

A LOST WAR ?

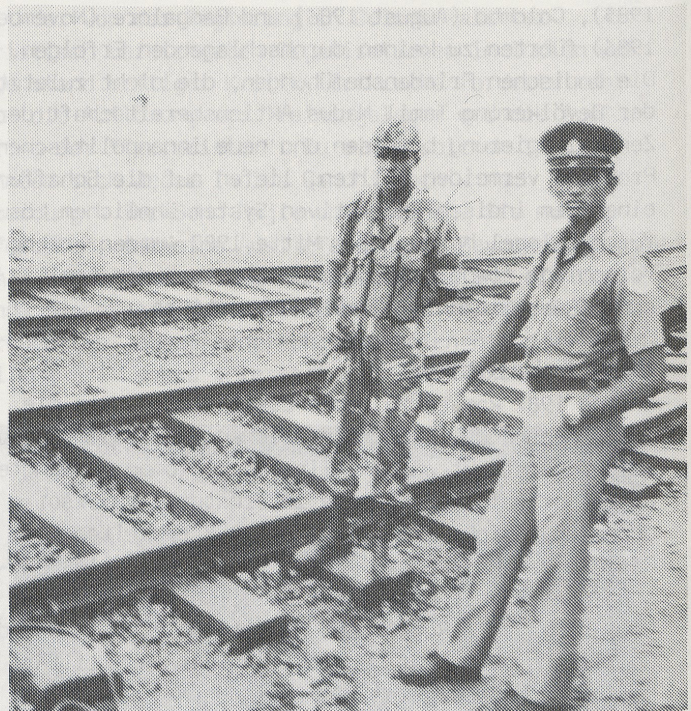
Die folgende Beitrag wurde Anfang September 1987 für "Süd-Asien" geschrieben. Der Autor, Herr Cheeran, ist Tamile und stellvertretender Chefredakteur der in Jaffna erscheinenden "Saturday Review". Während der letzten Jahre hat er auch zahlreiche Gedichte geschrieben, in denen er die Situation in den tamilischen Gebieten beschrieb und dabei nicht mit Kritik an der tamilischen Gesellschaft und den militanten Organisationen gespart hat. Der Beitrag erscheint, leicht gekürzt, im englischen Original.

The first sentry point at Elephant Pass remained intact. No one was there to be seen as our car passed the speed-breakers. "Kavuruth nähä" (no one there!), the Sinhalese driver of our car quipped. He is a perfect Sinhalese. He has never had an experience in the North or East. It was his eagerness to see some 'Tigers' (of course, after the India-Sri Lanka peace accord of 29th of July) that led him to take his car to the North with a foreign journalist, Bruce Palling of the "Independent", London. Bruce, my good friend, might well have thought of the smooth motorways in England. Unfortunately, the brutal war in Sri Lanka left no roads - roads in the proper sence - from Vavuniya to Jaffna.

This was my first trip to Colombo after the July 1983 holocaust. The holocaust indicated a major shift in the decision making of Tamil politics. Guns in the hands of some militants mattered most. In this sense, Colombo has had no special meaning for me. Besides, the several security check points that came into operation later prevented me from travelling beyond Elephant Pass. Before I go into depth of Tamil perception I would like to indicate the delicate differences that exist among the Tamils in Colombo, Jaffna and the East. After a brief visit to Colombo just after the accord and after all my intensive journeys along the Jaffna coastal areas including Valvettiturai, Point Pedro and other towns, I got some glimpses over the accord and the feelings of Tamils. It is clear, that some of the major demands of the Tamils have been met. Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvam, one of the directors of the "International Centre for Ethnic Studies" in Colombo told me, that the accord goes far beyond the previous pacts between Tamils and the Srilankan Governments and that this is the last opportunity for both - Sinhalese and Tamils - to come into terms. The cautious optimism expressed by Dr. Neelan, who was also a former TULF-member of Parliament, is characteristic of the sentiments of Tamils in general. A farmer, who just started tilling his land in the Vadamarachchi area responded to me with perfect enthusiasm: "I think the war is over. I had to spend the nights in the bunkers all these days, you know. For 4 months I have not been able to step

in my land, now the times have changed." This is more true with the fisher-folk. For the first time in the 2 1/2 years legislation that virtually prohibited fishing I saw fishermen happily walking with their fishing gear. For the middle aged woman who came all the way from Pandiruppu, a village 20 km away from Batticaloa in the East, to Jaffna to trace her lost sons the accord tasted bitter. She had already lost her eldest son in the May 87 offensive. She did not even know the group to which her sons maintained links. However, she knew that they are supposed to belong to three different groups that fought a bitter and dirty internecine war in the streets and jungles of the Tamil areas.

It is difficult to estimate even in material terms which is the most affected area in the Tamil homeland. If you are in Batticaloa, listening to the tragic tales of "missings" or the cruelties of the



STF ("Special Task Force" directly under the control of Mr. Ravi Jayawardene, son of the President) you are inclined to think that this area was the most affected. Suppose you are visting the areas of aerial bombardment in Jaffna, the fury is beyond words. Ironically, in Colombo, you get only 'information', 'statistics' and 'statements', not experiences.

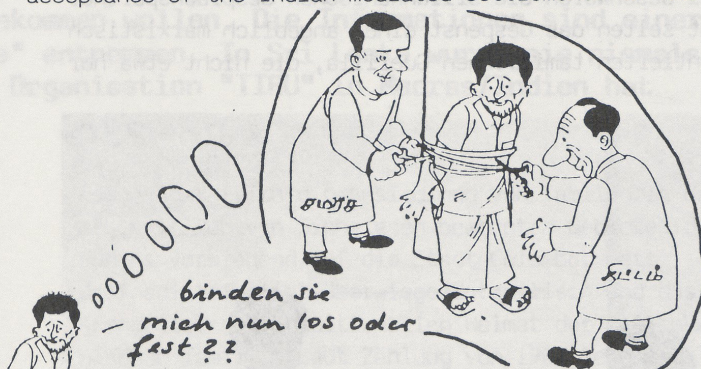
This is the worst tragedy: All the time the Government controlled media in Colmbo they have never uttered a sentence of truth about the killings and massacres in the North and East. For the ordinary Colombo citizen the war was a distant one. Undoubtedly, Tamils in Colombo are the happiest lot compared to other Tamils who - though welcoming the accord - undergo immense sacrifices and the blood stained memories are hard to pass through.

The war had cost so much. At least 16.757 innocent Tamil civilians, 1700 militants from all the groups (excluding those, who had been killed in the internecine war) had died besides all the loss in property (the figures are from my personal collection and from the files of the "Saturday Review"). I am not exactly sure about the casualties on the Government side, i.e. the number of troops killed. The total Sinhalese civilians killed were around 500.

The very pertinent question one asks at this juncture is whether the accord has the potential to consolidate the Tamil aspirations. I would wisely think that this accord is not just a damp cloth on a smouldering fire. It is a beginning, it is the beginning of the end. Whether we, Tamils, like it or not the accord had come to stay. And we, speaking in a participatory sense of being responsible for wonders and blunders effected by us, too should share the necessity of an accord. There are two specific reasons behind this argument. First, the great sigh of relief expressed over the unexpected end of war. The endless nights of shells and firings have gone. Sons and daughters are again back in the homes. How all this happened? If one looks back to the late seventies and the early eighties, the courage, determined willingness to fight and prepare to face any hardships on the way, the Tamils seemed more than strong. They never bowed their heads. They were not ready for a compromise. Instead, they sent their sons and daughters to fight for freedom. They accepted the crucial and brutal realities of the repressive state machinery, motivated by racism and chauvinism. However, within four years we get the sharp contrast, in willing to compromise, eagerness for peace and 'settlement'.

The very first lesson they learnt after the internal war between the TELO and LTTE, (April/May 1986) was that of realising the blind militarism. The petit-bourgeois layer that supported all the militant groups had come to know that if the situation continues there will be hardly any militant left to fight the Sinhalese army. The internecine warfare of the militant groups and the miserable failure of the "United Front" of the militant groups unavoidably created a sense of hopelessness among the Tamils. More over, there had been a gap between the militants and the masses in general. This was qualitative in essence. Instead of winning over the masses through democratic means, the militants (I don't want to go into details) particularly after 1984, have resorted to undemocratic forms of actions in dealing with the masses. These sent shock waves through the entire social fabric of Tamils. This, coupled with the internal war and rivalry, set backs in the fields of operation (in Mannar or Vavuniya) led to a formation of a psychological willingness for a settlement provided India takes up the respon-

sibility to look after the interests of Tamils at large. The one and only link existing between the militants and the masses was the war. Instead of organising the masses against the enemy, what we did was to ask the Tamil people to support and help. This estrangement is the basic fact that led to the acceptance of the Indian mediated settlement. In the



absence of a powerful proletariat and peasant layers (very few landless peasants on the Jaffna peninsula, d.Red.) almost all militant groups have resorted to a structural adjustment in which the petit-bourgeois cadres were geared to form most of the units, if not entirely. Dialectically, the accord is the inevitable consequence of the character of our "liberation movements"

In the backdrop of all this it was not difficult for me to anticipate the recent wave of killings that is taking place in the Tamil areas. Primarily, the phenomena of internecine war is not yet over. The LTTE, which effectively barred all the other groups except the EROS from functioning, has had to accept the other groups after the accord, which is very difficult and a humiliating experience for them. Besides, so much animosity and sense of revenge persisted among other groups. Once these smaller groups got into the Tamil areas with the presense of Indian troops forming a 'solid guarantee' for their existence they would have thought of utilising at least some of the opportunities to 'execute' at least some of the 'Tigers' (LTTE) who were held responsible for the large scale killings of the members of these groups. 'Tigers' on their part again proved themselves to be effective in preemptive strikes, even at the peaks of brutality. The self-paralysis that resulted after the self-destruction of Tamils through the infights would tend to strengthen the stakes of the Srilankan Government. On the other hand, it is bound to create a tough time for the Indian peace keeping force.

So far, there was hardly any objection from the Tamil people with regard to the presense of Indian troops. And this is significant. This is the situation, where we lost perfectly the war of liberation. There may be so many slips between the cup and the lip, as the saying goes. But for the accord, if there is a slip there will be only one possibility: Annexation by India!?