

Tamil Information

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Greater Commitment to Human Rights by Donor Nations Essential for Peace in Sri Lanka

Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) President M. Sivasithamparam has called on aid donor countries to lend their weight by demanding an early solution to the national problem in Sri Lanka. Mr. Sivasithamparam, addressing British development and refugee NGOs at a meeting arranged by the Tamil Information Centre in London on 1 April said that international NGOs had a greater role to play in the resolution of the conflict by constantly urging Western governments to use aid as a weapon in the search for peace.

The TULF leader referred to the Parliamentary Select Committee into the ethnic problem, denying government claims that there had been Tamil-Sinhala consensus in the Select Committee proceedings and outlined the events during the proceedings of the Select Committee. As the date for the Paris Aid Group meeting fast approaches the Sri Lankan government would wish to convince the donor nations that the Select Committee has achieved its purpose. But the fact remains that the Select Committee has been a total failure.

The All Party Conference to find a solution to the crisis, deliberated vainly for several years without the participation of the main opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and little interest was shown in its proceedings by President Premadasa. While this process meandered SLFP MP Mangala Moonesinghe proposed the appointment of a Parliamentary Select Committee, in a private member's motion, to recommend ways and means of achieving peace.

The Select Committee comprising 43 members was appointed in November 1991 with Mangala Moonesinghe as Chairman. The ruling United National Party (UNP) and the SLFP, suspicious of each other, did not submit any proposal to the Select Committee, keeping in line with past history when any proposal by one party has been vehemently opposed and shot down by the other.

The Tamil parties placed their proposals both jointly and separately before the Select Committee. Chairman Moonesinghe himself submitted a 'Concept Paper' in June 1992 which proposed separate Councils for the North and the East with a common apex council. The proposal was unacceptable to the Tamil parties because of difference of opinion relating to devolution of power to the two-tier councils.

Tamil MP K Srinivasan who had not participated hitherto in the proceedings of the Select Committee, unexpectedly entered the scene in November 1992 and submitted proposals having two main features:

- (a) Sri Lanka's Unitary Constitution to be amended to accommodate a federal structure.
- (b) The North-East Province to be demerged into Northern and Eastern Provinces with two separate councils.

Chairman Moonesinghe announced that SLFP leader Mrs S. Bandaranaike had telephoned him and accepted Srinivasan's proposals and soon after, UNP Minister Mr A C S Hameed declared that UNP would also accept the proposals.

However, that same day answering the BBC correspondent's questions at a dinner hosted by the Indian High

Commissioner, Mrs Bandaranaike denied that she had accepted the proposals and said that she had in mind "some sort of federal set-up", but not federalism. Mr Hameed for his turn, held discussions with the 14 Muslim MPs and declared that UNP too had "some sort of federal set-up" in mind. These developments clearly showed that although the hand that delivered the proposals was Mr Srinivasan's, the brain behind the proposals was someone else.

After a meeting of the Select Committee on 11 December, Chairman Moonesinghe wrote to Parliament Speaker that there was consensus among the members of the Committee for the demerger of the North-East Province and on devolution to the separate councils on the Indian model. The interim report of the Committee also referred to two separate councils for the North-East with powers similar to that of an Indian state.

The interim report was rejected by all the Tamil parties. Mr. Sivasithamparam said that the merger of the North and East was their minimum demand and explained the importance of a permanently merged North-East Province for the future of the Tamil people: The Tamils of the North-East have had historical ties and the pooling of the human resources of the North and the natural resources of the East will promote economic resurgence ensuring a viable Homeland for the Tamils where their security would be assured. The aspect of security has been made clear by Tamils fleeing to the North-East when threatened by violence in the South. It was only the massive military build-up in the North-East which led later to Tamils fleeing abroad. The

Tamils of the North-East have a common language, traditions and common heritage and the need is to strengthen their unity and not to divide them. Tamils of the East will not agree to demerger as it would make them vulnerable and the alleged domination of the Eastern Tamils by the Northern Tamils was true only in the 1950s, not any more said Mr. Sivasithamparam. The security provided by a merged North-East will also prevent Tamils fleeing abroad.

As to devolution on the Indian model, there are distinct differences in the constitutions of the two countries. India is a union of states and is neither a federal nor a unitary state. Provisions of the Sri Lankan constitution, particularly Articles 2, 3 and 75, specifically preclude adoption of federalism.

The final report of the Select Committee would be based on the interim report and we would not have federalism but a watered-down Indian model. The deliberations of the Committee, said Mr. Sivasithamparam, were not a serious attempt to solve the problem and the interim report did not reflect the view of the participants. There was never any consensus in the Committee relating to the recommendations in the interim report.

The TULF President stressed the need for the Sri Lankan government and the international community to realise that the future of the Tamils rested on the existence of the North-East as a merged unit. President Premadasa, according to his opinion, had three options.

(a) On winning the provincial elections in the other provinces divide the North-East by justifying it as a recommendation of the Select Committee. Demerger would be valid under Emergency regulations. He may hold elections in the East and will have no difficulty in winning as many Tamils are displaced.

(b) Demerge the North-East and continue to control the East until a

referendum in August as envisaged by the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987.

(c) Strike a deal with a Tamil Group to ensure Tamil votes.

The vital concern of President Premadasa in all three options would be re-election and not the welfare of the Tamils. Large amounts of money were being spent in the East to prepare for elections, where victory for UNP would bring about the permanent separation of the District from the North. The aim of appointing the Select Committee has all along been to achieve this end.

Mr. Sivasithamparam emphasised the need for an urgent political settlement and was confident that the resolution of the North-East conflict would pave way for solving many of the long-standing problems of the Hill Country Tamils. The conflict between the Tamils and Muslims could also be brought to an end and currently attempts were being made to bring the two sides together. However, this would prove a difficult task because of the fact that the government stands between the two communities. If the Tamils and the Muslims stand united then demerger of the North-East will fail as would government's desire to divide and rule.

A positive trend seen in recent times is the attitude of a section of the Sinhalese community towards the conflict. They feel that an immediate solution to the problem is needed to prevent disaster and if such opinion gathers momentum, there was a chance for accommodation and peace. Donor countries should lend their weight for this process by demanding an early solution to the ethnic problem, said Mr. Sivasithamparam.

The TULF leader's call on Western nations is an important one in the light of recent developments relating to human rights and militarisation. In 1990 the European Community referred to threats to human rights in Sri Lanka and indicated that this among other factors, would be

considered in formulating future assistance. Participating countries in the Paris Aid Consortium meeting in 1990 also expressed concern over human rights. Britain cut economic aid to Sri Lanka in June 1991 over Sri Lankan governments' human rights abuses and imposed an arms embargo.

According to human rights NGOs in Sri Lanka, human rights did not improve in 1992 or thereafter, despite government assertion that necessary machinery is in place to check human rights abuses. NGOs say "assurances of the Sri Lankan government should be keenly scrutinised by the international community since none of the constitutional and legislative changes promised have been carried out".

In these circumstances, most unfortunately, the British government's myopic analysis of the problem, probably based on information supplied by the Sri Lankan government, resulted in the lifting of the arms embargo in December 1992. The action of the British government is a blow to peace and will no doubt further contribute to the militarisation of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has purchased military hardware from Argentina, China, Russia and other East European nations including supersonic aircraft which are being currently used to bomb and kill Tamil civilians in the North-East. For the purpose of militarisation, Sri Lanka has allocated Rs. 23 billion (\$510 million) for defence in 1993, almost 20% of the GDP. While foreign nations provide "economic aid" the Sri Lankan government has imposed an "economic blockade" of the Tamil North-East which has caused thousands of civilian deaths by malnutrition and disease.

These are issues that must be taken on board by donor nations when they meet in Paris in June 1993.

COURT ORDERS DISREGARDED

Bar Association of Sri Lanka brought to the notice of the Attorney General that the judgements entered for the release of 15 persons in rights hearings had been flouted and these men were continuing to be in custody which amounted to a contempt of court. This situation proves the position taken by the A.G. before the UN Sub. Commission as a total farce.

RIGHTS APPLICATIONS

Sebamalai Anthonippillai from Gurunagar, Jaffna filed application in the Appeal Courts Colombo for the production in court or the release of her son George Simpson (27 yrs) arrested on 25 July 1992 at Vivekananda Hill, Colombo.

Gnanapragasam Mariades from Talaimanner West, Mannar District filed an application in the Appeal Courts Colombo for the production in court or the release of his son Mariadas Tharcisius Modudeen (25 yrs) arrested on 20 September 1989 at Wanarajah estate, Hatton in the Nuwara Eliya district.

JUDGE CALLS FOR REPORT

Appeal Court judge called for a report from the Chief Magistrate in respect of 3 rights applications being heard separately before him. All three applications were for the release or production in court of those arrested in the East by the army. Those subject to the applications are M. Premapalan, teacher at Kalmunai School (29 yrs) taken into custody at the Chenkaladi check point on 11 September 1990 while travelling in a bus. A. Ilangovan O/L student (19 yrs) Kalumani arrested at school on 24 June 1990 by soldiers from the Ampara Camp. The son of Kandiah Letchumi (18 yrs) arrested with several others while being at the Vantharumoolai refugee camp. The army has denied the arrest of these 3 persons.

TIC ACCESSION LIST

A selection of documents received by TIC in April 1993

PB

The thatched patio

Sri Lanka: International Centre for ethnic studies; November & December 1992

Vol. 5; No. 6; 63p

DESCRIPTORS: History/ Sri Lanka/ Literature

SHR 3173

Maraiyata matupati: Pukalidap Penkalin Kavitaikal (Text in Tamil)

France: EXIL; 1993

84p

DESCRIPTORS: Poems/ Tamil/ Women/ Politics

OHR 231

Newham Monitoring Project: Annual report 92/93

London: NWP; 1993

52p

DESCRIPTORS: Racism/ United Kingdom/ Harassment

OHR 230

I am a refugee: Stories of refugees in Britain today

London: Asylum Rights Campaign; Nov 1991

20p

DESCRIPTORS: Refugees/ UK/ Case Study

SGN 324

Atavintan, Ki. Pi.

Mukam Kol (Text in Tamil)

Madras: Gitanjali; Nov 1992

95p

DESCRIPTORS: Poems/ Tamil/ Politics

REF

Kryavin Tarkalat Tamil Akatati

Tamil - Tamil - Ankilam

Madras: Kriyavin; January 1992

979p

DESCRIPTORS: Tamil/ English/ Dictionary

PB

I don't understand what it's saying: the need for and provision of translated written information and materials.

London: Migrant Support Unit; August 1991

67p

DESCRIPTORS: Refugee/ Organisation/ Minorities

PB

Outsider

London: Minority Rights Group; April 1993

No. 35; 7p

DESCRIPTORS: Minorities/ Human Rights

OHR 232

Britain's Forgotten Prisoners: Meeting the Needs of Immigration Act; Detainees

London: Detention Advice Service; April 1993

22p

DESCRIPTORS: Detainees/ Immigration Act/ Organisation

SGN 326

Nivetanam (Text in Tamil)

Trincomalee: Thirukonamalai Kalai Elakkiya Vaddam; April 1992

58p

DESCRIPTORS: Tamil/ Literature/ Short Story

APRIL DIARY

APRIL 1

SECURITY POST ATTACKED:

The security post at Nochchimodai, Vavuniya District came under attack from the LTTE at 8.00 am while passengers to the North were passing this point. PLOTE members Kasi, Christie and Haran were killed along with a civilian Arunasalam Sachithanatham (34 years old) from Vannerikulam, Kilinochchi District. 14 civilians, 4 soldiers and 2 PLOTE members were injured in this incident.

FAST BY DETAINEES: 164 detainees at the Youth Rehabilitation Centre, Pallekalle, Kandy District began a fast in support of the detainees at Boosa in the Galle District who are on a fast unto death demanding early trial or release.

APRIL 2

TRIALS POSTPONED: The trial fixed against 21 soldiers in connection with the hacking to death of 35 Tamil villagers at Mylanthanai on August 1992 in Batticaloa District was not taken up for hearing as court was informed of the trial being transferred to the court in Polonaruwa District.

APRIL 3

NO TOXIC VACCINE: The stock of anti toxic vaccine for out patients at the teaching hospital, Jaffna was exhausted and patients were asked to fend for themselves.

APRIL 4

AIR STRIKES: Air Force planes bombed Nallur village in the Kilinochchi District which is the embarkation point for crossing the Jaffna lagoon to reach the North. A large quantity of essential food items awaiting transport was destroyed. Miraculously no civilians were hurt. JOC spokesman Brigadier Nalin Angamana denied this aerial strike at Nallur but conceded there were strikes in the Kilali area.

APRIL 5

ATTACK ON SOLDIERS: Three soldiers including an officer were killed when the LTTE struck in Mannar at 10.30 pm. One soldier was wounded. Brigadier Nalin Angamana added that LTTE losses were not known. However 2 LTTE men were killed one each at Batticaloa and Jaffna in separate incidents.

APRIL 6

OPERATION SUMANA TO CONTINUE: Brigadier Nalin Angamana announced that the military operation in Batticaloa code named Sumana would continue for months.

APRIL 7

PASSENGERS KILLED: Three passengers were killed when a shell fired from Elephant Pass army camp hit a boat plying the Kilali crossing. Another critically injured passenger was admitted to the Killinochchi hospital

APRIL 8

NEW ROUTE TO PENINSULA: Presidential advisor Bradman Weerakoon disclosed that if agreement was reached on opening the Sanguppiddy - Pooneryn route to the North it would become operational only after June or July.

APRIL 9

STUDENT KILLED: Munigathas Yogathansan (16 yrs), a student was killed and several others were injured by shell fire from the Palaly camp hitting the Kandarmadam area in the Jaffna district. Some houses in this area were also damaged.

SOLDIERS LOSE LIVES:

Nineteen soldiers including an officer were killed when a road clearing patrol was ambushed by the LTTE between Kalyanipura and Atuvawewa at Weli Oya in the Mullaitivu District. The tank regiment and airforce planes engaged in the counter attack claimed the recover of 3 bodies

of LTTE men.

APRIL 10

OPERATION CYCLONE: Infantry backed by tanks and heavy guns advanced from the Palaly army camp, Jaffna towards Idaikadu. Attack aircraft and helicopters gave air cover while this operation code named CYCLONE met stiff resistance from the LTTE. 5 soldiers were wounded and the JOC put the losses for the LTTE at up to 40 wounded or killed.

APRIL 11

TAMILS ARRESTED IN GALLE: Thirty-five Tamil youths including 2 women were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act at Galle in the South. All of them were employed in retail shops and jewellers.

APRIL 12

ARRESTS IN TRINCOMALEE: Nine Tamils including 5 women were arrested on suspicion after a search operation at Uvarmalai, Trincomalee District. Security was stepped up in view of the Hindu New year falling on 14 April.

APRIL 13

NIGHT RAID: One soldier was killed and 4 were wounded when the LTTE attacked soldiers near the food stores in Mannar town.

APRIL 14

NEW YEAR UNDER CURFEW: Mannar District was brought under an indefinite curfew from 2.00 pm. This followed an LTTE ambush at 12.00 noon on a truck carrying troops at Olaitoduwai in the Mannar District. Four soldiers including a Captain were killed and 4 others were wounded in this incident.

APRIL 15

REFUGEES INJURED: Ten refugees including 4 children were admitted to the Vavuniya hospital with injuries received from a roof collapse at the Nelukkulam refugee

APRIL DIARY

camp. The 50 inmates of the camp are without shelter now.

APRIL 16

AIRMEN INJURED: Bodies of 2 airmen Sunil Bandara and A. P. Ruwanwela were recovered in the Morawewa area, Trincomalee District with injuries resulting from an explosion. They were part of a foot patrol that left the Morawewa airforce camp. The reason for their injuries remains a mystery.

APRIL 17

SANTHANAMADU OUT OF BOUNDS: Security forces have declared the Santhanamadu area in Batticaloa District a prohibited area for the public without adducing any reasons for this move.

APRIL 18

ATTACK ON KILALI: Aircraft bombed the Jaffna lagoon area near Kilali the only access route to the besieged Jaffna peninsula. No casualties were reported.

APRIL 19

ARMS CACHE: Self loading rifles, machine pistols, explosives and fuses in large quantities were recovered from the Kudimbimalai jungles in the Batticaloa District by the security forces. This was a part of the SUMANA-II operation in the East according to a JOC report. Later reports revealed that 4 LTTE men were killed and their hide-out destroyed with large stocks of food.

APRIL 20

MASKED MEN: A part of the Trincomalee town was surrounded by personnel from the 3 armed forces and all residents were marched off to St. Joseph's College allowing one per household to remain in the residences. Masked men were used for detaining those being paraded before them. Several detentions were made.

APRIL 21

ANOTHER CURFEW: Curfew was declared in the Jaffna and Kilinochchi Districts and efforts were made to extend the perimeters of the army camps at Elephant Pass and Iyakkachi in the Jaffna District. Attack aircraft and tanks were used to support infantry at Iyakkachi. Two soldiers were killed and 5 were injured. LTTE casualties were not known according to the JOC.

APRIL 22

FORTNIGHT'S TALLY: JOC's spokesman Brigadier Angamana disclosed that 30 soldiers and 34 LTTE men were killed in the two weeks up to this day at various confrontations in the North-East.

APRIL 23

LALITH KILLED: Democratic United National Front leader and former Cabinet Minister Lalith Athulathmudali was shot while addressing a public meeting at Kirillapone grounds half a kilometre from the police station Kirillapone. He succumbed to his injuries after admission to the hospital.

APRIL 24

BUS SERVICE CANCELLED: Bus services between Vaakarai and Batticaloa have been suspended on the instructions of the armed forces. Residents are allowed to take only one measure of rice, half a bottle of kerosene, 2 boxes of matches and half a kg. sugar per person into Vaakarai, Batticaloa District. Residents are thereby greatly inconvenienced by these twin constraints.

APRIL 25

POLICEMEN KILLED: A police patrol along the rail track came under LTTE attack at Welikande in the Batticaloa District. Four policemen together with another female were killed in this attack.

APRIL 26

KUDUMBIMALAI KILLING:

JOC announced the killing of 8 rebels in the jungles as a part of operation Sumana under way in the Batticaloa District. Rifles, sub machine guns and other fire arms were recovered from the killed rebels.

APRIL 27

TIGERS KILLED: Twenty LTTE men were killed in an ambush at Kudumbimalai, Batticaloa District. LTTE men were attempting to recover the 8 bodies of their cadres killed the previous day. The JOC reported that one soldier was killed and another injured in this ambush.

APRIL 28

EPDP STATEMENT: In a statement issued by the EPDP it announced the suspension of its activities in Colombo to thwart communal passions being stirred by the opposition parties.

APRIL 29

PLOT TO KILL JOC CHIEF: A major security alert was enforced following intelligence report of LTTE plan to assassinate General Wanasinghe, Defence officials revealed.

PRISONERS ESCAPE: Three LTTE detainees were rescued by armed youths near Maruthangam in Tamil Nadu while they were being transported to Palayankodai prison from Madras Central jail escorted by Policemen. The escaped prisoners were important members of LTTE detained under the terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA).

APRIL 30

TELO LEADER REMEMBERED: Telo members in Batticaloa put up posters of their late leader Sri Sabaratnam in Batticaloa Town to commemorate the seventh anniversary of his death. Sri Sabaratnam was killed by LTTE in 1986.

REPORT ON DISPLACED PERSONS IN WELFARE CENTRES AND OUTSIDE

WELFARE CENTRES AS AT 31 March 93

DISTRICTS	NO. OF WEL- FARE CENTRES	NO. OF PERSONS IN WELFARE CENTRES	NO. OF PERSONS OUTSIDE WEL- FARE CENTRES	TOTAL NO. OF PERSONS DIS- PLACED
JAFFNA	233	67,649	175,771	243,420
MANNAR	7	34,694	20,056	54,750
KILINOCHCHI	10	28,564	12,325	40,889
VAVUNIYA	8	3,271	8,136	11,407
TRINCOMALEE	26	18,520	15,207	33,727
BATTICALOA	25	10,509	66,021	76,530
AMPARA	22	15,603	7,583	23,186
MULLAITIVU	25	19,966	10,137	30,139
COLOMBO	10	1,944	10,984	12,928
GAMPAHA	-	-	8,065	8,065
GALLE	-	-	278	278
KALUTARA	-	-	1,709	1,709
KURUNAGALA	37	3,770	2,245	6,015
ANURADHAPURA	50	14,610	6,154	20,764
POLONNARUWA	13	4,522	1,882	6,404
MONARAGALA	-	-	345	345
BADULLA	-	-	841	841
MATARA	-	-	1,299	1,299
HAMBANTOTA	-	-	1,298	1,298
MATALE	3	549	1,559	2,108
KANDY	-	-	3,150	3,150
NUWARAELIYA	-	-	910	910
KEGALLA	-	-	624	624
RATNAPURA	-	-	150	150
PUTTALAM	62	32,427	-	33,427
TOTAL	531	256,598	356,765	613,363

SOURCE: Ministry of Reconstruction and Social Welfare, Sri Lanka

Situation Report

COSTLY CIVIL WAR

Batticaloa M.P. Joseph Pararajasingam gave a breakdown of the effects of the North-East war while speaking at a reception held at the Periya Kallar hospital Batticaloa:-

- (a) During the last ten years, over Rs.22,000 million had been spent on this war.
- (b) Sri Lanka ranks 2nd to Pakistan within Asia in spending for defence from the national budget.
- (c) The country's debt during the last financial year was Rs. 3,600 million which amounts to a per capita debt of Rs. 22,000.
- (d) The 3 'Puckara' attack aircraft recently purchased from Argentina cost over US\$ 7.5 million.
- (e) The average death toll per day in the North-East is 40. This figure includes combatants and civilians.
- (f) An estimated 60,000 people have been killed in the North-East up to now as a result of the civil war.
- (g) Over 5,000 went missing during the period of war.

CLASSES ON BARE FLOOR

Over 20,000 students attending schools in the Jaffna district follow their lessons seated on the floor. Classes are even held under trees in several schools. These startling facts are borne out in some records maintained at the education department. Inadequate buildings and furniture have led to this plight faced by Tamil students who have also the lack of food, transport, exercise/note books, and electricity to contend with. Educational standards have inevitably fallen.

MALARIA SPREADS

Malarial fever was reported spreading in Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts. 1140 persons sought treatment for Malaria in the Jaffna district during February. The figure for Kilinochchi district stood at 168. Abandoning of the malalithion spraying programme since the commencement of hostilities in 1990 has been attributed as the prime cause for the spread of the disease.

MEDICAL STUDENT KILLED

Gnanasooriyar Wilson Nicholas, a medical student at the Jaffna University was killed on 24 March 1993 by shell fire directed by the Navy while trying to cross the Jaffna lagoon at Kilali. He was in the company of students invited to attend the Mahapola celebrations at Vavuniya by the Ministry of Higher Education. There is no access out of the Jaffna Peninsula by land and crossing the lagoon at Kilaly, is the only means resorted to by Tamils of the peninsula. The government has prohibited the use of this route. But people have no alternative and continue to use it risking their lives.

DENIAL OF ENTRY ULTRAVIRES

The Supreme Court delivered judgement in favour of the rights application filed by Rayadurai Surendran, a student from Neeraviady, Jaffna District. The applicant had been denied admission to the University despite attaining sufficient marks at a competitive examination. The University Grants Commission was ordered to pay costs to the applicant. The examination was held in April 1991 and the applicant is yet to gain admission to the University.

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS COUNCIL DEMANDS

The Jaffna University Students Council in a memorandum to the President has called for the lifting of government controls/embargo which stifle the educational resources in the North. Their demands are:-

- (a) The government must bear full responsibility for the killing of 1st year medical student Gnanasooriyar Wilson Nicholas who met with his death due to naval shell fire while awaiting transport near Kilali. This student was attempting to attend the mahapola function at the invitation of the government.
- (b) The government must provide an access for the people in the North by opening the Pooneryn route or lifting the ban on the Kilali crossing.
- (c) To order the immediate stoppage of random bombing and shelling which deliberately kills and maims civilians.
- (d) Lift the ban on stationery and kerosene oil
- (e) Lift the ban on bicycle spares as bicycles are the only mode of transport available to the students in the North.

S L M C PROTEST

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader MHM Ashraff has protested to President concerning attempts to distribute the only state land comprising 2 acres in Mutur among 13 Sinhala families. He points out that there is no other state land to construct public buildings and that there is no truth in the claim that the families had resided there for 30 years. Only 3 families had been temporarily residing there during the last 3 years according to Mr. Ashraff M.P.

Lalith: A Victim of His Own Abuses

Leader of the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) and former Cabinet minister Lalith Athulathmudali was shot dead by a gunman on 23 April while addressing a public meeting. Athulathmudali, served as Minister of Trade and Shipping, National Security and Higher Education Science in the Jayewardene government.

He was seen as the natural heir to the presidency being a prominent member of the Colombo elite, but J R Jayewardene chose Ranasinghe Premadasa to succeed him in the wake of the insurrection by the people's Liberation Front (JVP). He fell foul with President Premadasa following an attempted impeachment and was shown the door from the UNP.

Athulathmudali and his men were subjected to assault and intimidation. He could not move freely in his own former electorate. He suffered broken legs, his party organ was muzzled, his supporters were stabbed and candidates abducted. The treatment he received from President Premadasa's government made a mockery of the professed democracy and exposed the virtual dictatorship of an executive president. Observers say his elimination was a matter of time under the anarchic political system entrenched in Sri Lanka. That it happened on 23 April was no accident.

As Minister of National Security Athulathmudali set in motion a system that denied the Tamil population in the North-East many a fundamental right. Youths over the age of 15 were summoned to produce national identity cards at designated places in several villages while parents accompanied them to these venues and hundreds were detained and removed to Boosa camp in the deep south. With hands tied behind

their backs and linked together they were herded like cattle and thrown to the floor board of buses while in transit. On many occasions buses were stopped in towns and villages in the south and the Tamil prisoners were assaulted and humiliated before crowds of Sinhalese people. Most of them were bleeding from their wrists on arrival at Boosa. Waves of similar detention followed with long incarcerations thereafter.

Athulathmudali was also the prime mover of the notorious fuel embargo on the Tamil civilian population, a policy set in motion in clear violation of the Geneva Conventions. This was relentlessly pursued until his removal from the position as Minister of National Security.

Another first to the credit of Athulathmudali is the introduction of the 45 gallon drums packed with gelignite, nails and metal rods dropped as bombs from the slow flying Avro aircraft. Manual wheeling out of these drums together with their wobbly descent made them unsuitable for precision bombing and civilian casualties and damage that resulted did not concern Mr. Athulathmudali. In the last interview to the press before his death although he denied he was in a plane which bombed the North, observers say, he was in an aircraft which was a part of the squadron engaged in the bombing. He did not deny the bombing itself which is the crux of the matter. There is evidence that his jeep had to deviate from a road that had been blasted by a barrel bomb in 1987. He knew the effectiveness of these bombs on the civilian population but never revised this barbarous bombing strategy.

During the Vadamardchy (Jaffna peninsula) campaign in 1987 hundreds of able bodied males from age 15 to 45 were rounded up from temples and schools where they had been requested to gather. This Nazi type seizure of Tamils took place under his personnel supervision in some instances. These men were all shipped in cargo vessels to the Boosa camp very much in the fashion of slaves taken from Africa to America.

Athulathmudali was singularly responsible for scuttling the Indo- Sri Lanka Accord. He joined the then Prime Minister Premadasa against President Jayewardene and boycotted the ceremonies for the signing of the Accord. In a clear violation of the terms of the Accord he brusquely ordered Gerry de Silva the army commander in the north to remove 13 LTTE men taken into custody. Their suicide on the verge of being put on a plane to Colombo sealed the fate of the agreement. Interviewed about this on a later date he conceded that his aim then was to pit the Indians against the LTTE.

Athulathmudali as Minister of National Security was guilty of a string of human rights abuses against the Tamils in Sri Lanka. It is stark irony that he had to complain about human rights abuses against himself and use the political platform to condemn human rights violations of the government. Whatever the faults of Lalith Athulathmudali there is no denying the fact that he was refused a basic right to life which every human being cherishes to possess and this needs the condemnation of all free citizens.

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