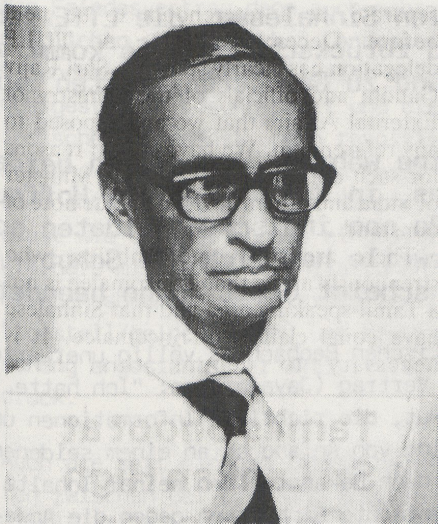


GASTKOMMENTAR:

Gamini Navaratne ist 'Editor' der in Jaffna erscheinenden 'Saturday Review' und zur Zeit zu Gast im 'Südasiensbüro'



Gamini Navaratne, Sinhalese journalist for 'Saturday Review'.

The news that has been coming from Sri Lanka's northern capital of Jaffna since October 9th, though scanty and mostly unconfirmed, has been very, very disturbing.

The "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam" (LTTE), which has been spearheading this struggle for a separate state in the mainly Tamil inhabited north of the island, appears to be engaged in a death struggle with Indian troops brought down to tame them. The Indian troops arrived at the invitation of Sri Lanka's President J.R. Jayawardene after a peace accord was signed.

As a first step, the militants were required to surrender all their arms in return for a general amnesty, the establishment of a nominated interim Government linking the northern and eastern provinces to be followed by an elected legislature.

However, developments in the north within the past three months have left the accord in a virtual shambles. In the first place, the LTTE did not gracefully accept the settlement which its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, said was thrust on the Tamils. Flowing from that stance, the LTTE did not give up all the military hardware it had acquired from a variety of sources.

Rather, it used the withheld weapons to consolidate its positions by eliminating its rivals, the "People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam" (PLOT), the "Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front" (EPRLF) and the "Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation" (TELO), who had surrendered most of their arms after accepting the accord as a "reasonable basis" for a settlement of the ethnic problem. The LTTE also used the weapons to drive away Sinhalese settlers from the eastern province, claiming that the whole region was "traditional Tamil territory". Then it embarked on the biggest military operation in its 12 year existence by taking on the Indian Army itself!! Six members of the Indian peace keeping force (IPKF) were shot dead in Jaffna by the LTTE on October 9th. This was the signal for the IPKF, which had been acting with great restraint up to then in operations to flush out arms, to go on a full-scale offensive against the LTTE.

The theatre of operation has been Jaffna, heartland of the Tamil country, where the LTTE headquarter and some of its major camps are situated. In fierce fighting many people have been killed. Exact figures are not known yet. The civilians had been asked to evacuate their homes and take shelter in temples, churches and schools until the whole operation was over. Their plight in these makeshift camps, not equipped to handle this type of emergency, must surely be terrible.

Meanwhile, the noose must be tightening round the LTTE - a noose placed round it's own neck by its inept leadership, say critics. I fully endorse this assessment.

Gamini Navaratne