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A Decade of Conflict Sri Lanka 1983-1993

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படிப்புகம்



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The Anti-Tamil Violence of July 1983

To characterize the massacre, pillage and arson directed at the Tamil people of Sri Lanka in July 1983 as a "race-riot" is a misnomer. It was not a case of the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority fighting it out with each other, with the government and state law enforcement agencies playing an independent role in an effort to restore law and order and protect the victims and apprehending the perpetrators of the violence. Instead what happened "was a series of deliberate acts, executed with a concerted plan, conceived and organised well in advance" (Report of the International Commission of Jurists, March 1984). It was violence of programmatic proportions in which sections of the ruling party including some cabinet ministers, the army and the police encouraged, aided, abetted, and in many instances actively participated.

Violent Prelude

The period preceding the July 1983 violence was characterised by mounting violence. Isolated attacks on security service personnel by Tamil militants, mainly by those belonging to the 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam' (LTTE), and retaliatory revenge attacks by the armed forces became frequent. On 23 July 1983, thirteen Sinhalese soldiers of the Sri Lankan army that was operating in the north dealing with Tamil militancy were killed in an ambush by the LTTE.

Some have attributed the violence against the Tamil people that broke out on 25 July 1983 as a spontaneous retaliation by angry Sinhalese to the killing of the soldiers. The incident might have provided the opportunity for those who were waiting for one after having organised the network for unleashing such violence. However the pattern of violent incidents during the previous two months was symptomatic of the developing situation which culminated in the outbreak on 25 July. The following are some of more manifest examples of violent incidents in the period immediately preceding:

(a) A well planned and co-ordinated attack was made against all Tamil students in the University of Peradeniya (Kandy) on the night of 11-12 May 1983. The Tamil undergraduates had to flee the campus following a room-by-room attack on them by gangs who came from outside aided and abetted by some Sinhalese students. On the following day, Tamil students of the medical faculty in Colombo were at-

tacked and chased away.

(b) On 18 May, parts of the northern Jaffna city went up in flames for a second time in two years when gangs of army personnel went on a rampage setting ablaze houses, shops, petrol-filling stations, vehicles, and looting property, shooting and assaulting innocent members of the civilian population, and this presumably was in retaliation to an LTTE ambush attack in which service personnel were killed. On this occasion, 169 houses and 45 vehicles were destroyed by fire.

(c) On 1 June, Vavuniya in the northern province gave the appearance of a blitzed town after service personnel went on a rampage in the town burning down the market, shops and vehicles and indiscriminately assaulting any Tamil upon whom they could lay their hands on. The offices of 'Gandhyam' (a social service organisation) were smashed and several of its farms and vehicles were set on fire.

(d) Starting from 1 June, Tamil passengers in trains, particularly the Colombo-Jaffna bound trains, were repeatedly subjected to violence both by civilian racist gangs and security service personnel.

(e) Violence began in Trincomalee and adjoining areas in the east from 3 June and continued until the end of July almost on a daily basis. In Trincomalee alone, the sum total of the violence was that scores of people were killed, many injured, over 600 houses and over 100 shops set on fire, and many Hindu temples destroyed.

The Scale of the July Violence

Sri Lanka had witnessed many outbreaks of violence directed at Tamils - 1956, 1958, 1961, 1979, and twice in 1981. But the violence in 1983 surpassed all previous ones in its scale, intensity and brutality. Tamil people irrespective of their age, sex or status in life were pursued and killed - hacked, battered or burnt alive - in their homes, on the streets, in vehicles, and in hospitals. There were instances when people, women and children included, ran out of their homes, they were chased, caught and thrown into their burning houses. Over seventy per cent of the homes belonging to Tamils in the south were destroyed. Almost every house was looted and relieved of their contents. Most of the Tamil-owned shops, business premises, industrial establishments and of-

fices were set on fire. Over 200,000 Tamils were rendered homeless and became refugees overnight.

The Ambush and Reprisal Killings in Jaffna

In the evening of 23 July 1983, 13 soldiers were killed in ambush laid by the 'Tamil Tigers' at Neervely in northern Jaffna. The army truck in which the 13 soldiers were travelling drove into explosives planted by the Tigers. The ambush was claimed to have been in retaliation to military operations carried out immediately preceding the ambush. During the night of 23 and the whole of 24 July, soldiers went on a rampage of killing at random in the Jaffna peninsula, and the final death toll was over one hundred persons, and several more were injured.

The country was during this period under an official proclaimed state of emergency as from 18 May 1983 and there was in force blanket censorship leading to a blackout of all news and information in respect of all "terrorist activities" and any "security operations" concerned with such activities. It was under this censorship that the news reports of the incidents of violence and atrocities that had taken place in the previous two months were not allowed to be published. However, the newspapers of 24 July carried the news of the killing of the 13 soldiers with banner headlines. Some believed that the publication of this report was calculatedly allowed so that the anticipated and inevitable retaliation and revenge would visit upon the Tamil people. Subsequent acts of commission and omission on the part of the government lends credence to the allegation that those in authority intended the consequences that inevitably followed the publication of the report of the killing of the 13 soldiers.

The report that was published also carried details of the funeral arrangements made for the evening of 24 July. The burial of the soldiers was to be at the Kanatte Cemetery in Colombo with full military honours, and the President, Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers would attend the funeral. With such publicity, in newspapers, radio and television, it would have been natural to expect that a large number of people would arrive in Colombo to attend the funeral.

By about 5 pm on 24 July, the crowd at the cemetery had swelled up to 4,000. Much in evidence among the crowd was the presence of small groups going around inciting the relatives of the dead soldiers and others to demand that the dead bodies be returned to their relatives. There was manifest evidence of purpose, organisation and professionalism in the way the groups operated. By about 8 pm, the crowd had doubled to 8,000 which increasingly becoming more restive and even violent. The demand for the dead bodies become more vocal, strident and incessant. The intriguing and unexplained delay in the arrival of the dead bodies for their burial aggravated the situation. A group within the crowd began to fill up the graves, which had been previously dug up, with a view to preventing the burial to take place. The half-hearted and inadequate intervention of the police served only to exacerbate an already worsening situation resulting in violent clashes. Seen among the crowd were some well known faces of the 'Jathika Seva Sangamaya' (JSS), the trade union federation of the ruling 'United National Party' (UNP) of which the Cabinet Minister Cyril Mathew was President.

President Jayawardene, whose residence at Ward Place, Colombo was less than half-a-mile from the cemetery, ordered the cancellation of the military funeral upon being informed of the grave situation that had arisen. An announcement was made at about 10 pm over the public address system that the "clamour of the people" had been taken into account by the President and that the dead bodies would be handed over to the relatives, and therefore the burial at the cemetery was cancelled.

Violence Erupts

Those instrumental in inspiring and organising such a large crowd to gather at the cemetery lost no time in inciting the crowd to violence. The crowd left in different directions. One group which went in the direction of the President's residence along Ward Place was swiftly dispersed by the police riot squad using tear gas and batons.

The other sections of the crowd went in all directions unmolested and unchecked by the security forces and within minutes that part of Colombo within a radius of one mile was up in flames. Shops and houses of Tamils were set alight; Tamil homes were entered to and the inmates attacked; and those who ran out of their homes were hunted down. The orgy of arson, murder, pillage, looting and mayhem continued throughout the night unchecked and unquestioned by the security forces or anyone in authority. The whole night of governmental inaction on 24 July was followed by further inaction amounting to criminal negligence on 25 July.

In the light of the violence and destruction that had occurred during the night of 24 July, and their continuation with greater intensity and brutality with more people participating the following morning, the President could and should have imposed a curfew very much earlier. The decision of the President to impose a curfew to be effective from 6 pm that day (25 July) was inexplicable, and some would go further to allege a gross dereliction of his duty.

Violence Organised and Premeditated

There is unanimity on all sides, including the government, the July violence against the Tamils was premeditated, well organised and executed with remarkable efficiency. The pin-point accuracy with which the goon-squads identified Tamil property, the similarity of the instruments they used to cause death and destruction (all had white plastic cans and tubes to syphon off petrol from cars, knives with shining blades showing signs of their recent manufacture, clubs and iron rods of similar dimensions etc.), the 'efficient' manner in which they moved from place to place, and the mode of transport, often state-owned vehicles, revealed that the violence was planned and organised in advance. The material and manpower that was marshalled and deployed to execute the unprecedented scale of violence in July 1983 could not have been mobilised overnight by an "angry people provoked by the killing of the 13 soldiers".

Who was responsible?

If everyone, including leading Cabinet Ministers, agreed that the violence was organised in advance, then who was responsible for it? The government's

initial explanation was that there was an "unseen foreign hand". The government did not provide any evidence of any involvement of any foreign country or government or agency. No one took this explanation seriously; not even the government for it soon dropped pursuing this line.

The second explanation given by the government was to accuse three left parties, and on 30 July it banned the 'Communist Party' (CP), the 'Nava Sama Samaja Party' (NSSP) and the 'Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna' (JVP) and arrested a number of their leaders and announced rewards on those leaders who had gone into hiding. The government did not produce at the time of the banning of these parties or at any time later even shred of evidence in support of the alleged involvement of any of these parties. After a few months, the ban of the CP was lifted and their leaders were released. The ban on the NSSP continued for nearly two years, after which it was lifted. The ban on the JVP continued and its leaders remained in hiding.

No Evidence of Left's Involvement

Many considered the allegation of involvement of the left parties in the anti Tamil violence quite implausible. The policies relating to the rights of minorities were non-chauvinistic and they had always advocated the settlement of the ethnic question by negotiation. In fact the main criticism levelled at them by the UNP and the main opposition party, the 'Sri Lanka Freedom Party' (SLFP) was that they were pro-Tamil. These parties were relatively small, and they would not have had the organisational capacity, the men and material that were deployed during the July events. There was incontrovertible evidence that sections the security forces actively participated in or failed to prevent the violence. To suggest that the left parties instigated the violence would mean that the security forces were acting on the orders of these parties - a proposition that could be regarded as quite preposterous.

Cyril Mathew's Role

Foreign journalists who had visited Sri Lanka before, during and after the July violence have been almost unanimous in their view that the responsibility for the organisation and orchestration of the violence was undertaken by sections within the government itself. Besides, opposition circles within Sri Lanka lay the entire responsibility on the section of the ruling party led by the then Industries Minister Cyril Mathew.

During this period, it was well known that Mr. Cyril Mathew was the exponent of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism in its most virulent form, and he never concealed his anti-Tamil sentiments. "Sri Lanka's history is the history of the Sinhalese" was his lopsided view of the island's history. He denounced and discouraged those who sought to settle the ethnic crises by granting "concessions" to the Tamil minority. He was a strident advocate of suppressing Tamil militancy by military means. "Terrorism should be met with counter-terrorism" was a constant refrain in his frequent speeches in Parliament.

Counter-Terrorist Force

While the government of President Jayawardene

was continuing negotiations with the leaders of the 'Tamil United Liberation Front' (TULF) with the ostensible purpose of reaching a settlement of the ethnic problem, Cyril Mathew, while being a Minister in the same government, was permitted to carry on his virulent anti-Tamil campaign. Whether Cyril Mathew, in fact, took upon himself the task of setting up a "counter-terrorist force" which was later deployed during the July 1983 violence is a matter worthy of investigation. But what was much in evidence during times of violence was the presence of a large number of members of his JSS trade union. There were authoritative and reliable reports that JSS members actively participated in violence - during the July 1980 strike of civil servants, during the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in May 1981, during the breaking up of opposition meetings during the Presidential elections and later by-elections, during the attack on the homes of Supreme Court judges, and during many other similar instances. Eye witness accounts collaborate that many JSS members and some of its leaders played a leading and active role in the violence of July 1983.

Waiting for a Spark

While other Ministers sought to find scapegoats and other vague explanations for the July 1983 violence, Cyril Mathew held the view that it was the justifiable reaction of the angry Sinhalese against Tamils. During the course of the debate on the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution on 4 August 1983, Mr. Mathew announced that he was not speaking as a Cabinet Minister, but as the representative of the Sinhala people.

During the July 1983 violence, the goon-squads invariably travelled about without any let or hindrance in state-owned vehicles, including buses belonging to the 'Ceylon Transport Board'. Who authorised the release of these vehicles? It would not have been difficult to have identified the vehicles used by their distinctive registration numbers and as to who used those vehicles on the days in question. Who supplied the thousands of white plastic cans, similar in appearance and size to the arsonists who went about setting ablaze Tamil property, and did they come from the 'Ceylon Petroleum Corporation', for which Cyril Mathew, as Minister of Industries was in charge, are questions for which the government could have found answers with little investigatory effort if it wanted to, but did not up to date.

Role of Security Forces

The evidence from eye-witness accounts of foreign journalists and visiting tourists about the conduct of the security forces looking the other way or actively participating in the violence against Tamils remains incontrovertible. Even the state-controlled 'Daily News' (20 August 1983) was constrained to editorially say, "We have seen men enjoying positions of responsibility conniving with hoodlums and rowdies, in some cases actively inciting violence."

Navy Rampage in Eastern Trincomalee

"In Trincomalee no member of the armed services was ever attacked. As at 26th July the Tamils were heavily at the receiving end. The Tamils were exercising great restraint and self control, in the face of

repeated attacks on them by the Sinhala mobs. The armed services were also being ruthless with the Tamils and being openly partisan towards the Sinhala people. It was in this atmosphere that the Tamil people in Trincomalee town prepared to retire to bed on the night of 26 July. Their intentions were rudely shattered by the rattle of gunfire first heard in front of the Naval Dockyard main gate and then in front of the Member of Parliament, Trincomalee. Around 130 naval personnel of the lower rungs had decided to unleash a night of terror on the Tamil people and destroy Tamil shops, commercial establishments, Hindu temples and such houses as they indiscriminately or designedly chose to attack. They used service vehicles and Ceylon Transport Board buses. They were fully armed with guns and had an abundance of fore power. They were also armed with grenades which were apparently, normally used by service personnel at war...The trucks were brought to a screeching halt in front of the house of the Member of Parliament who was away at Mannar on this day, and several uniformed armed hooligans jumped off the truck shouting in Sinhala and firing shots. The gate of the premises was pushed but the gate had been locked. The Member of Parliament's wife and children, his aged mother who was born and bred in the house in which she lived and whose ancestors for several generations were also born and lived in the same premises and other relatives and neighbours in their respective houses awaited their destiny. For a moment there was a glimmer of hope and the men got back into the truck and proceeded. It was to be short lived. They were to stop at fuel filling stations owned by the Trincomalee and Muttur Multipurpose Cooperative Societies and forcibly obtained necessary fuel for the fire that they were to light to set ablaze various parts of the Town that night. From street to street, from shop to shop, from temples to commercial establishments, to houses they were to proceed, first firing several rounds of ammunition to intimidate and ensure submission, followed by explosions with grenades to break open and damage and then set ablaze with the aid of fuel which was available in plenty..." (Ethnic Violence in Trincomalee: June-July 1983, by R. Sampanthan, MP for Trincomalee).

Slaughter in the Prison

On 25 and 27 July 1983, 53 Tamil political prisoners held under the 'Prevention of Terrorism Act' at the high security Welikade prison in Colombo were hacked and clubbed to death in their cells in two separate incidents. Soon after the first massacre of 35 Tamil prisoners, the government claimed that they were murdered by fellow Sinhalese prisoners who had turned violent. After the killings on 25 July, the remaining Tamil prisoners had made repeated representations to the prison authorities at the highest level for protection. However, at about 4.30 pm on 27 July, a crowd wielding axes, iron bars, spikes, wooden clubs and knives attacked and killed 18 more Tamil prisoners. Again the government claimed that they were also killed by Sinhalese prisoners who went out of control. The veracity of the claim of the government that in both instances, the Tamil prisoners were attacked by only fellow Sinhalese prisoners have been doubted by many. Some Tamil prisoners who survived the attack had a different version to recount.

The President Break his Silence

"For day after day, Tamils (both 'Sri Lankan Tamils' and 'Indian Tamils') were beaten, hacked or burned to death in the streets, on buses, and on trains, not only in Colombo but in many other parts of the Island - sometimes in the sight of horrified foreign tourists. Their houses and shops were burned and looted...And not until the fifth day, on 28 July, did President Jayawardene finally appear on national television. In a brief address, he blamed the violence and destruction exclusively on the reaction of 'the Sinhala people' to the movement for the establishment of a separate Tamil State, and announced a Cabinet decision to bring in what in the event became the Sixth Amendment, designed to ensure that even peaceful supporters of separatism could not sit in Parliament, and that 'those who advocate separation of the country lose their civic rights and cannot hold office, cannot practise professions, cannot join movements or organisations in the country'. In the course of that address, the President did not see fit to utter one single word of sympathy for the victims of violence and destruction which he lamented. If his concern was to re-establish communal harmony in the Island whose national unity he was so anxious to preserve by law, that was a misjudgement of monumental proportions." (Sri Lanka: Mounting Tragedy of Errors by Paul Sieghart, International Commission of Jurists, March 1987).

The President's speech represented a total capitulation to the very forces that had unleashed the violence. He did not condemn the brutal killings and destruction that had occurred during the previous five days; he did not condemn or promise to those responsible for the violence and destruction; and he did not call upon the security forces, as their Commander-in-Chief, to enforce law and order. Instead, he made inappropriate and exaggerated accusations that the "separatists" had murdered innocent people and that the separatist movement "has grown to such large proportions that not a few but hundreds had been killed during this movement". In detailing his planned legislation banning "separatist movements", he unashamedly acknowledged that he was giving into the "clamour and natural request of the Sinhala people". His reference to "not a few but hundred had been killed during this movement" was a deliberate exaggeration not only to mislead, but also to provoke and incite the Sinhalese people further.

Renewed Violence

Not surprisingly, therefore, renewed violence against the Tamils broke out the morning following the President's broadcast. A false rumour had been deliberately spread on this day (29 July) that the 'Tamil Tigers' had arrived in Colombo and were engaged in a pitched battle with the army and were moving southwards. This rumour was simultaneously and mischievously spread throughout the south of the island. The tragic result was that hundreds of Tamils were brutally murdered on 29 July alone not only in Colombo, but also in many other parts of the country where the rumour had been circulated.

Although the President had previously claimed that the majority of the Tamils had voted for him at the Presidential election and the UNP at the general election, the fact that he did not care for the fate of the

Tamils was further confirmed when he failed to condemn the violence or express sympathy for the affected Tamils even in his second TV broadcast. It was perhaps too presumptuous for anyone to have expected the President to have taken action to prevent the violence, condemn the perpetrators of the violence when it occurred, or to express sympathy or concern towards the beleaguered Tamils, for he had, even before the eruption of the violence on 24 July, pronounced his position vis-a-vis the Tamils: "I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people (meaning Tamils)...Now we cannot think of them, not about their lives or opinion." (Interview with Ian Ward, 'The Daily Telegraph', London, 11 July 1983).

Besides the President, the Prime Minister and many Cabinet Ministers also made TV broadcasts all of which without exception singularly omitted any condemnation of the violence, or expression of sympathy for the affected Tamils. The then Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, went one step further and absolved all "Sinhala Buddhists" of ever having used violence.

The Sixth Amendment

Even before the Tamil people could recover from the traumatic experience they went through during the violent events that commenced on 24 July 1983, a further blow was struck against them by the enactment of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution. The circumstances in which such a major constitutional amendment was proposed, debated in the absence of the representatives of the Tamil people, and enacted within a matter of a few hours of "discussion" on 3 August is not only typical of the short-shrift that democratic rights and parliamentary procedure receive in the island, but also is characteristic of the total disregard with which the Tamil people and their representatives have been treated.

The amendment was rushed through Parliament in a single day at a time when no Tamil person could venture out on the road without the prospect of being lynched and under emergency conditions and during curfew hours with MPs representing the Tamil people being kept away from attending Parliament for fear of their physical safety. The TULF leader, Mr. A. Amirthalingam, in his letter dated 10 August 1983, which he described as "perhaps the last letter I write as a Leader of the Opposition", addressed to President Jayawardene said: "The voice of the Tamil peo-

ple crying for justice and the right to live and safeguard their hardearned property goes unheeded. At a time when murder, arson and plunder are being perpetrated against the Tamil people, the government surrenders to the aspirations of the marauding mobs and enacts the Sixth Amendment. I would most humbly submit to Your Excellency that this is a further outrage on our people and their right to peacefully agitate for their political freedom. This amendment embodies the justice of the lynch mob where you further punish and humiliate the victim and not the criminal; the oppressed and not the oppressor."

The amendment provided that "no person shall, directly or indirectly, in or outside Sri Lanka, support, espouse, promote, finance, encourage or advocate the establishment of a separate State within the territory of Sri Lanka." Anyone who contravenes this provision becomes liable to the imposition by the Court of Appeal of civic disability for up to seven years, the forfeiture of his movable and immovable property, the loss of his passport, the right to sit for any public examination, the right to own any immovable property, and the right to engage in any trade or profession which requires a licence, registration or other authorization. In addition, if he is a Member of Parliament, he loses his seat; if he is a public officer, judicial officer or a servant of a local authority or public corporation required by the Constitution to take the prescribed oath, he loses that office or appointment. Further, any political party, or other association or organisation having the prohibited aims or objects may be proscribed, and MPs belonging to that party thereupon lose their seats, and all office-holders or members of the party may thereafter be convicted of an offence and subjected to the same penalties. The Sixth Amendment constitutes a clear violation by Sri Lanka of its obligations in international law.

Since the TULF MPs would not take the prescribed oath they had to forfeit their seats in Parliament. The TULF was the largest opposition party in Parliament in July/August 1983, and its leader was the official Leader of the Opposition. The consequence of the Sixth Amendment - and this must have been intended to be so - was to deprive the Tamil community of its remaining voice in Parliament and so of its opportunity to take part in the democratic process. The Sixth Amendment has played straight into the hands of the 'Tamil Tigers' and other Tamil militant groups. With this the stage was set for more and more violence.

After the "Black July"

Sri Lanka earned international notoriety following the horrific scenes of generalised arson, murder and mayhem that accompanied the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983. Since then the island, once described as the pearl of the Indian Ocean, and its people have experienced an era of violence and destruction unparalleled in its long history.

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, once regarded as a purely domestic problem, soon became a regional and an international issue. The conflict and the resulting suffering inflicted upon the people by the warring parties became topics for discussion and criticism of the

Sri Lankan government in foreign capitals, parliaments and international fora. Year after year, at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and other international conferences, there were denunciations of Sri Lanka's record of gross human rights violations.

The decade witnessed the gradual erosion of democracy and devaluation of parliament in the context of an entrenched executive presidency invested with enormous powers unequalled by a head of state of any democratic country. Representative democracy was further undermined when the life of the parliament elected for a period of five years in 1977 was

extended through the subterfuge of a rigged referendum. Ever since 1983, the country has been subjected to an officially proclaimed state of emergency under which many of the safeguards for the protection fundamental rights and freedoms have remained suspended.

The period between mid-1983 to the mid-1987 also witnessed sustained military operations by government forces in the predominantly Tamil areas of the north and east. Although these operations were purported to be against Tamil militant groups, it was the general mass of the civilian population that suffered the most.

With the enactment of the sixth amendment to the constitution which required Members of Parliament to foreswear the advocacy of a separate state, the TULF MPs who refused to take the required oath were literally ousted from parliament. Progressively the TULF became sidelined as the Tamil militant groups grew in strength and numbers after July 1983 with large numbers of youth flocking to join them. With bases, offices and training facilities provided in India, and the government there adopting a supportive attitude towards the Tamil cause, the Tamil militant groups began to determine the course of Tamil politics and the plight of the people.

The horrors of July 1983 made even those Tamils who had been previously sceptical of the prospects of a separate state to think and talk about "Eelam" - the Tamil state - more seriously.

Military Operations

With an unyielding and unwilling government in Colombo resisting to resolve the ethnic problem by meeting legitimate aspirations of the minority Tamil community, and the Tamil militant groups pursuing the course of armed struggle to achieve a separate Tamil State, Sri Lanka was destined to go through a period of unprecedented death, destruction and displacement of its people.

Even before the Tamil people had recovered from the fate that befell them in July 1983, the Sri Lankan government began a sustained campaign of military operations in the north-east in the face of increasing attacks by Tamil militant groups against the security forces.

In November 1984, the government promulgated draconian Emergency Regulations providing for the establishment of Prohibited Zones and Security Zones in the north of the country in order to restrict naval traffic from and to India by Tamil militants. The Prohibited Zones included the covering of a distance of five kilometres seawards and 100 metres landward along the entire coast of the northern province from Mannar on the west coast onto Mullaitivu on the east coast, and all human habitation and activity including fishing in the zone were banned. Whole areas inhabited by the civilian population were covered by this ban. The imposition of the Prohibited Zone covering the entire coastline of the Northern Province had the effect of rendering homeless an estimated 200,000 Tamil people. Over 40,000 fishermen and their families became deprived of their only means of livelihood as a result of the ban on fishing.

The whole area of Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts were declared a Security Zone where movement of people and vehicles (including ownership of vehicles) without special permits were prohibited. Prolonged

and very often round-the-clock curfews were imposed.

In the course of late 1984, President Jayawardene announced his government's plan to colonise all Tamil areas of the north and east with Sinhalese settlers to reflect the nationwide population ratio of 75 percent Sinhalese and 25 percent other minority ethnic groups. This plan was regarded by Tamils as not only a deliberate provocation to escalate the conflict, but also as a calculated attempt to manipulate the traditional demographic composition and character of the Tamil areas, and they characterised this move as an attempt to destroy their identity. The Minister of National Security, Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali, told a conference of District Ministers in Colombo on 8 January 1985 that the only way to root out terrorism was to remove the concept of "traditional homelands", and create parity between different communities. He said that according to the government's plan, 30,000 Sinhalese families would be settled in the north in the course of 1985. Under the plan 250 families would be selected from each of the Sinhala constituencies in the south for settlement in the northern province. The new settlers would be given military training and equipment to safeguard themselves.

Many moderate minded people among the Sinhalese considered the government's plan on colonisation and training of settlers as an unnecessary provocation which would only further antagonise the Tamils and escalate the conflict.

In the period between 1984 and 1986, thousands of Tamil youth were rounded up in the north-east and transported to detention camps in the south of the island where many of them were subjected to torture and inhuman treatment. In retaliation to armed attacks and ambushes by Tamil militant cadres, the security forces resorted to reprisal mass killing of civilians at random. To give one illustration, 106 persons were shot at random in Mannar on 4 December 1984 in response to the death of one soldier in a landmine explosion.

The military operations and retaliatory revenge attacks by security forces in response to attacks by Tamil militant cadres in the eastern Trincomalee district during the latter half of 1985 left it a devastated area and over 40,000 people became displaced. "The destruction of the Trincomalee district over the past three to four months is one example of the results of increasing intransigence and violence. Trincomalee is today a scorched, dead city. The huts and houses on the approach roads to Trincomalee are now deserted. Traffic is very rare. The schools are empty or are turned into refugee camps. The city itself recalls images of war-ravaged, bombed and burnt out cities. In only a few quarters of the city are houses standing and occupied. By early evening the city is deserted." (Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality, October 1985)

The Thimpu Talks

A ceasefire in the fighting between government forces and Tamil militant groups came into force 18 June 1985, the date on which the Indian sponsored talks between Sri Lankan government delegates and the representatives of the Tamil groups commenced at Thimpu in Bhutan. However, even before the talks in Bhutan came to an abrupt end, there were accusations and counter-accusations of ceasefire violations

by both parties. Despite the appointment of a Cease-fire Monitoring Committee composed of respected persons to monitor the observance of the ceasefire, there were widespread instances of violations by both sides. The security forces continued with their search and destroy missions, and the Tamil militants also continued to mount attacks on security personnel.

President for Military Solution

By December 1985, President Jayawardene confirmed publicly that he was seeking a military solution to the ethnic conflict. Denying that there was an ethnic problem in the island in an interview with 'India Today' (15.12.85), the President said, "The Tamil problem is more a military problem, and any military problem has to be tackled militarily". He described the Tamil militants as "a gang of murderers. They are called boys, militants, radicals, but they are simply murderers". Asked as to why he entered into talks initiated by India, "Yes, we were not ready earlier. Now we are acquiring arms and getting our soldiers trained. We are getting ready for a decisive military action...Already there is a strong feeling that we should stop all these talks and strike again... I am not fully prepared to tackle Jaffna. I want to finish first with the other provinces. It is not difficult to handle Jaffna. We can cut off food and supplies to the peninsula and flush out the terrorists in a month's time.". Asked as to what would happen if India were to intervene to prevent his military effort, the President said, "But if that happens, then all the Tamils living among the Sinhalese will be finished".

Foreign Support

In late 1984, the presence of Israeli service personnel in Sri Lanka became evident. It was conceded by the government in answer to a question in the Sri Lankan parliament that scores of Israelis had been admitted into the country without their having had to fulfil their normal visa requirements. The practice of burning and destruction of homes and sometimes whole villages by the Sri Lankan security forces in retaliation to attacks by Tamil armed groups had all the hall marks of the Israeli practices in the occupied West Bank.

As part of the process of the induction of foreign elements into Sri Lanka's security and intelligence structures, the government entered into a contract in 1984 with 'Keeny Meeny Services' (KMS), a Channel Island based company, to provide ex-SAS British mercenaries to undertake a reorganisation of the security services and training. The presence of the KMS mercenaries and their role in the island was admitted by the then Minister of National Security who conceded that they were engaged in "training the 'Special Task Force' consisting of police commandos".

In an interview reported in 'The Times' (London, 27.1.86), President Jayawardene said, "Countries like Pakistan are training my men. In 1985, Pakistan trained 60 officers and 1,500 Junior Commissioned Officers. My air force is also being trained by people from abroad."

Peace Moves and the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement

The peace moves initiated by India failed one after

another as the conflict continued. Beginning with the 'Annexure C' proposals authored by G. Parthasarathy in late 1983, the 'All Party Conference' which commenced in January 1984 and ended ingloriously in October 1984, the failed negotiations at Thimpu in Bhutan in the middle of 1985 to the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987, the Indian government had been making continuing efforts to bring about a resolution of the conflict without success.

After the failure of the Thimpu talks, the Sri Lankan government sought to impose a military solution by escalating military operations throughout 1986, and by the beginning of 1987 it was seeking to overrun the Jaffna peninsula with its 'Operation Liberation'. It was at this time that India, having warned Sri Lanka that it would not permit a military defeat upon the Tamils, flexed its muscles with its own 'Operation Poomalai' when Indian transport planes accompanied by Mirage fighters dropped "humanitarian aid" into Jaffna. This was soon followed by the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement (Accord) in Colombo.

Although the dominant Tamil armed group, Tamil Tigers rejected the agreement characterising it as "a charter of servility", many hoped that the agreement providing for devolution of power to a merged North-Eastern Provincial Council would have offered an opportunity for settling the conflict. The presence of the 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF) also gave the people of the north-east, who had suffered enormously at the hands of the Sri Lankan security forces, a sense of security and reassurance. But the expectations of peace and the feeling of reassurance were soon to be shattered with the outbreak of confrontation between the IPKF and the 'Tamil Tigers' in October 1987.

However, proposed elections under the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement to newly set up Provincial Councils took place in November 1988. The LTTE called for a boycott of these elections, but the presence and support of the IPKF ensured the victory of the non-LTTE Tamil groups with the 'Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front' (EPRLF) assuming the primary role.

During the confrontation between the IPKF and the LTTE that lasted until December 1989, the people were subjected to untold atrocities by the IPKF with massive loss of lives and destruction of property particularly in the northern areas. There were those among the Tamil community who garlanded and welcomed the IPKF on its arrival but were happy to see the last soldier depart in March 1990.

Government - LTTE Talks

In April 1989, the LTTE accepted an invitation from Sri Lanka's new President Premadasa who assumed office on a promise to secure the departure of the IPKF. Talks between the government and the LTTE commenced shortly thereafter with both parties declaring a cessation of hostilities. However, during the negotiations the fighting between the LTTE and the IPKF together with its allied Tamil groups who constituted the North-Eastern Provincial Council which had come into being following the elections in November 1988 continued.

Shortly after the government - LTTE talks commenced, President Premadasa called for the pull-out of the IPKF. After some unseemly diplomatic wrangling between Delhi and Colombo, by the end of December 1989 the IPKF had withdrawn from all dis-

districts in the north-east except Trincomalee and Jaffna from where the departure of the IPKF was completed in March 1990. With the eventual total withdrawal of the IPKF in March 1990, the provincial administration collapsed as the Chief Minister and many of his colleagues fled the country, and the LTTE took virtual control of the areas. Government administrative officers remained in place as did government police officers, but in practice most of their activities were subject to control by the LTTE.

Fighting between Tamil Groups

Shortly before, the Tamil groups forming the provincial administration led by the EPRLF had forcibly started conscripting thousands of young Tamils for training and to constitute a 'Tamil National Army' (TNA) from 1989. The TNA was obviously formed with the hope of withstanding any military challenge from the LTTE following the withdrawal of

the IPKF. As the IPKF withdrew from each district in the north-east, fighting broke out between the LTTE and the TNA. The fighting in the eastern Batticaloa district was particularly fierce and the LTTE emerged victorious with hundreds of TNA cadres being killed.

It has emerged that, after President Premadasa came to power and commenced negotiations with the LTTE, the government of Sri Lanka supplied weapons, vehicles and other material help to the LTTE to fight against its rival Tamil groups and the IPKF!

The LTTE's attacks on rival Tamil groups were not confined to Sri Lanka alone. On 20 June 1990 twenty men armed with AK-47 assault rifles attacked an apartment block in Madras, India, where the exiled EPRLF Secretary-General, Kandasamy Padmanabha was living. Fifteen were killed including Padmanabha and V.K. Yogasangari, an EPRLF Member of Parliament for the Jaffna District and P. Kirupakaran, Finance Minister for the North-Eastern Provincial Council.

"Eelam War II"

The government and the LTTE had been negotiating for over a year. However, without any advance warning fighting broke out between the LTTE and government forces again on 11 June 1990 with LTTE cadres surrounding many police stations in the east. The LTTE ordered all police personnel in eastern Sri Lanka and their families to vacate the police stations by 2.30 pm that day. "The LTTE took captive hundreds of police officers. It appears that most Tamil police officers, as well as some Sinhalese and Muslim officers, were released; however, most of the Sinhalese and Muslim officers held prisoners were summarily executed. The bodies of some of those killed have been found." (Amnesty International).

By mid July 1990, the security forces appeared to have regained control of the main towns in the east over which the LTTE previously asserted control during the period of its negotiations with the government - Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai. To begin with, in what was seen as a retaliation to alleged collaboration by Muslims with the security forces, Muslim civilians were attacked and many killed by unidentified persons, but the blame was promptly attributed to the LTTE by some Muslim leaders of the area and the government. Following these attacks on Muslims, Tamil people also were attacked allegedly by persons belonging to the Muslim community. It is believed that one of the initial contributory factors for the instigation of the attacks on civilian Tamils was the reported killing of Muslim policemen captured by the LTTE.

Following representation from Muslim leaders, the government implemented a scheme to train and arm Muslim 'home guards' with the ostensible purpose of protecting their community. Predictably violence escalated with attacks and counter-attacks, killings and counter-killings between the two communities. "The government's policy of arming civilian groups in the east appears to have contributed to an intensification of violence in the area; tensions between and within communities have been exacerbated". (Amnesty International).

While the LTTE has, since July 1990 been held responsible for a number of incidents in which hundreds of Muslim civilians have been killed, the government-aided Muslim 'home guards' have been accused of being responsible for the death and 'disappearance' of thousands of Tamil civilians in the Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai Districts in eastern Sri Lanka. Apart from this, the LTTE has forcibly driven out nearly 50,000 Muslim families from Jaffna and other northern areas.

Aerial Bombardment

Since June 1990, government forces have been engaged in a sustained campaign of indiscriminate aerial bombardment of the north, particularly the Jaffna peninsula. Thousands of homes, school buildings, temples, churches, hospitals, shops etc. have been reduced to rubble. Hundreds of civilians have fallen victims as a result of bombing raids. By targeting the main power grid, the northern areas, including the densely populated Jaffna District have been deprived of electricity since mid 1990. Without electricity, essential activities, including storage of medicines and blood for transfusions, have been made virtually impossible.

Despite the claim by the government that the war is directed only against the LTTE and not against the Tamil people, civilians have suffered most from the bombing raids. In carrying out its campaign of indiscriminate bombing and strafing, the government has displayed utter disregard for the suffering and damage caused to the people.

Economic Blockade

Transport and communication have been almost totally disrupted in many parts of the north-east, especially in many areas in the north. A virtual economic blockade has been imposed against the north and the civilian population has been deprived of essential food and medical supplies. The supplies made available

through the good offices of the 'International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) do not meet even a fraction of the needs of the population. The security forces have banned the transport of a large number of items essential to the basic survival of the community in the affected areas (the ban was partly lifted only in mid 1993).

There is no safe passage for people to and from Jaffna to the mainland. The army refuses to open up the Sangupiddy-Pooneryn causeway unless they are given the power to check people and goods at the crossing point to which the LTTE does not agree. The LTTE refuses to allow civilians to use the Elephant Pass "for military reasons". The only point at which people are crossing is the Kilali lagoon, which has been declared a "prohibited zone" under emergency regulations, and many people have been killed by the security forces as they seek to cross.

The ICRC's capacity to perform its humanitarian functions has been severely curtailed by the widespread and intensive nature of the military conflict between the LTTE and government forces, and the restrictions imposed upon the ICRC by the warring parties.

Abuses by the LTTE

While the LTTE claims to be the "sole representative of the Tamil people" and to have the support of the majority in the community, its rival Tamil groups assert that it achieved its dominance by systematic physical extermination of other groups and political parties.

The LTTE's declared aim is to achieve a separate state of "Eelam" comprising the northern and eastern Provinces which are primarily inhabited by the "Tamil speaking people" (Tamils and Muslims). It has conducted an armed struggle to achieve the state of "Eelam" for over a decade.

The LTTE had held effective territorial control and administered nearly the whole of the northern Jaffna peninsula for a number of years. Following the gradual withdrawal of the IPKF in the period December 1989 to March 1990, the LTTE took effective control of almost the whole of the north-east. By this time, it had started negotiations with the government of Sri Lanka and there was a cessation of hostilities between the LTTE and government forces. On the ground, in the north-east, Sri Lankan security forces and the police were confined to their barracks. During this period, the LTTE resorted to widespread kidnapping, arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, torture, 'disappearances' and extrajudicial executions of its adversaries, mainly from its own Tamil community.

The Rise and Fall of the JVP

The period covering 1988-1990 was also characterised by unprecedented violence in southern Sri Lanka both on the part of government forces and the 'Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna' (JVP), an extremist political group based mostly in the south of the island. Adopting a violently antagonistic position against the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement (Accord) of July 1987, which sought to provide the framework for the devolution of power for the Tamil areas, and to the presence of the IPKF in the north-east, the JVP engaged in a campaign of unmitigated violence including

widespread assassinations of not only members of the security forces, Members of Parliament and leading members of the ruling party, but also those belonging to the opposition parties. It also targeted individuals connected with human rights organisations, academics and many others. Through a sustained campaign of enforced work stoppages, burning down of government installations etc., the JVP was seeking to bring about the administration of the country to a grinding halt. In an attempt to prevent the parliamentary elections being held in February 1989, the JVP having called for a boycott of elections killed several candidates belonging to all political parties, election agents, officials and even ordinary persons who chose to vote at the elections.

According to government figures, the JVP murdered 6,517 people between late 1987 and March 1990. Government forces responded with counter-violence which was characterised by unmitigated repression and brutality. Anyone suspected of JVP membership or sympathy was shot dead and in many cases burnt alive. Their homes were set on fire. Death squads sponsored by the security forces went about the country in unmarked vehicles summarily executing anyone with suspected JVP connections. An estimated 60,000 persons 'disappeared' between 1988 and 1990. In November 1989 and the following months, government forces succeeded in taking into custody many of the leaders of the JVP, including its leader Rohana Wijeweera and its General Secretary Upatissa Gamanayake, most of whom were summarily executed without any trial.

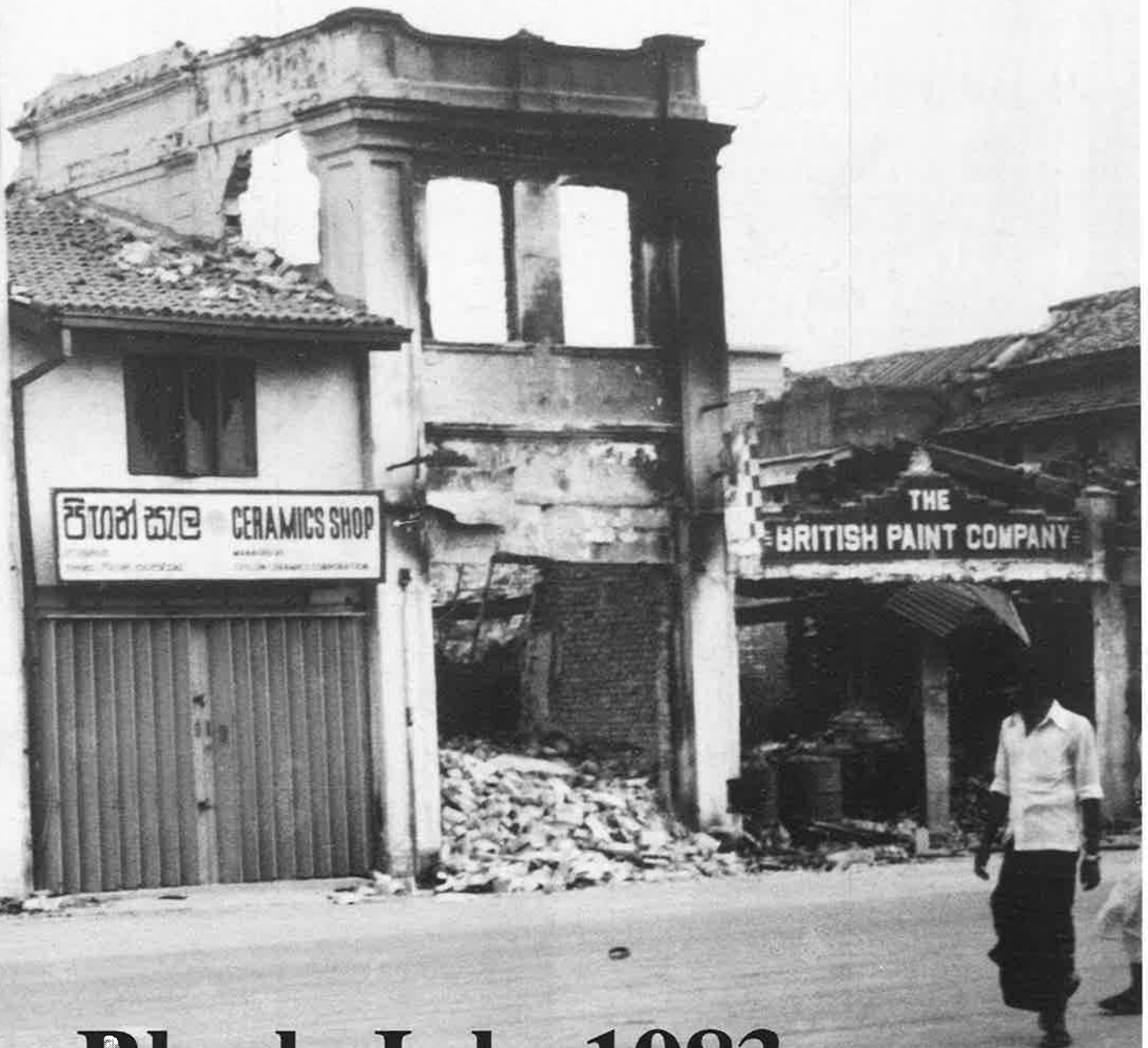
Another Decade of Conflict?

As this decade of conflict (1983-1993) approaches its end, Sri Lanka and its people witnessed the tragic murder of its President, Ranasingha Premadasa, and that of the leader of the oppositional 'Democratic United National Front' (DUNF), Lalith Athulathmudali. The assassinations have also been attributed to the 'Tamil Tigers' though they denied any involvement. Before the LTTE was also blamed for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and another former Sri Lankan State Minister for Defence, Ranjan Wijeratne. The LTTE was also blamed for the killing of the leaders of the moderate 'Tamil United Liberation Front' leaders A. Amirthalingam, V. Yogeswaran and M. Sivathamparam. Having initially denied any involvement in the assassination, the LTTE leadership later announced that the TULF leaders were executed because they were "traitors".

All these men were closely linked to the violent scenario that unfolded in Sri Lanka during the last decade. The country is still firmly locked in a brutal war for which there seems to be no end in sight. As things stand, Sri Lanka is set to go into the second decade of continuing conflict.

(p.s.: This is only a brief report and is in no way exhaustive)





Black July 1983



India followed the events in Sri Lanka with special attention. For one week terrifying news dominated the daily press. In the southern state of Tamil Nadu, papers were already sold out in the early morning. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime-Minister, was requested to intervene militarily in Sri Lanka or, at least, to take adequate measures to restore the Tamils' safety.

Photographs:

Graffiti at the Madras International Airport demanding that Indian troops should be sent to Sri Lanka to save Tamils; a sit-in protest by Tamils in the state of Tamil Nadu against the killing of their brethren in Sri Lanka (left) and (right) refugees at Mandapam, the major refugee camp in South India were people fled during and after the anti-Tamil riots.

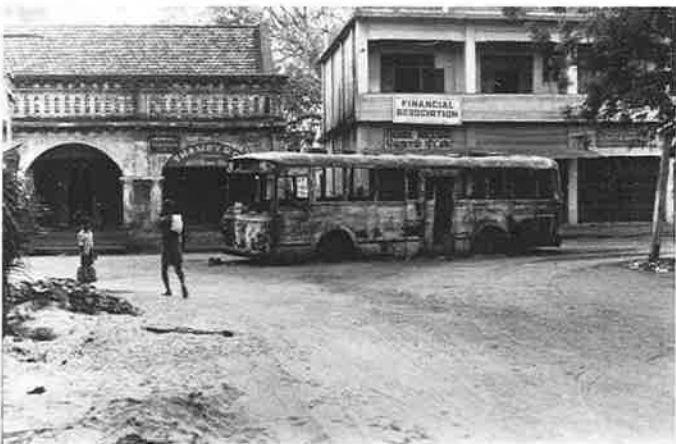


Even after the communal holocaust of July 1983 which brought the Government worldwide infamy, it failed to address the urgent need to give confidence to the Tamils. It relied instead on a barbaric military policy to subdue the Tamil insurgency, resulting in thousands of civilians being killed in the years to come. After July 1983 the situation escalated further with the appointment of Lalith Athulathmudali (who was killed in April 1993) in 1984 as the new Minister for National Security and Deputy Minister for Defence and the reinforcement of security personnel in the North and East including the establishment of new Army camps, things went from bad to worse. Hopes for an end of violence and a positive approach by the Government had faded.

After new acts of state-terrorism perpetrated by the Armed Forces fresh fear plagued the mind of the Tamil population especially in Jaffna. Innocent people were killed in March and April 1984.

Photographs: Between March 28th and April 12th the ordinary citizens of the Jaffna peninsula again experienced acts of state-terrorism. More than 100 people were killed and over 200 injured. For the first time, a catholic church was shelled and the building of the 'Jaffna Cooperative Store' was burned by the Army (left and right top). In retaliation a mob began to attack the Naga Vihara, a buddhist temple (right down), a Sinhalese school and 10 Sinhalese owned business establishments in the city of Jaffna (left down; right). What followed was the exodus of Sinhalese from the North.

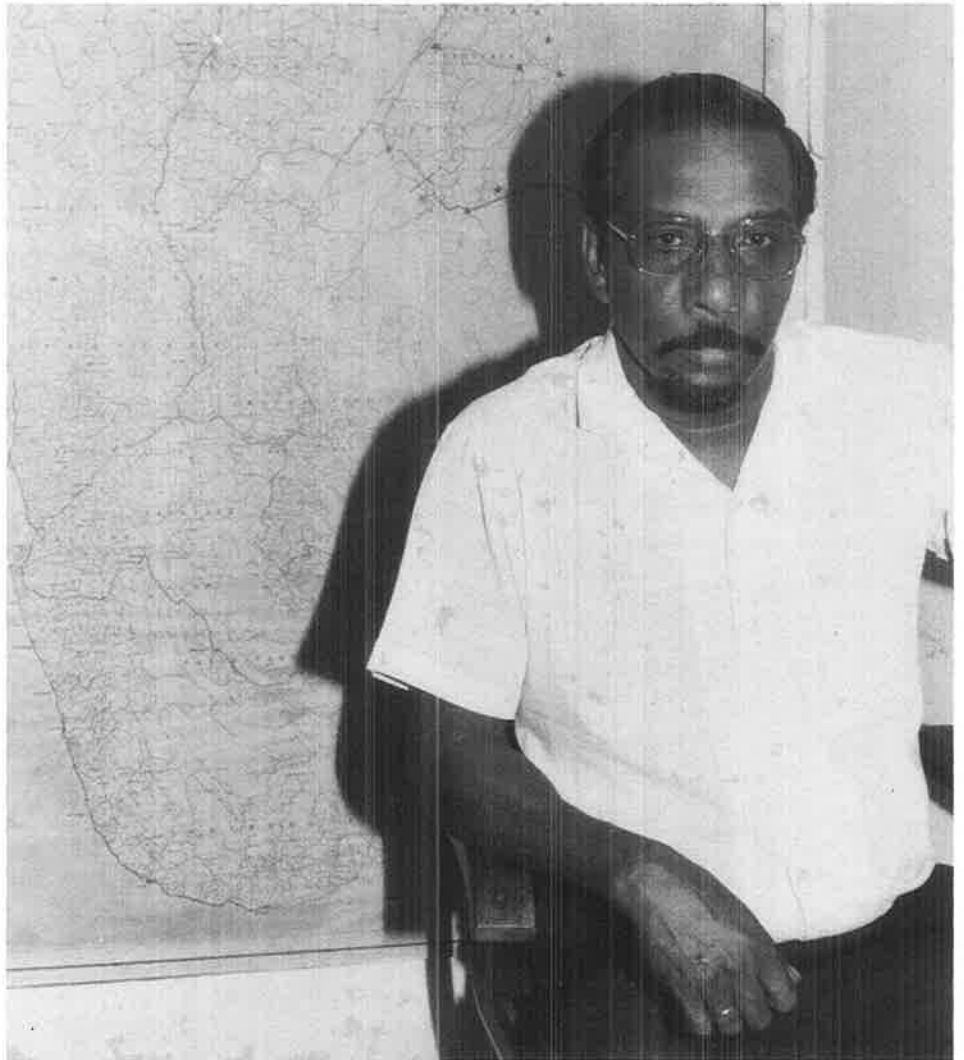


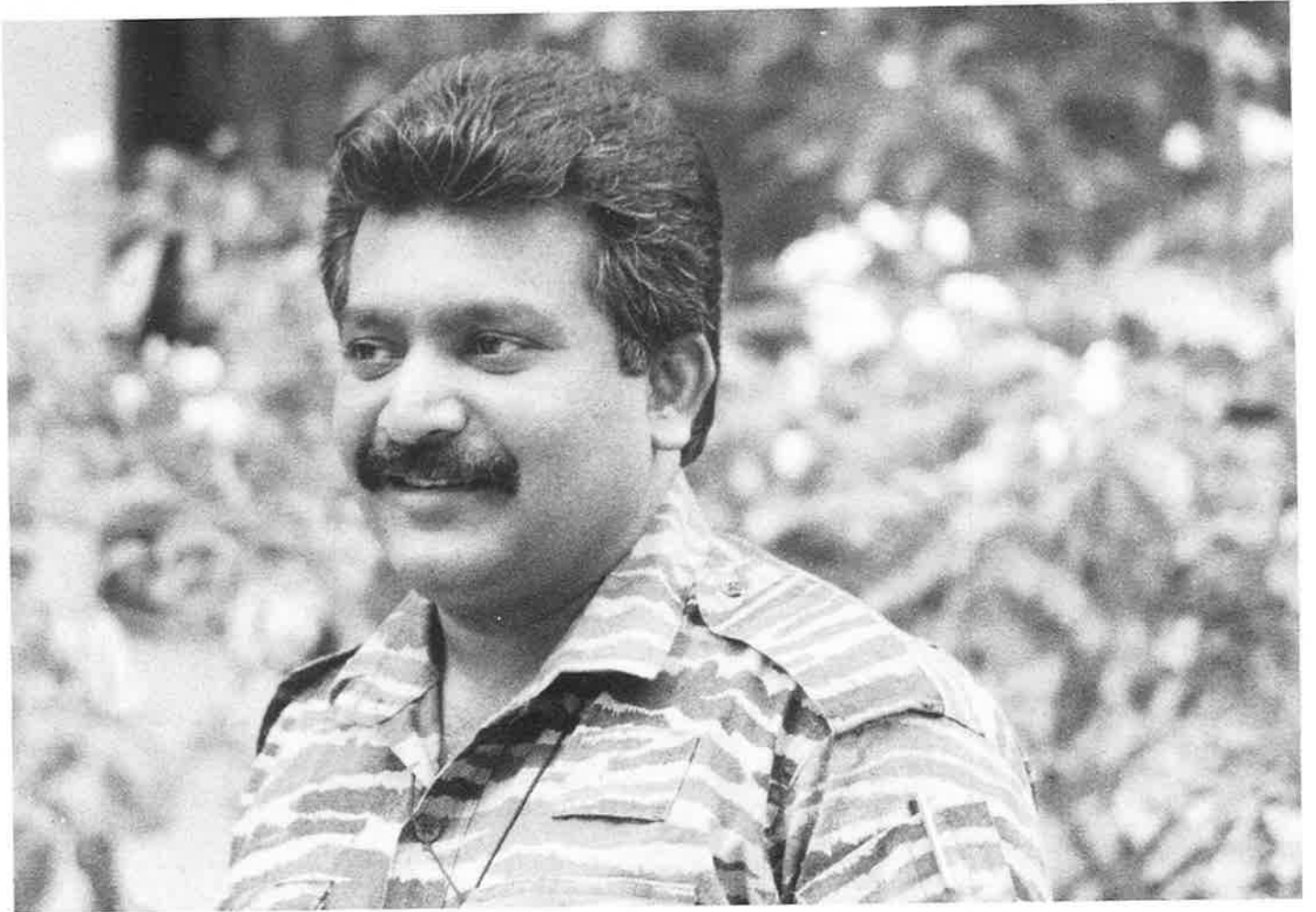


As a reaction to State Terrorism, Tamil militancy increased. The photographs showing the main protagonists of the 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam' (LTTE), Anton Balasingham, spokesman (LTTE, top left) and the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran (top right; photo by Martin Stürzinger) as well as the leaders of three militant groups (left down; photo by H.J. Haberlandt). From left to right: Padmanabha of the 'Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front' (EPRLF; later killed by the LTTE), Balakumar of the 'Eelam Revolutionary Organisation' (EROS; now with the LTTE) and Sri Sabaratnam of the 'Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation' (TELO; later killed by the LTTE).

Unity of the various Tamil groups did not last long. The LTTE in its bid for domination started crushing other militant groups from the beginning of 1986 (right down). This had brought the moral strength of the Tamil militancy to a low ebb and resulted in a breakdown of morale and community feeling among Tamils and had given the Government forces the initiative for a series of successful offensives in early 1987. Indiscriminate attacks on Sinhalese civilians, particularly by the LTTE and EROS, had also placed the Tamil militancy on the same moral footing as the Government.

At the same time, the Government started recruiting more and more young Sinhalese into the ranks of the security forces. A photo showing a young Sinhalese waiting in front of the 'Sri Lanka Army Recruiting Office' in Colombo.





(விடுதலை?) புலிகளினால் படுகொலை செய்யப்பட்ட எமது நாணுவ தளபதி

தோழர் மென்டிஸ்
COMRADE MENDIS
(1961 to 1987)

* இறப்பாக்காளர் உன் உயிரை புறித்தனர் எனினும்...
பொருடும் மக்கள் தம் இதயத்தில் உன் உறுது என்றும் வாழ்ந்திருக்கும்.

* REACTIONARIES TOOK YOUR LIFE BUT...
YOUR SPIRIT LIVES ON FOREVER IN THE HEARTS OF THE STRUGGLING MASSES.

தமிழீழ மக்கள் விடுதலைக் கழகம்.
PEOPLES LIBERATION ORGANIZATION OF TAMIL EELAM.

May 21, 1986

*Midnight; the house burns.
Before your very eyes
They stab your wife.*

*Plane hurl bombs
Dive steep
Soar in the air.*

*In all directions
Bombs fall
Reflecting
Shafts of sunlight.*

Children weep.

*Even now
Mother's mother
Grumbles
Over her spectacles
That fell down and broke
In her hurry
To get into
The underground shelter.*

*The officer at the blood bank
Tells me in all humility
That he cannot get
Blood from me.*

*I am in search of the friend
Who went in search of the person
lost in the friendly gunfight.*

*A few among those
Discussing whether it was
A democratic revolution or
A socialist revolution
Died
Hit by cannon shots.*

*I escaped
Two plane attacks
And twenty seven helicopter attacks;
Dashed against a pup
Broken my shin
And lay on a cot;
An intellectual friend of mine
Brought me "Zen and the art of
Motorcycle maintenance".*

*Even the man
Who was sculpting
The red cross sign
On the roof of the hospital
Fell to the shot of the helicopter.*

*Yet
There is the crow;
There's the paper;*

*Also,
The sound of the machine gun
Is on the air
Now
As ever.*



1986/87: Fighting between Government troops and various Tamil militant groups intensified. For the first time, the airforce started dropping bombs. Many civilians were also killed in 'crossfire'. By the beginning of 1987 the Government imposed an economic blockade on the North. Many civilians fled the area.

Photographs showing a raid by an air force helicopter gunship on Jaffna (top); a monument (left) put up by the people of Kurunagar/Jaffna in memory of 31 fishermen killed by the navy. It reads: "This monument was erected by the people of Kurunagar in memory of their 31 colleagues brutally killed off Mandaitivu on 10th June 1986"; (right): a Hindu Kovil (temple) in Jaffna town destroyed by bombs. Left: Militarisation in the Eastern Province where the Government recruited Sinhalese and Moslem civilians and appointed them as 'home guards' to protect villages from LTTE attacks.





'Operation Liberation', May/June 1987: The army tried to capture parts of the Jaffna peninsula which it had lost to the LTTE. In the Vadamarachchi operations, the army regained control of Vadamarachchi, which forms one part of the peninsula. It was a major victory for the security forces as up to this time they were more or less confined to their barracks by the militant groups. Photographs showing people fleeing the area of Vadamarachchi with their belongings (top) and a board put up by the LTTE in the centre of Jaffna town giving 'battle news' to the people.

Two Mornings and a Long Night

*Today dawns like this
neither dark
nor yet quite light
I stroll out sleepily
and a koel sings
from the old peepal beside the well.
Down in the shaft
the water's as placid as my heart.*

*Today dawns like this
Tomorrow, maybe not.
Maybe, about midnight,
as I'm closing my eyes,
tired from studying for tomorrow's exam,
a jeep roars up,
combat boots stomp to the door
and kick it in*

*Suddenly it's a nightmare
jackals snarling in the dark,
where is their voices
mauling Tamil slash
like a monsoon wind
or a bayonet*

*Too astonished to speak
we shrug we shake our heads
They drag we shake our heads
They drag me to the jeep
its roar still shattering the night
After that
it's all quite routine,*

*Morning dawns
The sun rises
On the ground above me
perhaps the grass is already growing*

*In that pre-dawn
neither dark
nor yet quite light
I do not return home,
call to my mother,
cough, spit, and wait
for the door to open,
hearing her cough, too, just inside*

*waiting for the door to open
the half-light morning silent
as ever it's been.*





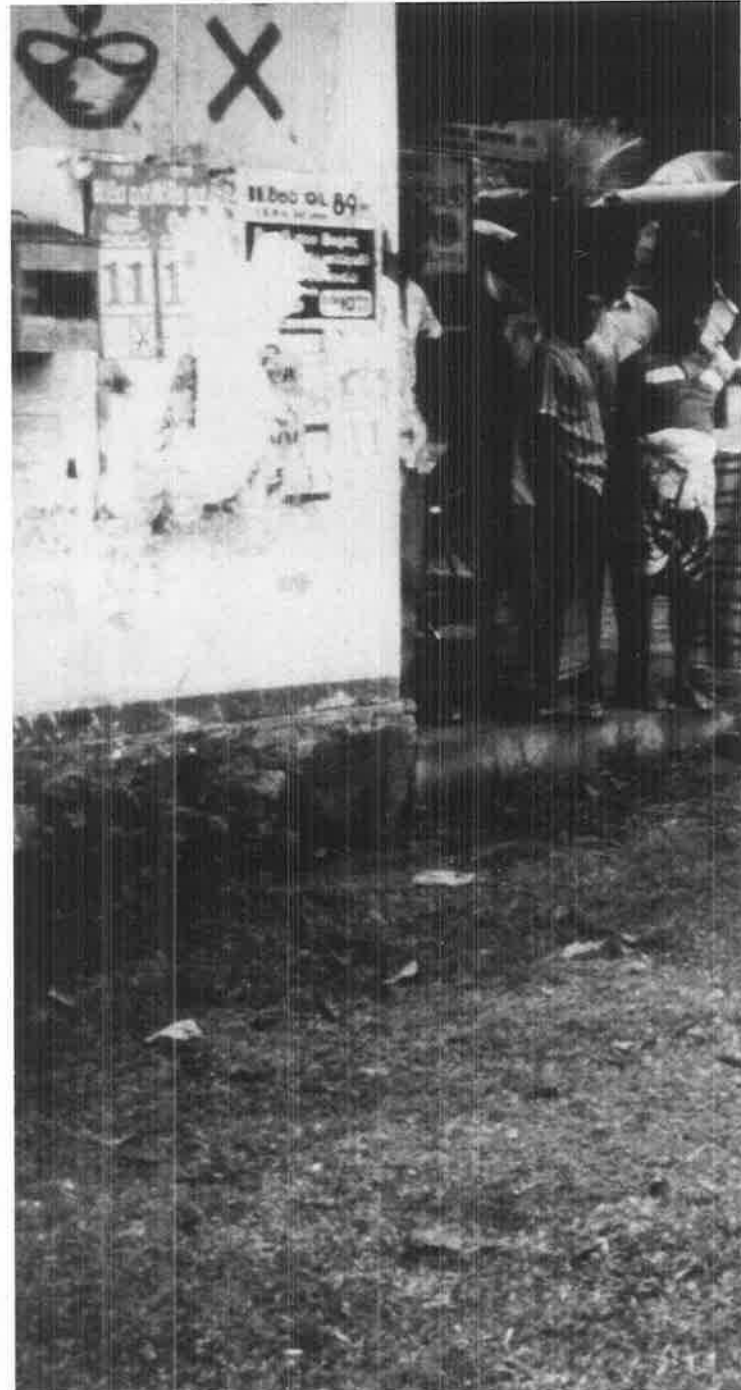
July 1987: An 'Indo-Sri Lanka Accord' was signed unexpectedly in Colombo. It stipulated - among other things - the deployment of an 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF) in the North and East of the Island. The coming of the IPKF was a watershed. It represented the terminal failure of brutalised manifestations of the politics of Sinhalese and Tamil chauvinism as represented respectively by the Government and the LTTE.

The accord and the deployment of Indian troops resulted in demonstrations in the South of Sri Lanka by Sinhalese groups including the 'Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna' (JVP).

In the North and East a period of relative peace started. Militant groups handed over some arms to the IPKF. But peace was only temporary. In October 1987 fresh fighting began. This time between the LTTE and the Indian troops. Other Tamil militant groups like the EPRLF, TELO, PLOT and ENDLF supported India and the IPKF. This resulted in fierce inter-Tamil fighting.

Photographs showing a poster put up in Jaffna reading: "Thanks to Indias humanity" (left); a poster put up in Colombo thanking President Jayawardene "for bringing peace to our country" and an Indian soldier putting up position in the North-Eastern city of Trincomalee.





The period covering 1988-1990 was characterised by unprecedented violence both on the part of the Government forces and the extremist Sinhalese 'Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna' (JVP) which started a campaign of terror and murder against supporters of the 'Indo-Sri Lanka Accord' including widespread assassinations of members of the security forces, members of Parliament, leading members of the ruling party and those belonging to opposition parties. The Government forces responded with counter-violence which was characterised by unmitigated repression and brutality. Anyone suspected of JVP membership or sympathy was shot dead and in many cases burnt alive. Their homes were set on fire. Death squads sponsored by the security forces went about the country in unmarked vehicles summarily executing anyone with suspected JVP connections. An estimated 60.000 persons 'disappeared' between 1988-1990. Photographs (left): Vijaya Kumaranatunge was the first Sinhalese politician who was killed by the JVP in February 1988. (three top): A soldier guarding Colombo; a Sinhalese family in Tengalle showing a photograph of their son, Wasantha, who was one of the first killed by death squads fighting the JVP; posters protesting against the killing of innocent Sinhalese youth by the 'Special Task Force' - a special police unit -; (down): a young Sinhalese killed and partly burned by death squads.





1988/1989: After Provincial Council elections in November 1988 the 'Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front' (EPRLF) - the main LTTE adversary - and the 'Sri Lanka Muslim Congress' (SLMC) came into the North-Eastern Provincial Council. The LTTE had denounced the participation in the election. Like the JVP in the South those who supported the 'Indo-Sri Lanka Accord' and the Provincial Council set-up were called 'traitors'.

In April 1989, the LTTE accepted an invitation from President Premadasa who assumed office on a promise to secure the departure of the IPKF. Talks between the Government and the LTTE commenced shortly thereafter with both parties declaring a cessation of hostilities. However the fighting continued between the LTTE and the IPKF together with its allied Tamil groups who constituted the North-East Provincial administration. Shortly after Government-LTTE talks commenced, Premadasa called for the pull-out of the IPKF. The Government and the LTTE negotiated for over a year.

Photographs (left top): Board of the newly elected North-Eastern Provincial Council situated in Trincomalee; two leaders of the EPRLF, Padmanabha the party-leader and Varadarajah Perumal, the new 'Chief Minister' for the North and East; (right up): A 'Tamil National Army' set up by the newly elected North-Eastern Province Government under the EPRLF being trained by Indian Officers; opposing the regional Government and the EPRLF and the Indian troops, the LTTE recruiting new cadres from villages on the Jaffna peninsula; (large one): A LTTE 'baby-fighter' on sentry.





With the departure of the IPKF in March 1990 and the collapse of the provincial administration in the Tamil areas, the LTTE gained effective physical control of the Northeast. However, the Government-LTTE 'honeymoon' did not last long: Without any advance warning and quite unexpectedly, fighting broke out between the LTTE and Government forces again on June 11th, 1990 with LTTE cadres surrounding many police stations in the East. This coincided with fresh fighting between the LTTE and other Tamil groups. One of the tragic features of the latest round of fighting is the inter-caste clashes between Tamil and Muslim communities in the Eastern Province. The LTTE also started driving out Moslems from the Jaffna peninsula.

Photographs: Indian soldiers leaving Sri Lanka (left top); the LTTE again is in control of many Tamil areas (top centre); The 'Eelam Peoples Democratic Party' (EPDP) fighting the LTTE on the side of the Government troops (large).



Daylight Time is Money

*Every night people lie down,
go to sleep,
and even the dogs stop their mindless yapping.
There, amid the mysterious dark's
filigree of stars
we all take leave of time.*

*And there in that peculiar void
We're all released to dream.*

*Me, I'm always stuck
freeze frame in a mob scene
can't move my feet,
can't breathe in the crush
of human being.*

*No one seems to notice.
We're all stuck in the same way
in the same dream.*

*Sucking for air
like a beached seer trying to speak
I come awake.*

*It's good to remember
that sometimes the river floods
the sea golden with
its surge of Kaarthikai
blossoms on the tide.*

*By dawn my head's a potpourri,
and my body parts
are strewn through the cosmos
like scattered pieces
of some incomprehensible jig saw puzzle.*

*Personally I like it like that,
and we ought to leave well enough alone.
But we all put our pieces back together,
stand them on their feet,
and send them off to work.*

*It's time again,
and that's all we've got to sell.*





P. RAYA
 87 RUE DE COLOMBES
 92600 ASNIERES SUR -
 - SEINE ; FRANCE

Today, the signs of the conflict and a situation which is far from normal can be seen in many regions of the country. Several towns and villages in the North and East have been almost reduced to rubble - various hardships are still part of the daily life for thousands of people. Nevertheless the LTTE is trying to make clear, who is ruling the North. But even in Colombo where most of the people seem to forget what is going on in the country, violence and murder have returned just a few weeks ago.

Photographs: left page showing clockwise: A member of the 'Tamil Eelam Police', a sub-organisation of the LTTE, tries hard to tackle the bicycle traffic on Hospital Road, Jaffna; Tiger boards welcoming people who enter the town of Point Pedro on the Jaffna peninsula; the economic blockade imposed by the Government on the North has led to a situation, where traffic is seriously affected. By cerosine driven overloaded motorbikes people try to travel northbound; the ruins of St. Peter's Methodist Church, Jaffna, destroyed by aerial bombardement; right: the area around the old Dutch Fort of Jaffna has been a target for raids by the airforce for weeks; huge cut out of the late President Premadasa - who was killed on May 1st, 1993.



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