

Die Organisation 'University Teachers for Human Rights' (UTHR), Jaffna, hat im Mai einen neuen Bericht zur Lage in den Nord- und Ostgebieten Sri Lankas veröffentlicht. Der 90-seitige Bericht schildert vor allem die Situation in den Ostgebieten Sri Lankas. Wir veröffentlichen nachfolgend Auszüge aus dem Report. Der vollständige Bericht kann im Südasienbüro bestellt werden (Kosten: 27, -- DM einschl. Versand).

## THE EAST: AN OVERVIEW

### 1.1 General Introduction

The common mood one comes across among Eastern Tamils is one of resignation and utter helplessness. The humiliation they feel has been rubbed in deep by the frustration they experienced in respect of missing persons, and the dire threats connected to burning tyres with which government servants were ordered to return to work. The Batticaloa and Kalmunai areas each have lists of dead and missing extending over 1000. The regime is not always so harsh now. Sentry point checks are mostly formal and policemen and soldiers could frequently be friendly and human. Yet there is an undercurrent of unpredictability. The massacre of 20 or so Tamil travellers in Eravur on 21st February, following the killing of two Muslim homeguards is among several sharp reminders that lives are playthings for the state.

Apart from the fact that people are nearly always questioned in Sinhalese, there is the very visible fact in Batticaloa town, that Tamil and Sinhalese policemen are distinguished by the former being unarmed and the latter armed. This is a humiliation to which Sinhalese policemen were not subject following the recent JVP uprising.

The visit by President Premadasa on 14th February did nothing to restore confidence among Tamils. A delegation of Batticaloa mothers wanted the President to look into the matter of 175, mainly youths, removed by the army from the Eastern University refugee camp on 5th and 23rd September, who then disappeared without a trace. The President told them in effect: "The mothers of those killed by the JVP are crying. The mothers of dead security forces personnel are crying...." To many people in Batticaloa, this sounded a piece of sarcasm completely evading the fact that the President has an obligation to be accountable. The people also noticed that the President visited Kattankudy where the Tigers killed Muslims, but made no attempt to visit places such as Valaichenai where a large number of Tamils had been killed. The President's gift to Batticaloa town of a clock tower based on Kandyan architecture, topped by an ornament of Buddhist significance, only gave further offence. A university don observed, "Kandyan architecture may be good in itself. But we have been through an experience after which we see everything through coloured glasses. Could he not understand that?"

Coupled to a measure of satisfaction that the LTTE is embarrassing the government, there are very grave reservations about its record. When the LTTE ran away in June after announcing the

final battle, deserting the people faced with an angry army, there was both puzzlement and anger. After building heavy fortifications, the Tigers had abandoned the Oddaimavadi bridge - the gateway to Batticaloa District - without a fight. Many expositulated: "Whatever happened to those arms captured from the TNA that the Tigers had displayed in lorry loads?" One observer said that the Tigers had met their Waterloo in Kiran. Their failure to overrun the small unprepared army camp despite repeated attacks, he felt, had changed their psychology. Their policy then evidently changed to concentrating their military strength in the North East to provoking and using the conduct of the forces to turn the East into a source of recruits.

Like elsewhere, the result of the struggle particularly in the Batticaloa and Amparai Districts is paradoxical. A powerful driving force in these areas was to break out of the hegemony of Jaffna and to assert an Eastern identity. The massive participation of Eastern youth in the militancy, it was once thought, would lead to this. Eastern youth are today dying for the Tiger cause in larger numbers than ever before. But the hegemony of the Jaffna based leadership has been strengthened. Myths far removed from reality, concerning the superiority of Jaffna, are current in the East. Common ones are: "Our Tigers are rotters. They are only good at settling personal scores. But those in Jaffna are doing a splendid job, sincerely dedicated to a cause", and, "We Tamils in the East have no future. We are always cutting each others' throats. We have no leadership like in Jaffna." Ironically, the Tigers have been saying repeatedly in Jaffna that it is the Eastern boys who are largely fighting for them, while Jaffna boys were being selfish and are running away. People have become tired and fatalistic, not wanting to talk about what happened ("It is all history now!") and not wanting to analyse. Only a few understand that Tiger policy is a well co-ordinated policy with Eastern cadre doing a good part of the fighting and dying in the North. To enhance and sustain the Eastern man's loss of confidence in his own ability is an important aspect of Tiger politics. When the Eastern University became a large refugee camp where people were learning to take up issues collectively, despite serious ups and downs, and the camp leadership was developing a strong sense of responsibility, whom the people were looking up to, the Tigers forced the closure of the camp without any discussion with the camp leadership. People who were realising some collective strength to fight back, were driven to become helpless fugitives in jungles, unprotected and facing many natural perils in addition to bombing and helicopter strafing. (See report).

### 1.2 Inter Ethnic Relations



The lesson that has been tragically brought home to both Muslims and Tamils is that the two communities are inseparably linked and that a sound basis for co-existence needs to be found. The fear of LTTE attacks on Muslims and Tamil fears of reprisals by Muslim home guards, directly or indirectly backed by the nation, has affected all areas of life. In the rice bowl of the Batticaloa and Kalmunai, passenger vans belonging to one community drive at break neck speed through villages of the other community, not daring to pause. The bulk of Muslim staff and students do not attend Eastern University because it is situated in a Tamil area, although the neighbouring area is Muslim.

Mutual necessity however helps to build bridges. Kattankudy is a Muslim village heavily dependent on trade. Owing to the security situation, Tamil traders lack the ability to transport goods from Colombo. Within three weeks of the Kattankudy massacre, there were gestures of conciliation. Kattankudy traders have now re-opened their shops in Batticaloa town.

In many areas peace committee meetings have been organised by security forces commanders and held in police stations - the most acceptable venue for both parties. The exercise has several drawbacks. With the state, ironically in concert with the Tigers, having actually encouraged and used Tamil-Muslim differences, its motives are suspect, although individual officers may be sincere. An important draw back is that apart from expressing good sentiments and bringing about some thaw, these committees can determine very little. They cannot give guarantees of safety. At least in the area of expressing goodwill and trying to understand each others immediate difficulties, there have been some successes. A notable failure is Kalmunai.

The resumption of Kattankudy Muslims trading in Batticaloa was aided partly by good personal relations between the community leadership at Kattankudy and the Roman Catholic Church. The Church had also tried hard without success to get the LTTE release three Muslim leaders it had abducted from Eravur on 4th July.

But the ultimate guarantee for security rests with forces outside the control of ordinary people, pursuing their own aims. Tamils fear getting back to Pottuvil and Eravur because they cannot predict how the security forces would react to acts of the LTTE. Acts of violence attributed to Muslims have almost never been independent. Muslims on the other hand are looking for guarantees, not from the security forces or from Muslim politicians, but from the LTTE. In town after town Muslims has said that the Tamil-Muslim differences would vanish the moment the LTTE states publicly that it would not harm Muslims. The more mature Muslim leaders are extremely anxious to re-establish good relations with Tamils. Our discussions were always cordial. After 9 months of war, the LTTE is seen on the surface as the major actor - it shows the powerlessness of all the communities and the destructive power of the LTTE.

1.3 The Consequences of the LTTE's Strategy: From the time it massacred Muslim and Sinhalese policemen at the outset of the war, the LTTE has pursued a clear strategy of attacking Muslims and deepening communal enmity. Even at the time some Muslims reacted in Kalmunai following the killing of Muslim policemen and the arrival of the army, there were no signs of unrest in the Batticaloa district. There was even a tendency among Muslims here to rationalise the Tigers' actions. Yet from the 12th July, the Tigers set about attacking Muslims in the Batticaloa district, starting with the massacre at Kurukkal Madam. It is this that argues against the supposition that the initial killing of Muslim policemen among others was simply a mistake by a local leader. The Tigers have stirred the communal cauldron and have used the anger and frustration resulting from government actions to get their recruits. But at what price? All creative activity in the region has been brought to a standstill, and the Tamils in particular are on the way to becoming a smaller and fragile community.

While there is a limit to which the state could afford to be seen as working towards anarchy, the Tigers have no such inhibitions. They have cloaked total irresponsibility as a sacred prerogative. Thanks to their adversary, they have been able to demonstrate that they could frustrate anything by anyone else. If they choose to give a guarantee of safety to the Muslims tomorrow, the relief will be so great that if elections are held immediately afterwards, many Muslims would consider voting for them as a survival tactic. Such benefits can only be shortlived. In defying every human norm, the Tigers have also sown the seeds of their own destruction. The longer the crisis lasts the greater the anger against elders, who appear to compromise Muslim dignity to survive. More Muslim youngsters will draw the conclusion that to oppose the Tigers, they must imitate them. With economic hardship and confinement, there are disturbing signs of such a reaction. Posters have reportedly appeared in Eravur threatening those who have dealings with Tamils. Many Muslims are keenly aware what it would mean for the Muslim community. A Muslim leader in Akkaraipattu said vividly: "An attack is something that lasts a short time, some die and it is over. What we are worried about is the counter-attack. It grows within us and terrorises us, as it happened to your community."

The other danger referred to by both Muslim and Tamil leaders is that while the present state of communal enmity lasts, there will be no political initiative and matters of common interest vital to both communities will be lost sight of. While the Tamils and Muslims are preoccupied with each other and with the security forces dominating most of Amparai District, the state will push Sinhalese colonisation from the west. As it is few Tamils and Muslims are left in the Gal Oya scheme. With the commencement of the war, the few Tamils left in Amparai town and places such as Inginiyagala and Ingurana were killed or thrown out. Pottuvil is now a no go area for Tamils. While the Tigers have used the mad policy of state sponsored Sinhalese colonisation of deprived Sinhalese for mobilisation, they have done nothing to address the issue creatively.

1.4 Waiting for the Unknown: While the Sri Lankan forces began the war in an orgy of blood, as though they were co-operating in



a recruitment campaign for the Tigers, the killing at present is at a low ebb. The occasional massacre still does take place. From mid-February to late March at least, those taken prisoner are generally said to be alive. In many cases visits have been allowed. In Thirukkovil-Thambiluvil, the last known killings by the STF were about early February. In Karaitivu it is said that most of those taken in are released soon. There is some uncertainty about what happens to the rest. We have no information on developments following the deterioration in Moneragala.

There appeared to be a change of orders and a change of tactics. There are even cases in early March where the STF had warned LTTE suspects and sent them home. These may have borne some fruit if the government had launched a parallel political initiative to give confidence to the Tamils. But the forces have been sent to do a thankless and frustrating job in a total political vacuum. The forces lack the discipline, and character to match the Tigers' destructiveness. They had discredited themselves and hurt the Tamils too deeply. The initiative is thus clearly with the Tigers. Everytime the forces react by punishing the Tamils, they move a step in the direction of defeat.

While the government has over 9 months not made up its mind on a political programme, the process of destruction goes on. Barely three days after we had conversations with Muslim leaders in Akkaraipattu, who were both warm and hospitable, a bomb went off in the fish market killing at least six persons and injuring several more. This co-incided with LTTE attacks elsewhere in the East. In Akkaraipattu, both Muslims and Tamils had to put in much creative effort to restore something close to normal relations. Many old friendships had been reactivated and even some inter-communal organisations were functioning. It took only a split second for an imbecile bomb to destroy that trust so painfully rebuilt. The purpose of the bomb was to simply ensure that Tamils and Muslims do not discover strength in working with each other. In handling the aftermath, the forces have predictably failed, however determined they were to prevent trouble. Local sources said that 23 Tamils had been abducted by Muslim homeguards, not in Akkaraipattu, but in the sensitive region between Kalmunai and Karaitivu. A senior police officer is quoted as saying that he is not aware of such abductions.

This would only further enhance Tamil fears and distrust. To the Tamils, homeguards are simply an arm of the forces. In the incident of 21st February near Eravur, where about 20 Tamil travellers were massacred, at least two gun shots were fired and one or more persons in uniform were sighted. There was no attempt to have an inquiry to punish the offenders and to reassure the Tamils that this would not happen again. The late Minister for Defence simply contended that homeguards were not involved, as if that were the end of the matter. The state of mind of Tamils around Kalmunai should be understood. It would take a generation or more for them to recover from the entry of the first army battalion last June. Their subsequent experience is one of continual horror - mostly linked to Muslim home guards and their masters. They would tell you today: "Do not go on the streets after six", "Do not go near the old police station. That is where they behead people." To the outsiders, the burnt out shops

of Kalmunai are merely an eyesore. But those who pass them day after day are reminded of corpses and skeletal remains. Whether the information concerning the abduction of 23 Tamils is accurate or not, the authorities have to go far beyond simple denial - to the process of the law. It has been brought home to the Tamils again and again that publicising Muslim deaths is good propaganda, but Tamils do not matter for the government. For the Tigers it is the reverse. In the meantime the Tigers have launched a recruitment drive with the slogan of liberating South Tamil Eelam (the East). Tamils in such an environment will seldom see through the cynicism.

1.5 The Intrinsic unity of the East: Barring a new initiative by a force that can give confidence to all communities, the East stands to slip further into tragedy. On a human level, the tragedy of the East is beyond description. Its vast agricultural potential remaining unused is a mere symptom. Communities who had lived together have been split asunder by hatreds. The Tamils have been prostrated by a sense of division. Many families resulting from intercommunal marriages had been broken up. Communities of Sinhalese had sprung up in many Eastern towns in a healthy manner, through normal migration in search of opportunities. These Sinhalese who had intimate social relations with those whom they lived among, have also been humiliated, killed or expelled.

The Muslims and Tamils spoke the same language, lived with each other and were bound by local customs. The question whether one is Tamil or Muslim is ironical at a time when perhaps the greater volume of literary output in Tamil appearing locally is of Muslim authorship. Tamils must face up to the fact that instead of using much that was common to strengthen existing ties, by giving respect to Muslims for their contribution to the economy and culture, they treated them as an appendage. Attempts to forge only a mechanical unity in the face of threats from the state, such as colonisation, exposed all the contradictions.

In order for the Easterners to find a creative means of fighting back, they need to rediscover the history they had forgotten. Today they are dominated by a total sense of their division and worthlessness, coupled with an admiration for Jaffna that was initially a part of the middle class value system.

The truth is very different. Until quite recently the Eastern militant cadre showed a community spirit which ignored group divisions. When this posed a challenge to the leadership in Jaffna, they had to send men from Jaffna to create division and restore their authority. When the LTTE took on the TELO in May 1986, the native born Batticaloa LTTE leader, Kadavul, issued a statement expressing the need for Eastern Tamils to be united and assured the other groups that they would not be harmed. The LTTE leadership had to send Kumarappa and Pottu to enforce the division. Francis, another LTTE leader born in Batticaloa, was very highly regarded and is said to have been against the killing of Batticaloa resident Sinhalese in October 1987. The killings were ordered by the Jaffna leadership. Francis later died a miserable man. Division, mutual suspicion and a feeling of worthlessness in the East are thus integral to the LTTE's strategy, which based on Tamil chauvinism has also meshed with the aims of Sinhalese chauvinism. The organic unity of the East needs to be rediscovered.