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Pirapaharan, Chapter 41

by T. Sabaratnam

(Volume 2)

The Massacres

The LTTE attacks on Kent and Dollar farms and Kokkilai and Nayaru fishing villages shook the Jayewardene government. The attacks upset its plan to establish large-scale Israeli-type militarized Sinhala settlements within the border of the Northern Province. With one hard punch, the LTTE knocked the bottom off that massive plan.

The Jayewardene government was forced to abandon the large-scale Sinhala settlements because they had an unexpected Sinhala refugee problem in its hands. Sinhala farmers living north of Padaviya and Sinhala fishermen settled along the Trincomalee - Mullaitivu coast started fleeing to their original villages. They left with their families and with whatever they could carry with them.

Ravi Jayewardene and his men who rushed to Padaviya saw this pathetic sight. They talked to those fleeing. They pleaded with them not to desert their farms. They even raised the cry of Sinhala nationalism. The Sinhala farmers told them their concern was the safety of their families. The chorus they sung was: 'Tigers are attacking. It is not safe to stay.' Ravi assured them that the army would protect them. Those fleeing replied: 'The soldiers ran before we did.'

Ravi Jayewardene and his men met in Colombo. They analysed the impact of the Kent and Dollar farm attack. They concluded that the exodus of Sinhala settlers was a setback to their settlement plan. They concluded that the LTTE attack had blocked all possibilities of obtaining World Bank funding for their ambitious plan to contain the Tamil militancy to the northern province. They also realized that they stood exposed before India and the world.

The National Security Council also studied the impact of the attack in detail. It decided to pursue the aggressive Sinhala settlement policy. It decided to concentrate on building up the bruised morale of the Sinhala people. It considered the report prepared by S. L. Gunasekera and Davinda Senanayake on the steps to be taken to boost the morale of the Sinhala settlers.

The Gunasekera report advocated two measures. The first was to arm and train the Sinhala villagers in the use of firearms. The second was to station an army brigade in Weli Oya and to establish a string of army posts to guard the Sinhala villages. Those recommendations were accepted and Weli Oya Brigade Headquarters was established four kilometers from Kent Farm. The former Chief of Staff of the Army, General Janaka Perera, was appointed the Commanding Officer. Janakapura, a new town built in Weli Oya, was named after him. Kent Farm was renamed Kalyanipura after his wife and Sampathpura was built and named after his son.

Janaka Perera, 2001

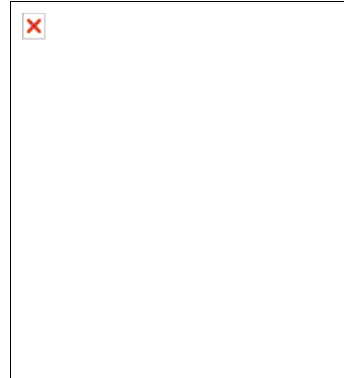
Arming of the Sinhala villagers began in mid- January 1985. Ravi Jayewardene and the voluntary organization he founded, Sath Sevana, undertook that job. Funds were provided by the government. Sath Sevana started the arming operation from Padaviya and concluded with Gomarankadawela in the Trincomalee district. By the end of April, all Sinhala villages in Weli Oya had been armed.

All Sinhala border villages had thus been militarized by the middle of 1985. But, arming of Sinhala border villages failed to bring peace to the farmers of the area. It, instead, intensified Sinhala - Tamil enmity. It heightened Tamil militant activity. It created a situation where an entire brigade of the army had to be deployed to protect the Sinhala settlers.

Hardening Determination

Militarization of Sinhala border villages spewed several unexpected and undesired consequences. The major results were: hardening of the determination of Tamil militants to fight back, army massacres of Tamil civilians, forced evacuation of the people of traditional Tamil villages, creation of a refugee problem which internationalized the ethnic conflict, widening of the recruitment base for the Tamil militant groups and, most importantly, the need for the government to reassure the Sinhala people that the army and the government were "on top."

The hardening of the determination of Tamil militants was evident from the statements of their leaders and the increase, widening and growing sophistication of militant activity.



Pirapaharan gave expression to the growing Tamil determination to fight back in his interview to the Indian magazine *Gentleman* in late 1984. The excerpt:

Gentleman: There were also some reports of the Sri Lankan Army's efforts to drive the Tamil peasants out of the Trincomalee district and allow Sinhalese settlements in their place. What will be your stand if these reports are true?

Pirapaharan: We have no other option but to fight back. We will effectively fight back and foil their plans.

Tamil militant leaders conveyed their determination and capability to fight back when they met Gamini Navaratne, editor of *Saturday Review*, a Sinhalese, in Chennai during the third week of December 1984. Navaratne met the leaders of the LTTE, EROS, EPRLF, TELO and PLOTE and held talks about the possibility of a meeting between them and government representatives to consider a political solution. He went to Chennai after a meeting with President Jayewardene and Lalith Athulathmudali. Political analysts said that Navaratne's visit was at the behest of Jayewardene.

The militant leaders told Navaratne that they were prepared to talk to the Sri Lankan government to explore the possibility of a political settlement. Navaratne told the Chennai media at the conclusion of the visit: "I found that none of the groups was averse to direct dialogue with President Jayewardene's government to seek a political solution, provided one could be found and provided the proper atmosphere could be created for such a meeting."

The militant leaders also told Navaratne that Jayewardene was "hell bent" on the military solution and they were also determined to give Jayewardene a military answer. Balasingham told the media after a meeting he had with Navaratne: "Our campaign will intensify unless the government realizes that it cannot defeat us militarily."

On 13 February, the militant campaign intensified. On that night, the LTTE staged its first attack on a Sri Lankan military camp. Over 100 LTTE fighters surrounded the Kokkilai Army Camp in the Mullaitivu district and attacked it with RPGs, mortars and grenades for over four hours. In Chennai, the LTTE claimed that they had killed 106 soldiers and they lost 16. The government downplayed the attack for fear that the Sinhala reaction would go against it. The Defence Ministry release said four soldiers and 14 'terrorists' died in that encounter.

Military analysts and commentators realized the significance of the Kokkilai battle. They said the Kokkilai attack indicated the determination, the capacity and the capability of the Tamil militants, especially the LTTE, to fight the Sri Lankan state. They said the Kokkilai battle was a full-scale armed confrontation. The LTTE had chosen a recently established, well-fortified camp for its first attack.

Collecting water in Kokkilai, currently settled by families from Negombo, 2005

The attack showed the LTTE fighters were fully equipped and trained for the battle. They were dressed in battle fatigues and were armed with food packets, water bottles and medicine. They had night vision glasses and powerful modern weapons - AK 47s, M16 rifles and motor and grenade launchers. They brought searchlights.

The *Sun* said it was not just another attack. It called it a full frontal attack on an army camp. Ravi Jayewardene reported to the National Security Council that the Kokkilai attack was a full-scale armed confrontation and said the LTTE was becoming a 'sophisticated enemy.' Jayewardene told Parliament on 20 February that the Kokkilai attack had altered the character of the armed conflict. (see Chapter 29 for a detailed account).



The LTTE has fought back since then and, in 2000, it liberated a portion of the territory the Jayewardene government had brought under Sinhala control in 1985. It could have recovered more, Karuna, the LTTE's former Eastern Commander, told the media in 2002, if not for Pirapaharan's order to halt the advance when the fighters were at the gate of Padaviya. Karuna told journalists that that order was given because Pirapaharan did not want his fighters to overstretch themselves. Tamil military analysts give additional reasons. They say Pirapaharan wanted to tie down a portion of the Sri Lanka army in Weli Oya because that would be a big financial strain for the government.

Massacres and Evacuations

I related in Chapter 23 the reaction of Thondaman to the Kent and Dollar farm attack. Seated on his ministerial chair, he expressed his happiness about the attack. A few days later Devanayagam, the other Tamil minister, expressed a similar reaction. In fact, every single Tamil in Sri Lanka and abroad was happy about the attack. In Tamil Nadu, there was a sense of elation. Some Tamil papers led with that story.

In my view and estimation, the Kent and Dollar farm attack was a milestone in the Tamil freedom struggle. It denoted that in the Tamil psyche a separate Tamil nation had born. That did not happen even during the 1983 pogrom. That riot made the Tamil people think of their homeland. They thought that they could live in safety in the northeast portion of the country. The Weli Oya Scheme made them to realize that the Sinhalese were out to deny them that, too. Since then the need to defend their homeland has become their priority concern.

Hundreds of Tamil civilians were massacred by the police, the army, navy and the armed Sinhala thugs before and after the Kent and Dollar farm massacre. The official document conveniently leaves all those incidents out. The document seems to reflect the government thinking that all Tamil civilians are combatants or terrorists.

"Who is a terrorist? Is he the person who uses a gun? Or is he also not a terrorist who accompanies a terrorist with a gun? Is he not also a terrorist who gives a house to a person who has a gun and who wants to kill? Is he also not a terrorist who watches the movement of the army and then goes and tells a terrorist: do not go that way, the army is around."

Massacres of Tamil civilians and forced evacuation of Tamil villages commenced the day after the Kent and Dollar farms were attacked. Soldiers shot dead 20 Tamil detainees held in the Vavuniya army camp. The army said they were killed when they tried to escape. Human rights organizations like Amnesty International that investigated that massacre rejected the explanation given by the army. Evidence gathered by Tamil journalists say that the detainees were taken to the border of the camp, asked to run and shot dead.

Air Force helicopters and the army went into action from the morning of 1 December, the day after the LTTE attack. The helicopters sprayed bullets and dropped incendiary bombs over Tamil villages in Nedunkerny and Vavuniya. Army reinforcements from Parakramapura Camp in Padaviya and JSSOP troops from Vavuniya went on a search and destroy operation. Lalith Athulathmudali claimed in a statement issued in the evening of 1 December that the troops were pursuing the attackers. He said Air Force helicopters had spotted the fleeing terrorists and had strafed them.

On 2 December, the *Sunday Observer* and Sunday *Virakesari* published the casualty figures of the air and land operation provided by the Defence Ministry. They said 68 terrorists had been killed, 42 wounded and 35 arrested, making a total of 145 persons. The Defence Ministry release conveyed to the Sinhala people the message: 'We have killed more.'

The Sunday *Virakesari* published two additional reports. The reports were from the paper's provincial correspondents. The report from the Vavuniya correspondent said the air force helicopter attacked civilian areas in Nedunkerni and Vavuniya. It said the victims were all civilians. The report from the Trincomalee correspondent said Sinhala thugs led by soldiers had attacked Tamil villages. It said the persons killed and injured were all civilians.

Subsequent investigations carried out by the University Teachers of Human Rights (Jaffna) (see its Bulletin No. 4), the TULF and the



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Saturday Review supported the reports filed by the *Virakesari* correspondents.

The TULF report was prepared by a group of prominent Tamils headed S. Thangathurai, former Member of Parliament for Mutur, and a resident of Kiliveddi, an ancient Tamil village in the Trincomalee district, on the request of Rajiv Gandhi to whom Amirthalingam had protested against the attacks on civilians and the forced evacuation of the residents of Tamil villages.

These reports and two subsequent Tamil publications have documented the attacks on Tamil villages during December 1984 and January 1985. I have referred to the account given by Vijayarathnam in his Tamil book Manal Aaru about the attack on Amarivayal in Chapter 23. I have also referred in the same chapter to the account provided by C. Gurunathan in his feature series "Refugee Villages" about the attack on Thennamarawadi.

Residents of Amaraivayal, a Tamil farming village between Dollar and Kent farms and Padaviya, were driven away on 2 December 1984, thus opening up the fertile farmland from Padaviya to Kent and Dollar farms for the settlement of Sinhalese farmers. Farmers of several other Tamil villages in that area were also driven away on the same day.

Chemmalai was one of those villages. An army jeep entered Chemmalai that morning and warned the people to run away. The soldiers in that jeep fired indiscriminately, killing two civilians. This they did to scare away the villagers. The villagers fled into the forests and waited there for two days. They saw Sinhala thugs entering the village the next day and looting and burning their huts. They decided to leave Chemmalai. They walked through the forest to Mullaitivu.

The army attacked Othiyamalai, another Tamil village in the region on the same day. It was gruesome. Soldiers from Padaviya Army Camp and some Sinhala thugs moved to the Malaikaddu Hindu Temple, the guardian temple of the village, situated at the entrance to the village, on 1 December evening. They spent the night in the temple and cordoned off the village the next morning. They arrested all able-bodied males. They took the men to the village community hall, lined them up and shot them. When they left the village they took five elderly men in a tractor. The men's partly burnt bodies and the burnt tractor were discovered two weeks later near the Kent farm.

The Government Agent of Mullaitivu visited Othiyamalai the next day with the Medical Officer of Health and the Village Headman. They found 27 bodies. The officers recorded evidence, the headman and the relatives identified the bodies, the officers recorded the names and other details of the dead persons and cremated them. All the victims were listed by the Defence Ministry as terrorists.

On 3 December the army shifted its attention to the coastal areas following the attacks on Kokkilai and Nayaruvu two days earlier. In Chapter 23, I gave a descriptive account of the attack on Thennamarawadi, the northernmost coastal Tamil village in the Trincomalee district. The soldiers lined up 13 youths and shot them. The entire village of about 200 families was ordered to leave. The villagers moved over to Mulliyavalai and founded a settlement called Ponnagar.

On the same day, the army conducted a search and destroy operation in Kokkilai and Nayaruvu. Twelve Tamil youths were arrested and killed.

On 4 December, two odious massacres took place in Weli Oya and Mannar. Semmadu is a historical Tamil farming village 16 kilometers south of Kent and Dollar farms. The army entered the village in the morning and took away everyone except a lady and her children. The army later denied going there, but the residents who were taken away are still missing. *Saturday Review* and the TULF report said they were all killed.

The other carnage of 4 December took place in Murungan in the Mannar district. A landmine attack by the militants on an army jeep killed a soldier and injured six others. Soldiers from Thallady Camp came out and retaliated killing 107 civilians. *Saturday Review* published a comprehensive account of the massacre. Virginia Leary's ICJ Report also gave a full account. According to these reports and to the fuller accounts published in the Tamil papers, the soldiers were drunk and burnt all the shops to about three kilometers on either side of the scene of the landmine attack. They fired into the houses killing their inhabitants. They also burnt a sub-post office and all those who were inside. They stopped the buses that came that way, dragged the passengers out, and killed them. They also fired at the farmers working in their fields. Eyewitnesses interviewed by Tamil investigative journalists described the massacre as a "four-hour orgy." The carnage in Murungan was one of the worst chapters in the long story of massacres in Sri Lanka.

The army in Mannar did not stop at that. They perpetrated two more gruesome killings; the first a few days after the Murungan massacre and the other in the first week of January 1985. The victim of the first murder was the Methodist Minister of Murungan, George Jeyarajasingham, his Sinhalese wife Bridget, their driver and two other passengers. They were travelling to Colombo in a Datsun pick-up van when they were waylaid and killed. They were said to be in possession of video recordings of the Murungan massacre and had notes of the investigations they had carried out and the evidence they had recorded from eyewitnesses. They were killed to destroy the evidence of the massacre. The army denied any involvement in the incident.

Killing of a Priest

The second incident occurred at St Anne's Church in Vankalai, Mannar on 5 January 1985. Parish priest Father Mary Bastian and eight parish members were killed by the army that night. According to the statement issued on 8 January by Bishop Marcus Fernando, Bishop of Chilaw and the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, the 38-year-old Father Mary Bastian was in the mission house when a group of soldiers attacked the church and killed him. The bishop condemned the attack saying, "The shooting was an unprovoked army attack on the church and the incumbent."

Fr. Mary Bastian (photo courtesy TamilNet)



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The Bishop of Mannar, Thomas Savundranayagam, in a statement, condemned the killing of Father Mary Bastian. He said, "We deplore the killing of the Catholic priest Rev Fr Mary Bastian, parish priest of Vankalai, in the early hours of Sunday 6th morning at Vankalai mission house by the security forces. Fr M Bastian, aged 38, a dedicated pastoral worker was deeply involved in the upliftment of the poor people in the diocese of Mannar."

The government, through a press release by the Information Department and through a statement by Lalith Athulathmudali gave a different version of the incident. The press release said, "A group of terrorists opened fire at the army unit which surrounded the church at about 11pm. In the ensuing exchange of fire, eight terrorist suspects were killed and five others captured by the armed forces. A woman and a priest are believed to have been killed in the shootout."

Athulathmudali denied that Fr. Bastian was killed thus contradicting the Defence Ministry release. He said Fr. Bastian's body was not found among those killed and arms and ammunition were found in the church, which was used as a terrorist base.

The Catholic Church protested against the government version. It said a group of soldiers surrounded the church and opened fire at the Church. It said there was no exchange of fire. It added that there was no woman in the Church at that time. That was an addition by the government to discredit the priest. It said no arms or ammunition was found in the Church.

The Church vehemently protested against Athulathmudali's denial of Fr. Bastian's body among those killed. Athulathmudali asserted repeatedly that Fr. Bastian was not killed and had escaped to India. That suggestion was introduced to create a suspicion and thus reduce the impact of the adverse international publicity that had damaged the image of Sri Lanka. The Catholic Bishops' Conference said that there were eye-witnesses to the killing and expressed regret that the government had not published the results of its investigations.

Amnesty International, which carried out its own investigation, in its report stated, "So far Amnesty International has not received any evidence in support of the speculation that Fr Bastian is alive in India. His body has not been found, but there is credible evidence that Fr Bastian was shot dead by army in his mission house and that his body was removed by them from the place of the incident and disposed of. The security forces surrounded the church premises around midnight January 5-6, 1985, entered the back of the mission house, and called Fr Bastian. When he approached, he is said to have been shot through the windows from the verandah in a room at the back of the mission house. After several hours, his body was reportedly removed and put on the steps of a girls school, close to the convent, photographed after certain objects had been put around it, and in the early hours of January 6 taken away in a white van by uniformed security forces personnel believed to be from nearby Thallady Army camp." (see AI report of 7 April 1985)

On The Top

These horrid massacres and enforced evacuations failed to subdue the Tamil militants. They stepped up their landmine war. At Batticaloa on 18 December, a landmine explosion killed eight policemen and their civilian driver. The next day, 19 December, the LTTE blew up two army trucks at Padaviya, killing two officers and two soldiers.

The government answered those landmine attacks with a fresh crackdown in Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. In Jaffna peninsula, over 1,000 young men were arrested. In Batticaloa, the number arrested exceeded 400. In Trincomalee, the treatment the government gave the Tamils was worse.

Through loudhailers the army ordered residents of Kokkilai, Kokkuthoduvai, Karunartu Kerni, Kayadikulam and Koddai Kerni, Kokkilai, Nayar and Alambil to leave their villages within 24 hours. The villagers fled northwards to Mullaitivu and were accommodated in refugee camps set up in schools and places of worship.

Athulathmudali said that the government had no option but to intensify the military operation and had decided to use rockets, bombs and small-calibre artillery against the 'terrorists'.

In his speeches and statements, Athulathmudali painted the picture that the army was in control of the situation, "We are on the top," he said in a New Year statement. He said the strength of the security forces had been considerably increased. He said over 12,000 security personnel were in the field. They were better trained and well equipped, he said.

Ravi Jayewardene had trained the first batch of the newly created Special Task Force (STF), a unit of police commandos. And, President Jayewardene announced in the first week of January 1985 that 50 to 100 Home Guards would be trained and deployed to guard Welioya.

Tamil militant groups did not fall behind. According to D. Sivaram (Taraki), a reputed military analyst and commentator, militant groups were really on the top. Jayewardene and Athulathmudali, through the 1983 holocaust and the massacres, evacuations and mass arrests, had acted as the recruitment promoters for the Tamil groups.

Sivaram, in his article 'The Cat, a Bell and a Few Strategists' printed in the *Sunday Times* of 20 April 1997, says that the total strength of the militants who had basic military training before the 1983 riots was 800. In 1984-85, he estimates, the deployable strength of the Tamil militant groups was 44,800 youths and girls. The breakup, according to him was, PLOTE - the largest at that time - had 6,000 cadres under training in its camps in South India and around 12,000 cadres in the camps in the NorthEast. TELO had 4,000 cadres under training in its camps in South India and 2,000 in the NorthEast. EPRLF had about 7,000, including 1,500 girls, in South India and the NorthEast. The LTTE had less than 3,000 cadres and EROS 1,800 cadres. The balance belonged to the smaller militant groups.

www.tamilarangam.net

The 1983 riots caused the initial rush of angry Tamil youths to the militant groups. These youths were mainly from the north and the south. The massacres, mass arrests and forced evacuations created a fertile recruitment ground in the east.

The government did not realize that their actions to 'combat Tamil terrorism' was strengthening the Tamil freedom struggle. It carried on, regardless, with mass arrests, massacres and enforced evacuation in 1985 and 1986.

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Chapter 42. Massacres Continue

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