

In the meantime, military sources claimed that, although the Tigers had acknowledged holding 40 policemen and one soldier, they are holding many more soldiers captured in ambushes and attacks on army camps about whom they have not given out any information.

Cabinet Minister and President of the Ceylon Workers Congress, S.Thondaman, has stated that he would visit Jaffna on a peace mission if the Parliamentary Select Committee proposals fail to bring about a political solution. Mr.Thondaman, whose earlier plans to visit Jaffna to talk with LTTE leaders were aborted following hysterical propaganda backlash from extremist chauvinist forces in the south of the island, said in the press interview, "Nobody can stop me now, since a Buddhist delegation has also visited Jaffna on a peace mission". Mr.Thondaman stressed the need to evolve a consensus of all parties, which was the essence of the democratic system. He welcomed any move by any party to bring about a settlement of the northeast problem.

The Swedish government has expressed its willingness to assist in the peace process in Sri Lanka if the parties to the conflict were to approach it. In response to a letter addressed by Prof. Peter Schalk of the Upsala University, the Swedish Foreign Minister has stated that: "In order to make possible for Sweden to consider to play an active role in the attempt to reach a peace agreement with the fighting parties, it is indeed necessary that both sides turn to the Swedish Government and demand explicitly that it shall engage in such a peace process".

While there is no indication that the Sri Lankan government has responded to this initiative, Lawrence Thilagar, a Central Committee member of the LTTE and who presently lives in Paris, has re-

sponded. In a letter addressed to the Swedish Foreign Minister, Mr.Thilagar has said, "The policy of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been to engage in unconditional talks with the Sri Lanka government with a view to ending the conflict. We are willing to sit and discuss with the Sri Lankan government the establishment of a structural frame within which the two peoples in the island may live in equality and in freedom."

While the above mentioned initiatives went without any concrete results yet, there is also mounting pressure for a military solution. The 'Parliamentary Select Committee to seek a resolution of the ethnic conflict' also seemed to be reaching a stalemate. In the aftermath of the Opposition decision to launch the campaign of 'no-cooperation' in Parliament, the SLFP announced that it would withdraw from participation in the Select Committee until such time as the government would change its attitude of confrontation with the Opposition. On 28 May, seven Tamil political parties - ACTC, TULF, EROS, ENDLF, EPRLF, TELO, PLOTE - said they were seeking an interview with the SLFP leadership to appeal to the SLFP to resume its participation in the Select Committee. However, reports of a meeting of the Central Committee of the SLFP conveyed the impression that the SLFP was not willing to reconsider its decision.

#### Indo-Lanka relations

The decision taken by the government of India on May 15 to outlaw the LTTE was also one which would have many repercussions in Sri Lanka. Although many observers in both countries felt that this was a largely 'symbolic' gesture, and was an exertion of pressure on

both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to move towards a process of negotiated settlement of their differences, the ban and the subsequent indictment of LTTE leader Prabhakaran as one of the accused of the Gandhi assassination necessitated a re-consideration of the issues with regard to a possible negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict. The LTTE has accused that India in collaboration with the Sri Lankan government has prepared a "three-point plan of aggression against Tamil Eelam". According to an article in its Tamil weekly "Kalaththil", the three points of the plan are :

\* To create an alternative leadership among the Tamils to that of the LTTE;

\* To falsely implicate V.Prabhakaran and other important leaders of the LTTE in criminal offences, and thereby seek to legitimise their aggression under the pretext of attempting to capture them; and

\* To first drop Sri Lankan troops in areas where the LTTE leaders are presumed to operate from, and thereafter Indian special troops would follow in order to support the Sri Lankan soldiers. For this purpose, India has already anchored in the Bay of Bengal off the coast of Sri Lanka two Naval Vessels carrying special troops, who are proficient in Tamil.

The article adds that the two governments are already undertaking joint preparations according to the above plan, and that by making false criminal charges against the LTTE leaders, the Indian government was seeking to portray them as criminals. It is in this attempt to create an alternative leadership that the TULF leaders were recently invited for talks in New Delhi where, for the purpose of reorganising the party, the Indian government gave them Rs. 10 million, the article alleges.

## Politics of Massacres

Karapola, Muthugala and Alanchipothana are very small villages on the northernmost borders of the Mahaweli 'B' Scheme. To reach these villages, you have to turn off the road from Pollonnaruwa to Batticaloa a little before you come to Welikanda, at a junction known as Sevanapitiya and travel on a dirt road for about seven kilometres. Beyond Alanchipothana, the Mahaweli river flows on its way to the sea at Trincomalee. And on the other side of the river is LTTE territory.

Karapola and Muthugala are 'purana' (old) Tamil villages, the villagers say they have lived there for seven generations or more. They have been rice cultivators by tradition and are typical dry zone farmers, impoverished, resigned to their fate.

Alanchipothana is a more recent settlement of Muslims

from the Eastern Province who lost their homes in a major cyclone in the late seventies. The village is situated on the not-so-arable land in that area. As a result, the farmers of Alanchipothana have tended to work in the fields of the villages of Karapola and Muthugala on a leasehold system. Somewhere in this cycle of things, the Tamils seem to have been pushed further down the ladder of deprivation and pauperisation while the Muslims have moved upwards. This unfortunately reinforces some of the racist stereotypes that abound in Sri Lanka. In the present case, what needs to be kept in mind is that some degree of economic tension between the Tamil and Muslim communities was already present in the villages. And when the Tamils declared, somewhere after the New Year festivities of mid-April, that they would not be leasing their fields to the farmers of

Alanchipothana any more, this gave the already-existing tensions a fresh impetus. The Muslims allege that the Tamil villagers could never have taken such a drastic step without the packing, financial as well as moral, of the LTTE; the Tamil villagers say that the Mahaweli authorities have told them that all lands that are not farmed by the title-holders will be reclaimed by the Mahaweli Board. Whatever the truth of these variations, the fact that concerns us at this point is, that the tensions between the Tamil and Muslim villagers were exacerbated by the land issue. In addition, as in all 'border' villages in the north and east, the state's decision to arm Muslims as Home Guards and as Civil Defence Squads while consistently and consciously not arming the Tamil villagers who live in similar circumstances, has led to a further dimension being added to the Tamil-Muslim dichotomy.

It is in this context that we could look at the violent events that took place in Alanchipothana. Karapola and Muthugala on the 28th and 29th of April 1992. Shortly before midnight on the 28th April, an armed group of men and women, in uniform, launched an attack on the Police Post in Alanchipothana. There was a platoon, consisting of 28 policemen, present at the time. They were taken completely by surprise and fled in the face of their attackers. The gang then moved on through the southern part of the village, killing, burning and looting as they went. Almost all the killings were done by hacking and cutting: few shots were fired. At the end of it, almost 60 people lay dead or dying; more than 30 of them were children below the age of 12, the ones who could not run away fast enough. Some of the Muslim villagers say that they saw young men from the Tamil villages of Karapola and Muthugala among the marauders; this has yet to be proved conclusively. Others say the group gathered together before they left the village and shouted out slogans including long live (Vaalkai) to this or that LTTE leader in the area.

Villagers in Karapola and Muthugala, a mere mile or so away at the most, say, that they heard the noise of shouting through the night. A little before dawn, first the village of Karapola and then the village of Muthugala were attacked by a group of armed men. Many villagers testify that the Home Guards and Civilian Defence Squads of Alanchipothana were among the attackers. There were 49 men authorised to possess firearms in Alanchipothana at the time of the incident, and since victims from Karapola and Muthugala bore bullet wounds, it is likely that this story is true.

Once again, the toll of human life was brutal: the route of the two villages left over 50 persons dead, and once again, over half the victims were children. The army post set up between the two villages proved inadequate to deal with the fury of the attackers: the villagers of Karapola allege that when they ran towards the army post in the hope that they would find safety there, they were fired upon and chased back into the village and into the arms of their killers.

The security forces seem to feel that the attack by the LTTE on Alanchipothana was motivated by the fact that this is one of the villages that lies further north in the Welikanda area. It is because the Muslim villagers are there that the Police, and now the Army are able to maintain an outpost there; thus, driving out the Muslim villagers could well be part of an LTTE thrust to 'clear' this area. The security forces want the Muslim village there, so that they can operate in the area freely; the LTTE wants the Muslim villagers out of the area for this very reason. Trapped between the military strategies of two armed groups of people, the villagers of Alanchipothana, Muthugala and Karapola are paying the price of being pawns in a war-game they do not really understand.

By the 10th of May 1992, over ten days since the incident, 508 villagers from Muthugala and Karapola were living in a

makeshift camp set up in the premises of the Muthugala Tamil Maha Vidyalaya. They were the ones whose homes had been destroyed. Others continued to live in their homes in the two villages but said they felt extremely vulnerable and insecure. Children who had seen their parents and grandparents brutally massacred before their eyes wandered around in a daze; old women wept as they described the murders of their children and grandchildren. There were also stories of women from the Tamil villages being raped before being murdered, but these remain unconfirmed.

The situation in Alanchipothana is also the same. Many villagers have left for the homes of friends and relatives nearby and say they do not want to return to the village until they are assured of total security. The Police Post in Alanchipothana has now been reinforced by an Army detachment as well. The Army post in between Karapola and Muthugala has also been fortified. However, looking at the villages and taking into consideration their strategic location on the very fringes of the disputed 'border' between the north central and northern provinces, it still seems woefully inadequate. Given the nature of the conflict at the present moment, one feels that in fact no adequate steps can be taken to guarantee the safety and security of these villages and of those civilians who live in them; the resolution of the ethnic conflict at the national level seems to be of essence if these villagers are to carry on with life 'as normal'.

The question of the provision of adequate security for the villagers who live in these so-called border villages of the north and east therefore emerges as a key issue to take up when considering not only the recent events at Alanchipothana, Karapola and Muthugala, but the incidence of similar massacres in other villages in the north and east in the past months. This is particularly important when one considers that there is absolutely no mechanism in place that can effectively prevent the recurrence of such incidents. The other issue that should concern us is that of adequate redress for the villagers who got through such traumatic experience. That is, if ever their losses can be redressed.

Over and over again, we have watched the real tragedy of the conflict in Sri Lanka play itself out in this way. Hundreds of innocent men, women and children pay with their lives for the manipulations of those who seek power at no matter what cost to the society. The people who live in the 'border' villages continue to eke out their existence from day to day, never knowing when the armed gangs will strike. The vision of a past when they lived together, Tamils and Muslims, as good neighbours, supporting each other in a time of need and reaching out to share the pleasures of life together has disappeared.

After the incidents the Government has appointed a Special Commission of Inquiry into these events. The commission has submitted a report on May 27th. Details are not yet known.

Sunila Abeyesekera

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