

the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take this opportunity to talk about the growing relations between the United States and Sri Lanka, relations that I hope will be getting more attention in the near future.

In particular, I wanted to mention the upcoming visits of two distinguished Sri Lankan officials to Washington, D.C., next week.

At the beginning of this year, I formed a new bipartisan congressional caucus on Sri Lanka in an effort to promote increased dialogue between our two countries and to be a voice in Congress for the approximately 100,000 Americans of Sri Lankan descent.

Formerly known as Ceylon, Sri Lanka is an independent island-nation. Its territory comprises one of the largest islands in the Indian Ocean, about the size of West Virginia, lying approximately 20 miles southeast of the southernmost tip of India.

This South Asian nation of about 18 million people, a democracy where both the president and the prime minister are women, continues to work to strengthen its relations both with other developing nations and with major industrial powers like the United States.

To that end, the president of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Kumaratunga, will be in the United States within the next few days, September 24 to 28, to attend an annual International Monetary Fund/World Bank meeting in her capacity as the chairwoman of the Group of 24 of the IMF.

On Sunday, September 26, the President will host a reception here in Washington. The Group of 24 comprises a cross-section of countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Group of 24 seeks to address economic growth-related issues in the developing countries and to strengthen their financial and monetary situation.

Mr. Speaker, while I welcome the president coming to Washington for these important international meetings, I would like to see Sri Lanka's Head of State return to our Nation's capital for a State visit.

Earlier this year I wrote to President Clinton asking that he formally invite the president. The last presidential visit from Sri Lanka to the U.S. was in 1984. President Clinton did respond to my letter, although he did not commit to extending such an invitation. However, as South Asia continues to assume a growing importance in U.S. foreign policy considerations, I hope and I will continue to push for a State visit.

Mr. Speaker, next week Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Kadirgamar, will be making an official visit to Washington. Our Sri Lankan Caucus will be setting up a briefing with our Members and our staff with

the Foreign Minister tentatively scheduled for next Thursday. I look forward to a productive meeting that will expand the dialogue between our two nations.

Mr. Speaker, bilateral U.S.-Sri Lanka relations have always been strong since Sri Lanka won its independence from British colonial rule in 1948. In addition to our growing trade relations, the U.S. and Sri Lanka have a shared stake in promoting security, stability, and democracy in South Asia. Sri Lanka continues to work to promote tolerance among the various religious and ethnic communities that make up its population. It is a country that shares many of our values, and we have many common interests that must continue to be pursued.

Mr. Speaker, I hope next week's visit by Sri Lanka's president and foreign minister will contribute to this process of closer relations with the United States, and I urge my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to join me in continuing to work for closer ties between our two countries.

GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I am here tonight again because we still have not passed legislation to add direction to the issue of gun violence in America.

Given that we have been plagued by gun violence in our schools across the country, to the most recent shootings involving Jewish children in Los Angeles and members of a Baptist church in Ft. Worth, Texas, it is clear that there is an overwhelming need for gun legislation. We have an opportunity as a body to address this issue.

The juvenile justice bills from the House and Senate which are currently in conference committee can provide the American public with the action they deserve on this critical issue.

I urge my colleagues to support my bill, which would require child safety locks on handguns, a bill which would require all sellers at gun shows, flea markets, and other weapon markets to run an instant background check on every one of their purchasers, and a bill which would close the loophole in the Brady law which would prevent felons from acquiring guns. We should also raise the handgun purchase age from 18 to 21 to effectively protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, events around the country illustrate the need for these changes in our laws to be enacted. Thirteen children under the age of 19 are killed each day because of guns. In 1996 alone, 4,643 young people were killed by firearms. Guns cause one in

four deaths of teenagers age 15 to 19. Firearms are the fourth leading cause of accidental death among children ages 5 to 14.

Each year gun violence is getting worse. From 1984 to 1994, the firearms homicide rate for 15- to 18-year-olds increased over 200 percent, while the non-firearm homicide death rate decreased 12.8 percent.

How many more shootings, Mr. Speaker, must occur before this body will take substantive action? How many more children must be slaughtered by guns before we pass laws to protect them? Is it necessary for every congressional district within each State to experience some traumatic, violent event before we act on the issue of gun violence?

Gun violence affects all Americans regardless of age, class, religion, or socio-economic status. Many countries around the world do not have the same level of gun violence as the United States. This is a problem that has a clear solution, legislation to stem the tide of violence that has plagued us as a Nation.

Mr. Speaker, in my State of California alone, the number of incidents of gun violence over the course of 10 years is unacceptable.

In Berkeley, Kenzo Dix was gunned down by a 14-year-old schoolmate when he was accidentally shot when the two were playing with a pistol. In Los Angeles, a 14-year-old boy was accidentally shot in the head and killed by a friend showing off his father's handgun. In Oceanside, 4-year-old Christopher David Holt unintentionally shot and killed himself with a .357 Magnum revolver he discovered in a concealed compartment at the head of his grandfather's bed.

Of the 5,000 children who die each year because of guns, which averages out to 13 per day, nearly 500 deaths are accidental.

My child safety lock act, Mr. Speaker, which I introduced in the 105th and 106th Congress, would have prohibited any person from transferring or selling a firearm in the United States unless it is sold with a child safety lock. This bill and other legislation currently in the conference committee will address this issue.

We must have the ability to cross party lines, Mr. Speaker, forget our political and ideological differences, and pass legislation to avoid the continued senseless bloodshed and loss of innocent lives around our country.

I urge my colleagues to support legislation which will create a safer environment for all Americans and preserve the future of our children.

HURRICANE FLOYD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.