

TAMIL NATION



GOOD

WALLS

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FACT & FICTION?

We publish below two news reports - the first published in the Colombo newspaper, *The Island*, on 22nd March, and the second in *The Hindu* of April 4. The first was written by a staff reporter of the Colombo paper and the second report under the headline - **LTTE Men Seize Boats, Massacre Fishermen**, is attributed to "a military spokesman" in Colombo.

According to the Colombo newspaper report, activists of the military wing of the JVP had sought refuge in the Eastern province following the ruthless suppression of the group in the South by Sri Lankan armed forces and pro-Government "vigilante groups". The report says: "Suspected hardcore terrorists from the neutralised Deshapremi Janatha Vijayaparaya (DJV) are believed to have taken refuge in the strife-torn Eastern Province in a bid to evade arrest, a senior police investigator said.... He said the suspects had fled to Trincomalee and taken to fishing following the collapse of the organisation nearly two years ago. They were natives of the southern towns of Matara, Gandara, Kottegoda, Hambantota and Tangalle... Following last week's arrest in Trincomalee, evidence has strongly suggested that several more hard-core activists of the suppressed movement were currently hiding in that area...."

The *Hindu* report quoting the "military spokesman" in Colombo says: "Suspected Tamil guerrillas rounded up a group of fishermen in north-eastern Sri Lanka and slaughtered them on a 'remote beach'. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam seized some 30 small fishing boats off the Trincomalee coast, took the Muslim fishermen to a lonely beach, and started butchering them with swords and assault rifles...."

The Sri Lanka government, as all know, has a virtual monopoly over the process of "information". It is free to say what it wants, release statements as they wish, particularly when it is waging a war within its own territory, and not a very successful war either. Truth, as all critical newspaper readers are aware, is also the first casualty in war, particularly when the "information" is sourced to "military spokesmen". News agencies and foreign correspondents, lacking firsthand knowledge of events, have no option but to transmit whatever government or military spokesmen

say, (after all, they have to earn their bread and butter!) and newspapers in turn also faithfully publish them.

The responsibility therefore of critically evaluating the kind of "information" lies with readers. Although *Tamil Nation* has no evidence to show, we are convinced, through long familiarity not only with how the information process works, but how the Sri Lanka government works, that the second report is loaded with mischief.

Note how "suspected Tamil guerrillas" in the first sentence graduate into Liberation Tigers in the second, and how "fishermen" get transformed into "Muslim fishermen" in the second. We also do not think that anyone in Sri Lanka has spotted Liberation Tigers carrying "Swords"; guns, yes, but swords? Swords are a Sinhala speciality! Even Sri Lanka's national flag has a lion with a sword!

The obvious conclusion that any objective reader can come to is that the same Sinhala vigilante groups responsible for the brutal massacres of JVP subversives and suspects in the south have now shifted their operations to the East under cover of the formidable Army, Navy and Air Force presence in Trincomalee. The *Island* report itself gives the clue, does it not?

The smart "military spokesman" in Colombo has apparently ~~lied~~, not two, but three birds with one stone, in issuing that report. Firstly, he has neatly exculpated the government from the crimes; secondly, by transferring the responsibility to the Liberation Tigers (who is to check anyway?) he has succeeded in maligning the latter in the eyes of the world - a process that has been going on for the past decade or so. Thirdly, by making the victims "Muslim fishermen", he has not only thrown the scent off the Sinhala armed forces, but has kept the picture of Tamil-Muslim feud alive! But how many newspaper readers have the critical faculty to see through all these?

MAKE GOOD

NEIGHBOURS

Sri Lanka's new High Commissioner to India - Neville Kanakeratne - is no fledgling in diplomacy. On the contrary, he shares with the late Shrimathi Vijayalakshmi Pandit of India the unique distinction of having been accredited to two of the most influential world capitals, Washington and Moscow, as well as being associated with UN proceedings. Having been in "moth balls" for a considerable period, his present re-emergence as his country's envoy in New Delhi assumes more than ordinary significance.

High Commissioner Kanakeratne who could be easily mistaken for a Tamilian but

government's policy in bombing its own citizens, the Tamils? Undoubtedly that was being called upon to skate on thin ice, and Mr. Kanakeratne's response was that was covered more with confusion than with clarity. He declared that he had no details of the bombing of Tamil areas (no one asked him for details) "except what he read in the newspapers"! But then, not only High Commissioner-designates, even others read newspapers.

Interestingly, he also added that he was not "directly familiar" with the incidents (aerial bombings); a naive and ostrich-like reaction coming from a representative of his country. How can anyone sitting in Colombo be "directly familiar" with bombs falling over Jaffna? Or with the wailings of the old and the young, or the odour of burning flesh? One does not have to be directly familiar with human suffering, particularly in one's own country, to owe a duty, or to cultivate an empathy towards one's fellow citizens? This is not to say that High Commissioner Kanakeratne hasn't our sympathy. Diplomacy after all has its limitations. When the skeletons in one's country's cupboard begin to rattle and create a din, the most an ambassador can do is to try to muffle the noise a bit, while hoping that those around are short of hearing!

That apart, we would like to draw attention to a particular portion of the High Commissioner's interview, the unintended significance of which might have been overlooked by many. Possibly it was a Freudian slip on his part, but at one point he is quoted as saying: "If two neighbours were to have an argument across the garden wall, a third neighbour (India) could ask them to patch up". Who did he have in mind by two neighbours having an argument across the garden wall? Obviously the Sinhalese and the Tamils? Redefined as a political concept, that precisely is what Eelam Tamil have been saying all along! We are two peoples, each with its own distinctive language, culture, religion, attitudes, and Neighbourly

Territory; and the Tamils wanting to lead their own life, without the neighbour trying to jump over the wall, stone the house, and settle his own family members and trying to take possession (State-aided Sinhala colonisation of traditional Tamil areas). If what Mr. Kanakeratne has sub-consciously admitted in homely phraseology could be translated into a peaceful, political settlement, there need not be any more arguments across the garden wall. Nor any need for a third, tired neighbour shouting across his garden wall - A plague on both your houses!

Good walls, like good fences, make good neighbours, Mr. Kanakeratne. Once the Sri Lanka Government develops the mental courage to concede on principle that the Tamils possess all the components required under international law and morality to qualify as a nation, the argument stops there. The rest is a matter for friendly dialogue between two equal neighbours. That the Tamils should continue to live as a perpetual ethnic minority under a unitary constitution imposed on them by an ethnic majority - in an artificial polity created by the British colonialists in the mid-19th century for their own administrative convenience - is what the argument is all about.

The solution is so simple that we are amazed that successive Sinhala politicians have been unable to see it: **Just Get Off Our Backs**, that is all, and then we will both be free. You will have your Paradise Isle back, at least that part of the island that makes it a Paradise, and we will make the best of our own arid land; which is of not much use to you anyway! And who knows, even the common garden wall that Mr. Kanakeratne spoke about, could be lowered, to enable free movement between both properties!

S. Sivanayagam



for a missing "m" at the end of his name, passed through Madras recently on his way to take on his assignment; a good thing, even if airline schedules had not permitted a direct flight, because in many ways Madras holds the key to Delhi's attitude to Colombo. An enterprising reporter of *The Hindu* managed to get a probing interview off him, the first one on Indian soil. That was sensible diplomacy too, because what one says in Madras has to have some immediate relevance to the Tamil question, rather than what gets articulated in Delhi - where inevitably concerns for peoples get submerged in relationships between governments.

While *Tamil Nation* appreciates Mr. Kanakeratne's candour in conceding that "mistakes are made" - particularly his quoted statement: "Sometimes, we don't take everything a politician says as representing the Government's policy" (not seriously, in less diplomatic language) it was unfortunate that his candour failed him when confronted with a more difficult question: **Did he approve of his**

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TAMIL NATION

"Truth and knowledge are an idle gleam if they do not bring power to change the world."

Sri Aurobindo

Recognising that to change anything it is necessary to understand that which we seek to change, the TAMIL NATION is concerned, not only with providing information but also, with furthering an understanding of the issues that confront the Tamil national movement. Recognising that, in the end, we truly understand anything only to the extent that we have been able to change it the TAMIL NATION is concerned with changing those material conditions of existence which continue to oppress and discriminate against the people of Tamil Eelam. The Tamil Nation is rooted in the growing togetherness of the Tamil people and it seeks to participate in the effort to strengthen that togetherness. The TAMIL NATION seeks to focus attention on the unjust relationship between nations without a state and nations that have attained state-hood. And, the TAMIL NATION exists to debate and campaign for the radical changes necessary, both amongst the Tamil people and outside, if the struggle of the Tamil people for national self determination is to be won.

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LTTE leader Kittu tells THE HINDU A UNITED SRI LANKA DOES NOT MEAN A UNITARY CONSTITUTION

The LTTE leader in London Sathasivam Krishnakumar (Kittu), in an interview with **The Hindu**, has said that the LTTE was prepared to face a referendum among the Tamils in Sri Lanka on whether they required a Tamil Eelam, and to find out who were the real representatives of the Tamil people. "If the Sri Lanka Government is prepared to hold a referendum on those two issues, we will definitely take part in it", he asserted. "We are ready to discuss with the Sri Lanka government the mod-

alities for holding such a referendum."

The LTTE had to be careful about decisions which determined the fate of the Tamil people and therefore it was prepared to take part in a referendum to find out the opinion of the Tamil people, he said.

The LTTE leader said there were many people in the world who wanted Sri Lanka to be stable and the LTTE was not against such wishes. **The LTTE did not even oppose the contention of the Sri Lanka government that the Tamil problem**

should be solved within "a united framework". But if Colombo insisted that we should discuss a united Sri Lanka "within its unitary constitution, then it is meaningless and amounts to duping the Tamil people, he said.

Mr. Krishnakumar accused Colombo of trying to impress the world that the LTTE was not keen on entering the democratic process and that it was afraid of facing elections. "We are ready to face elections any time, but we totally reject the

Provincial Council set-up, or any solution from Colombo which does not meet the aspirations of the Tamils."

Answering a question, he said the LTTE was prepared for talks with the Sri Lanka government provided it did not lay down any conditions. "We will not accept any conditions. At the same time, we are not against negotiations or a peaceful settlement. But we should protect our people's rights. That is why we are firm on unconditional talks", he said.

"Detained for giving Tea"

TULF M.P. for Jaffna G. Premachandran speaking in Parliament said that a large number of persons had been detained for over a year on allegations of having associated with LTTE cadres. Those people had either given some tea to the LTTE men or had some contact with them while the government was also entertaining LTTE leaders during peace talks. Such persons should not be kept under prolonged detention, he said.

Threats to Lawyers

The newly-inducted President of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, Ranjith Abeyseriya has deplored that in recent times several members of the legal profession had to face threats, and that some had even been brutally murdered. He observed that the present state of affairs cannot be tolerated and otherwise the very continuance of orderly society will be undermined.

Briefs

Hosted by India

Sri Lankan powerful political High Priest Ven. Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi, the Mahanyake Thera of the Malwate Chapter, along with three others have been invited by the Indian Government for a 2-week pilgrimage in India. Arrangements have been made for them to visit places of religious importance such as Buddha Gaya, Saranath and Benares.

23 Tamils Abducted

Twenty three Tamils civilians are reported to have been abducted by armed Muslim "Home Guards" in the eastern Amparai district on March 24, following a bomb blast in the Akkaraipattu market, in which at least eight civilians were killed and fifty others injured.

AI Members in Colombo

Two members of Amnesty International, Derick Evans, head of the Asian Far East Division and researcher Elizabeth Nissan visited Colombo during the second week of March to take part in a Trade Union Conference encompassing Trade Unionism and Human Rights. This is believed to be the first visit to the island of any AI members for the past 15 years. They met with a number of Government officials during their one-week stay. It is proposed that Amnesty International which had been denied entry into the country, and which was once described by the last Ranjan Wijeratne as a "terrorist organisation", might make a formal application for a research visit to Sri Lanka.

Infighting in SLMC

The member of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, M.L.A.M. Hisbullah, representing the Batticaloa district, was prevented from speaking in the Sri Lankan Parliament on 20th March, on an objection raised by the SLMC leader H.M. Ashraff. Raising a point of order when Deputy Speaker Gamage Fonseka called upon Mr. Hisbullah to speak, Mr. Ashraff said that each party had been allocated time, and the time given to the SLMC would be used by him and Abu Bakr (representing the Wannai district) only.

Plote Sacks "Commander"

The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) now serving as mercenaries under the Sri Lankan government has sacked its Batticaloa commander "Mohan", according to a statement issued in Colombo by the PLOTE "military commander" Manikkadasan. Mohan and three other cadres accused of having engaged in "anti-social activities" in Batticaloa.

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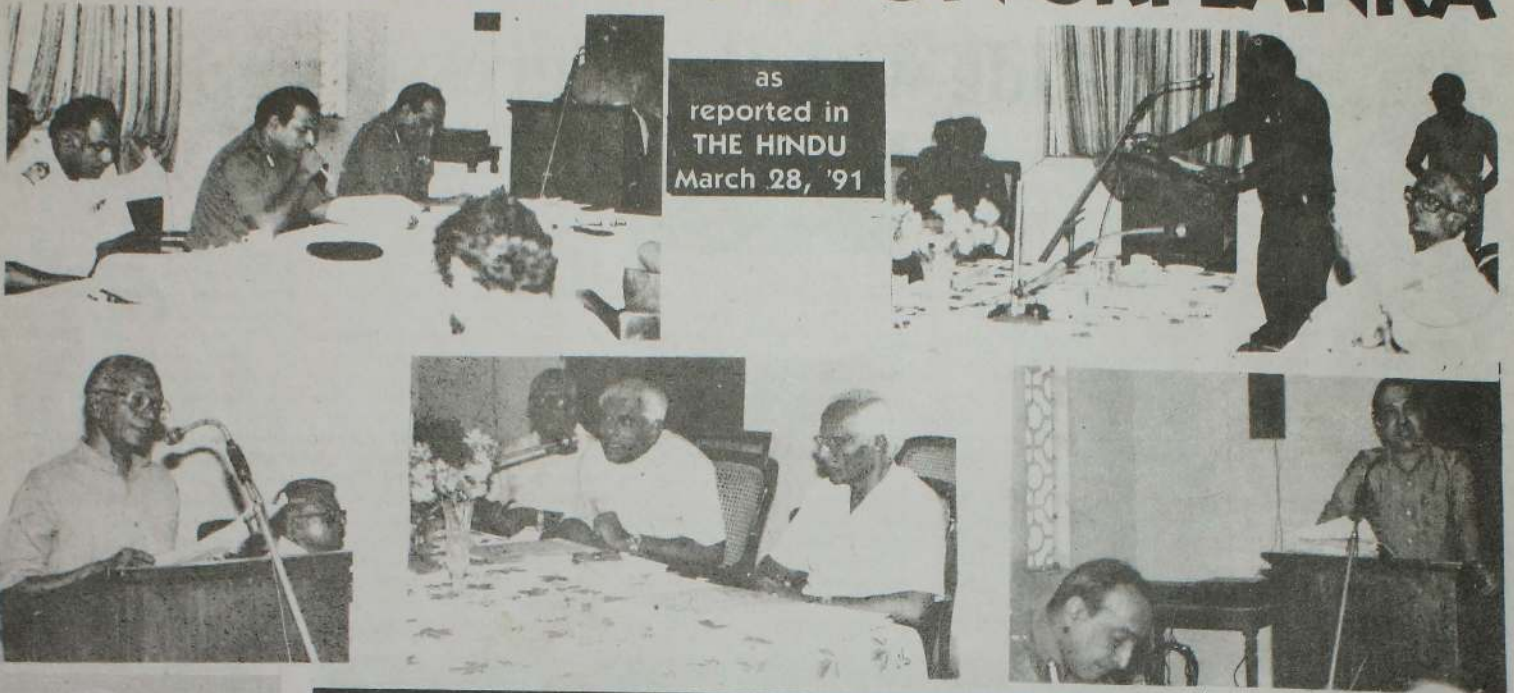
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MADRAS SEMINAR ON SRI LANKA



as
reported in
THE HINDU
March 28, '91

'INDIA SHOULD REVIVE ROLE IN SRI LANKA'

Former diplomats, journalists, academicians and Sri Lankan Tamil leaders today demanded that the Government of India return to its policy of lending its good offices for solving the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. They said India should give up its present "isolationist, hands-off policy" on the events in Sri Lanka and they strongly advocated a federal solution within the sovereignty and unity of the island.

They were speaking on "Emerging trends in Sri Lanka and India's options" at a seminar organised by the Centre for South and South-East Asian Studies, the Madras University, the Madras Chapter for the Society here for Indian Ocean Studies and the Island Trust, Coimbatore.

Mr. Thomas Abraham, former High Commissioner in Colombo, urged all the major political parties in India to mention, clearly in their election manifestos that the resolution of the ethnic conflict on the island was of utmost importance. He pointed out that there were 2,30,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees here who should go back with honour and dignity. In August, 1983, Indira Gandhi had discussed federalism as one of the means by which the Tamil problem could be solved.

Coordination needed: Mr. K.P.S. Menon, former Foreign Secretary, said that during India's involvement in Sri Lanka, the various Indian agencies at work quite often did not know what the others were doing. This led to their pulling in different directions, which made

for fuzzy objectives. If Delhi were to get involved again, it must ensure coordination among its various agencies. If negotiations were to begin, there must be a clear mention of federalism as the solution to the Tamil problem.

Mr. N. Ram said India cannot afford to remain a spectator to what was happening when the Sri Lankan Government was resorting to a "barbaric" bombing of its own citizens (viz. the Tamils). "Genocide cannot be allowed by either India or the international community," he said. Delhi must play its role, given the facts of its neighbourhood and the presence of refugees here, and must go into details of the merger of the Eastern province with the North, the portfolio of Land and Land Development, substance of executive and legislative power for the Tamils. It should go for a federal solution. "As far as ethnic conflict is concerned, Eelam has to be redefined in federal terms and it has to be within the sovereignty and unity of Sri Lanka."

Mr. S. Sivanayagam, Editor, *Tamil Nation*, said India's foreign policy under Mrs. Gandhi had a mind of its own and Colombo was always kept on its toes. If the present situation on the island continued, the Sri Lankan Government might reach a point where it could push itself into a dead end, politically, economically and militarily, leading to anarchy. Out of this chaos might emerge a solution that could satisfy the Tamil aspirations and give the LTTE an official recognition that India

had so far denied. He regretted that between 1984 and now, India's policy towards the Tamil militancy had been one of drift and ad hoc approaches.

'Did not want to be cheated': Mr. R. Sampanthan, former TULF M.P., said people should not jump to the conclusion that a major liberation movement would reject the federal solution out of hand. The militants, who were fighting for the Tamils, did not want to be betrayed (by Colombo) as the moderate Tamils had been. This is the reality that should be contended with. Since their armed struggle had entailed so much of sacrifices, they did not want to be cheated. He regretted that the Tamil struggle had been characterised as "intransigent" and "obdurate". This was not true because Colombo had failed to deliver on its obligations.

Dr. V. Suryanarayan, Director, Centre for South and South-East Asian Studies, Madras University, said India's treating the ethnic crisis as Sri Lanka's domestic problem would be counter-productive. The door for negotiations with the LTTE should be kept open.

Mr. Thomas Abraham, journalist, said the present military situation was "stalemate" and neither the LTTE nor the Sri Lankan armed forces would be able to achieve a decisive military solution. Therefore, the search would begin for a favourable political solution.

Mr. S. Muthiah, historian, said the failure of developing countries to solve their socio-economic problems would see the birth of movements such as the JVP again and again.

Others who participated at the Seminar included Dr. Chitra Sivakumar, Mr. R.R. Sivalingam, Dr. Balu Dr. C.K. Raman and Brigadier Nanda.



Enduring the Agony of Sri Lanka's war

A Ride with the Tigresses

JULIAN WEST
reporting for
ASIaweek
March 8, 1991

I crawl into a sandy hole in the ground, preceded by a small boy. Hardly able to breathe inside the concrete-walled bunker, sand trickling through the palmtrunk supports above my head, I try to imagine what it must have been like - pressed in here with 30 or 40 frightened people - during the Sri Lankan Air Force bombing raids three weeks earlier.

People sometimes stuff their ears with cotton wool to deaden the sounds of bombardment - described as one of the most frightening aspects of a raid - although the bunkers are almost sound proof. Barely a few paces away the turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean lap noiselessly, sole reminder of the once-timeless beauty of Valveddithurai on Sri Lanka's northern shore.

At midday on Jan. 20 an air force helicopter flew over the town, dropping leaflets warning people to move out within 48 hours. Three hours later, as people cowered in bunkers, the first bombers arrived. They were accompanied by helicopter gunships and shelling from Palalai military base, 10 km away. That night, flares from naval vessels offshore lit up the town. Four days of continuous bombardment later, after more than 250 bombs had been dropped, Valveddithurai was virtually reduced to rubble.

Emerging from the bunker, I am greeted by the same desolate scene that shocked survivors. Whole streets are destroyed. Barely a house is left undamaged. Valveddithurai, birthplace of Tiger guerrilla leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and a well-known smuggling area, has been bombed several times during this seven-year war. In the latest attack, 500 houses and two large schools were demolished and more than 100 other buildings, including two historic Hindu temples, were irreparably damaged. A Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) camp less than a kilometre away was untouched.

Valveddithurai was one of the most densely populated towns in Sri Lanka. Ten thousand people lived in a 1.6 km coastal strip. The tightly packed houses collapsed on to each other like a pack of cards. Miraculously, only ten people were killed and 20 seriously injured. Forewarned by the leaflets and the first round of attacks, 90% of the population left for neighbouring villages. The rest hid in bunkers. Almost every house in Jaffna Peninsula has one, which accounts for the relatively low mortality rate in recent bombings.

"We have been attacked since 1984, so we're quite used to it," says Dr. K. Shanmugasunderam, head of the Valveddithurai Citizens Rehabilitation Committee, who recites statistics of destruction from his "mobile office," a straw shopping bag.

Not much is left of Valveddithurai. A family shifts rubble from the ruins of their home. Another couple with a small child attempt to cook a meal on the square-metre patch of floor that remains of their house. I ask the man what they intend to do. "We're hoping some aid organisation will help us rebuild. This is our land and though it's small, we don't want to leave it."

The destruction of the historic Sivam Kovil and Muttiaramman temples, twin Siva and Shakti temples more than 200 years old, has offended the residents deeply. "How would

you feel if a temple in your area was destroyed?" asks Dr. Shanmugasunderam. "I cannot express it in words. But I feel it in my heart." At his insistence we take our shoes off and tip-toe among the broken glass and brick shards carpeting the floor. He informs me that, had a bomb not just desecrated the temple, non-Hindus like myself would not be allowed in.

Valveddithurai people are intensely proud of their seafaring history. They are especially proud of having produced Mr. Prabhakaran, their "son," and are vehemently pro-Tiger. "We have not lost our hearts, despite the massive destruction," says Dr. Shanmugasunderam. "We feel we can stand again. We're fighting for our freedom and we'll fight till we reach our

Bombing raids on the north have intensified since Jan. 10, the end of a Tiger proposed ten-day ceasefire. The LTTE was beleaguered by bad weather, adverse international opinion and a crackdown on its activities in India's Tamil Nadu State. The army, believing the Tigers were weakening, did not want the ceasefire. "Strategically that was the time to hit them," says a colonel in the northern command.

Outside observers believe the intensity of the present campaign signals two things.

are mortally afraid of where they're going to land." The forces accidentally bombed two of their own men recently.

Infiltration of the Tigers among civilians also creates inevitable casualties. "The LTTE has taken over so many houses, if the Sri Lankan government wants to bomb them, it will have to bomb the whole peninsula," says an exiled Tamil MP in Colombo.

I have come to Jaffna by accident - perhaps the best word to describe a 280 km journey across battle lines and through a free-fire zone. I had intended to branch off westward. But once through the Sri Lankan army checkpoint, I keep going up the long road north. To deter attacks from helicopter gunships or stray bombers, I paste a banner read-



objective." Ironically almost the only intact edifice is the town fountain - four brightly painted, cartoon-like tigers rampant.

On Jan. 30 air force bombers attacked a crowded market in Pudukudiyiruppu, a village south of Jaffna Peninsula with a 90% refugee population, killing 22 people and seriously wounding thirteen. "Three Siai Marchetti bombers swooped down on the market at 5.30 p.m. - exactly the time most people are there," says an observer. "A child had to have both legs amputated. Later we found an arm. Pudukudiyiruppu was a very precise target. There were no LTTE nearby."

Throughout the night patients relayed to Jaffna General Hospital by the Red Cross and the Tigers, a five-hour journey along cratered dirt roads and by ferry. In the casualty ward, a man with the saddest eyes I have ever seen tells me he has lost his wife in the raid, leaving him with their seven-year-old son.

The same week a refugee camp housing 40 families in a girls' school, 10 km from Jaffna town, was also bombed. Two people were killed and four wounded. A fourteen-year-old girl lost her leg. On the road south, at an ancient shrine to the Hindu elephant god, Ganesh, bombs killed a man, his baby daughter and a ten-years-old boy.

"Under cover of the Gulf crisis," says a Tamil lawyer, "the armed forces are engaging in military operations of an indiscriminate and reckless nature." The other indication is that the army is working to a deadline, which some observers think may be June this year. North of Vavuniya, a town 140 km south of Jaffna, Sri Lankan forces hold only Palalai air base, Elephant Pass and Kankesanururai naval base. They have therefore resorted to aerial strikes - most damaging to civilians.

The army claims it only bombs known Tiger targets. But it admits that its aircraft - single-engine Siai Marchetti training planes, adapted to carry two bombs: Chinese Y-8s and Y-12s; and British Avros, small passenger planes from which homemade bombs are pushed out - do not permit accuracy. "We do not have the sort of equipment the Americans have," says an army spokesman. "Ours is just a look and see operation. However we sometimes wonder if it's worth killing civilians just to get 20 terrorists."

The bombs - oil drums filled with gelignite or sometimes flammable gas and rubber tubes, which stick to the skin like napalm - have no ballistic stability. "If you look up you can see them twisting and turning as they fall," says the colonel. "Sometimes we ourselves

ing PRESS in large letters across the roof of the car. And hope for the best. Journalists have no permission to visit Jaffna.

Past the Sri Lankan army checkpoint at Vavuniya, I enter a 1.6 km no-man's land before the Tiger checkpoint. About 3,000 people are waiting in line, bound for Colombo. Many have waited five or six days. It is midday. There is no shade. The temperature is in the 30s.

Each morning around 8.30 people run from the Tiger checkpoint to queue at the army checkpoint. Each afternoon most are sent back. I am told the army is processing an average ten people a day. Meanwhile these people, who have already journeyed to Vavuniya, have to sleep out or under trucks, sometimes in the rain. They have no food and are at the mercy of bicycle vendors selling rice packets at four times the normal price. There is no water, no lavatory. "Now you see what we, as a minority, have to go through," says a salesman.

"Conditions here are inhuman," says Mr. Kulasekaram, a thin, middle-aged clerk in the Land Commission Department, returning from a visit to his family. He whispers to me: "Some ladies have not urinated for two or three days." A man with throat cancer is going to hospital in Colombo. Later, I discover, a heart patient who

waited at the checkpoint for five days has died.

I last visited Jaffna seventeen years ago. Then, as now, it seemed another country - separated from the rest of Sri Lanka not only by a causeway across a lagoon, but by language, culture, religion and vegetation. Jaffna is an arid, hot, sandy spit of land where brittle palmyra trees stand sentinel against a burning sky, like huge fans. At night, in the dry atmosphere, the sky is brilliant with stars.

Jaffna people - Tamil-speaking Hindus - have been conditioned by their sparse environment. They are hardworking and thrifty, with a high percentage of doctors, lawyers and engineers. Geographically and culturally the people of Jaffna are closer to south India. Valveddithurai is only 30 km from Tamil Nadu, half the distance to the nearest Sinhalese town. Their isolation from the mainly Buddhist south was entrenched by a Sinhala-only language policy, introduced in the 1950s, designed to favour a Sinhalese workforce. That confirmed their minority status - they comprise 18% of the island's 17-million population - and germinated the present separatist war.

As a Jaffna religious leader explains: "Under the British we were all equal. They found Tamils hard-working and dependable, which is why there were so many English schools in Jaffna - for employment. After the British left, our youth found no avenue of employment. The only work here is coastal fishing or farming."

Then, Jaffna society seemed conservative and strict, caste-bound and enclosed. Young people were brought up to study. Girls were kept indoors, in the kitchen, until marriage.

I find Jaffna changed forever. The palmyra trees and sandy wastes are still here. But in the last seven months an estimated 20,000 buildings in the peninsula have been wholly or partly destroyed. The walls of those left standing are cracked, ceilings have collapsed, barely a window pane remains.

A shortage of petrol and its prohibitive cost - \$10 a litre, thirteen times more than in the south - has grounded the black Austin A40s and Morris Minors that once chugged solidly down the Jaffna lanes. Now a relay of bicycles ferries kerosene and other essentials the 280-km round trip from Vavuniya. Women, dressed as if for a wedding in astonishing red and gold saris, perch on the crossbars of bicycles, like birds of paradise, bound for destinations kilometres away. Only the Tigers drive vehicles.

After sunset most houses are in darkness. Kerosene costs ten times the Colombo price and matches are unavailable. "We have been in the dark for the last ten months," says Mr. Kulasekaram. "Our children can't study anymore." There is no firewood or gas for cooking. Cash is short: banks receive insufficient money for their needs. Telephone lines were cut long ago.

Less than a third of the food needed by Jaffna arrives. Lorries are detained at Vavuniya for months, waiting for transport permits. An official says only 3% of food intended for the area has been delivered in the past three months. "People are on the brink of starvation," he says. "They're dying in silence." Food sent by the government from Colombo by ship, under the Red Cross flag, often returns unloaded because

(continued next page)

PASSAGE TO JAFFNA THE END OF WIJERATNE

Continued

of high seas or attacks around the military camp at Palalai.

Once the ship arrived packed with sanitary towels. "There were thousands of sanitary towels in Jaffna," confided a nun. "We don't need sanitary towels, we need food. People are living on one meal a day."

In the airy, rambling Jaffna General Hospital, a doctor tells me they lack essential drugs, dressings and surgical instruments. "Operations are often delayed because of lack of oxygen," he says. "Also, we don't have enough oxygen for follow-ups, so some people die." Half the 1,015 beds cannot be used because of bomb damage.

The face of society, too, has changed. Most of the middle class and professionals have emigrated to Canada or Australia. Since last June 125,000 refugees have gone to Tamil Nadu - swelling the number there to 200,000. More Tamils now live in Greater London - 60,000 - than in Colombo. In the peninsula 250,000 are displaced.

Most astonishing of all to some older Tamils is the emergence of a young guerilla movement - the Tigers. "No one was as shocked as we were when our boys went to war," says a Tamil government servant. "The traditional set-up of our society has changed." Notes a Tamil lawyer in Colombo: "The under-35s now constitute the ruling class." As Mr. Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's amiable political spokesman, says: "We are running the law and order here. We are the civil administration."

At the LTTE's administrative offices, people wait to have domestic and land disputes settled and to get exit permits to leave the north. Armed cadres stroll in and out, but the atmosphere is relaxed. Small uniformed boys run errands, though the office is also staffed by dedicated civilians. "It's very difficult for us to live now," says Sarojini, a 38-year-old woman in a blue sari, who works as a translator and whose fourteen-year-old son is a cadre. "But we don't care about the food. We want freedom."

In a real sense, the LTTE is like a large family. Many Jaffna people have relatives in the Tigers, and call them "our boys." Their monkish disciplines are admirable, if austere: no smoking, no drinking, no marriage until a certain age and number of years of service. They have revolutionised the role of women in Jaffna, giving them equality, as fighters, and striving to eliminate dowry and caste systems.

Malini and Nishanti, tiny but stocky Tigresses, represent the new Jaffna woman. Wearing combat fatigues, their hair tied up in braids - the regulation Tigress hairstyle - the two area leaders giggle, hold hands and clasp each other's knees as we wheel down the road in a trishaw. They are shy of me - although they are the ones with the T-81 Chinese assault rifle.

Both have received military training and fought the Sri Lankan army in several battles. Initially, they explain, girls were involved in political work, but six years ago they insisted women be allowed to fight. They were first given AK47 and M-16 assault rifles. Later they carried heavy weapons like rocket-propelled grenade launchers, bazookas and machine guns.

Malini says she and fourteen other women halted the advance of Indian Peacekeeping Force troops on Jaffna town

in October 1987. "We didn't have uniforms then, so we were wearing skirts and blouses. The Indians didn't notice us, although we were carrying guns. They thought we were just a group of young girls. I ordered the girls to lie down and from there we started firing."

Malini, 28, is postponing marriage. "Getting married and having children is not a problem. But so many of my sisters have died so I have a responsibility to continue the struggle." So far, 106 women Tigers have died in the war.

Nishanti, 22, joined the LTTE in 1987. Like many Tigresses she ran away from home to join, knowing her parents would stop her. They had hoped she would go to university. "I joined out to fight against the enemy but to liberate myself," says Nishanti. "I'm opposed to the dowry system. Now I wouldn't accept a man who wanted a dowry. Although Tamil women can choose to work and be free, all these aspirations come to nothing in the end. Women are enslaved by traditional systems and male chauvinism." As women guerillas, they experience unheard-of freedom.

Yet the Tigers' domination of Jaffna society, often through fear - real or imagined - gives them a sinister complexion. More than once I'm told I cannot photograph a poster or a hospital ward without "permission". Jaffna now has no political parties, no trade unions, no non-governmental organisations. Newspapers are controlled. "It has become a society with no political freedom," says a Colombo Tamil professor. "The intelligentsia, formerly an important component of society, has been subjugated."

Still, support for the Tigers in Jaffna seems genuine, even fierce. Indiscriminate bombings and an economic blockade on the north have inevitably driven people into the Tigers' arms. "Young people are still joining the LTTE," says the exiled politician. "They feel if they are going to die anyway in bombing raids, they might as well fight for their rights." Adds the lawyer: "I don't see how the government can ever win back the confidence of people who feel so alienated. People from Jaffna feel the government has crossed a certain moral threshold which forfeits its right to claim the allegiance of those citizens."

Meanwhile combat continues. The week after my visit Minister Wijeratne declared: "We're fighting a war and we're fighting it to a finish." Mr. Balasingham claims the LTTE would prefer "a political solution to a political problem." But with its leader, Mr. Prabhakaran, in the role of jungle fighter and hero, and with an entire generation of Tamil youth indoctrinated as guerillas or sympathetic to the Tiger cause, the leap from warfare to politics looks impossible. Mr. Balasingham says there is "now no alternative but to fight for an independent state."

"The civilian population is fed up with this war," says a Tamil observer. "But there is no space for them to speak out. There are very few rational voices. The situation is so dismal, one hardly sees any light at the end of the tunnel. It's like a bad dream." Replies the army colonel when I ask him how long this war might last: "I think foreign correspondents can expect work in Sri Lanka for a long time."

This Syndicate feature was written soon after Ranjan Wijeratne killing on March 2.

The blowing up of Sri Lanka's Minister of State for Defence, the man who prosecuted the war against the Tamils, publicly dared his adversaries to take him out and wished them "good luck", is a fresh reminder of the reality that for the armed militants who have taken on the militarised Sri Lankan state, there are and there can be no half measures. Ranjan Wijeratne is to date the most high-powered and the most important victim of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and his end came comprehensively - in a way that ruled out any chance, let alone of survival, of identifying the remains. His hell-raising Praetorian Guard perished with him, along with some innocent civilians, in this ambush in the heart of the capital.

Ironically, some ten days before the assassination, in the course of issuing a crude threat to a Mothers Front rally in Colombo - protesting against the large-scale killing and disappearance of Sinhalese men over the past two years - Wijeratne's Defence Ministry issued the public warning that it had information that the LTTE was planning to set off bombs in Colombo and therefore people should avoid gathering in crowded places. The LTTE promptly issued a statement denying there was any such plan.

Deadly signature

Who killed Wijeratne? Not us, say Prabhakaran's Tigers. According to Kittu, the LTTE's former Jaffna commander who after his disablement, has been the organisation's highest-ranking representative freely accessible to the international media, "the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam categorically denies involvement in the assassination." In the old days the Tigers had the reputation of invariably owning up their kill - since politically they had nothing to hide about their single-minded militancy and their commitment to the armed struggle. Today, given their seven year track record and political graduation, there is no need for them to own up military strikes at civilian or political targets. Public opinion in Sri Lanka as well as India has become quite adept at recognising the deadly signature of the Tigers in a range of successful actions against their adversaries.

In his measured observations on a fallen foe, Kittu asserted interestingly that Wijeratne "symbolised Sri Lanka's racist and oppressive system", was responsible for the killing of hundreds of innocent Tamil civilians, blocked the track of political negotiations and led the hunt for a military solution regardless of the consequences. Speaking from London, the LTTE representative noted, cold-bloodedly but accurately, that "his demise is a sense of relief for the Tamil people". He widened the perspective by pointing out that "Wijeratne had a number of enemies in Colombo."

The Probability

Those who know something about the motive-forces and *modus operandi* involved in the

N. Ram

militarised ethnic conflict and the phenomenon of armed militancy in Sri Lanka can offer the prediction that proof on the hand behind this high-powered explosion is going to be virtually impossible to come by in the coming days and weeks. The track record of police investigations into such violent happenings in South Asian countries is educative: it reveals that the challenge is beyond the means and capabilities of the investigative machinery of 'soft' states which repeatedly make the tall claim of being expert at going after 'terrorism'. The experience of the Anuradhapura massacre of May 1985, the Pettah bomb explosion of 1987, and numerous subsequent episodes in the region underline this unflattering reality.



Kittu Cold-blooded but measured observation

The answer to the question of who took Wijeratne out - in what was, in essence, a military operation capable of repetitive staging against other high-powered political targets - can only be guessed at, on the basis of military and political probability. In terms of motive, grievance and cause, the assassination could have been the work of either the JVP or the LTTE. Indeed, according to unofficial estimates highlighted by the recent activism of the Mothers Front in Sinhala areas, around 60,000 people disappeared between 1988 and 1990 as a result of the operations of pro-government killer squads. One well known instance is the case of the dissenting journalist and playwright, Richard de Zoysa, who was liquidated a year ago.

Post-1989 JVP

Ranjan Wijeratne was the spearhead of this savage operation which achieved the stunning political triumph of beheading the leadership of the JVP and smashing a loosely run politico-military organisation. Those familiar with the post-1989 plight of the JVP believe this extremist organisation is in no state to carry out the type of highly planned and skillfully executed military ambush which saw the end of Wijeratne.

On the other hand, the Tamil grievances are strong and the LTTE, in sharp contrast to the JVP, is clearly in a position to do something about the state's atrocities. In fact, for all the pounding its Vadamarachi stronghold and some other areas have taken from Wijeratne's military, the armed Tamil militants continue to call the shots in the region of ethnic conflict. Barring some areas of intensive military concentration and bombardment, it is they

who seem to have the freedom of movement over an extensive area which includes guerilla-friendly jungle habitat.

When the fragile peace between the Premadasa government and Prabhakaran's organisation broke down on June 11, 1990, after fourteen months of "talks" directed against India's role, Wijeratne & Co clearly misjudged the politico-military situation. The overpowering success against the JVP went to their head and made them terribly arrogant. It is interesting that Kittu has charged that it was Wijeratne who prevented the Sri Lankan government from "going in for a negotiated settlement to the Tamil issue" when "the Sri Lankan President... and others in his government wanted to solve the problem through discussions". One of the surprises of recent Sri Lankan politics was the emergence of the apparently non-political Wijeratne as the UNP's strong man. He made it clear to the media that he revealed in his tough guy image.

In the period preceding the conclusion of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, it was Lalith Athulathmudali who was the military's favourite. But the former Minister of National Security had impressive political and diplomatic skills and a reputation for insight and flexibility, notwithstanding his hawkish image acquired during anti-LTTE operations. Wijeratne had few such skills.

A lunch meeting

I met him, in mid-1989, during an informal discussion over lunch at the residence of ex-President J.R. Jayewardene, and found him soft-spoken, reticent and moderate in the sentiments he chose to express. He also sounded distinctly non-political, at least in terms of nuances, in comparison with others at the table. This was before he and his security apparatus succeeded in taking out the JVP leadership and organisation. Subsequently, he made a series of intemperate remarks about the ethnic crisis and about India's role in Sri Lanka. He also made his own play to influence the course of Indo-Sri Lankan relations and, to a small extent, the direction of political development in Tamil Nadu. For example, he expressed satisfaction on January 17 over the official action taken in Tamil Nadu to block the LTTE's allegedly free movement across the Palk Straits, but opportunistically applauded the Chandra Shekhar regime's dismissal of the DMK government. (His comment on this was: "We are pleased the Central government is sticking with the accord.")

Personal reputation

Ranjan Wijeratne, a planter with a passion for 'law and order' minus its socio-political and ideological complications, did not have the reputation of a communal-minded person. However, life and practice entwined him with the worst human rights violations witnessed in the South Asian region in the post-1971 period.

Over the past eight months, the brutalisation of the Tamil people in the North-Eastern province of Sri Lanka has proceeded with very little let-up. Unfortunately, domestic political troubles in India and the Persian Gulf crisis have tended to obscure the gravity of this situation on the ground. The fresh flow of refugees to India has signalled the failure of the Sri Lankan political system to handle the challenge posed by the intractable ethnic conflict in a democratic and humane way. Wijeratne - wantonly turning

(Continued on page 9)

Continuing the House of Lords discussion

23rd January 1991

Self-inflicted tragedy

Lord Avebury: My Lords, we are greatly indebted to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Ripon for drawing our attention to the miserable state of affairs in Sri Lanka and for trying to focus our minds on what could be done by the international community to restore the rule of law in that unhappy country. He painted a grim but nevertheless accurate picture of the state of affairs there.

Unfortunately this tragedy is self inflicted. My noble friend analysed some of the political reasons which led to the development of that state of affairs. It is very tempting to go into an analysis of those factors and to explain what is the aetiology of the state of violence and the reasons behind the emergence of the JDP as an armed opposition in Sri Lanka, to which the noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce, referred. It did not come out of a political vacuum but emerged in 1971 when I first visited Sri Lanka as a representative of Amnesty International to inquire into the situation in which 14,800 people were detained by the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike without any process of law and where disappearances were already widespread and torture endemic in the establishments run by the police and security forces. Therefore, that is not a totally new phenomenon, but one that had emerged 20 years ago.

Some of the measures taken by governments in the intervening 20 years have encouraged young people to turn to violence instead of constitutional means of expressing themselves. For example, there were the actions of the government of President J.R. Jayawardene from 1977 onwards when he had a five-sixths majority in Parliament. He gave himself presidential powers armed with that majority. He charged his political opponents before a special tribunal and imposed punishments on the former prime minister and minister of justice for acts which had been lawful at the time at which they were committed. He held a referendum to double the life of his parliament from six to 12 years, rushing through the referendum as being urgent in the national interest and the text was unavailable to voters.

Jayawardene's fraud

During the campaign, he enjoyed a virtual monopoly of radio and television and the press, which was largely state owned. He imposed emergency regulations which were used to shut down the main Sinhala language opposition daily. He closed printing presses operated by critics of the government and arrested or threatened opposition leaders. There were raids and apparatus was destroyed in the headquarters of the main opposition party. Meetings were prevented or disrupted and campaign literature was seized and confiscated. That was how President J.R. Jayawardene won the infamous election of 1982. During that time I was present in Sri Lanka and I say without hesitation that the proceedings were fraudulent and unlawful.

In 1983 there was a pogrom against the Tamils in Colombo including a massacre of Tamil prisoners held in the principal jail. Not a finger was lifted by the government to stop the atrocities which clearly had political backing from somebody high up. However, those

events were used as an excuse by the government to proscribe the JVP, which until that time—as I remind the noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce—had been returned to constitutional politics, as well as two other parties and some individuals, including persons who had protected Tamils at risk to their own lives.

At that point the JVP reverted to terrorism and the government embarked on a programme of counterterrorism which has continued ever since, even after the leadership of the JVP was totally destroyed as it was last March when the leaders were captured and murdered in custody, which the noble Lord, Lord Taylor, has already mentioned. The brutality of the security forces more than matched that of the uphold the rule of law against the rule of the bullet and bomb actively incited the criminal

The Premadasa election victory in 1988 was also of dubious validity, marred as it was by widespread violence and intimidation, as was the parliamentary election of 1989 at which I was present. There were dozens of political murders including those of nine opposition candidates and many officials. The turnout in both elections was sharply down, particularly in areas of traditional opposition support. At one polling station I attended in the south, in a constituency of strong SLFP support, nobody voted. At another polling station I came to there was the body of a terrorist laid across the threshold. He had just been killed by the security forces. Obviously people did not come out and vote when that kind of thing was happening and when shots could be heard throughout the whole area.

hatred is never appeased by hatred. The Tigers, on the other hand, masters of cruelty as the *Tamil Times* described them, have perpetrated the most revolting atrocities against Moslems in the north and east. The entire Moslem population of the north—10 per cent. of the total—have been driven mercilessly from their homes and hundreds massacred in the east.

Professional Skills

According to the official figures of the Rehabilitation Ministry, reported in the newspaper *Island* on 22nd December there are 928, 954 internal refugees. In the 60 camps in Batticaloa, eastern region, there are 222, 161 people all but a handful of them Moslems from the region. In Britain, Canada, the United States, India and Australia there are several hundred

universities since they reopened after a two-years closure last September. Sixteen lawyers who were also human rights activists have been murdered since 1988, and 36 fled the country after threats to their lives and those of their families. The noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce, is absolutely right. There are many distinguished lawyers in Sri Lanka. However, more and more of them are having to seek exile abroad, 24 in Britain. Those gross violations of human rights are continuing long after the government claimed to have disposed of the JVP in December 1989 when Rohana Wijeweera, the JVP leader, and the entire central committee, with the exception of one man, were unlawfully killed while in the custody of the police.

As far as I am aware, and I stand to be corrected by the Minister, there have been only two cases brought against servants of the state in regard to the crimes committed. In the first case, the torturing to death of the human rights activist lawyer, Wijedada Liyanartchi, the superintendent and two police constables who arrested him were charged with murder two years ago. But they are out on bail and there is no sign of the case being concluded. Meanwhile the lawyer who acted for Liyanartchi's family was driven out of Sri Lanka by death threats following the murder of two colleagues who acted with him on the case.

In the other case, that of the shooting of a student at the Teldeniya Central School, Kandy, one prosecution lawyer has been murdered. Five of the witnesses have also been murdered. The trial judge fled the country and has changed his name. Senior counsel for the prosecution has sought asylum in Britain. Since it became impossible for litigants to retain lawyers in human rights cases, the Bar Association agreed, after consultation with judges and the Attorney-General to act on behalf of litigants nominating one of their members to conduct each case. The two most recent asylum seekers in Britain are lawyers who were so nominated but who nevertheless received death threats that they could not ignore. No doubt the government would like to create the impression that the rule of law prevails and that everyone has access to the courts. However having created an autonomous machine for murder and intimidation they cannot easily stop it when acts that are extremely harmful to Sri Lanka's image abroad are perpetrated.

Private arms

On 30th November I had the honour of chairing a meeting organized by the Campaign for Democracy and Human Rights in Sri Lanka at St. Martin's in the Fields. The remarkable feature of that meeting was that the 300 people who attended came from all communities, including some from the armed opposition groups. Yet they managed to reach a unanimous resolution outlining a solution to the frightful problems facing their country. They declared that the help of the United Nations was necessary to develop proposals for constitutional electoral reform and to secure the withdrawal of the huge quantities of weaponry which remain in private hands, most of it distributed by the government. Coincidentally, I understand that the civil rights

SRI LANKA : A SELF-INFLICTED TRAGEDY, SAYS LORD AVEBURY

activities of their servants. J.R. Jayawardene exhorted the security forces to "kill, kill, kill and kill the brutes", and legislation was enacted exonerating the security forces and police for any criminal offenses they might commit in the course of their duties. In the meanwhile, on the other side of the question, J.R. Jayawardene had totally ignored the Tamil United Liberation Front between 1977 and 1983, when it constituted the main opposition in Parliament. The TULF was a conventional political party, and by undermining its credibility among the Tamil people, J.R. Jayawardene made it inevitable that terrorist groups would supplant them. He did not honour his election promise of more autonomy for the district development councils, but instead unleashed violence against the Tamil people and their priceless assets which included the famous library of Jaffna, which was totally destroyed.

IPKF's destruction

Having lost control of the north, J.R. Jayawardene then invited the Indian Peace Keeping force to restore order, under the Indo-Sri Lanka accord of July 1987. But the Indians proved to be even more destructive and murderous than the Sri Lanka armed forces. The accord also handed a major propaganda weapon to the JVP, which it was not slow to exploit. When President Premadasa came to power he asked the Indians to withdraw. But by the time they complied the damage was already done.

Thus, although some of the violence was indeed perpetrated by the JVP—as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce said—the effect of the violence during those elections was to improve the results for the reigning government. The presidential majority was small enough to have affected the result in a material way. President Premadasa probably would not have come to power if there had been free and fair elections.

Politics Militarised

The Indians, meanwhile, had completed the militarisation of politics in the north and east, and set the scene not only for conflicts between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities, but also for the bloody struggles within the Tamil communities themselves; between Tamil and Moslem and, as has been said, between the LTTE and the government. President Premadasa naively thought that he could use the LTTE, and there was a honeymoon period after the Indian withdrawal. But the Tigers, having forced the regional super power, as they saw it, out of their territory, were not going to share power with Colombo. They inflicted heavy losses on the Sri Lanka armed forces in the north, which is now de facto under LTTE control. The response of the authorities in Colombo has been to create yet another armed group to seek out and kill suspected members of the LTTE in the south. It is very sad that President Premadasa, as a Buddhist, should ignore the Buddha's proposition that

thousand more refugees, many of them highly qualified professionals whose skills are going to be desperately needed in the reconstruction of Sri Lanka's shattered economy and public services. The other minority which is overlooked too often is the community of Tamil plantation workers, who have very little in common with their remote cousins in the north and east but whose existence is harsh and whose rights as descendants of fourth or fifth generation immigrants transplanted as serf labour by the British are ignored. If there is to be a separate Tamil state in the north, they would be no more at home there than in the land of their ancestors, Tamil Nadu.

In the south generally the pattern has been one of kidnappings and disappearances. According to a report by two British MPs who visited Sri Lanka in November 1990, together with a Belgian and a Dutch lawyer, an estimated 60,000 people—as my noble friend also mentioned—have disappeared in the south since 1987, many of them after being taken into custody by the police. Recently there have been several bizarre cases of detainees pleading with the judges not to release them on remand after bailed prisoners were picked up by masked gunmen in unmarked jeeps and subsequently disappeared.

Violations Continue

Christopher Bigsby, writing in the *Independent* of 6th January, says that 120 students disappeared from Sri Lanka's

'COLOMBO WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RE-ESTABLISH DIRECT RULE IN NORTH'

movement in Sri Lanka itself has made a similar proposal.

Recently the Australians proposed that an interim UN administration should take over in Cambodia because the government and the armed opposition there were unable to agree on a peace formula which would enable the people to decide what kind of government they wanted for themselves. A surprisingly large number of states were prepared to agree a more active role for the UN which would involve even a short-term transfer of sovereignty. In Sri Lanka the problems are not the same, but perhaps there are additional reasons for envisaging such a UN role. Colombo will not be able to re-establish direct rule in the north, and if the Tigers control the electoral machinery, no other point of view will be allowed. So the only chance that the people have is if an impartial outside body comes to restore law and order and to supervise elections. Ideally, the United Nations should also help those who fled the north to return to their homes. I certainly go along with those who think that perhaps the Commonwealth Secretariat might have a similar role.

Death Squads in South

All observers of the situation in Sri Lanka agree that the huge arsenal of weapons in private hands must be recovered. Recently the government themselves have said that one of the essential conditions for peace is that all who are not legally authorised to carry arms should hand them in. They might have been thinking of the Tigers, but in the south it is the death squads which are doing all the killing. It is theoretically within the government's power to disband them. Here again, I believe that outside help will be needed because the culture of violence has so deeply infected the security forces that orders to hand in unauthorised weapons would not be obeyed. Again, perhaps the Commonwealth Secretariat might be able to help reconstruct the uniformed services and weed out the killers.

Ideally, the government should also bring proceedings against officers who have committed offences and suspend others who may be strongly suspected of having committed criminal offences where there is insufficient evidence to prosecute. The problem is that over the years these officers have acted with the tacit approval and encouragement of the government. One of the highest ranking officers in the police force conspired to commit criminal offences on a very large scale in the south. As is generally known, the same officer was actually found by the Supreme Court to have violated fundamental rights in the notorious "voice of the clergy" case; yet that man was promoted by the government.

Donor countries

So the state owes a debt to these criminal officers and will not readily ditch them. Some people believe that if they were deprived of their weaponry and thus unable to deploy their private armies, they might be prosecuted. But here there may be scope for the donor countries to exercise some persuasion by saying that next year they want

to see firm action taken, as has been said, to dismantle the death squad structures and to remove their patrons from office. At the aid meeting in Paris last November, the consortium made some general observations about human rights which have been referred to, but they need to be much more specific if results are to be achieved.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Masham, said, there is a danger that, preoccupied with the war in the Gulf, we shall lose sight of the sufferings of people elsewhere in the world. The ordeal of the people of Sri Lanka has lasted for many years and there is no immediate sign of relief. This debate may help to show that we are conscious of their plight and that we long to help in reaching a solution. We are unlikely to have analysed in an hour the problems which the best minds of Sri Lanka have addressed for years, but we stand with those who combat oppression by peaceful means.

Baroness Ewart-Biggs: My Lords, I know that we are all very grateful to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Ripon for having brought before the House this evening this enormously important but very troubling subject. As many previous speakers have said, what accentuates the importance of discussing this subject this evening is that most troubled areas, apart from the Gulf, are now no longer before the public eye. The right reverend Prelate asked for many assurances from the Minister. I look forward very much to hearing the answers.

There have been some wide-ranging speeches which have covered many different aspects of the background and the historical reasons for the present conflict and described the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka at the moment. I wish to comment briefly on three reports. Their contents confirm most of the details which the right reverend Prelate and other speakers gave this evening.

Amnesty banned

The noble Lord, Lord Avebury, mentioned the report from Amnesty International, which, sadly, among other human rights organisations is banned in Sri Lanka. Amnesty International describes how the human rights violations by the Sri Lankan government forces reached a peak in 1989 and how in the south thousands of people disappeared or were victims of extra-judicial executions. Further, it describes how, following the reimposition of the state of emergency in June 1989, government security forces made little attempt to conceal their resort to widespread murder. It also describes how the Sri Lankan government persistently denied that they sanctioned illegal killings by the security forces, claiming that they killed only in combat. That point was clearly made by the noble Lord, Lord Avebury. A recent member of the Sri Lankan security forces is quoted as saying:

"rather than finding measures to reduce the violence, the Government has sought to wipe out the JVP with widespread repression"

The noble Lord, Lord Avebury, also noted the report made by a group of four Members of the European Parliament who visited Sri Lanka from 27th

October to 4th November 1990. Their mission was to compile a report on the violation of human rights and the disappearance of Sri Lankans. They reported that various estimates received suggested that at least 60,000 people had disappeared in the south of Sri Lanka since 1987. That represents about one in every 251 of the population. While they were there they received reports of continuing disappearances. Indeed it was reported that up to 50 killings a week had been reported in the Kandy area in the past two months.

Failure of the State

They went on to describe that many groups were now restricted in their operations. They gave the example of trade unions' which can no longer operate in the free trade zones and in many cases are intimidated if taking part in industrial action elsewhere. They concluded that, although the army and authorities deny responsibility for the killings and disappearances, the scale is such that the state cannot be absolved from responsibility. The state has either failed in its duty to maintain law and order or has condoned the activities of the security forces. The fear of economic collapse has fuel-

defence expenditure and away from social programmes was having an adverse effect on the welfare of children in Sri Lanka. That is particularly sad as Sri Lanka had achieved very encouraging progress over the previous decade. Infant mortality had declined and a very high immunisation coverage had been achieved. However, malnutrition is now a very serious problem with children. At least half the children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition. The report says that nearly 100,000 families and about 400,000 people are homeless, that the psychological effect of the conflict on the children has become very severe and that those who have been orphaned or lost a parent now number thousands. Children of pre-school age are in an even more precarious position.

Health services have now completely deteriorated and diseases which had been wiped out are now returning. There has been an increase in malaria. Forty per cent. of the island's rice production is in the east and the harvest in August was badly disrupted. Seventy-five per cent. of the fishing industry is concentrated in the LTTE controlled northern district.

The burden on the economy is being exacerbated by the Gulf crisis, which, as the noble

representations to the Sri Lankan government to ask them to reconsider their decision to resume military operations against the Tamil Tigers? Further, can he say whether there will be initiatives to secure an effective ceasefire which can be independently monitored between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers? I should also like to ask the noble Lord whether the Government have sold military equipment or dual-purpose equipment, such as computers, to the Sri Lankan government. I believe that it is most important to know what kind of military equipment is entering the country at this time and whether we are training any members of the Sri Lankan army or security forces.

Most previous speakers talked about aid. I very much agree that if we were to cut off aid to the people of Sri Lanka it would be the poorer people who would suffer the most. Therefore, can the noble Lord say what is the figure of gross British bilateral aid for 1990-91 and whether the World Bank has warned that in future its aid will depend upon improvements in the Sri Lankan human rights record? I believe that the World Bank aid group has agreed on an amount of money, but I should like to know whether it has indeed, the Sri Lankan people are suffering the most.

Lord Roy: My Lords, I listened with great interest to the words of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Ripon and those of other speakers. The right reverend Prelate knows Sri Lanka well. He has lived and worked therefore several years. It was plain from his speech that he feels a real affection for the country and the people. Affection for that beautiful country also shone through the speeches of other speakers - notably those of the noble Baroness, Lady Masham, and the noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce. It is just such an affection that has long characterised relations between innumerable people in this country and Sri Lanka. We in Britain have therefore felt a particular concern for the pain and suffering that Sri Lankans have experienced in recent years.

Threat to the State

The political situation in Sri Lanka is indeed tragic. The quantity of blood shed during the past seven years has been appalling. Great harm has been done to a society which would otherwise be peace loving, humane and, as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce, reminded us, law abiding, by two ruthless terrorist uprisings and a government response to them which has often paid little heed to the sanctity of basic human rights and the rule of law. I well understand the concern of many people in Britain who have friends or relatives in Sri Lanka, or who merely feel deeply affected by what they have heard of the situation there. The extent of that concern is well known to the officials and my ministerial colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who have received a great many letters about Sri Lanka from Members of another place and your Lordships House, and others in this country.

(continued overleaf)

REGRET THAT AUSTRALIAN INITIATIVE NOT FOLLOWED UP

led the intimidation and the continuation of the underlying climate of violence and repression. The growth of human rights groups are now entirely sickened by the conflict. Groups such as the Mothers for Human Rights and the Sri Lankan Freedom Party have been established to campaign against human rights abuses.

The European Parliament delegation recommended the visit of United Nations sub-committee on disappearances and human rights which had been accepted by the ministry of defence for February 1991. It also supported an investigations into disappearances by an independent body and said that it would support the resolution of the Sri Lankan Bar Council for an inquiry by an independent commission. The delegation also wished to encourage increased co-operation between the Sri Lankan government and the international Red Cross, a point to which the noble Baroness, Lady Masham, referred.

Switching of funds

The third report was made by the programme committee of the United Nations Children's Fund. It made quite clear that the conflict and the consequent switching of funds towards

Lord, Lord Taylor, said, deprives Sri Lanka of vital revenue. Prior to the crisis there were over 100,000 Sri Lankan migrant workers in Kuwait who were annually sending home £75 million. That constituted Sri Lanka's largest source of foreign exchange revenue. Now rather than receiving that revenue the country is expanding a great deal of money on reintegrating those refugees on their return from the Gulf.

Britain's role

The situation is very serious and, as previous speakers have asked, what can Britain do? I should like to ask the Minister a few questions about certain movements which are about to take place. I should first like to ask him whether the proposed visit of the United Nations Sub-committee on human rights to Sri Lanka in February is still scheduled to take place and, if so, whether there will be any delegates from Her Majesty's Government on the committee. Secondly, can the noble Lord tell us when Her Majesty's Government will next meet representatives of the Sri Lankan government to discuss human rights abuses in that country? Thirdly, can he confirm that he will make urgent

Continuing the House of Lords...

I do not propose to take up the time of the House by speaking at length on the history of the violence in Sri Lanka. Most of it will be well known to those who have followed events there over the years. I should however, like to set out the Government's view of the present situation.

We support the government of President Premadasa in its efforts to defeat the terrorist threat from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the LTTE) in the north and east of the country. Similarly we recognised the Sri Lankan Government's need to defeat the Sinhalese nationalist terrorists of the JVP in the centre and south of the island. We are not sorry that the JVP appears to have been defeated. As the noble and learned Lord, Lord Wilberforce, so eloquently explained, it was an extremely dangerous threat to Sri Lankan society. No democratic government can allow itself to be dictated to by threats of violence. On the other hand, we have also consistently condemned some of the means used in confronting those threats, especially the violation of basic human rights which has occurred all too often.

The right reverend Prelate asks what action we propose to take to help to end the hostilities in Sri Lanka. I wish that there was something that we could do to achieve that end. The sad truth is that in order for peace to break out, both sides must want to stop fighting. Regrettably, that does not appear to be the case at present.

Australian initiative

We regret the fact that the Australian-inspired Commonwealth initiative, referred to by the noble Lord, Lord McNair, and the noble Baroness, Lady Masham, has not yet been followed up. The main responsibility for reinstating that initiative at present lies with the Sri Lankan Government. But should circumstances change, I can assure noble Lords that we shall be ready to help where we can, either directly or by encouraging other parties acceptable to both sides in Sri Lanka to offer their services.

In June last year, the LTTE abruptly broke off talks with the government which were aimed at resolving their grievances peacefully. At that time the differences between the two sides seemed small. The government had made considerable efforts to seek a peaceful settlement with the LTTE. However the LTTE abandoned the talks and resumed fighting, rejecting two ceasefire proposals put forward by President Premadasa.

At the beginning of this month the LTTE itself initiated a unilateral ceasefire. The Sri Lankan Government responded by itself calling a ceasefire; but after 10 days in which 34 violations were attributed to the LTTE the government decided that it had no choice but to resume the fighting. We much regret that the ceasefire did not prove to be longer lived. We shall continue to urge the Sri Lankan Government to take whatever opportunities present themselves for putting an end to the bloodshed.

The right reverend Prelate has also asked what action we propose to take to restore human rights in Sri Lanka. We are of course deeply concerned about the reports of widespread violation of human rights by members of Sri Lanka's security forces. It is distressingly clear that far too many of those whose task it is to fight terrorism have in the past themselves adopted the behaviour of the terrorist.

European Community

We have made our anxieties clear on many occasions to the Sri Lankan Government both bilaterally and with our partners in the European Community. I should like to give some examples. In October, European Community Heads of Mission in Colombo jointly urged the Sri Lankan Government to observe internationally accepted human rights obligations. In the same month we and our EC partners made it clear at the Sri Lankan Aid Consortium Meeting that future decisions on aid to Sri Lanka will take into account its human rights record. A decision will be made shortly on

whether to go ahead with £3 million of British bilateral aid to Sri Lanka next financial year. Sri Lanka's human rights performances will certainly be one of the major factors which we will take into account. I think that that deals with one of the right reverend Prelate's concerns.

On 3rd December our High Commissioner in Colombo met President Premadasa, and my honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed developments with the Sri Lankan High Commissioner in London on 19th December. On both occasions our views on human rights violations by the security forces in Sri Lanka were very clearly expressed. My honourable friend told the Sri Lankan High Commissioner that we see only one way in which his government and its security forces can regain the confidence of the population of Sri Lanka and of the international community. The whole government, particularly those ministers and officials who are directly responsible for the security forces, must make public its determination to use lawful means in the fight against their enemies. To take up the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Avebury, in addition it must be clearly demonstrated that individual members of the security forces who indulge in unacceptable behaviour will as a matter of government policy be brought to justice.

There is some evidence that all this pressure is bearing fruit. In mid-November the Sri Lankan government appointed its own special task force to investigate human rights questions and report direct to President Premadasa. Just last week President Premadasa announced the creation of a commission of inquiry to examine individual complaints of disappearances. We see the appointment of these bodies as steps in the right direction and are bodies as steps in the right direction and are encouraging the Sri Lankan government to do all it can to allow them to work effectively. We shall be watching closely to see just how effective they are.

£ 440,000 assistance

The noble Lord, Lord Taylor of Gryfe, raised the matter of help for Sri Lankans stranded in the Gulf. We responded quickly with a contribution to the cost of repatriating refugees from the Gulf, including many Sri Lankans. This contribution, including Britain's share of European Community assistance, now amounts to £11 million. The noble Lord also referred to the NGOs and their activities. We have provided over £ 440,000 in the past 12 months to support emergency relief work by NGOs in the north and east of Sri Lanka. We also support the NGOs, including the Intermediate Technology development group which was mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord McNair, in other activities in Sri Lanka.

The noble Lord, Lord Taylor of Gryfe, paid tribute to the British High Commissioner in Colombo. I am sure that the House would agree with the noble Lord in the kind and fitting tribute to the work done by our High Commissioner, David Gladstone, in Colombo in circumstances which are often not easy. I can assure the noble Lord that his words will be much appreciated.

At the end of her speech, the noble Baroness, Lady Ewart-Biggs, fired off a battery

Letters

Categorising

the Sinhala politicians

Mr. Sachi Sri Kantha, of Osaka Bio Science Institute, 6-2-4 Furuedai, Suita, Osaka 565, Japan writes :-

Dear Sir,

Disregarding the party affiliations, the Sinhalese politicians in Sri Lanka can be broadly categorized into four 'S' types, with reference to their stand on the Tamil issue.

1) "Schemers": This breed pretends to dispense justice to Tamils but practice only opportunistic politics. e.g.: all the past and present leaders of the UNP and the SLFP, who became the prime ministers and presidents of the island.

2) "Screamers": This vocal breed (mostly originating from the non-Govigama castes among Sinhalese) pretends to be the patriots of the Sinhala nation. Since they could not aspire to the top echelons of power, they vented all their frustrations on the Tamils with demonic intensity. e.g.: K.M.P. Rajaratne, C.P.de Silva, I.M.R.A. Iriyagolle, Philip Gunawardene, Rohana Wijeweera, Cyril Mathew and Merril Kariyawasam.

3) "Sleepers": More than 60% of the Sinhalese politicians belong to this breed. They do not care about the Tamil issue as such they are labelled as 'sleepers'. Many novices begin as 'sleepers' and then graduate into either 'schemers' or 'screamers'.

4) "Sympathizers": This is a rare breed (e.g.: Wilmot Perera, Edmund Samarakkody, Shelton Ranaraja and most of the leaders of the traditional Leftist parties till 1960), who sympathized with the Tamil aspirations but did not carry adequate political clout among the Sinhalese. They have been mostly obliterated now.

Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, who met an untimely death on March 2nd was the most recent addition to the 'screamers' breed. He was an ambitious man and he departed this world before fulfilling so many of his stated ambitions. I will list below some of his utterances, as recorded in the *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines during the past year or so.

"We will bac the Tamils to the hilt. Our first aim is to develop these neglected and devastated Tamil areas". (*Time*, Feb. 12, 1990).

"Now we are going to annihilate them (LTTE). There is no turning back". (*Newsweek*, July 2, 1990).

"We will erase the LTTE from the earth". (*Time*, July 23, 1990).

"No one should call for a cease-fire. We will not capture them (LTTE); we will destroy them (LTTE)". (*Time*, Aug. 27, 1990).

"The battle will continue, for as long as we have ammunition". (*Time*, Sept. 17, 1990).

Sincerely yours,
Sachi Sri Kantha

Language hypocrisy

Mr. Sripala Siriwardhana of Colombo writes :

The other day I was waiting in the foyer of the Navaloka Hospital, the most prestigious in Colombo. A shining brass plaque on the wall commemorates its opening by no less Sinhala-only worthies than J.R. and President Premadasa and others. The inscription was in English only.

I looked around to see if therewas any other tablet in Sinhala. There was none.

I wondered at the unashamed hypocrisy of a people who would knife a Tamil for not supporting Sinhala-only, but would themselves tolerate their own name boards appearing in English-only.

(continued on page 9)

of questions. I shall do my best to answer a few of them. She asked about arms sales: all arms export licence applications are carefully scrutinised, case by case, taking all factors, including human rights, into account. Sri Lanka is not a major market for British defence equipment.

As concerns military training, we provide some military training for members of the security forces. We do not undertake training in cases where we believe that those trained might subsequently be involved in what we would regard as unacceptable practices. Our training is designed to instil the discipline and high professional and ethical standards of our own forces. There are no British military personnel involved in training in Sri Lanka.

UNCHR working group

The noble Baroness also asked me about United Kingdom representation on the UNCHR working group. The composition of the group is not yet decided. She also asked me what contacts Britain would have with the government of Sri Lanka in the near future. My honourable friend the Minister of State hopes to visit Sri Lanka later this year. He will no doubt raise human rights questions at that time.

The noble Baroness asked about the proposed visit of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights to Sri Lanka.

A visit is proposed for September 1991. That date was suggested by the Human Rights Commission itself.

Some progress is being made, albeit not yet enough. President Premadasa and his government are very well aware of the deep concern felt in this country felt in this country and in many others around the world over the situation in Sri Lanka. We continue to encourage, urge and occasionally cajole the Sri Lankan government to do its utmost to resolve the country's problems peaceably. We are prepared to offer our services wherever they may be of assistance. But in the end of the problems can be solved only by a determination by Sri Lankans themselves, of all opinions and ethnic groups, to settle their differences around the negotiating table.

Baroness Masham of Ilton: My Lords, before the noble Lord sits down, I wish to inform him that I received a fax from the Red Cross today. The fax came from Geneva and it stated that the Red Cross has started an appeal for Sri Lanka. Is it possible that some of the £3 million that has been referred to could be given to the International Committee of the Red Cross to help the Sri Lankan Red Cross society undertake humane relief work?

Lord Reay: My Lords, I am not sure whether that is a matter for her Majesty's Government. I shall, however, certainly look into it.



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35 Years after "Sinhala only", Lankan M.P.s debate Language!

Thirty five years ago, Sinhala was declared the only official language of the country, paving the way for the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka, and the bloodshed, genocide and the war for Tamil liberation that was to follow. In a comic attempt to close the stable door long after the horse had bolted, Sri Lankan M.P.s were debating in the month of February in the year of our Lord 1991 how best the Tamil language could also be accommodated, with the former Minister for War Lalith Athulathmudali, in his reincarnation as Minister of Education, chipping in with some studied comments. TAMIL NATION reproduces here excerpts from the Sri Lankan Hansard of February 5 and 6, 1991, purely by way of offering entertainment to our readers:



relief through the courts or any other system. Certainly, all the facilities are not available. Certainly, retirements have aggravated that. But this will bring about the necessary change of attitude where every public officer will feel "I have to carry this out, otherwise I will be in trouble."

Sir, there is a history of this. It was started when Hon. Wijekoon was the Minister, and I happened to be also in that Committee, and then it has seen the light of the day when Hon. Festus Perera is the Minister.

There are certain features in this Bill that are not quite clearly stated, but which are underlying this Bill. One is the language policy of Sri Lanka is not to compete, but to provide incentives to all at every possible turn - for citizens, incentives for officials, incentives plus compulsion. For citizens, Mr. Nimal Siripala de Silva quite rightly said, "Well, where are the opportunities for people to learn? The Youth Commission said, "start teaching a second or third language only from Year 3+. What have we done now? We have said, "If you have facilities start from the Year 1, but certainly you must start from Year 3". This time with the book distribution we have given a "Three-Language Alphabet" to the students - + 3-Basha Hodiya."

You might say, "Why not language?" But we must start with script for the Fifth Year. Of course, ideally it would have been good to have languages. But we recognize the fact that there may be a shortage of teachers for some time - (Interruption). That is the problem - (Interruption). Yes, we are trying to get over it. I will tell you how we want to get over it.

(Mr. C.V. Gooneratne)

I agree with what you are saying, but was it not your Government that brought about this problem?

(The Hon. Lalith Athulath Mudali)

Well, I do not want to go into it.

(Mr. C.V. Gooneratne)

I also do not want to get into a debate but I just want to remind you.

(The Hon. Lalith Athulath Mudali)

I can go back into the 1950s, Sir, but that is not the purpose - (Interruption). All that does not produce any worthwhile results. Let us face the reality of the problems that we have - (Interruption).

(Mr. Deputy Chairman of Committees)

Order, please!

(The Hon. Lalith Athulath Mudali)

People in Europe manage to learn many languages because the script is virtually the same except in parts of Eastern Europe. We have the initial hurdle of having to know more than one script. So we want, at the end of this year, every child in the fifth year to be able to read any sign board throughout this country. This means not only the child in Weligama being able to read Tamil. It means that the child in Point Pedro will also be able to read Sinhala. I do not want anybody to feel a stranger in this country when he is reading something. Gradually the incentive will

work so that they will want to learn more.

Then, Sir, what are we doing? At O Level - we have already implemented it from December last year - every child will be recommended to sit for papers in three languages.

(Mr. K.B. Ratnayake)

May I interrupt you, please. As regards implementation, I think you as the Minister of Education, will have to bear the brunt of it. My personal view is, now that you have the two languages Sinhala and Tamil as official languages why not now itself you lay down the second language? You see that education is by the media of the mother tongue, either Sinhala or Tamil. So why do you not make it compulsory for a student to take a second language from the Ordinary Level so that the Tamil boy will take Sinhala and vice versa? For that you must fix the date now itself. You cannot do it immediately because you are not teaching this in the rural areas. For the teaching of these languages facilities are available in the towns but not in the rural areas. So it is your responsibility.

(The Hon. Lalith Athulath Mudali)

I agree with that. The only thing is even in the towns, in some towns the teaching of Sinhala and Tamil are more difficult than teaching English because, say, in Point Pedro you hardly find Sinhala teachers and in Matara you will not find so many Tamil teachers. Certainly that is what the hon. Member suggest, the direction in which we wish to go to make knowledge of these languages compulsory, but we feel that if we make it compulsory you will get the reaction that they do not like it.....

(Mr. Deputy Chairman of Committees)

Mr. P. Joseph, you have ten minutes please.

(Mr. P. Joseph)

Mr. Chairman, my party, the Tamil United Liberation Front full welcomes this Bill for the establishment of the Official Languages Commission, presented by the Hon. Minister of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs although this Bill has been introduced very late in this House.

At the outset the Hon. Minister said that this Bill once introduced will at least satisfy some aspirations of the Tamil speaking people of this country. I would like to focus the attention of both sides of the House that this alone will not solve the Tamil problem, and all of you must endeavour, your best to solve this long outstanding Tamil problem by political means and not by a military approach. This is my request as a man belonging to the Tamil United Liberation Front is concerned. Sir, in fact the Official language Bill which was introduced in 1956 by the late Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was the root cause of the present situation in this country. In fact I wish to recall the prophetic statement that was made by the late leader of the LSSP, Dr. Colvin R de Silva, when he took part in the debate on the Sinhala Only Bill in 1956. He most prophetically stated that once this Bill is passed, you are

not going to have one State in this country, but there will be two States in this country. I think, Sir, that to clear these hurdles and obstacles a Bill like this will definitely bring about a certain amount of goodwill among the minority communities.

Now, Clause 5 of this Bill in relation to the appointment of this commission says that it shall consist of six members to be appointed by the President, one of whom shall be nominated by the President to be the chairman of the commission. In this respect, I would like to request the Government as well as the Hon. Minister, since this commission is to implement the Official Languages Act, particularly the Tamil language, that 50 per cent of the members of this commission should be from the minority community and that the chairman of the commission should also be from the minority community. Only then you can take away the fears of the minority community in this country.

(As Hon. Member)

This Bill concerns the Sinhala language and the Tamil language.

(Mr. P. Joseph)

I agree, but you know that the Sinhala Language Act is implemented correctly but it is the Tamil language Act that is not implemented correctly in this country. It is for this purpose that this Bill has been introduced. So I call upon the Hon. Minister to rectify this and to see that more minority members are nominated to this commission.

Look at Article 18 of the Constitution. Article 18 (1) says "The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala". It is only in paragraph number two that you find - that is the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution - "Tamil shall also be an official language". Although my party has been clamouring for parity of status in this country - (Interruption). When the Government wanted to introduce Tamil also as an Official language, in Article 18 of the Constitution itself they could have easily stated, "The Official Languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil. Instead of that, Tamil comes as No. 2.

(The Hon. Lalith Athulath Mudali)

I urge the Hon. Member not to put it into No. 2. In a Constitution, as we all know, there is a parity of sentence. Constitutions are interpreted very differently from statutes - (Interruption). If you have any difficulty we will pass them together. Then there will be no problem. Do not go and give people ideas by saying this....

(Mr. P. Joseph)

In conclusion, I would like to tell this House of an experience that I myself and my Colleague and party Member, Mr. Senathirajah, had when we visited a patient in the Eye Hospital last week. When we went there we wanted to go to Ward No. 3, but wherever we went we found that the boards indicating various things were only in Sinhala. There was no Tamil or English even to direct us. This is a Health Department hospital and I think the Hon. Minister will have to look into this matter.

Thank you very much.

(to be continued in the next issue)

(The Hon. Lalith Athulath Mudali)

Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, after the eloquent contribution by Mr. Nimal Siripala de Silva I think I can talk about his speech. First, what I was impressed by was the fact that there was no dispute about the language policy for Sri Lanka. After so many years if we have come to that understanding, that is a great day for this country.

Now, the main thrust of his complaint is, "you are not going to be able to implement it quickly." That is fair area of debate, and there is no doubt that the existing facilities for implementing this is not hundred per cent perfect. Article 25 of the Constitution says very clearly that the Government must provide the facilities. In no way is that obligation removed.

Sir, the problem of languages being used in the administration of the country is not

merely a problem of facilities or lack of them. There is or there has been unfortunately a problem of attitude - the problem of attitude of not really wanting to implement the policy. Politicians agree; broad issues are determined. But when it goes down to some level of officialdom, there is some reluctance. Quite often that reluctance arises out of ignorance, lack of knowledge that this is what they have to do. This Bill, Sir, seeks to correct that, that every public official must know this and the Constitution and must implement it. I can assure, Sir, the moment that a Head of a Department knows that he has to implement it he will take steps faster than anybody else to ensure those facilities necessary for implementing it. Up to now the fact was, while we agreed to the language policy, a Head of Department did not feel compelled to implement it, and whatever happened a citizen could not get

(continued from page 8) B

Letters

Language hypocrisy

Why hasn't the patriotic Maha Sangha raised hell against the public violation of the Sinhala-only laws; at least they could agitate for a second tablet in Sinhala and forget the 'only'.

The hospital is the private property of one of the richest mudalalis in Sri Lanka. Are the Buddha men who preach the Sinhala-only gospel with such violence, so cowed by the wealth of the proprietors that they dare not protest this open insult to Sinhala. Denying even Sinhala-also! Not even parity with English in the land of the Sinhala-Buddhists!

And the unkindest cut of all, a Sinhala-only President and his successor have blessed the venture in English-only.

Sripala Siriwardhana
Colombo

The expectation is that the military offensive - which Wijeratne threatened will be resumed as a kind of memorial to the fallen hero of Sinhala chauvinism. To make matters worse in a political sense, President Premadasa has vowed to uphold the unitary status of Sri Lanka which Wijeratne "fought to preserve" - making nonsense of all the autonomy initiatives pursued by Sri Lankan and Indian leaders in the 1983-89 period and militating against any prospect of a negotiated political settlement, on federal lines, in the future.

The end of Wijeratne

continued from page 5

his back on the unilateral cease-fire instituted by the LTTE - a characterising the move, absurdly, as a "surrender" by Prabakaran's organisation - carried out the uncivilised policy of a state bombing its own people, erasing all moral and political differentiation between armed extremists fighting for Eelam and innocent men, women and children among whom the guerrilla "fish" are active.

The Madhu Camp

In early February, according to a credible journalist observers who have visited the area, Sri Lankan Airforce planes committed the atrocity of dropping barrel bombs (a crude version of napalm) on a school in Prabakaran's coastal home town of Velvettiturai, they devastated temples, churches, schools and houses in four days of savage bombing and artillery assault. Wijeratne even issued a warning to the entire population of the Jaffna peninsula to evacuate homes and places of work if it wanted to be safe, because the Sri Lankan military was going to cut off the Tigers and then liquidate them. In late February, the lives of thousands of Tamil refugees in the Madhu Church Camp, looked after by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, have been put at high risk by Wijeratne's military threatening to wage all-out operations in the area against the LTTE and ordering the civilians to get lost.

TAMIL DISAPPEARANCES IN TRINCOMALEE CONTINUE

It is not always fun and games at Trincomalee's main stadium. One day in January it was packed with about 25,000 Tamil men and women, brought there by the army in a massive screening exercise to weed out the militants.

The operation had begun early in the morning. Sri Lankan soldiers cordoned off areas in the town, searched houses and sent the inmates to the grounds. Some leading Trincomalee citizens and relief workers were invited to watch the "identification parade" at the stadium. As people waited in rows, three or four men - their faces covered under hoods - moved among them. Every now and then a hooded man would stop and nod, identifying a "suspect". The man nodded at would be immediately whisked away for questioning.

Only a couple of round-ups on the scale of the stadium identification parade have taken place in Sri Lanka's eastern district of Trincomalee since the Eelam war began again last June. But reports and rumours persist of people being picked up from their homes and from refugee camps in the district, never to be seen again. There is a dearth of information, but people speak of a small group of men - with or without hoods, in plainclothes, in black T-shirts or in army uniforms - taking away people who would then "disappear."

Times of India (Sunday Times) March 31, 1991

ASHWANI TALWAR in Trincomalee reports on Sri Lankan soldiers' bizarre operation against Tamil suspects

The experience seems to be similar to what the people of the Sinhala-south went through when Sri Lankan security forces were ruthlessly crushing the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). When the war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) erupted again last June history started repeating itself, in the East. There was a spate of "disappearances" in the first few months of the new war. Many relief workers give the credit of bringing down the rate of disappearance in the district to Brigadier Lucky Wijeratne, a coordinating officer of the district who was blown up in a land-mine blast three months ago. There seems to have been a relapse after the Brigadier's death. "It is getting to be nasty again," a relief worker said.

Brigadier Siri Peiris, who took over about a month ago, admits he has heard about the disappearances, but denies that the army could be involved. His men only conduct above board cordon and search operations to fish for the LTTE and those

who provide support to it. "A fish cannot live without water. So the water has to be drained out before we get the fish," he says.

Among the "fish" the army is holding on for the moment are three members of the domestic staff of the Trincomalee delegation of *Medicins Sans Frontieres* (MSF) - a French relief agency. Although it had been more than a week since the young men had been arrested, MSF have not been able to visit them.

About a month earlier, MSF got a bigger jolt. Travelling on their prominently marked vehicle, an MSF team came across an army patrol south of Echalampattu. The patrol fired at the MSF pickup, reportedly getting several bullets into it. Nobody was hurt. Brigadier Siri Peiris said it was a mistake. The patrol from neighbouring Batticaloa district had intelligence that an LTTE group was moving about in a white pick-up; exactly the vehicle on which the doctors were travelling.

The Brigadier said he was still awaiting a list of the people who had "disappeared" in the district since June from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The local citizens' committee too had not tabulated the complaints that have reached them. But even during a brief trip of Trincomalee, one comes across many cases of missing people whose whereabouts are not known. At the Clappenburg refugee camp, a woman handed over a copy of a memorandum she has posted to officials and politicians. There had been no word about her husband who was reportedly taken into custody by the army months ago. She expected this reporter to find the whereabouts of her husband from authorities in Colombo and then write back to her. Another woman who knew English scribbled a list of half a dozen women "abducted" the same day from her village.

At the Clappenburg camp, many refugees are housed in disused airforce hangars. At night the refugees, who have

put up shanties in the hangars, are confined in the enclosed space. The gates of the hangars are clanged shut - making it an uncomfortable hot place - "for their own safety" because there had been complaints that groups of unidentified men were picking up "suspects" from the hangars. In a refugee cluster a few kilometers outside Trincomalee town of 600 families, about 50 people are reported missing by the relief workers.

A refugee who had been picked up from a camp in the district about six months ago, said he was detained by the army for about a week. Six of the 30 who were taken into custody along with him have not been heard about. "That means they are not living," he felt.

Brigadier Siri Peiris however is categorical that no army squads operate in his district, picking up people. All army detentions are on-the-record, he maintains. The squads which figure in rumours and complaints must be "civilians", perhaps Muslims, according to him. Tamil-Muslim relations in the East have worsened during the government-LTTE war, but it is unlikely that "civilian" Muslims would organise groups to abduct people from Tamil villages. The Muslim Home Guard set up to protect the Muslims from the LTTE, however, has a bad reputation.

LANKAN ENVOY HAD HEARD OF BOMBING THROUGH NEWSPAPERS!

THE HINDU, March 29

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner-designate to India, Mr. Neville Kanakarathne, today expressed the hope that the island's ethnic conflict, which he described as "running sore," could be healed with the help of the "good offices" of the Indian Government.

Would Colombo like India to lend its good offices again to solve the Tamil problem? "You can lend your good offices without formally participating in the negotiations" viz. by India activating its diplomatic channels and paving the way for a conducive atmosphere so that both the sides (the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE) could sit down for talks, Mr. Kanakarathne said.

However, "this (ethnic conflict) is an internal affair." If two neighbours were to have an

argument across the garden wall, a third neighbour could ask them to patch up. "Within your own family, if there is a problem, a good neighbour will not intervene," Mr. Kanakarathne said. The neighbour would merely point out that he was being disturbed.

The High Commissioner-designate was speaking to reporters at the airport here while on his way from Colombo to New Delhi.

On his priorities, he said "Things were not what they had been in the past (between Colombo and New Delhi) because of misunderstanding and problems." Therefore, the Sri Lankan President Mr. R. Premadasa, had instructed him to do all he could to restore the "traditional, cordial and friendly relationship" that

existed between them for decades.

Asked what he thought was the main problem that affected the relationship between the two countries, he said his personal view was that there was a serious lack of communication between them. "Many of these problems spring from misunderstanding based on, what I consider, lack of communication at all levels - Government, academic, business, students, etc. There should be more exchange of visits and contacts at people-to-people level."

Calls for negotiations: On whether he approved of the Sri Lankan Government bombing its own citizens viz the Tamils, Mr. Kanakarathne claimed that he had no details of the bombing of the Tamil areas excepting what he read in the newspapers. He was "not directly familiar" with the incidents. "It is most unfortunate that any country has to go through this experience. I hope I will be of some value of Sri Lanka and Indo-Sri Lanka relationship and with the good offices of your Government, we will be able to bring this running sore in our political set-up to an end," he said. He hoped this could be achieved through negotiations and that the amity among the communities on the island could be restored.

When it was pointed out that the late Minister, Ranjan Wijeratne, had said India had no role to play in the affairs of Sri Lanka, the High Commissioner-designate remarked. "Sometimes, we don't take everything a politician says as representing the Government's policy. The President's policy, the Government's policy has always been that we should have cooperation with India, that India has legitimate interests which we have to respect and Sri Lanka has legitimate interests. Both are members of the non-aligned movement. Both subscribe to good neighbourliness... A large number of the IPKF soldiers have sacrificed their lives. Our people appreciate this. A large number of people I have talked to in Colombo and rural areas appreciate this."

Asked now the ethnic conflict could be an "internal problem" when there were 2,30,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India, he said, "I agree. During Mr. V.C. Shukla's visit to Colombo, this was among the issues discussed." Colombo had said it was prepared to take back the refugees and rehabilitate though it would not be possible to put them immediately in the houses where they lived. "This is a human problem. This has nothing to do with politics."

On whether any political settlement was possible without the LTTE's participation in the negotiations, he said the Government did not know to what extent the LTTE represented the people in the North. This could never be found out when there were no elections. "Nobody can hold elections where the fighting is going on." In many parts of the world, people were forced to support groups with arms.

On the LTTE's insistence that Colombo should give up its condition that the LTTE declare itself against the use and possession of arms, that Mr. V. Prabhakaran himself take part in the talks and that all other Tamil groups would participate in the negotiations, he said the LTTE had been in direct contact with Colombo till June last year. Colombo did not go back on its negotiations in June. It was the LTTE which resorted to violence and no Government could tolerate this. The LTTE had "slaughtered" 800 policemen then, he alleged.

Concedes 'mistakes': Whether he thought it was necessary to undo some of the gains of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement such as the merger of the Eastern province with the North and putting an end to the Sinhala colonisation of the Tamil areas, Mr. Kanakarathne conceded that "mistakes are made" on every side. No purpose would be served by going into the past mistakes and finding out who made them. Instead, lessons should be learnt from mistakes.

In his earlier assignments, Mr. Kanakarathne was Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the U.S. and the USSR.

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PEOPLE EVENTS

West London Tamil School celebrates Sri Thiagaraja Day

West London Tamil School held a five-hour recital of vocal and instrumental Carnatic music on 9th March to celebrate Sri Thiagaraja Day. The recital was held at the Wembley High School and the Chief Guest was the Deputy Mayor of Brent, Cllr. T. Taylor. More than 30 musicians participated.

Among the musicians who participated were: (Vocal) - Prema Navaneethayalan, Mrs. Paranthaman, Puvana Ilampooranar, Kala Yogarajah, Priyadarshana Yogarajah, Sasikala Kothandapani, Ambika Thamotheram, M. Yogeswaran, and Saroja Ramakrishnan. (Violin) - Aruntha Ratnasingam, Lakshmi Jayan, Arvind Jayan, and Kartik Ragunathan. (Veena) - Suthamathy Srisatkunam, Kanchana Sivalingam, Shyamala Jayachandran, Renuka Sivanandan, Renuka Sriyananda, (Lute) - M. Yogeswaran, Balamurugan and T. Nimalraj. (Mridangam, Ghatam, Ganjira and Morsing)



I.Somasundara Desigar, M.Sukumar. Muthu Sivarajah, S. Kirubaharan, Yasakaran Sharma, Anjalo Kumaradas and S. Chithamparam.

The concert ended with a group rendering of Sri Thiagaraja's Pancharatna Keerthanais.

Great credit must go to the West London Tamil School for assembling the galaxy of musical talent at this unique festival in London, and particularly to Mrs. Ambika Thamotheram, Head of the Schools Vocal section and to her son Dr. Nimalraj, a Teacher-Governor of the School.

MARRIAGE

Sri Kumar - Indhumathy, Sri Kumar, son of Mr & Mrs V.Sivasubramaniam of 46, Fairfield Road, Oxbridge, Middx UB8 1AL, and Indhumathy, daughter of Mr & Mrs. P. Kulasingam of 7, Mayville Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 2HU, at John Kelly School Hall, Neasden, London NW2 on March 31.

Indhumathy is an accomplished Bharata Natya dancer. Only six months ago, she performed before a very appreciative audience at the Bharata Vidya Bhavan in Kensington at which the Chief Guest was Mr. Mark Fisher, M.P., Shadow Minister for the Arts.

Eelam Tamil Vigil

London Tamil women observed a fast and vigil outside India House in the Aldwych in Central London to draw the attention of the Indian Government as well as the British public to the untold suffering of Eelam Tamils as a result of indiscriminate aerial bombings and embargo on food, fuel, and medicines by the Sri Lanka government.

EELAM CRICKET IN AUSTRALIA

The Victorian Tamils Cricket team, Melbourne, defeated its Sydney counterparts, the Sydney Tamils by 48 runs in the first intercity 40-over cricket match played at the Monash University Cricket grounds recently.

Winning the toss and batting, the Vic Tamils belted 193 runs, with S. Senathirajah, Sivaratnam and Premachandran, all scoring rapid fire 30's at the top of the order. While Rajadurai, Nagarajah, Sriskandarajah and Rasaratnam were the others to reach double figures.

The visitors got off to a very bad start with both openers. Linganathapillai Thusanthan and Vasikaran Rajadurai, both falling to Premachandran in the very first over of their innings. Easan Valupillai (32) then com-

bined first with C. Shanmugarajah (16) and later with K. Silvester (25) and W. Vijeseelan (20) to add respectability to the visitors score. But the innings folded at 149. For the hosts, Sriskandarajah 3/38, Yogalingam 2/11 and Premachandran 2/15 were the main wicket takers. The previous night Vic Tamils hosted the visitors, the Sydney Tamils, to a dinner dance.

cricketers for their coaching needs.

This season, the team is led by two experienced cricketers, in Mr. Thiagarajah Prabakaran (Ex-Hartley wicket keeper) and Mr. Sinniah Shanmuga (Former Tamil Union all rounder). The team is managed by Mr. Radhesha Rasaratnam. The team is financed by its numerous members.

The club is participating in the Victorian Indian Sports Association (VISA) cricket league. Having lost all its matches in the first half of the season, the team has come back strongly and won six out of its other seven matches, in the last half of the season, and is currently lying sixth overall, in the VISA Tournament.

The Vic Tamils Cricket Club was formed by some former schoolboy cricketers, with the view to promote social and sporting activities among the Tamil community and to tap the young talent among our people and to make available to them the experienced and seasoned ex-schoolboy and ex-club



Pictured above is the Victorian team (left to right, seated) Suresh Senathirajah, Harshan Senathirajah, Bala Rajadurai, Nagaratnam Satheesh and Suren Senathirajah. (Standing) : Sinniah Shanmuga, John Premachandran, Dilharan Sivaratnam, Ganga Yogalingam, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah, Krishnan Arnold, Radhesha Rasaratnam and Sivapragasam Ravitharan.

Shakuntalam Dance-Drama in London



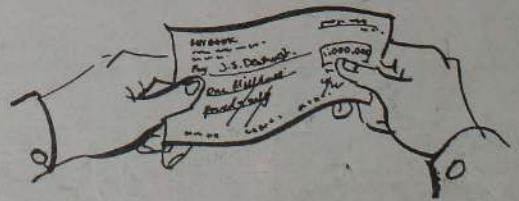
Poet Kalidasa's epic play Shakuntalam - was presented in a memorable 3-hour Dance Drama by 40 pupils of the Shakespeare School of Oriental Dancing in London recently.

The Shakespeare school of Oriental Dancing in Edgware, London was founded by

Gunawathy Shakespeare, nee Brodie of Jaffna, in 1980, and has made a name for itself, particularly within the Gujarati community in West London. Gunawathy had her early training in Bharata Natyam at the Kalakshetra, Madras. Assisting her in the production was her

daughter Shenika. Wimal Socekanathan, one-time announced and presenter of Tamil programmes at the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and now a successful London solicitor, acted as comper with considerable verve and eclat.

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MANNAR : CURFEW & INFORMATION COVER-UP

Areas north of Vavuniya have been completely cut off for any kind of movement of people for nearly ten days beginning March 20. With a view to prevent any leaks of information of whatever is happening in the war zone, particularly in the Mannar district, the military authorities have been enforcing indefinite curfews in all surrounding areas. It is presumed that even humanitarian relief by ICRC and UNHCR has practically ceased, and the fate of several thousands of refugees in the Madhu camp is not known. It is also feared that hundreds of them may have been killed in indiscriminate air raids.

THREE DAY NORWEGIAN CONFERENCE ON EELAM TAMIL ISSUE

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF EELAM, SAYS NORWEGIAN

A three day conference on the Tamil Issue was held in Trondheim in Norway on the 15th, 16th and 17th March. Participants included representatives of Tamil organisations in Norway as well as representatives of Norwegian non governmental organisations. Mr. K. Raveenthiran, Mr. Reggle Davidraju and Mr. Uthayan Singaraja of Tamil Information were concerned with the organisation of the Conference. The principal concern of the Conference was to discuss the setting up of an effective network to convey information about the Tamil question to both Norwegians and to Tamils in Norway. It was estimated that there were around 5000 Tamils residents in Norway at the present time.

The Conference was addressed by a representative from the Norwegian Home office on the Norwegian Government's policy towards Tamil asylum seekers in Norway. Mr. Bent Hauge, a Norwegian Human Rights activist stressed that the need for a Tamil refugee to 'integrate' with Norwegian society did not mean that the Tamil should not preserve his or her 'identity'. He pointed out that

this identity was not simply cultural, or religious. It was all these and more. Most Tamils in Norway were looking forward to the day when they may return to their own state of Tamil Eelam. He said, referring to the Tamils in Norway: 'You are the resources of your future country. Plan for your future educational system and build the links that you will need when Tamil Eelam is established.'

Mr. Nadesan Satyendra, addressed the Conference on behalf of the International Federation of Tamils. He spoke on the background to the present conflict in Sri Lanka and commended to the Conference the words of David Selbourne, the Oxford don, in 1984 when he said: "Other countries across the world, which have had to shelter the thousands of Tamil refugees who have fled and are still fleeing the island, must increasingly bear the cost of the denial of the fundamental political rights of the Tamils of Sri Lanka... Report after report by impartial bodies - by Amnesty International, by the International Commission of Jurists, by parliamentary delegates from the West, by journalists

and scholars - have set out clearly the scale of the growing degeneration of the political and physical well being of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka... everyone who possesses an elementary sense of justice has no moral choice but to acquaint himself fully with the plight of the Tamil people. It is an international issue of growing importance. Their cause represents the very essence of the cause of human rights and justice; and to deny it, debases and reduces us all" Mr. Satyendra pointed out that 40 years of human rights violations by successive Sinhala controlled administrations was evidence enough that the people of Tamil Eelam were a people subjugated by an alien Sinhala people. A subjugated people were entitled to free themselves from such subjugation and it was this right which was recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the right of self determination.

Mr. K. Sivarajah who heads Tamil Development Network of Norway, explained the working of his organisation and the place of development activities in Tamil Eelam. He

emphasised the immediate and urgent need for relief work in Tamil Eelam. The representative of the Tamil Coordinating Committee of Norway, stating that the TCC spoke in Norway on behalf of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, declared that the TCC was concerned with the political issues of the Tamil national liberation struggle and also with questions of relief and rehabilitation in the Tamil homeland.

A panel which included Mr. K. Sivarajah, Mr. K. Raveenthiran and Mr. N. Satyendra initiated a discussion on what Tamil Information should do, with whom Tamil Information should coordinate with and how Tamil Information may be financed. The Conference agreed on the need to look at Tamil Information work in the context of the political and developmental aspects of the Tamil question.

INDIAN NEWSMAN HARASSED

The Indian High Commission in Colombo has expressed its dismay to the Sri Lanka government over the harassment of an Indian correspondent by the police in Colombo on March 26. A group of six policemen, both in uniform and civvies had called at the residence of the Times of India correspondent Ashwani Talwar, ostensibly to search for arms and ammunition, and closely interrogated him for over half an hour over what they called his "frequent visits" to the northeast. (A report by Ashwani Talwar on disappearances of Tamils in Trincomalee appears elsewhere in this issue of Tamil Nation).

Although the Police later apologised and said it was a case of mistaken identity, it is believed that the idea was to put a fright into the Indian journalist from sending independent reports to his paper. Defence Secretary General Cyril Ranatunga, who appears to be virtually running the government after the killing of Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, said it was a "genuine mistake", and assured the Indian High Commission and Colombo-based correspondents that such a thing would never happen again.

MANNAR WAR : SRI LANKAN ARITHMETIC DISBELIEVED

On the 19th March, the LTTE launched major assaults on two army camps in the Mannar district - Silavathurai and Kakkupandyan. The following day Defence Ministry Secretary General Cyril Ranatunga held a Press briefing in Colombo at which he announced that "heavy fighting" was continuing and that "five security personnel have been killed and 41 others injured in the fighting so far. The bodies of 14 LTTE cadres, including some women fighters and eleven weapons were found at the scene of the battle". He also said that an indefinite curfew has been imposed in the entire Mannar district and some adjoining areas (THE ISLAND: 21st March). On the 23rd March it was announced that after four days of fierce fighting, the LTTE attacks on the two camps were repulsed. "Some officers", reported THE ISLAND of that date, "said that the LTTE casualty figures could be as high as 300..." That was tucked in the Seventh paragraph of the Page 1 new story headlined - LTTE ASSAULTS REPULSED, which meant that

the Colombo newspaper itself did not give much credence to the claim.

That being the subdued claim for home consumption, foreign new agencies in Colombo as well as foreign correspondents were fed the outright claim that 300 LTTE cadres were killed, on the 22nd itself.

Media Scene

While some used their discretion, the UNI "played it up", but despite the sensational nature of the figures involved, it appears that the newspaper offices did not react equally enthusiastically. The TIMES OF INDIA and THE HINDU of the 23rd gave single column treatment to the story, with THE HINDU exercising greater sub-editorial integrity by giving the headline 300 LTTE MEN KILLED, Claims Sri Lankan Army. Rita Sebastian's despatch of the 22nd to the INDIAN EXPRESS did not

even mention the claim. It merely said: "Reinforcements were being rushed to the army camps at Kakkupandyan and Silavathurai... under LTTE seige since Tuesday." The headline was: ARMY CAMPS STILL UNDER LTTE SIEGE.

On the following day the same paper carried a single column story quoting DPA under the headline - 300 ULTRAS KILLED. The INDIAN EXPRESS (Madras edition) which usually gives much "play" to the Sri Lankan government propaganda statements strangely enough ran a 4-column headline four days later (March 28) which said: FIVE LTTE MILITANTS KILLED IN CLASH. The fact that the INDIAN EXPRESS thought that the killing of five LTTE militants merited a 4-column headline on Page 1, while the "killing" of 300 LTTE militants deserved only a single column headline reveals -kaing a concession to sub-editorial waywardness - that even the INDIAN EXPRESS did not attach much credibility to the Lankan claim!



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