

Monaragala Districts are the most severely affected. Death will soon begin to roam around freely.

The long-term solution to this would be based on a government-lead plan prepared in consultation with indigenous scientists and farmers, aiming at protecting and revitalizing the network of tanks, the forest cover, animal life, land, the cattle, which would ensure food security and security of life for humans. The social consequences of not moving in this direction have been illustrated through the bitter experiences of the South and also the North. Failure to do so would possibly make the entire Ruhuna a dry desert not suitable for any form of life.

Asian Development Bank and other financial institutions that was responsible for the failed project in Lunugamvehera reservoir should pay compensation to the damage caused to the people and land. In fact ADB has provisions to pay compensation for such failures utilizing the Asian Development Fund. This should be released immediately.

Many different organizations and groups have now begun to pay attention to the situation of these people. Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, Mr. Sajith Premadasa and the JVP have taken leadership

in these relief operations, other than those by various voluntary organizations. People hope that this would be done in unity, with purity of intentions.

Food relief in the form of dry food rations, milk foods and even drinking water are immediate needs, particularly of the children, mothers and the old people who are weakened by lack of food. An environment that would provide the animals food and water should be built without delay. Ensuring their right to life is urgent.

Sri Lanka is not a country which lacks rainfall. It is a land of riches, where plant life is abundant; soil is relatively fertile, people have had a long tradition of living compassionately. The suffering today is a result of replacing the values of compassion and kindness with motives of quick profit maximization, replacing the necessary gratitude towards earth and its life forms with selfish aggression and competitiveness. This is not merely a natural disaster, but a disaster brought upon innocent people by lack of wisdom, dependence and greed. The message given to us by this calamity is that we are yet to find ways of correcting the mistakes that were started under the British rule. We have also to overcome the poverty of vision. ■

Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform

On the Bombings in the USA

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The terrorist attacks were major atrocities. In scale they may not reach the level of many others, for example Clinton's bombing of the Sudan, with no credible pretext, destroying half its pharmaceutical supplies and killing unknown numbers of people (no one knows, because the US blocked an inquiry at the UN and no one cares to pursue it). Not to speak of much worse cases, which easily come to mind. But that this was a horrendous crime is not in doubt. The primary victims, as usual, were working people: janitors, secretaries, firemen, etc. It is likely to prove to be a crushing blow to Palestinians and other poor and oppressed people. It is also likely to lead to harsh security controls, with many possible ramifications for undermining civil liberties and internal freedom.

The events reveal, dramatically, the foolishness of the project of "missile defense." As has been obvious all along, and pointed out repeatedly by strategic analysts, if anyone wants to cause immense damage in the US, including weapons of mass destruction, they are highly unlikely to launch a missile attack, thus guaranteeing their immediate destruction. There are innumerable easier ways that are basically unstoppable. But today's events will, very likely, be exploited to increase the pressure to develop these systems and put them into place. "Defense" is a thin cover for plans for militarization of space, and with good PR even the flimsiest arguments will carry some weight among a frightened public.

In short, the crime is a gift to the hard jingoist right, those who hope to use force to control their domains. That is even putting aside the likely US actions, and what they will trigger—possibly more attacks like this one, or worse. The prospects ahead are even more ominous than they appeared to be before the latest atrocities.

As to how to react, we have a choice. We can express justified horror; we can seek to understand what may have led to the crimes, which means making an effort to enter the minds of the likely perpetrators. If we choose the latter course, we can do no better, I think, than to listen to the words of Robert Fisk, whose direct knowledge and insight into affairs of the region is unmatched after many years of distinguished reporting. Describing "The wickedness and awesome cruelty of a crushed and humiliated people," he writes that "this is not the war of democracy versus terror that the world will be asked to believe in the coming days. It is also about American missiles smashing into Palestinian homes and US helicopters firing missiles into a Lebanese ambulance in 1996 and American shells crashing into a village called Qana and about a Lebanese militia - paid and uniformed by America's Israeli ally - hacking and raping and murdering their way through refugee camps." And much more. Again, we have a choice: we may try to understand, or refuse to do so, contributing to the likelihood that much worse lies ahead.