

pathetically lower than this at 13.5 percent (Auditor General's office). Government leaders often mention the war as the major cause of the poor development record. But they have not been able to find a political solution to bring the war to an end. This would involve a fundamental restructuring of the state to enable reunification through power sharing and that calls for a leadership with the political will to do it. We do not seem to be anywhere close to such a solution and the country is sliding back into war.

In these circumstances, it will be hard not to conclude that Sri Lanka's project in post-colonial state building has failed in some basic respects and that the failure to build a Lankan society based on an overarching Lankan identity has been the biggest failure of all. Sadly the political elite that shaped state formation had a different notion of a 'Lankan nation' as

they were committed to the creation of a state that is Sinhala Buddhist both in character and appearance.

Perhaps those ultranationalist allies of the government who are for a military solution believe that war is the best way to finish the unfinished business of building a unitary Sinhala Buddhist state and for the state to regain its monopoly on violence. The Liberation Tigers are responding in the same language - a final war to complete the secession. I am no military expert but many experts seem to think that war will not lead to either of these outcomes but to a prolongation of the agony of the people and to a deeper crisis for the unitary state. I am deeply convinced that reviving the peace process is the first step towards a solution. The solution may be miles away but a long march to a durable peace through negotiations is better than a protracted war of mutual annihilation. ■

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## BANNING OF "THE DA VINCI CODE"

The following is an FMM press release:

The Free Media Movement wishes to express its concern regarding a decision by the President to order the Public Performances Board to ban the film "The Da Vinci Code", as reported in the "Daily News" on 25 May 2006.

The report goes on to say that this move is in response to an appeal by the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

In principle, the FMM is opposed to all forms of censorship that restrict the freedom of expression. Throughout the world, the issue of censorship is one that is extremely contentious. Guidelines to prevent the exposure of children to scenes that may have an adverse impact on their development as well as to prevent the depiction of extreme violence and brutality are present in almost every country. However, these guidelines are almost always implemented through a legal mechanism, such as a Board of Censors or a Public Performance Board, such as we have in Sri Lanka. The existence of such a mechanism provides accountability and also avenues for redress for those who may feel their artistic freedom has been curtailed by the decision to restrict viewing of certain public performances for children.

In this context, a decision by the President to "order" the Public Performances Board, which is mandated by an Act of Parliament to carry out its mandate in reviewing every public performance and in granting certification for universal or restricted performance, to ban any public performance, is a serious challenge to existing legal norms and standards in Sri Lanka.

We urge the President to call on the Public Performances Board to carry out its mandate by reviewing the film "The Da Vinci Code" when it is due for screening in Sri Lanka and then take a decision according to the powers vested in it through the Public Performances Act and according to the guidelines it has developed for its effective functioning.

We also urge the President, the Public Performances Board and the general public to understand the principles of freedom of expression that underlie the decisions of the governments of India and Thailand, our closest neighbours, to permit the public screening of the film "The Da Vinci Code" following intense debate and legal and moral arguments. ■

Free Media Movement