed ownership of 'co-operatives and broad-based public companies'. For instance, when the government included in its annual policy statement (1964/65) a proposal to take over the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, a faction in the government itself was skeptical about the future press freedom. This skepticism, bolstered by the press itself, played a dominant

role in defeating the government in Parliament, as well as at the general election which immediately followed in 1965.<sup>10</sup> This election defeat did not necessarily mean however, that the laissez-faire policy had made a better contribution to socio-economic progress during the period 1956-65 and had thereby gained public sympathy; rather, it could be viewed as another opportunity given to the same policy to act responsibly, by a people who had traditionally appreciated freedom of expression as an untrammelled right.

The debate, largely centred around private ownership and freedom of the press, was never perceived as a threat to the newspaper industry. A new company, the Independent Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, founded in 1961, started two dailies: 'Davasa' and the 'Sun'. By 1970, the national press consisted of three major newspaper groups which published five English, four Sinhala and three Tamil dailies, and seven weeklies. The 'Silumina', a weekly, claimed 'the highest circulation for any newspaper in South East Asia'.<sup>11</sup> (See also Appendix 'C').

The growth of the press was not, however, accompanied by a corresponding analysis of its role and goal aimed at 'the well-being and happiness of the people'. This was mainly because the policy debate had increasingly concentrated on the 'centre' without paying equal attention to the periphery of the communication process. In their attempt to justify the effective-

ness of this one-way process, Western-trained policyplanners resorted more and more to alien models of development communication such as the Dominant Paradigm and the Radical Approach which swept across the 'developing world' during this period. For instance, they perceived the major role of the press in development as organized publicity ('positive' or 'negative') based on the same one-way information dissemination process. It was mainly due to this 'misperception' (as it deserves to be called now) that the Coalition Government in 1964 attempted to 'nationalize' the press without first rationalizing press freedom. Another example is the establishment of the Department of Information in 1967, with a number of publicity and information dissemination functions to facilitate (mainly through the press) a 'positive' development campaign.<sup>12</sup> Finally, this 'misperception' denuded probably the most striking aspect of the roles and goals of the contemporary press policy: that was that such roles and goals could be well determined by the relationships the press-owners maintained with the political leadership. As Wilson points out, it was mainly for such personal matters that the Lake House 'overwhelmingly' publicized the development effort of the 'National Government' (1965-70) headed by Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake, whereas the Independent Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. 'bitterly' opposed his 'Food Drive' (Economic Development Campaign).<sup>13</sup>

Since Sri Lanka has always had a politically active

population, the true nature of the laissez faire policy became more apparent during the general election of 1970. According to Wilson's survey, the national press behaved quite irresponsibly during this period, thereby losing its public credibility. Almost every national paper, irrespective of the language medium or reader orientation, ran 'dubious', 'incorrect' and 'misleading' news stories, comments, cartoons, and other information, which were sometimes totally contradictory to the original policy goals set for the mass media. For instance, while the Lake House press was 'guilty' of misrepresenting public opinion, the Independent Press was biased in its news stories, which were sometimes 'deadly in their intent' to both national unity and national development.<sup>14</sup>

The regulated press policy which came into effect in 1973, as a remedy to most of these 'policy ills', was expected to restructure the ownership pattern, and reinstitutionalize the press in a manner which would comply with the original policy goals.

#### The Regulated Policy

The new policy was based on two major recommendations made by the Press Commission of 1964 (see p.72 of this study). Accordingly, the ownership pattern of the Sri Lankan press began to change. First, the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. was

converted to a public corporation (Bill No.28 of 1973) by the compulsory sale of the majority of its shares to the public sector.<sup>15</sup> Then the Times Group, which was at the brink of bankruptcy in the late 1970s, was also taken over by the government. However, the private sector still owned a powerful press which, by the mid 1980s, consisted of three major newspaper groups: the Independent Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd; Upali Newspapers Ltd; and the Veerakesari Press. A large number of newspapers, many of which are affiliated to political parties, are also owned by the private sector. (See also Appendix 'C')

The Lake House, the largest newspaper group owned by the government, is managed by a chairman and a Board of Directors, most of whom are government appointees.<sup>16</sup> Their affiliation to the government has been a major factor in determining the editorial policy of all Lake House papers. The situation has created the impression that these newspapers, from the day of their 'nationalization', have lost the sense of balance with regard to objective reporting. For instance, though they are not entirely 'government news sheets', the Opposition launched a sustained boycott against them in the mid 1970s, and the anti-government militant groups brought circulation to a standstill in the South in 1987-88. Thus, from the point of view of 'the Opposition', the change in ownership has obviously concentrated power in the hands of the government. However, it had been

expected that the Press Council, set up under the provisions of the SLPC Law No.5 of 1973, would "take appropriate action to maintain the balance in the matter of reporting news".<sup>17</sup> The Press Council, still in place, has seven objectives:

1. To ensure the freedom of the press in Sri Lanka, to prevent abuses of that freedom, and to safeguard the character of the Sri Lankan press in accordance with the highest professional standards.
2. To ensure that newspapers shall be free to publish as news true statements of facts, and any comments based upon true statements of facts.
3. To ensure on the part of newspapers and journalists the maintenance of high standards of journalistic ethics, and to foster a due sense of both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
4. To improve methods of recruitment, education, welfare and training in the profession of journalism.
5. To promote a proper functional relation among all sections engaged in the production or publication of newspapers, and the establishment of common services for the supply and dissemination of news as may from time to time appear to be desirable.
6. To undertake research into the use and needs of the press, to keep under review developments likely to restrict the supply of information of public interest and importance and development in the Sri Lanka press which may tend towards concentration or monopoly, and to suggest appropriate remedial measures in relation thereto.
7. To advise the government on any matter pertaining to the regulation and conduct of newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

It is empowered to conduct inquiries into complaints regarding professional misconduct, breach of journalistic ethics, publication of untrue, distorted, or improper state-

ments, pictures or other matters. If such complaints are justified, it has the authority to order corrections, apologies, or to censure newspapers and persons involved. The Law also created penal offences, with regard to publications of profane, defamatory, obscene matters and unauthorized publication or Cabinet proceedings and decisions, of matters likely to tend to the creation of shortages or windfall profits or other adverse consequences to the economy, of 'any proposal or other matter alleged to be under consideration by any Minister or any Ministry or the Government'.<sup>19</sup>

So far, the functions of the Press Council have been confined mainly to conducting 'inquiries', and it has failed to give equal attention to other activities. Critics have noticed this failure from its very inception.<sup>20</sup> Even recent annual reports (e.g. 1980,82,83,84) have been almost completely devoted to summaries of such inquiries, whereas only a few paragraphs, under 'Research and Documentation', have attempted to deal with the preparation of a 'code of ethics for journalists' (1980), improvement of their welfare (1982) and training (1983/84). This imbalance shows the meagre attention other policy matters have received and also the Council's failure to take 'appropriate action' other than 'conducting inquiries' to maintain the 'balance in the matter of reporting news'.

These 'reforms' of press policy illustrate the fact that

the government, as the main promoter of development, has been successful in regulating the previous laissez-faire policy which had editorially harassed certain democratically elected governments merely because the press owners did not approve of their 'development vision'. In sum, the change of ownership pattern and the establishment of the Press Council have created the impression among those who are involved in the 'press business' that the press is a responsible institution that should be dealt with in a responsible manner. Nevertheless, the new policy has not made any impact on what policy analysts call 'mechanisms of social control'<sup>21</sup> in which the government has been primarily involved and which have thereby widely affected the performance of the press. One such mechanism is the withholding of advertisements to a particular newspaper (or newspaper group) by a government ministry, department or similar institution just because it has critiqued the government or has not provided adequate news coverage of their publicity. Since government advertisements are a prime source of income, most national newspapers tend to think twice before publishing any 'objective report' which would embarrass their main advertising supplier. It should also be noted that the government-managed newspapers do not face this problem as severely as their privately-owned counterparts. Another mechanism emerged in the 1970s, when the government gave itself the authority to issue licenses to publishers to import machinery and newsprint and to allocate newsprint at the time of a general shortage. The



government institutions in charge of these activities could manipulate their power and authority to 'warn' any hostile newspaper on its attitude toward the government development activities. A third mechanism of social control is the 'self-censorship' that journalists have been compelled to impose upon themselves. Goonasekera clarifies,

There may not be any formal controls, or any needs or interests to be manipulated. But the general policies of the Government are such that a situation of uncertainty is created among journalists. Not knowing the exact policies, but sensing that things could go wrong if they are imaginative or bold, the journalists tend to 'play-it-safe'. In other words there is 'self censorship' - the worst kind of censorship possible in a newspaper.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, it is quite clear that it is the government in power that has 'benefited' most under the regulated press policy. While the press is still entirely free to report objectively and critique the government on facts, the government has been freer than ever before to use the press for the 'well being and happiness of the people'. On the one hand, it has been well protected from undue criticism and editorial harassment: a government which comes to power with a different 'development vision' can now function disregarding the press's approval or disapproval of its policies and strategies. On the other hand, it owns the largest newspaper establishment: the Lake House, or as the President J.R. Jayawardene once called 'a powerful engine of propaganda' in the country.<sup>23</sup> The government also can use,

of course, if it agrees with its conscience, other kinds of mechanisms noted above in guiding the press toward development.

Since the socio-economic crisis has been more conspicuous than ever since the early 1970s, the regulated press policy was necessarily directed to bolstering the government development effort. Its prime aim was to facilitate the role of the press in guiding and reflecting public opinion in a more responsible manner (rather than using it as a medium of positive publicity). It was expected that the masses would be mobilized accordingly through attitudinal change, thereby enhancing public co-operation and active participation in the attainment of national development goals. As mentioned, the two governments which ruled the country during this period (SLFP-led United Front, 1970-77; and UNP, 1977-to date) followed two (different) development policies, and the new press policy was interpreted according to their respective 'development visions'.

The Government of 1970-77 followed what one may call a 'socialist' approach to development problems. Their interpretation of the regulated press policy exhibited largely the characteristics of the Radical Approach. They rejected both press monopoly and oligopoly. To 'ensure the freedom of the press ... and to prevent abuses of that freedom' against the government development effort, direct state intervention in the performance of the press was deemed imperative, as was strongly

recommended by a member of the Commission of 1971.<sup>24</sup>

Today, every honest man must grant that there cannot be any form of socialism or even any kind of true democracy in this country, as long as the Capitalist Press enjoys a free hand. (para 338)

The freedom of the press even in a capitalist society means the right of the citizen to get at the truth from the columns of the newspapers. If he is denied this, then there is no freedom of the press. (para 340)

I recommend that all the daily newspaper companies be nationalized and that the power to publish newspapers be vested in two State-sponsored Corporations -one supporting the Government and the other the Opposition. (para 349)

As was noted in the preceeding sub-section, the conversion of Lake House to a public corporation in 1973 was no less than the creation of a 'State-sponsored corporation' supporting the government. However, no policy decision was made to give a similar facility to the Opposition. Instead, 'freedom of the press' and 'democratization of the information process' seemed to have been interpreted in favour of the government, assuming that whatever an elected government would do in the name of development could be unquestionably accepted by the press and the masses. Accordingly, criticisms of national newspapers were strictly controlled. For instance, the Independent Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. was shut down in 1974 for being engaged in " a vociferous and patently unjustified anti-government campaign".<sup>25</sup> Ironically the Communist Party organ 'Aththa' also suffered from this 'radical' interpretation. Since the Communist Party was a

part of the Government, Aththa's criticisms precipitated a crisis among policymakers themselves, which eventually resulted in the expulsion of its Managing Director, Arnolis Appuhamy. Thus, instead of bringing the 'wrong-doers' before the Press Council, authorities have acted too 'radically', resorting sometimes to emergency regulations,<sup>26</sup> thereby contradicting the original policy goal of democratization of the information process with actual policy decisions and practices. Such actions have negatively affected related policy objectives such as the facilitation of public participation in socio-economic development, guiding and reflecting public opinion, national integration etc., because people had been largely deprived of knowing 'different views and interpretaion of news' of the main promoter of development: the government. Thus, the change of press ownership and re-institutionalisation of the press had become mere transfers of power from one point to another within the same 'centre', which has limited information dissemination to an unprecedented level. According to Jupp,

The creation of the Press Council, the Lake house legislation and, perhaps most potently, the reserve emergency powers held by the government, all made it possible to limit access to information within the island to a degree previously unknown. News management through government intervention became a concrete reality which Ceylon had not previously experienced except briefly during the crisis of 1958. With very little external supply of news and with most opinion leaders totally dependent on the newspapers and radio, the informational basis for flourishing democracy in Sri Lanka suddenly seemed rather narrow.<sup>27</sup>

Radical policy practitioners were quite optimistic that a 'positive', 'uncritical', 'uniform', development message would be capable of making attitudinal change and of mobilization of the general public toward desired development goals. Obviously, the reality has run counter to this optimism, simply because Sri Lankans have once again been compelled to rely on their oral tradition, bolstered by rumours 'operating at a national scale with a high degree of efficiency'.<sup>28</sup> Government development programs were bitterly rejected by the public in the general election of 1977, not because they were unacceptable to the masses, but because of the failure of the authorities 'to carry them out in an appropriately puritanical and efficient manner'.<sup>29</sup> This means that even after 'the elimination of a venal press' through the introduction of a new policy, the authorities have failed to put across the development message properly to the broad masses.

A new interpretation of the regulated press policy has been applied under the 'free (economic) development policy of the UNP government (1977-to date). Accordingly, the press has become relatively freer. Restrictions on the import of hardware (technology and newsprint) have been removed. Consequently, there has been an impressive technological advancement in the national press. Leading newspaper publishers have converted their printing processes into colour offset, and the number of pages in the daily and weekly presses have dramatically

increased.<sup>30</sup> (See also Appendix 'C' for daily circulation of major dailies in 1988)

Acknowledging the concept of a free-press as having "derived from the right to think freely, (and) to express oneself freely in word and writing" President Jayawardene declared in 1979,

The Press today is free. There are national papers which have the right to criticise the government and do so; anybody can start a newspaper organisation, anybody can import the most powerful printing machine in the world. There is freedom to import, raw material can be obtained and they can print anything they like.

The party papers are free to criticise the government - and they do, very vigorously. There is no boundary to what they can say except the normal laws; they are given government advertisements; they are entitled to use the government transport system to transport their papers.<sup>31</sup>

With the expansion of the boundaries of press freedom, the national press, particularly the privately-managed papers, have been fairly critical of the government development strategy while giving a wide coverage to its national development programs such as the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project, Free Trade, the One-million Housing Project, and the promotion of Tourism. The party press, particularly the Communist Party organ 'Aththa', has been quite outspoken about the consequences of this 'free development policy'. Many critics, who have been practically denied access to the national press, express their

views through the 'Aththa'.<sup>32</sup> Since the very existence of the Press Council (though it has failed to fulfill its mandate) is a kind of 'warning' to wrong-doers, there has emerged, unlike before, a fair debate based on facts between the government and the Opposition with regard to new development policy.

However, it is not clear whether the public -though highly literate - has been capable enough to distinguish reality from rhetoric, but they seem to have been convinced of the government's ability to 'create' wealth, and its determination to continue development programmes despite opposition criticisms. For instance, they approved the same development policy in the Presidential Election of 1982, apparently giving the 'benefit of the doubt' to the government. In reality, however, the newly-created wealth percolated from international organizations and rich countries that had come in favour of the government with heavy doses of foreign aid.<sup>33</sup> A random observation of the national press during 1978-82, testifies to the fact that both the private and the public sector propagated through newspaper columns and advertisements the assumption that the newly-created wealth would automatically percolate down and 'irrigate' the entire society. In other words, the role of the press in development, though guided by the same Regulated Press Policy, has been interpreted in a different way which was quite similar to that of the Dominant Paradigm. However, this interpretation too has had certain boundaries particularly with regard to such

sensitive national issues as ethnic conflict, political instability, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor under the new development policy.

The turning point came with the popular disturbances of 1983. Critics substantiated the fact that Sinhala nationalism and Tamil Separatism were not so much the product of tradition, rather, a result of the breakdown of tradition concomitant with capitalist development, culminating under the 'free' economic development policy.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the President had previously warned that restrictions on press freedom would be unavoidable, had the Government's (free) development policy were to be disrupted by the press.

In a developing country there are three main problems arising - freedom from hunger, freedom from unemployment and freedom to develop. If a nation is going on that path, can one permit unbounded liberty to people to disrupt that path? We have allowed it, up to now. But if that liberty comes to the stage where the government is disrupted, where we cannot carry on our work, where people have to suffer, what is the government to do? Resign? Hand over the reins of government to the free press and say, 'Carry on'? Or are we to restrict them and to see that the people have food, clothing, a roof and employment?<sup>35</sup>

This warning came into effect as press censorship when the ethnic conflict, along with the socio-economic and political crisis, was believed to have been capitalized on by Opposition critics, to exemplify the weaknesses of the government's national development effort. In fact, it was more than censor-



ship because, according to the Norwegian Study:

...the Government has throughout systematically issued one-sided and at times also distorted information about the political, military and diplomatic aspects of the current conflict.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, the conflict has 'deep economic and social roots' which sprouted and burst into awful bloom behind closed doors. It is hard to measure, however, as to how far the press and press censorship has contributed to the issue by making the public ignorant of contemporary events and their root causes. But it is quite clear that the public is not ready to accept a solution imposed upon them under strict press censorship. For instance, a part of the solution to the ethnic conflict was obviously the peace accord which was eventually signed between India and Sri Lanka. However, as the Globe and Mail reported,<sup>37</sup> the Accord was imposed upon the public as a 'fait accompli' and was not discussed impartially by the press and other media. Obviously, imposition of solutions to development issues has negatively affected their effective implementation. However, since independence, it has been the practice of almost every government, and the press has been made a tool of imposition of such solutions upon the masses. As observed, the regulated press policy or more precisely, its different interpretations have been increasingly used to achieve this end.

## Summation

The Sri Lankan press was a virtually unregulated private sector monopoly prior to the enactment of the Press Council Law No.5 of 1973 and the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. (Special Provisions) Bill No.28 of 1973. In general, the period between 1948-73 has been identified as an era where the press was guided by a laissez-faire policy. Its initial structure and performance led to a lengthy policy debate between 1956-73, which resulted in the current regulated press policy.

The prime goal of the press has always been the facilitation of development by providing the government and the public with an impartial and effective channel of information which would guide and reflect public opinion, mobilize the masses, and enhance public co-operation and participation within a democratic framework. As the main promoter of development, Sri Lankan governments, once elected, have used their mandate to impose 'development' rather than facilitating it to emerge from within the masses, and the press policy, though re-structured and re-institutionalized over time, has not been freed from this chronic problem. Imposition of solutions to development issues has often resulted in chaos, as has been exemplified by the aftermath of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord. Indeed, such impositions comply with alien models of development communication, but obviously not with the traditional Buddhist Model, where the key

notion has always been 'understanding' rather than 'influence'. What is obvious particularly from the latter part of the foregoing review is that the Sri Lankan Press Policy has lacked the essential qualities honoured by its own society, or it has failed to interpret them into actual policy decisions and practices from its very inception.

#### Notes for Chapter Four

1. Bryce Ryan (1958, p.148), referring to the situation in 1953 in a typical Sri Lankan village, argues that "the newspaper is the village's most important source of contact with world events".
2. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Plan Implementation in 1982 to identify the level of competition among mass media after the introduction of television in 1979 revealed that the press was only secondary to radio in popularity. See R. Peiris 'How Popular is the Press as a Mass Medium' in Pragathiya, (Sinhala), Vol.1, No.1, (Ministry of Plan Implementation, Colombo, 1984), pp.29-33.
3. The press was widely used along with oral cultural tradition to guide public opinion and mobilize the masses toward an Independent Sri Lanka in the late 19th and early 20th century. See a detailed account of the press's contribution to the Movement in K. Pannasekera, History of Newspapers and Periodicals in Sri Lanka, (Sinhala), Colombo, 1969.
4. The liberal theory of politics argues that "the press as an institution should be given the protection accorded under all freedom of speech rights". See V. Lowe, "Reporting Democracy in the ASEAN Region: A Question of Journalistic Ideologies and Interests" in P. Desbarats and H. Henderson (eds). Encounter'87 (Canada, 1988), p.66-77.
5. H.A.J. Hulugalle, The Life and Times of D.R. Wijewardene, (Colombo: 1969), p.244.
6. M.A.de Silva and R. Siriwardene, Communication Policies in Sri Lanka, (UNESCO, 1977), pp.27-28.
7. Ibid. p.28.
8. See his speech delivered at the Press Association of Ceylon on 'The Responsibility of the Press in Guiding Public Opinion and in Reflecting Public Opinion'; Colombo, 1959.
9. The Final Report of the Press Commission of 1964. Colombo. para 20.
10. J. Jupp, Sri Lanka: Third World democracy, (Frank Cass Co. Ltd. Great Britain, 1978, p.16), notes that among three potential threats encountered by the Coalition Government of 1964, it was primarily the "alliance of the newspapers, the UNP and conservative sections of the SLFP objecting to plans to nationalize the press" that was to bring down the Coalition and put the UNP into power for the next five

years.

11. This paper used to print a slogan depicting this 'victory' just below the title logo; it read " The most widely-spread weekly in South East Asia".
12. See details in Chapter Three under sub-section: 'A Mediacentric Communication Policy'.
13. A.J. Wilson, Electoral Politics in an Emergent State. (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.140.
14. Ibid. pp.140-157.
15. The Bill, passed through the National State Assembly in July 1973, limited the shares of the existing owners to not more than 25% of the total, vesting the remainder in the Public Trustee, until their eventual sale to public sector institutions.
16. Only two non-working directors are appointed by shareholders. The rest of the Board of Directors and the Chairman are appointed by the Public Trustee.
17. Silva and Siriwardene (1977), op.cit. p.32.
18. The Sri Lanka Press Council Act No 5 of 1973, pp.3-4.
19. Ibid, pp.4-10.
20. M.A.de Silva and R. Siriwardene (1977,p.32), op.cit. note: "Although the press council is empowered to exercise many different functions, in practice it has confined its activity since its establishment in 1973 to inquiring into complaints made by aggrieved individuals or organizations against this or that item in a newspaper, and ordering corrections or apologies wherever it has upheld such complaints.
21. A. Goonasekera (1978), op.cit. pp.88-90.
22. Ibid. p.89.
23. J.R. Jayawardene, Vision of a President. A Publication of the Presidential Secretariat.(Colombo: 1984), p.28.
24. This member, M.A.de Silva submitted a separate report on Broadcasting and Mass Media, in addition to his contribution to the major report. The quoted paragraphs are from his own report. (See Report of the Commission on the CBC, 1971).

25. Independent Newspapers Ltd. which had supported the government of 1970-77 to come into power, turned against it "when school textbook publishing was made a monopoly of the Government Printer, depriving (M.D.) Gunesena (and Co. Ltd., the publisher of Independent Newspapers) of a very profitable contract". See J. Jupp (1978) p.165.
26. For instance, it was under emergency regulations that the government closed down The Independent Newspapers Ltd. in 1974.
27. J. Jupp, (1978), op.cit. p.170.
28. M.A.de Silva (1971 p.209) vividly notes this point in his individual report (op.cit.), para 304 as follows: " In a democracy the Government must go all out to keep the people informed of what it is doing. It is this that will keep win the battle for people's minds. If it loses this battle, it will have to pay very dearly for it, particularly today when even the spreading of rumours is now operating at a national scale with a high degree of efficiency".
29. Jupp, J. (1978), op.cit. p.367.
30. For instance, one of the leading Sinhala dailies in the country, the Dinamina had been sometimes reduced in size to 6 pages during the period 1970-77, whereas since 1978 it has remained within the range of 12 to 36 pages or more.
31. J.R. Jayawardene, (1984), op.cit. p.27.
32. For example, Gamini Iriyagolla, the author of The Truth About Mahaweli, (Colombo, 1978), published a series of critical articles on the Accelerated Mahaweli Project in the 'Aththa' which would have found hardly any space in the National Press.
33. In 1979, external aid covered 65% of total public investment, and foreign debt, as the Asia Correspondent for The London Financial Times, David Housego, pointed out, was 10% of all foreign earnings, which may easily rise to 40% by 1990. According to Housego, Sri Lanka has become the 'test case of IMF realism'. See the article 'Government Faces Crucial Choice' in the Comment/Feature section of The Ceylon Daily News, Friday 8, 1980; The Norwegian Study (1987, op.cit.) notes: "Few other countries have ever received such a high volume of aid per capita as the \$ 54 which Sri Lanka achieved" in 1981.
34. A.H.A. Lodhi, "Class and Chauvinism in Sri Lanka" in Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol.17 No.2. (Manila: 1987), pp.160-186.

35. J.R. Jayawardene, (1984). op.cit. p.29.
36. Sri Lanka: Country Study and Norwegian Aid Review, (University of Bergen, Norway, April, 1987), p.55.
37. The Globe and Mail, August 19, 1987, p.A-6, 'Sri Lanka's Moment'.

## Chapter Five

### THE RADIO BROADCASTING POLICY

Since radio broadcasting in Sri Lanka has been a government monopoly from its inception in 1923, the policy guiding its structure and performance has continuously been designed and defined in accordance with the general policy of the government toward development. During the pre-independence era the colonial government imposed a 'profit-seeking' development policy, and therefore radio broadcasting was also regarded as a part of its income-generating machine. Its programs were directed at the affluent urban society where broadcasting was deemed profitable. As the Special Committee on Broadcasting of 1941 reported, this policy, or 'the outlook in Ceylon' during this early period, appeared 'to have been guided by an effort to balance the income and expenditure of the Broadcasting Service'.

After independence in 1948, particularly with the 'change' in the government development policy, the broadcasting policy also began to undergo several modifications. These modifications and the accompanying attempt to achieve contemporary development goals may be characterized by two institutional and structural reforms: 1) the establishment of Radio Ceylon (1949-66); and 2) its replacement by the Ceylon/Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (CBC/SLBC).<sup>2</sup>



The succeeding analysis will examine how far such reforms have been effective in achieving the policy goals set for broadcasting within the context of national development, and the obstacles to achieving these goals.

#### Goals set for Broadcasting

At independence, the policy goals set for broadcasting were not quite clear, but it was implicit that they would concentrate on two national necessities of the day. The first, as in the case of the press, was the objective of dissemination and exchange of information, which would enhance public awareness with the news and different views essential for public decision-making in the course of national development; the second was the promotion of national education and culture. Since the ideological base of the national development effort, as was mentioned in a preceeding chapter, depended largely on the Western modernization concept, these broadcasting goals were Western in orientation. Nevertheless, the influence of the traditional Buddhist model was also apparent, particularly in the initial period of policy formulation.

For instance, unlike in the colonial era, public broadcasting policy was to pay considerable attention to the receiver (listener) and his/her communication rights with broadcasting being recognized as a 'free-institution', which at the same time

should be used for nation building. This idea, which has remained since independence was officially affirmed by the then Minister of Broadcasting and Information, J.R. Jayawardene in 1960:

A national broadcasting organization should not be exploited by an individual or a group of persons for their own ends. **The listener has a right to hear facts without distortion.** Exchange of ideas with fair representation of major points of view is an essential safeguard of free institutions. Broadcasting must reflect the life and culture of this country and also present to the nation a fair picture of the life, thought and achievements of other peoples throughout the world.<sup>3</sup>

However, as far as national development is concerned, no purposeful attempt was made until the mid-1960s to establish 'direct links' between broadcasting and the government development effort. The situation created such an indifferent attitude toward radio broadcasting among responsible authorities that the first Director-General of the CBC, Neville Jayaweera, openly declared:

Although broadcasting had functioned in Ceylon for nearly 40 years (He was referring to the period prior to 1965) it had **at no time been related to any defined goals...** Its potential as a means by which the attitudes of the people could be influenced, their values changed and their co-operation secured for larger social and economic purposes had not even been considered.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, the policymakers of the mid 1960s decided to re-emphasize the broadcasting goals, giving a high priority to the

economic and social development of the country. The above Director-General revealed: "We felt that we could not allow a medium so pervasive as Radio to Function (sic) in isolation from the strivings of the Community towards economic and social betterment".<sup>5</sup> In fact, this emphasis on socio-economic development, which has since the mid-1960s had made an explicit influence on the structure and performance of the entire broadcasting system, resulted from Radio Ceylon's failure to achieve the policy goals originally set for broadcasting. It is important for this study to examine what caused the failure.

#### Radio Ceylon and its Failure (1949-66)

The first notable change in the broadcasting structure, after independence, resulted in the establishment of a separate government department in 1949 under the name 'Radio Ceylon'. The Postmaster General who had functioned as the head of broadcasting with an advisory board during the colonial period, was replaced by a Director-General under the new structure. In 1950, a Commercial Service was also inaugurated with the intention that "it would provide a plentiful source of income which could finance the development of cultural, informational and educational broadcasting in the regular national service".<sup>6</sup>

As a government monopoly, Radio Ceylon made considerable progress in technology during the early 1950s, particularly with

the assistance of Britain and the United States. In return, the BBC and the Voice of America services were allowed to use some of the facilities installed by them. In fact, Britain played an influential role within Radio Ceylon which transcended mere general 'technical assistance'. For example, it was still a Britisher (John Lampson) who held the position of the Director-General, and it was under his supervision that the Commercial Service was organized.

The attention paid to hardware development and the Commercial Service resulted mainly in popularizing sound broadcasting, increasing the number of licensed radio sets from 23,415 in 1948 to 162,134 in 1956 (See Appendix 'D'). Nevertheless, this growth was hardly accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the performance of Radio Ceylon in terms of initial policy goals. Radio Ceylon still preferred English language and Western-oriented programs to those with a more indigenous flavor. For example, in 1953, the time allocated to Sinhala and Tamil-speaking listeners per week was 43.5 hours and 39 hours respectively, whereas the small minority of English speaking, Western-oriented listeners was served with 49.75 hours within the same period. Moreover, the Commercial Service was repeatedly accused of having led to the debasement of taste and of undermining the indigenous culture. In fact, the Broadcasting Commission of 1953 recommended the closing down of the Commercial Service and suggested its profitability be maintained

through controlled advertisements in specified hours. The feasibility of this recommendation was never accepted by responsible authorities then or thereafter.<sup>7</sup>

Though the promotion of national education was a leading policy goal and the Schools Broadcasting Service had been set up to achieve this objective in 1931, the failure of Radio Ceylon in this domain was beyond doubt. In the words of the Broadcasting Commission of 1953:

From the evidence before us, both oral and written, on the subject of Schools Broadcasting, one fact emerges very clearly, and that is the **lack of co-ordination** of the transmitting and receiving ends. In other words, there is a gap between Radio Ceylon and the schools in regard to planning at one end and listening-in at the other. There is no effective machinery in the Education Department to ensure that school broadcasts, planned and produced by Radio Ceylon, are actually listened to by schools, and that the Educational authorities co-operate with the Radio Ceylon staff to make School Broadcasting a success.<sup>8</sup>

The failure of educational radio was indeed an excellent example which illustrated the lack of co-ordination between Radio Ceylon and other development-oriented departments. Even more than a decade later, the situation had not changed. The Report of the Commission on Broadcasting and Information of 1966 re-affirmed the failure as 'a waste of time' and 'a sad confession'.<sup>9</sup>

The failure to achieve policy goals through Radio Ceylon

can be attributed to numerous factors, among which certain key points are relevant to this study. First, the government development effort - whether education, culture, society or economy-oriented - flowed as usual from the centre to the periphery. Even with a change of the 'development vision' after the general election of 1956, this 'flow' continued with the fullest support of the government. Second, broadcasting was increasingly becoming a medium of partisan propaganda, thereby creating a 'credibility gap' and 'detracting its effectiveness as a means of influencing public opinion'.<sup>10</sup> Third, as mentioned above, the gradual negligence of original policy goals had been exacerbated to such an extent that the functions of Radio Ceylon seemed to have 'had at no time been related to any defined goals'.<sup>11</sup> Fourth, the excessive attention paid to profit-making through the sale of entertainment created the assumption that 'Radio was essentially a means of entertainment'<sup>12</sup> rather than a development-oriented mass medium. Finally, as in any other government department, the bureaucratic structure of Radio Ceylon was deemed a 'heavy hand', which slowed down its own progress as well as its contribution to national development.

The 1966 Commission clarified the failure, and stressed that emphasis should be placed on the demands of the listener. It identified the major structural and functional obstacles emanating from Radio Ceylon being a department directly controlled by the government.

Listeners demand an efficient service with programmes of high quality, including legitimate controversy and objective news bulletins, for which the broadcasting authority should take full responsibility. A broadcasting service does not flourish under the heavy hand of departmentalism.<sup>13</sup>

The Commission's final recommendation was to replace Radio Ceylon with a **Broadcasting Corporation** which would not be directly subject to government control. It hoped that the government would 'take good care to place' broadcasting 'in worthy hands' precisely because its prime belief was that such an instrument could '**promote national unity, expedite economic development, encourage arts, improve taste, liberalize education and make the nation happy by providing clean and lively entertainment**'.<sup>14</sup> It is with these re-emphasized expectations that the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation came into existence in 1966.

#### The CBC/SLBC. (1966 to date)

The Ceylon (now, Sri Lanka) Broadcasting Corporation, was set up by the Act No 37 of 1966, consists of a Chairman and a board of directors appointed by the Minister in charge of broadcasting. Since they are the highest policy-making body of the Corporation (see Appendix 'E' for its organizational structure) the Minister takes into consideration political affiliations as the main criterion of making these appointments,

besides knowledge of the broadcasting field, ethnic and religious representability etc.

The chief executive of the Corporation is the Director-General of Broadcasting, whose decisions are crucial in carrying out the 'less articulated' functions assigned to the Corporation.<sup>15</sup> One of his major responsibilities is to exercise the functions of the Corporation with regard to programs in a manner,

(a) that nothing is included in any such programme which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to incite to crime or to lead to disorder or to offend any racial or religious susceptibilities or to be offensive to public feelings.

b) that the programmes maintain a **proper balance** in their subject-matter and a high general standard of quality; and

c) that any news given in the programmes (in whatever form) is presented with due **accuracy** and **impartiality** and with due regard to the public interest.<sup>16</sup>

The principal factor which has caused frustration in realizing these objectives is, somewhat ironically, the government's own policy toward broadcasting. Section 5 of the 1966 Act is quite important in this regard:

In the exercise of its functions and powers ... the Corporation shall comply with the general policy of the Government with respect to broadcasting and shall comply with any general or special directions given by the Minister pursuant to the policy of the Government in relation thereto.<sup>17</sup>



In fact, it is this clause that has been widely used by various governments to justify their increasing influence over the activities of the CBC/SLBC. When government policy, particularly after the mid-1960s was to give high priority to socio-economic development, it has faced no practical difficulties in using broadcasting facilities to establish what the (CBC/SLBC) authorities believe are 'rational and dynamic links' between the public and the government development effort. What is significant in this endeavour is the fact that the CBC/SLBC, though under different managements, seems to have followed an identical strategy, within which the receiver's complex behaviour has been regarded as a passively-treatable phenomenon.

#### The Policy Strategy toward Development (1966-77)

Immediately after the CBC was set up, it "accepted the position that its resources should be placed at the disposal of the country's efforts at economic and social reconstruction as a matter of high priority".<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, under the CBC's first management appointed by the 'National Government' (1965-70),

... the programmes put over the air had to be prepared in a manner that would attune the peoples' thinking towards development with all the consequences that would flow from peoples' participation in a drive towards economic progress. The plans for agricultural and industrial reconstruction drawn up by the experts had to be explained to the people in a way that they could see for themselves the benefits that would accrue.

In the rural areas particularly the Corporation felt that

farmers had to be brought alive to new technology. A new spirit had to be generated that would help towards changing a subsistence agriculture into a surplus one through use of fertilizers, weedicides and better methods of cultivation. It was thought that conventional methods of talks over Radio would not be able to achieve these objectives, generally as people do not like being 'talked' to. The Corporation decided to take Radio to the field and to involve farmers in their living environment in Young Farmers' Clubs, discussions and quiz programmes. The strategy was further widened to include even the use of drama and songs for creating a climate of awareness and enthusiasm.<sup>19</sup>

Since broadcasting facilities were expanded to most remote areas of the country with the installation of powerful medium-wave transmitters at Maho and Weeraketiya in 1969/70, the CBC had the technical potential to implement the new policy strategy in an unprecedented manner. With such facilities at hand, it launched a massive reorientation to news and entertainment programs, integrating them into such extravaganzas as 'National Exhibition' and 'Mahaweli Ballet', which were staged in leading towns throughout the country. In order to achieve the re-emphasized goals, a 'news-in-brief' program was also introduced, in addition to the four major news bulletins. The Broadcasting Commission of 1971 reviewed how the entire strategy functioned within the period 1966-70.

Talks, discussions and quiz programmes were made to highlight urgent economic and social programmes. Plays and songs with a new meaning were put over to divert the minds of listeners to the more serious problems of their environment. Short news bulletins carried on the hour sought to publicise the activities and achievements of the people living in rural areas. Knowing that people like to relax by their radios, steps were taken to ensure that the

music component of programmes continued to predominate. Whenever the management felt that the instructive components of the programmes was tending to keep listeners away, the situation was retrieved by a rapid alteration of programme schedules.<sup>20</sup>

The theoretical base of this strategy were based on early forms of the Diffusionist Approach, popularly known as the 'diffusion of innovations' through broadcast media. The weakest aspect of this massive endeavour was, however, related to the fact that the whole strategy had become not only one-way but one-sided, i.e. political propaganda. There was no room for critical views to be voiced over the radio. It was mostly the 'Govi Rajas' who spoke on behalf of the public, and on news programs it was only the positive aspects of the 'Food Drive' that were highlighted. More pertinent was the allegation made against the reliability of statistics and actual results of the 'Food Drive'. This eventually became a popular topic within the oral communication tradition, and for the opposition press led by the Independent Group.<sup>21</sup> Though the entire campaign had a certain impact on the people's attitude toward economic development, it was later revealed that the level of public approval and participation highlighted by the CBC was a gross miscalculation and a misinterpretation.<sup>22</sup> The relevant point to this study is the fact that a similar or more one-sided and centrally- controlled policy strategy has been followed, even after 1970, by the successive (UF) Government (1970-77) and its appointees to the CBC/SIBC.

During the first few months of the new management appointed by the UF Government, CBC programs were mainly devoted to: criticizing the activities of the previous government, introducing the upcoming Five-Year Plan, and announcing proposed changes to the socio-economic and political structure of the country. As usual, these 'reforms' originated from the leading political figures of the 'centre', whereas the public, particularly an educated youth, most of whom were still unemployed, had no concrete 'vision' whatsoever of what these reforms would mean to them as peripheral receivers. This lack of understanding or co-ordination between the 'centre' and the receiving end, for which the CBC's 'one-way' and 'one-sided' policy should be partly, or else largely, responsible,<sup>23</sup> was exemplified by the Youth Uprising of April 1971. This particular event, which resulted in the replacement of the CBC's entire board of directors with more efficient 'government acquaintances',<sup>24</sup> seems to have motivated the politicians to keep broadcasting under stricter government control. Thus the CBC, during the decisive period of the 'uprising', played an important role in bringing the unfortunate situation under control, through a 'war-time'-like propaganda campaign. Even after the crucial period was over, it did not permit the causes of the 'issue' to be debated, or the atrocities of the armed forces to be retrospectively reported. The entire issue was buried under emergency regulations until it popped up at the general election of 1977, as the greatest event of the century which would determine the nation's

future path to development.<sup>25</sup> The important fact is that this policy of strict control was indiscriminately applied to facilitate government development activities, particularly the implementation of the Five-Year Development Plan and related socio-economic and political reforms between 1971-77.

However, since the (UF) Government was popularly identified as 'anti-capitalist', a considerable shift within the subject matter of CBC/SLBC's international news reporting was seen during this period. For instance, the 'nation-building' movements in Vietnam and Palestine were given considerable priority, along with the 'achievements' of the East-bloc countries. The 'West' was portrayed as a potential trouble-maker in the 'non-aligned' Third World.<sup>26</sup> However, no policy directives in specific terms were given to the News Division as to how such foreign events should be interpreted; the final decision rested totally in the hands of the Director-General.

Apart from such 'reforms', the CBC, which was re-named the SLBC with the change of the country's name in 1972, seems to have taken a more nationalist stance in the production of cultural and educational programs. It encouraged classical music and well-written songs, while discouraging Westernized 'pop' music and 'Baila'.<sup>27</sup> Following the Educational Reforms of 1972, the SLBC reorganized its Educational Service, with a permanent Co-ordinating Committee comprised of officials from the SLBC,

as well as the Ministry of Education and the Curriculum Development Centre. The new set-up achieved a fair degree of improvement, particularly in co-ordinating activities, and continues to operate even today within that framework. Nevertheless, critics note that 'there is much room for further improvement', if the Corporation and relevant Ministries were to take the initiative.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, cultural, educational and other development-oriented 'reforms' originated from the 'election manifesto' of the (UF) government. These were hardly subjected to any public discussion after the general election of 1970.<sup>29</sup> Obviously the CBC/SLBC's own strict 'one-way' and 'one-sided' policy toward these 'reforms' did not permit it to represent true public opinion and maintain the 'proper balance' in the subject matter of programs with due 'accuracy' and 'impartiality'. It was apparent that the UF Government suspected an ongoing 'Western capitalist conspiracy' which would hamper socio-economic and political reforms and the use of broadcasting for the promotion of such reforms. Strict governmental control on broadcasting was thereby justified and deemed essential, particularly in the course of liberating the public from exploitation by the local rich and from the country's dependance on the West. Its static economic (development) policy agreed with this centrally controlled, rigid broadcasting policy, but failed to convince the public of its 'logicality' and 'practicality'. In short,

this policy which was conspicuously borrowed from the 'Radical Approach' and applied equally to Press policy, propagating that liberation from exploitation and dependance would automatically enhance media's contribution to socio-economic development. But in practice, it resulted in total failure.

#### The Renewed Attempt (1977-88)

With the introduction of the 'free' economic development policy by the successive (UNP) Government (1977-88) the SLBC has followed a renewed strategy to achieve its broadcasting goals. The main characteristic of this strategy has been the decentralization of broadcasting services to regions where four 'Services' (Sevaya) were established during 1979-83. The intention of this 'decentralization' has been to cater to the specific audience needs of respective regions, which were deemed difficult to be met by the 'centre': 'Rajarata Sevaya' in the North Central (Anuradhapura); 'Ruhunu Sevaya' in the South (Matara); Mahaweli Community Service in areas covering the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project;<sup>30</sup> and 'Mahaweluwa Sevaya' in the central highlands (Kandy).

These regional services operate under directors who are responsible to the Director-General through Deputy Director-General (Regional Services) in Colombo. In terms of results these 'Services' have appreciably improved the relationship

between the broadcaster and the rural audience through such programs as 'Rasa Dotha', 'Srawakayek Samaga', 'Viridu Prasanga' and 'Keti Katha'. Listeners have responded with enthusiasm to these programs. According to the SLBC Annual Report of 1983,

The Rajarata Sevaya at Anuradhapura which completed 5 years of Regional broadcasting (by 1983), concentrated on improving the quality of programmes by spear-heading people's participation. Programmes oriented to the farmer in the dry zone were continued, responding to the views of the listener. A survey was carried out to determine the ratings of programmes, and it was found to be satisfactory. Musical programmes such as Navarella and listeners' requests were adjudged popular with a listenership of 87%. The survey also revealed 56% listenership to Agricultural programmes. The overall listenership to the Rajarata Sevaya was 97% which is a matter of pride for the Corporation.<sup>31</sup>

It may be concluded that the decentralization of sound broadcasting has apparently decreased the controlling power of the 'centre' on the selection and production of certain programs. For instance in 1983 Mahanuwara Sevaya produced nearly 50 programs a week in the three major languages, with an air time of 54 hours. According to SLBC authorities, these programs have been designed,

... to suit listeners' preference taking cognizance of the varied **religious, cultural and historical traditions** of the area and the beliefs, pursuits, practices and aptitudes of a society that is largely multi-racial and multi-lingual.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, much of the content seems to be devoted to entertainment rather than development issues. A publication by



the Audience Research Division of the SLBC revealed in 1987 that Rajarata Sevaya, established to serve the predominantly agricultural North Central region, allocated only 1 hour 27 minutes for 'development programs' within a given week, whereas 'entertainment and music' within the same period occupied more than 28 hours!<sup>33</sup> Considerable time was also allocated to religious (10 hours) and news/information (7 hours) programs. However, as usual, news and information programs have not dealt with critical views on development issues. In this regard, decentralization (or regionalization as it deserves to be called) seems to have been a mere extension of the typical one-sided policy of the 'centre'.

However, one can not ignore the fact that this renewed attempt has also put a more democratic face on the entire country by providing the political opposition with a limited opportunity to express its views. Since 1978 the SLBC has given a very limited coverage of opposition views in Parliament and May Day rallies. From a comparative perspective, this seems indeed a genuine attempt to comply with the original policy goal of 'exchange of ideas with fair representation of major points of view' which is 'an essential safeguard of free-institutions'. However, most reports related to political events are highly 'selective' and pro-government. The broadcaster knows what his/her exact limits are if s/he wants to secure his/her job. This 'self-limiting' or 'self-censorship', as in the case of the

press, impels creative persons to function as government officials rather than broadcasting professionals. Moreover, given the fact that the News Division, with a daily output of about 20 news programs in all three languages, is largely influenced by ambitious government politicians who seek popularity, a fair representation of major political views can hardly be accommodated within a major news bulletin of approximately 10 minutes duration. Similarly, the programs on Channel 1 (later the National Service) have focussed on major development schemes, of which no critical comments are possible by participants. The entire news/information campaign during the early 1980s reminded the average Sri Lankan of similar CBC attempts under the 'National Government' of 1965-70.<sup>34</sup> The attention paid to agricultural programs has repeatedly been in the form of instructions rather than discussions or exchanges of experience.

Thus, despite the renewed attempt, the SLBC has as usual remained the official voice of the government rather than an impartial mass medium which represents the entire nation. The actual performance of this so-called break-through strategy has not been significantly different from that of the preceeding strategy.

### Other Goals

Though the SLBC operates as a public Corporation. It has always been considered a financially independent institution, not subsidized by the government. A deviation from this policy occurred in the 1970s when the political authorities viewed the Corporation as a possible job-provider to unemployed youths. Consequently, in 1977 the SLBC had to spend Rs. 12 million, out of a revenue budget of Rs. 20 million merely for personal emoluments.<sup>35</sup> It therefore ran at a loss and had to be subsidized by the government.

Since most of the hardware is imported the Corporation has paid, since the early 1980s, particular attention to achieving its commercial goals.

The main revenue of the SLBC comes from the sale of air-time, license fees, production, and obituary notices. In 1983, these revenue activities were centralized under a Business Division with its own director. The idea has been to make maximum profit. The Division was apparently established as an expedient response to the 'free', 'profit-oriented' economic policy of the government, under which an unprecedented competition for advertising emerged between the SLBC and the newly introduced National Television.<sup>36</sup> This competition tended to create the impression, particularly among the custodians of

culture, that the SLBC promotes consumerism while neglecting cultural and other development goals. This has proved accurate, in that the SLBC positively responded to advertisers' requests that Channel 1 and 2 be re-identified as the National and Commercial Services.<sup>37</sup>

At present, the SLBC allocates more time to Commercial Channels than to either the Sinhala or Tamil National Services. (See Appendix 'F') Since 1988, the English Service has been operating as an amalgamated Commercial and National Channel, which includes the All Asia Service, South East Asia Service and the STX (Stereo) Service. This 're-organization' has encouraged more commercial activities and Western-oriented entertainment programs. However, the promotion of culture and education as policy goals has been not entirely abandoned by the Sinhala and Tamil Services. Examples are such popular cultural and public educational programs as 'Thumpathrata', 'Sandakadapahana', 'Sahithye Sanvadaya', 'Sambhawya Sahitya' and 'Sithijaya'.

In addition, several isolated attempts have also been made to promote national unity since 1983, the year severe ethnic disturbances broke out in the country. For instance in that year the Tamil Service organized a series of public performance by Dr. (Mrs.) Vasantha Kumari from South India. The Sinhala Service has also broadcast dramas, songs, and talks related to the theme of 'national unity'.<sup>38</sup> But they all seem to be isolated and

limited to a handful of producers and listeners due to a lack of co-ordination among the three (language) Services as well as within the relevant National and Commercial Channels.

Moreover, the authorities seem to believe that the ethnic issue is a theme that may not be openly discussed over the broadcasting medium. This is mainly because the SLBC Act 'warns' that the programs broadcast by the Corporation should comply with the requirement 'that nothing is included in any such programme which is likely to incite to crime or to lead to disorder or to offend any racial or religious susceptibilities'.<sup>39</sup> One of the safest ways to comply with this requirement is to avoid any confrontation with such controversial themes as ethnic disunity. As noted in Chapter 1, 'a decision not to act is as much a policy decision as a decision to act' and this policy of 'inaction' of the SLBC has tended to evade the most timely and effective way of discussing the problems related to national unity at a national scale.

The best example from the recent past is the signing of the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, which was not subjected to any critical discussion over the radio. (How the government used the regulated press policy during this period was noted in the previous chapter). Under these circumstances, it is hardly admitted, even by the SLBC authorities, that the goal of national unity has ever been achieved through their isolated,

un-coordinated programs.

### From Radio to Television

While the failure of radio broadcasting to facilitate national development after 1971 has never been properly examined,<sup>40</sup> a long-awaited policy decision was made by the UNP Government to introduce color television to Sri Lanka. It was basically assumed that television, once introduced, would be a powerful and effective medium where other mass media, (particularly radio) had failed to bring about the desired development-oriented changes. Thus, Sri Lanka entered the global television community on April 15, 1979 and nation-wide transmission was inaugurated in February 1982.

The structural and institutional framework of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (the SLRC) - the sole authority in charge of television broadcasting within the country - is fundamentally similar to that of the SLBC. It is quite clear that policy planners have closely followed the CBC Act of 1966 in drafting the SLRC Act No 6 of 1982, which provides the initial structural and institutional framework for TV broadcasting in the country. Accordingly, certain common characteristics can be found between the SLBC and the SLRC. The most common of them is the level of government intervention in management, as exercised through the appointment of the Chairman, the Director-General and the Board

of Directors. This has helped the political authority in power to place a 'heavy hand' on the activities of the SLRC. Another common characteristic is the program 'requirements' that should be met by both Corporations. Both Acts stipulate these requirements in an identical text.<sup>41</sup> These similarities are a representative indication of the fact that the introduction of television into Sri Lanka has been mostly an extension of the broadcasting system from audio to audio-visual, without changing much of the existing structure, performance and regulations.

In other words, the fact that Sri Lanka entered the global television community only recently, has not substantially helped it adopt an explicit television policy as to how the new medium could and should be used to facilitate the country's development effort. The official view is that "everything a Government does is for the people" and therefore, "when a mass medium like TV is introduced by the Government of a country, it is intended to benefit the people of that land".<sup>42</sup> This apparently means that the acquisition of a lucrative mass medium like TV has been officially justified by the euphemism that it is for 'national development' or more precisely, that its service, as in the case of radio broadcasting, is 'in the public interest'. Though the term 'public interest' has not been elaborated or explicitly defined by the SLRC Act or relevant authorities, the use of television 'in the public interest' is repeatedly pronounced 'in terms of its social benefits'.<sup>43</sup> This means that television has

been viewed mainly as a medium of educating the public with a variety of news, public affairs, and other formal and informal educational, informational and cultural programs.

Despite these sanguine expectations, the actual performance of the Sri Lankan Television during the past few years, shows instead the fact that it has become a highly profitable business venture, which sells entertainment and promotes consumerism. During this short period, foreign programs have always occupied more than 40% of the total broadcast time, while domestic productions have been confined to routine news bulletins and entertainment programs sponsored by various commercial enterprises.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, as Neville Jayaweera mentioned:

Through TV we are now linked to a global export system where we are the consumers and 'they' are the exporters. and I think that any government that wants to change this present tendency is going to find a major problem on its hands.<sup>45</sup>

It is not yet clear whether the present authorities have made any conscious attempt to change this 'tendency', because the current television broadcasting policy seems to be enjoying great support, even providing a model for radio broadcasting. As a result, the SLBC authorities seem to be lamenting over the financial success of the television instead of admiring the devotion of the Sri Lankan audience who still stick into radio and regard this wide-spread medium as the 'leader' among all



mass media.<sup>46</sup>

The relevance of the current TV policy to this study (which is not intended to deal with the television policy in detail) is the fact that such a profit-seeking policy has clearly derived from the Western consumerism-oriented development philosophy which has its roots in the Dominant Paradigm. Radio broadcasting policy has also come to a dilemma, where on the one hand the SLBC must pursue commercial goals more diligently than ever, while on the other hand, continue to achieve its original non-profit objectives.

#### Summation

During the past 40 years, (1948-88) radio broadcasting in Sri Lanka has undergone two major structural and institutional modifications. The first - the establishment of Radio Ceylon in 1949, ended up in failure, mainly due to its being a government department subjected to bureaucratic control and outdated rules and regulations. Original policy goals set for broadcasting with the sanguine expectation of democratizing the broadcasting service were revived by the latter reform - the conversion of Radio Ceylon in 1966 into a Crown Corporation (the CBC/SLBC). As the above review reveals, this new Corporation has continued to fail, mainly because it has made no difference in acting as an independent entity, not subjected to government (particularly

political and bureaucratic) control over it. Critics have summed up the failure as follows:

... what took place in 1966 was merely a change of name and of the mechanics of organization, but in its mode of functioning, broadcasting policies and content of broadcasting matter, the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation has functioned ... as the direct instrument of the government of the day. The hopes and expectations of the 1966 commission have not been borne out by the corporation's actual record.<sup>47</sup>

The failure of radio broadcasting to facilitate national development has been obvious in almost every related sector, ranging from socio-economic to the cultural and educational spheres. Though the Broadcasting Commission of 1971 pointed out certain key shortcomings in the structure, performance and regulations of the broadcasting system, the authorities have encouraged only 'an incremental approach' to changes within the existing structure. The best example from the recent past is the decentralization or regionalization attempt of the functions of the SLBC.

The major reason for this state of affairs is apparently the authorities' strong inclination to adopt alien models of development communication within which broadcasting policy has become a mere set of regulations rather than a clear 'course of action' based on development necessities of the nation. Though policy goals have been set, as in the case of the Press, in

accordance with domestic audience requirements, actual policy decisions and the resulting performance have constantly derived from a 'philosophy' borrowed from the Dominant Paradigm, the Diffusionist Approach or the Radical Approach. A frequent feature of the selection criterion of most programs - particularly news and public affairs - is the political authorities' ideological bias toward the above Approaches. (With the advent of television the SLBC seems to be considering a re-emphasis on this rather than opting for a structural and institutional rearrangement of the entire broadcasting system.) Under these circumstances, the listener's right to hear facts without distortion has often been denied, and s/he has been kept in a 'functionally illiterate' and ignorant position with regard to development realities. Briefly put, certain main characteristics of the colonial communication policy - such as conveying messages from the government to the public, presenting one-sided views of facts as well as treating the mass audience as passive, peripheral receivers etc. have increasingly found expression within the existing broadcasting policy despite on-going reforms since Independence.

### Notes for Chapter Five

1. Report of the Special Committee on Broadcasting in Ceylon, Colombo, 1941, para 34.
2. This Crown Corporation was originally named as the CBC in 1966. When 'Ceylon' was renamed 'Sri Lanka' in 1972, the CBC automatically came to be identified as the SLBC. The name was legally changed on October 27, 1977 by the SLBC (Amendment) Law No.11.
3. Quoted from his speech delivered at Radio Ceylon in April 1960. See details, in A. Goonasekera, Communication: Policy and Planning in Sri Lanka, (Colombo: 1978), mimeo, p.94.
4. See N.Jayaweera's statement to the Commission of Inquiry on the CBC. 1971, para 161.
5. Ibid. para 161.
6. M.A.de Silva & R. Siriwardene, Communication Policies in Sri Lanka, (UNESCO: 1977), p.35.
7. For details of these early statistics and recommendations see the Report of the Commission on Broadcasting of 1953; and Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: Some Significant Events 1923-87, (Sinhala - mimeo: A publication of the Audience Research Division: the SLBC, 1987).
8. Report of the Commission of Broadcasting of 1953, para 278.
9. Commission of Broadcasting and Information of 1966, para 154.
10. M.A.de Silva & R. Siriwardene, (1976), op.cit. p.37.
11. N. Jayaweera's statement to the Broadcasting Commission of 1971, op.cit. para 161.
12. Ibid. para 161.
13. Report of the Commission of Broadcasting and Information of 1966, op.cit. para 59.
14. Ibid. para 67.
15. The CBC Act No. 37 of 1966, under Part 1, Section 3, stipulates the functions of the Corporation as follows:
  - (1) The functions of the Corporation shall be-
  - (a) to carry on a broadcasting service within Ceylon and from time to time develop, extend, and improve that service

in the public interest;  
 (b) to exercise supervision and control over programmes broadcast by the Corporation;  
 (c) to advise the Minister in respect of matters relating to broadcasting; and  
 (d) to exercise and perform such powers and duties in relation to broadcasting as are conferred or imposed on it by or under this Act.

16. Ibid. Section 3 (2).
17. Ibid. Section 5.
18. Report of the Commission on the CBC of 1971, op.cit. para 162.
19. Ibid. para 162 & 163.
20. Ibid. para 164.
21. See details in chapter four on 'The Press Policy'.
22. Report of the Commission on the CBC, 1971, op.cit. Chapter XI11.
23. Since the CBC has been operating as the only publicly-owned mass medium of the day it should be mainly responsible for this massive communication breakdown.
24. The 'uprising' of 1971 began on April 05, and the entire Board of Directors was replaced by an acting chairman and director-general on April 08, 1971.
25. Critics view the incident as a deterioration of the nation's commitment to democracy. The Opposition's solution was to re-establish a 'Righteous Society' committed to the principles of democracy. The idea was echoed during the general election of 1977. See details in J. Jupp, Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy, (Great Britain: Frank Cass Co. Ltd. 1978).
26. It is important to note that Sri Lanka was the host to the 5th Conference of the Non-Aligned Nations held in Colombo, 1976, which brought up the idea of non-aligned newspool.
27. 'Baila' is a form of music with 'smutty texts' used as entertainment at parties in the maritime provinces, particularly among the Westernized community. The origin of 'baila' is related to Afro-Portuguese soldiers of the colonial period and the word 'baila' means 'dance' in Portuguese. It has been the belief of the average Sri Lankan that 'baila' with its low status would and could

harm the traditional music styles. In fact, it remained untouched by mass media until late 1960s. The SLBC started to include 'baila' songs with comparatively 'clean' texts in its light music programs in 1981. See details in K. Malm and R. Wallis, "The Baila of Sri Lanka and Callipso of Trinidad" in Communication Research, Vol.12, No.3 (July, 1985), pp.277-300.

28. W. Diyasena, "Use of Media For Promoting Intellectual and Aesthetic Development of the Child", in Marga, Vol.5, No.4, (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1978), pp.53-75.
29. In fact, this has always been the case with regard to the 'approval' of development reforms by the public during the past 40 years. Given the fact that Sri Lanka has no opinion poll organizations, the political authority assumes that the public would approve every reform they bring forth, once their party is elected to power.
30. The Mahaweli Community Radio (Service) was established in 1981 in collaboration with UNESCO and the Danish Government. It has paid a commendable attention to cultural aspects of the 'Mahaweli' Settlements, which received special mention at the World Community Conference held in Montreal, Canada, 1983.
31. Annual Report of the SLBC, 1983. p. 75.
32. Ibid. p. 76.
33. N. Karunanayake, A Review of the Broadcasting Service in Sri Lanka, (Sinhala-Mimeo, Audience Research Division: the SLBC, 1987), p.22.
34. See details under the sub-section : 'the Policy Strategy and Development 1966-77' (of this chapter).
35. Prior to 1970, the CBC's recruitment policy, though highly politicized, was mostly in compliance with its increase in work-load. In 1969, the CBC had around 1000 employees, but the number shot up to about 2000 by 1976, without any justifiable increase in the work-load or the expansion of its activities. See A. Goonasekera, (1978), op.cit. p.96.
36. The television policy and its impact on radio broadcasting will be briefly discussed in the succeeding sub-section of this chapter.
37. Since the early 1970s both channels had been designated as Channel 1 and 11 to maintain the balance between the two Services without discouraging and discriminating one over the other. But, in 1983, 'it was found that there was a

drop in income from Commercial Advertising' apparently because many a would-be advertiser was reluctant to advertise on the radio. Their complaint was that 'there was no identification of the Commercial and National Service'. Hence, the SLBC decided to re-identify the Commercial Service as a separate entity from the National Services. (Annual Report of the SLBC 1983, p.74).

38. See details in Annual Reports of the SLBC 1983-87.
39. The CBC (SLBC) Act of 1966, Part 1, Section 3 (2) (a).
40. After the Commission of Inquiry on the CBC of 1971 submitted its report, the activities of the SLBC have not been subjected to any extensive investigation. Ekanayake Commission appointed in 1977 has not produced a report.
41. See comparatively the SLRC Act of 1982, Part 11, section 7, (2), (a) (b) and (c), and the SLBC Act of 1966, Part 1, section 3, (2), (a) (b) (c).
42. M.J.Perera (Chairman of the SLRC), "Television and the People" in Economic Review, Research Division, People's Bank, July 1982, p.10.
43. Ibid. p.10.
44. In 1983, air time allocated for foreign programs on the National Television (Rupavahini) was 43.2%. The majority of all programs were English (52.8%) whereas Sinhala and Tamil programs had only 32.2% and 13.8% respectively. The allocation of time for foreign programs on the ITN is even greater.
45. A 'Discussion' with N. Jayaweera on the "Introduction of the Second TV Channel" in Economic Review, op.cit. pp.11-14.
46. The fact that 'radio' is still the 'leader' was revealed by two recent studies undertaken respectively by the Ministry of Plan Implementation, and the SLBC. See W. Weerasooria, "Radio Still the 'Leader'" in The Daily News, September 6, 1984, p.4; Who is listening, a publication of the Audience Research Division, the SLBC, (Colombo: 1987).
47. M.A.de Silva & R. Siriwardene, op. cit. pp. 37-38.

## Chapter Six

### CONCLUSIONS

In this study I have made an implicit attempt to register a plea, through a chronological review of Sri Lanka's press policy and radio broadcasting policy within the context of national development. Policymakers of post-independence Sri Lanka have repeatedly advocated and emphasized that goals set for mass media during the course of national development should be achieved within a democratic framework where the relationship between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' should be symmetrical. This initial 'policy intention' complied with the basic principles of the Buddhist model adopted by pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Thus, democratization of the communication/information process came to be viewed as the 'bedrock' of Sri Lanka's mass media/communication policy. It was expected that such a policy would facilitate socio-economic progress through attitudinal changes and mobilization of the masses, guiding and reflecting public opinion, enhancing national unity, and promoting culture and education in a broader sense. A number of structural and institutional reforms were introduced to expedite the services of major mass media, notably the press and radio. However, as this review has repeatedly revealed, there were ongoing gaps, discrepancies, contradictions and imbalances between policy goals officially endorsed and media functions actually performed. This situation compels any policy reviewer to make a



primary conclusion that Sri Lanka's press and radio broadcasting policies have failed to produce the expected results with regard to national development.

The failure to achieve goals set for press and radio broadcasting is obviously a representative example of the disappointing performance of the entire 'mediacentric communication policy', promulgated by communication policy-planners, in support of the government development effort. This failure - indeed with incidental successes on certain aspects - is widely related to historical, structural, economic, political, professional, and institutional constraints and shortcomings exacerbated mainly by the adoption of alien models of development communication to solve domestic policy issues.

Therefore, Sri Lanka's immediate necessity is to search for ways and means of formulating a development communication policy based on an indigenous model. Modern mass media are only a part of such a model because primordial indigenous media play a dominant role in facilitating social change and mobilization in most developing countries, including Sri Lanka. However, since the mass media, particularly radio and the press, are now substantially spread throughout the country, a communication policy should ensure that these media of 'one-way information' become the media of 'two-way communication'. Clearly, the current mass media system has inherent difficulties in achieving

this objective all by itself. (This point has been outlined in general in chapter one). In the Sri Lankan case it is the political will which should come first- to minimize many of the functional obstacles related to the roles and goals of media in development.

The foregoing review has already revealed that it is perhaps a mistake to attach excessive significance to, or optimistically rely on the policy provisions contained in the Constitution, the Press Council Law or Broadcasting Acts and similar official and legal documents. They are no more than solemn texts of intentions and principles. 'Freedom of expression' has virtually become a political and professional ideal, but not a reality. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of the government or private sector (elites) has discouraged 'pluralism', and maintained a monopoly on the control of information. Censorship or excessive government control has often denied even the democratic opposition's right to know and to be heard.

Furthermore, since the entire communication system is structurally dominated by modern mass media, the inherent top-down hierarchical pattern preferred by authorities for the dissemination of information ('innovations') from the centre to the periphery has hampered trends toward democratization of the development communication process. In the wake of more sophisti-

cated electronic media such as TV, traditional oral culture has been deemed an obstacle which should be discouraged and disrupted in order to maintain the uniformity of the one-way message. The expansion of the media infrastructure and the acquisition of new resources in recent years have promised great opportunities and facilities, but such sanguine promises seem to have been raising anxiety and uncertainty.'

Thus, the government policy (or more precisely its political will) toward development and communication has so far been to impose solutions through the excessive control of mass media. Instead, as discussed in Chapter One, it should shift itself from 'control-oriented regulations' to an effective 'plan of action', making essential institutional and structural changes to the existing model which, as we have already observed, is a melange of a number of alien models. The new model should view socio-economic change and development as 'the interplay between institutional change and cultural reconstruction' within which the communication rights of the general public are honoured and encouraged. Here, development is not imposed upon the masses through pseudosymbols and one-sided propaganda. As advanced by the Convergence Approach, the new model should involve 'a series of simultaneous, multidimensional interactions between internal and external forces',<sup>2</sup> while giving a balanced emphasis to both foreign influences and internal constraints. Since no study (obviously, including this

one) has dealt with such a model for Sri Lanka, necessary research should be initiated and undertaken in this domain, with particular attention to current development and communication realities. However, as Myrdal points out with regard to 'underdeveloped countries' our need is,

... not primarily for a large number of high-flown statistical theoreticians, which might seem beyond what can be rapidly provided. What is needed is well-trained persons who have substantive knowledge about conditions in underdeveloped countries and the critical ability to formulate questions about the material that are adequate to the social reality in these countries.<sup>3</sup>

The prime intention of such research should be to find ways and means of strengthening the democratic basis of both mass media and indigenous media within the expected development model.

A basic issue raised by authorities who repeatedly resort to alien models is that developing countries like Sri Lanka cannot indulge in the luxury of 'freedom of expression' or 'press freedom' because they endanger national unity, integrity and solidarity, and also fail to safeguard the uniformity of the development message. But at the national level, as we have already observed, the reality has run counter to such assumptions more and more frequently in recent decades. This may be true with regard to such phenomena as 'cultural synchronization' occurring through one-way flow of media products and information

at the international level.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in conscience, one cannot decry injustice in others when the same situation exists in one's own backyard!

In order to clarify such matters as well as to preserve and safeguard the democratic communication rights of media owners, practitioners, buyers or sellers (advertisers), and general receivers, the political authority could, as a preliminary step, establish an autonomous body, perhaps in the form of a **Communication Policy Council**, as has been proposed by UNESCO.<sup>5</sup> It should be empowered to de-politicize and demystify the roles and goals of mass media in development. Such a Council should be directly responsible, not to the Minister (in charge of mass communication) or even to the Executive President, but to the general public through Parliament. The mandate and structure of such a body should be decided and agreed upon by Parliament with the help of necessary public hearings. The complex task of designing and defining goals and roles of media should be prioritized in its mandate. Since it is now accepted that "a more liberal and critical communications policy would perhaps be more helpful to the national development effort",<sup>6</sup> such an independent body would be a fresh start for the entire communication sector.

The fundamental issue related to any elaboration in this regard is whether Sri Lanka is prepared, even as a preliminary

step, to go for such a new 'plan of action', replacing the existing 'policy philosophy' which it inherited as an amalgam of its own tradition and 'transplanted' modernity.

If we look back, Sri Lanka possesses a traditionally strong socio-cultural system which was never totally subjugated to the pressure of the 'modern way of life' introduced by the colonizer. Nevertheless, the effectiveness and pervasiveness of the colonial consumer-culture, backed by the transplanted import-export economy, has systematically enmeshed the entire society in a dilemma. Briefly put, since independence, Sri Lanka has been revolving (as Geertz<sup>7</sup> suggests is the case of most newly independent countries) around 'two towering abstractions', 'essentialism' and 'epochalism'. By 'essentialism' Geertz means 'the Indigenous Way of Life' characterized by traditional aspects of society, including domestic culture, social institutions, national character and local mores. By 'epochalism' he refers to 'the Spirit of the Age' or 'the general outlines of the history of our time' dominated by the cosmopolitan, future-oriented modern life. According to Geertz the crucial issue confronted by policy-planners today is to strike the right balance between these 'two seemingly contradictory entities'.

Since the communication policy planners and practitioners of post-independence Sri Lanka have been mostly Western-trained, and lacked the necessary knowledge of traditional aspects of the

indigenous communication environment they continued to impose 'the Spirit of the Age' over 'the Indigenous Way of Life', without strengthening these two into an enlightened policy. The long-run outcome of this imposition has been a gradual expansion of the gap between the masses and the elites, who represent (if bluntly put) tradition and modernity, respectively.

The current planning structure and operational dynamics of the media institutions are governed and guided largely by the nature of this ever-widening gap. The elites as a 'social group' dominate much of the socio-economic and political life of the country. The capital city, Colombo, is their centre; English is their mother-tongue. Almost all development plans, including those of communication, generate from Colombo, and decisions related to such plans are habitually made in English. Foreign aid, on which Sri Lanka currently depends for major development projects, can be received only if the government in power is prepared to safeguard this status quo. This dominance of the 'centre' can not easily be challenged because it is an extension of the global economic system to which Sri Lanka has been linked since the colonial period. The elites have extended this dominance and dependence to the peripheral hinterland through various means, including the modern mass media.<sup>8</sup> Tarzie Vittachi, an internationally-acclaimed Sri Lankan journalist, comments on this reality with specific reference to the Sri Lankan press:

The same relationship of dominance and dependence which ties the metropolitan centre to the periphery of the modern world system finds an analogous concentration of wealth and privilege within each national entity, between urban centre and rural hinterland, between the westernised elite and the mass of the people. The press is part of that pattern, and anybody who has edited an English language newspaper, especially a daily, knows this only too well. Though it is the Sinhala paper which reaches the mass audience, it is the phone in the English newspaper Editor's office that rings most often, bringing instant, hourly or daily feedback from the Minister, the Secretary, the Corporation Chairman, the businessman, the planner and the administrator who all belong to the same social and 'reference' group. And since this country has no provincial or regional press, and the outstation correspondent is usually some part-time worker, the newspaper can be as cut off from the village as the high-powered economic planner in his air-conditioned room. In any case, communication from the Colombo-based press is a one-way street.

Under these circumstances, the masses have become mere 'peripheral receivers' who, just as a habit, participate in the 'democratic development process' only through the exercise of their 'universal franchise'. They are supposed to vote for or against a particular development program at a general election usually once every six years. Afterwards, 'participation' from decision-making to the execution of development plans, is confined to a group of so-called 'people's representatives' comprising either 'right-wing' or 'left-wing' politicians, and professionals, who basically follow the same development strategy, perhaps with different interpretations. Mass media are managed by the same 'reference group' in line with their 'policy philosophy'. Whatever recommendations are made by State Commissions or individual reseachers (either to establish



National Communication Policy Councils or to urge for 'dissociation',<sup>10</sup> or similar corrective suggestions), they seem to be moulded to suit their 'philosophy'. Then, researchers are compelled to repeat that the mass media are controlled not simply by written law or decree but by an unwritten, intangible philosophy (of a small group of elite, who, in Sri Lanka, constitutes less than 5% of the entire population).

Hence, our plea for a new 'course of action' is addressed mainly to those who hold political power. The message is not to let the concepts of access, participation, equality, self-reliance and in short, democratization of communication and development become mere ideals. It should be repeated that it is the danger of political and economic manipulation through government control of media that should be primarily understood and overcome. The fact that people do not like to be prohibitively controlled unless such a control can be well justified, should be given prominence in media policy formulation. This is imperative especially since Sri Lankan society is highly literate, politically active, predominantly rural and has been traditionally influenced by the freedom-based doctrine of Buddhism. According to Buddhist psychology,

Even though you try to put people under some control, it is impossible. You cannot do it. The best way to control people is to encourage them to be mischievous. Then they will be in control in its wider sense. To give your sheep or cow a large, spacious meadow is the way to control him. So it is with people: first let them do what they want, and

watch them. This is the best policy. To ignore them is not good; that is the worst policy. The second worst is trying to control them. The best one is to watch them, just to watch them, without trying to control them. The same way works for yourself as well."

Under the guidance of an autonomous Communication Policy Council, encouraged by an indigenous development communication model, Sri Lankan mass media, in line with primordial communication systems and the traditional oral culture, can provide a 'spacious meadow' for the 'sheep and cows' in the country, letting them be 'mischievous' in a responsible manner. However, it should be re-emphasized that this kind of 'course of action' can become a reality only if there exists the political will to do so.

### Notes for chapter six

1. N. Jayaweera provides a brief, critical review of many of these issues in his 'Discussion' on "The Introduction of the Second TV Channel" in Economic Review, July 1982, pp.11-14, (People's Bank, Research Division, Sri Lanka).
2. C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 240-41.
3. Gunnar Myrdal, The Challenge of World Poverty (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).
4. C.J. Hamelink, Cultural Autonomy in Global Communication: Planning National Information Policy (New York: Longman, 1983).
5. UNESCO, National Communication Policy Councils: Principles and Experiences No.83, (Paris: 1979).
6. S. Amunugama, "Approaches to Communication Planning" in Media Asia, Vol.6 No.4, AMIC Quarterly, Singapore: 1979, pp.185-240.
7. C. Geertz, op.cit.
8. N. Jayaweera, op.cit.
9. Tarzie Vittachi, quoted in A. Goonasekera, Communication Policy and Planning in Sri Lanka (Colombo: 1978), mimeo.
10. This is the thesis of Dieter Senghaas, (The original in German, Frankfurt: 1977), quoted in C.J. Hamelink (1983), op.cit. pp. 95-101.

Hamelink elaborates: "Dissociation, or 'delinking' as it is sometimes referred to, does not necessarily find support in all Third World countries at present. Resistance is particularly strong where the governing elite has a strong cultural and political orientation toward the metropolitan countries. ... The decision on a national policy of dissociation may be a direct challenge to the interests of traditional governing elite. It often implies profound structural changes and a transition to a new political leadership with a broad popular democratic base within a country". PP.95-96.

11. S. Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginners's Mind (New York: Weatherhill, 1977), p.32.

## Appendix 'A'

### Statistical Data:

Sources: \* World Development Report (1988), World Bank  
@ UNESCO Statistical Digest (1987)  
# EIU Country Profile: Sri Lanka, 1988-89 (The Economist Intelligent Unit: London)

Other data (except general facts, of which no source is mentioned) are from Census reports of the Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Official name of the country: Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Administrative Capital: Sri Jayawardenepura; Commercial Capital: Colombo.

Area: 65,610 sq.km. (23332 sq. miles; 270 miles at its longest and 140 miles at its broadest). In comparison, Canada is approximately 152 times bigger than Sri Lanka.

Population (in millions): 16.1, (1988)\*; 14.8, (1981); 12.7 (1971); 10.5 (1963); 8.1 (1953); 6.6 (1946).

Persons per sq.km: 241 (1985)@.

Ethnic Composition (as a % of the population) since 1946:

	1946	1963	1981
Sinhalese	69.4	70.9	74.4
Sri Lankan Tamils	11.0	11.0	12.7
Moors	6.5	5.9	7.0
Indian Tamils	11.7	10.6	5.5
Others	1.1	1.6	.8

Languages spoken: (as an approximate % of the population)  
Sinhalese 75%, Tamil 20%, English 5%.

# Age Groups (as a % of the population)

Group	1971	1981
0-14 years	38.9	35.2
15-54 years	51.9	55.4
55-and over	9.2	9.4

# Literacy (as a % of the population, 10 years of age and over)

	1953	1971	1981
Male	80.7	85.6	91.1
Female	55.6	70.9	83.2
Total	69.0	78.5	87.2

# Population by urban rural sectors (%)

Sector	1946	1971	1981
Urban	15.4	22.4	21.5
Rural	84.6	77.6	78.5

Life Expectancy at birth: 70 years (1988); 66 years (1973);  
43 years (1946)\*

Labor Force (as a % of the population)  
42.7 (1946); 65.6 (1971); 69.7 (1981)

Unemployment rate (as a % of the population): 18% (1989)=

GNP per capita : US\$ 360 (1984)  
: US\$ 400 (1986)\*  
: Average annual growth rate 2.9% (1965-86)\*  
: Average annual rate of inflation 9.6 (1965-80)\*  
: ... do ... 13.5 (1980-86)\*

# Principal Exports:\*=

Tea, Rubber, Coconut, and (since early 1980s) Textile and garments. Principal export destinations in 1988 were USA, UK, Japan, Pakistan, FRG, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

## Principal Imports\*#

Petroleum, Machinery and equipment, Vehicles and transport equipment, Communication equipment including telephones, radio sets and television sets; Food and beverages. The principle sources of imports in 1986 were Japan, USA, UK, UAE, China, FRG, Hong Kong, India, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia.

Currency: Sri Lankan Rupee (divided into 100 cents).  
Average exchange rate in SLRs per US dollar: 19.2 (1981), 20.8 (1982), 23.5 (1983), 25.4 (1984), 27.16 (1985), 28.02 (1986), 29.45 (1987)\*. In Nov. 1988 it was Rs. 32.00.

Total External Debt (in SLRs millions):

2451 (1981), 2876 (1982), 3037 (1983), 3077 (1984), 3581 (1985), 4120 (1986).

No. of Newspapers: (See Appendix 'C')

Consumption (kgs) newsprint per 1000 inhabitants: 478 (1975); 540 (1980); 885 (1984)@.

No. of Radio stations: 1 national and 4 regional stations.

Radio receivers per 1000 inhabitants: 51 (1975); 98 (1980); 115 (1984); 157 (1985)@.

No. of Television stations: 1 national ('Rupavahini') and 1 urban (Independent Television Network).

Television receivers per 1000 inhabitants: 2.4 (1980); 28 (1985)@.

Cinema seats per 1000 inhabitants: 13.5 (1975); 13.2 (1980); 12.8 (1984); 12.4 (1985)@.

## Appendix 'B'

2A. පිටුව : (1) පළමු - 1968.01.20  
PART I & SEC (1) - GAZETTE EXTRAORDINARY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA - 1968.01.20

1st Column	2nd Column
Department and Statutory Institutions	Subjects and Functions
Department of Information	INFORMATION
Broadcasting Corporation	Distribution of Official news to the Press including the arranging of Press Conferences
Sri Lanka Press Council	Preparation and issue of publicity literature.
Government Owned Business Under taking of Independent Television Network	Advice on Publicity to other Government Departments
Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation	Dissemination of information about Ceylon generally and to Individual inquiries
	Information and publicity material for Ceylon Missions abroad
	International Agreements relating to publications
	Sale, storage, and dispatch of Government Publications other than departmental publications
	Preparation of films
	Arrangements for film shows
	BROADCASTING
	Broadcasting including commercial broadcasting and overseas transmissions.
	Radio Engineering
	Television
	Listener Research
	Broadcasting publications
	PRESS
	Control of Newspapers and their printing in Statutory Public Corporations
	Sri Lanka Press Council

In terms of this Notification, the new headings, Departments and Institutions and subjects and functions shown in the Schedule above are substituted in place of the heading "Minister of State" and its "Departments, and Statutory Institutions, Subjects and Functions" published in *Gazette Extraordinary* No. 86/8 of April 30, 1980.

Presidential Secretariat.  
Colombo 1. January 19 1988

J R JAYWABONE.  
President

## Appendix 'C'

### Circulation of Major Newspapers. 1970

(Source: A. j. Wilson, 1975, p.141)

Name of paper	Language	Average daily Circulation
Ceylon Daily News	English	72,403
Ceylon Observer	English	12,509
Ceylon Observer Magazine (weekly)	English	86,777
Dinamina	Sinhala	123,892
Janatha	Sinhala	31,015
Silumina (weekly)	Sinhala	355,020
Thinakaran	Tamil	34,074
Thinakaran Vara Manjari (weekly)	Tamil	37,329
Daily Mirror	English	17,217
The Times of Ceylon	English	8,867
The Times (weekly)	English	29,613
Lankadeepa	Sinhala	57,769
Sri Lankadeepa (weekly)	Sinhala	133,093
Sun	English	6,800
Dawasa	Sinhala	58,600
Weekend Sun	English	n.a.
Savasa (weekly)	Sinhala	n.a.
Dinapathy	Tamil	12,100
Virakesari	Tamil	n.a.
Eelanadu	Tamil	n.a.

### Circulation of Major Newspapers. 1988

(Source: Editor & Publisher, 1988)

Name of paper	Language	Average daily Circulation
Dinamina	Sinhala	140,000
Silumina (weekly)	Sinhala	352,180
Daily News	English	65,000
Sunday Observer	English	84,865
Thinakeran	Tamil	18,240
Thinakeran		
Vaaramanjari (weekly)	Tamil	22,430
Sri Lankadeepa (weekly)	Sinhala	87,000
The Sunday Times	English	65,000
Dawasa	Sinhala	117,000
Rivirasa (weekly)	Sinhala	300,600
Divaina	Sinhala	99,489



The Sun	English	61,000
The Island	English	43,000
The Sun/Weekend	English	69,800
Dinapathi	Tamil	53,000
Virakesari	Tamil	36,000
Virakesari (Sunday)	Tamil	38,000
Eelanadu	Tamil	20,000
Aththa	Sinhala	30,000
Janadina	Sinhala	30,000

#### Appendix 'D'

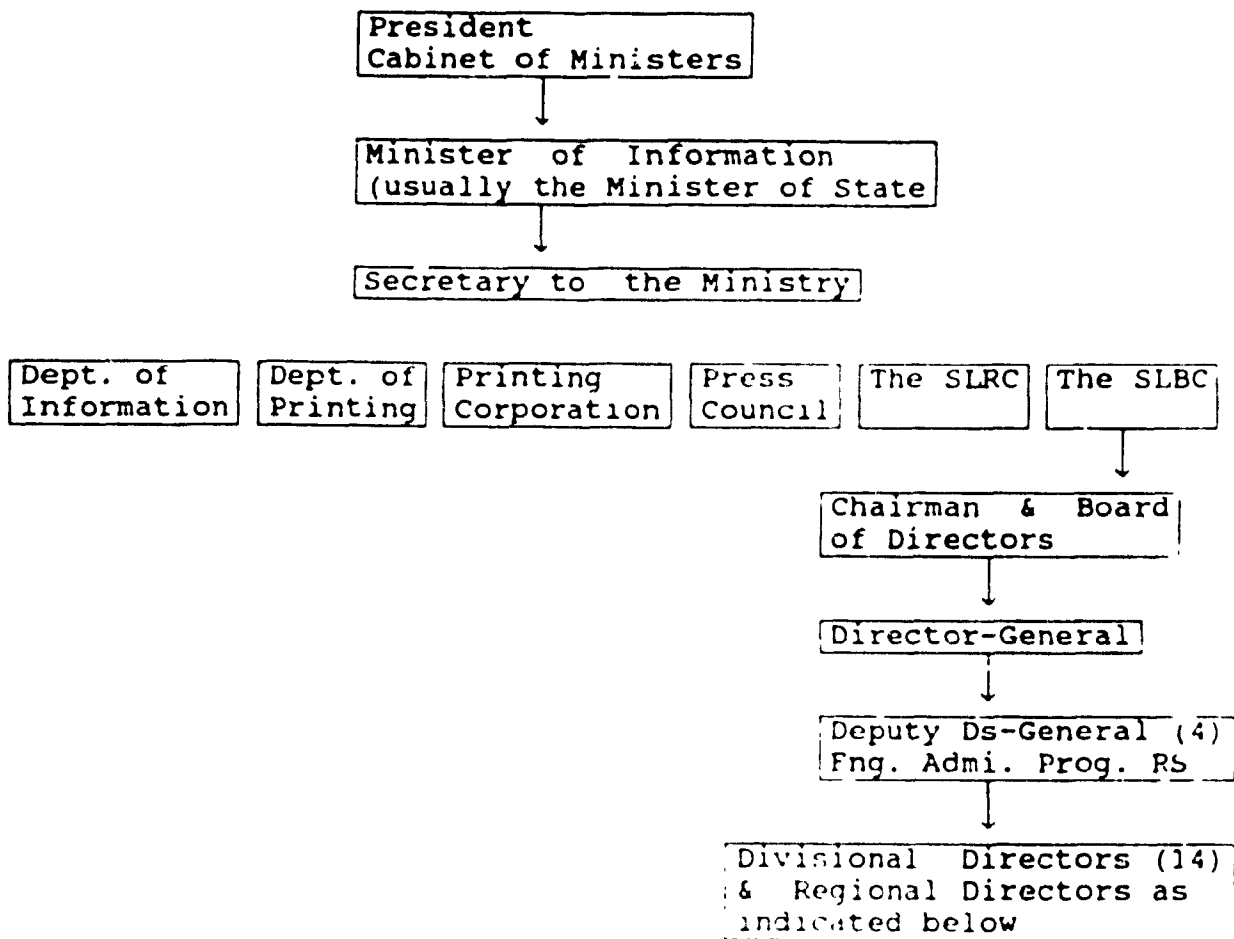
#### The Growth of Radio's Popularity (by No. of sets registered)

(Source: 'Broadcasting in Sri Lanka: Some Significant Events, 1923-87', Audience Research Division, the SLBC, 1987).

Year	No. of Sets
1924	53
1934	2,342
1942	11,393
1948	23,415
1952	49,500
1955	122,860
1959	280,000
1975	481,392
1976	597,998
1979	1,178,186
1980	1,384,191
1982	1,434,320
1984	1,496,050

## Appendix 'E'

### Organizational Structure of the Media System with Special Reference to the SLBC-1988



1. D/Sinhala Service; 2. D/Tamil Services; 3. D/English Services;
4. D/Finance; 5. D/News; 6. D/Administration;
7. D/Central Operations; 8. D/Educational Services; 9. D/Training;
10. D/Audience Research; 11. D/Sports; 12. D/Foreign Relations;
13. D/Business Administration; 14. D/Security;
15. Regional Directors one for each regional station.

## Appendix 'F'

### The distribution of the broadcast hours in the Language Services

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#### National Service

#### Commercial Service

Sinhala 0625-0800 hrs daily  
1500-2230 hrs daily  
0625-1300 hrs week ends  
1500-2230 hrs week ends  
0525-1300 hrs Po, a day  
1500-2230 hrs Poya day

Tamil 0630-0815 hrs daily  
1800-2000 hrs daily  
2100-2315 hrs daily  
0845-1200 hrs (Public Holidays & Week ends)

0625-2230 hrs daily

0530-1000 hrs daily  
1200-1800 hrs  
1930-2230 hrs  
1400-1430 hrs (Kannada)  
1430-1630 hrs (Telugu)  
1630-1830 hrs (Malayalam)  
1630-1900 hrs (Tamil)

#### Amalgamated National & Commercial Service

English 0600-0900 hrs  
1300-1600 hrs  
1800-2230 hrs  
1800-2300 hrs (STX Transmission)  
1000-1200 hrs (Week-ends & Public Holidays)

Stereo (STX) 1000-1200 hrs (Saturdays/Sundays/Public Holidays)  
1800-2300 hrs daily

A/I Asia (English) 0600-1000 hrs daily  
1800-2130 hrs daily

South East Asia (SEA) 1600-1700 hrs daily

Muslim Service 0815-0845 hrs daily  
2000-2100 hrs daily

Hindi Service 0650-1000 hrs daily  
1200-1400 hrs daily  
1900-2230 hrs daily

Middle East Service  
Sinhala 2215-2315 hrs  
Tamil - 2315-0015 hrs  
English - 2315-2345 hrs  
Fridays - 0015-0045 hrs

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