

## Sri Lanka

The following report was prepared under the exigencies of war. It is a contribution by people, who - for reasons of their security - cannot be identified. The present war which broke out in June 1990 is being waged in a country where ordinary people are everywhere helpless, the universities are silent and the politicians are confused. Appr. 5.000 people have been killed within short period of 4 months, 500.000 were rendered homeless and have become refugees. We publish the report in excerpts and in an edited version. The full report, which comes in two parts (138 pages), can be obtained from the 'South Asia Bureau' (DM 30,--). For further details on the present conflict please also refer to 'Südasien', 5/90, 6/90 and 7/90.

**Historical Background**

The present conflict has its roots in attempts to manage conflicts of interests and to safeguard the influence of dominant power blocs without any corresponding moves to secure and enhance the basic rights and freedoms of ordinary people in Sri Lanka. The process of erosion of civil liberties which began over a decade ago, has been accelerated during the last three years. All armed parties were responsible for this, while the Sri Lankan state and other state powers which were directly or by proxy involved in the shaping of events, must bear the heaviest share of responsibility for their pursuit of interests with a cynical and calculated disregard for human rights.

The rapid erosion in the South of the country came in the wake of the JVP's ('Janatha Vimukti Peramuna') military campaign against the government which followed the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987, and the failure of the government's military campaign against the Tamils. This was put down by the state's security establishment, now enhanced by a number of paramilitary units, by a campaign of counter-terror, which left a large number of Sinhalese youth killed. The visible hall-marks of this campaign were mutilated corpses burning on roadsides with tyres around them. Human Rights sorces in the South commonly put the number so killed at about 30.000. The number killed by the JVP is put at 1.000 - 2.000. The JVP's targets included prominent and respected Leftwing politicians who were critical of them besides persons from the UNP ('United National Party') and the security establishments.

The erosion of civil liberties amongst Tamils in the wake of the militancy against state oppression has been often discussed. Therefore we shall concentrate on recent events. By the end of 1988 the Tamil militants had become deeply compromised and weakened by their past conduct and were involved in the politics of survival. Whether they acknowledged it or not, all groups were in need of patrons whose first concern was not the well-being of Tamils. In November 1988, the pro-Indian EPRLF ('Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Libera-

tion Front') led coalition acceded to power in the newly set up North-East Provincial Council through elections in which their powerful antagonists, the LTTE ('Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam') did not participate. Ranasingha Premadasa upon becoming President in December 1988, reaffirmed the governments's commitment to the provincial council and to the process of devolution envisaged in a bid to find a political solution to the Tamil problem in terms of the Indo-Lanka Accord. In a reciprocal show of goodwill, Mr. Varadaraja Perumal, the Chief Minister for the North-East, personally hoisted the contentious Sri Lanka national flag on Independence day, 4th February 1989. All this did not bring a restoration of the rule of law to the North-East, where the 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF) was responsible for security. If anything, the stakes were placed higher and the killing rates of both sides increased - particularly of civilians.

President Premadasa started talking to the LTTE in April 1989 and shortly afterwards demanded the departure of the IPKF, while the political solution to the Tamil question and the fate of the provincial council were far from settled. The pro-Indian party controlling the provincial council (EPRLF) was sent into a state of panic as an Indian pull-out appeared increasingly likely. The Chief Minister began complaining that there was deliberate stalling on the devolution of powers and provision of finance for the provincial government. Several of the LTTE's attacks against the IPKF brought about the not unexpected heavy reprisals against civilians such as at Valvettithurai and Point Pedro in July/August 1989 which brought further discredit on the IPKF. At this point IPKF officials bitterly complained that they had evidence of the Sri Lankan government supplying weapons to the LTTE, in order to undermine their credibility and role, for which the Sri Lankan government was party. This claim was subsequently repeated by leading opposition politicians in the South of the Island and also in the local press reports.

In the meantime the LTTE appeared to be forming close

links with the Sri Lankan security establishment and enjoying a great deal of freedom. A number of leading LTTE personalities expressed confidence in President Premadasa in press interviews and even prominent Southern (Sinhalese) intellectuals acknowledged the LTTE as the legitimate representative of the Tamil people.

It was in these circumstances that with the help of the IPKF the EPRLF adopted the cruel and ill-considered response of conscripting young persons to form the 'Tamil National Army' (TNA) with the stated purpose of protecting the provincial government in the eventuality of an Indian pull-out. The manner in which this was done, together with anarchic killings by pro-Indian groups in the wake of the LTTE's advance, totally discredited the pro-Indian groups such as EPRLF, ENDLF ('Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front') and TELO ('Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation').

The LTTE took control of the North-East between November 1989 and March 1990 as the IPKF pulled out. The LTTE's advance in the East and in the Wannu region (south of the Jaffna peninsula) was facilitated by support from Sri Lankan forces. The Sri Lankan government reluctantly or otherwise acceded to the LTTE's demand that its forces should only mark a passive presence, leaving the maintenance of order to the LTTE. The LTTE emerged with its legitimacy and fame greatly enhanced.

It would have ideally liked quick provincial council elections to consolidate its position, absorb its cadre into a provincial police force and legitimately maintain its organisation at state expense. It appeared even prepared to tolerate some dissent, limited press freedom, a token opposition and even international observers at elections. Such moves, while providing some relief to those on the wrong side of the LTTE, would have enhanced its international image.

The TNA disintegrated in the course of the LTTE's advance, after putting up some resistance in the East. A large quantity of Indian supplied weapons fell into the LTTE's hands. Whether by supplying them to an ill-prepared conscript army, India actually wanted the LTTE to have these weapons, in view of a predicted confrontation with the Sri Lankan army, is one that has been much speculated upon. Many conscripts of the TNA who surrendered to the LTTE were returned to their parents. In a number of places where there was resistance, those who surrendered were treated harshly and shot dead. Over 1,000 members of pro-Indian groups were shipped to India by the IPKF. The rest scattered. A number of them who tried to cross to India with their supporters and families were killed at sea - the LTTE and the Sri Lankan navy were blamed for these killings. Either separately or in collusion, in press reports in India and by local villagers. These allegations were denied by both parties.

The 'United Nations Sub-Commission on Human Rights' of

February 1990, brought to the surface an aspect of the relationship between the government and the LTTE that had been implicit right along. Leading opposition parliamentarians who went to Geneva to raise the matter of human rights violations, particularly in Southern Sri Lanka, were upset at finding the LTTE closely supporting the Sri Lanka government. In 1987 and earlier, all Tamil militant groups had sent representatives to the sub-commission and had been vehemently critical of the government. The victims were then mostly Tamil civilians. Looking back at the entire process which lasted 14 months, and statements by leaders on both sides, it becomes evident that the understanding between the LTTE and the government had little to do with the rights of the Tamil people, the Sinhalese people or of mutual understanding between the two. The Government had neither done nor said anything to suggest that it repented its former military approach to the Tamil problem which left thousands dead. Nor did the leading protagonists on the Tamil side regret killings of Sinhalese civilians by Tamil militants or show any sensitivity towards the feelings of rural Sinhalese over the loss of thousands of their young during the recent campaign of counter-terror by the Sri Lankan government. True, both sides had staked much in a tactical understanding to undermine India's position. What followed raises the question, whether agreements not based on trust, justice and a common respect for the dignity, rights and well-being of all people, are worth anything. In this case, ordinary people are paying a high price for the adventurism of leaders whose vision was confined to the problem of immediate survival.

#### **Towards war**

From all what has surfaced in public, it appears that the LTTE's long drawn out negotiations with the government were mostly about the regularisation of the LTTE's cadre as part of the police and armed forces and about manning levels and deployment of Sri Lankan forces in camps and stations in the North-East upon the IPKF's pull out. There appears to have been no final agreement on a political solution. The LTTE perhaps thought that with the enhancement of its legitimacy following provincial council elections, it would be in a strong political position both locally and internationally to get what it wanted in a bargaining process. It was already engaged in strengthening its position in India after finding an ally in Mr. Karunanidhi, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, besides others. Equally, the Sri Lankan government feared such an eventuality. It is understandable that the government tried to buy time. One problem raised by the government, the technical problem of dissolving the existing provincial council whose leaders were in exile, turned out to be more cosmetic, given the casual ease of past constitutional amendments.

A more real problem for the government was the question of surrender of arms by the LTTE. This was being demanded by almost every shade of political opinion in parliament, particularly by the 'Sri Lanka

Muslim Congress' (SLMC) which had its base in the East. The LTTE had banned political activities by the SLMC, and a number of violent incidents left the Muslims with a view of the LTTE as a repressive force. The LTTE on the other hand claimed to speak for all Tamil speaking people, including the Muslims. But its conduct made this claim unsustainable. Also the LTTE's ambivalence on several issues and reports of its military build up made particularly the Southerners very uncomfortable.

At the beginning of 1990, the LTTE's chief spokesman Anton Balasingham stated while reaffirming confidence in existing arrangements, that the LTTE would lay down its arms once the last Indian soldier departed from the Island. With the progressive departure of Indian troops (completed by the end of March 1990), the emerging LTTE position was that the government must create conditions where the Tamils would not require the protection of arms. The government maintained that the provincial council elections could be held only in a gun-free environment.

While the government's stand was legally correct, in this matter at least the LTTE had some good arguments on its side. Given that the government found it in order to hold North-East provincial council elections in November, 1988 while pro-Indian groups moved around with arms, why could these elections not be held now while the LTTE did the same? What had changed substantially since July 1983 to reassure the Tamils that the government would protect them and administer the law impartially? Had not the government itself supplied the Tigers with weapons a few months earlier? After all, had not the government itself ignored or taken lightly complaints by Muslim and Tamil parliamentarians over the LTTE's continuing hunt for 'traitors'? The government lacked the moral authority to counter these arguments.

The conscription campaign initiated in July 1989 by India and its allies (EPRLF etc.), provoked so much resentment and fear, that a large number of young boys in their early teens joined LTTE ranks. The LTTE's fame and legitimacy reached a peak about February 1990 when Indian troops vacated most parts of Jaffna. In this atmosphere even younger children received training from the LTTE with next to no public protest. Since no final agreement had been reached with the government and the outcome of further negotiations would be inevitably influenced by military strength, it was only natural that both sides should prepare themselves militarily. The result was an escalating game of brinkmanship. Every time the government forces tried to move out or to establish a new post, they were challenged by the LTTE. There ensued either a time of tension or a minor skirmish, followed by talks. Nearly every time, the government appeared to give in. Army camps in Point Pedro and Valvettithurai were removed. Policemen stayed in barracks anxiously peering out of sentry-points, while LTTE posters outside warned them not to move out without permission.

As the weeks dragged on, the political position of the Tigers became more shaky on the ground. Though many admired them and felt that they had given the Tamils a sense of strength and dignity, confidence in what they held out was lacking. More mature boys generally kept aloof from them. Spokespersons for the LTTE's student wing, the SALT, stopped visiting boys' schools when the tendency for awkward questions became infectious. Taxation and interference in areas of civilian life such as culture and entertainment became irritants. The LTTE in turn hardened its approach. A number of persons with past dissident connections had fled the North-East upon hearing that the LTTE had inquired about them or had called at their homes. Sources in Batticaloa District put the number killed between October '89 and June '90 at over 300. In Jaffna the number killed is believed to be much lower, but the LTTE had claimed that it was holding over 1,000 prisoners. On the matter of taxation, LTTE sympathisers maintained that it was forced on them by the government postponing elections and the regularisation of its armed cadre which would have given them official status and funds.

The LTTE became more anxious about its position, there was also the suspicion of a deliberate government conspiracy in the delay. The government could have countered this by stating unequivocally what it was prepared to give towards a political solution. This it did not do, encouraging unhealthy speculation on the Tamil as well as on the Sinhalese sides.

The end of May 1990 marked a period of tension when the government had talks with militant groups which were previously aligned to India (and antagonistic towards the LTTE). When air force helicopters flew over Jaffna, civilians were advised to build air raid shelters. On 3rd June, the LTTE's information network abroad announced confidently that talks on reaching accommodation over differences with the Sri Lankan government were going smoothly and that the tide of tension and anxiety had receded. When the conflict escalated on 11th June, the manner in which hundreds of policemen surrendered without resistance suggested that the government was unprepared and instructions had not been given. Military camps too were unprepared for prolonged sieges.

### **The war begins**

When the war broke out on 11th June, there were many skeptics throughout the country who said that both sides need it. A conspiracy may be hard to establish. It may be more correct to say that the war was brought about by ways of reacting to situations and habits of mind, that were on both sides essentially anti-democratic. Once the tactical use of rapprochement was over, the host of political problems had to be faced. The human needs and basic rights of the Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim people had not been addressed. Sinhalese were becoming unconvinced of the utility of the deal with the Tigers. The opposition was more vocal in challenging the government's human rights record. In

the Tamil areas the disquiet with the prevailing order has been mentioned. The Muslim issue had not been addressed. The Amnesty International statement, reported about in the 'Island' newspaper, Colombo, said: "It (the LTTE) appears to condone and threaten the extra judicial execution of those it considers 'traitors'...", and went on to charge the group of carrying out summary executions of purported criminals, and recommended that the 'International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) be allowed access to its detainees. This was symptomatic of increasing doubts about the LTTE's credentials internationally - something on which the group placed a high premium.

As had been said often, the immediate issue that triggered off the war is certainly not the quarrel between the Tigers and the Batticaloa police over a civilian's illicit love affair. The Tigers had themselves reported in their media on 3rd June that talks on settling differences between themselves and the government were going well. It appears that the government had earlier given word to the Tigers that 4,000 - 5,000 persons named by them would be regularised as part of the army, police or both. This was strongly suggested in private conversations of senior LTTE members from the middle of 1989. About this time the government had also announced that recruitment to the forces would be on ethnic proportions - i.e. 18 percent Tamils. From the time the IPKF departed, the government, for whatever reason, does not seem to have moved on this matter. June appears to have been a kind of deadline agreed previously. A number of influential Tamils who wanted to start rehabilitation projects in the North-East were told by the Tigers to wait till June before starting anything big.

On the part of the Tigers, their decision to confront the state forces may be argued as a logical necessity. But such necessity only arose through a series of actions and deals without reference to basic human values. Any political force seen to be respecting truth and justice could have found sounder means to secure its legitimate demands.

#### **About the war**

On the government's part, it is acting with greater license against Tamils than what it would have found difficult to justify in 1987, as the massacres in the East would testify. The unstated policy that is in operation now in the East, is the old one of marginalising Tamil influence through a mixture of terror and state sponsored colonisation. The aerial strafing of starving civilians in Jaffna seeking food and shelter is given legal sanction through curfews. Despite the weeks of time available, no moves were made by the government to seek the help of the ICRC and of civilian organisations to organise centres where people can be sheltered and fed without being molested from air or land. In normal times feeding the people of Jaffna requires 100 lorry loads or 500 tons of food stuff a day. Figures available with the government will show that only a small fraction of this has been

getting through for the last couple of months. It is dishonest for the government to evade this fact by accusing the Tigers of black marketeering. It is plainly inhuman to restrict the movement of civilians under such conditions, whose other alternative is to starve. The description of the bombing as a policy of destroying the concept of a Tamil homeland by bombing the houses of Tamils, as a parliamentarian put it, does not appear to be far from the truth. It is hard to imagine how such a policy could have been justified in human terms, even against an alien people.

On the LTTE's part, there is reason to believe, that out of tactical considerations at least, the leadership is not keen on news of massacres of Muslims and Sinhalese. Faced with a disillusioned Tamil people, the LTTE has to depend more on overseas publicity of the government's atrocities - with which the government, as always, is readily obliging. But what happens on the ground reveals either a lack of clarity in its thinking, poor leadership, or both. The events in Kalmunai during June represent a scenario that has been repeated again and again during the struggle.

Prior to the massacre of the policemen, 11 soldiers in a group that had come to buy vegetables in Kalmunai were killed. The civilian population itself was disgusted with the manner in which their bodies were desecrated and dragged with ropes. They were lying in public places for six days, until health authorities intervened. The LTTE then withdrew knowing well what would happen to the people. The voiceless people, already afraid with their sense of decency violated, were left covering in their homes and refugee camps, awaiting the inevitable holocaust. A feeling, sometimes unconscious, which guides such actions is that civilian deaths are good for propaganda. The scenario in Trincomalee was similar. What happened was a caricature of the LTTE propaganda leader Anton Balasingam's pledge, "we will not hesitate to take up to arms to defend our people and to carry on our aims".

If the government had really cared for the Tamil people or had wished to win them over, the forces should have behaved in a disciplined manner. Then the people themselves would have shared their feelings. Instead, their behaviour sent the survivors running to the jungles, where the LTTE was, for safety. The government itself is instinctively or deliberately following a course of creating conditions for justifiable genocide.

It is no use talking about army psychology. The army as an institution has degenerated with the political culture of this country. Prior to the slaughter of Sinhalese youth in 1971 (during the youth uprising), the army was evolving under its use in breaking up the Tamil satyagraha (peaceful protest) in 1961. Its subsequent history in Tamil areas in the 60's, was one of increasing indiscipline and insensitivity to the law.

What has become evident in the militarisation of the

Sri Lankan state during the last decade, and its increasing complacency with indiscriminate killing, is that it now feels itself strong enough to disregard international human rights pressure. This illusion of strength is supported by the approbation or silence of nearly all persons and institutions of influence. This is why the government's efforts to promote the LTTE as everyone's common enemy must be resisted. This alluring notion has cast a veil over what is being done to the Tamil people by the state. The fact that the government which embraced and strengthened the LTTE can now bomb the Tamils on the absurd grounds that they are harbouring the LTTE is an example of how external interference can make the people powerless. The LTTE must be confronted for what it stands by the Tamil people. This requires sympathetic external pressure of the kind that will help the people to find a voice in their destiny.

For the moment the government will continue in its disastrous course thinking itself strong. The truth is that it is faced with economic disaster, a Sinhalese people tired of war drums and an army showing signs of weariness with the political leadership. The annual cost to the country of the Middle East crisis is put at US \$ 500 Million. The government will go on playing with the war, unable to win and lacking the will to seek a political solution. Soldiers marching through minefields will not relish the thought that their leaders gave the LTTE 7 tones of explosives (obviously to be used against the Indian forces and its Tamil allies), over 2000 AK-47's (Kalashnikows), several hundreds of thousands rounds of ammunition and several hundred LMG's (light machine guns). The war will be fought on crude, low cost terms.

There has for years been a wilful blindness to the plight of Tamil civilians. During the Vadamarachchi operation of 1987 ('operation liberation'), civilians who had constructed air raid shelters were in many instances killed as having done it on LTTE orders. Even officers spoken to could not understand the stupidity of punishing civilians. Today, when the government says the LTTE is demanding gold and money from people, it does not acknowledge the government's duty to protect people from expropriation. But the context rather indicates that it is an additional excuse to bomb them. When it says that Tamil children are being forced to join the LTTE's 'baby brigades', a duty to protect children of the nation from this destiny is not acknowledged. But its actions indicate that it feels justified in killing Tamil children. The direction of the war is not towards victory, nor are there attempts to win over civilians and isolate the LTTE.

The direction of the war is not towards victory, nor are there attempts to win over civilians and isolate the LTTE. It is moving towards creating conditions for justifiable genocide by identifying all Tamils as terrorists. This is the logical aim and culmination of the ideology which was at work during the 1983 racial violence. A great misfortune of the Tamils was to have

themselves, from a position of weakness, given birth to an ideology which devalued life - of other communities as well as its own.

### **A Bloody Stalemate - The South -**

A Canadian academic told a Colombo audience about an experience he had recently during the festival at the shrine at Kataragama in the deep South of the Island. After President Premadasa had worshipped at the devale (Hindu temple), a Buddhist monk proposed to have a session in support of the armed forces (which was very common during the past months). The monk held the national flag and spoke, while some helpers tried to drum up support. Though, people moved about in numbers in the temple premises, only three people wanted to hear him. The academic spoke to many ordinary persons, nearly all of whom had no enthusiasm for the war and many of whom were amenable to a federal solution for the country - in sharp contrast to the mood reflected in the press. The academic came to the strong conclusion that the opposition to the war from the poorer majority of the Sinhalese was so great, if passive, that the government will have serious difficulty in working up enthusiasm for it using the traditional appeal to race and religion. He added emphatically, that in his long experience, ordinary people left to themselves had a genius for settling their differences. By and large it would be true to say that the notion of race or ethnicity figures very prominently in scholarly discourse both in Colombo and Jaffna, that deals with the current national crisis. The view that the crisis is one about human rights, basic values and basic justice, against which communal differences are being exacerbated and used, is one that is struggling to gain ground. It is also a sentiment that is being voiced by an increasing number of young Tamils and Sinhalese for whom English is not the first language. Nearly all of them have been through the deceptive charm of sectarian appeals to race and religion, and have come out of it with feelings of anger and disgust.

The evidence for the professor's conclusions is not lacking. The allegedly spontaneous banners that came up in support of the armed forces in June are suffering the depredations of the elements with no significant additions to their number. In places in the deep South, these banners needed armed guards to ensure their existence. Contributions to the 'National Defence Fund' (NDF), symbolising the peoples' support, in nearly all known cases required degrees of coercion ranging from the subtle to the blatant. The latter was quite in evidence. The University of Peradeniya (Kandy) which prides itself in being the only national university, gave its employees the dissenting option in contributing a day's wages to the NDF. The option may appear to be cynical in view of the continuing prevalence of burning bodies in its environs. Students of several mission schools in Colombo appeared to have no choice. At Manning Market, Wellawatte (Colombo), an army Lieutenant was seen telling the vendors how much each should contribute. Furthermore uniformed men were

behind almost every instance of recent attacks on Tamils in the South. The regular reports in the press of burning bodies in the South also suggest that the government still fears serious dissent in the South.

Any traveller into Sinhalese areas would often come away with the strong impression that they are a people cowed by the terror of the state and the JVP, patiently bearing the humiliation and the corruption that stares them in the face. This makes the killings of some of the most alienated sections of the Sinhalese by Tamil militants all the more tragic. There was prior to June a very good opportunity to break the mould of Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism in Sri Lankan politics. In this both the Sinhalese and the Tamil leaderships have failed.

#### **Arming Civilians and the Muslim Dilemma**

Following the massacre of Muslims at Kattankudy on 3rd August, 1990 (for which the LTTE was accused), the 'Sri Lanka Muslim Congress' (SLMC) voiced the feeling common to many Muslims, that the government should arm the Muslims to defend themselves. Taken in context, this incident was one in a chain of massacres, where all three communities were victims. By far the most numerous amongst the victims were the Tamils - killed mainly by the most powerful armed group in the conflict, the Sri Lankan state. It was over this group of victims that there was a conspiratorial official silence. The silence only exacerbated Tamil feelings of anger and made them susceptible to deliberate attempts by the state to turn their anger against Muslims. The SLMC leader, Mr. Ashraff, evidently saw a trap being laid and was to adopt a complex position in the days to come. He later expressed his sorrow over the fate of Tamil victims and said that what he was asking for was that if the government could not protect the Muslims, it must provide them with arms to defend themselves. The manner in which the government responded to this understandable demand from the Muslims is revealing. The Minister for Defence announced the Muslims would be recruited into the armed forces until the number reached their ethnic proportion of 7 percent. Most unbelievably, he also announced that the actions of the LTTE had precluded the recruitment of Tamils into the armed forces just now. Such a position obviously militated against the government's claim that the war was not against Tamils. Having accepted that Muslims must be taken into the armed forces to protect Muslims, the Tamil community which also suffered grievous loss was being left out in the cold. The government was effectively conceding that it was the business of the LTTE to protect Tamils. It was a move bound to inflame Tamil anger against Muslims. This policy must have come under fire and over the next few days the government announced that it would recruit Tamil homeguards nominated by Tamil parties opposed to the LTTE to protect Tamil villages. But the damage was already done. The government's arming of communities through creating homeguard units is a patently cynical exercise which only serves to multiply hatred and misery.

#### **The fate of the Political Solution**

Massacres in the East, burning bodies in the South, disappearances in Trincomalee and the aerial bombing of Jaffna are all belied by one fact - that there is no political initiative that addresses issues of basic justice for the whole country. Since the passing of the sixth amendment (August 1983), the government has itself connived in the destruction of a Tamil leadership it could talk to. The LTTE has been very unhelpful in not stating what practical objective it would settle for. The government's own failure to do the obvious continues to intrigue the populace. It is obvious that the ordinary people do not want this war and are willing to be quite flexible. Why does a government that has so much power on paper, being in control of both the executive presidency and parliament, not take up a clear position on pressing issues such as devolution, questions relating to land and land settlement, the North-East merger and the sixth amendment?

The government's dithering only makes matters inextricably worse. It bombs civilians in Jaffna because it has no idea on what to do about Jaffna. To over-run Jaffna militarily would be costly in terms of military casualties and uncertainty over Indian reaction to civilian casualties. Furthermore, holding Jaffna militarily would require tying down at least 10,000 men going by the IPKF's experience. This would be ill-affordable in the event of a resumption of the insurgency in the South (by the JVP). The alternative option is to challenge the LTTE politically by offering a solution which addresses Tamil insecurity and establishing the government's sincerity in its day to day actions. The bombing and helicopter-strafting is a sign that it is prepared to do neither, while wanting to be seen doing something.

Likewise in the East, while not having a clear mind on anything, it simply follows its chauvinistic instincts when transient military gains enable it to do so. In Trincomalee the old game of encouraging Sinhalese to take over Tamil property under military cover has resumed and so has the game of tinkering with district boundaries. The provincial council settlement is being broken up under cover of military occupation. The Tamil Deputy Inspector General of Police of the North-East who was forced to sit in Trincomalee watching Tamil youth disappearing by the courtesy of Brigadier Lucky Wijeratne's troops, has now been sent packing, his post having become non-existent.

The only thing the government did in compliance with the LTTE's wishes was to dissolve the North-East provincial council, while not taking a position on the sixth amendment. Ironically the dissolution of the council was accomplished by parliament nearly 4 weeks after the commencement of the war with the LTTE, when the objective seemed to be lost. The scrapping of the sixth amendment, more than being a demand of the LTTE is one from the Tamil people, and indeed of any self-respecting minority. It in effect enjoins a minority

not to promote separation from Sri Lanka, without imposing on the majority any reciprocal obligation to treat the minorities justly. It's insulting character is evident from the fact that it was passed by parliament in 1983 when Tamils were being murdered and were being driven in terror to refugee camps.

Thus when the President of Sri Lanka calls for international mediation and says that the door to negotiation is still open, quite apart from the LTTE, any Tamil would be at a loss. The problem has been talked about and extensively studied for more than ten years. All negotiations have been broadly within the framework of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact of 1958. Even on the question of land settlement, the dispute centred mainly around settlements in large schemes, such as the Mahaveli scheme, where huge investments are involved. The kind of thing that the government is attempting to do in Trincomalee today was completely ruled out. Hence from a Tamil viewpoint there is nothing new to talk about. Instead of showing sincerity and good will the government has reneged on everything over which agreement was reached.

Where the Sinhalese opposition is concerned, the government's position is curious. It's officials have admitted privately that they are afraid of the opposition turning down any proposal put forward by the government. It has instead egged on the Tamil groups attending the 'All Party Conference' (APC) to put forward proposals and get them accepted by other southern parties, in particular the 'Sri Lanka Freedom Party' (SLFP). The SLFP which feels that it was cheated of the reigns of power during the last elections and is challenging President Premadasa's marginal victory in the presidential elections of December 1988, does not attend the APC. The APC is an advisory body summoned by the President and has no teeth. The Sinhalese opposition rightly feels that when Premadasa took the supposedly revolutionary step of coming to secret deals with the LTTE, far from consulting them, they were completely left in the dark. The Tamil groups and the 'Muslim Congress' who are now being consulted at the APC were then treated with contempt. They thus tend to view the APC as a gimmick and are in no mood to make life easy for Premadasa. This brings us to an important feature of constitutional changes introduced by J.R. Jayawardene in 1978. While denying a strong opposition its due role in the formal power structure, the government has felt a need to seek their consensus in ad hoc bodies like the APC. The result is a weak and indecisive government rather than a strong one.

#### **The initiative from the religious leaders**

On 15th July a memorandum, signed by several religious leaders in Jaffna was sent to President Premadasa calling for a political solution to the present crisis. It's main import was that for the first time a body of Tamil citizens including such important figures as Bishop Deogupillai, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna, the incumbent of the Nallur Kandasamy temple and Bi-

shop Ambalavanar of the Church of South India (CSI), had accepted that all parties were to blame for the current impasse. They categorically stated that a federal solution rather than separation, will meet the aspirations of the Tamils. A positive and sympathetic response from the government would have placed the onus on these leaders to challenge the destructive trend of the dominant Tamil politics. Furthermore, these leaders had stuck their necks out to offer leadership when there was a political vacuum with hardly anyone or the government to talk to.

On 18th and 20th July, three days after the appeal was made, several containers containing smelly substance, believed to be excreta, were dropped in Bishop Deogupillai's area from the air. The ordinary people construed this to be the president's reply and several of them blamed the religious leaders for the stink. By the close of the first week of August, several churches and religious institutions that functioned as refugee camps had been bombed, and the Bishop himself barely escaped with his life to become a refugee. While these leaders were humiliated and deprived of their role in speaking for the community, the LTTE was able to call forth a massive procession to mourn those who died during its attack to storm the Jaffna Fort. The crowd marched in spite of the aerial intruders. This episode is illustrative of the tragic course being pursued by the government, cornering people into supporting destructive extremism.

#### **An LTTE leader speaks his mind**

Addressing a meeting at the University of Jaffna last July, Mr. Yogi, the leader of the LTTE's political wing told the audience: "Negotiations and ceasefires may come and go, but the fight will go on. We will get Eelam soon ... We will not talk to other groups ... We have sometimes lost ten fighters to obtain a gun. Hence a gun is worth ten lives. Therefore, we will worship the gun ... Intellectuals do not support us. The educational system must be reformed because it has not taught people to think independently ... You may have ideas, but it is the fighters who can enforce them. Therefore you are subservient to the fighters."

This is a frank testimony to the poverty of leadership that has cost the Tamils so much in lives, territory, material destruction and social breakdown. Having induced hundreds of young men and women to lay down their lives, it cannot even speak of a steady cause. While maintaining Eelam as its formal slogan, it can make astounding turns when the leadership is threatened. Its inability to put forward publicly, a reasonable objective is a liability that springs from its own history and rhetoric.

#### **The Question of a Ceasefire**

In a war where killings of civilians has assumed barbaric dimensions, it is natural and proper that any concerned person should wish for an early end to this. Since 1985 many ceasefires have come and gone, destroying hopes of well wishers. While these ceasefi-



*Facsimile of the front cover of an issue of 'Pörkkural' (or 'War Cry'), an internal publication of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.*

res placed some temporary restraint on the major armed parties, they did not spare the civilians. One could say that most civilian leaders whose presence could have had an ameliorating effect and have imposed some sanity were killed during ceasefires. The situation at the end of every ceasefire had deteriorated so much that people were left longing for the pre-ceasefire condition. When seeking a ceasefire, we must also pay attention to what we want to happen during a ceasefire. This needs greater understanding and commitment.

The question is also closely tied to the destructive nature of the politics we describe in the following section. It also concerns the legitimacy of the parties concerned. A close examination of all ceasefires in our context show that parties agreed because there was a serious challenge to their power and credibility and needed a respite. But there was no change of heart and a commitment to democracy and human rights. The result was tactical manoeuvring to keep power at any cost with its natural consequences. While it is difficult to justify killing political enemies in one's own camp during war because of the demoralisation it will create, it becomes almost the sole preoccupation during a ceasefire. In particular, during a guerilla campaign, when a group requires the people's support in the form of food and shelter, it becomes awkward to be accused of killing a political opponent with a clean record. Such liabilities are minimised during a ceasefire when the group is physically secure.

Thus the LTTE's ceasefire with the Sri Lankan government was marked by political killings of many Tamils, reaching a peak during the early part of 1990 as the IPKF pulled out. Human rights violations became bla-

tand. The government on the other hand while materially helping the LTTE to eliminate its enemies (in the North and East) and using it to goad the IPKF, was free to concentrate on its counter-terror (in the South). This too reached a peak during the IPKF pull-out, bringing the total killed to a semi-official figure of 40,000. Up to this point the ceasefire was useful to both.

Beyond this point, the emerging information suggests that the LTTE got the bad side of the bargain. It had taken great care not to embarrass President Premadasa. While it made no links with the Sinhalese opposition, the government appears to have been gearing up to use the Muslim and Tamil enmities the LTTE had exacerbated without second thoughts. Just as people began to talk of peace being restored, repression descended in the Tamil areas. After its spokesman had made some liberal noises and had talked of perestroika, the group lacked the ability to come to terms with its past - its history of alienating many as 'traitors', and of first allowing the Sri Lankan forces to advance in 1987 ('operation liberation') by its elimination of other groups and then enabling India to intervene legitimately. Both parties had problems of legitimacy with their own people. The foregoing serves to show that a mere ceasefire without the concomitant enforcement of human rights is meaningless. It is for this reason that even well-meaning talk of an international peace-keeping force could be mistaken and counter-productive. The first task is to get the principles right and decide what is to be monitored and enforced. Then it does not matter how it is done provided it is done effectively by competent persons. The important thing is to first get both sides committed publicly to have basic human rights monitored and enforced. Then preva-



rication and foot-dragging by either party stands to be exposed. To start with an international peace keeping force would be open to seemingly legitimate technical scruples by both sides. For instance the LTTE spokesman Balasingam has already said that such a force which circumvents India will not be acceptable to it (another somersault!). A prominent Indian role will on the other hand give cause for the Sri Lankan government to throw its spanners into the works. Once principles are secured, technical gaps can be bridged with ingenuity. For example, while a prominent role for the Indian army in an international force can be objectionable, there can be no legitimate objection to prominent Indians who have championed human rights.

We know that many non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and international groups long concerned with problems in Sri Lanka are setting their minds to the problem. While wellcoming this we are only saying that it can be done effectively and durably with no greater delay. How it is done will determine the lives and future of the few Tamils left who have been with the people and have taken a courageous stand at this time. Without them there can hardly be a future.

#### **Development Amidst the Politics of Destruction**

This was a question which confronted us in stark terms between the months of March and June 1990 when there was a concerted effort by the Tigers to persuade NGO's and the government that this was the time to begin the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction in the North-East. Many of us felt instinctively through long experience that the aims of rehabilitation and reconstruction were incompatible with the current politics which had alienated, destroyed and made of none effect, the energies and contribution of a sizeable section of the populace with a social conscience. The Tamils will need rehabilitation and reconstruction even more urgently after this most devastating of wars. Those who are genuinely interested in the Tamils must ask themselves what kind of process this is going to be, who will participate, who will benefit and whether it will encourage the politics of reconciliation, development and a mitigation of evils. The whole question is also very relevant to the Sinhalese South.

NGO's have been a part of national life for over a decade. At the start there were conditions where some constructive work in helping communities in need, could have been done without paying too much attention to political developments. Subsequent developments indicate that such conditions ceased to exist some time before July 1983, though from that time NGO activity, both local and foreign, had increased with even churches joining in. Despite enormous funds poured in, little of permanent value has been accomplished. In this chronic state of conflict, a pattern has set in. Armies and armed groups kill, destroy and create refugees, the NGO's feed. The government has been quite comfortable with ignoring those victims it does not particularly care for. We cannot avoid escaping the fact that confronting the politics of

destruction is a necessary pre-requisite of genuine rehabilitation and reconstruction.

#### **The politics of destruction**

We shall now explain what is meant by the politics of destruction. This is the politics of tactical survival without reference to morals or principals. Without an honest attempt at finding answers to questions of justice, it perpetuates power by spreading alienation, division and insecurity amongst those whose problems pose these questions. Instead of harnessing the energies and securing co-operation amongst diverse communities for the common good of all, it destroys all constructive energy and good will, and channels all energy into obsessive hatred. Instead of seeking to bring out the best, it brings out the worst in everyone. Those who practice this politics become increasingly trapped into devoting nearly all their energies into surveillance of, and fomenting divisions among those who challenge their power. This is the politics of destruction. With such politics, development is hardly possible. We have seen how the Tigers have practiced it. Though it brought them power in the short run, it cornered a large number of youth into the logic of the same politics and has made the people powerless. The only thing which dominates the minds of these youth who have faced humiliation and oppression at the hands of the Tigers is bitterness and vengeance. They are prepared to use any means to frustrate the Tigers as the Tigers have done to them. With all democratic space closed, only the logic of the gun prevails. It is ironic that at their height of power and fame in March 1990, the Tigers needed to hold about 2,000 political prisoners in the most dehumanising conditions, and were unable to be generous. But the media, both local and foreign, called this peace and praised the Tigers and the government.

As for the government, its politics is marked by burning bodies in the South while conducting a patriotic war in the North. Without going for the creative option of putting forward a political solution, it is using the divisions between Tamils and Muslims as well as amongst Tamils, making the Tamils and Muslims more isolated and insecure. Ironically, the Tigers to their own disadvantage and by their own inability, deepened these divisions with the connivance of the government.

This destructive politics is also evident in the manner in which the government silenced the entire student movement in the South. In spite of their divisions, the student movement in the 80's became a major voice in articulating genuine grievances arising from corruption coupled with the application of economic programs reflecting western interests and notions of development. Many student activists strongly believe that the government was actively involved in creating divisions which were highlighted by the murder of Daya Pathirana in the mid 80's. The IUSF (Inter University Students' Federation) which was active during 1988 and 1989 is characterized as terrorist by some and as racist by others. It may have been mistaken in its ideas

and actions. By its selectiveness in condemning terror, it stood compromised and discredited by the JVP's acts. But there are few grounds for believing that the IUSF was JVP any more than the UNP was JVP.

The fact is that many members of the IUSF knew next to nothing about the JVP. According to their own batch mates a number of students who were killed or have disappeared are not those who threatened their fellows and teachers but were simply members of legitimate student bodies. We know for certain that a number of IUSF members were open minded creative persons who wanted to do some good. It was a good deal due to their persistence that at the presidential elections, the SLFP put out in its manifesto quite far reaching proposals to devolve power to minority regions.

On the question of labour of Indian origin, their position is more generous than those of the two main parties. These are no small achievements for young persons whose opportunities for interacting with Tamils were limited. Did not the country, at least for its own good, owe it to these young men to have a form of politics that would channel their goodwill and creativity rather than brand them as terrorists and hunt them down? The fact that several of them living in hiding, having narrowly escaped death at the hands of the state, have themselves not become murderers shows a rare human quality.

wanted. Our poverty of ideas is being exacerbated in addition to economic poverty. While the vast majority of our young are silenced and terrorised, their counterparts from the elite with foreign university education stand to be pushed into publicity and prominence in excess of their understanding and contribution. The seething anger that lies below the surface should not be underestimated.

The much publicised and costly Gam Udawa 90 (village awakening) exhibition at Pallekele which coincided with the president's birthday is perhaps symbolic of the kind of development that takes place under these conditions. The hidden reality in Pallekele was that several of its inhabitants had been killed and burnt some months ago, following a JVP attack on a local army camp. None of its registered voters had cast their vote at the presidential elections in December 1988. Many Sinhalese harboured strong feelings about the whole affair which was colourfully portrayed in one paper as 'Pallekele reborn'. A Sinhalese lady in a government department which participated in the exhibition was called up by her boss for an explanation on why she had declined to contribute to the National Defence Fund. She said that if the government was serious about the cause of the soldiers and the fund, it should have cancelled the exhibition and given the money to the fund, instead of taxing those who are struggling with their daily living. To take this



The seriousness of the depressing state of our universities where students are silenced to the point of even being scared of contesting student union positions, is not generally appreciated. The country is being run as though the energies of the young are not

position in Kandy required no mean courage. In the nature of the prevailing dispensation it strongly suggests itself that much of the foreign money that comes as aid reinforces this politics rather than benefit the people. If the government's access to

dollars was restricted, it would have had to think seriously before purchasing aircraft and bombs to kill its own people and destroy wealth that cannot be replaced.

One could also discern a strong link between the LTTE's foreign connections and the process of the people becoming powerless.

Development requires accountability, and that cannot be secured here without challenging the dominant politics of destruction.

#### **The need to be firm**

In this climate of silence, the responsibility strongly falls on the local NGO's, churches and the universities to expose the nature of the destructive manner in which power is wielded in the South as in the North. The ordinary people have no one else. A lack of firmness or wishy-washiness would be costly to these institutions as well. Quite frequently, after long discussions, statements are issued which deplore violence, deplore the decline of morals and call for peace and negotiations. Such serve to sooth consciences and satisfy foreign funding agencies, without posing a challenge to the oppressors. Those in power regularly utter the same sentiments. The grim reality is left untouched. But on the other hand those in these same institutions ceremonially associate with those in the state, have tete tete's with them and are entertained by them as old school chums. They may of course tell those in power some things privately, which from experience is of very limited value. In the absence of a firm principled public position on what exactly is wrong, their links with those in power give the ordinary people very different message. They form conclusions about whose violence they seriously disapprove of, and become uncomfortable with these institutions. This is partly the cause of allegations, sometimes wild, which have surfaced from time to time. Leadership in this climate is serious business requiring much sensitivity.

#### **Preconditions for rehabilitation and reconstruction**

To begin this process, what the Tamils need is the politics of rehabilitation, which will enable the creative energies of the people to be utilised. For this the people need space to defeat the politics of destruction. Through political pragmatism arising from their survival instinct, the Tigers may show different faces to different people and even voice liberal sentiments. But this cannot be sustained. To cover up their history of opportunism which cost the Tamils dearly, and their alienation of a large section of the population, particularly the conscientious young, they will need to resort to terror. As long as this politics prevails, the Tamils will continue to have an uncertain future. To start economic reconstruction under these conditions to give a superficial feeling that development is under way, will definitely lead to disaster.

To start with all organisations must be allowed to function democratically. Only this will provide space to re-evaluate and identify those tendencies which have become dominant in the social arena. This is necessary to counter the dehumanisation brought about during the course of the armed struggle. We have not gone through a liberating process whereby the community could be strengthened with a higher value system. The community has got used to reacting mechanically and people tend to look for immediate alternatives to safeguard their short term interests, such as by going abroad. It is therefore essential that organisations and individuals who try to look at ourselves self-critically should be protected at any cost. The NGO's and human rights organisations should understand the vital role these people can play in restoring civil society.

#### **In Parliament**

By the end of August there were some healthy signs amongst the opposition. On Sunday 26th August all major opposition groups, including the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party), MEP (Mahajana Eksath Peramuna), SLMC (Sri Lanka Moslem Congress), CP (Communist Party), SLMP (Sri Lanka Mahajana Party), LSSP (Lanka Samasamja Party) and the NSSP (Nava Samasamja Party) attended a meeting convened by the TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation) to demand a halt to the bombing in Jaffna and to get food and supplies urgently to the civilian population in the North-East. Once again, the Opposition launched into spirited attacks on the government's human rights record. Violations in the South had been highlighted during the extension of emergency debate and at question time. The SLFP had for the first time since the outbreak of war decided to vote against the extension of emergency. The other Tamil groups (i.e. the once opposing the LTTE) are also voicing concern and are talking about civilian suffering, instead just bashing the LTTE. The SLMC too seems to have realised that simply going to the government with pleas to help the Muslims, is not just inadequate, but will only help the government to use the Muslims in a disastrous manner. The SLMC has shown greater sensitivity to the sufferings of the Tamils, as neighbours of suffering Muslims, and has recently been critical of the government's handling of the problem, and of its conspiratorial wrecking of the North-East provincial council arrangements.

But given the urgency of the situation in the country, all this is far from adequate. We cannot wait 4 years for elections. The Opposition is far from evolving a political consensus on how to find a political solution that will corner the government. It lacks the will to challenge the government by taking the political upper hand. The government is likely to go on by saying that the Opposition can talk while it has the serious business of fighting the war, until total disaster strikes.

Just to take the other Tamil parties alone, their position is far from healthy. They have failed to take

an open and critical view of their past and have done nothing to challenge the LTTE politically. For the first few weeks of the war, they angered Tamil civilians by being too pre-occupied with the LTTE, and paying less attention to civilian suffering.

During the early months of this year they were wary of the LTTE coming into the political mainstream. They did not appear too keen on the removal of the sixth amendment to the constitution and the cancellation of the Sinhalese 'Sri' from motorcar license plates, simply because these were demands put by the LTTE in its talks with the government. But these were more importantly Tamil demands. The LTTE had made its entry into the so called political mainstream conditional upon the removal of the sixth amendment. If the Tamil parties opposed to it were willing to be self-critical, they could have challenged the LTTE on its historical and human rights records. But instead some of them lobbied parliamentarians against voting for the removal of the sixth amendment. To do this they had to appeal to the Sinhalese chauvinism of some of the MP's. In other words they were fighting the LTTE with the same methods of deception and intrigue that the LTTE had used against them when they tried to run the North-East provincial council. Thus the groups opposed to the LTTE were prepared to resort to any means to see that the LTTE was not allowed to do anything as the LTTE had previously done to them. Both were prepared to play into the hands of Sinhalese chauvinism for that purpose, and opened the door for the government to play one against the other. This is why we have said elsewhere that as a pre-requisite for development or any revival of civil life, the destructive politics by which the Tigers have cornered themselves as well as others must be defeated. Make no mistake - if the Tigers try to hold power and run things as they did, there is enormous destructive potential for what happened in parliament happening all the way down Tamil society. Pre-occupation with so-called traitors will take precedence over everything else. A healthy change may be set in motion if the other Tamil groups start by looking at their past and their own past misbehaviour self-critically. Asked about the president's role in the breakdown of arrangements with the LTTE, a senior parliamentarian replied: "The president is surrounded by a group of conspirators. There is no evidence to say definitely where the president stood. But what happened does not say much for an all powerful president."

There was a widespread sense of loss amongst Tamils over the absence from parliament of A. Amirthalingam and Sam Tambimuttu (the LTTE is said to be responsible for killing both). Many felt that despite his serious faults Amirthalingam was a person who would have been very useful at this time. He would have made a noise and it would have been heard around the world. An Easterner who had worked closely with Sam Tambimuttu said: "Sam did play his games. But he had enormous credit with international organisations like Amnesty International. His reports were thorough and splendid.

Had he been alive what happened to the people of the East and their sufferings would not have been shrouded in a veil of darkness. They should never have touched him."

### **Diplomacy, Finance and Weapons**

A curious event occurred in April this year, shortly after the IRKF's departure. The government ordered the Israeli interests section in the US embassy to be closed. This was a sharp departure from the practise and instincts of an influential section of the ruling UNP. The UNP government under President Jayewardene had invited the Israelis as part of a US package to help the government forces - particularly in intelligence matters. The Israeli agencies 'Mossad' and 'Shin Bet' are said to have been involved. Jayewardene's son Ravi was closely associated with the Israeli role. President Premadasa's own sympathies are known to have been very pro-Western. This was natural to the larger section of the Sinhalese intelligentsia which looked to the West as a counter to India - perceived as the traditional enemy. There was also a substantial section of local opinion which saw Israel as a creature of Western imperialism and saw non-alignment as the correct policy for Sri Lanka. This was reflected in the foreign policy of the Bandaranaiques which found convergence with Indias. It was Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP led coalition with the Left that in 1970 expelled the Israeli mission in Colombo, in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

For the Premadasa government, there were other considerations as well. The Arab countries in the Middle East, unlike Israel, purchased large quantities of Ceylon tea and supplied this country with oil. In addition to this, strong Muslim opinion from within the country was being brought to bear on the government to expel the Israeli interests section, with the prospect of mediating with Arab nations to give Sri Lanka something material for its troubles. There was also some disenchantment within the US administration over its protege Israel's rigidity on the Palestinian question. According to Sihabudeen Ossman writing in the Colombo 'Sunday Times' of 12th August, a cabinet member told the SLMC (Sri Lanka Moslem Congress) "that a solution had been found by elevating both the Israeli Interests Section and the PLO to embassy status". What then decided the expulsion of the Israeli Interests Section which earned an expression of disappointment from the US embassy? Some have suggested that the US was consulted and its disappointment was only formal. Other diplomatic sources in Colombo have said that the government was very upset when Senator Stephen Solarz from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with responsibility for South Asia, protested about its human rights record. It was about this time that the American and Western press carried some hard hitting articles about the government's record, highlighting the murder of journalist Richard de Zoysa ('Südasien', 6/90). These sources regarded the expulsion of the Israelis as a means of hitting back at the US. When the war with the LTTE broke out in

June, despite the government having initially at least succeeded in claiming morality to be on its side, unlike in 1983, western enthusiasm to help the government was not visible. Australia turned down a request to sell ammunition. This may also be related to the perception that India was presently neutralised. By August it became clear that the government was desperate.

In early August Minister Ranjan Wijeratne (Defence and Plantations) set off on a trip to Middle Eastern countries including Iraq, Iran and Libiya with Minister Munsoor (Commerce). It was taken for granted by the press that the purpose was to request arms and military help. The mission failed because Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, which came to be known after the Minister was airborne, threw everything in the Middle East topsy turvy. In a press conference after his return ('Island', 10th August), the minister claimed that the purpose of the visit was to explain the "factual position in Sri Lanka". He could not visit Iraq because Baghdad airport was closed, as he found out in Cairo. In Iran he met the president and several ministers who "gave him a good hearing". In Libiya, he met the No. 2 as Colonel Gadaffi had to rush out of Tripolis on an urgent matter concerning the Gulf crisis. They were treated well, but had to leave for Iraq after 1 1/2 days. The Minister for Foreign Affairs had not been associated in the mission.

The worst was yet to come. The Colombo 'Sunday Times' of 26th August reported on the economic impact of the Gulf crisis. If there was no further increase in the oil price Sri Lanka's annual oil bill will go up US \$ 110 Million to 370 Million. Its loss of annual earnings from Kuwait and Iraq alone is US \$ 120 Million from Sri Lankan workers' remittances. Iraq which purchased 20 Percent of Sri Lanka's tea is now unable to do so. The war is said to be costing the government about US \$ 1 Million a day.

As for allegations that Israel is helping the LTTE, diplomatic sources said that there is no evidence of the Israeli state being involved, except the possibility of involvement by some Israeli mercenaries. In all this, it is evident that the kind of foreign policy advice the government has been receiving over the years needs to be questioned. Whatever the tactical reasons, one must question the sense of responsibility exercised by those who think that a weak Sri Lanka could drift from the well tested policy of non-alignment, could flirt with shady powers such as Israel, Iraq and Libiya within a short space of time, and then come out in one piece.

There is a close link between the will for bold political initiatives at home to secure peace, and a foreign policy that reflects soundness and dignity. The alternative is to play with lives and hold onto power while the nation burns.

## Life in the North and East

### - Food shortages - Incident at Uduvil Colony

Following the outbreak of the war, all food stocks were taken over by the LTTE and were controlled by them. Food that was released through retail shops fetched prices which only the middle income group could barely negotiate. Food was distributed only to people staying in refugee camps. The low income groups with no steady income who were not refugees, such as those in Uduvil colony, suffered badly.

Recently hard pressed people in the Uduvil colony, who suspected that the manager of the local MPCS (Multi Purpose Co-operative Society) had lied to them, raided the MPCS store and found some food stocks. The angry villagers informed the LTTE. The LTTE searched the manager's house and found rice and kerosine oil, which they removed in addition to what was in the store. The manager was taken into custody. The manager pleaded with the people who were well known to him and were from the same area. Out of pity, the young man in the area drafted and signed a letter asking the LTTE to pardon the manager and took it to the LTTE. The LTTE thanked the young man and took them all away to dig bunkers. When releasing them, they were asked to bring their mothers who were at the forefront in the MPCS affair. In the end the villagers did not get any of the food stuff that was theirs by right, and were left feeling very angry that the movement did not care for their well-being. A woman from the community said, "We recovered food from a crow and gave it to an eagle".

The two things to note here are the lack of humanity from the leaders of a liberation struggle and the discipline and magnanimity of some of the poorest people from the lower reaches of society. Instead of ransacking the MPCS, they went to the 'authorities'. They were also ready to plead for the miscreant manager.

### A. Level Examinations: LTTE and the Government Attitudes

Thousands of students were busy preparing for the Advance Level examinations scheduled for August, when the war broke out in June. Ordinary civilian life was shattered in the North-East and in the East, people were living in terror in refugee camps. When the government announced that the A.-Level examination would be held on schedule, the people felt furious and powerless. The government further announced that people from troubled areas could sit at other centres. Given their own disturbed circumstances and the real risks facing young travellers, a very small fraction felt inclined to try this option. By this insensitivity, the government was both alienating and frustrating the class of students whose disillusionment with the LTTE was greatest. The delay in the government announcing a separate examination for the North-East was damaging. The LTTE was on the other hand looking for any means to get students involved in anti-government protests. Its student association organised a campaign against the government's earlier decision and

called for boycott of A.-Level examinations. The students for the most part remained cynical.

Subsequently, the LTTE became excessively agitated at the thought that a few students may go to Colombo and sit for the examination - an option hardly feasible to the majority. Then posters came up calling those who would sit for the A.-Levels outside the North-East traitors. They together with their families were deemed unfit to live in the North-East and were condemned to exile. The problem itself was not so serious one in comparison with much else that was going on. This action demonstrated the LTTE's inability to appeal to reasons and community sense. Its paranoia and insecurity impelled it to rely on terror.

A campaign and march were organised against "Educational Oppression". When the government announced that a separate examination will be held in the North-East, the fear of tougher examination was used to continue the same campaign.

When dealing with university students, the LTTE's concern for education was quite the reverse. They were told that studying was futile and were asked to join the final battle.

The manner in which the LTTE has handled several issues during this war, of which the A.-Level examinations is one, brings out its true nature. It utilised, thrived on and enhanced the basic selfishness in the society, while frustrating any tendency for reform. Brutality, self-centredness and suicide are responses of different sections of the society to the politics of 'every man for himself'. The LTTE cannot afford to extend its logic of stigmatising those who wish to sit for their A.-Levels outside. This would mean terming all those with means who wish to leave the country now because of real difficulties, traitors. Indeed, it would place members of the leadership like Anton Balasingam, who left the country and became a British citizen at a time when the pressures to leave were minimal, in an unenviable position.

The LTTE has never valued independent persons who consciously came back to the country to serve. Some of them have met with cruel fates. On the other hand persons who went abroad for purely selfish reasons and who are willing to do propaganda or make contributions to the merchandise of death have been highly valued.

Even in Jaffna today which faces an acute crisis, there is no attempt at a politics of promoting community sense or of helping the poor worst hit by deprivations. Releasing apparently scarce goods through retailers at astronomical prices is a means of making money out of those who can afford, while not seriously providing for the poor. Those who want to leave for Colombo can do so provided they could afford the extortionate transport charges. The legitimate anger of the poor against the Sri Lankan state is also

useful, as no alternative has been left to them except to depend on the LTTE. The yawning gap of hypocrisy is bridged by terror.

It is of little wonder that corruption had become an integral part of almost every aspect of Jaffna life over the last few decades, with the connivance of the social leadership. The LTTE was an organic growth adapted to Jaffna society. The minority of young men and women who tried to fight this tendency and lost patience, have been often driven to either compliance, madness or hatred.

On the government's part, the insensitivity with which it handled the A.-Level candidates in the North-East, is yet another instance of how it is the best friend of its sworn enemy, i.e. the LTTE.

#### **Detainees in the North**

Around 2,000 persons have been arrested and detained in LTTE camps. Their ages range from 20 to 70. Many of those detained were alleged to have had links with rival Tamil groups or the Indian army. They were detained in rooms walled with a space of 6 feet x 1 1/2 feet for light and air. Their legs were permanently chained with no locks. Detainees were chained together in the nights before sleeping time. Toilet facilities were limited, with each person allowed three minutes. Drinking water was rationed at half a tumbler (cup) a time, and sometimes only poured into the mouth.

A large number of sick persons suffering from a variety of illnesses including hernia, diabetes, heart ailments etc. received no medical attention. Prisoners were called by their numbers.

A detention centre was built at Thunnukkai, south of Jaffna peninsula, where most of the prisoners were held. Following the outbreak of war, most of them were moved to Chavakachcheri on the peninsula. Some of the prisoners were released recently with each requiring 4 guarantors. Generally, the guarantors were required to have some standing with the LTTE. Some of the guarantors were detained recently after those guaranteed by them vanished from their areas. They were kept with other prisoners for two weeks and then released. Over 1,000 are still said to be in custody. While the torture is said to have been intensive, not many were killed.

#### **The Release**

During late July, the guarantors were called for a meeting at Tinnevely which was addressed by Salim of the LTTE. He made a forceful speech saying that the detainees to be released were not fit to live in Tamil Eelam, but were fit only to live under LTTE supervision. Several conditions were imposed on those released. They were to sign at Tinnevely every day. No excuse such as heavy bombing will be accepted if they fail. If they were leaving their areas, the LTTE should be informed 72 hours in advance. They should not play any role in public life such as even being a

member of a church committee. Any failure would result in the prompt arrest of the person released together with all the guarantors. The guarantors faced a confiscation of 40 Percent of their property if the released person absconded. They were told not to think that a person's social position would be of help and claimed even to have a professor under detention. Not even a severe military situation would enable them to escape, he said, a special unit has been devoted entirely to surveillance and monitoring.

Both the tone and the conditions were so severe that about half the guarantors withdraw. After Salim left, the remaining guarantors pleaded with other members of the LTTE not to be so severe, and were told that released persons could report until late afternoon instead of before a particular time in the morning. The release ceremony was held in Pandeteruppu, 9 miles from Jaffna. The main speech, made by Puthuval Rathinathurai, in mellifluous Tamil, was opposite in tone to that of Salim. The speaker headed the LTTE's cultural unit. He said that those being released were neither traitors nor criminals. They had not worked against the LTTE on their own volition. They must be embraced and reintegrated into the society as brothers. When those to be released were transported to Jaffna, the bus was stopped mid-way, and the detainees were told that under no circumstances should they talk about their experiences under detention.

Most of the detainees released were afraid to talk about their experience. Persons close to some of the ex-detainees gathered bits and pieces over several days. One told a friend that he would tell him a long time hence. Some of the physical torture described consisted of the detainee being asked to lie flat and given 40 - 80 strokes with a wooden pole or being tied stretched and having rough piece of wood forcefully dragged over the skin. The mental torture was much worse. So bad was the experience of humiliation and injury that this detainee felt that he was unfit for civilian life and felt like returning to prison. He doubted that many of them would live more than a year. It was also reported that several detainees at Chavakachcheri were taken to dig bunkers in frontline positions. During air raids some of the detainees were sheltered while others were kept in the open.

### **The Young**

We have observed that during the current situation, a large number of young persons are joining the LTTE under conditions of brutal alienation created by the government. Boys above 16, the group most disillusioned with the struggle, are regularly taunted by girl propagandists who ask whether their books and studies would save them from the Sri Lankan army. Ironically, experience suggests that this group would be the most vulnerable if the army came into Jaffna.

Many of the boys joining are about the age of 12. It is a society where the government has connived at the destruction and humiliation of its leadership, and the

people have no one they could trust. Social workers have observed that many of the children, of whose personal background something is known, have motives much to do with some shortcomings in their personal lives, rather than with any motion of liberation. Anguished parents have gone from camp to camp trying to trace their children. After several denials, the child sometimes tells the parents that he or she is well looked after and that they could stop coming.

The young recruits are sent into action after rudimentary training lasting about 2 weeks and are often sent for frontline duty. It is said that the casualty figures from this group are not reflected in official lists of martyrs. Witnesses have seen the older cadre leaving the scene of conflict, leaving the smaller fellows to do sentry duty. As the result of frontline positions being most prone to bombing and shelling, a number of very young persons have been maimed with limbs lost. A large number of them want to leave, but are afraid that their condition would mark them off as victims of summary action by the Sri Lankan forces once they make an entry. According to medical sources, a significant number of these young persons have attempted suicide by playing around with cyanide capsules.

The extent of desertion is not known, but following some desertions in recent times, there have been reports of shaving of heads of new recruits. This was a practice resorted to when Indian army formed the 'Tamil National Army' (TNA) through conscription - a measure strongly criticised by the LTTE. A number of deserters are in hiding.

With education at a standstill, public meetings and displays of persons in arms function in part as means by which young persons are allured. Sometimes several hundreds are gathered at a public place for 'defence' training. In the course of three hours of physical activity and swearing of oaths, a strong emotional drive is built up. Sometimes a volunteer may be asked to report after several days. There is then little room for second thoughts.

### **Rediscovering the Tamil Struggle**

Countless young people took up arms in the North and East to fight for better rights and a just deal for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Different movements sprouted up and grew all of whom had the same visions and made the same sacrifices. These movements were mobilised along lines of region, caste, personal friendship and loyalty which added fuel to already existing friction. Thus somewhere along the line, these frictions gained a dynamism of their own that turned the whole nationalist struggle into a black farce. The culmination of this regressive trend was the recent grotesque alliance between the LTTE and the government. The nationalist struggle in the process of challenging the state has taken a strong authoritarian turn and has subjugated all opposition and criticism. This has manifested in control of all forms of public and semi-public ex-

pression, the infamous internecine warfare and the elimination of 'traitors'. The EPRLF-ENDLF-TELO ('Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front'-'Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front'-'Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation') alliance arriving under Indian subservience turned their wrath upon the people. The LTTE through connivance and terror ruled by suppressing all independent thought and activity. In September '89 the EPRLF imposed a complete ban on Jaffna based dailies. In February 1990 the ban was lifted and the newspapers were allowed to run, on the orders of the LTTE. In some cases even the headlines are specified by them. News coverage of LTTE events and functions is a must and any item that may appear adverse to their interests be totally blacked out and the newspaper in question pulled up. Independent trade union activity is also banned and a certain trade union was asked to sever its ties with its Southern headquarters. In the absence of freedom of expression on the home front, protest has sprung up amidst the expatriate community, especially among the recently emigrated asylum seekers. About 33 small journals are published in Tamil from Western capitals, many of whom have voiced their protest at the wanton killing of civilians and the anti people activities of the LTTE. One such journal called 'Mother land' based in Toronto was subject to a banning order and the editor threatened with death.

The consequences of dissent and resistance are fatal. Widespread fear is the order of the day. The state of terror as obtains in our society has deep-rooted causes. Jaffna society, fragmented and atomised, has not found a cohesive capacity to look beyond the limitations of its present structural construct. It has since historical times accepted and nurtured

trends and tendencies which have tended to preserve a cohesive mid-level hierarchical structure. Jaffna society offers its uncritical patronage to the strongest and probably the least threatening to middle class ideology, thus giving up all right to initiate and criticise. Almost compelled to accept the LTTE as their saviours, they washed the hands off so many others who struck out on the same path of liberation. Today 5,000 young people and their families have ended up in the Indian State of Orissa as refugees - a land perhaps more alien to a Jaffna person than London or Paris.

Women in arms in control of their future may gladden the minds of feminists, but once again this is a paradoxical position. The women's wing of the LTTE military section has evinced a few signs of consciousness on women's position in society today. Their pamphlets appear to verify this. But the LTTE being a conservative and monolithic organisation, the women's wing will not be able to move beyond a certain limited terrain. Their practices are entirely subsumed by the overall ideology of the LTTE. At least, in one instance, their methods of torture had in no way deviated from normal LTTE practice.

In this enveloping state of fear and apprehension of what comes next, the task of any solidarity forum will be to consistently support and encourage people's participation. Any independent action that might come out at present, be it a women's organisation or newspaper activity or environmental, needs the whole hearted solidarity of all interested parties. But only through mobilisation of people's structures can the democratic process be strengthened and society as a whole achieve a progressive dynamism.

## Bombing only when there is no alternative, says Lalith

"There is no way to destroy bunkers around Jaffna Fort without bombing. We use bombing when there is no alternative. If we don't use air support, we will not be able to rescue even the wounded. India was against bombing, but when the IPKF came here, they were compelled to bomb LTTE positions", said Minister of Education and Higher Education, Lalith Athulathmudali.

He was addressing a large rally at Awissawella, organised by the people to hand over contributions to the National Defence Fund by Jansaviya recipients, private individuals and organisations.

Mr. Athulathmudali said he was extremely happy about the numerous contributions to this fund. "I set it up in 1985 and there was some opposition to it then. Certain changes have taken place in politics, today. The Leader of the Opposition with delegates from 19 political parties are meeting the President. It is a good thing to meet the President. But why are they meeting the President. Is it because there is no food in the North or do they want food dropped there.

"The Food Minister who spoke earlier explained how much of food and other items have been sent there.

The LTTE is robbing the food sent to the people of the North. Why are these people not condemning these criminal acts? A certain international journalist had a meal with the LTTE leaders. He has explained about the sumptuous and grand meal he had with the LTTE men while civilians consumed simple meals. Everyone knows that Tigers break into food stores and rob people's food. Jaffna needs 2000 tons of food. When India air dropped food, they dropped only 25 tons, and 13 tons went into the sea. Dropping of bombs is not an obstruction to distribute food. The LTTE not only robs the food but also obstructs the distribution".

Commenting on the SLFP demands, Mr Athulathmudali said, "It seems the SLFP does not want the Air Force in this fight in the North. The SLFP wants us to stop bombing. There is no way to break and destroy

LTTE bunkers, without bombing. Without air support we can't rescue the wounded. We use bombing when there is no alternative. India was against bombing. The IPKF thought it did not need air support, but later they realised the need and started bombing in their fight against the LTTE".

Explaining how the government was dragged into the fight, the Minister said, "We have to fight, there is no alternative. I have not said of any military solution, but we have to fight. Our President most sincerely wanted peace and he did his best to solve it peacefully, but the Tigers wanted a military victory for themselves.

The LTTE does not want any democratic solution because they are real fascists and that is why they assassinated the Tamil leaders. The LTTE holds the record of brutally murdering leaders of all Tamil political parties.

This is not a war against Tamil people, but a fight against the LTTE. Tigers have killed the most number of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Tigers have killed the largest number of Tamils. Even the IPKF did not kill so many Tamils as the Tigers have done. The assassinations of Amirthalingam, Yogeswaran, Sabaratnam, Uma Maheswaran, Sam Tambimuttu and a host of other Tamil leaders were carried out in order to set up a dictatorship. With such a disgusting record of killings the LTTE can't accuse anyone of genocide".

Mr. Athulathmudali said that the LTTE had mostly 12, 13 and 14-year-old boys and girls in its cadre. The same thing had happened to Hitler nearing the end of the Second World War. Nazi cadres were reduced to mere boys and girls as many had died and others had deserted.

He said, "We are not frightened of Tigers. I know Mr. Ranjan Wijeratne is not frightened of them. I am not frightened of them. I saw how they were running for their lives at the Vadamarachi operation".

Stressing their importance of solving the problem of the East without surrendering the rights of any of the

three communities living there, Mr. Athulathmudali pointed out how baseless and false the reference to the East as "traditional Tamil homeland".

"When we see the ethnic ratio in the East, it is the traditional homeland of all three communities. While 40 per cent of the population remain Tamils, 33 and 27 per cent respectively are Muslims and Sinhalese. The East is the only place in Sri Lanka where the Muslims' strength exists. I know of the great sacrifice the Muslims of the East have made. Without recognising the Muslims' rights there can't be any solution. Their interest must be protected. Their rights can't be surrendered or bartered".

Minister of Plantation Industries and Minister of State for Defence, Ranjan Wijeratne, said, "Owing to the correct policies of the UNP the people have kept us in power since 1977. The UNP won even in 1988 the Presidential elections and at the 1989 general elections, owing to its policies and the unprecedented development carried out since 1977. At those elections the President gave certain promises some of those have been fulfilled. We released terrorists to give them a second chance. The President invited the JVP for discussions, but they did not respond. The LTTE was invited but they did not agree to lay down arms.

"You know the destruction caused by the JVP and we had to fight them and wipe them out. The LTTE said that the IPKF men were plunderers and rapists and they agreed with the President to drive the IPKF. Now we are chasing and attacking the LTTE. They are running".

Referring to Mrs. Bandaranaike meeting the President, he said, "Mrs. Bandaranaike is asking us not to attack from the air. This SLFP which has no policy, but a bond of family bandyism, is trying to prop up the LTTE. We will destroy the LTTE. We will not allow anyone to interfere with our internal affairs".

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