

# **THE POLITICS OF DESTRUCTION & THE HUMAN TRAGEDY**

**REPORT NO.6**

**ISSUED:4TH FEBRUARY 1991**

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## NOTE

# PREFACE AND A GENERAL APPEAL

The crisis in Sri Lanka which now faces the Tamils, and ultimately all the people of this country with an uncertain future is one that appears to defy definition. The Tamils have largely lost their spiritual and intellectual bearings and their physical existence hangs in the balance. The manner in which the Muslims are being uprooted, robbed and driven out en masse from the North, and the attitudes towards them that are being promoted, puts the dominant Tamil ideology in very disreputable company. In losing any sensitivity to what it means to be a minority, they have forgotten their own history. The Muslims who were making steady gains as a community have suffered setbacks as the result of the brutal intolerance of the Tigers and the manoeuvrings of the government. They are now being inducted into a culture of violence while sober and reflective Muslim voices are being pushed aside. Apart from the Sinhalese peasants being killed in border areas, the devastating potential for the Sinhalese contained in the general degeneration of the political culture is seen in the continuing phenomenon of burning corpses in the South.

It is evident that those who wish for peace on this island are at a loss to identify the problem, leave alone find a solution. A recent press release by the Canadian Foreign Secretary Joe Clark illustrates the point. In a 'balanced' statement expressing concern over human rights violations in this country, Mr. Clark called on both sides to go for negotiations as the most appropriate means of resolving the dispute and ensuring the safety of civilians in the North and East. Similar sentiments had been reflected in a recent statement by the British Prime Minister and in a call made by the Indian High Commissioner.

On the other hand when speaking privately, there is general agreement that everyone feels a sense of loss. Most people feel instinctively that a negotiated settlement is a very remote prospect. Since the outbreak of war, the natural, if unspoken, thrust of the government's military and administrative machinery has been to speed up the obliteration of historic Tamil associations and presence in the Eastern province. Its callousness has brought death to over 6000 Tamil civilians - not in combat but in massacres and bombings.

The Tigers on the other hand, by their brutal massacres of hundreds of policemen taken prisoner, and of 700 or so Muslim civilians helped the process of dehumanisation by destroying the possibility of human communication and understanding.

Events over the last four months have left us with two main obstacles to a negotiated settlement. One is the government's attempt to deny Tamil claims in the East by bringing about a fait accompli through decimation and displacement of the Tamil population. Although influential sections of the government and the press have supported such moves, the result will never be acceptable to Tamil opinion or help to build confidence among them.

The other is the character of the LTTE, the natural articulation of which not just helped to precipitate the war, but calculatedly left the Tamils at the mercy of enraged Sri Lankan forces whose nature was well known, without the will or the capacity to protect them. More importantly negotiations would mean talk of constitutional arrangements, elections, settled conditions and some airing of dissenting opinion. Such would mean questioning the legacy of the Tigers - a legacy marked by the tragic demise of hundreds and thousands of young with a

feeling and dedication towards the well being of Tamils, TNA conscripts, ordinary civilians and intellectuals. Any hint of openness would make the Tigers immediately nervous, and not without reason. Between the months of January and June this year, there was a precipitous decline in the purely emotional feeling that is called support for the Tigers. Like in October 1987, this consideration must have weighed heavily in the outbreak of hostilities. [See our [reports 4 & 5](#) and [special report 3](#)].

We have to examine the peculiar phenomenon referred to and how the government's attitudes have given it strength, durability and according to LTTE sympathisers who leave the concerns of the people out of their emotions, a necessity. It is important to understand this phenomenon because in seeking a solution we have to go beyond feelings that seem very reasonable at a subjective human level, beyond ethnic considerations and see the process as a national malaise threatening all of us - not just in this country, but the fall out from the success of this phenomenon will influence movements in the Indian sub-continent as well.

We spoke of feelings that appear reasonable at a subjective human level, because in the present state of political culture, many ordinary Sinhalese, soldiers and officers feel that the government was very reasonable with the LTTE and that gestures of trust and restraint were rudely and obscenely spurned. The government had provided the Tigers during the 14 months of the LTTE-Premadasa honeymoon with military, material and diplomatic help to replace the Indian army and its allies as the dominant power in the North-East. The Sri Lankan army had also observed unaccustomed restraint during several provocations by the Tigers in the months leading up to June. The other side was not talked about. It is hard to maintain that in helping the Tigers the government was helping the Tamils. During the honeymoon the government had actually connived with the Tigers, directly and indirectly, in the killing of hundreds of Tamils including TNA conscripts, individuals and refugees with dissident associations. Further, the North-East was brought under a regime with an apparatus of repression that was unprecedented. Not knowing this side, but only the government's much publicised generosity to the Tigers which it identified with the Tamils, anger against Tamils came naturally with the massacre of policemen. To those who saw things this way, the punishment of Tamils through bombing and atrocities seemed justified.

We spoke of this phenomenon as a common malaise because of its self reinforcing character and its ability to look larger than life in the general drift of subcontinental politics. Whether, it is the grievances of the Tamils in Sri Lanka or of the Sikhs, Kahmiri's or Assamese in India, governments have lacked the capacity to take a principled and rational outlook, and instead tend to react with repression combined with a lack of clarity. The ensuing process of alienation gives credibility and strength to extremist violence and totalitarian forms of organisation.

In Sri Lanka the results obtained by the LTTE and JVP have convinced many people exasperated with the government, to believe that only their methods work. Tamil leaders and parliamentarians had talked about discrimination and federalism and had protested peacefully for decades only to earn contempt, ridicule and organised violence. Peasant organisations and trade unions in the South who protested against the impoverishment and the decline in the quality of life resulting from economic policies of the government, heavily linked to the dictates of Western capital and giving multinationals direct control over large tracts of agricultural land, met with the violence of goon squads and large scale dismissals. The

government appeared immovable. This was in 1980. Less than a decade later, the government desperately invited the JVP for negotiations after it demonstrated its capacity to kill, paralyse the nation and strike terror into the very corridors of power. The LTTE after it responded to a similar invitation was feted in the manner of visiting royalty, in sharp contrast to the abject fate meted out by the government to its Sinhalese and Tamil detractors of a milder sort. The government's capitulation to what it had earlier termed criminal groups was even hailed as fine statesmanship by tired intellectuals, only too ready to gloss over the lack of it in the past. The end result was to pour scorn over the values of moderation, reason and decency, which were now consigned to homilies over state television.

### **The High Cost of Anarchy:**

In habitually abandoning interests of the people for transient tactical political advantage, a heavy price has been paid in terms of the dignity of the nation and consequently of the people.

The country is paying heavily for what lies behind those sentiments coming with less subtlety from senior ministers and not repudiated by the President or other cabinet colleagues. The Amnesty International has been called a terrorist organisation and there is little sensitivity to the process of the law which determines the character of the state.

The Independent Surrender Commission was set up by the President to facilitate the surrender of those having real or suspected JVP links without the fear of meeting the scandalous fate of many other youths. This worked well for a time and the commission's work was wound up by the President in August. It has subsequently become well known that a significant number of those who had surrendered had been killed after they were released - something that may not have happened to them if the commission had not existed at all. Answering questions in parliament, the Minister of Defence has maintained that these persons were killed not by the forces, but by villagers angry with the JVP.

In early November 'the Island' reported the appearance of about 30 headless bodies in Thirukkovil and Akkaraipattu - a well known fact in that locality. A Defence Ministry statement published in the Sunday Observer of 4th November described the claim as mischievous, following an 'inquiry'. Leading citizens of the area were quoted as having denied the appearance of the bodies. The plight of these citizens who try to keep life going in an isolated area full of refugees, in an atmosphere of terror, is not hard to imagine.

These are two among a host of instances showing that the workings of civil society have ceased to exist in a large category of instances. A generation is growing up without knowing that there used to be such things such as post mortems, magistrate's inquiries and accountability before the law.

In this respect the government has utterly degraded itself. As a liberation group the Tigers have not shown themselves in any way superior to the government. The Tigers too have the last word by simply denying everything. They deny the killings of Muslims and the regular disappearances and ill-treatment of so called traitors that mark their rule. Humanity in this country has been devalued and what increased the sense of loss is the state's incapacity to assume a responsible role.

But the state is itself a product as well as a promoter of our value system, and all secular and religious institutions must share the responsibility for this hopeless state of affairs. The parliamentary opposition too shows no signs of trying to understand the seriousness of the whole issue. The cause of human rights in this country has been made weaker by the Opposition using it as a means to embarrass the government rather than address the issue in depth. Even from some of the more intelligent and articulate Opposition MP's, their contribution to the debate on the Tamil crisis stops mainly at opposition the North-East merger. The main issue of trying to restore a sense of confidence to the Tamil minority who have suffered from years of state violence is hardly addressed. The government, whatever its motives, can give legitimate reasons for seeking a solution outside parliament, effectively devaluing the latter as the institution presiding over the nation's destiny. It is high time that in the interests of democracy the Opposition showed a greater sense of responsibility.

The thinking of the Sinhalese intelligentsia as reflected in the media has shown a general sense of complacency in the face of a very dangerous situation facing the country. Many are advocating going back to square one as if the Indian intervention did not happen. The growing disenchantment in the South itself is lost sight of. Economic conditions continue to worsen. It is a serious reflection on the state of the Sinhalese people if thousands of youth join the army, not through patriotism but through hopelessness and fatalism. What sort of a country is it where youth have to think along the lines that it is better to join the army and be pensioned off with loss of life or limb, than to be physically wholesome and unemployed?

What if after all this repression and frustration, there is a mass swing of Tamil opinion towards a lobby calling for an annexation of the North-East to the Indian federation? To be ignorant or complacent of the many dangerous directions in which the situation could drift is a mark of decadence.

The destructive course of Tamil politics cannot be defeated militarily. A change can come about only by creating space for a new independent Tamil politics that has digested the lessons of the past, to emerge. Though temporarily eclipsed in the North, pluralism in the South is not entirely dead. The government may yet find it in its interests to adopt tactically a radically new approach to the Tamil problem, because of repeated tragedies as well as the sheer dictates of its survival, and to sustain its present economic policies.

This is best done not by discussing issues such as Federalism and the North-East merger at the outset, but by taking responsibility for restoring confidence amongst Tamils. This also means taking responsibility for all the young Tamils, boys and girls, who are faced with a stark choice between a well founded fear of the Sri Lankan army and the Tigers who will use them as tools in their power game. An impartial inquiry into all civilian deaths during this war, particularly into the role of the state forces, is an absolutely necessary part of such confidence building. Without such, accompanied by preventive measures, the dominant Tamil politics will reinforce its claims, steadily destroying the community. The state will go on killing with no tangible restraint, confused about its objectives and denying the ugly things that everyone else knows about, until the nation itself drowns in blood.

Responsibility also means trying to understand why the Tamils were alienated, why they were mortally afraid of state aided Sinhalese colonisation and how the state machinery silently and decisively worked to their detriment. It is no good dodging the issue by saying that the law operates equally, when in fact the power to act and to deci

# CHAPTER 1

## The Role of International Organizations and Expatriates:

### Some Practical Issues

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#### **1.1 Rationale for an International Initiative:**

In recent times some doubts as well as vital questions have been raised about the practical viability of human rights. When, within the last two years, persons with strong liberal convictions fell within the attentions of the JVP's terror, they were pushed into thinking that the state's counter terror was at least a transient necessity. The LTTE's erratic behaviour came at a time when the state's forces had tasted blood and the liberal establishment was tired and wrapped in doubt. On top of this, human rights organisations have been castigated as villains and even terrorists by official circles, in a show of bravado.

Those of us believing in human rights hold, on the basis of historical experience, that its values are fundamental and cannot be overridden by tactical considerations without destroying everything we hold dear. When South Asian governments, for instance, cast rhetorical aspersions on human rights organisations, is it simply satisfactory to dismiss this as a reaction of someone culpable? To be effective, we need to go deeper into this phenomenon and understand the state of mind of those voicing such unjust sentiments. We also need to understand the socio-historic context in which all rationality is thrown to the winds and state powers indulge in frenzied callousness.

Many studies have found a strong link between the rise of the Sinhalese chauvinist ideology in national politics and Sri Lanka's weak, dependent economy imposing constraints on a ruling class limited in its outlook. The growth of Tamil narrow nationalism in the North and the rise of the JVP in the South, both of which became interlocked with the state in a spiral of terror and counter-terror, are instances of the growing authoritarianism of the system forcing everyone with a grievance into desperate actions. It is important to understand the weakness and insecurity of the ruling class which found in populist chauvinism against minorities, a refuge from its incapacity to meet the aspirations of the masses who were now better educated. When the limits were reached in attempts to satisfy the majority, the next step was naked repression. In contrast, the stronger economies of the West with an unfair access to resources from the third world, have the ability to pay their way through discontent at home

by adopting welfare measures. In consequence their domestic threshold of intolerance is much higher, and the rulers though uncomfortable, have learnt to live with a fairly open discussion of issues relying largely on consent and not coercion alone. But the insecurity, intolerance and even chauvinism of their political culture shows through particularly in the arena of international relations - such as in the deplorable support for repression in Latin America and the double standards evident in the dangerous mishandling of the Gulf crisis. It is in no way evident that the rulers of the so called developed countries are in general morally superior to the rulers of Sri Lanka as is often maintained.

It is thus fair to say from experience, that in handling ethnic conflicts and issues of peace, one should not expect too much from other governments. The thrust should rather be in creating popular movements that promote certain rational courses of action while raising questions about present directions. An important aspect of it is to remove fear and paranoia from forces which by their own choice and inadequacies have become imprisoned in the game of might is right - the rule governing relations in an unjust world order. In such an order, these weak forces constantly find themselves outmanoeuvred and humiliated. The removal of fear and paranoia is important to persuade these forces that there is room for bold new initiatives distinct from repression and murder.

Take for instance 'Perestroika' that brought about a remarkable thaw in the climate of Europe overnight. Such ideas could not have become practical propositions if the leaders of Eastern Europe, presiding over weak economies and repressive regimes, had been overwhelmed by fears of Western conquest or dominance. There were legitimate grounds for such fears. Apart from historical fears, there was the hard fact that the economically powerful nations of the West were involved in a 'moral' crusade against communist nations of the East, accompanied by an arms race where the expenses and stakes were being pushed up, perhaps in a genuine belief that the Soviet Union threatened their security. Seen from the East, things would have looked very different. Apart from leaders, even many ordinary people living in the East's traditionally weak economies would have been frightened by the actions and rhetoric of Western leaders. In their bid to keep abreast in the arms race, the leaders of Eastern Europe could only find the resources by risking discontent and hence finding a need to keep alive the apparatus of repression, which was itself creating its own problems. If the governments of the East and West were the only actors on the scene, the situation would have indeed been without hope, eventually leading to tragedy.

It is here that issue based popular movements like the Council for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Green Peace together with Environmentalist, Women's and Church groups played their historic role that is insufficiently recognised. These movements found their echoes in Eastern Europe, forcing governments across ideological divisions to talk about issues in a civilised manner. Europe's elder statesmen such as Willy Brandt and Olaf Palme lent their support to these movements and even raised issues such as the disastrous consequences that would flow from economic injustice towards the developing (third world) nations. Through personal contact they also humanised relations with the East, thus greatly diminishing fear and paranoia.

We feel that internationally based NGO's and human rights organisations could play a similar role in the crisis facing Sri Lanka.

## **1.2 Human Rights Organisations and Sri Lanka:**



In a crisis such as ours, the state should be held principally responsible for the state of affairs and its actions, and the pusillanimity and moral failings of the leaders must be exposed and questioned. In the case of so called liberation movements like the JVP, the LTTE and others which have shown very clear signs of degeneration, do we need to wait for them to become state powers themselves before we criticise their atrocious conduct? We know from experience that not to do so is disastrous. Again these institutions should be sensitive to the fact that they are also relying on other nations whose governments and agencies have used them to the detriment of the people here.

In the context of the current war, what we ideally need for peace is a popular movement among the Sinhalese that will assume responsibility for the legacy of racial violence against Tamils and re-examine the whole question afresh. This is again virtually inseparable from the growth of a movement among Tamils that would repudiate the legacy of terror and allow the Sinhalese to feel that they have nothing to fear, such as the division of this country, from a just treatment of Tamils. But we know from the current drift of things that this cannot happen. It is here that international organisations can play a useful and necessary role.

Currently, the situation is largely governed by subjective impressions and feelings. Although the Sri Lankan state seems very powerful in the local context, in the international arena its weakness, dependence and powerlessness are driven home again and again, causing insecurity and fear within its ruling class. Let us try to understand how this class and perhaps many Sinhalese would see their position.

they fail to see that their weakness and humiliation in the international arena is largely of their own making. In the course of events which led to the shaping of Human Rights consciousness, world opinion was very sensitive to the abuse of minorities. The dark events of July 1983, captured in film, left a deep impression on international consciousness. It is hard to find another occasion where the leaders of a state so openly and unashamedly threatened a minority. Against this impression, the abuses and degeneration of the Tamil militancy made little impact. These are frequently seen as the response of a victim. Rather than seeing its way towards restoring Tamil confidence, the state has been spurred into more erratic actions that have further eroded its credibility and increased its feeling of isolation.

Moreover, their powerlessness in the international arena tends to make them angry and irrational. India was training Sri Lankan army officers and Indian firms were tendering to supply equipment to the Sri Lankan army for some time after it started training Tamil militant groups. After President Reagan's envoy Vernon Walters had arranged Israeli military help for the Sri Lankan forces, the same Israeli Mossad had also trained the LTTE according to recent revelations. Were Western governments entirely ignorant about this? For powerful governments, having their agents play double games with small third world states that have seriously mismanaged their own affairs, is all in a day's work. On top of this feeling of helplessness come the churches and human rights organisations. For angry Defence Ministers who cannot hit back at Reagan, Thatcher and Gandhi, the Amnesty International and Church organisations become natural targets, besides their own civilians.

Many international human rights organisations have decades of experience in dealing intimately with liberation struggles. By now they must have the capacity to pick out those tendencies in rebel groups which lead to rottenness and degeneration. If one examines the dissident phenomenon and the reasons for it, the signs of degeneration were evident in the JVP as early as 1971 and in the Tamil militancy by the early 80's. While exposing state

powers for their abuses, it is also important that human rights organisations come out openly with what they see as signs of degeneracy in rebel groups. This will help to place some constraints on the latter while removing some of the paranoia from weak state powers. In turn, it will help the process of encouraging the state towards trying new and humane initiatives, and more importantly allow some hope for new peoples' movements and alternative ideas to come out.

This role can only be played by organisations having people and their well being as the centre of their concern, and which by their international standing have the capacity for objectivity. Politics whether from the oppressive state, other national states influencing events here, or the oppressed themselves has been governed by subjectivity, with little concern for long term consequences. What we have had in this country is anti, and not pro-people's politics. We have not had a politics that is pro-people, but the opposite of it. Tamil politics which began as anti-state quickly degenerated towards anti-people. No other struggle produced so many "traitors" - that its traitors by definition.

In today's world international opinion does matter. We wish it had been more critical of what the Tamils were doing to themselves. We have been ruined by an excessive indulgence in self pity to the exclusion of responsibility. We need to ask, what in the name of liberation have we been fighting for? Why did we acquiesce in sending the flower of our innocent youth on the path of suicide? We have not been fighting for the right to live in dignity, to develop ourselves as a free, humane society and to contribute our creative potential for the betterment of the community and the world at large. But rather, at crucial junctures of our history, we appeared to be asking the world's indulgence for a right to lie, to wallow in a filthy fanatical chauvinism, and a right to kill and maim our opponents at will. This appears to have been the case when over 80 dissidents and 200 Sinhalese civilians were killed during the weeks leading to the war of 10th October 1987, and in the events leading to the current war. It is time for organisations concerned with human rights to redefine their role in a broader context that will account for the total reality.

Apart from defensive considerations, there are also areas in which international organisations can go on the offensive, aiding those tendencies and movements that work creatively to build something on the ground to defend the interests of the people. Organisations which have the good of the people as their central concern should be able to identify and evaluate such activity.

### **1.3 An Appeal to the Expatriates:**

In the midst of war and tragedy, when people are over-whelmed by hopelessness and feel powerless to do anything for themselves, our reports are causing uneasiness amongst many quarters abroad. We address this section mainly to the expatriate community with a view to raising some important questions concerning our survival and our future. Whether they like it or not, their wishes, perception and activities very much influence the fate of the people at home. Moreover in the meantime, large numbers of boys and girls are voluntarily and involuntarily giving their lives, and people with no avenues to leave are bearing the brunt of the war. Thus, those who make judgements and influence the course of events have a grave duty to seek out facts, think seriously and understand what it means to the community and

where we are heading. There are many who supported the cause, directly or indirectly helped to destroy lives, then came out of it saying that they had made a mistake, and devote themselves to pursuing lives and careers in the West. To them the whole experience was as water off a duck's back. Many more are likely to follow this irresponsible course. But to the community at home, the damage done is irreversible.

On the other hand if they take responsibility for what has happened, dissociate themselves from present trends, enlighten others and move towards creating a new history, they can make a positive contribution. This would also create space for healthier developments at home and influence benignly the culture of the world as a whole.

We need to first look at the struggle in the context of Sri Lanka's history and explode some myths that are prevalent in the Tamil middle class - particularly abroad. We need to see the historical connections and pose the question whether we ever had a liberating politics.

We will not go into matters that have been written about at length elsewhere. But we merely highlight some developments and pose some questions. When the majority Sinhalese community succumbed to the politics of narrow nationalism, the process of nation building was destroyed from within. Politicians from the minorities too responded with variations of the same ideology. They became prisoners of it for their political survival. There were small groups of Tamils trying to promote alternative, creative responses to Sinhalese chauvinism. They failed, partly on account of their own limitations, and largely because of the potency of narrow nationalism. When questions were raised about the honesty of politicians, their hypocrisy and the world of a difference between rhetoric and reality, there were in response, the usual clichés concerning motherland, purity and traitor. At best people were told to ignore appearances and not to embarrass the politicians who were trying to achieve something. The militant struggle was super-imposed on this politics without exposing the totalitarian and futile nature of narrow nationalism. Some of the militants who tried alternative approaches, came up against the same kind of rhetoric and often had a fate more tragic than that of their non-militant predecessors.

In the actions and rhetoric of the dominant politics of today, we see the clear stamp of the narrow nationalist legacy of the TULF, although the difference between rhetoric and reality is far more glaring. How successfully has this politics strengthened community feeling among the Tamil speaking peoples? Instead of seeking to unite Tamils and Muslims in the East, why did this politics also have to create division and bitterness in the North where no such existed? Can a liberating politics rely on fomenting hatred and appealing to sectional interests for mobilisation? Today we are witnessing the horror of the logical progress of our narrow nationalism.

It is not our task here to discuss issues of violence and non-violence, but it suffices to point out that the history of liberation struggles with a military component, have produced great men of thought and action such as Mao Tse Tung and Hamilcar Cabraal, to name a few, who have written extensively on the subject. Our leaders too paid lip service to them. There are two things about which they are clear. The struggle must be about defending the people, on whom it is centred, and a liberation fighter is one whose presence inspires confidence and makes the people feel their human potential. To take the second, in our struggle people have only been made to feel degraded and worthless. In many situations here, the presence of a fighter actually inspires fear and anxiety. The question too often asked is what trick will he play to get the other side kill us? In place of assurance we too often find women and children

fleeing and screaming without any guidance, or people cowering in silent fear afraid to complain, awaiting the grim fate of the inevitable. What we have seen is the erosion of any sense of cohesiveness in our society. And in consequence of identifying fighting with having a gun and the ability to kill, what have we produced? A liberation army or a killer machine?

A large number of our expatriates would contend that they went abroad for the sake of their children. They must know what it means for an eleven year old child to be sent about with a gun without the parents having any influence in the matter. What then of a struggle that makes a virtue of this, knowing well that these children are only machines with no understanding of what they are doing, merely satisfied that a good meal is on the way? The elite are certainly privileged when it comes to their children. Do these child recruits have the philosophical maturity to cope with their short and brutish lives being snuffed out and in particular their limbs blown up? Do people know the agony and the cursing of the injured? Further, how does the military strategy square with the concept of liberating the people? Here again myths are built up based on a few sensational attacks like in Kokkavil and Mankulam, which have made headlines. Those in Jaffna and abroad can dwell on these to their satisfaction with no sense of concern or sensitivity to the plight of the people in the East who suffer the terror of the army and the STF. What was the politics behind their suffering? It is easy enough to take a foreign reporter to parts of the East or even to a suburb of Batticaloa and pretend that it is a liberated area. But what is the reality? Is there the will or the ability to protect a single civilian home in the North or East? There seems to be an awareness of reality only when an army walks into parts of Jaffna with its attendant consequences as has happened twice recently, which we easily forget. We also forget that there are Tamils outside Jaffna. With this forgetfulness that accompanies idle triumphalism, how capable are we of seeing the overall picture? Are not the Tamils and the country losing inexorably all the time? What are the factors that lie behind this military strategy?

There is also something sensationally unique about our struggle. Almost every liberation struggle has been fought by a number of groups. Very seldom has one group set out to ban other groups. Where this happened it was always after the enemy's capitulation. Is it a sign of exceeding strength or of the need to silence reason in order to defy reality? Is it not a sign of fatal sickness, a part of the same militant psychology that forces people in a besieged peninsula to put up festive decorations in the sight of angry air force pilots?

The more we dig into reality, the more indefensible the whole thing becomes. When the Tamil elite are questioned by foreigners, they would readily run down the Sinhalese, talk about the insecurity faced by Eastern Tamils because of state violence coupled with colonisation, and about the exploitation of hill-country Tamils, throwing in slogans like 'Don't drink Ceylon Tea - It is Tamil blood.' But how has the current politics tried to address the very real problems of these people?

During the 14 months of the LTTE-Premadasa honeymoon, did the LTTE put forward a cogent set of proposals to resolve the constitutional issue and the thorny land question which is a matter of life and death for Eastern Tamils? There was one hartal on the citizenship question of a group of hill-country Tamils shortly before the outbreak of war. This served to drive home to the government, the LTTE's capacity to paralyse the North-East through its gun power. But then, was the issue of hill-country Tamils addressed with any cogency before or after the hartal? Where were the rights of the people during the LTTE-Premadasa talks? Were they not mostly about how many people from which party are to carry guns and where? Was not the most disgraceful arresting and torturing of ordinary Tamils against whom there was

some suspicion of political links one of the few issues on which working agreement was reached?

Is it not time to face the truth that Eastern Tamils and Hill country Tamils and sometimes the Muslims, are only being used in a politics that springs from the Jaffna man's ego? How else does one explain the military strategy in the East? Why have started the war in the East where the Tamils were most endangered? If there was seriousness about the Eastern Tamils' well being, why stir up the contradictions by killing hundreds of policemen taken prisoner, including Muslims from that area? If a mistake had been made could not the prisoners have been used to bargain for the safety of Tamil civilians? Or if too late, admit that a mistake was made and take disciplinary action against the offenders as part of the cease-fire process? Then to tell a cringing people that this was the final battle, incense a brutal army by desecrating bodies of dead servicemen (Kalmunai), explode land mines when troops were approaching civilian concentrations and run away, leaving the civilians to fight the one sided final battle!

Is not this military strategy based on simply using the anger and misery of Eastern civilians facing an undisciplined army, just to get recruits? And where are these recruits being used? - mainly to fight in Jaffna and not to liberate their own land! Our politics had become so degenerate that in many parts of the East, it did not require sophistication on the part of the government to set the Muslims on Tamils and then to step in as protectors of both Muslims and Tamils at the same time.

#### **1.4 Is Peace Possible?**

Now that talk of cease-fire and negotiations is once more in the air we need to go into the important causes of the conflict. The LTTE had earlier talked to the government about power for itself and not about the people. As both a bargaining chip and in preparation for other eventualities, it launched a parallel military build up and recruited thousands of children at a time when the larger expectations of ordinary people were about permanent peace. To break through this mood and attract recruits, the LTTE had to resort to the language of violence saying that the present arrangement was only a temporary solution and their goal was Tamil Eelam. This created an internal dynamic of its own necessitating war. On the other hand different sentiments were being uttered in Colombo, in English.

Coupled to this, the major political parties of the South have never shown tangible concern for the Tamils, and whenever there was a crisis, they had quickly agreed upon a military solution. With the politicians abdicating responsibility, the army was sent in without political guidance and without a parallel political process to give the Tamils confidence. With the army having done its stuff, it ended up demoralised and looking weak. Even if talks get going now, it is being too optimistic to expect from Southern politicians the kind of wisdom that will address the Tamil people and not just the militant groups.

The LTTE now appears to be talking about Federalism and the Canadian constitution for international consumption. Its weakness prompt it to look for some diplomatic gains to justify having started the war. It will skirt the questions of whether it was worth all the lives lost and bringing the society to the brink of collapse? Whether there was not a public mood in the South that was willing to be generous, with the term Federalism appearing in much high level

Southern discourse? Whether the same thing could not have been achieved by mobilising the people politically?

Again to keep its politics going and to satisfy the expectations it had fed, the LTTE will have to say that this new solution is temporary and that its goal is nothing short of Eelam. Although Sinhalese fears in the past were largely imaginary, this time there would be the real articulated public fear that whatever they give the LTTE, their next step would be Eelam. Thus will both parties be cornered.

Of course the Tamils need a form of Federalism, that would guarantee their security and unfettered development. But as we have shown, there is no solution unless the present mould of our politics is broken. We need a form of politics that will genuinely respect the Sinhalese and Muslims and not seek to kill and humiliate them. We need to be responsible by them.

Such a politics can emerge only by placing the people at the centre and guaranteeing their democratic and human rights. It is only then that the ordinary common sense of the people would assert itself. There is much that can be done by Tamil expatriates to create such a space.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Liberation Phenomenon**

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**2.1 Liberation or Degradation? - The People's Experience:**

Immediately prior to the June war, the Liberation Tigers massacred hundreds of surrendered Muslim and Sinhalese policemen in the Eastern Province and called upon people to join hands with them in the final battle. In Kalmunai on 11th June, they killed 10 Sri Lankan soldiers who had come to buy provisions and desecrated their bodies. Following this display of manly courage, after about 4 days, the Tigers made a precipitate withdrawal. Often, the Tigers in their motorised transport hooked it ahead of frightened people they had pledged to protect, who had to follow on foot.

Then came the "brave" soldiers of Sri Lanka, sending thousands of unarmed Tamils to an involuntary nirvana, displaying an astounding inventiveness when it came to inflicting pain. The anger of the Muslims, following the murder of over a hundred Muslim policemen from the East, was directed into the orgy of barbarity. The Tigers in turn resorted to collective reprisals against Muslims to shore up their credibility amongst "Tamils", which was now close to non-existent. It was collective reprisals by the Sri Lankan state against Tamils in 1983, that had given the Tamil militant struggle its initial legitimacy.

About 12th July, a convoy of Muslims travelling in vehicles between Kalmunai and Kattankudy was stopped by the Tigers. According to Muslim and Tamil sources, several of the Muslims went on their knees and pleaded. Over a hundred were taken prisoner and a few bodies were dumped at Kurukkalmadam - a village reportedly not supportive of the Tigers. This was followed by the massacres of Muslims at Kattankudy and Eravur on 3rd and 12th August respectively.

Between the government and the Tigers, the destructive anti-people politics of the East was brought to new tragic heights. The people, the Muslims and Tamils, had nothing to thank either side for. Being burdened with so much sorrow and being unable to plan for and contemplate those things that are a source of ordinary human happiness, the people were now being driven to take vicarious satisfaction in the infliction of pain on brother and neighbour, now artificially classified as an enemy. Not having anything to show for their politics except shattered lives and destruction, crusading against Muslims became the mainstay of the Tigers. In early October, a leading Tiger personality visited Vakaraï to sound out local feelings. Many took fright thinking that there were going to be renewed attacks against Muslims in the East - although the capacity of the Tigers in that area had been weakened. What eventually did happen by the end of October was the expropriation and expulsion of Muslims from the North. While many Tamils were puzzled and often angry, the shameful act received a measure of approval in the East. Many were also disturbed by parallels in Tamil history - such as the government taking it out on Tamils in Colombo and elsewhere for the killing of 13 soldiers in Jaffna. The treatment of Muslims in the North was strangely reminiscent of the anti-Jewish pogroms of the Tsars and other bankrupt European rulers down to Hitler.

On the morning of 16th June, Justice Minister A.C.S.Hameed was flying into Jaffna, for what he yet faintly hoped would be the placing of the formal seal on a cease-fire agreed during the previous day's talks. At 6.30 a.m. the Tigers for some unspecified reason had fired at the Jaffna Fort. The Jaffna hospital which had gone through several bad experiences because of firing from the Fort since 1986 was left in a state of uncertainty. On 19th June the Tigers removed all their cadre from the hospital saying that another lot of injured was being brought in. At 12.30 a.m. on the 20th, there was another round of firing at the Fort. The patients and the hospital staff fled without further prompting. Later in the morning the hospital authorities decided to close the hospital. On the 21st, the LTTE's propaganda chief Yogi, pulled up the puzzled doctors for closing the hospital.

Then commenced the aerial bombing by the Sri Lankan forces, much of which had no military purpose. Officially the bombing was described as a precise operation directed at identified and verified targets. A general described it as something undertaken at great risk in populated areas. In practice any small arms fire from below, any gathering of youth or movement of vehicles of the type used by the LTTE, became legitimate provocations for bombing. What was near these targets, hospitals, dwellings of civilians, or refugee camps did not matter. Privately, several officials held that as long as civilians harboured the LTTE, they ought to take the punishment. The manner in which the game developed, both sides wanted civilians killed. One because of callous anger and the other found use for civilians mainly as propaganda material in the form of corpses. (See our earlier reports).

As the liberators shifted camps by taking over civilian houses, one area after the other became a target. They fired at passing aircraft from the ground, from vehicles, from near refugee camps and once from the proximity of the ICRC building in Temple Road, Jaffna.

With having to fight a war on the cheap with budgetary restrictions, the precision achieved in certain kinds of bombing was of the order of that obtaining with huge catapults throwing molten metal onto the enemy, in use during the epic battle between Dutugemunu and Elara of the 2nd century B.C. Indeed there was much improvisation from the tactics of that period. Barrels of human excreta were air-dropped on Jaffna. The required precision was amply served by Chinese built Y12 transporters. The old petrol filled barrel bombs with rubber casing were replaced by new varieties. When the military called for a ban on urea based fertiliser being sent to the North-East alleging that the LTTE was using it to manufacture explosives, there was an element of set a thief to catch a thief. Some varieties of barrel bomb dropped from Y12's were using urea and salt. Jaffna farmers and housewives are now in search of unexploded barrel bombs.

Civilians from smashed houses sometimes spoke admiringly of Y12 bomber pilots. After a good deal of trial and error, they even managed some bulls eyes. In conformity with IMF restrictions more Y12's are reportedly in the pipeline.

Both sides had long ceased to battle for the hearts and minds of the people. It was rather over their lives. During the battle for the islands in late August, the government announced (an aerially imposed) curfew, and helicopters hovered menacingly to shoot at anything that moved. On the same morning the LTTE announced over the loudspeaker at Muthiraisanthi that travel passes would be issued on that day. Passes to get away from the two forces became such coveted possessions, that hundreds were bound to queue up, parting with two sovereigns and ignoring the risks.

There was seldom any seriousness about defending the people. The object seemed rather to endanger them. After the army had landed in Kayts, the LTTE either denied that the army had landed or assured the people that the army would be resisted and prevented from moving in. Many who tried to get away to the safety of the mainland were stopped from going. Some of these persons were later killed by the army. One of them was shot at a church in front of his young child. The scenario was consistent with what had happened in the East. The pass system together with extortionate transport charges to leave Jaffna fitted into the same pattern.

It was a strange sort of struggle in many ways. The liberators started the war, but the onus for the welfare of the people was being placed on the government. When the liberators could not provide food, electricity and medicine, the government was accused of depriving the people.



People sought safety in the enemy territory of Colombo, at least as much because of needless suffering imposed on them by the local regime as by the aerial bombing. Having destroyed all independent organisations, the LTTE showed few signs of taking responsibility for the welfare of the people. Starving refugees were pouring into Jaffna. Many of them readily parted with their remaining capital in the form of jewellery, literally for a meal. A lady was offered a pair of gold bangles for Rs.150/-. She declined because she thought it robbery to accept. Then came the offer, "If the price is high, take them for Rs.50/-!" Some student leaders who tried to work independently with the refugees left Jaffna in frustration and fear after being sternly told that they could only work through big brother. What was being encouraged in the name of liberation was individual greed, selfishness, lying and opportunism. The unwritten philosophy that had grown with this politics was that maximum social frustration brought maximum recruitment motivated by a suicidal will to destroy. A liberation which gives meaning to their life in death only!

The army withdrew after briefly occupying Paranthan in July, during which they had levelled the shops surrounding the market square for their protection. Then the LTTE came and destroyed government buildings including the bank, new post office, MPCS and the water tank, burning valuable files and documents belonging to the people. The apparent excuse was that the army should not be left with buildings to occupy. Equipment at the Paranthan Chemical Corporation providing employment to large numbers was also destroyed. In the meantime Jaffna papers reported that many houses in villages neighbouring Paranthan had been looted by the army. But according to local people, the army had hardly been to those villages and that the looting had been done by someone else while the people had been away during the operation. In one village, Kumarpuram, all houses had been broken into, except that of a leading LTTE supporter. The villagers asked him, "It was the army who did it, didn't they?". After the initial shock, the supporter asked threateningly, "Are you serious or are you being sarcastic?".

Sometimes there appeared to be a measure of co-ordination. In Mannar during late October, the LTTE looted the Muslims and expelled them. Immediately afterwards, the army moved in and looted the Tamils. It was all done peacefully with no fighting. So proverbial had become the army's reputation, that some LTTE persons on gold collection campaigns have asked, "Why do you want to keep your gold? If you don't give it to us, the Sri Lankan soldiers will take it from you when they come!"

Looking at the whole struggle, one does not see any aim or strategy except destruction. People in different localities are handled tactically by appealing to dormant rivalries and animosities. Now in mid-November, the LTTE is moving in high profile in Jaffna as though it is in full control, calling upon people to join in patriotic acts of flag flying and making provocative preparations to celebrate National Heroes week at the Jaffna Fort which was vacated by the army. This is being done not in the wake of victory but when the enemy is literally at the gates following a recent advance in Valikamam from the base at Palaly. Many observers know that for some time defences had been prepared along the approaches to Thenmaratchi, in preparation for a withdrawal from Valikamam. People in Thenmaratchi have heard it from local LTTE leaders that the people of Jaffna are to be taught a deserved lesson.

If the government had mature statesmanship, its aim should have been to clearly demonstrate to the Tamil people that it cared for them. But it has instead competed with the LTTE to demonstrate contempt and callousness. Food for starving civilians has been withheld causing tremendous suffering to the sick and those injured by the government's bombs. The LTTE has

understandably not faced any deprivation. It has only put the civilian population at the mercy of racketeers and certainly more dependent elsewhere. The government did not stop its harassment here. When people sent food packages to relatives in Jaffna through a church organisation, these were subject to systematic pilfering, including the removal of anything of speculative military value, such as candles and matches. All essential medicines carried for the sick and the ailing were robbed by troops at Vavuniya. Even bottles of Sanatogen were robbed as if the government had intelligence of tottering Tigers past their three score years and ten. By this policy the government lost an important political battle.

Thus were both sides locked in a war against unarmed people, using young men and women forced by one or more of fear, hatred, penury and hopelessness to become 'heroes'. It is evident that hatred and contempt for the people was shared by both sides. On the part of the Tamil militants, whose unspecified cause is still being associated with liberation, how does one explain these feelings of animosity towards their own flesh and blood?

One aspect of the matter which was brought to the surface during the LTTE-Premadasa honeymoon still remains valid. When the leaders are pushed by considerations of survival, they are quite capable of becoming natural allies. It is yet possible that both sides will come to a tactical agreement. The leaders of the state will have panegyrics written to their unequalled statesmanship. The Tigers will as before show two faces. One in Colombo and another in Jaffna. One set of interviews for the English press and one for the Tamil. Liberal sentiments in English and threats against traitors in Tamil. Having called upon hundreds of young men to commit suicide for Eelam, they may once more argue that a transitional tactical understanding is necessary. All this is again possible given the nature of the forces and their intrinsic weakness. It will once more be argued that the Tamils got something because the Tigers fought.

There is surely one thing that both sides would want to forget and even suppress - the sacred memory of the dead. Both would want to avoid accountability on this matter. This would be a matter of common concern pushing them to embrace each other. Both sides have behaved as though individual lives can be snuffed out at any gunman's whim. The causes and callousness are too ugly to be disinterred. Until we are accountable to the dead any attempt at peace will be tenuous.

## **2.2 Reading the Past:**

"That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been". - Ecclesiastes.

The Leader gave a series of press interviews about the beginning of the second quarter of this year, largely, though not completely, putting an end to speculation about his continued existence. Answering a question on how the consequences weighed in his declaration of war against India in October 1987, he replied that he was not thinking about the consequences. But, he said, he was thinking about whether to fight a war against India or not. This reply was applauded by many members of the Jaffna intelligentsia as one that was both clever and fitting. One detractor observed: "You go to the Jaffna bazaar on any day, and you will see riff raff elements transporting heavy sacks on their backs between lorries and shops. At the close of the day, they go with their earnings to a tavern, get drunk and often get into violent quarrels. Before a fight, they do not think of the consequences, how it will affect their families, whether they will starve or whether they will be thrown onto the streets. No, they

only ask whether to fight or not to fight. In a healthy society, we will call such lumpen conduct irresponsible and will look for means of providing these persons with a more edifying vision about their life. When we have a leader who acts and talks in this vein, and is applauded by those who ought to know better, we are left with something frightening that is within us".

How did an "educated" society come to acquiesce in a leadership that left the people so degraded before the eyes of the world? A part of the answer lies in the acceptance by a large section of the middle class of the utopian ideals of Tamil chauvinism that over-rode basic human considerations. Any objective evaluation of what the LTTE had been doing over the past decade and more, should have left no illusion about what to expect. This is particularly evident in the field of individual killings. These went on despite the fact that there was no organised opposition to the LTTE after 1987. The fact that the LTTE could find no other ways to deal with dissent, symbolises its intrinsic weakness and paranoia.

The manner in which targets were chosen is significant. Sunderam (killed 1982) and Mano Master (killed 1984) were persons who had matured through the militant struggle, and had they lived there would have been a qualitatively different kind of leadership, less authoritarian and more accountable to the people. Sunderam was a member of the PLOTE. Mano Master at the time of his murder had returned to his native place of Pt. Pedro after differences with the leadership of the TELO, to which he had belonged. Though the other groups were strong then, the LTTE timed its killing when an opportunity presented itself, where Mano Master was a lone individual without institutional backing. The LTTE systematically, with patience, looked for opportunities and killed persons who were strong and able enough to give the Tamil struggle a new and healthy direction.

Its fear of ideas combined with individual ability remained strong even after it brutally asserted itself as the leading group in 1986. It killed members of the old Left such as Vijayanathan and Annamalai. It waited two years to kill the student leader Vimalaswaran after terror had largely reduced the students to apathy. Former dissidents and ex-militants were hounded out, detained and tortured, when all they wanted was to be left alone to live quiet lives. Hundreds of those taken in are not accounted for. What the LTTE actually achieved was to kill courage, character, ideas and originality among Tamils. The community was forced into a milieu bereft of any fresh air and cut off from any invigorating contact with the outside world.

This is reflected in the drastic change that has taken place in the world of art and literature. 1985, though a period of anarchy in comparison with the past, was a time of intense intellectual activity. Many militant groups were around and many issues were being raised and discussed by young people. There was a variety of literary output. Translations of articles in English were cyclostyled and sold for small sums of money. Leaflets and booklets of poems were in abundance. There were also drama groups providing a variety. All this ceased following the LTTE's decimation of the TELO in mid-1986.

By contrast, in present day Jaffna there is nothing. Whether intellectuals, dramatists or religious dignitaries, the only ones allowed to operate are those who will deliver to order. At all levels of civil life, the soul is fled. The final assault on the university is described in a separate chapter. If one compares the situation in the South, where things are as it is pretty bad, the seriousness of the self-inflicted blow that the Tamils have received becomes evident. In the South there is still a variety in journals and of literary output. There are a number of

political groups taking a critical line against Sinhalese chauvinism and are raising human rights issues in the North as well as the South. Plays are being produced, occasionally banned, then to reappear. There are drama groups from rural areas producing anti-war dramas, questioning the class based exploitation inherent in sending young men into the battle field. Education in the South is in a far better state than that in the North-East. Much of the disadvantages resulting to the Tamils in education are self-inflicted. Our management of this resource has not been of a quality such as to clearly expose how it has suffered from discriminatory and military actions of the government.

While there was and always is discrimination, the curtailment and destruction in recent times of the existing infrastructure that makes for civilised life - such as in education, transport, health and communications - has a good measure of what was part of the politics. Again the politics of the LTTE, whenever there was the prospect of something that would challenge its solitary claim for power, irrespective of the promise it held out for the Tamils as a whole, was to precipitate a crisis. This happened during the killings of dissidents and Sinhalese civilians in September/October 1987 and in the killings that led to the current war. It then relied on terror against Tamils and the oppressiveness of the enemy to offer itself as the only medicine. The direction has been to frustrate ordinary human aspirations of the Tamils, deprive them of any alternative, pushing many to opt for the destructive. Sinhalese culture, which many Tamils fervently believed to be a barbaric one is today in a much more promising position than Tamil culture. An Indian journalist G.Ramesh (Lanka Guardian 15th November) has pointed out that Tamils in general have not posed the shocking question - whether the Tamil language will be alive in 100 years time! That would be an ironical postscript in view of the original aims of the struggle.

It is against this backdrop that the LTTE leadership fears individuals raising questions and has an abnormal fear of those who have belonged to political groups. In this whole context many dissenters have claimed that the LTTE has right along paid far greater attention and has shown a qualitatively superior ability in stamping out Tamil dissent than in combating the enemy against which they are claiming to fight. Whether liberation can come as a byproduct is not a subtle question.

### **2.3 In Defence of What?**

The LTTE was an organisation which, particularly in the early 80's, had recruited many persons of ability, humanity and intelligence, like the other groups. Such persons started having doubts, particularly after the crackdown on the TELO, and quietly started leaving the organisation. This phenomenon reached crisis proportions particularly in the months following the IPKF offensive. So desperate had become the situation that according to dissident sources, an order went out to area leaders to shoot civilians arguing against or resisting the laying of landmines in their neighbourhood. It is said that only two leaders, Lollo and Mathi, both now dead, could command the callousness to carry it out.

At this point, a conscious decision was taken to expedite and encourage the mass recruitment of the very young, down to about the age of ten. Instead of exposing this tragic bankruptcy with greater statesmanship and concern, the IPKF actually legitimised and encouraged this process by sponsoring its own conscript army - the TNA. the misbehaviour of other groups also played into the hands of the LTTE. The LTTE had discovered in children its ideal

recruits - very brainwashable, totally irresponsible where the public is concerned, and given the lack of an alternative once inside, very loyal if their creature comforts are catered for. This shift was reflected in propaganda against education by LTTE spokesmen. Changes in the pattern of warfare have also paralleled this history. During the IPKF presence following the October 1987 offensive, the main thrust of the LTTE was to frustrate the IPKF as well as to frustrate the emergence of any civilian effort independent of the LTTE. Except in Mannar, there was hardly a successful LTTE attack even against an IPKF sentry point. The success in Mannar was achieved by actually firing at sleeping soldiers from inside the hospital building, calculatedly putting the lives of 89 patients at risk. The LTTE proved that the easiest way to fight an army which was callous about civilian lives, and itself look powerful in the process, was to fight them with total disregard for civilians. The massacre by the IPKF of 53 civilians in Valvettithurai on 2nd August 1989, which cost the IPKF dearly in political terms, followed the LTTE breaking a truce and killing about six soldiers on patrol. During this period, the number of Indian soldiers killed by the LTTE is comparable with the number of unarmed civilians it assassinated. The latter were often done by young boys wielding pistols.

But the myth concerning the superior fighting qualities of the LTTE was decisively broken. With the help of the Sri Lankan army, the LTTE's first attempt to dislodge the PLOTE from the Wanni during mid-1989 was a costly failure. The second attempt in January 1990, as costly as it was, succeeded only because the LTTE was able to launch repeated attacks with fresh supplies of manpower flown in by the Sri Lankan Air Force.

The developing trend became clear with the outbreak of the June war with the Sri Lankan forces. The experienced hard-core who were in short supply would be used mainly to defend places of high military or prestige value. The rest, including children, would be used mainly to harass, frustrate and to go to the frontline. Civilians were to be endangered for propaganda value rather than protected. This is clear from the sketch in 2.1. The young and inexperienced were also frequently used as expendable military material. The copious use of suicide squads, being so unique in the modern world, was often publicised as a mark of high dedication and courage rather than as a tragic misuse of the brainwashed young. There was also a general poverty of military imagination in terms of defining objectives and using manpower and lives effectively. Lives were often expended in purely romantic ventures which were then given a religious significance.

During the first attack on the Fort in June, young boys who were sent to scale the walls of the Fort died attempting the ridiculous. During the second attempt in August, the scheme of action where a crane was to lift the attackers into the Fort was so clumsy, that the crane tilted on uneven ground and 40 of the attackers were mown down in the open. During the army action in Kayts and Mandaitivu in August, the army was hardly resisted, though the people were prevented from fleeing to the mainland for safety. Left in total confusion, over 100 civilians were killed by the army which suffered no loss. 49 Eastern province LTTE cadre sent there with no knowledge of the terrain, committed suicide without seeing action.

While the Tigers were trying to explain away these drawbacks which had become part of a pattern, a parallel drama was being enacted with unerring efficiency by the special surveillance unit of the Tigers, answerable directly to the leader. Mails were tapped, people and their contacts were watched. Ex members of a defunct militant group in Karaveddy, who had even contemplated working with the Tigers after the Indian offensive, were picked up in early September and were tortured. Imagined signs of dissident activity, even Bible studies, were looked into. Considerable talent and resources in the form of mature cadre were

channelled into this activity - so much so that persons who had narrow escapes discovered that they had been trailed by parallel units which failed to exchange information. Even when the enemy was at the gates, they were taking no chances with their own people. It is clear that defending the people was not among the priorities of the group. Nor was fighting the enemy among them. They knew they could get power by frustrating any thing by anyone else.

In eliminating other movements, the Tigers also did away with the obligation to defend civilians. Every forum in which civilian concerns could be raised was also suppressed. When several groups operated before mid-1986, competition between them ensured that all tried to show a concern for civilians. The concept of bunkers and air-raid shelters was introduced and popularised by the PLOTE. It built one in front of Jaffna hospital with an alarm system to warn civilians to take cover when the Sri Lankan army started shelling from the Fort. This was widely admired.

Apart from other regular instances of deliberately endangering civilians, we take current patterns of deliberate institutionalised harassment of civilians. Following the July 1983 violence, many people flocked to Jaffna determined to make it a permanent home. But today people want to flee Jaffna on an unprecedented scale, signifying the alienation they feel towards the struggle.

The LTTE has responded by instituting a pass system with draconian conditions. In 1985 people gave gold voluntarily towards the militant cause. Why does gold have to be forced out of people through terror now? A family wanting to go to Colombo has to hand in the house keys. A family leaving for India has to hand over the title deeds as well as belongings such as bicycles. Extortionate transport charges were levied and safety and comfort in travel were deliberately jeopardised. The army was prepared to allow the use of the main road between Vavuniya and Elephant Pass. This was stopped by firing at the first few lorries to take the main road.

There was a massive exodus from Jaffna when the pass system was lifted for two days on 6th and 7th October. Those fleeing were abused through a loudspeaker at Mirusuvil, as cowards and traitors. It is ironical that those going from Jaffna to Colombo are called traitors, while they lucky ones able to make it from Colombo to Geneva, London or Toronto became patriots. They are actively canvassed to make life miserable for their fellows at home. If the same logic applied to those leaving Jaffna is strictly applied to the expatriates supporting the LTTE, the results would be far from flattering. In so many ways enormous pressure is being applied on people not to leave Jaffna - to what purpose? The whole concept of National Heroes week observed from 21st - 28th November is an instance of the indignity with which those in Jaffna are rewarded. The whole notion was ironical.

In the middle of a war of liberation, it is natural for liberation fighters to appeal to the people not to forget the sacrifice of the dead through leaflets and such like. Any elaborate commemoration is put off until victory. But here enormous resources have been spent at a time of hardship, and people have been forced to decorate and put up shrines while in a state of vulnerability and the enemy virtually at the gates. As predicted, the government which had learnt nothing over the years, fired from the air wherever signs of enforced festivity were visible.

On the final day, the LTTE ordered that all teachers and students, with women in red and yellow and men in white, should present themselves at school at mid-day. Students were

asked to monitor the teachers presence during the Heroe's Week celebrations. This piece of harassment had no value whatsoever, not even in terms of publicity. It was meant simply to give the population the message, "We order as we please, and you obey." A similar event took place during the first quarter of 1990. People were forced to decorate and observe for a month, the second death anniversary of Annai Poopathy of the Batticaloa mothers' front, who fasted to death. The order went out that coconut shoots in the pandals should be replaced with fresh ones every 3 days. At Tharmapuram, near Kilinochchi, the people failed to do this when their coconut trees failed to yield fresh shoots. A punishment was enforced in the form of a hartal.

Such deliberate callousness is motivated by the aim of rendering the people docile, by removing any sense of self respect and frustrating every normal human longing. By thus debasing humanity, a small community can pack enormous destructive energy that can frustrate powerful armies. But this society cannot do anything edifying for its own self. In the process of multiplying misery for itself as well as for others, it will commit suicide. It is like nuclear fission. In the process of releasing enormous destructive energy, the mass - the people - is destroyed!

#### **2.4 The Fate of Truth in an Orwellian World:**

One redeeming feature of the Sinhalese South is that despite the barbarity of burning bodies, the truth is hard to suppress. Still there is a variety of reading matter in circulation. Some diversity of opinion reaches the printed word. Questions are being raised and there is a healthy scepticism about the political leadership. Attempts to strengthen state patronage over religion and use it to cloak infamy can still elicit sharp rejoinders (Sunday Island, September) Pluralism still shows a capacity survive, although authoritarianism and terror bring about from the people the responses of cynicism and indifference, weakening the society and state as a whole.

Between the North and the South truth becomes a casualty in two different ways. In the South the credibility of the state is so low that people have a tendency to disbelieve what the government says. Among ordinary people in the South, there is still confusion about who massacred the Muslims in the East and who drove the Muslims out of Mannar. In this situation the plight of civilians in Jaffna is not difficult to imagine. On the one hand there are the broadcasts by the state which simply turn them off. There is no printed material coming from outside and no foreign news. There are only three Tamil newspapers printed locally, all directly or indirectly controlled by the Tigers. One of them, the Eelanathan, is the Tigers' official journal. Such is the high point of the struggle for freedom.

Yet a discerning reader could learn the truth from these more eloquently from these than from anywhere else. The massacre of Muslims by the Tigers was being denied angrily and strenuously by Tamil organisations abroad. According to Tamil ideology the Muslims were part of the Tamil nation and hence any killing of Muslims must be a serious affair. The killing of Tamil civilians by aerial bombing in Jaffna and the massacres of Tamils in the East were events that were regularly receiving front headline coverage. It was only natural that 'Uthayan' should have given the massacre of over 100 Muslims in the East on 3rd August, front headline coverage. The other two journals which are closer to the Tigers presented this incident as a small item. It was later learnt that the Uthayan was pulled up for his concern for the Tamil nation.

While the massacre of Muslims by the Tigers was being denied, the Eelanathan was publishing articles of such kind as would incite a reader to feel that physical harm done to Muslims could not be very wrong. In a closed intellectual world where people were forced to breathe the same poison they excreted, there was for the first time, growing talk that the Muslims were separate from the Tamils - something that Muslims had been saying all this time and people would not listen to. The path was being paved for the draconian expulsion of Muslims.

During the battle when Sri Lankan troops crossed from Mandaitivu (Leyden Island) and entered Jaffna Fort, a fighter plane flew seawards over the Fort and disappeared from sight. The Tigers did not know that it had plunged into the lagoon. The news was first given out over the Sri Lankan radio. The local Tiger news bulletins promptly claimed that they had shot down a fighter. The Tiger office in London then made a claim that they had shot down a fighter with a SAM 7 missile. The official version in Jaffna was changed accordingly.

The 'Eelanatham' gave Jaffna readers translations of excerpts from Ostrovsky's book on the Mossad, 'By Way of Deception'. It gave the portion where a Mossad agent speaking in front of Sri Lankan military officials in Hebrew referred to them as monkeys hardly off the trees, who needed to be given a banana and sent off. He had then shown them slides of the inside of a vacuum cleaner, saying that it represented an up to date sophisticated radar system. The paper failed to mention references to Mossad training given to the Tigers, and that as far as the Mossad was concerned, Tamils too were included in the monkeys just off the trees, all deserving of as much attention as their money warranted.

This silence is also revealing. For many years the Tigers have tried to present themselves as a liberation movement seeking contacts with such, the world over. Their propaganda has been laced with references to the Sandanistas, the Palestinian struggle, the ANC and so on. Moreover, their enemies and victims have been accused of being agents of the CIA and Mossad. This is the level at which the public is being informed.

Thus Tamils are forced to live in an atmosphere where there is no variety of opinion. No self examination. And crucial questions about their future are not raised. The atmosphere is demeaning of humanity and destructive of intelligence. Instead, people live on gossip and pointless speculation that substitute for factual reporting. Lawyers' courtroom tricks are used to disown Tamil responsibility by leading persons. Ingenious rationalisations are found for incidents such as the Kattankudy massacre - "Those who went to the Mosque as late as 8.30 p.m. could not have gone there to pray. They must have been plotting something." Or that "Muslims are leaving Jaffna because the government is paying them to do so". These are elements of a Tamil disease that has reached new proportions. This is the kind of atmosphere in which the Tigers' politics of collective suicide can thrive.

## **2.5 Role of the Tamil Intelligentsia:**

During the abortive peace earlier this year, many members of the Tamil intelligentsia living in the West and in Colombo flocked to conferences organised by the ROOTE (Research Organisation of Tamil Eelam) in London and Jaffna. ROOTE is an LTTE organisation which sought to co-opt this intelligentsia in its attempts at development. The meeting in London was opened by Kittu lighting the traditional lamp - a man who claimed to have killed dozens of civilians during his stint as Jaffna leader, and whose gruesome massacre of TELO members



remains a public scandal. These meetings came at a time of euphoria when it appeared on the surface that the Tigers would deliver the goods. Several of those attending these seminars were leading authorities in their scientific fields. They were also products of Jaffna's liberal English public school educational system, which reached its peak of success in the 50's and 60's.

Those who commented on attending these said basically the same thing in a self-righteous dismissive manner: "We are not interested in politics. we only want to contribute our share towards the development of our land." Strictly speaking this is not true. Quite often when military successes by the Tigers or the killing of a large number of Sri Lankan soldiers or Sinhalese appealed to their chauvinistic vanity or played to their hatreds, they readily applauded it. They had routinely made political judgements and had emotionally identified themselves with the Tigers.

But even through their hardened hearts they were dimly aware that things were not altogether right. They were uncomfortable with the Tigers having killed several members of the educated elite. A large number of able young men dedicated to Tamil freedom had met cruel fates at the hands of the Tigers. Over a thousand at that time were languishing in the Tigers' draconian prison system. Then there was the fate of very young children of the largely poorer classes being militarily mobilised - to which a blind eye was being turned. When members of the intelligentsia say that they are not interested in politics and want to join the festive euphoria occasionally spread out by the Tigers, it only means that they wish to indulge their vanity without taking their share of responsibility for this immense injustice and tragedy. The Tigers well understood this. Thus did the 'cream' of Tamil society become shameless camp followers to a cause that one day, when sanity is restored, Tamils will be manifestly ashamed of.

This phenomenon also underlines the emptiness of a society where the drive for education in the sense of social and material success was so great that any perspective of the totality of life was lost sight of. So much prestige was attached to routine research into minutiae, where the authors and their publications would be forgotten in 20 years, that there was an arrogant disdain of the common issues of ordinary life - like justice - that make up politics. Opinions are routinely given with such pompous arrogance on political issues, as if social prestige was a substitute for hard time consuming analytical thinking.

Once again the conduct of the intelligentsia in Jaffna was characterised by cowardice and opportunism, safeguarding themselves while endangering others. Some of them would go as volunteers to dig bunkers for the Tigers, an event to which much attention would be drawn. They would then spend a short time in a safe place and get back home. This would then serve as publicity to pull in others to work in really dangerous places. The members of the intelligentsia performing this service would receive privileges - such as immunity for their children from military tasks. Many of them had escorted their sons to Colombo while defending the use by the Tigers of less privileged children. While admitting that use of children is wrong in principle, they would add, "But this is the final battle!" While on the verge of completing immigration formalities to take themselves and their children away to Australia and Canada, they still continue to feed others with irresponsible lies about Muslims, dissidents and about the prospects awaiting those left behind.

Members of the intelligentsia at home could adduce reasons of survival, however selfish, to explain their behaviour. But for a sizeable section of those abroad, it is a matter of fighting

from a distance a bizarre battle, according to the dictates of their warped souls. They do not even want to know the consequences of what they are advocating. When it comes to home, leading Tamil expatriates in Western capitals practice rules of censorship which would have been an embarrassment even in Jaffna . When it came to their acts, the militant groups generally preferred silence to offending the intelligence of the local man. Among the worst offenders are some of the expatriate publications in English. They have obfuscated the stories behind several well known killings about which no one would attempt to fool the Jaffna man. They would have it that civilian refugees fleeing to India upon the Tigers assuming control early in 1990, were killed not by the Tigers or the Sri Lankan forces, but that they were victims of factional fighting in the TNA. The Muslims were not massacred by the Tigers, but by paramilitary units within the Sri Lankan forces. There is even an impressive network to coordinate the spread of lies. An allegation against the Tigers would bring the typical response, "Tell us the source, so that we can deny it." An editorial in the Tamil Times mildly suggesting that the June war was least wanted by the people and was imposed upon them, brought about an outraged response from some leading expatriate quarters.

While the propaganda machinery at home is managed unconvincingly, that abroad has several highly educated and able persons in it, who know how to succeed in the West and would spare no effort or expense to get their sons into the most prestigious Western universities. But what do they do to the sons of the soil at home? Some of them have doubts, but they want the recognition of being office bearers in the local Tamil Sangam. So they allow themselves to be used by a minority of active individuals. Some have changed political colours so many times that they are just cynical. A senior and articulate academic in North America would make inspiring speeches about the Tigers being our legitimate representatives. He would then confide privately that he spoke rubbish. A senior Tiger leader told a private audience that he knew that the expatriates were not serious, but that they would use them for propaganda purposes. A study of the expatriate intelligentsia, how they are manipulated by a mixture of fear and appeals to personal vanity, their insensitivity, would all reveal the workings of Jaffna society in the extreme without the benign, mitigating cultural influences at home, which still struggle to survive.

In contrast to the intelligentsia there are many Tamil refugees in the West, socially insignificant as they are, who have been through the struggle and make a genuine effort to understand what is happening. Unlike English journals, there are a number of Tamil journals published by these groups which raise questions and issues from the heart.

## **2.6 Dissent in Jaffna:**

The process of closing all formal fora for alternative opinion is now virtually complete, and there are few places where any intelligent discussion takes place. The lack of any desire to think seriously about the future and demand that there should be an alternative course to collective suicide, coincides with a very widespread practice by the literate (meaning a large section of Jaffna) to find alternatives to living in their homeland. Wherever one comes across groups in conversation, there is a dominant trend towards exchanging information on 'travel agents', how to get visas, the point system for Australian immigration and such like. Colombo is awash with Tamils going to travel agencies, embassies and communication centres. Overseas telephone calls have become a way of life in sharp contrast to a decade ago. It is between these preoccupations that people make casual political judgements. Though

individuals still take considerable risks to dissent, most observers are agreed that even in the jaws of disaster, there is little chance of any mass protest. The Tigers too recognise that while terror has its effect, the most potent mechanism for dampening dissent has been the ease with which the Jaffna man can go abroad. A significant number of the economic institutions left among Tamils concern this activity. The politics of the Tigers has meshed with this trend. This is why a person who goes to Colombo as a traitor becomes a patriot once abroad. Then the same shallow interest in the well being of their people and the habit of not analysing, would well suit the needs of the Tigers.

Under such conditions it is to be expected that much of the dissent is bound to be private, largely passive and confined to limited long term objectives. The bulk of these dissenters have one thing in common. They are conscientious persons with enormous courage, with a strong commitment to the people and the land. We take three broad categories.

One group consists of Hindus with a deep sense of their cultural roots, with a grounding in the ethical teachings of Indian sages, particularly Thiruvalluvar, and in the laws of nature based on karma. They would have a commitment and a sense of purpose in their work, but would not voice public dissent, though their feelings about the politics of the Tigers could be surprisingly strong and uncompromising. One example is a lady doing a very responsible job. Her outlook was moulded partly by observing her nephew, disillusioned but trapped in the organisation, who in his last days experienced the agonies of a wounded soul. She was once walking to work when she was told of the murder of a prominent person. Upon inquiry she was told that the killers were unknown. In keeping with the training of women of her generation, who would use Tamil to convey affection and intimacy, and English to sound authoritative, she responded sharply: "What do you mean you don't know? IT IS THE TIGERS!" She said nothing more and walked on looking grave. While responsibility for the killing was being obfuscated in expatriate circles, there was no fooling those with a strong instinctive feeling about Jaffna society. They were convinced that the choice was between this politics and the survival of the Tamil community.

Another in this category is a leading citizen faced with considerable risk as well as responsibility through all the recent military operations. He has stuck to his work in Jaffna with his family, rejecting all temptations to emigrate. His identification with the people is so close that he would freely and patiently attend to people who come to him for help at odd hours. For a number of years he did not express his personal opinions, but would answer questions about facts surrounding his experiences with clinical precision. He confided recently: "I have no illusions about what the Sri Lankan army would do if it came in to Jaffna. I may get killed. But that is a small thing. Unless this politics is destroyed, there is no hope." Unlike expatriate sentiments, such come from persons with a sacrificial commitment to the land and its common people!

The second group we consider is a sub category of Christians often at odds with the established church for trying to live and teach the Gospel. The established church in Jaffna is by some tests more compromised than the church in the South. Though the church in the South has been cowardly, it still provides some fora for open discussion. The Church in the North has not voiced itself on issues of traditional Christian concern, such as the militarisation of children. By leaving such matters to the ICRC and voicing itself only on Tamil grievances against the government, the established church may do more harm to the people than good. One or more leading functionaries of one denomination have been saying things like, "95% of the people support the Tigers. The rest are Sinhalese!"

Against this background conscientious Christians have had a difficult time - particularly those who believe that the Gospel demands the practice of non-violence. A young Roman Catholic clergyman in his parish ministry kept raising questions about what is going on and about his non-violent convictions. A tense situation developed when a section of the parish murmured, "The Bishops in the South are giving money to the president's National Defence Fund. Only our clergy want to talk non-violence." That is a pointer to the failure of the Church as a whole by actually endangering those who are conscientious about the teachings of Christ.

A senior colleague of this young clergyman recently addressed a mass rally as the guest of another parish. Calling for a self examination, he laid down five necessities. One called for a change of heart from the militants. The priest of the host parish became worried upon seeing some militant cadre in front of the church premises. In summarising the sermon, he gave a slight twist to the necessity mentioned - "May God bless the cause of the youth".

Addressing a group of students on social responsibility, a theologian raised the matter of killing Muslim civilians in the East. Talking to him later, a worried official of the institution let it slip that what mattered to them were not his ideas on social responsibility, but his academic credentials.

These person are a handful of individuals in the established church. Others of increasing significance are represented by the growing non-conformist and house churches. Though lacking material resources many of them have laboured with commitment and have advocated non-violence. Though not to the liking of the LTTE any more than of the established churches, open confrontation has so far been avoided. This is largely because they regard their primary task as preaching the Gospel. Though their activities may hamper support, they do not pose a direct threat to political power.

A very significant sector from which passive opposition springs is the hard working peasantry spread across many rural areas of the North and those in allied services. The heyday of their prosperity was during the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike. Since then their economy has been on a precarious footing, at the mercy of market forces, import policies and the security situation, all more unpredictable than the weather. For their survival they have a keen awareness of what is going on around them, decisions in Colombo, oil crises, all of which determine their decisions from month to month. A sudden influx of imported onions into Colombo would mean they have to decide whether to store or to sell at a loss. They also have a tradition of hard work. Such people question everything and are difficult to fool. If transportation that is crucial to their survival is blocked, they would know the politics behind it.

It is such persons who sheltered student leader Vimalswaran for a year in the heartland of Jaffna when the LTTE's writ was unchallenged. Without a political commitment from this class, dissidents on the run would not have stood chance. Not surprisingly some of the populist measures contemplated by the LTTE leadership during the interlude of peace were aimed at this class. These people know that as individuals they do not count. For tactical reasons they would bow to the LTTE and for their survival they would run errands for the LTTE at great risk. But in their minds they are clear that this politics will have to go. For them running risks is a way of life. One of them casually told a dissident he was sheltering, "The local LTTE area leader is coming to lunch. I will take you to another house and bring you back later."

The following episode gives an insight into their spirit. A young man trying to go to Colombo was turned back by LTTE sentries in the Wannu. The young sentry boys would only say, "No travel for the time being. Orders are orders. Don't think we are like the other groups." The young man went back a little and was wondering what to do, when an old Wannu farmer came that way. "In a spot of trouble aren't you? What, going back home? Can you make it?" said the old man, and waited musingly. The young man said that he had no choice. "Don't be stupid", said the old man, "Go through this lane. When you come to the end of it, there is a house. The woman there may shout at you. Ignore her and turn left into the paddy field. Go straight. When you get to the end, left again, and you will be back on the main road. Thereafter, no problem." The young man made it.

## **2.7 Influence of Government Policy & Southern Reactions:**

We have dealt with this matter in various places - particularly the nature of the military response and the general refusal to understand the problem of minorities. We shall briefly dwell on a related aspect. This is the suppression and stifling of any potential to provide an alternative to the dominant politics by Tamils themselves. We have maintained that a solution could only emerge through a politics where the human and democratic rights of all persons in this country are respected. For this to happen those Tamils who feel that they want to live in this country with the Sinhalese and Muslims and make legitimate demands for the well-being of their people, should be respected and their credibility upheld. What is happening now is the opposite. This again and again boosts up the Tigers as the only answer to this government.

An important manner in which this happens is when leaders of the local community are unable to make any impact on the torture and disappearance of thousands of detainees or to provide the community with any assurances. In the Batticaloa area over a hundred young persons picked up from refugee camps are unaccounted for. Peoples' representatives raising the matter are bullied and humiliated. In the Amparai District when the appearance of thirty odd headless bodies was reported in 'the Island', the inquiry took the form of intimidating leading local citizens to sign a denial. In the meantime the LTTE successfully ambushed an STF patrol in Panama. Whom would the people turn to for leadership under such conditions?

The use made by the government of Tamil groups is so counter productive as to actually add to the LTTE's prestige. A mature government genuinely wanting to expose the LTTE would have insisted that these groups show more spunk and fight for the interests of their people. Instead it has used their weapons to discredit them and add to their humiliation. MP's from these groups prefer to forget that they were militants with a cause. They are regularly taken on ministerial visits to the East and mostly observe a silence on the indignities being heaped on the people there by government forces. On a recent visit of a multi-party delegation, one representative of a militant group introduced himself to the Colonel as someone working closely with the Brigadier in some other area, whose conduct leaves much to be desired. Another member of the delegation asked the Colonel about missing persons. The Colonel replied casually, that such things must be expected to happen.

An elderly civilian who was recently appointed MP for the Batticaloa District, whose appointment the EPRLF publicly objected to, was the only person to question the Minister of Defence about persons taken from refugee camps and who were now missing. The army initially admitted taking over hundred and reduced the number to about 30 later. The Minister maintained that he cannot account for persons the army does not admit as having taken. The

elderly MP persisted on his demand for some time. But his younger ex-militant colleagues kept silent without supporting him.

At another meeting of an all party delegation with the Minister of Defence, the representative of a Left party complained about 30 or so Tamils who went to Amparai, were detained and about whom nothing more was heard until that time. The Minister asked sternly, "Are they your cadre?" On being told that they were ordinary civilians, the Minister replied, "If they are your cadre I will personally make some arrangement. Otherwise you have no business to ask."

Trincomalee is an area about which Tamils are very sensitive. Instead of trying to give Tamils confidence by handling it carefully, it is managed by a Brigadier responsible for several hundred disappearances. The Brigadier enjoys wide powers in this area where Tamils have numerically been the greatest sufferers over the years. We have commented on current rehabilitation efforts in [Report No.5](#). On a visit of the delegation above in October, they were taken to a multi-racial housing scheme sponsored by the NGO Sarvodaya. It turned out that though shramadana (volunteer) labour is provided by Tamils and Muslims, practically all the houses being built are for Sinhalese.

It was explained to them there that the Brigadier was a no-nonsense man who had brought all NGO's involved in rehabilitation under his control. On non-discriminatory principles, the Brigadier had decided on the allocation of Sarvodaya houses. First to the displaced persons of 1987, nearly all of whom just happened to be Sinhalese. Curiously the numerically much larger body of persons displaced in 1983-86 and 1990 are mostly all Tamils. This adds to our earlier insight about government policy in Trincomalee.

One Tamil group, the EPRLF, appears to have privately taken an independent stand on the goings on in Trincomalee, presumably using its connections with the Indian Government. Although there was no public protest from any Tamil group, there were angry references in the press on attempts being made to relocate Sinhalese. During the third week or so of October, some persons working for EPRLF MPs were abducted and evidently roughed up in Colombo. A complaint made to a very senior member of the government is said to have brought about the response: "There are forces outside the control of the government who are unhappy about the President talking to Tamil groups." During this period it is reported that EPRLF MP's felt rather intimidated about leaving Sravasti hostel and going to Parliament. Further inquiries revealed that the `force' concerned was a Tamil group well known to the EPRLF, and by no means outside the ambit of the government.

During the IPKF presence, the PLOTE kept its distance and preserved a measure of independence. In January, the Sri Lankan forces helped the LTTE to dislodge them from their stronghold in the Wannai. Following the outbreak of war in June the PLOTE succumbed to severe pressure to work with the forces - some of their cadre were knifed by soldiers in Kalmunai. Later PLOTE cadre were posted with Sri Lankan soldiers at sentry points in Vavuniya. For some time they tried to curb the indignities to which civilians were subject to by soldiers. But they lacked even the means to complain to a responsible person about the conduct of individual soldiers. In turn they became frustrated as people grumbled about PLOTE cadre in the same breath in which they complained about soldiers. Recently there have been a number of complaints about extortion by PLOTE cadre.

To make matters worse there is no move in the South to understand the "Tamil Problem." Numerous articles and editorials are appearing about politico-military approaches, and human

rights organisations questioning the treatment of Tamils are being attacked. But no one is asking what is happening to the Tamil community and the cost to the country of its destruction. What progress has been made in making the minorities feel part of the country? In fact despite Tamil being elevated to an official language, the position of the Tamils has worsened. Furthermore, as a general offshoot of insensitivity and repression there are vast segments of disenchantment. A very large number of these people outside the North-East who have not seen a Tiger in the flesh and know little about them except that they have seriously embarrassed the government, hail the Tigers as their vicarious avengers. This group includes Sinhalese and people like Malayali's from Kotahena who were victims of violence unleashed against Tamils in July 1983. Such is the alienation created by the government in many places, that subjective feelings about the Tigers override the key question - what it would mean to them if their own people adopt the politics of the Tigers?

Thus when an elder-statesman representing the Hill Country Tamils who has been a senior member of the government for over a dozen of years, asserts that the Tigers are the representatives of the people of the North-East, one needs to consider his own community's experience. He has a number of times been quoted privately as saying that the government would not give the Tamils anything voluntarily. Interestingly, his assertion came as a response to a question about the Muslim minority's position. (Sunday Times - 9.12.90). He cannot surely mean that Muslims should be part of the North-East in the same manner that his community is part of the South.

Once more it will hardly come as a surprise if, having strengthened and legitimised the Tigers to this point, the government would be overawed into taking them on as partners with sole control over the North-East.

## **2.8 The Government and the Tigers - A note on attitudes**

### **to politics:**

We concentrate on a salient feature that is informative. Despite the increasing repression and intolerance, the government, like others around the world, retains a capacity to appeal to its political rivals or even enemies, and use them when it can find a common cause or a question of common interest. Thus when this war broke out, the president summoned Tamil opposition groups and had talks with them. He could get even the SLFP which was challenging the legitimacy of his power, and together with other opposition groups, send them to India to sell the war. He could give regular, well-publicised, cordial receptions to Tamil delegations to defuse their complaints about the forces' conduct. He could summon an All Party Conference and sit with opponents, taking his own time evolving a political solution. Even media publicity given to the views of some of his critics, like the leader of the Tamil Congress, is tolerated. But like everywhere else, there is a price for going too far as recently the EPRLF and the SLMC discovered. In the West it may be telephone tapping or surveillance for the purpose of black mail, or, particularly in the US, a rigorous scrutiny of one's income tax returns. In this country, it could be a visit from forces "outside the government's control." The point is that such a relationship with opponents gives the government some options, including that of putting a good face on capitulation.

The Tigers, on the other hand, being the accredited leaders of a small community with few resources, lack the ability to use their opponents even in a crisis. In 1986 it demolished its rival groups in the middle of a war allowing the enemy to make a rapid advance. When some other militant leaders appealed to the LTTE to state its conditions for co-operation, these requests were ignored. When after the IPKF's arrival, a breakaway faction of the EPRLF reportedly sent an emissary to discuss peace with the Tigers, the emissary failed to reappear. Following the war with the IPKF, there was a division among former members of a defunct Left wing group with one faction wanting to do nothing and the other wanting to support the LTTE. Recently the LTTE has detained several tens of these person who were simply staying at home and they are unaccounted for.

Following the outbreak of the current war with the Sri Lankan forces, there was a mood among many ex-militants living abroad to work with the LTTE. News of the LTTE's repression at home put an end to this.

Why is it that a group like the LTTE in a strong position to be generous, and badly needing support, preferred to brutally spurn every opportunity for co-operation, and prefer instead desperate measures such as cannibalising the social fabric and plucking up children in large numbers to keep the show going? An important part of the answer is its use of the twin concepts of the sacred group and traitor to promote its appeal - a potent weapon inherited from the TULF and later used against it. The price paid was a spiralling cycle of repression, desperate measures and a resort to mysticism to explain setbacks, contradictions and somersaults. It is hardly surprising that any open discussion that would be the price of co-operation, is anathema to the LTTE. Take some of the links in history. The LTTE once tried to ingratiate itself with India by boasting with little subtlety that it had given India a foothold in this country. It went to war with India to avoid any power sharing. This was when the other groups became active with Indian Forces. Forced into a corner, the LTTE made a deal with the Sri Lankan government, purportedly because of whose perfidy it fought India, and helped the Sri Lankan forces to decimate its rivals. Now its rivals have been cornered into working with the Sri Lankan government. How does one sort out treachery and patriotism from this mess except by asserting a sacred prerogative?

This is given further substance by the fact that the LTTE has repeatedly shown a willingness to ignore its own rhetoric and sit and make deals with apparently sworn enemies. It made an appeal to India soon after the outbreak of war in 1987 and once more it calls for Indian recognition and talks of not accepting an international peace effort that circumvents India. Soon after hammering the TELO in 1986, it consorted with Sri Lankan army officers and cabinet members on television. Later it made a deal with President Premadasa on the basis of their common patriotic interest in keeping outsiders (namely Indians) out. Thus despite the rhetoric it was not serious about enemies without. But no quarter was given to any hint of dissent within. It was not seeking the right of Tamils to be an independent self respecting community, but was seeking a sub contract from the Indian and Sri Lankan governments to be given sole charge of Tamils. Its main enemy was the independent spirit of Tamil people themselves.

Another feature of Sri Lankan as well as international politics is that politicians authorise or even use accredited agents to do their dirty work and themselves keep aloof. These jobs are done by agencies for intelligence and subversion, special units within the police or by private goons in the pay of politicians. Thus President Premadasa could authorise his forces to do their stuff and himself visit the victims with beaming benevolence, paying his respects to



kovils and vihares to the whirr of TV cameras, talk about rehabilitation and issue orders for more supplies. While his forces are waging a brutal war against the LTTE or the JVP, he could on his own account call them for talks.

With the LTTE there is no separation between the military and the political arm. Even in such unjustifiable actions such as the expulsion of Muslims from the North, its political arm, the PFLT, was at the forefront. By contrast none of the Muslim parties talking to Tamil groups in Colombo have any visible connections with the Jihad or the Muslim home guards in the East. This is again indicative of the LTTE's nature. It is not that this makes the government morally superior. No disregard for human rights will work. But for the short term it gives a certain amount of flexibility to avert a precipitate plunge into disaster. When the cost is proving too high, the government retains the ability to sweep the dirty work under the carpet and shake hands with the enemy.

The LTTE by contrast has left itself no options to deal with the Muslims as a self respecting people. They are a very different category from Sinhalese colonists. The latter are essentially poor and exploited people settled in the East by well heeled promoters preferring the flesh pots of Colombo. They are not integrated communities with deep roots in the soil and who are articulate, having produced men of education and influence. They may be killed or driven out as refugees, and the government, if it proves expedient, could afford to drop them and let their grievances fester for decades. It is very different with the Muslims in the North-East. They know and feel that they belong to the region as much as the Tamils. They are integrated communities with deep roots. Their contribution to Tamil culture and scholarship is substantial. Further, a majority can afford to become tired and indifferent as is now symptomatic of the Sinhalese. They could cut their losses and there would still be much left to be rescued. It is very different for a minority - in particular for the Muslims of the North-East. What is worse, the Tigers have taught everyone with a grievance that to succeed easily against the likes of the government or themselves, they need to imitate their methods. Like Tamil dissidents, Muslims cannot be marginalised by branding them traitors. The Tigers forgot that like what Sinhalese governments did earlier, they too were dealing with a minority.

## **2.9 Indian Links:**

Shortly after the outbreak of the June war, some very senior Tiger leaders addressed a seminar at the University of Jaffna. A question was posed about the LTTE's foreign policy, particularly in relation to Mr. Karunanidhi - Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. A very high ranking LTTE personage made an audible impromptu blurt of something obscene in reference to Karunanidhi, comparing him unfavourably with Amirthalingam. Those near the front clearly heard the remark. This was quickly followed up by a political spokesman with something printable. The audience was thus given an insight into the cynicism and anger governing mutual relations between Tigers and their actual and aspiring Indian godfathers. On the surface it would appear that the Tigers have much to thank Karunanidhi for. Despite the fact that the Tigers kept Karunanidhi at a distance when MGR was alive, he had campaigned for the Tigers when Indian soldiers were dying fighting them, he deliberately slighted the Indian army, he was lenient, to say the least, with Tiger operations in Tamil Nadu and even faced widespread accusations over the killing of EPRLF leaders in Madras on 19th June.

Their relations with Subramaniam Swamy too show similar symptoms. Mr. Swamy has been quoted in the press to the effect that he had made the connection for the Tigers to train with

the Israeli Mossad, that does a thriving business in helping some of the worst governments to suppress both violent and non-violent liberation movements. The cause of his present disillusionment with the LTTE is attributed by him, on the face of it, to personal displeasure with Balasingam of the LTTE. It is in the nature of these politicians to pick up something and drop it on mere fancy. The level of their sense of responsibility is such that the fate of a whole people may hinge on their moods and on personal considerations. The LTTE too may not be able to understand that these individuals do not have the capacity to do everything it requires of them. To the LTTE, they are tools to the goal of an agreement with Delhi - not for influence in India but for Delhi's seal on a sub-contract giving the Tigers exclusive rights over the fate of Tamils in the North-East.

The opportunism of Indian politicians who play with such phenomena and strengthen them without the sense of responsibility to understand what it is all about, can cost India dearly. As it is, the Tigers have an image far in excess of their material strength - What is after all left of Ceylon Tamil society? Its apparent success will inspire groups with grievances to imitate its methods. Perhaps after the phenomenon collapses - if only out of sheer material exhaustion - some future Indian artists would represent goddess Kali with the face of a Tigress.

India still appears to view the Tamil problem exclusively in terms of its foreign policy aims. It is yet to understand what is happening to the Tamils and take responsibility for past mishandling. Apart from the needless suffering caused to civilians, it has not admitted responsibility for the cruel fate suffered by TNA conscripts and the fact that arms left behind by India were used in the massacres of Muslim civilians. Until there is a change, there will be more tragedies - both here and in India.

Those in the South who spend too much time accusing India of foul play, should face up to the fact that it was July 1983 that opened the floodgates for this ugly episode. If they would only actively face up to their responsibility - which they have consistently failed to do - there will be no room for Indian interference. They cannot bomb civilians and slaughter by the thousands and think realistically that nothing would move in India. They fail to understand that they do not have the same choices and influence as in 1956.

## **2.10 Why did the Tamil Intellectuals Fail?**

In closing we present the views of a young man who was an active member of the militant cause half a dozen of years ago. He is not an academic, but through the hard school of life he has earned highly enviable skills that would have made him a millionaire in the West in no time. But he remains in the country because of a strong emotional and political commitment. Being fluent in all three languages, he roams the country in various guises, active now in human rights work. We present his views as something seldom heard and extremely valuable in understanding the crisis:

"A large number of Tamils are in a state of despair, sitting helplessly at what may be the threshold of their final doom. Apart from the vindictive havoc brought about by the Sri Lankan forces, there is internal repression which does not allow us space even to re-evaluate. I blame the Tamil intellectuals for this state of affairs. Today they wring their hands and say what could we have done when our lives were threatened? Was this always true? The signs were there a decade ago and the intellectuals could have checked it.

"The massacre of over a hundred and fifty Sinhalese, including women and children, at Anuradhapura in May 1985, was a crime that blackened the name of the militant cause by bringing it down to the level of the Sri Lankan forces. Again the intellectuals say that they were either unwilling or scared to condemn it. Then there is the other dishonest line that we had frequently heard from intellectuals: "Don't criticise them openly. After all they risk their lives. Tell them privately, they will listen." It is a fact that a large number from all groups gave their lives. But what is happening today is an insult to all of them. I know from a friend who was close to Das of the TELO, that when the Indian RAW approached him about carrying out the Anuradhapura massacre, he was horrified. The LTTE agreed at least partly because it wanted to endear itself to the RAW, above the TELO. When we look back at how the LTTE had worked, how it systematically and patiently targeted individuals who were a challenge to it, it had a very clear mind where its priorities were concerned. Its record in this respect is far more impressive than its military one.

"Yet again and again many intellectuals have seen the whole Tamil cause as banking on this organisation, repeatedly trying to polish the surface of what was rotten within, and at the same time giving an intellectual polish to their cowardice. A key reason why they did not see an alternative to the LTTE stemmed from the psychology of their class. There were healthy attempts at alternatives to the LTTE, but the intellectuals refused to see them and thus weakened them. If these attempts had been supported, the fate of the Tamils would have been different.

"Take the EPRLF for instance, which had started showing symptoms of rot by 1984. In 1985 two EPRLF men shot dead a psychiatric patient in Chunnakam. There was a public protest backed by the LTTE. This was amongst the exceptionally few killings for which the EPRLF was responsible before the Accord. The EPRLF agreed to inquire into the incident and punish the culprits. The heads of the culprits were shaven and they were tied to posts publicly at the Chunnakam market. They were removed only when the LTTE instigated the crowd to stone them. Has the LTTE ever admitted a mistake or held a public inquiry into a complaint against itself? When the TELO was inhumanly decimated and the intellectuals were silent, the EPRLF organised a public protest. One was always able to walk into an EPRLF camp, say anything about them and walk out in one piece. Until the time they were banned, they did keep a space open for the public to protest. But the intellectuals largely despised them, seeing them through spectacles coloured by caste and class.

"But this was not the case with ordinary common people who have throughout shown a sense of decency and displayed guts. I need not repeat the many incidents where ordinary people collectively and individually refused to bow down to oppression. This, despite the fact that there was no one to protect them. At the end of 1986 when the LTTE had launched a hunt for EPRLF members on the run, a friend of mine in a village in Jaffna whom I was visiting, was asked about me. My friend told the questioner the truth, that I never had any connection. Another LTTE member stepped in and slammed my friend in the face, causing him to fall. He got up and went home bleeding from the mouth. Later he went to the bank and cleared all his savings. He gave it all to me and told me to get his family out of there if anything happened to him. He then went to the local LTTE camp, pushed the sentries aside and walked in. He then beat two others who came to stop him. Next he caught the person who had assaulted him, slammed him against the wall and beat him. He then told the LTTE men that he had been born in that village and that he would continue to live there. He did that and the LTTE did not touch him. The LTTE was often afraid of such determination. What was he after all? - an

ordinary son of the soil. Our intellectuals never measured up to such levels. My friend is abroad now."

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EXPULSION AND EXPROPRIATION OF MUSLIMS IN THE NORTH

#### [3.1 Early Signs:](#)

#### [3.2 Chavakacheri:](#)

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#### **3.1 Early Signs:**

If this particular episode has any historical parallels, one may be the treatment of Jews in Germany during the interval separating Hitler's accession to power and the outbreak of war in 1939. During this period of rising harassment and intimidation, large numbers of Jews, Albert Einstein among them, left everything they had and left Germany for good. Why did the politics of Tamil liberation have to take such a course? We have seen that once the politics was on the course of defying ground realities, it deepened divisions, created hatreds and fears. Then these in turn came in handy for mobilisation of support. The use of caste, subtle though it is, is there. But has not been made a part of political discourse. Although the LTTE has a large number of recruits from the lower castes, as it once had many Muslims, many high caste Tamils would condone measures against EPRLF supporters on the presumption that they are low caste. In recent months about a dozen and a half Tamil households from Chavakacheri have been reportedly taken into custody after expropriation. Such moves of collective action without reference to norms of justice, had moved the struggle into a new league of depravity, and perversion.

Where the Est was concerned, there was a conflict of interests between Muslims and Tamils, but at a manageable level. The chain of events involving the LTTE's antipathy to Muslim political groupings, the massacre of Muslim policemen and the government's use of Muslim home guards, the LTTE's massacre of Muslim passengers at Kurukkal Madam, counter massacres by home guards on government instigation and so on, led to a total breakdown of communal relations in the East. Like the government in the South, the LTTE in the North, gave its one sided presentation of developments. It became an unspoken cliché that Muslims were traitors. A number of intellectuals and the printed word began to break a 35 year old tradition which categorised Muslims as part of the Tamil speaking nation. Now they began to say that Muslims were different.

But in every way Muslims and Tamils in the North had been traditionally totally integrated into local life as interdependent communities. There were Muslim traders, tailors, iron mongers, labourers and scholars. More recently, several of them took to farming in the Killinochchi area. As part of the arena of culture and scholarship, Muslims formed an important component of the University of Jaffna. There was no conflict at all. Jaffna, once bereft of its Sinhalese, and now of its Muslims, would indeed be a poor sort of place. It may be added, that, businessmen being as sharp as they are, several Muslim businessmen, like several of their Tamil counterparts, had read the signs years ago, and were in the process of shifting capital to the South. This does not apply to small traders and poorer Muslims.

### **3.2 Chavakacheri:**

The fact that the first incidents began at Chavakacheri is also connected with the LTTE boosting its presence and facilities in a big way in Thenmaratchi. Military dispositions had also been prepared ostensibly to abandon Valikamam if the government forces made a serious thrust. The social environment was also relatively more conducive to the mobilisation of vigilantes. The expulsion of entire families connected with EPRLF persons is also significant.

On 4th September, vigilantes beat up Muslims worshippers inside the Chavakacheri Mosque. The vigilantes were handed over by Muslims to the local LTTE camp. Some elders called for an inquiry. The elders were reportedly told, "You are a minority. Those who beat you up are from the majority community. It is therefore not appropriate for us to take action against them." Such thinking suggests that many of the present cadre do not know the history of anti-Tamil violence since 1958. The incident was not reported in the media.

By the end of September, the Muslims in Chavakacheri were warned that they should be prepared for an expulsion order. Following the end of the first week in October, a very senior LTTE leader visited Vakarai in the Batticaloa district in the East where anti-Muslim feeling was rife following recent incidents. This strongly suggests that the LTTE regarded some major action against Muslims as a means of regaining its tattered credibility in the East. On 15th October, Muslims in Chavakacheri were asked to leave the peninsula. They were forced out without being able to carry hard earned valuable items such as fridges and fans. The following report was given by sources from that area:

"The Muslims' houses were looted and ransacked and they were treated in the most brutal manner. In effect, the liberators behaved like an invading army on the binge. The LTTE cadre pocketed whatever article, such as scent bottles, that they could pocket. In one house, the bridal attire (kooari) of a young lady, married on 30th June, was removed. The owners had been asked to vacate their houses, leaving the woman of the house in charge when the LTTE came to take the inventory. One man had taken his wife leaving a 60 year old lady behind. When asked, he replied, 'Since they are behaving like an invading army, like the IPKF and the Sri Lankan army, there is no guarantee that my wife would be safe'."

### **3.3 Mannar, 21st - 28th October:**

The accounts given in this section and the next have been pieced together from Tamil sources in Jaffna and Mannar, and Muslim refugees now in the South.

In order to carry out this 'operation' which the LTTE has understandably been silent about, it drew on some imperial traditions. LTTE cadre from the East with anti-Muslim feelings, who had been involved in massacres of Muslims, were inducted into the North. Local leaders without reason or feeling to make a distinction between Muslims and Tamils were puzzled and sometimes disturbed, but were ordered to co-operate. In Mannar Muslim iron- mongers and craftsmen had even manufactured weapons for the LTTE.

Shortly after cadre from Karikalan's Eastern group had been inducted into Mannar, they pounced upon the Muslim village at Erukkalampiddy at 11.00 p.m. on 21st October. It is reported that about 300 cadre took part in the operation. 70% of the 1200 households were robbed of mainly cash and jewellery, and were also threatened.

Fathima Umaloo was a widow of 29 with a baby, who earned a living pounding rice flour and fetching firewood. Much of her capital consisted of a 1 1/2 sovereign gold chain. This was plucked off her.

Proctor Saburdeen was a leading local citizen, whose brother was present when the LTTE arrived. The house had some cases of electrical items, left there for safety by Tamils in preparation for the Sri Lankan army's long expected arrival. The brother not knowing this, denied having electrical items. After searching, an LTTE man placed a pistol over his head and fired. In a state of shock, the brother helped them to all they wanted.

C.S.Suleyman and sons, a trader in electrical items, had cleared his shop in preparation for the Sri Lankan army's arrival and had stored his goods at his son-in-law's at Erukkalampiddy. After the LTTE's operation, he started distributing his goods free to locals. On receiving intelligence of this, the LTTE warned him to get the things back by 5.00 p.m. on the 24th.

On the 24th at 4.00 p.m, the LTTE made a public announcement by loud-speaker: "All Muslims living in Mannar island should leave by 28th October. Before leaving, they must seek permission and clearance at the LTTE Office. The LTTE will decide their exit route."

Most Tamils were utterly disturbed by this. A meeting of local citizens was arranged for the 25th morning. The Bishop who was at Madhu could not come. Those who met included Roman Catholic clergy, officials from Save the Children Fund, Christian laymen and other leading citizens. Following the meeting at MARR centre, a delegation went to see the local LTTE leader Suresh (former student, Univ. of Jaffna) and asked for the order to be rescinded. Suresh explained that it is an order from the hierarchy and it was beyond his control. A Jaffna citizen who was there started faltering, saying that if the leadership had decided, then they must leave it. But some of the Roman Catholic clergy in particular pressed the matter, demanding that if he was not in control, then to reveal who was in control. Suresh replied that the Mannar group was not involved, but the Batticaloa group was in charge. The clergy demanded that he should arrange a meeting for them with whoever can make a decision and argued why the expulsion was unacceptable. Suresh finally said, "The decision is unalterable, because it is a prophetic decision by the leader himself." This, he said, they would understand in the fullness of time. However, he promised a reprieve of the order for two days for further consultations. The delegation immediately went to the Mosque at Erukkalampiddy, and asked the Muslims to stay put.

The LTTE was placed in an awkward position with Tamils confronting its order to the Muslims. But the LTTE was not short of tricks up its sleeve. The LTTE pounced on

Erukkalampiddy for the second time on the 26th night, and robbed it of goods which were this time conveniently packed up. After day break, the Muslims told Fr.Croos that after this second time they could not possibly stay, adding that these chaps who had killed in the East were merely asking them to go. They may as well thankfully go with their lives intact. Fr.Croos approached the LTTE again and obtained an extension until 2nd November. Ironically, a good proportion of the goods looted by the LTTE were goods left by Tamils with Muslim friends for safety, in anticipation of looting by the Sri Lankan army. Each Muslim family was allowed to take one sovereign of gold, Rs.2,000/- cash and five travel bags per family. Printed forms were given for clearance.

On 28th October, the Tigers sealed Erukkalampiddy village and Tamils were forbidden to go into the Muslim area. All dealings with Muslims were banned. Tamils were allowed to remove their own goods only with permission. A boy, who had removed his family's goods given for safe-keeping, was badly assaulted the previous day. He had first been stopped and asked to go to the LTTE camp. Instead he thought of taking the cart home and going to the camp later.

The Muslims from Puthukudiruppu, Tharapuram, Uppukulam and Erukkalampiddy were taken to the beach at a place near Erukkalampiddy known as 'Five Coconut Trees', and were left there until they could find boats. They had to spend nights in the open in rainy weather with no conveniences and no boutique to obtain food and water. On the 28th the MARR (Mannar Association for Refugee Rehabilitation) purchased all the bread baked in Mannar and obtained the LTTE's permission to take bread and water to the Muslims. Over three days, the Muslims made their exit to Kalpitiya, 60 miles South, by sea. Boats owned by Muslim fishermen in Mannar and Kalpitiya were used. The journey was often hazardous in crowded boats. There was at least one case of a parent numbed by cold, dropping a child into the sea and not knowing it for some time. To the old and the sickly, who had not known any place in the world, but Mannar island, the emotional and physical strain of the removal may prove fatal.

On the mainland of Mannar, which included centres with large Muslim populations such as Vidathalthivu, Adampan, Mullikulam, Vaddakandal, Periyamadu, Parappankandal and Murunkan, an announcement was made on the 25th that Muslims should surrender all their vehicles, fuel, electrical items and bicycles at the local Mosque or school. The following day, 26th, they were asked to register at the local LTTE Office and leave, using travel arrangements provided by the LTTE. They were first taken to Madhu, where they were checked. They were next checked thoroughly at Pandivirichchan. Cash and jewellery above what was permitted was removed and receipts were issued. The next check at Vavuniya amounted to further robbery. LTTE cadre arbitrarily removed what they wished - cash, jewellery and even thermos flasks. Many Muslims were stranded in Vavuniya with nowhere to go. Many who had places to go to, did not have the cash to pay their train fare.

### **3.4 Jaffna, 30th October:**

On 30th morning at 7.30 a.m. a loud speaker announcement called upon all Muslims to assemble at Osmania stadium. This they did in a state of puzzlement. The meeting was addressed by LTTE leaders Karikalan and Anjaneyar. Karikalan had been in charge of Batticaloa operations. Karikalan told them that all Muslims would have to leave Jaffna. They can go to their so-called leader Ashraff, he said, who would provide them with food and shelter in the Amparai or Batticaloa districts. They were told that no harm would be done to

them as Muslims in the East had done to Tamils through looting, killing and rape. Their lives were being given to them as a beggarly portion, he added. Finally, they were given two hours to leave. They were informed that all their possessions were earned in Tamil Eelam, and were given the concession of taking along Rs.500/- and perhaps a sovereign of gold. They were released at 10.00 a.m.

The reasoning closely paralleled the justifications given for the July 1983 violence against Tamils in general. The LTTE leaders spoke in the same threatening vein that several government ministers did at that time. These LTTE leaders may not know Tamil history. But they had an unerring instinct for what was required on such occasions.

The Muslims were dumbfounded and were too shaken to decide in two hours what to take and what not to. Tamil friends and neighbours who too were very upset and attempted to go to the Muslims were prevented. At 12.00 p.m. Muslims were to report to check points at Manohara Theatre, Oddumadam and Five Junction, with a few others. Many were checked at their homes before they left. At Manohara the men were asked to park their bicycles on the other side of the road and were checked on the road itself. The woman were taken inside to be examined by female cadre. The treatment was humiliating and the looters behaved as though people retaining their meagre hard earned possessions were criminals. One woman was made to remove her brassiers and part with jewellery hidden inside. One Tigress started removing the ear studs of a Muslim girl. Losing patience after removing one, she pulled the other, leaving the girl with a torn, bleeding ear. Documents removed from people included their property deeds as well as Janasakthi (Janasaivya) documents. Some female cadre crowed triumphantly that the Muslims were being taught a lesson for not contributing the two sovereigns of gold asked for earlier. This was why, they said, they had cleverly given them only two hours notice.

A tailor from Five Junction who had shops in Urumpirai, Chunnakam and Pt.Pedro, has lost all his capital and has six children to mind. When the exodus was about to begin, his family was already in a van and he arranged some things on the hood before getting in. He was pushed out by an LTTE cadre despite his pleas and was asked to wait for another vehicle. He got into a lorry at 9.00 p.m. He landed in a refugee camp in Colombo. By the end of two weeks, he had obtained no information about his family.

Thameema (37), wife of Namlan (49), is mentally depressed and is being given medical attention. During the final check Rs.25,000/- worth of cash and jewels which they had hidden was robbed. Thameema's friend and neighbour Asia (37) died of grief during the journey. Asia's body was interred in Colombo. Members of the Muslim community also complained that some of their young were beaten on suspicion and were detained.

According to Muslim sources 15 Muslims from Jaffna, 3 from Chavakacheri and 10 from Mannar were detained for ransom payments totalling several tens of million rupees. Amongst Muslims detained were Mubeen, big businessman and former UNP organiser from Jaffna, Sultan from Chavakacheri, Subraan (Jamalthees Nabi), an Islamic leader, (Sinna) Thaheer, tailor and Teliz.

Mubeen's wife once pleaded with the LTTE to show her husband once. She was asked to sell their capital in Colombo and produce Rs.10 million.

### **3.5 General Reactions & Future Prospects:**



Throughout this entire operation Muslims underwent a great deal of anxiety. Communications were so bad that Muslims in one area did not know what was happening to those in others. Muslims in Jaffna did not know what was happening to those in Mannar and those on Mannar island had no communication with those on the mainland. 46% of the population in Mannar District (Total: About 150,000) was Muslim. Their anxieties began when anti-Muslim press articles started appearing. Then a Muslim businessman in Chavakacheri was victimised and a story was spread that he was giving information through a walkie talkie. Except for the vigilantes and their admirers, people were sceptical. The Muslims had also paid little attention to happenings in the East. They had next to no connections with the Muslims in the East. Some said, "We have never seen them nor had married among them". To think of Northern Muslims as supporters of Ashraff's SLMC was sheer paranoia on the LTTE's part. The SLMC's politics offered no attractions to the Northern Muslims, just as the politics of Tamil Eelam offered nothing to the Hill country Tamils and even the Eastern Tamils had grave practical doubts. The Northern Muslims had never evinced a desire to be politically active, or to challenge Tamil nationalism. It is said that when a Muslim was MP for Mannar, he was very cordial with the Tamils and understandably did a lot to enhance Muslim trade - his main concern. The LTTE's paranoia parallels that of the government which encouraged massive violence against Hill Country Tamils in 1983 for something that happened in Jaffna. Amongst the Muslim communities expelled was one in Vattakachchi, that was involved in agriculture, rather than trade.

During this operation the Northern Muslims were left in no doubt about who was responsible for the massacres of Muslims in the East. This was used to threaten them both implicitly as well as explicitly. The importance of Karikalan's boys in the first move itself had a macabre message. The mood among expelled Muslims ranges from resignation to extreme bitterness. Some say, "We must be thankful that our lives were spared." The bulk of them feel very upset at the thought they were fully integrated into the life of the North and had lived beside Tamils and then, this had happened to them. Some feel a sense of satisfaction that their Tamil neighbours had largely stood by them. Others nurse bitterness against Tamil civilians whom they feel were only too glad of an opportunity to rob their property - similar to some Muslim sections backing the actions of Muslim home guards in the East.

It is now inevitable that Muslims of the North will become politicised even if interests are too divergent for them to find common cause with Eastern Muslims. Nearly all of them want the Sri Lankan army to over run the North. If the army is in occupation, sheer economic need may impel them to go back to their homes. Though provenly a disaster, the idea of Muslim home guards is already being sold to the Mannar Muslims. The television showed the Minister of Islamic Affairs telling the home guard recruits, "The security forces have problems, such as language, when they operate there. So you must help them." The risk for the Eastern cycle repeating itself in the North must now be taken seriously. If that happens there will be much bloodshed in areas such as Mannar.

Even if it is indifferent to human suffering, why did the LTTE choose such a course? The short answer is that in its experience it has nothing to lose by such a move, although the Tamils would have lost by turning Muslims from friends into sworn enemies. How the government has and would use such a cleavage is predictable. This, the LTTE too would welcome. More civilian frustration would mean more support and more recruits. That is the nature of the politics which must compensate for its unsoundness by fracturing society and making some sections more dependent on it. The motive of robbery too would have weighed critically in these proceedings. Kidnapping, ransom, taxation and activities of such ilk have

been a major part of the LTTE's thrust from the time that the IPKF's departure was imminent. Earlier, it had the, often active, support of the government. The manner in which the Sri Lankan government is handling the current situation, may drive all the communities in the North-East to look back on the days of the IPKF presence, as by comparison, halcyon days, with all its attendant consequences.

To Tamils with their religious sensibilities, shuttered dwellings emptied of living souls and silent Mosques that no longer make their calls to prayer, remain a haunting presence, boding some future ill.

Late Addition: According to Muslim refugee sources, their elders are extremely worried about large numbers of their sons going for training in the use of arms. They describe this trend as unstoppable as it was with Tamil youth in the wake of July 1983. They have no illusions about where it will lead to. Many of them reportedly have expressed a willingness to talk to the LTTE if there is some prospect of a compromise that will halt this trend.

These sources are not clear about who is responsible for the training. The government which is far from happy about independent Muslim political groupings would certainly not encourage any armed activity by Muslims outside home guard units and the armed forces.

## **CHAPTER 4**

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#### **4.1: OPERATION SANTA CLAUS, MANNAR - October 21-November 8th.**

The onset of the season of give and take appears to have induced the two sides to participate in a combined operation in Mannar island. This was an operation conducted with shopping lists rather than with hit lists. All shoppers were looking for electrical items, jewellery, sarees, motor cycles and bicycles - the minimal necessities of life that have become luxuries in this country. By common understanding, both sides used the currency of the North-East - not Rupees, but Grabits.

As the first part of the operation, the LTTE looted the Muslims from 21st - 28th October [See Chapter 3]. the Tamils who were heart broken at seeing what happened to the Muslims, soon turned their thoughts to the other group of shoppers, whose arrival was now inevitable. The coastal area was bombarded from air and sea in preparation for the landing, on 1st November. One civilian was killed as the result of this. The LTTE which was itself preparing to leave without waiting to welcome the new arrivals, advised those in town to move towards Sunny Village. A group of civilians on the way to Sunny Village met another group coming from Sunny Village who said that they were coming because the army was going to land there. Both groups stood in confusion in the soaking rain near the hospital, where they had met. Then others came and warned them sternly not to loiter about as the army was coming, and to get into churches and schools.

The army arrived and there were no further civilian casualties. The refugees stayed in their camps for a week. When they got home they found practically every house ransacked with valuable items removed. Items removed included stationary, presumably to inform those at home about the progress of the shopping. Ladies who had Kanchipuram sarees not fashionable in the South, discovered to their happiness that they had a change of clothes. Some were lucky enough to get back their bicycles and motor cycles. The rest of the shopping was shipped to the South. In the end there was some season's cheer all round. The Muslim and Tamil residents could say, "We are thankful that they spared our lives." The others had the goodies.

By the end of November no food relief had been brought into Mannar. Quite appropriately, the population had to ply their tummies with drum-sticks (murungaikkai) - the only fruit or vegetable available in Mannar, besides coconuts.

As things quietened down, a young lady approached a young army officer to obtain permission to travel to Colombo. The officer, in a public relations mood, inquired after her well-being and asked if she was pleased that the operation had been conducted without any loss of life,. The young lady reminded him that the population were now paupers and refugees without even a change of clothes. Feeling embarrassed the officer patiently explained: "You see, I am from a good family whose name is renowned in national sports. Stealing is neither a part of my nature nor upbringing. The first group of soldiers we send on an operation like this are thugs. We are mindful that they may not come back. So we do not place too many restrictions on them. We just tell them to avoid killing civilians. That is the best we could do. If you have any problem, now, do tell us. We will take immediate action." The officer also informed the lady that 60 swords were recovered from the LTTE office and asked why a liberation group needed swords.

One does feel sorry for the hopeless plight of such officers. The bankruptcy of both parties is such that to fight this war, each is using sections of its society that are cornered and have few options in life. The LTTE is using children from among the Tamil poor, and the government is using the poor state of the economy to get its recruits. But there is an important difference. After decades of bungling and brutality, the government's task is that much harder and requires character, patience and wisdom. The LTTE is uncertain about its ends, but is very clear about its tactics. Against such clarity attended by the expected success, if the government can only send in this kind of an army, the future of those like the young officer is unenviable. Judging by press reports, there are rumblings within the army.

Looting being an officially sanctioned pattern of army activity is now clearly established. [See our earlier reports]. When the question of compensation for civilian survivors comes up, where will the money come from? From the national defence budget, from the President's National Defence Fund, or will it be put before the Paris aid group meeting in October 1991?

#### **4.2 Feeding the Fishes:**

Following the operation in Mannar island (See 4.1) one ship bringing looted goods and already unloaded in Colombo, when a second was on its way in early November. A radio message was received conveying an order from the defence authorities not to bring any more loot into port. Two motor cars, four motor cycles and several bags were then dumped into the sea. Many of the bags were seen floating for a long time.

#### **4.3 Headless bodies in the East:**

We drew attention to this phenomenon which transpired in the Amparai District during late September and early October. The Island of 1.11.90 carried a report obtained independently in its front page. There was a sharp reaction from the Minister of Defence who claimed that he had ordered an inquiry. The result of the inquiry was a denial couched in threatening tones in a Defence Ministry broadcast over news bulletins and published in the Sunday Observer of 4th November. All relevant press cuttings are given below:

["The Island" 1st November 1990]

Headless bodies washed ashore  
From our Ampara Corr.

A number of headless bodies of adult males have been washed ashore in Akkaraipattu and Tirukovil recently.

It appears that the necks have been cut with some guillotine type machine, as the cut appears very fine and smooth which is not possible with any sword.

Fifty-year old Mrs.Periyathamby Marimuthu of Vinayagapuram identified one of the bodies washed ashore as one resembling that of her son called Rejendiran alias Raju aged 19. According to eye-witness about 32 such bodies had been washed ashore and "the Island" understands that inquests were not held into these killings.

Whenever a body is washed ashore, the people living in the locality bury it on the beach itself. They explained that the law is dead in this area, and there is no person in authority to entertain such complaints.

["The Island" 2nd November]

How does 'The Island' get reports before me? asks Ranjan

Plantation Industries Minister and State Minister for Defence, Ranjan Wijeratne said yesterday that 'The Island' in its 'verbatim report' of last week's Cabinet, news conference had given an accurate version of what he told journalists in reply to a question why the security forces did not take action to prevent the LTTE from holding a meeting at Valvettuturai. "I said that it could not be done because of the lack of initiative on the part of the forces. The "Daily News" reported it as "lack of ammunition". "The Island" had it correctly. They give a verbatim report. The "Daily News" put me in a mess. It let me down. "The Island" report was accurate.... it gave it verbatim", the Minister said.

When Mr.Wijeratne was asked at yesterday's Cabinet Press briefing about "The Island" report of 30 headless bodies being in Akkaraipattu, the Minister replied, "How is it that "The Island" gets it before I do?" He directed Defence Secretary, Gen. Cyril Ranatunge, who was present at the conference, to make a note of that and submit a report.

Investigations conducted revealed that newspaper reports which appeared on 1st Nov. 1990 to the effect that a number of headless bodies of adult males were washed ashore in Akkaraipattu were found to be not, only baseless, but also false and mischievous. The Asst.Govt. Agent of Thambiluvil and Tirukkovil has denied the discovery of any bodies with or without heads. He stated that the Grama Niladari for Vinayagapuram reported that there were no such bodies as reported in the media. The citizens committee for Peace and National harmony, Akkaraipattu South and Thambiluvil state that they were not aware of any such incident. The President of the Federation of Akkaraipattu Mosques found no truth in the allegation.

The manner of the inquiry is a comment on the state of law and of the judicial process in this country. What happened? As was to be expected, a local security forces official approached

leading local citizens and demanded a statement of denial. According to our information, a letter was given to the effect, saying truthfully, that the said number of headless bodies did not appear on any one day. The official came back later saying that he was not satisfied. A second letter was then given.

#### **4.4 Massacres in the Amparai District:**

On 24th January 1991, the Colombo press broke the news of 27 Sinhalese peasants massacred by the LTTE in Maha Oya. The contingent of security forces and home guards guarding a village in the area had apparently left when they were fired upon. The dead consisting 15 children, 7 woman and five men, were buried in a single grave the following day.

'The Island' said in an editorial comment: "The savage massacre of hapless civilians .... brings into question that infamous organisation's claims to be fighting for rights or freedoms of any kind ....these horrific killings in Maha Oya can only be interpreted as an attempt to fan the flames of ethnic hostility to even fiercer temperatures...."

The Island and the Colombo press, not through ignorance, missed out important elements in the tragedy. Both the government and the LTTE have been involved in shows of strength through a series of massacres of civilians. We follow from where we left off in earlier reports.

During the second week of December 1990, the LTTE ambushed an STF vehicle in Panama killing 7 STF men in the first incident of that kind in the STF controlled area. The STF was then escorting Sinhalese students for O.Level examinations.

According to information made available to us, about 54 Tamils over a wide area were killed by the STF in reprisals. Victims were picked up from Periyaniawanai and Padiruppu. Those picked up at Kallaru included 4 members of one family. Some of those picked up were students going from Kurumanveli to Kalmunai for O.Level examinations. Among those picked up were two teachers. One was from Thurainilawanai and another was Sritharan from Kottaikallaru. Five women from the 37th colony at Palaiadivattai, 5 miles from Vellaveli, were raped by Sinhalese home guards from the 32nd colony, during this period.

#### **4.5 An experience in Eravur during and after the Massacre - August-September 1990:**

the man concerned hails from Jaffna and was employed in Eravur. In August the LTTE placed a land mine near his place of work. Fearing normal army reaction, he, and several others with him, took refuge with Muslims. Later the Muslims told them that it was not safe for them because of Muslim home guards armed by the government. They then walked about half an hour and took shelter with some Tamils. That same night (11th) two armed persons whom everyone took to be LTTE cadre, came to that area and asked them to leave, saying that they were going to attack Eravur. They then moved to Chenkaladi. the attack which commenced at 10.30 or 11.00 p.m. went on till the following morning.

Asked why the army did not intervene, he replied that they had been in Chenkaladi only two days and would not have known the area to move out confidently. According to him, "Ranjan Wijeratne came the following day and armed more Muslims and went away. Over the next

two days the army went on a rampage at Chenkaladi. Since that time armed Muslims have been killing Tamils who went back to look over their property".

According to this man, the local opinion was that the Tigers had conducted the massacre at Eravur, because they were desperate and thought they could create friction between Sinhalese and Muslims. While we do not know enough to comment on this, it is significant, that according to a Muslim source in Eravur, the attackers had spoken Sinhalese!

This man and his party then moved into the refugee camp at the Eastern University. Several of them worked with the Red Cross. There were adequate provisions and electricity, and the refugees began to feel comparatively relaxed. This angered the Tigers who came to the camp and accused them of living comfortably while they suffered in the jungle, and left after warning them that they were going to attack Muslims. Thus began the panic stricken exodus from Vantharumoolai into snake infested jungles, starvation and disease.

The man found his way back to Jaffna, where the general belief was that the army had killed the Muslims. The man held his tongue and his life.

#### **4.6 Recent Developments in the Batticaloa District:**

About 17th January, the army commenced an operation in the Vakarai area. Two columns of troops moved into that area, one from Polonnaruwa and one from Batticaloa. According to sources from the area, over 100 civilians who had taken refuge in the jungles were killed during the operation. Most of them were those who had been made to move out from the Eastern University and other refugee camps by the LTTE, last September.

Militant groups operating with the Sri Lankan army are now said to be moving freely around Batticaloa and the phenomenon of revenge killings has again begun. About 5 persons with alleged LTTE connections were killed recently. The severed head of a TELO man was placed before the house of an alleged TELO supporter. A principal from Araipattai, Mr.Nallarattnam, who was involved in peace efforts between the Tamils and Muslims was killed 2 months ago.

The lives and the well being of refugees has become a lethal form of political football. Shortly before the September exodus, 158 persons were taken away by the army from the Eastern University refugee camp. The army later admitted having taken 144. It was claimed subsequently that only 32 were taken and that they were all released. (See report by Rita Sebastian, Sunday Times, 4.11.90). None of those said to have been released reached their homes. The LTTE had visited refugee camps. Some have claimed that the disappearances were the cause of the exodus. Other LTTE sources claimed that it instigated the refugee exodus to save them from disappearing. But many others routinely treated LTTE visits and army forays as part of the game they had to survive and gave it little attention. Rather than in terms of cause and effect, this can only be understood in terms of the callousness of the government and the calculating destructiveness of the LTTE.

#### **4.7 Jaffna**

##### **4.7.1 Jaffna Report (December 1990):**

The LTTE's mobilisation of the people, through a mixture of persuasion and coercion, to observe national heroes week, brought about the expected response from government forces,

but on a scale lower than expected. Decorations, pandls and public meetings marked the week, beginning 21st November. On 20th November Puttalai School, Pt.Pedro was bombed. There were no casualties as it was outside school hours. During the same session, the LTTE office in Pt.Pedro was bombed. The bombs missed the target and damaged nearby houses. The LTTE moved house without difficulty. But neighbouring civilians had to stay in their own houses warily awaiting the second attempt. In Vaddukoddai, a bomb aimed at an LTTE target felled a palmyrah tree. As usual, for those near LTTE establishments the choice was between leaving their houses and risk losing them, and remain, risking the wrath of aerial marauders.

The LTTE overrunning the Mankulam camp resulted in more punitive measures against civilians. Shells fired from land or sea towards an LTTE training area at the end of November injured Mr.R.D.Mylvaganam of Navindil and his servant girl. Mr.Mylvaganam, a retired land office was milking his cow in the morning. Both were treated by the MSF. Another old lady living next to an arms factory in Vadamaratchi was advised to move by relatives who made reference to aerial bombing. The lady replied that she was hardly concerned about the bombers, since the possibility of an accidental explosion next door weighed heavily on her mind.

On 6th December, a bomber circled Velayuthm school, Pt.Pedro, where slogans marking national heroes week were painted prominently on its wall. Puttalai school had been moved to this school following the former being bombed. Mr.Arulpragasam, a senior teacher of the school and circuit steward of the Methodist Church, who was doing some work inside, had gone out of the school to do some shopping. He was killed, together with 5 others by the bomb(s) which missed the school. Shells fired from Palaly base on the same day, killed an elderly lady in Urumpirai.

The activities by the forces provided an apt setting for the LTTE to campaign on the need to defend the land. Balasingam speaking in Pt.Pedro explained the leader's absence by saying that inspite of his advice to the contrary, the leader felt shy of meeting the people until the goal of Tamil Eelam is realised. Yogi, speaking in Manipay gave his line that there may come a time when all people would have to bear arms. This time in a departure from its earlier stand, the EROS dead were included among the martyrs. This issue had caused verbal friction in 1987.

The emotional climate resulting from these festivities was used to draw in more children to bear arms. A typical event was what took place at Sagara Vidyalayam, Varani in early December. The area leader went to the school with some of his men and made a rousing speech about everyone's obligation to defend the land. 12 children went with the Tigers. When the parents went to the local camp, they were told that the children were not there. It took them 3 days to trace where their children were being held. On going there, 9 children ran into their parents' arms in tears. 3 remained behind.

Visitors to Jaffna coming there after an interval have described the human scene as depressing. Hungry looking people moving from place to place with their meagre belongings, or going about with gunny bags and chits of paper in the hope of obtaining relief.

Again as many sensitive observers have pointed out, whatever the exciting distractions of military ups and downs, the people have lost, perhaps irreversibly. An entire generation of young persons have been variously affected. A large number of persons who were



economically self-sufficient and possessed qualities of hard work and honesty, have been driven to grinding poverty. While the effects on the economy in the South are marginal, the effects on the Jaffna farmer are catastrophic. Housewives in the South had to put up with the minor inconvenience of items such as potatoes and onions, normally exported from the North in large quantities, shoot up in price. Owing to a blight in the South potatoes shot up from Rs.28/- to Rs.70/- per kilo. The Jaffna farmer who is unable to export these together with other crops would in many cases sell at a loss. Thus there is pressure on a large section of the population to turn to racketeering of one kind or the other in order to survive.

Another irony of the struggle is that the major source of cash inflow has become salaries paid by the adversary to government servants. The economy has to adjust itself so that everyone gets a share. Many in productive work have taken to some vocation that will give them a share of this resource. A common occupation is to hawk goods in short supply at highly inflated prices. Agents make money in charging heavy commissions from cashing salary cheques. With transportation to Colombo disrupted, there are astronomical profits to be made in transportation. On the way villagers and boatmen extort money to help people cross flood waters or to carry the elderly. A large part of the money again finds its way back to Colombo - a considerable part of it into the hands of travel agents constantly getting Tamils across fool-proof barriers in the West.

There are features of the current war which are common to all wars. Every war has produced its racketeers and arms manufacturers who were amply rewarded for their patriotism. But through the tragedy there also often developed new forms of social organisation, new ideals, a spirit of reconciliation and new institutions to prevent war. In our case every development is negative. The Tamil identity has been obliterated. People trust each other less and love each other less. There is no concerted move to protect those most adversely affected and build social solidarity. Leaders of communities or nations fighting a war where there was a perception of a common cause have even co-opted their political opponents to share in the responsibility of organising services and the people. Instead, here, thousands who felt for the community have been arrested and tortured as traitors. Because it suited their politics, the leaders have actually presided over the community going to pieces and have even played a leading role in the extortion and racketeering. Jaffna is unique in having its law enforcing authority kidnapping people for ransom. In early December a senior professional was kidnapped. The wife who approached the rulers was asked to come back with a certain sum of money. A close relative who then went to them was told, that if the matter dealt with his immediate family they would entertain him. But that this did not concern him. People were being told again and again that loving their neighbour was none of their business. Those who did the contrary were terrorised instead of being rewarded.

These developments combined with the stifling of any independent thought or organisation has had a devastating effect on character. Literally thousands complain about personal irritations such as the effect of military distractions on their children's education and motorcycles commandeered by the rulers and returned with the kick-start broken. But they do not wish to see the overall tragedy. While describing the fate of other gun carrying children as voluntary, they would bring their own child to Colombo complaining of unhealthy impositions. They would also readily rationalise the fate of 'traitors' and Muslims.

It is not difficult to imagine how these persons would react when they become expatriates - the one safety valve allowed and encouraged by the LTTE. They would look at the struggle sans the personal irritations they had complained about bitterly at home. On the other hand the

slogans of the LTTE had been popularised long ago by the now traitorous TULF. The Tamil community appears to be in for a long haul.

#### **4.7.2 Aerial Bombing in Jaffna:**

About 11.00 a.m. on Sunday 20th January, notices were air dropped in the Valvettithurai area asking people to evacuate within 48 hours. The bombing however commenced 4 1/2 hours later around 3.30 p.m. 4 bombers, 3 Avro transports and 2 helicopters took part in the operation. The coastal area between Urikkadu and Nediakadu was subject to heavy bombing for two hours. It was to be expected that many civilians would have been in Valvettithurai under these conditions. According to reports 8 civilians were killed, and of the 30 injured, 21 were admitted to Manthikai hospital.

On the 21st VVT, Kokkuvil, Valikamam North, Sirupiddy and Puttur were subject to bombing and heli-strafting. 4 bombers were seen above Kokkuvil and 10 bombs were dropped, about 5.00 p.m. It is not known whether the target was an LTTE camp or the kerosene queue that was on the road. A retired principal, R.Mahadeva, was killed and 7 others injured.

In the meantime the LTTE issued a notice, addressing the people 'who had co-operated with them fully and had inspired them in the armed struggle'. The aerial attack by the Sri Lankan state, it said, was to demoralise the people. The Sri Lankan state, it said, which could not succeed in Mankulam or in the Fort cannot succeed in making any advance or establishing a camp in VVT. It further said, "The whole of North Tamil Eelam is under aerial attack. It is therefore meaningless to seek safety by moving from Vadamaratchi to Thenmaratch or vice versa. In order to defeat your enemy's intentions, please dig bunkers and stay in your own homes."

On the 22nd, two bombs fell in front of Hindu Ladies College, Manipay, one of which exploded. It was 12.30 p.m. when children were in the school compound. It was the third day of bombing at VVT. 6 fire bombs were dropped from a transport at 7.00 a.m. 15 more were dropped in the afternoon. Several buildings were seen burning for hours.

The Eelanadu reported that 5,2000 families from the affected area in Vadamaratchi had sought refuge in Thenmaratchi. The bombing was said to be most intense around the former army camp at VVT. The LTTE bunkers were hardly affected, and their Pasilan cannon were loaded in preparation for an army advance. It appears that the army had delayed its plans.

In VVT, about 5 schools (including Sithampara and the Roman Catholic school), 4 temples and 500 homes were affected, according to the 'Eelanadu'. Among the temples bombed is the famous Athiady Vembadi Pillayar Kovil.

the situation with regard to essential commodities is very bad in Jaffna. Over a matter of days, rice shot up to Rs.52/- per kilo, and petrol, Rs.400 per bottle (1/6th of a gallon). The situation was becoming so out of control that the Tigers who had previously organised or presided over the black market suddenly imposed price controls. Goods promptly vanished from the shelves. Subsequently the LTTE announced sporadically that it had discovered

hoarded goods, which it was to distribute. Crowds which queued for kerosene at Rs.30/- a bottle, often received 1/4 bottle after a long wait. It is expected that there will be severe shortages until the black market is restored to make the smuggling of goods from the South worthwhile. Even then, the prices will be far too high for most people.

With regard to medicines, the government hospitals, as of 24th January, had satisfactory stocks for the time being. But nothing is available from the shops. At the rate at which people were getting injured, the situation with medicines too may become critical.

#### **4.7.3 Detainees in Vadamaratchi:**

A sense of identity was forced on the Tamils through the common experience of state oppression. At the same time there is enormous potential for conflict within Tamil society itself. WE have pointed out that the nature of the current politics, instead of defusing such potential to strengthen the community in the face of state oppression, does the opposite. The ability to recruit and brainwash children from all sections belies the fact that there are deeply felt divisions hidden by the supervening threat of the Sri Lankan army's projected arrival. Parallel trends are also in evidence in the South.

To understand the deeply felt suspicion with which the LTTE moves in certain parts of Vadamaratchi, one needs to realise that Vadamaratchi is a patchwork of diverse communities and political influences. Karaveddy, covering a sizeable area, forms the agricultural core of Vadamaratchi. Its inhabitants are hard working and are mostly farmers or farm labourers - many of them from the depressed class. The traditional Left was strong in the area and many of its people politically sophisticated. The LTTE did not command a large following there until it wiped out the other groups militarily. To this day, the LTTE is unduly sensitive to both ex-militants from other groups as well as to hints of dissent, which a more mature force would have ignored.

In May the LTTE looked for Sellathurai Atputhan (20) of Karaveddy North. Being unable to find him, they took his father, mother and wife as hostages.

Sebaratnam Kanthan (21), an EPRLF supporter was arrested in April. He was being held at the LTTE'S detention centre at Karaveddy VC with about 40 to 50 others.

Uthayakumar (23), a mill owner from Karaveddy was detained by the LTTE during a night in mid-August. The charge against him was that he had financially helped a friend in the Peravai, a defunct Left group from that area. Uthayakumar is the second of two sons in a family having in addition five daughters.

Kuhathasan (Kuhan) was picked up by the LTTE at Athulamman Kovil, Karaveddy in mid-August. The temple has a well that provides drinking water for the area. As a tradition, people were not meant to keep their footwear on in the temple precincts. Female LTTE cadre used to come in a vehicle to fetch water, and used to keep their boots on, disregarding the tradition. One day the local people put a board requesting users to remove their footwear. The female cadre who came disregard the sign. Some boys who were there drew their attention to the sign. The female cadre ignored them and went away. 10 minutes later, LTTE boys arrived in another vehicle and detained 25 bystanders. The parents complained to Selvam, an LTTE intelligence man from that area. 10 were released in early September. Up to the end of

October, there had been no information about the rest, including Kuchan. On 20th August, an LTTE camp at Kachchi was bombed. The LTTE later claimed that 49 detainees were among those killed. A person well known to an LTTE guard killed during that incident, was asked about the detainees who were killed. He remained silent. After the others in the company had dispersed, he took the inquirer to a side and told him, "I did not want to discuss the subject in front of the women". He added that it was true that that 49 detainees were killed. But those who died in the bombing were 3 detainees and 2 LTTE guards, he said.

Thirukumaran (21), son of Rajaratnam and Chandralingam (Chasi) (23), son of Ambalavanar were arrested by the LTTE at Vathiri on 26th October. The arrest was at Irumpumathavady, Vathiri junction. They were charged of talking about the LTTE at the junction. Chasi had been trained locally by the LTTE before the IPKF arrived.

#### **4.7.4 Public executions and the killings of the detainees:**

Vasanthasullosana aged 39, mother of two children from Navatkiri, Neerveli was executed publicly on the 15th of August by the LTTE. The LTTE accused her of indulging in 'financial fraud' using the name of LTTE. This was the first public execution after the IPKF's withdrawal. During the IPKF period, she rendered her help to the LTTE in a number of ways - especially giving food parcels to their camps in her village. It is worth noting that during this period people who used to give them food were subject to severe torture and even death. If the IPKF or the groups in power at that time came to know about this, by all means she would have become a martyr. Thus she had a strong desire to help the LTTE, unmindful of the risk she took at that time. She came from a 'well to do' family from the village and she used to help people through natural generosity. According to sources from her village, at times she ran short of money. Then she used to sell her lands to settle the money. This attitude of hers made people feel that she was a little irresponsible. The kith and kin of the detainees who were detained for ransom by the LTTE used to go for her help to mediate their release. While doing this she seems to have collected nearly Rs.90,000/- from various people, without the LTTE's knowledge, and used it for her own purposes. In the first week of July, the LTTE somehow came to know about this and she was taken into custody. Hearing this her uncle sold few of her lands and repaid one lakh to the LTTE. The lady was a heart patient and during her detention she suffered from severe chest pain and was admitted to hospital. But the LTTE did not release her even after that and whenever her sister went to the camp, they promised that she would be released soon.

On the ill-fated day - 15th August she was brought to "Muthiraisanthai" in a van with a man by the name of Shanmuganathan known as Guru master. According to the LTTE he also had indulged in 'financial fraud'. Both of them were blind folded. Around 4 o'clock in the evening both were given the 'lamp post punishment'. Vasanthasullosana became a hapless victim of a woman's gun. Incidentally her daughter's age attainment ceremony was held on the day she was killed. Actually her sister visited her camp on the previous day and requested them to release the mother to attend her daughter's ceremony. The person who was in charge promised to release her the next day. When they were anxiously waiting for her arrival, a van came to her place driven by a woman and her daughter asked the woman who was in the front seat, "Where is my mother?". The woman in the uniform sarcastically said, "She is coming behind." The girl was under the impression that their mother was coming by bus and she ran towards the bus stand which is a few yards from their house. But her son who saw his

mother's body through the shutter screamed. Immediately the body was pushed out and the van sped away.

This cruel murder brings out two things revealing the true nature of the LTTE. A woman who took lot of risks and helped them in a period of uncertainty has a strong character of her own. Of course, she has used her contacts with the LTTE which was involved in abducting people and demanding ransom, to gain certain benefits for herself. The LTTE could have disassociated her from them, and could have warned her about her conduct. After she had returned the whole amount of money, the way in which they have killed her shows their brutal bankruptcy.

The people at Muthirai Santhai witnessing the act were really appalled. But there are also people justifying the whole thing. After this there were another 6 to 8 public executions in the Jaffna peninsula alone. In the meantime from September 15 onwards up to 500 names were given out as persons executed by the LTTE, by their Information Centre for detainees. Because of the threat posed to families, it is difficult to get details about the victims. The pattern of events regarding these incidents also brings out certain sadistic features of the episode. The LTTE was keeping a large number of people under detention and parents were never allowed to see them. There are people aged around the 40's who have been taken in just because they had contacts with the IPKF, immediately after the IPKF withdrawal. During IPKF's presence, the people who were residing near the camps became very vulnerable due to IPKF officers' visits to their houses. Those who were arrested allegedly had cordial relationships with IPKF personnel. Nobody knows what type of threat they can pose at this juncture to the LTTE!

During the early part of September some of the kith and kin who were regular visitors to the information centre to find out the fate of the beloved ones, were told to fill certain forms and were informed by the people who were in charge that they will release their relatives on September 15. When parents, sisters and relatives visited the camps on the 15th, the LTTE started to read out names and said that they had been executed. This went on for a week and the list is said to have contained up to 500 names. Those who went to see the loved ones were told in no uncertain terms that they had been killed. Why did they allow the mothers and relatives to come with hope and suddenly give the cruel news? The people who were there threw stones and sand and cursed the LTTE for their evil deed. According to one eye witness, some mothers vowed to give birth to a new generation of children to fight the Tigers!

#### **4.7.5 The Army in Fetters:**

A senior LTTE figure speaking to a relative of a detainee had said that they were holding 8,000 prisoners, including 2,000 women. Whatever the truth, other sources guess that 4,000 would be a minimum. This reflects the spate of arrests during and around September. We have described the conditions under which they were being kept in [Report No.5](#). All reports [See other reports in this section] suggest that the bulk of the detainees are suspected of political connections, not even necessarily opposed to the LTTE. Some were picked up in Vadamaratchi because they had received leaflets by post from India from former associates of the Peravai. Apparently they were kept under observation and their contacts were noted.

Torture of detainees has been routine. Many had been forced to dig bunkers in dangerous places. A group of persons with heads shaven and chained to each other, digging bunkers near the Kachcheri were identified as EPRLF prisoners. According to the same LTTE spokesman,

they do not easily kill people now. But when released these persons cannot move out of a specified area, must report daily to the LTTE and will have to perform jobs assigned to them by the group - generally of a military nature.

According to the last information we received, the LTTE has routinely ignored ICRC inquiries about its detainees. If it does, it would have to conform to international norms. Any talk about a cease-fire and a democratic process would be meaningless unless this scandal is ended. [It was reported in the Colombo press that the ICRC had visited about 40 policemen held by the LTTE about 9th January 1991].

According to other sources, one of the constant fears of a detainee is that if he succumbs to torture, he would be listed as having been killed during aerial bombardment. On one occasion about September a large number of parents of detainees were summoned to a camp in Jaffna. The parents went in anticipation of their sons being released. Then over 100 names were read out as having been killed during bombing. The total number which the LTTE claims to have killed is said to be up to 500.

Parents of detainees usually fear reporting the issue to anyone out of fear for the safety of their child. Those released are enjoined under threat not to talk about their experience under detention. The ICRC is technically meant to help relatives to draw up affidavits about those detained. But fear of informants prevents them from going near the ICRC. By contrast, in the South, reporting detentions to the ICRC has become accepted as routine and useful at times. Thus the fate of the detainees is one where little information is available and people dare not talk about individual cases.

#### **4.7.6 Injured Women and Children:**

A large number of girls and children were recruited and were flung into battle in reckless fashion with little understanding of the purpose and the lack of maturity to come to terms with blown limbs and permanent physical disability. Once the original boyish sense of adventure and evaporated with injury, children often bitterly cursed the movement and even attempted suicide. Others talk about the experience in a dazed matter of fact manner. The two attacks on the Fort and the attack on Mankulam resulted in a large number of such casualties. The LTTE which had evidently not given serious thought earlier to problems of injured women and child cadre, appears to have come up against unforeseen difficulties.

The following were related by eye witnesses. The scene was Manipay hospital just after the attack on Jaffna Fort on 5th August. The ward was full of injured girls. A woman major in military uniform with her hands on her hips walked from bed to bed, mechanically repeating the same thing: "Do not be sad. We will liberate our soil". Her disposition was totally incongruous with the mood of the injured, writhing in pain. Some had even hesitantly tried to commit suicide with cyanide capsules. One girl with a leg blown off and a slit mouth nonchalantly related her experience: "We surrounded the Fort and announced that unless they surrendered, we would attack in 10 minutes. The planes arrived and we were getting missiles from the air as well as from the Fort. We ran. There was an explosion and I fell down. I tried to move my leg to get up. But nothing happened. I then noticed that my trouser leg was hanging, and my foot was somewhere behind. Then an `anna' (elder brother) carried me. After he went a few paces, there was another explosion. The `anna' who carried me collapsed dead. As I fell, I saw Mathangi. She too was dead. I lay on the ground for 20 minutes while shells flew over me. One exploding shell spit my mouth....."

Another girl with a head injury was at Manthikal hospital. The place reeked with blood. The tractor in which her party had been travelling in Karaianagar had caught a shell when they tried to attack the naval base. After being injured as girl held on to her gun as instructed until someone collected it. Asked how she felt before the attack, she said that it was the most exhilarating experience. They were simply thrilled as they had a cup of tea before setting off. Then she became anxious. She asked the lady close by, "Akka (elder sister) will you stay with me tonight?" Later in her sleep she cried, "Amma (mother), amma, come and stay close to me!" Then: "Drive the tractor slowly, my head hurts.... I asked the akka to stay with me, I don't know if she is here....."

#### **4.7.7 The gathering of Martyrs' Families:**

Towards the end of the national heroes week celebrations, the families of the martyrs were collected for a ceremony. There was little choice. They were escorted by guards with guns and grenades and taken in vans. They were addressed by the deputy leader Mahattaya renowned for honeyed words: "...It is a great privilege for me to meet you. You have made the immense sacrifice of a member of your family to the cause of liberation. It would have been my great pleasure to have come to you individually. But alas, because of the exigencies of the situation, you had to come to me... We were in a weak position after fighting the Indian army, having lost many of our cadre. So we had to talk to President Premadasa to buy time and build up our strength. Now we are in a strong position to attain our goal..... Only five percent of the people really support us. Because we are now strong, many opportunists are coming after us and are working for us.... You are the link between us and the people. You must help us. You must identify those opportunists and traitors and let us know. You must identify those persons who demean our struggle by spreading lies. Tell us also of those who speak against us..."

The impression left after the meeting was that rather than wanting to honour them or to assert confidence, it was an admission of weakness and of gnawing inner despair. The exercise was about recruiting informers.

#### **4.7.8 The Hungry Woman:**

She was a woman of about 50, A Trincomalee refugee in the Jaffna district. Some younger members of her family were in the LTTE. Her rations had been stopped. On 20th December, she went to the village committee (Sitturavai) to lodge a complaint. Faced with a reluctance to reverse the decision, she had criticised the LTTE. Persons came to her home that night, and asked her to come the following day and that her rations would be issued. When she went the following day, she was sent in turn to 3 LTTE camps and then there was no trace of her. There was no prospect of pursuing the matter because the LTTE said that she had not come, and the boy who had gone with her was refusing to speak. Nothing more had turned up by new year. Such incidents illustrate increasing sensitivity to any criticism, even when the cause was hunger rather than political ideas.

#### **4.7.9 Incident at Kayts:**

Three people were killed in a mysterious way in Kayts on the 16th of December 1990. Their

bodies were found in a well, tied together with a huge stone, 36 hours after the incident. They were identified as Anthonipillai (75), his wife Theresamma (65) and his sister Elisammah (72). Anthonipillai's boy is said to have been found without any wounds or scars. Both of the women were squeezed to death.

While the inhabitants of Kayts were fleeing from their places in fear of the Lankan army's retaliation, these three remained in their homes assuming that in any case they won't get harassed because of their age. They seemed to have related this to some of their relatives that the Sri Lankan army and the EPDP had come to their place twice in search of the LTTE and no harm was done. The gruesome killing had brought panic to that area. Why they were killed still remains unanswered. It is worth mentioning here that the area in which the incident took place is about half a mile from the Kayts civil hospital and the area has virtually come under the Sri Lankan army's control after the recent operation against the LTTE. There is an LTTE sentry post situated near the place of the incident.

#### **4.7.10 Dissent within the LTTE:**

It has been known that members of the LTTE had all sworn an oath of absolute loyalty to the leader and the slightest sign of dissent is ruthlessly rooted out. But members who wish to leave had been allowed to leave provided they are perceived as posing no threat to the organisation. A large number of those who remain, do so with a feeling of discomfort, fearing the world outside as they fear the organisation.

Confessions made to an aunt by an LTTE area leader killed by the IPKF in November 1987 are revealing. His brother who described the deceased as a 'lamb' before he joined the organisation, came to know of these confessions later. This area leader was very loyal to the leadership and never questioned their orders. These qualities were put to use. He was occasionally given secret instructions to kill certain comrades in the organisation marked by internal intelligence as having dangerous tendencies. The method often adopted was to get into a conversation with the victim, take him out on a motor bike ride, and do the deed in a lonely place. Having done this several times the area leader felt deeply disturbed and poured out his mind to his aunt. After about a year in the organisation, he developed some maniacal tendencies. He said that when he faced someone he just felt like pulling out his pistol and putting a bullet into the person's head, even into his father's head, just to see how the victims suffered.

He had also told his aunt that secret instructions had at times been given to trusted individuals to surreptitiously finish off a comrade on the battle field, so as to put the blame on the enemy. This had long been suspected. So much so that whenever a prominent LTTE'er was declared martyred on the battle field, seldom did persons close to the LTTE take it at face value.

When a close relative of the area leader, an expatriate scientist and a functionary of the LTTE's ROOTE, was told of these confessions, he put it aside as something regrettable. Members of the late area leader's immediate family in London who do not know of these confessions, still faithfully attend LTTE meetings.

During national Heroes week in November, a street was named after the late leader in his hometown, and the leader, and presumably his victims, were commemorated as martyrs.



Following the IPKF offensive in 1987 when the LTTE was disorganised and civilians were hysterical, an order went to area leaders from the top, to kill any civilian protesting against the laying of land mines in his area. Except for Lollo and Mathi, all other leaders are said to have ignored this instruction. Mathi and Lollo were killed about a year later by the IPKF. Lollo's list of individual killings is said to have numbered more than 60. Gamini, an area leader in Nelliady, was sent on punishment transfer after internal intelligence reported him too soft on civilians.

The LTTE spent large resources observing in Jaffna, National Heroes Week last November. This was regarded by the leadership as a tactical necessity. But cadre from the Eastern province, who form the majority, are said to have taken this badly in consideration of the misery in the East. It has been suggested that the reference to the suffering of Tamils in the East in the cease-fire declaration was in deference to this internal development.

Observers with contacts within the LTTE report that a large number wish to leave the organisation, particularly in the 16 to 18 age group. One of those who left and went abroad recently was a notorious area leader, mentioned in the landmine incident in UTHR(J) [Report No.2](#). In that incident he had threatened a man who discovered a landmine next to his house and had consulted a neighbour. He was told that if he had a problem he could quit his house, but it was criminal of him to tip off his neighbours and spoil the planned attack.

This leader has curious story behind him. His parents were unpopular persons in the village who used to pass comments at other people's children who had not joined the movement. When their own son Ravi joined, they took it badly and went in search of him and pleaded with him, but to no avail. When Ravi returned from training, his sight used to strike terror into the villagers. 'He is going to do something. Get ready to run', was a frequent remark. His family was influentially placed in the local Sitturavai (Village Committee). When he left, his parents accompanied him to Colombo to make the travel arrangements.

Another leader who left and went abroad is one who played a prominent role in the assassination attempt on the ENDLF leader in 1987, which led to the death of 4 AOG churchmen.

Those who extol the sacrifice and courage of ordinary LTTE persons, wilfully ignore their internal sufferings. Nor do they acknowledge that they were allowed to real power to determine the movement's direction. They were used. The only power they enjoyed was to kill ordinary civilians and to bring misery to many homes.

According to those who have been in touch with a number of persons who want to leave, their fear and anxiety is to do with their future. An immediate problem is that if they leave and some informer points them out to incoming Sri Lankan troops, they would almost certainly have a summary death. Supporters of the cause also have a duty towards those who leave.

#### **4.7.11 Normality in Jaffna:**

Many public institutions in Jaffna are said to be applying normal rules to employees who are absent from work. The university has been dealt with separately. The education department has sent out a circular with excerpts from normal regulations for absenteeism - first a period on no pay and then termination. Even the government does not maintain that the situation is normal. Do these normal regulations apply to people subject to bombing and shelling? Apart

from normal risks, how about heart patients, Muslims and those requiring regular medical care that is not available? All very abnormal!

#### **4.7.12 The Killing of Assembly of God men, September 1987:**

Although this incident took place more than 3 years ago, it illustrates the difficulties involved in peace keeping, and even more, in monitoring the observance of Human and Democratic Rights, where one needs to take for granted that there is no change of heart.

In early September 1987, 4 AOG men, including 2 clergy and 2 lay persons, were shot dead at Uduvil junction at 10.00 p.m. while travelling in a white van. The following day an LTTE loud speaker vehicle went around Chunnakam accusing the traitor groups brought in by the IPKF of killing even Christian clergy. The truth was widely sensed, but few dared to talk about it. The following account was given by an ex-LTTE man who was privy to the facts. "The group led by Kutti Prabha was waiting at Uduvil junction to ambush the ENDLF leader, Rajan, who was expected to come that way in a white van. But unknown to the group, Rajan had already passed. When the van with the clergy came, one of those in the ambush signalled the van to stop. The driver, perhaps excited at seeing the gunman, swerved towards him. Immediately, the order to fire was given. On realising the mistake, Kutti Prabha went to the top man himself. In anticipation of the IPKF, then in a peace keeping role, coming to examine weapons, they were ordered to clean their weapons and deposit them in different camps".

The truth usually comes out. But there remains the problem of protecting unarmed individuals who practice freedom in such a vicious atmosphere. The IPKF was negotiating power between armed parties and lacked the sophistication, training or the motivation to protect or even be sensitive to democratic activity at the level of the people. That was one of the key reasons for its failure. Much more imaginative thinking will have to be done to have a monitoring process whose first concern is the unarmed people.

#### **4.8 Aftermath of the Mankulam attack:**

[From "The Virakesari", 30th December]

The aftermath of the operation on the Mankulam army camp brought on untold sufferings to the people of Vavuniya and Mullaitivu. In the months of (late) November and (early) December 18 civilians lost their lives in different acts of atrocities including aerial bombing and army in discipline. In the Nedunkerny Mathiamadu district 3 people who were taken away by the army in early December are still reported missing. And, to date, not a single soul knows what fate befell the seven lorry drivers who left for Jaffna from Colombo on the 24th of November. That same day an unidentified armed gang broke into a hamlet in the Vavuniya Thekkankadu district and hacked to death 8 persons including women and children. Aerial bombing and the uncertainties of the time have brought great damage to the economy of the area, notably to cultivation. In the Thanaimurrippu, Kulakattu district the reservoir developed a leak from damage caused to the bund of the dam. This poses a great threat to paddy cultivation. There is much damage caused to building and property not excluding schools, temples and other public institutions. In Mathiamadu, Paranthan and Sannasi areas the homes of several inhabitants were looted prior to attack from the air. The people rendered homeless continue to live with relatives and friends.

#### **4.9 Calling off the Ceasefire:**

In calling off the ceasefire the government put forward the following demands to the LTTE [Daily News 12th January 1991]:

Reiterating the government's commitment to the search for a peaceful solution on the North-East question, the government called upon the LTTE to demonstrate its concern for civilian hardships (resulting from LTTE action) with the following steps:

- \* Release all hostages and not take any more of them;**
- \* Stop all torture and execution of all captives and prisoners or**
- \* Stop using civilians in mine-clearing operations;**
- \* Stop recruiting innocent children and innocent citizens for combat;**
- \* Stop all reprisals on civilians;**
- \* Stop all acts of terrorisation of civilians as a means of obtaining their support; and**
- \* Allow humanitarian access to all prisoners-of-war.**

Coincidentally the demands in their wording and order bore a close resemblance to demands put forward to both sides by the International Alert on 4th January. The IA declaration was received by the government with mixed feelings, particularly because of its reference to a federal solution. It is good to know that the government is capable of learning from those frequently maligned as 'human rights do-gooders'. Hopefully, it may in time follow them.

Significant omissions from the original IA declaration were references to bombing and shelling and food blockades. Had the LTTE responded positively it could have gained in political image. [See Appendix for the IA declaration].

#### **4.10 The ICRC taken to task:**

The following report appeared in the Island of 31 January:

Vehicle with Red Cross markings fire's at copter  
(By Norman Palihawadana and Shamindra Ferdinando)

Air force helicopter on Tuesday morning strafed a vehicle with Red Cross markings in the northern Jaffna peninsula after a group of LTTE terrorists travelling in it allegedly fired at the helicopter with light machine guns and other arms, the Army said yesterday.

The helicopter was flying from the strategic Palaly base towards Elephant Pass when it 'located' a vehicle with Red Cross markings about three miles east of Kodikamam. At that time the vehicle was moving towards Iyakachchi, the Army said.

Then the vehicle had moved into a coconut plantation and this 'action' had prompted the pilot of the helicopter to hover over the spot. Within minutes terrorists had jumped out of the vehicle and allegedly opened fire at the helicopter.

the helicopter too had retaliated with machine gun fire. The Security Forces believe that at least a few terrorists had been killed or injured in the `incident'. The Operational Headquarters of the Defence Ministry was aware of the Kodikamam `incident' and the alleged use of a vehicle with Red cross marking to transport terrorists. Army said yesterday.

The Defence Ministry is expected to raise the alleged use of a vehicle with the Red cross markings to carry terrorists and ultimately fire at a Government helicopter with the ICRC.

Since the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) under Mr.Philip Comtesse moved to help the affected people of the North-East war, some security forces officers have continuously expressed the possibility of the ICRC assisting the LTTE terrorists.

The ICRC upto now has failed to blame the LTTE for any of the crimes committed in the past seven months, sources aid. Since June last year nearly thousand Sinhalese and Muslims had been killed apart from murdering hundreds of captured policemen.

However despite the ICRCs willingness to express continuous concern over security forces operations against the terrorists, they had not blamed the terrorists for anything, security officers complained.

"The Island" was unable to reach any ICRC official by the time of going to press, yesterday afternoon.

The Red Cross has long been a matter of controversy in this dirty war. During the spring of 1987, a government helicopter bombed an ambulance with red cross markings, taking injured persons from Pt.Pedro hospital to Jaffna hospital, destroying the hospital ambulance, and killing the driver and the patients. Later on, the IPKF accused the Sri Lanka Red Cross of transporting arms for the LTTE. Whatever the truth of the incident reported, it is sheer facetiousness to draw the ICRC into it, even a hint of malice.

The ICRC has been performing a yeoman task under difficult conditions, coming under accusations from both sides. When the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army were battling it out near the Fort in September, shells fell on the Jaffna ICRC office, and not by accident. We know for certain the ICRC's genuine concern for the welfare of civilians. There was very real concern for prisoners, both in the South as well as for those held by the LTTE in the North. There is no question of accusing the ICRC of dishonesty or hypocrisy.

The ICRC has operated according to rules and has intervened in the press in accordance with these, during the war. The first time in early September was to deny a government claim that the LTTE had prevented it from transporting food for civilians in the North. The second time was during the third week of October after the ICRC assumed control of Jaffna hospital and an air force plane bombed within the area under ICRC control. The Island should have known better how the ICRC operated, including its rules of confidentiality.

Criticism of the ICRC has to be made at a different level, such as how relevant are its rules, how much it should bend them, and whether it is realising its full potential or not. Such examination in a constructive spirit would be useful and that is the prerogative of the press. When everything looked absolutely dark in the South in 1989, the press too treated the coming of the ICRC as a sign of hope. Why so much bile when the ICRC had also extended its services to Tamils in distress?

## CHAPTER 5

### THE 'LIBERATION' OF THE UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA

#### [5.1 November 1989 - November 1990:](#)

#### [5.2 November 1990 - An exercise in Autonomy:](#)

#### **5.1 November 1989 - November 1990:**

For the two years which ended in November 1989, the university had attempted, and to a remarkable extent succeeded, in confronting the activities of the IPKF and the LTTE which were directed against the people - particularly their human rights violations. While the IPKF regarded the university with a mixture of anger and respect, the LTTE as an alleged liberation group, had little excuse to confront the university openly. Nevertheless it watched the university closely, dropping hints of its resentment. The university continued to stand up for the rights of the students, even those with LTTE sympathies. Soon after the IPKF announced its cease-fire in preparation for withdrawal on 20th September 1989, Dr.Rajani Thiranagama, a prominent human rights activist in the university, was assassinated, signalling by this act of terror, a new and menacing challenge to the university.

It was partly with a view to meeting this challenge that the university organised a peace march on 21st November 1989 focussing on the plight of the young who were being forced or cajoled into arms by the two opposing sides. The LTTE which denied killing Dr.Thiranagama, sent some armed men to the university who inspected the slogans to be carried on the march and demanded that the march should call for a withdrawal of the IPKF. This was rejected by the students as being against the spirit of the march as well as a meaningless provocation. The pressure continued until the eve of the march. Thanks in part to the presence of international delegates, the students won the round and the march went ahead as planned. The student leaders had good reason to fear the worst. In July, the previous year, Vimalaeswaran, a student leader who had once challenged the LTTE over the disappearance of a student in 1986, was murdered by the LTTE [[UTHR \(J\) Report No.1](#)].

In December 1989, Anton Winsles, a provenly conscientious student leader, was elected president of the university students' union (USU). Winsles, as a one time LTTE helper, had close contacts in the LTTE, but was uncompromisingly independent. The next crisis came as the IPKF withdrew and the LTTE demanded that the student union vacate the room assigned to it, which before October 1987 was used by the Maru Malarchikalagam (MMK) - a defunct cultural organisation captured by the LTTE about 1986. When the students resisted, the LTTE importuned a senior don, and even dropped hints that a death sentence which was once passed on him had been held in abeyance.

The MMK became defunct following the IPKF offensive of 1987. Finding LTTE literature in its room, the IPKF had proceeded to ransack the university administration and the arts faculty offices, thinking that the university was an LTTE complex. Instead of facing the question of whether as a liberation group it had then used the university responsibly, the LTTE accused

the university of having destroyed the MMK. It is essential to note that during the IPKF operation, the LTTE used university buildings to fire at the IPKF and left before the IPKF reached the premises. The IPKF's retaliation damaged the buildings, and roofs were virtually non-existent in certain buildings. It was the rainy season and almost all the university documents were wet and they would have become unusable. But because of the staff's initiative, university people were able to enter the university and safeguard the valuables including the documents of the MMK! The university could have summoned a meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee of Staff, Students and Employees (CC) to issue a statement refuting this allegation. The CC was an institution formed in early 1989 along with the mood of democratisation, and was very successful until the time of the peace march. It had increasingly come under attack from senior persons who felt that their power without accountability was being challenged. The Vice Chancellor was under strong pressure to dissolve the CC. The LTTE's allegation, made with an intimidatory thrust, went unchallenged. Once more, as during the fast of 1986, the burden of carrying the autonomy of the university fell on the student leadership.

Following the outbreak of war in June 1990, the student leaders followed an old tradition in collecting materials for the refugees pouring into Mullaitivu. The LTTE maintained that relief could be distributed only in its name. Although the students had to consent to the LTTE, which now monopolised fuel, transporting these materials, they annoyed the LTTE by distributing them without naming any authority. About this time the LTTE issued a call for the NGOs to support the struggle for Tamil self-determination led by the LTTE. The USU issued a balanced statement in English critical of both sides and sent it to the press. Following this, some persons from the LTTE's ROOTE, confronted the students who had drafted the resolution. A doctored version of the resolution was published in the press.

The ROOTE approached the USU and wanted it to pass a resolution accusing the government of Sri Lanka of genocide, calling upon the struggle led by the LTTE to be recognised internationally, and for all people to unite behind the LTTE and join the struggle. A hint was dropped that if the motion was not passed, the USU would be dissolved. By now many members of the student executive had fled as refugees either to India or to Colombo. It fell to Winsles to put this resolution to a general meeting. At the vote, the motion was defeated 145 to 115. The LTTE wanted it put to the vote a second time, and it was again defeated. Two days later Winsles was approached by the LTTE and was forced to issue the statement required by the LTTE. Having signed the statement, Winsles and his colleagues resigned from the USU.

It may be wondered what inspired the student body to defy the LTTE during these developments. One must keep in mind the opposing aims of the two sides. The LTTE had for years displayed persistent anger against the university, accusing it of not having helped them in any way. It scorned the university, and a key leader of the LTTE, obsessed with the university, is quoted as having said, "If the Sri Lankan airforce bombs the university, we would join them". The LTTE pursued a course of trying to forcibly identify the university with it. Equally, the students in particular, feared that if the army broke through into Jaffna, it would kill them. The LTTE on the other hand would, by past performance, like to see some students and staff killed for propaganda and mobilisation. In this acute dilemma, facing in particular the students, the authorities remained silent.

The LTTE was very angry with the student leaders and a high level of surveillance was kept up. In a meeting with the authorities Winsles told a small audience why they could not

function under conditions created by the LTTE. This was repeated verbatim by a key LTTE leader. Winsles and other student leaders were repeatedly asked to come for military training. In having to flee Jaffna, Winsles and some of his colleagues joined a long line of well-motivated predecessors, who saw the unmasked face of a tendency, so appalling now as it was once attractive.

There was a feeling in the university of uncertainty and dissolution. The students received little guidance when the LTTE launched its long matured propaganda campaign, suggesting that everyone should join its fight, and that education beyond standard 8 was superfluous. The students began drifting away to their homes, to Colombo and to search for their families in the devastated East, after receiving strong hints, certainly not contradicted by the authorities, that the university will not be allowed to function for perhaps two years.

The staff and members of the administration were strongly canvassed to make token gestures towards the war effort. Some obliged for a variety of reasons, and were rewarded with favours, such as accessibility and immunity for their sons from restrictions placed on others. With the USU obliterated, the students came under the domination of the MMK which exerted itself as a parallel or even superior administration. Most prominent in the university was a student, who during the IPKF presence, had been charged with an examination offence. The charges had been dropped without calling the invigilators for an inquiry. Later he began appearing at the university in uniform in an official vehicle, when all others were cycle-bound-from the Vice-Chancellor downwards.

In September, a human rights activist on the staff had to go into hiding when LTTE squads went searching for him.

### **5.2 November 1990 - An exercise in Autonomy:**

The LTTE for a variety of reasons found itself compelled to reverse its strictures on education. With the traditional obsession with educational qualifications in Jaffna and with pressure on the young to take to arms, the exodus from Jaffna reached serious levels. The pass system brought in by the LTTE and the enforced rigours of travel, did little to stem the exodus, though it made people delay plans, made them cough up gold sovereigns and made them more anxious. Further, all this combined to give expatriate Tamil opinion a jolt.

Suddenly the silent educational authorities went into action as though it had become everyone's patriotic duty to restart educational institutions. Staff and students who had gone out of Jaffna because of the war situation were summoned back to Jaffna.

If the LTTE was going to allow the university to function, there was, as just after the IPKF operation, a strong case to reopen the university if it could function as a self respecting institution, safeguarding the interests of the students and the community. The students resident in Jaffna were largely for reopening for three reasons. Being occupied would make it easier for them to resist being importuned for military service. There was an instinctive feeling that they would be safer if the university was functioning, whenever the Sri Lankan army came in. Thirdly, they were so disillusioned that they wanted to quickly finish their studies and go abroad.

Before reopening, the authorities had to face some important questions. They had to face the fact that Muslim staff and students were physically prevented from being in Jaffna. A number

of staff and students had left Jaffna because they could not function democratically or because they felt physically threatened by the LTTE. There were many who felt that the security situation was inimical to their presence. There was no let up in the bombing and shelling. A Sri Lankan military thrust appeared more imminent now than it had been earlier, when the university was closed all but in name. In reopening the university a clear statement of objectives and principles was needed. Students were being recalled from far away places in the East, where they had gone to join their traumatised families. No protest came from any quarters of the university against the treatment meted out to the Muslims and their fellow Muslims students. When few students from the Eastern province who were in Jaffna requested the university authorities to consider the plight of the other students from the Eastern province, senior officials and students from Jaffna had paid no attention to such pleas. The university had an obligation to give confidence to both these students and their families that it was taking steps concerning the students' security. It could have demanded from the LTTE that it should not do harm to students or staff. That the university being essential to the future of the Tamils, it should refrain from maintaining an armed presence in a given neighbourhood of the institution. Parallel to this it could have demanded from the government that no military operations should be conducted in this area. Such steps would have created a sense of solidarity and would have upheld the dignity and autonomy of the institution. These ideas too were not new, in view of previous dealings with the IPKF.

Again responsibility demanded that there being no normal situation, normal rules should not be applied. There was no question of forcing staff and students to report. A clear statement of objectives would have served as grounds for appeal, for everyone to co-operate in keeping the University open. This was what was done in the climate that prevailed in November 1987.

Nothing of this kind is known to have been done in the current situation. There was a deafening silence on the obligations of the institution towards its members. Instead the carrot and stick was used in a humiliating manner. A letter was reportedly handed over to the University Grants Commission asking for the staff not to be paid in Colombo. Pressure was also applied on the UGC not to entertain students requesting transfers to other universities.

The UGC was left with the thorny problem which an autonomous institution should have handled. What was to be done with the staff and students who had legitimate reasons not to go to Jaffna? There was also genuine concern in the UGC for the safety of the officials of the University of Jaffna. If they were acting under duress, a wrong move on the part of the UGC, it was felt, would place them in jeopardy. There was also a reluctance to interfere in the normal prerogatives of the university and be accused of conspiring to run down an institution of the Tamils. The UGC, long regarded as the interfering arm of the Sri Lankan state, appeared more concerned for the autonomy of the University of Jaffna than the university itself.

Once the university reopened there were few illusions about who was in charge. Staff members going to their designated lecture room sometimes found that the room had been commandeered. There were regular meetings with compulsory attendance where those like Yogi poured out their muddles. Communalists in the South would have drawn comfort from Yogi's reasons for acting against Muslims.

The climax of November was the observance of National Heroes Week in the university. Senior university persons spoke to the effect that not only should they commemorate the martyrs, but that one day they should all become martyrs. In the minds of the speakers it may



have been a harmless piece of gimmickry dictated by fear -just as they knew that arming children was totally wrong, but pretended that in view of the exigencies of the 'last battle', the issue did not exist. The impact of such rhetoric on students and their parents need not be elaborated on. Having come to the university expecting protection, they were being called to be martyrs to a cause they generally dreaded. The LTTE itself uses such speakers for propaganda value, but would never take them seriously. One speaker who said that they must all work 48 hours a day for the cause had already sent his son to Colombo. Another had already sent his wife and children to Britain and hoped to follow them, when the army moved in. One don even suggested to the students to remove Sri Lanka in the address they put in their dissertations and asked them to put just University of Jaffna, Jaffna. On the other hand, he confided to one of his colleagues, "If the army moves in, we will all become born again Sri Lankans." For the intellectuals it is a clever somersault. But for the young boys and girls who are giving their lives for a cause legitimised by this intellectual set, it is a tragedy.

Another university official speaking to students seeking transfers in Colombo, assured them that there was no problem and that everything was normal in Jaffna - something the Sri Lanka government would have been happy to have him tell foreign journalists, who have been maligning the government over its military policy.

One senior academic and administrator who had kept an independent mind, found himself occasionally provoked into subtle dissent. The LTTE wanted a high powered group of intellectuals to advise them on how to revive the economy. This academic told them, "There are a very large number of people and farmers thrown out of work between Jaffna and Palaly. They are the persons you must ask. We are hardly qualified to advise you".

## CHAPTER 6

### THE SOUTHERN DIMENSION

#### THE SOUTHERN DIMENSION

##### The Universities:

The nature of the situation in the South flows from what lies behind two contrasting sets of queues. One set, seen regularly in provincial capitals, consists of long lines of young men applying to join the army. The look on their faces has no hint of dare-devilry, patriotism or enthusiasm, but is one of pure resignation. They are in their best dress, carrying files of certificates and testimonials. Their bearing reflects too much awe and gravity for a job that herds them together and drives them forward to kill and too often, to have their limbs blown up.

The other set also consists mostly of young men, not different in appearance from those in the first. But these are young graduates in visa queues outside Western embassies. It is said that a very small fraction of the 400 or so young graduates receiving highly prized

engineering degrees this year from our universities, can be absorbed into employment. But emigration to Australia for instance, will follow almost for the asking.

A research paper by public servants Kuhathasan and Bedewela published in the Island (21st January) gives more frightening indications of the plight of the youth. 36 percent of Sri Lankan women remain unmarried. 41% of the males and 35% of the females are unable to lead a family life due to economic reasons. 22% of males and 14% of females do not have a house of their own.

It was against this backdrop that the government was feeling nervous at the prospect of 200,000 Sri Lankans fleeing home from Saudi Arabia once war in the Gulf appeared imminent. To appease relatives who wanted them back even as paupers, a report in the Sunday Observer first gave the impression that its embassy was contacting them and making arrangements for their return. But advertisements for jobs in Saudi Arabia kept appearing, apparently with government approval. It finally turned out (Daily News, 24th January) that the government was doing little, if anything, to challenge the Saudi position that in view of most services being declared essential, exit visas are not being issued. At least in the case of those from the North-East, the government could say that in consideration of their safety, they may be better off in Saudi Arabia. Those in Jaffna are not protected by anti-missile missiles.

If Sri Lankans have become amongst the most despised and devalued human beings, crises which have matured over decades cannot be entirely blamed on the present government. But a government must be judged by how much it cared for the people, how much it did to unite them and how creatively it handled problems. It must be admitted that the current politics, both from the government and the opposition, can only enhance cynicism and resignation.

Human Rights: The government controlled 'Daily News' could often be clever and convincing in its editorials. Its issue of 18th September 1990 addressed the question of burning bodies - an issue brought into focus by the police confiscating from an MP at the airport, dossiers on missing persons and photographs of burning bodies which were the property of the UN Human Rights Commission.

While being frank about the tragedy, it defended the government, attacking 'human rights dogooders' and suggesting that the subversive threat of the JVP, which did not play according to Queensberry rules, could not have been handled by legal niceties. Its final paragraph said:

"It is best that the unfortunate and ugly chapter of this nation's recent past be closed. There is no need to stir dustbins in an effort to gain political mileage. What is necessary today, is to get rid of the causes that led to the subversive rebellion and ensure that Sri Lanka will never again have to re-live the terror or resort to the counter measures of those weeks and months now passed."

If that oft repeated sentiment is genuine, there ought to have been an admission that a blunder was made and thousands of innocents were killed because the JVP, and the LTTE subsequently, subjected the forces to unaccustomed provocation. This should have been followed by some concrete measures to restore human dignity and accountability before the law, followed by steps at reconciliation. But what have we seen?

Several persons in the South whose surrender was overseen by the Independent Surrender Commission appointed by the president, were killed following their release, after August.

Replying to questions raised in parliament, the defence minister suggested that these persons were criminals killed by angry villagers.

One political party, the NSSP, organised the mothers of disappeared persons into 'Mothers of the Disappeared'. A senior government minister referred to this group as 'mothers of criminals'!

The same logic applies in dealing with the Tamils. Despite repeated calls to forget the past and talk peace, there are no steps being taken to give Tamils confidence or to check reprisals.

In the meantime elite sections of society go on as though the rest of the country did not exist. Roman Catholic bishops and mahanayakes bless the president. The Minister for Defence will follow the Anglican Bishop of Colombo as chief guest at the Thomian Fair '91 in February, organised by his old school St. Thomas' College. He is sure to receive a public commendation for the great job he is doing.

In place of reconciliation, the country is being alienated and subject to resentment at various levels. From which source will spring the next bout of violence remains unpredictable. Something looking harmless enough today may change its character in a crisis brought about by politics of this kind. Many Kandyan Sinhalese for instance have observed that hundreds of burning bodies appeared in the Central Province when a low-country Sinhalese was DIG. It does not strike them so forcefully that the same thing happened when this same officer was in the Southern Province. We do not have a politics of reconciliation that would combat tribalism.

The government appears to be trapped into a series of ill-fated decisions, without the character or the imagination to end the cycle of brutality. Finally everything boils down to sensitivity regarding human rights in its widest sense. We shall briefly examine how some key institutions have responded to this politics in a manner that has made them part of the problem. The role of the opposition has been examined elsewhere in this report.

The Press: In a normally functioning civil society, the press ought to play a creative role in checking degenerative tendencies, presenting facts, clarifying issues and raising questions. The direction here is determined by the fact that journalists who want more openness and fairness find themselves constrained by terror. The mainline press, instead of giving confidence to the oppressed and encouraging rationality, has only increased alienation. Its pro-armed forces stance and selective reporting have further alienated Tamils and large sections of the Sinhalese, and is by no means even helpful to the armed forces. The Island on 1st November 1991, gave on its front page a small report on 30 headless bodies in Thirukkivil, in the East. The reaction from the Defence Ministry two days later was so harsh and intimidating that this was never attempted again. What has been reported in the press is a series of massacres of Sinhalese and Muslims by the LTTE. There was little hint of the thousands of Tamils killed - including the recent killing of 54 Tamils by the STF in the Amparai District in reprisal for 7 STF men killed. With reporting of this kind, large numbers of Sinhalese who have experienced the forces at first hand, remain skeptical of what they are told. For Tamils, such reporting combined with the general chauvinistic undertone, reinforces the view - the Sinhalese cannot be trusted.

If the press was to be part of a rational political process, it would, apart from trying to understand the ethnic problem and checking unlawful behaviour by the state, have tried to

probe the nature of the LTTE, the internal drama within where human beings are moulded, the nature of its international support and its arms procurements. This is how a democratic society would handle the problem. The armed forces are then held in check while being sensitive to the human reality.

We have very little of that kind of press. What appears about the LTTE is mostly unprofitable gossip taken out of context. We read about Balasingam's missing dog four months late, jibes about Baby Brigades, gold sovereigns and speculations about Prabakaran's health. Taken out of its tragic human context, when Baby Brigades also deliver bloody noses, it becomes all the more mystifying and demoralising. Indifference and lack of information, and brutality coupled with mystification, are two sides of the same coin. Thus to the defence ministry, the theft of 30 torch batteries became worthy of citation as a ceasefire violation, while the army complains that during the LTTE-Premadasa honeymoon, containers for the LTTE had slipped in through the port of Colombo.

In spite of the army being lionised in the press and the jingoistic coverage given to its activities, how really helpful has the press been even to the army? The current Mossad Commission inquiry is revealing. When so many things are wanting, it is probably not fair to judge officers by whether they knew the difference between a circuit diagram for a radar system and that of a vacuum cleaner allegedly displayed by Elta Electronics of Israel. But the officers who went there were no fools. They discovered that Israel sold them three Dvora naval craft with defective generators, and tried to sell others with engines tampered to run above design speed, to meet tender specifications. It was plain that Israelis were hardly friends. Almost certainly, who was making money would have been the subject of much talk in officers' mess'. Why did the press hold up Israel as a friend? Was it in the interests of the army to keep all this in the dark?

If the Israelis brought in by the Americans were so deceitful and the LTTE's arms supplies such a well kept secret, it was clear that the government's reputation was such that Sri Lanka had next to no real friends. Why did the press not question this state of affairs? After all, the people of this country, including the army, were paying the price! The bogeyman picked by the press - the so called expatriate Tamil lobby - has now been shown to be in reality a cardboard Tarzan.

Take the manner in which the IPKF was sent out of this country. The army had grave reservations about it. But the press joined in the euphoria over the IPKF's departure. Even recently, the Island (2nd January) has, with qualifications, commended it as a positive achievement of Premadasa. We do not question the desirability of the IPKF's going. But its presence was precipitated by historical developments concerning the Tamils. There was no surgical option. No questions were raised about what alternative security was being given to the Tamils. The whole question was viewed chauvinistically. The LTTE-Premadasa talks were mainly about subcontracting to an armed group, the right to do as it pleased with the Tamils. As early as January 1988, a Tamil editor had his press blown up for saying that, to ditch the Accord and talk to the government was to ride a clay horse. To the forces, it meant stepping into a quagmire.

When the press publishes something strong, it is seldom to do with healthy democratic reasons. It usually meant that there was a powerful lobby that was unhappy. During September, the Sunday Island published an article by a former diplomat, strongly protesting

the moves to associate the name and the cause of the Buddha with those responsible for murder and inhumanity.

One columnist in the Island has obviously been inspired by the army to give vent to their grievances and signal its unhappiness with the recent cease-fire. It came out with many things either viewed with approval at that time or passed over in silence. It recalled the government's inaction over the killing by the LTTE of Tamil MP's and the help given to the LTTE to decimate rival groups and capture arms.

It recounted: "Helicopters were given to top terrorist leaders... sophisticated communication equipment and other items including machine pistols were imported via an unsuspecting Sri Lankan defence official. All packages to the Colombo based terrorists were sent through this official, informed sources say.... Terrorists were allowed to import containers full of supplies. All these containers were cleared with full speed.... Ruling party leaders continuously backed this bunch of criminals and the opposition failed to do much.... Hundreds of soldiers and well experienced officers had been killed in action. All these were the result of the government allowing Prabhakaran and..... to gain supremacy in the North East, concerned people say..." (Sunday Island 6th January 1991).

There is little doubt that information such as what comes out during the Mossad Commission inquiry which commenced sittings in Colombo during January, will only hurt once powerful persons who had fallen from grace. The commission is inquiring into allegations made by Ostrovsky in his 'By way of deception', pertaining to Sri Lanka. It was also reported that two stars of Jayewardene's cabinet were quizzed by the CID after Premadasa became President. The press will not ask what Premadasa was doing all those years as Jayewardene's second? There will hardly be commissions to investigate the disenfranchisement of Mrs. Bandaranaike, the Welikade massacre, and the banning of Left parties as the alleged organisers of the July 1983 violence.

For a government that proliferates commissions and task forces, there is remarkable resistance to appoint a commission to inquire into the inquiry concerning the killing of journalist Richard de Zoysa. The demand comes from the international community and the opposition. There is thus a natural inhibition on the part of journalists about probing too far. Even probing into the LTTE's current strength may not leave the government looking too good.

The press could be entertaining. But it has hardly been anyone's friend, or of much help to the nation.

### **The Universities:**

The University of Peradeniya, when it was the University of Ceylon, was an outstanding university in Asia. For a university where lively political debate continued into the 70's, now political discussion is taboo. The events of the 80's, the racial violence, the civil war and then the JVP's terror and the government's counter terror, have completely changed the character of the universities. Students at Peradeniya have been warned by the authorities not to come crying to them if they get into trouble with the security forces. Most students who were forcibly kept away from their studies by the JVP, do not mind this. Like their counter-parts in Jaffna, they are totally disillusioned with the politics they have seen and share the same aim - to quickly get their certificate and get out of this country. Their experience which led to such

cynicism, has also removed the need to think about the future of this country and how they are going to live in it. They care as little for their fellow students as they do for the armed forces. If a fellow student or staff member disappears, a widespread comment would be that he asked for it.

In an atmosphere where students are discouraged from thinking about political issues connected with justice and their collective well being, the students who come into prominence are those prone to hooliganism. The ideal Vice Chancellor in such situations is not one inspired by great ideas, but one who will play the Brigadier. The Faculty of Engineering which once produced Vickramabahu Karunaratne, Lionel Bopage and Viswanandadevan is today a very different place.

The staff too are painfully discovering that political issues are things that they cannot isolate themselves from. For instance, many of the staff in Engineering, Medicine and the Sciences are those who have striven to maintain standards over years of contracting resources and staff, resisting the temptation to emigrate. But the economic and political milieu is one where students come out indifferent towards the country, its people, and looking towards Australia and Canada. The staff in turn have to wonder what they are about in terms of results achieved.

One legacy of the 80's is that right wing values - order, discipline toughness -are held in widespread admiration. When it is said, 'only this government can run this country', what they mean is that this country has no future and only repression could keep discontent at bay, until at least they are safely out of it.

The universities, which are integral to the current politics, are thus of little use in terms of giving direction to the nation. When it comes to solving the nations problems, the end result of state repression is that rather than obtain help, the government has in the universities, something nearing a white elephant.

As is usual in cases of repression, people feel powerless and their world is greatly narrowed down to their personal concerns. They tend to jealously guard personal privileges, whether deserved or undeserved. Take the performance of the universities during the current war. Only the Open University Teachers' Association condemned the bombing of civilians in the North in addition to the acts of LTTE, and called for the government to bring the Tamils into a political process by clearly stating the terms of a solution. Attempts by the OUTA to get the Federation of University Teachers Association (FUTA) to move in the matter were of little avail.

There was then the matter of hundreds of students from the University of Jaffna wanting transfers to universities in the South. Their reasons were varied. Some had faced intimidation and feared returning to Jaffna. Some just could not operate as self respecting persons under the LTTE regime. Some could not face the physical insecurity created by the government's campaign. Others felt a mixture of these causes or felt that the University of Jaffna was going to be in a state of crisis for a long time, and that they would be better off with a degree from the South.

There was firstly the question of space and facilities. But it was a matter requiring a principled response from Students' and Teachers' Associations in the South. Medical students from Jaffna who talked to Southern colleagues and directly or indirectly with staff, found the response almost wholly negative. These responses were largely based on gut personal

feelings, such as a desire to restrict competition or the possibility of losing British Medical Council recognition, which Jaffna lacked. Comments were reportedly made by staff such as, 'We lost two years. Now it is their turn', or 'Sinhalese students cannot study in Jaffna and we cannot even tour Jaffna. Why should we have them here'.

While such feelings may be justified on a personal level, how do they help the country and how politically prudent are actions based on such feelings? It is a matter of regret to many in Jaffna that the university's base has been narrowed down by the exclusion of Sinhalese and more recently of Muslims. The tide cannot be turned overnight, but it is left to those concerned persons to promote non-sectarian and universal values through their actions. The southern universities lost an opportunity to lift the stigma that descended on them in July 1983. Some of these students will return to Jaffna with the feeling that one cannot blame the LTTE too much.

By contrast, sensing an opportunity to score a tactical victory to discredit the ideology of Eelam, even a UNP cabinet was able to rise above gut communal feelings, and issue a directive to find places in the South for students from the University of Jaffna wanting transfers. (Nevertheless it was doing much else to give credence to that ideology). The universities were largely insensitive, even to the point of being blind to national self interest.

While doing little that is laudable in the current context, one can be sure that when everything is over, many dead and governments changed, there will be from scholarly circles in the universities and other well funded institutes, objective and very readable treatises on what is past and buried.

The Armed Forces: Over the last year, a number of items have surfaced in the press to suggest strongly that there was much discontent among the forces, particularly with the role into which the government (and the opposition by default) was thrusting them. They have made their feelings felt through the press and chiefly through Mrs. Bandaranaike, the leader of the opposition.

In January 1990, Mrs. Bandaranaike made a statement on the floor of the House UTHR(J), [Report No.4](#)], alleging that army officers were being ordered to get mixed up in political killings, particularly by co-operating with vigilante units. She was careful to add that only a small minority was associated in this and referred to a particular officer in the Army HQ.

There are strong indications that some officers had approached foreign embassies for help in leaving the country, because they disliked their orders. Following the Richard de Zoysa killing, the press reflected puzzlement and dismay among certain quarters of the security establishment. Some of them had even thought of de Zoysa as their man.

Going by traditions built up since the early 80's, it would appear that the average officer is not very sensitive about killing civilians. But many are by indications sensitive about hit lists - particularly when there is the class factor.

The political opportunism which pushed them unprepared into the current war, made the forces both angry and irrational, further strengthening and legitimising the LTTE. The president's boast about doing to the LTTE what was done to the JVP, with its macabre connotations, and the defence minister's rash promise to wrap things up in two weeks, both came crashing down. The army found itself feeling weak and demoralised. From the

beginning of the war complaints have surfaced that the army suffered by being deprived of air support because politicians were then using helicopters for other purposes. One such complaint attributed to the former national security minister in an interview, was later denied by him, and there was speculation about his political future under this government. The latest was made in parliament by Mrs. Bandaranaike, soon after the Mankulam debacle in late November 1990. That was the time President Premadasa was visiting Jaffna. A complaint also surfaced in the Sunday Times just after Mankulam that wounded army personnel had suffered because of inadequate surgical facilities. Government doctors were enjoined to volunteer. All these charges were strenuously denied. The minister for defence angrily suggested in parliament that army personnel with SLFP affiliations were circulating such falsehoods.

It also surfaced in the press in early December that a handful of senior army officers had revealed their intentions of leaving the army, some at least to emigrate. These departing officers are often from model UNP families. There is little doubt that the army senses that, obligatory praise apart, hardly anyone loves them - in the South as much as in the North. Even the government, it would appear, is not serious about them. They are not sensitive about those whom they kill, but they keenly feel that they are being made to carry the can for the failures of national politics.

It is in the current context of political ineptitude and demoralisation in battle, that plans have been announced to double the size of the army to about 100,000. As we pointed out earlier, the army recruits as much as the LTTE recruits are victims of the system who are moved mainly by circumstances. For persons who have spent 20 years in the army to rise to the rank of colonel, to resign, go abroad and live as nondescript persons in the West, can come mainly from disillusionment. The country itself is largely cynical. School leavers among the elite are hardly likely to look upon army careers in the earlier manner.

Expanding the army under these conditions would bring about serious problems of its own. A healthy non-elitist conception of the army could be achieved under a different kind of politics. But here we are trying to induct into the army disillusioned, deprived youth in an elite dominated society with its value system in an acute state of crisis and confusion. For young army officers who think of themselves as basically decent, it becomes painful to face the fact that they are in an outfit where looting is virtually regularised. Amidst political indecision, such an army is being pitched against an enemy that is clear about its politics and plays its cards carefully. The prospects for the army are not bright.

Expansion is also bound to heighten the tension between professional and non-professional types - a distinction probably blurred in practice. An extreme example of the latter is a police officer, who in 1971 was reportedly deemed disturbed, and instructions were given to keep him away from firearms. He showed his potential in a political service he rendered in 1982 which found disfavour in a court of law. Thereafter his career zoomed, reaching heights of notoriety during the anti-JVP campaign. The Richard de Zoysa affair brought other names into public view. While such persons find favour under the present political dispensation, many of their colleagues would feel uncomfortable.

General: What we have here is a dominant ideology with its world view that has not been challenged. A politics based on it is getting the country into deeper crises, with its misery, alienation and division. Under this dispensation institutions including those of a liberal origin, function in such a way as to reinforce the crisis. The hold of this ideology is seen in that, with so much at stake (lives and the future of the nation), while hedging for so long on putting



forward the basis for a solution, the president has to publicly seek the advice of the chief Buddhist clergy - the Mahanayakes. The army which is a victim of the whole process is still groping. Even with increased numbers it does not hope for victory. It only hopes to get the edge over the Tigers in terms of brute force so as to pursue that old will-o-the-wisp. That is to negotiate from a position of strength with those with the guns, over the dead bodies of thousands of ordinary people.

All this is being done with no idea of the consequences, as if India is far away, there are not 200,000 Tamil refugees in India, that Tamil Nadu politics is not closely linked to Tamil politics here and that the IPKF was only a bad dream. Suppose the LTTE is militarily smothered, what if Tamil sentiment turns to India to intervene at any cost?

Again the government though beleaguered from so many quarters appears strong and stable, because the opposition has no cogent ideas and the government is seen as the ablest practitioner to meet the demands and contingencies of current politics. Only this government it appears can bridge the gap between high sentiments and low deeds. Only it can hammer the Tamils today and embrace the Tigers tomorrow. The tragedy is that these are seen as necessities by influential sections.

Unless a new basis is found for Sri Lankan politics and the opposition sees its way to articulating human rights with greater consistency than for mere effect, we are in for greater tragedies. It is notable that the opposition while campaigning over human rights violations in the South, has come up with no ideas about the Tamil problem, except to continue the military thrust. Too many opposition speeches suggest that care should be exercised in the North, not because there are human beings there, but so as not to give India an excuse to intervene. This gives substance to angry allegations by the government, implying that when they feel threatened, the opposition would opt for repression, however crude.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **I.A. Welcomes cease-fire, urges regional self-government**

**I**nternational Alert appreciates that the Sri Lankan Government has responded to the LTTE's cease-fire of 1st January by declaring a 7 day tentative cease-fire from 4th January.

Echoing demands from inside as well as outside Sri Lanka, International Alert calls upon the Sri Lankan Government and all political parties in the country to take this opportunity to make a serious and clear offer of regional self-government for the Tamil people within a united Sri Lanka. This could well be done along the lines of federal or similar arrangement prevailing in many countries around the world without impairing their unity, says I.A. representative Eduardo Marino, recently in Colombo.

The international community - long concerned with the grave situation in Sri Lanka - should welcome in principle the unilateral cease-fire by the Tamil guerrilla LTTE as from 1st January 1991. The international community should look forward to a considered and prompt constructive response by the Government of Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka as elsewhere in the world, experience shows that a cease-fire, in order to be more than a tactical gesture and actually be conducive to meaningful peace talks, must be accompanied by practical guarantees and be impartially monitored.

## **GUARANTEES**

In the circumstances found in the North and East regions of Sri Lanka, where the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil guerrillas have been fighting with big losses on both sides and causing tremendous loss of life and high levels of material destruction among the population, there can be no better guarantee to start with than a solemn agreement by all sides to fully respect the main rules of the international law of armed conflict.

Such an agreement would immediately test the intentions of all combatants and start building confidence within both the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil guerrilla as well as among the population at large.

In practice this would include a commitment to:

- release all hostages and not to take any more hostages;
- stop all torture and executions of captives and prisoners;
- stop using civilians in mine-clearing operations;
- stop recruiting for combat boys and girls under 15;
- stop bombing and shelling populated areas;
- stop all reprisals on civilians including food blockades;
- stop all acts of terrorisation of civilians as a means of obtaining their support, and all looting as a way of compensation of combatants.
- allow humanitarian access to all prisoners of war.

These measures accompanying the cease-fire would immediately transform for the better the conflict scenario.

Any credible cease-fire demands impartial monitoring.

## **MONITORING**

The United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have already been performing excellent work in Sri Lanka for some time. The former has been present in the form of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in the North and East provinces. The latter has been represented by a delegation of the ICRC rendering a variety of humanitarian services throughout the country. Neither the UN nor the ICRC are bodies foreign to Sri Lanka but agencies of the international system of which Sri Lanka is a member with both rights and duties.

This is why the Government of Sri Lanka could consider seeking the services of both the UN and the ICRC to jointly monitor impartially the cease-fire and the compliance with the

humanitarian guarantees. This could conceivably be done by way of widening the operational mandate of both the UN and the ICRC in Sri Lanka now, also in the spirit of the many precedents of co-operation between the UN and the ICRC in our parts of the world.

International Alert is well aware of the favourable disposition of many governments to back up in various ways a very serious, sincere and enlightened peace-effort in Sri Lanka at this point - and to cooperate in reconstruction and development thereafter. International Alert is mainly aware of the cry of the people in war regions for peace with human rights and self-determination with democracy.

A properly monitored cease-fire between combatants together with the humanitarian guarantees to safeguard non-combatants may be the first effective step.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **The War in the North-East**

**T**he war which is going on in the North and the East has left a large number of people amid death and destruction. People do not feel that the government is treating them as their citizens. The bitterness against the Sri Lankan army and fear is still lingering on. The happenings in the Eastern Province and other areas rightly or wrongly reinforced their view that the Sinhala army and political establishment is bent on destroying the Community. On the other hand they detest LTTE's destructive politics and feel angry about everything happening around them. If the government and the politicians in the South do not understand the complexity of the problem and the trauma faced by the Tamil and the Muslim people in the North and the East, then they will do more damage to national unity of this Country than anybody else!

The people are cynical about the guarantees on the part of the government in solving the crisis in a proper and human way. Instead of openly and clearly putting forward a concrete frame work in which the government seeks to find a solution to the ethnic problem and to canvass the opinion among the Sinhala masses and other political parties for consensus, it is dragging on with vague promises. After all these tragedies have not taken place for the very first time. These have happened in this country; it was are not going to have a leadership which has the courage and the wisdom to put forward an acceptable solution to the ethnic problem based on regional autonomy or Federal set-up (which are the standard frameworks in which the ethnic problems are being managed in most of the countries), then the future of our country seems to be very bleak indeed. On the other hand the way in which the government responds to the demands of every quarter seems to imply that only the might of the gun is being respected by them!!

The responses meted out to the democratic forces led to despair and frustration of the Youth and lead to a form of destructive politics which resulted in meaningless destruction in our land. Therefore after seeing and meeting the people of Jaffna, I wish to put forward the following requests to show sensitiveness to the people's need there and to make them feel that they are a part of our Nation. The following measures have to be taken immediately to save the situation from ruin and to avoid large scale death and destruction at least, at this last moment.

(1) It is fact that the people there do not have confidence in the government; and they are also against the destructive politics of the LTTE group. They feel that they are between the Devil and the deep sea. Large number of youths are cynical about the whole thing but they are powerless and fearful that if the army comes then their lives will not be spared. At present people cannot move out of Jaffna that easily. More than that, large scale effort is taken by the LTTE to force directly or indirectly all the people mainly the youths to get involved in some activities in the hope the army treat them as LTTE. Under these circumstances youths do not have any option but to join them with the feeling that we fight and die instead of drying in vain. Therefore unless the government and the armed forces understand this and take measures to give confidence to those youths, that there are alternatives for them, they will force a large number of people into the destructive political path. For this, mere assurances are not enough to convince the youths. We need concrete proposals to deal with this situation. If the government announces that certain organisations such as churches, temples, etc., as well as ICRC and some international Organisations to oversee the process of arrest, it will give them some confidence. They can be asked to gather in Refugee camps supervised by the ICRC (and other NGO's help can also be obtained in this regard). And the army when they want to arrest, they should be registered with the ICRC to make sure no ill-treatment is meted out to them in army's custody. In this way the people will have confidence that their lives will be saved. People are also scared to go to Refugee Camps as they also fear that the LTTE might provoke the army. Therefore it is essential that these camps should have some international representation. It is unreasonable and unworkable to transfer the whole Jaffna population to Vavuniya. The destruction of properties seems to be a pattern as far as the Sri Lankan army is concerned. Its going to alienate the people more and more and the bitterness will last long.

(2) The minors who are carrying arms are also in fear of their life. It is necessary for a responsible government to handle this situation with care. All of them should be given amnesty and allowed to go back to schools.

(3) There are incidents where the army have killed those youths who are desperate and are trying to flee the country with their families. Apart from few incidents the captured persons are being badly treated. Those who are fleeing from Jaffna to India at this moment are invariably cynical about LTTE politics. If the army would not understand them and if they treat them like this, naturally they are bound to feel sympathetic to Tigers' cause.

(4) The State patronage given to the Sinhala colonisation is well-known. The heavy destruction in villages around Trincomalee has created fear amongst the Tamils that the earlier programme of colonisation is going to continue. It is to be noted that it is a sad fact that certain national papers argue this course of action to counter the LTTE's action against Sinhala civilians : which shows how ignorant and irresponsible they are. It is this approach that inherently breeds destructive politics. If the State uses its power to demonstrate its ability to create insecurity to the minority and by which they can subjugate them, then they are sowing seeds for future destruction. Therefore its time for the government to assure the Tamil people that they will not continue with this type of politics. It is also morally wrong for the government to colonise a large number of poor people in these area's for their short-sighted politics.

Hope that the government will fulfil the above demands to win the people's confidence and provide a concrete solution to this ethnic issue. The two major communities are speaking two different languages and majority in both communities also practices two different religions.

This shows the nature and the depth of the problem! Therefore it should be taken very seriously and the solution be found to enhance national unity on the basis of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious nature of our society for a lasting peace!! Hope we have learnt our lessons from our short-sighted politics which ruined the whole nation!!! **(These are some reflections made after I have seen, heard and touched Jaffna and its people. My visit to Jaffna was from the 17th September, 1990).**  
**(Sgd) Fr.Dudley Attanayake.**

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## **NOTE**

In this report we have brought out certain features of the present political phenomenon in the North and East to raise awareness of the situation. We cannot effectively tackle the human rights issues in isolation unless we understand the political environment in which the violations are taking place. How the media is being manipulated, emotions have been raised, surveillance is being carried out, dissent has been suppressed are matters of concern for anyone who cares about the fate of people. The reality in which character degeneration is so widespread and terror has crept into the minds of people make any semblance of normality very deceptive. The legitimate fear and the insecure feelings of the Tamil community against the Sri Lankan state is being harnessed to the full by the LTTE to legitimise their hold on the people. In a sense the destructive politics is being institutionalised to such an extent that no Tamil political groups are in a position to represent the interests of the people. Unless this politics is replaced, talking about human rights violations is a meaningless exercise. We hope that our reports will play a role in that direction