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SPECIAL FOCUS**TAMIL INFORMATION CENTRE**

THE RENEWED KILLINGS OF TAMIL CIVILIANS IN SRI LANKA FOLLOWS UPON THE FAILURE OF THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE TO OFFER ANY MEANINGFUL SOLUTION TO THE TAMIL NATIONAL QUESTION. THE TAMIL INFORMATION CENTRE SEEKS TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND:

1..air force men kill civilian Tamils..

1.1 At least ten Tamil civilians were killed and more than twenty five were seriously injured by Sri Lankan Air Force personnel on the 28th of March 1984. The Air Force personnel fired at random in and around the market town of Chunnakam in the Northern Province. And it would appear that the stage is being set for President Jayawardene's final solution to the Tamil problem. We hope that we are wrong.

2..following 'unbridgeable gap' at amity talks..

2.1 It was about a month ago that, at the opening sessions of the Sri Lankan Parliament, President Jayawardene reported on the impasse that had been reached at the round table conference which had been initiated at the instance of the Indian Government. He said:

"The tamil representatives of the north have to satisfy the extreme elements that seek separatism through the bullet. They have to convince them that the solution they accept and wish the others also to accept comes as close to separation as possible within a united Sri Lanka. The leaders of the Sinhala and Muslim people on the other hand have to explain how the proposals they put forward are as far away as possible from secession. There is an almost unbridgeable gap between the two positions."

3..and failure of Sri Lankan Government to offer any solution..

3.1 The style was familiar. The elected government of Sri Lanka distanced itself from the problem and became an innocent bystander - a detached observer of a problem, a problem with the almost unbridgeable gap. Here was a government which sought to govern but which itself had no solution to offer - at any rate no solution which it could publicly declare.

4..other than a planned build up of the Sinhala army in Tamil areas..

4.1 But in early March, Brigadier Nalin Seneviratne, who has been described as 'a tough soldier' was posted to the Tamil area in the North as the coordinating officer. Soon thereafter, the Tamil Government Agent in Jaffna was transferred and replaced by a Sinhala officer. The infamous army camps in the north where Tamil prisoners were tortured in 1981 and 1982, were reopened. Indiscriminate arrests of persons in Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Jaffna were carried out. Some were arrested as hostages for wanted youths. Sinhala settlement of Tamil areas in Trincomalee and Batticaloa was intensified. There were moves to vest 5000 acres of land in Trincomalee in the Port Authority. Food supply to the Jaffna peninsula was curtailed and attempts were made to introduce a limited rationing system.

5..and a high profile United States association..

5.1 In the meantime, the unprecedented visit of U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. Carl Weinberger, to meet President Jayawardene in Colombo in late 1983, was followed, in January this year, by the visit of Mr. Joseph Addabbo, the Chairman of the Defence Appropriations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives. Mr. Addabbo thanked the Government of Sri Lanka for having approved the "revival" of the Voice of America transmissions from Sri Lanka - transmissions which had been stopped for more than twenty five years. Mr. Addabbo said that the United States will consider a proposal made by the Sri Lankan government that the U.S. provide modern naval training for the Sri Lankan navy. He also said that on his return to the United States, he would immediately recommend that funds be released to Sri Lanka for defence purposes. The U.S. senators Mark O. Hatfield and Thomas F. Eagleton visited Sri Lanka later in January and in February Deputy Assistant Secretary, Mr. Howard B. Schaffer held discussions with President Jayawardene. He said that the relations between Sri Lanka and the United States were "excellent" and added that the United States had a high regard for President Jayawardene. Mr. Schaffer paid a compliment to the Sri Lankan embassy in Washington, "a small embassy which had done well in countering Eelam supporters in the United States". It was against this backdrop of a high profile U.S. association that the visit of President Jayawardene to the United States in June was announced.

6..coupled with an expensive legitimising propaganda effort..

6.1 And then came the publication in Sri Lanka of an article in an Indian magazine, which gave a sensationalised account of the so called training of Tamil guerillas in South India. It was an article which appeared in an issue date lined 31st March 1984 but it was published in Sri Lanka on the 21st of March, by a Sinhala owned daily which has at all times consistently supported President Jayawardene. And it was published despite the fact that the government had banned the dissemination of any information spreading separatist ideas.

7..which labelled the Tamil struggle as 'leftist inspired'..

7.1 The article described the Tamil struggle as left inspired. Again the style was familiar. In July and August 1983, when hundreds of Tamils were killed and thousands were rendered homeless by a systematic planned attack, the Government of Sri Lanka said that the attack on the Tamils was left inspired -presumably a left inspired attack on a left inspired Tamil liberation movement. In 1981 and 1982, when Amnesty International reported on the torture inflicted on Tamil prisoners, the Government of Sri Lanka said that the report was left inspired. In 1983 when David Selbourne, the Oxford don expressed his concern at the continuing oppression of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka said that his concern was left inspired. In 1983, when Aquino was shot dead in broad daylight in Manila, President Marcos said that the killing was left inspired. We are reminded of Hitler in 1930 and the burning of the Reichstag - that too was left inspired, at least according to Hitler.

8..in the hope that the world may listen..

8.1 And the world listened then as it may sometimes listen, even today, because the world prefers to listen to that which it prefers to believe. It prefers to close its eyes to Hitlers in the making. It is so much more convenient to put it all on the communists, the marxists

and the leftists, so that the world may go on with its own business with an easy conscience, without being bothered too much by torture, by rape, by genocide in a distant land.

9..but in truth, a propaganda cover for a 'Biafara' type solution..

9.1 And so if a systematic attempt is made by the Sinhala army to terrorise the Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka in pursuit of what President Jayawardene described in, July 1983, as the 'malaysian solution' to the Tamil problem, it will not matter too much - after all the Tamil liberation struggle is left inspired. It is a nice phrase and a convenient label. Any public relations agency concerned with moulding world opinion in such a way that the Sri Lankan government can buy the time to set about doing 'a Biafra' in Jaffna could not have improved on such a phrase. It is, ofcourse, a mistake which the United States has often made in Asia and Africa - the mistake of too readily categorising a whole national movement as marxist, a mistake which has often resulted in driving national movements into marxist hands.

10..because 'the world had not believed the Government before'

10.1 And the Indian journalist who wrote the article was obviously mindful of the power centres of the world. He spoke of 'super power intervention' to prevent the establishment of Tamil Eelam. Which super power did he have in mind? He went on to say that the Tamil guerillas in Tamil Nadu "await with anxiety President Jayawardene's visit to the U.S. in June". The readers of the article were left with little doubt as to what the writer had in mind. And on the 21st of March, within a few hours of the publication hitting the streets of Colombo, the Sri Lankan Minister for Information Dr. Ananda Tissa De Alwis announced, that the Government was purchasing 'large numbers' of copies of the magazine for distribution to its embassies abroad as 'proof' of the threat to Sri Lanka. He said: "A piece of paper will be attached to each of these magazines. It will carry this message - 'We have told this story to the world. The world has not believed us. Now the Indian journalist has told the truth.'" The world which did not believe the Sri Lankan government would believe the word of an 'Indian' journalist. And, ofcourse, in this area the views of Dr. de Alwis do command respect - he has considerable expertise in the area of public relations, having served for many years as head of a leading international advertising agency.

11..but would the world believe the Sri Lankan government now ?

11.1 The article by the "Indian journalist" had clearly served to help the Sri Lankan Government to legitimise its proposed 'Biafra' action against the Tamils of Sri Lanka. It served to divert attention from the failure of the government to accept federalism as a way out of the impasse at the round table conference. It served to divert attention from the failure of the government to take any steps whatever to compensate the thousands of Tamils who had lost everything in the holocaust of July and August 1983. It served to divert attention from the systematic campaign of successive Sinhala governments to oppress and terrorise the Tamils of Sri Lanka into submission. It served to divert attention from a continuing oppression and a terrorism which had its beginnings in 1948 when around one million Tamils who were born in Sri Lanka were de citizenised, disenfranchised and rendered stateless: an oppression and a terrorism which resulted in hundreds of Tamils being killed in 1958 when they had demanded a federal state, and when they

had not demanded separatism and when there was no guerilla movement, whether leftist inspired or otherwise: an oppression and a terrorism which deprived thousands of intelligent and qualified young Tamils admission to the Universities and which drove them to the streets: an oppression and a terrorism which resulted in the burning of the Jaffna public library by the Sri Lankan army: an oppression and a terrorism which has bred violence in its wake. And the article by the 'Indian journalist' served to divert attention from the cause by seeking to sensationalise some of the effects. but, on minister Dr.Ananda Tissa De Alwis's own admission the world had not believed the Government of Sri Lanka before. We wonder whether the world would believe it now.

12.. and so the stage was being set...

12.1 Two days after Minister de Alwis's announcement, the young Minister of Trade, Mr.Lalith Athulathmudali was appointed Minister of National Security. On the 24th of March the new Minister of National Security visited the Buddhist Mahanayakas to receive their blessings to wipe out "terrorism". On the 25th March the energetic Minister visited Jaffna.

13..for the massacre that was to follow..

13.1 And, then a few days later, on the 28th of March, we have the so called ambush of Sinhala air force men in Chunnakam - a so called ambush in which, according to the communique of the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry, the troops suffered no casualties. A so called ambush which was no ambush at all. All telephone communications were jammed until the Government released its official version of "an ambush". More than ten Tamils including a woman, were killed and more than twenty five seriously injured. The Defence Ministry communique calmly admits that it was a case of "revenge shooting". A revenge for what? A revenge shooting which killed at least ten and injured more than twenty five but the communique contains no word of regret.The communique contains no expression of sympathy for the Tamils of Jaffna. The communique contains no expression of horror at the indiscipline of the air force.- The communique contains no promise, no reassurance that the Government will secure that such revenge shootings will not occur in the future.

14..to be explained away as the act of an 'indisciplined army' ..

14.1 And again the style was familiar. In July 1983 too the armed forces shot and killed more than forty youths "in revenge" but there was no expression of regret, there was no attempt to hold an inquiry. When President Jayawardene was asked as to why no inquest or inquiry was held, he replied that there was no purpose since the bodies had already been burnt. And so, as in July and August 1983, the government would have the world believe that these are the acts of an indisciplined army and airforce, which the government can neither discipline nor command.

15..but facts and President Jayawardene' own admission falsify this explanation..

15.1 But facts are stubborn. The recent changes in the administration of the Tamil areas, the appointment of a new Minister of Internal

Security, the build up of the army in the North , the increased tempo of military rule, the reopening of the army camps, show rather, a government in control and working to a plan . And we are reminded of the words of President Jayawardene to the Daily Telegraph correspondent, Ian Ward, in July 1983, significantly two weeks before the terrible holocaust of July and August : ' I am no longer concerned with the lives of the Tamils'. Mr.Jayawardene was frank and it may be a mistake that the world has not taken him at his word.

16.. and suggest a move towards a final solution in violation of the rights guaranteed by the International Covenant of Civil and Political rights which Sri Lanka has ratified..

16.1 And the question that arises is whether the Sri Lankan Government is now moving towards the undeclared final solution to a problem ,which in the perception of the government of Sri Lanka is a problem with an unbridgeable gap.This is a question that must concern all those who are working for the protection of human rights.The first article of the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights declares that all peoples have the right of self determination and the Tamils of Sri Lanka are a people with a common language, a common culture, a common history and a traditional homeland. It is on the basis of the right of self determination that all the other human rights of a people can be secured - without the right of self determination, all other human rights will remain merely pious aspirations written on thin paper. However, it would seem, that in the eyes of the government of Sri Lanka the solution to the Tamil problem does not lie in recognising that the Tamils of Sri Lanka are a nation ,it does not lie in recognising that the Tamils of Sri Lanka have the right to freely determine their political status.It would seem that to the government of Sri Lanka, the solution does not lie in the removal of the oppression and the discrimination, the solution does not lie in a federal constitution but the solution lies in the annihilation of all those Tamils who have the courage to stand up for their rights . It would seem that to the government of Sri Lanka the solution lies in the creation of a servile minority which satisfies the Hitlerite doctrine that the role of a minority is to serve the majority. We hope that we are wrong in our perceptions.

17..a path of genocide and therefore a need to placate India temporarily..

17.1 We hope that the government of Sri Lanka has not decided on the path of genocide. Such a path would ofcourse make it necessary to placate in particular, the feelings of India, atleast until the grim deed is done and we wonder whether the recent visit of a senior Sri Lankan Minister to New Delhi has something to do with this. India will no doubt be informed of the proposed visit of President Jayawardene to the U.S.A. in June this year and the possibility of a friendship treaty with the U.S.A. India will no doubt be informed that unless the Indian Government agrees to restrain the feelings of solidarity that her people have with their brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Government will have no option but to strengthen U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean.

18..and persuade the United States..

18.1 And, in June, perhaps President Jayawardene will seek to persuade President Reagan that with U.S. support his government can survive.He will seek to explain away the continued failure of his government to

manage the plantations and the economy. He will seek to explain away the corruption that surrounds him and which prevents him from mobilising the manpower necessary for the effective management of the country. He will seek to explain away seven years of failing to go anywhere but trying to somehow stay in the seats of power. The Sri Lankan government will seek to persuade President Reagan that the national interests of the U.S. will be served by supporting a regime, which has postponed elections, which has taken away the civic rights of the leader of the main opposition party, which has set itself on a path of confrontation with its Chief Justice, and which has organised intimidatory demonstrations by its goon squads before the homes of judges of the Supreme Court. And the government will seek to persuade President Reagan that the best cure for the economic problems that face Sri Lanka, is not the effective management of the resources of the country, but a strong dose of racism and continued intransigence on the question of treating the Tamil nation equally and fairly. And the government will do all this, in the name of securing democracy in Sri Lanka and as a friend of the United States - almost as good a friend as the late lamented Shah of Iran. Perhaps it will also add that the national interests of the United States in the Indian region will be best served by alienating the feelings of more than 50 million Tamils.

19..but, in the meantime, a 'Biafara' style operation in Tamil areas..

19.1 And as the talking goes on, we fear that more and more Tamils will be killed in the weeks and months ahead. We fear that no young Tamil will be safe in Sri Lanka. We fear that the killings will be legitimised on the ground either that they were the result of rivalry between different Tamil liberation groups or that they were in retaliation against so called 'ambushes'. We fear that in this way, the Sri Lankan Government will seek to blunt the feelings of moral outrage amongst the people of the world - a moral outrage which found expression in the international media in July and August 1983. We fear that the Tamils of Sri Lanka will be called upon to pay a heavy price in terms of human life and suffering for their struggle to be free from a continuing oppression. We hope, and we pray that the Sri Lankan Government will prove us wrong.

20..and we hope and we pray that we are wrong..

20.1 We hope and we pray that the Sri Lankan government will prove us wrong. But if the Sri Lankan Government proves us right then it might well remember the words of an Indian patriot in 1907 that in martyrdom there is an incalculable spiritual magnetism which works miracles. "The soil which has drunk the blood of the martyr imbibes with it a sort of divine madness which it breathes into the heart of all its children, until there is but one overmastering idea, one imperishable resolution in the minds of all beside which all other hopes and interests fade into insignificance and until it is fulfilled, there can be no peace or rest for the land or its rulers". This is the lesson of history and the Tamil people will provide no exception to its teachings. And those who do not learn from history are condemned to re live it.