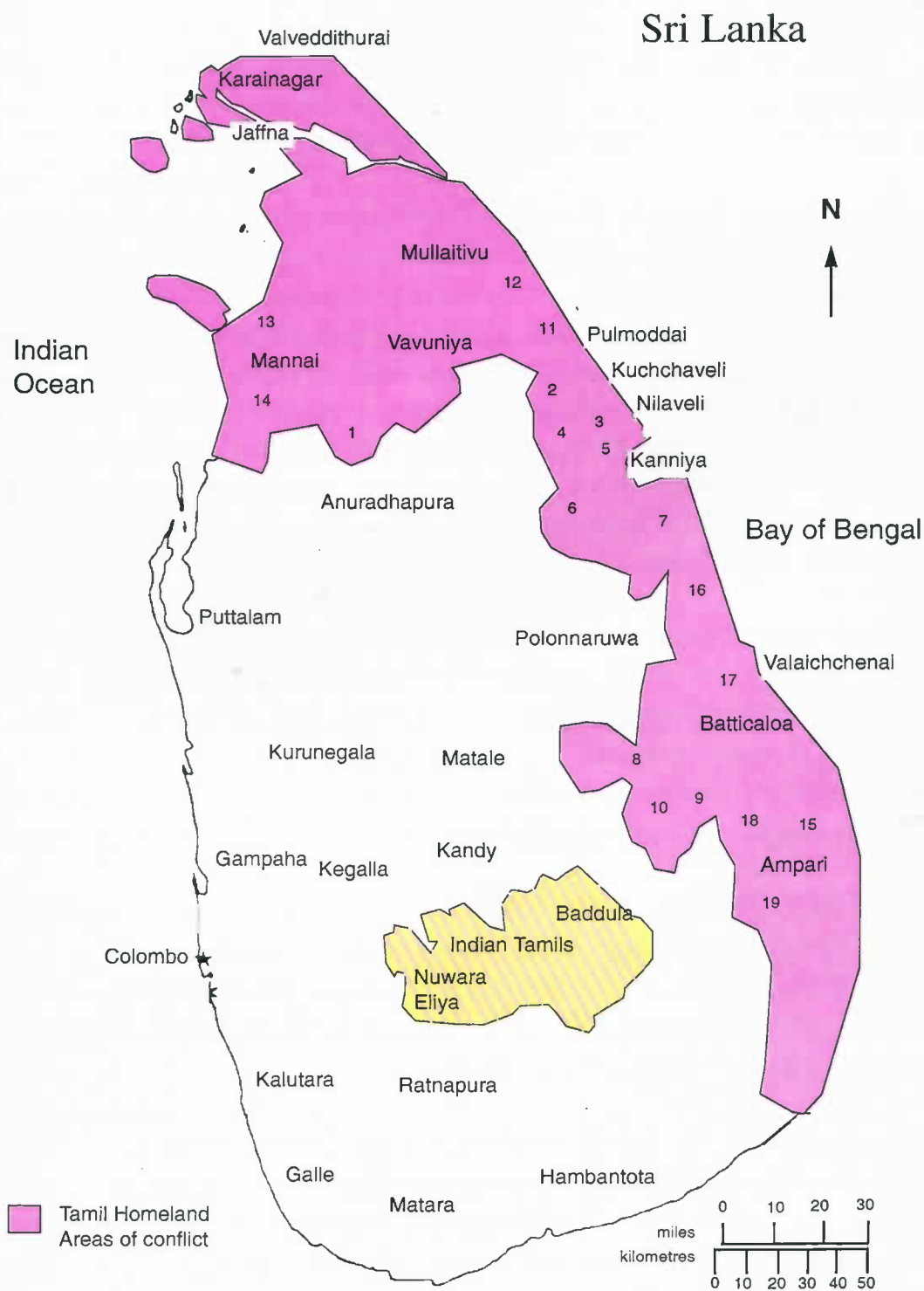


ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA — THE EFFECT ON HEALTH



BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is a small Island at the southern tip of India and is populated by 17 million people. It is also the location of a brutal war waged by the government against the Tamil minority.

Sri Lanka is populated by many different communities. The majority Sinhala Buddhist comprise about 70% of the population. Two other major communities are the Tamils (18%) and the Muslims (7%).

Sri Lanka was ruled by Western Colonial powers for close to 500 years during which time the different communities, each with its own kingdom, were brought together for administrative purposes. At the time of independence in 1948 Sri Lanka had a system of government which gave total political control to the Sinhala Buddhist majority. This majority soon passed legislation by which a significant section of the Tamils were disenfranchised. The minority communities in the country were soon alienated and marginalised by subsequent laws such as those making Sinhalese the official language and the protection of the Buddhist religion a function of the State.

Successive governments took further action which threatened the economic survival of the Tamils. The state funded colonisation of Tamil lands by Sinhala people. It also drastically reduced the opportunity for qualified Tamils to obtain higher education. More importantly, these governments failed to protect the Tamil people from repeat pogroms and acts of physical violence organised by segments of the Sinhala population.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s it was the government itself with its armed forces that planned and carried out acts of physical violence against Tamil lives and property. The acts of violence perpetuated by the agents of the government included the intentional burning of the Jaffna library with its large collection of rare books.

The attempts by the Tamils to protect themselves by peaceful means and within the framework of parliamentary democracy was a failure. After 3-4 decades of indignity the Tamils became convinced that the protection of Tamil lives and property would rest on the re-creation of Tamil self rule.

Groups of young Tamils organised themselves to fight a guerrilla warfare against the Sri Lankan state.

The militant action of the Tamil groups brought about violent reprisal by the government armed forces. The violence has since been escalating as a process of action and counter action.

The latest phase in the protracted war began in June 1990. Since that time the government has used unopposed air power to bomb Tamil homelands with enormous loss of life, limbs and property. The Tamil militant group (LTTE) now has established control over substantial segments of the Tamil homeland and has started an administrative and legal system, including the printing of its own currency. The government has responded by imposing an economic blockade and cutting off electric power and supplies of fuel. This move, probably aimed at causing suffering to the Tamil population and inciting them rise against the LTTE, has failed. Instead it has had the consequence of even further alienating the Tamil people from the government. However, it has also caused untold and continuing hardship due to the lack of food, medicine and other essential supplies. The cumulative effect has been increasing deprivation and disease among the minority Tamil population.

**THIS CONFERENCE SEEKS TO BRING ABOUT
A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAR
IN SRI LANKA IN ORDER TO RESPOND
CONSTRUCTIVELY TO THIS SITUATION**

THE HUMAN COST OF WAR

The information and images of the conflict in Sri Lanka has failed to portray the massive extent of the human suffering resulting from the war. This Conference attempts to focus on the status of these unfortunate victims. While an impression of the extent of suffering can be obtained by the following data, the pain, anguish and despair of the affected individual cannot be measured.

Sri Lanka: Demography and basic indicators

1. Population (millions) 1992	17.7	2. Population Annual Growth rate (%) 1980-92	1.5
3. Life expectancy	71	4. Total adult literacy rate 1990	88
5. Infant mortality rate 1992	15	6. Maternal mortality rate 1980-91	80
7. GNP per capita (US\$) 1992	540	8. Daily per capita calorie supply as a % of requirement 1988-90	101
9. % of children (1980 -1992) suffering from:			
Underweight (0-4 yrs)	Wasting (12-23 months)	Stunting (24-59 months)	
Moderate & Severe	Moderate & Severe	Moderate & Severe	
31%	21%	39%	
10. % of government expenditure allocated to (1986 - 1992)			
Health	Education	Defence	
5%	8%	9%	

SOURCE: The State of World Children 1994 - UNICEF

This information does not reflect the reality of the situation in full in North-East Sri-Lanka (Tamil Homelands).

NORTH-EAST: DESTRUCTION AND DEATHS IN THE TEN YEAR WAR (1983-1993)

Houses damaged or destroyed	150,000
Places of worship damaged or destroyed	1,479
Tamil civilians killed	35,000
Tamil civilians disappeared	10,000
Tamils held in prison without charge or trial for over three years	1,500
Tamils held in military camps (estimate)	5,000

SOURCES: Tamil Information Centre
Ministry of Hindu Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka - 1994
Sri Lanka Monitor (Publication of British Refugee Council)

PLANTATION SECTOR (HILL COUNTRY)

Mortality rate at least 2X national average, including child deaths and maternal deaths

		1980	1982
Infant mortality	Haputale	50	70
	Nuwara Eliya	83	95

(R. Kuian & K. Jayawardena, the Exploitation of Women on the Plantations. Colombo: Women's Education Centre, 1984)

Fewer schools, lower education levels, fewer teachers than in surrounding villages/towns

Literacy 61.8% (National 85%)

Of 150 women workers surveyed:

- 27% suffer high blood pressure
- 80% have dental problems
- 34% have blood deficiencies
- 35% suffer chest complaints (asthma and trachea-related)
- 83% have arm and leg ailments and backaches

Of 141 married women:

- 96 child births
- 24 still births
- 34 spontaneous abortions

(Kantha Maga 12.92; VIRAK 23.2.92; TIC 8.92)

ORPHANS

- Of 829,000 total in country 469,000 due to North-East war (Probation & Child Care Services Dept., TIC 10.92)

JAFFNA 1992 - 1993

- In 12 refugee camps, 60% of infants, 90% of mothers malnourished
- In Jaffna Municipality, 58% age 1-4 malnourished in Manipay, 60% in villages malnourished, 74.5% in refugee camps malnourished
(TIC 5.92; TIC 3.93)

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT DONOR AID

- Concern has been expressed that donor funds intended as humanitarian aid have been diverted to defence. **In 1992 60% of donor aid had been diverted from key areas including power, telecommunications, health and education.**
Paul Isenman, World Bank SAsia Director
(SLM 6.93; TT 15.7.93)
- Bottlenecks in disbursement of donor aid for refugee rehabilitation and resettlement.
(INF 7.93)
- Cabinet spokesman H. Herath admitted that Rs. 11 million (\$250,00) in food aid had 'disappeared'
(SLM 6.93)
- UN International Fund for Agricultural development:
Of the 114 'developing' countries studied, Sri Lanka is one of five countries with the sharpest increase in rural poverty in the last twenty years (others are Zambia, Mali, Brazil, Kenya)
(World Solidarity Forum 3.93)

REFERENCES:

- INF - Inform Situation Report (Colombo)
TT - Tamil Times (England)
TIC - Tamil Information Centre monthly (England)
SLM - Sri Lanka Monitor (British Refugee Council)
VIRAK - Virakesari (Colombo, newspaper in Tamil)

% OF CHILDREN BELOW 80% OF WEIGHT FOR AGE* - JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

	December 1991	December 1992
Infants	27	37
Children 1 - 2	44	57
Children 3 - 4	54	66
Children in refugee camps	-	47.8

* As result malnutrition caused by restrictions on food supply

SOURCE: Situation Report Update - Medical Officer of Health Jaffna - 15.12.92
Current Nutritional Status of Population in Jaffna
District, Report No2 of the committee appointed by the NGO Council, Jaffna -
20.12.92

SRI LANKA - MILITARY EXPENDITURE (RUPEES MILLIONS)

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total Expenditure	8,190	8,445	13,956	16,394	15,960	24,990
As a % of Current Expenditure	17.8	14.8	19.4	20.2	18.9	

SOURCE: Tamil Information Centre

TAMILS DISPLACED (AS AT AUGUST 1994)

Tamil refugees in the North-East

Jaffna	244,000
Mannar	54,000
Kilinochchi	41,000
Vavuniya	11,000
Mullaitivu	30,000
Trincomalee	34,000
Batticaloa	77,000
Amparai	23,000

TOTAL

514,000

Puttalam

Muslims displaced from north

40,000

Colombo

Tamils displaced from North-East Living in Colombo and suburbs

100,000

Tamil Nadu, India

Refugees in camps	70,000
Refugees outside camps	100,000

TOTAL

170,000

Other Countries

Asylum-seekers in Europe and North America

400,000

TOTAL NUMBER OF TAMILS DISPLACED

1,224,000

SOURCE: Tamil Information Centre