

51

001

* MA' ARCHI *

No. 143, Wak : 4/10
East Ham, London E6
Anti - Tamil &
Anti - India Riots

July - August '83

M
9
001

How the World
saw it

Published by:

EEZHAM TAMILS
ASSOCIATION (Madurai Branch)
Tamil Nadu, India.

S
R
I
L
A
M
K
A

Over a period of 26 years, Tamil in Sri Lanka have been humiliated, tortured, their belongings burnt and murdered by Sinhalese mobs and the state Armed Forces.

The worst period was in July - August 1983 when thousands of Tamil speaking people of Indian origin suffered at the hands of the rioting Sinhalese mobs.

This collection from the World Press is merely a drop in the ocean. There are many other Press reports and eye witnesses.

We request the readers to circulate this booklet after reading. Let there be more awareness of the fate of our country-men in Sri Lanka! Let us urge the Central Government to take positive firm action in Sri Lanka!

Publisher

Vickramadevi Press
Mumbai

* MA . ARCA *

No. 143, Wakfield Street

East Ham, London E6

“The Sinhalese and the
Tamils cannot live together
in unity ever again: the scars
are far too deep . . .”

Anita Pratap – Sunday

0/00

What has happened to Buddhist Lanka? This island of paradise once used to be described by its own travel promotion bureau as “a drop of tear in the Indian Ocean”. Today it is a drop of blood.

On 25 July angry Sinhalese formed into small gangs and indulged in the kind of mayhem never seen or experienced before in Sri Lanka. In a matter of hours, Tamils of the country had been attacked, killed (nobody will ever be able to arrive at the exact number of innocent Tamils butchered), their houses and property looted and burnt. Overnight, the prosperous and industrious Tamil community of Sri Lanka, a section of which controls Sri Lankan trade and business, was reduced to the status of refugees, stripped clean of all its belongings and the fruits of years of honest labour. Even though there have been cases of Tamils' eyes being gouged out, people being disembowelled, children being dismembered and men being

roasted alive the emphasis in the atrocities has been not to kill but to plunder. Death is not the real punishment meted out to the Tamils. There seems to have been a systematic effort to humiliate and subjugate them, reduce them to paupery so that their tormentors could bulldoze themselves to a position of strength. There was an organised attempt to shatter the economic foundations of the Tamil community. This time the rich Tamils too, like Gnanam, Maharajas and Thilanathans who control the textile and trade industries, reeled under the onslaught. Hitherto the anti-Tamil riots that fester perpetually in the northern and eastern provinces spilled to the capital, Colombo, as well as other places like Kandy, Anuradhapura and Ratnapura. It was a country-wide destruction of Tamils as a race. As the looting, arson and massacres continued against the Tamils, it became broadbased to include all Indians, not just Tamils.

Colombo today is a horrifying spectacle of devastation. Entire chunks of the city have been reduced to a charred rubble. Ruined hulks of office buildings belonging to Tamils and Indians pockmark Petta, the commercial district of Colombo. Every single shop and establishment belonging to the Tamils has been plundered and set on fire. A symbol of the anti-Indian sentiment is the Indian Overseas Bank, that has been gutted completely. Barely 50 yards from the President's official chamber are buildings that have been set on fire, thereby speaking volumes on the amount of protection the Tamils have had under President Jayewardene's government. When this correspondent went to riot-torn Colombo, charred debris was littered on the streets. Black ugly clouds of smoke belched into the sky. Houses and shops were still being set on fire. When curfew was lifted, there were panic buying sprees and one could see long serpentine queues at groceries, civil shops and at gas stations. In fact,

strict curfew was imposed during the better part of this correspondent's stay in Colombo. Curfew time was most eerie as Colombo looked like a bombed, ghost city, with not a soul to be seen on the streets, sans the security forces. Panic was palpable. There was tension everywhere. Wellawatte in Colombo is called Little Jaffna due to its heavy concentration of Tamils. Almost 80 per cent of this locality has been razed to the ground. Charred shells of houses and shops once belonging to the Tamils gaped at you in the Tamil-dominated areas like Wellawatte, Dehiwala and Bambalapitiya. Textile mills, oil, rubber and other factories owned by Tamils in the industrial belt like Paliagoda have been reduced to ashes, depriving at least 10,000 of their jobs. The maximum number of refugees are to be found in these areas.

Visits to the refugee camps are nerve-shattering experiences. There are thousands of Tamils and Indians whose lives have been destroyed overnight. They have been killed, maimed, separated or rendered homeless. As Murthi, a bank officer put it so succinctly, "Twenty years of savings have gone up in smoke" This correspondent saw many small children cowering in fright, whimpering for their fathers or mothers. They just could not cope with the traumatic turn of events. Mothers wept for their lost children who had got separated from their families, while fleeing from their burning houses. One can imagine the anguish of these people who do not know whether their husbands or sons or wives are safe. In the first few days, no meals were available in the camps and the refugees had to starve. Most of them only had the few clothes they wore and even less cash. As refugees kept pouring in, the sanitation and hygiene of the camps deteriorated, fast spreading diseases. Food, as and when it came, was poor and insufficient: 30 food-packets for 1,000 people. After four or five days, the camps were more organised and rice and sambar was served once a day.

The camps are ill-lit, badly ventilated and overcrowded with refugees spilling onto the open grounds. Some squatted, and others stared fixedly into a blank future. The refugees that this correspondent met, narrated their heart - rending experience of terror, pain and sorrow. What frightened them was that they were beggars now. They did not know what to do. Some of the Tamils wanted to go back to Jaffna as their relations were there. Others, including some unfortunate Indian tourists, wanted to get back to India as soon as possible. The Jaffna Tamils did not want to come to India because they have absolutely no links with India: the country was as foreign as any other place. There were many injured Tamils that this correspondent spoke to. K. C. Sinanathan had jumped off the fourth floor of a burning building and fractured both his legs. A distraught Sachithanandan had sustained burn injuries. His physical scars will heal soon but his emotional ones are likely to take a long time: he had watched his son being thrown into a burning car. The refugees live in mortal dread: their only fear being an attack by the security forces.

In one of the camps I learnt to my horror that 27 injured Tamils, who were in no condition to be discharged had been asked to leave the Colombo General Hospital. Not a single Sinhalese patient had been asked to go. These wounded refugees were brought to the Saraswathie refugee camp that had a Red Cross unit. From one of the wounded, Manian, half a bottle of pus was removed from a head injury alone. All his leg wounds were festering, according to a social worker, Mercy Merois, on duty. The physical, psychological and financial holocaust is beyond description.

As the Sinhalese fury snow-balled, all Indians were included in the hit list. Indian tourists, those on deputation to the government of Sri Lanka and even the

Indian High Commission staff were touched by the leaping tongues of communal fury. Mr. Iyer, Mr. Abraham and members of the Indian mission staff were brutally attacked during curfew hours when they were returning to their office. Mr. Iyer was dragged out of the car, and despite showing his identity card, was beaten with iron rods, chased and kicked by a gang of about 25 armed Sinhalese youths. One of Mr. Iyer's eyes has been badly affected and his whole face is a confusion of bandages. External affairs minister P.V. Narasimha Rao took him away with him to Delhi. The reason given to the other mission staff was: there was inadequate medical attention. Perhaps the real reason was to remove an embarrassment, a symbol of the incinerating anti-Indian sentiment in the island. Even the official reason indicates that the Indians in Sri Lanka are so trapped that even a High Commission official cannot avail of adequate medical attention! Mr. Mohan Chandran, also a member of the mission, was unfortunate enough to have his house completely looted and burnt. As he was scheduled to return to New Delhi in August, having completed his three-year tenure in Colombo, he and his wife had gone on a shopping spree. Everything has been lost. Their only possessions are the clothes that they have on their body. A fleeing Tamil couple thrust their seven-year-old son Sundarshan Ratnaraja for safe custody to Mr. and Mrs. Trilok Singh, also of the Indian High Commission. The whereabouts of the parents are not known till today. For security reasons, all the Indian High Commission staff were accommodated in the five - star hotel.

The anti-Indian sentiment was ignited to a large extent by the dangerous and reprehensive role played by the government controlled Sri Lankan press. India voicing its concern for the Tamils and news that dead bodies could be buried or cremated without an inquest sparked off a major controversy with the press screaming

that Mrs. Gandhi had done a "shocking about-turn" by supporting Tamil terrorism in Sri Lanka. India's concern for the lives of the innocent Tamils was deliberately misconstrued and equated with India's encouragement of the terrorism by the Tamil Tigers. The poison was injected into the gullible masses and passions were whipped up to a devastating pitch, resulting in the biggest racial tragedy that Sri Lanka has ever known.

What triggered the unprecedented state of violence against the Tamils is well known. It was the killing of 13 soldiers on 23 July in Tinnevely in Jaffna by the Liberation Tigers. The bodies of Second Lt, Gunawardena and his 2 men were brought to Colombo for burial with full military honours but the attempts of the state authorities were thwarted by the relations who wanted to take back the bodies to their respective villages. It is believed that the sight of the mutilated bodies fired the shortening fuse to a high powered communal bomb. The acts of reprisals on the Tamils by the Sinhalese security forces grew to become a racial holocaust. But what triggered the ambush that killed the 13 army men? The rape of four women who later committed suicide in shame by the Sinhalese soldiers was only catalytic. It would be facetious to pinpoint this as the main provocation for the killing of 13 army men. The Liberation Tigers, fighting for a separate Tamil Eelam (separate Tamil state) have not been known to indulge in random violence and killing for the sake of killing. Investigations by Sunday reveal that an incident that took place in Meesalai, near Jaffna, in July, necessitated the ambush as far as the Tigers were concerned. On 15 July, the army attacked three terrorists who were travelling on bicycles. Two were killed on the spot. The other escaped. One of the terrorists who was killed was Charles Antony, alias Seelan. Antony was one of the most wanted of the Tamil terrorists.

He was the leader of the military wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the group that owes allegiance to V. Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers. ... From Antony's body, the army recovered three SMJ magazines, comprising 25 cartridges, each bearing the "LTTE" insignia, and two carbine rifles. A phial of potassium cyanide was also recovered from him. This corroborates the widely-held belief that the Tigers committed to Tamil Eelam have formed suicide squads. Obviously for Anthony, death was better than capture. The death of Anthony dealt a crushing blow to the Tigers. At the same time it led to euphoria in the army camps because one of the most feared terrorists had been killed. The security forces felt that the LTTE days were numbered. This was a sentiment secretly shared by many in the LTTE itself. Perhaps, that was the reason why there was a sudden surge of a poster campaign in Jaffna by the LTTE leader exhorting the people not to lose heart. It became imperative for Prabhakaran to prove to his own rank and file and to the army that the LTTE had not been emasculated, that the death of Anthony, though a setback, had not paralysed the outlawed organisation. Meticulous planning went into the 23 July ambush. It was a Saturday. For the Buddhists it is "Poya", a holiday when violence is eschewed. This gave the Tigers 24 hours' time. The ambush was pulled off successfully at 12.02 am on 23 July. The message was loud and clear: 'The Tigers are still very powerful and are still on the prowl'.

President Jayewardene's explanation is that violence has been organised by "anti - government forces to discredit his government". If one wished to be charitable, one would say that the Jayewardene government is paralysed, utterly helpless, overpowered and held hostage by goonda elements. The government, one could say, has been rendered impotent by the mutiny in the armed forces. The International Commission of Jurists in a

fact-finding committee report on ethnic conflict and violence in Sri Lanka stated recently that "state terrorism by police and armed forces is the third type of violence prevalent in Sri Lanka", the first two being communal violence and political terrorism. According to the report, state terrorism has been a "recurring fact" since 1974 when a group of policemen invaded a session of an international Tamil cultural conference causing a stampede where nine persons were electrocuted. The civil rights movement of Sri Lanka stated that "allegations of the killing and torture of Tamil youth by police and armed forces during the 1979 emergency are widespread". One of the worst incidents was when about 200 policemen went on a rampage on the nights of 31 May, 1 and 2 June, 1981 wreaking havoc on the Tamil community in Jaffna. They even burnt down the Jaffna Public Library. The army's innate tendency towards destruction rose to the fore this time too with reports of gun-toting soldiers going berserk. In fact, on 24 July, army personnel stopped a tourist coach proceeding from Jaffna and executed 14 Tamil youths to avenge the death of the 13 army men. On 26 July, 130 sailors of China Bay in Trincomalee went berserk, indulging in arson and looting of Tamil property. The devastation was extensive. A British correspondent said that he had been in Trincomalee on the night of the incident and had heard nothing less than 70 explosions. It could be that President Jayewardene is a helpless spectator, hamstrung by uncontrollable armed forces that have taken the law into their hands. Though this speaks very poorly of Jayewardene's ability to run a government, it is more charitable than saying that the Tamil genocide and destruction of Tamil property has been engineered by the state authorities, which is what a good many people believe.

There is enough circumstantial evidence to support this charge. Take the blood-curdling massacres in jail.

It is difficult to believe that Sinhalese prisoners are capable of overpowering the security guards in the Welikade prison that is supposed to have "maximum security". It is not merely Tamil prisoners who were killed but also those Tamils who were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Law, an Act promulgated in 1979. It is almost as if the government wanted to annihilate terrorism, suspected terrorists and their sympathisers in one ruthless sweep. Kuttimani, Jegan and several other Tigers lost their lives as did office-bearers of the Gandhiam Movement whom the state authorities suspected to be in league with Liberation Tigers. In the first prison massacre, 5 prisoners were butchered. Should not the authorities have promptly evacuated the rest of the Tamil prisoners in the same prison as common sense would have told them that they too would have been vulnerable to attacks? The authorities chose to drag their feet and the result was that 17 were slaughtered. Why one is inclined to believe that there was a Machiavellian plot to systematically exterminate the suspected terrorists, who are potential threats to the state, was that there was another jail massacre in Jaffna where three terrorists were killed. One is strained to believe that Sinhalese prisoners all over the country were singling out only terrorists as their targets.

Innumerable refugees told this correspondent how army personnel watched on while the crazed mobs ransacked and burnt their houses. One said the soldiers gave a thumbs-up signal in appreciation and another mentioned that a passing army officer saluted the scavenging mobs. The army egged on the perpetrators which is why the average Tamil is today mortally afraid of the army and feels more secure in the hands of the state police. Then again, in several instances, government machinery was used to wreak havoc. For example, govern-

ment vehicles were used by the mobs to go on a rampage; army trucks were allegedly used to transport the looted goods. One eyewitness account also serves to substantiate government involvement. Saratha's is a big shop catering to the Indian tourists. The owner, suspecting trouble, protected his shop frontage with a thick iron shutter. According to the eyewitness, a heavy truck of the government electricity board was used to smash the shop. And when that had been accomplished, there were loud shouts of "Jaiwewa (a victory cry in Sinhalese)."

There are private armies in Sri Lanka. Most ministers, it is alleged, have their own organised goon squads. Mr Paul Perera UNP MP, Mr Lalith Athulathmudali, minister for trade and shipping are rabid anti-Tamils. In fact, as one Tamil told this correspondent, Mr Cyril Mathew, the minister for scientific affairs is most unscientific in his attitude to the Tamils. His anti-Tamil stances have provoked Mr. A. Amirthalingam leader of TULF to label him as minister for "anti-Tamil affairs." It is believed that these goon squads were unleashed into the streets with licence to indulge in the violence. It may be pointed out that the vast majority of the Sinhalese themselves are appalled by what a section of their people is doing to the Tamils. One Sinhalese lady who watched her Tamil neighbour's house being looted and burnt, said that the attackers must definitely have been let loose from the jails. They were dark-skinned and savage-looking and she was convinced that they were criminals who had been assigned with the specific task of reducing all Tamils to the status of refugees. Almost all the refugees that this correspondent spoke to said that the perpetrators had been given liquor. The carnage was so well-planned that one is inclined to believe that the goon squads had the Tamil voters' list with them enabling them to single out the Tamils with such meticulous precision in the initial stages. Later, as the com-

munal conflagration continued to burn with intensity, other Indian communities too faced the wrath. It was so well organised that the mobs knew precisely what the Tamils possessed, be it in terms of goods, factories or number of vehicles.

The organisers held up traffic on the roads and forcibly seized petrol and diesel from cars and vans. All this was fuel for the arson. It is very interesting to note that about a week before this carnage, there was an acute fuel shortage in Jaffna. It was so severe that even government-owned vehicles came to a halt. Why was there such a sudden fuel shortage? Jaffna has always been ill-treated by the Sinhala regimes because it is a Tamil dominated region. It was as if there was a systematic build-up for wreaking havoc on the Tamils. Only an excuse was needed and it was provided in the killing of the 3 army soldiers.

Due to the rigorous censorship, only certain kinds of information is being sold to the public. The censorship operating for foreign correspondents, particularly Indians is even more severe. The government is able to completely muzzle the media but is so confused that the news often becomes absurd after the ill-conceived and hasty modifications it is subjected to. The officials themselves cannot keep pace with the latest news as versions are changed so rapidly. The happening of 29 July is a classic instance. At the noon press briefing, which this correspondent attended, Mr. Douglas Liyanage, the secretary to the ministry of state, said that fresh outbursts of violence followed a shootout incident in which "suspected terrorists who had infiltrated into Colombo" had been arrested. Panic spread among the Sinhalese citizens that they were under siege by the Tigers. The government immediately changed its version stating that the killing took place when the army shot the looters. The

version changed once again, this time to an outrageously pathetic one that spoke volumes for the depleted ingenuity of the officials in charge of cooking up or modifying versions. It was said that a soldier had shot himself. The rumour that the Tigers had invaded the city had gained so much credence that an official announcement had to be made saying that there was no "threat to Colombo city."

The only reason why one hesitates to believe that the government could not have sponsored this holocaust is that it is a very severe self-inflicted blow. Tamils have traditionally controlled the key sectors of the economy. By wiping them out and making them refugees, the Sri Lankan economy, which was never in good shape, afflicted as it was by a 35 per cent inflation rate and rampant unemployment is today, in a terrible mess. The second largest source of revenue is from the plantations, and 80 per cent of the plantation workers are Tamil. These workers have come in for a massive attack in this wave of violence. Tamils in the hilly provinces have surely been killed but as these parts are remote and inaccessible, there is no news. The revenue from the estates is now bound to crumble. Tourism is Sri Lanka's fourth largest source of revenue. This year, this vital sector too, has been badly damaged. Burning of Tamil shops has compounded the problem of scarcity of commodities. Prices have been sent spiralling with a kilo of sugar costing as much as Rs 25 (Indian). Gutting of the factories has made the unemployment situation worse even for the Sinhalese, as many of them were working in the Tamil mills and factories.

Ethnic violence is a tortured dimension of Sri Lanka's history. Mr Lalith Mudali feels that the Americans are responsible for the Sinhalese ire against the Tamils. The American missionaries had come to Sri Lanka about two

centuries ago but had concentrated their activities in the North (Jaffna). They built schools and hospitals so that the Tamils who lived in the Jaffna area soon became well educated and had an advantage over the rest of the Sinhalese. Even today, the Sinhala government views the Catholic clergy with suspicion. Bishops, who have remonstrated against the unfair discrimination of the Tamils or the torture meted out to them are themselves arrested. Their activities are branded as "anti national." As recently as 21 July 1983, the Vatican Ambassador Cardinal Bichola Rotuno, posted at Colombo, was asked to leave the country by the Sinhalese government. During the British raj the Tamils rose to positions of power as they were found trustworthy, hardworking, industrious and educated. By the time Sri Lanka attained independence in 1948, the key civil and administrative posts were held by the Tamils. Indians in search of greener pastures came to Sri Lanka and prospered in business. Sinhalese were at a distinct disadvantage. Instead of correcting the imbalances, the Sinhalese government sought to repress the Tamils by first enacting the Citizenship Laws of 1948 and 1949, by which more than half-a-million Tamil plantation workers were disenfranchised. They were reduced to statelessness and denied human and civil rights. This was followed by "state-aided aggressive colonisation which swallowed nearly 3,000 square miles of what is delineated as 'Tamil Eelam.'" The militant Tamils construed this as a bid to "annihilate the geographical entity of the Tamil nation." This was followed by discrimination against the Tamils in the sphere of language, employment and education. When Mr. S. Bandaranaike rode into power on the wave of nationalism, he enacted the "Sinhala Only Act" in 1956 which made Sinhala the only state language. Tamil public servants were forced to learn Sinhala or surrender their jobs. Later, gradually employment opportunities in the public

service and the armed forces were practically closed to the Tamils. Tamil areas were isolated from national development projects. All that the nation got was spread out over the Sinhala regions. The Tamil provinces were "isolated" as an unwanted colony and left to suffer the worst form of economic deprivation. What disillusioned the Tamil youths was the "standardisation" of admission that was introduced in 1970, whereby the Tamil youths had to get higher marks for university admissions whereas the Sinhalese students were admitted with lower grades. Lack of educational and employment opportunities frustrated the Tamil youths. Out of this humiliation was born the Liberation Tiger movement in 1972.

The need for an armed struggle became imperative from the youngsters' point of view because the anti Tamil riots were increasing in frequency and intensity. While the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) resolved to stage a non-violent fight for political independence on the basis of the nation's right to self-determination, the Tigers felt that all peaceful struggle including parliamentary agitations, negotiations and pacts had been exhausted. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister R. Premadasa, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, chairman of the LTTE stated: "The guerilla warfare, the form of the popular struggle we are committed to is not born out of blind militancy or adventurism but arose out of historical necessity: out of the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression". The state armed personnel became the main target of the terrorists.

The Liberation Tigers are an extremely well-knit, well-organised terrorist network. Though numerically small they have been able to paralyse the Sinhala government set up in Jaffna. Due to collaboration with international terrorist organisations like the PLO, the Tigers too have been able to get hold of sophisticated

weapons and ammunition as well as extensive training in guerilla warfare. Prabhakaran, for instance, has been known to shoot a running constable right between the eyes at a distance of over 200 yards. "Mystery ships" are often found in the Sri Lankan waters and, according to sources, these ships dump trained terrorists and ammunition into northern Sri Lanka. It is only recently that the Sinhala government came to know that the Tigers had been tapping the high-frequency radio channel in Colombo airport. This was how they were able to monitor army and air force movements to and from Jaffna. The Sinhala government believes that the terrorists have been helped by the Soviet Union as well as the British leftists. Mr. David Selbourne, the celebrated author, is known to be a sympathiser of the Tigers. A few months ago despite being blacklisted, he had succeeded in reaching Jaffna and met the Tiger leaders. He was deported by the Sri Lankan authorities. By allowing the situation to drift, the government is now in a fix. They have been unable to annihilate activity in the north. If anything, it is going beyond their control.

Sinhalese fury has now more or less been spent. It has been spent not because ugly passions have been satiated but for the simple reason that there are no more Tamil houses left to loot and burn. Now the Tigers have sprung into action. The day after the President's broadcast on 28 July, they staged their first attack against the security forces in Colombo city. About 135 soldiers are said to have been killed by foreign-trained Tigers.

What is the end to a situation like this? One cannot merely reduce it to the number of houses looted and burnt, the number of Tamils killed, or the number of Tamil women raped. The crucial question is: what is the fate of the Tamils? What is their future in Sri Lanka? A number of Tamils that this correspondent met did not want to come to India because they had no connections here. Their only link

was with Jaffna. So they wanted to go back there. Though none of these Tamils had sympathised with the Liberation Tigers earlier and did not want an Eelam by staging an armed struggle, they are today forced to go back to the security of Jaffna. They realise that they can expect protection only from the Tigers. All Tamil political parties will now have to go underground following the President's broadcast that parties advocating division of the country would be proscribed. Even the TULF had wanted the right to self determination but one which was to be achieved through peaceful means. The present government's decision means that even the TULF will be forced to go underground. This correspondent left Colombo with the feeling that racial prejudice had gone beyond the point of return. The Sinhalese and the Tamils cannot live together in amity again: the scars are far too deep and the mistrust far too keenly entrenched. The Tamils of Sri Lanka are a spurned lot, spurned by their own government. How can they live in security in a country where the President has reportedly told foreign correspondents (to Sunday Observer of London) that he did not care about the Tamils. They do not have to go as far as foreign journals to realise that President Jayewardene has betrayed them. They needed only his broadcast over the state-owned radio, made three days after the island-wide carnage to come to this conclusion. The broadcast was laconic, brisk, to the point of being brusque. The main announcement was the decision to proscribe the parties. He gave the tacit impression that the violence perpetrated by the Sinhalese against the Tamils was justified, stemming as it was from the growing Sinhalese suspicion that the Tamils were trying to divide the country. There was not a word of caution or appeal for restraint for the Sinhalese on the rampage. There was not a word of sympathy for the innocent Tamils of Sri Lanka. This is his dharmistha (free and just society) !

‘ From the President — not a syllable of sympathy for the Tamil people ’ . . .

The Economist, London - August 6, 1983

Communalism and terrorism are both activated by hate, and both are exacerbated by appeasement. The Sri Lankan government clearly does not appease Tamil Terrorism: this is why its army was on patrol near Jaffna on the night of July 23, when 13 soldiers were killed in an ambush. But two weeks later, as the spiral of vengeance between Tamils and Singalese set off by the ambush continues to whirl, President Jayewardene and his colleagues give the impression of pandering to Singalese chauvinism.

Government spokesmen have offered two linked explanations for the violence — “a foreign hand” and a left-wing conspiracy. The President has conjured up the threat of an invasion from India; others have hinted at the possible expulsion of Soviet and East German diplomats. On July 30 th three Marxist parties were banned and their presses sealed. Looters have been denounced and at least 1,000 arrested, along with a number of left-wingers. Calls

for a separate Tamil state in the north have been declared unconstitutional. Yet there has been little official public disapproval of the racist hate behind the attacks on the minority Tamils by Singalese.

Some Singalese have also been injured in the firestorm and tens of thousands of them have seen their jobs disappear in the wreckage of Tamil-owned firms. But the overwhelming majority of the victims of Sri Lanka's ethnic war have been Tamil: hundreds dead, many thousands homeless and millions of pounds worth of industrial and commercial property turned into smoking ruins.

This catalogue of destruction is not in itself evidence of a failure of official will to contain it. A Security force of 30,000 soldiers and policemen that cannot cope with some 200 Tamil terrorists is not likely to do well against Singalese mobs. But for days the soldiers and policemen were not overwhelmed: they were unengaged or, in some cases, apparently abetting the attackers. Numerous eye-witnesses attest that soldiers and policemen stood by while Colombo burned. Were they following their own communal instincts, or signals from above?

What the troops and the rioters did not get was a clear public order to stop the mayhem. After two days of violence, and the murder of 35 Tamils in a maximum security jail, the only editorial in the government-run newspaper was on "saving our forest cover". It was five days after the precipitating ambush and a day after a second prison massacre that the people of Sri Lanka heard from their 77 year-old President. On July 28th, Mr. Jayewardene spoke on television to denounce separatism, and proscribe any party that endorsed it, in order to appease the natural desire and request" of the Singalese "to prevent the country being divided". Not a syllable of sympathy for the Tamil people or any explicit rejection of the spirit of

vengeance. Next day Colombo was a battlefield: more than 100 people are estimated to have been killed on that Friday alone, and 30,000 Tamils fled to refugee camps.

The President is known to have held out against demands in the past from his cabinet for harsh anti-Tamil moves. Is he now a prisoner of the army and of his own hard men, such as the minister for industry, who is a public critic of the Tamils? If so, it is partly the fault of his own highly centralised presidential system. Although there are Tamils in his cabinet, and the attorney-general, Mr. Pasupathi, and the inspector-general of police, Mr. Rajasingham, are both Tamils, Mr. Jayewardene has no minister for Tamil affairs and no contingency planning staff.

The president was not in conciliatory mood when the Singalese backlash began. His offer of a conference to discuss terrorism had been rejected a few days earlier by the opposition parties and he had been compelled to widen its agenda to include Tamil grievances. Then there was India. Just when the president was feeling beset by his own bumptious Tamil opposition, its friends in Delhi expressed concern about Sri Lanka's emergency regulations. These irritations may have affected his judgment when the storm broke. Anti-Indian stories in the local press were undoubtedly one reason why the mobs turned against Indian nationals including diplomats, and Indian-owned property. A few days after a lightning visit by the Indian foreign minister Mr. Rao, on July 30th, the president continued to ride the anti-Indian tide with a leaked allusion to a possible Indian invasion.

It will be some time before the full toll of these weeks of fire and brimstone is known, partly because so many Tamils have fled their homes. The refugee camp population had reached 76,000 by the end of the first week, according to official figures released by

diplomats. On July 29th the first boatload of displaced Tamils set off for the relative safety of Jaffna. Other boats, including three lent by India, will continue the sea - lift.

In Colombo, top - level civil servants and industrialists — members of a once-privileged Tamil elite which was never touched by any previous communal disturbance — have been cowering in the homes of Singalese friends. The 17 members of parliament in the Tamil United Liberation Front, the largest opposition party stayed underground until they surfaced for a strategy session in Jaffna this week. They had already decided to resign their seats, in protest at Mr. Jayawardene's six year extension of parliament approved in a referendum last December. Now unless the party gives up its ritual commitment to a separate Tamil state, it will be outlawed and its members barred from all employment.

A swathe of burnt out shopfronts across the country is visible evidence of the flattening of the country's most vigorous commercial class. Two weeks ago Tamils owned 60% of the wholesale trade and 80% of the retail trade in the capital. Today that trade is gone. Food shortages and inflated prices are one result. The Tamil industrial base, built up over generations, is no more. Censored news broadcasts are mainly about the efforts of government agencies to fill the food gap. These two weeks of terror will cripple Sri Lanka materially for years, but the damage to the national psyche may be even longer - lasting. A separatist movement can sometimes be stamped out by determined repression. Two alienated communities cannot be welded back together by similar means.

“ Sri Lanka is in a tunnel
of which no end is in
sight. . . . ”

Arab News, Saudi Arabia.

The future of Sri Lanka looks bleak. The division between Tamil and Sinhalese has so intensified these past ten days that if anything is clear it is that the country is never going to return to what it was before. Sri Lanka is in a tunnel of which no end is in sight.

It has to be said straightaway that much of the fault for this impossible situation lies with the government. President Jayawardene has not handled his country's crisis with either skill or tact. First he appeared to give in, if not actively side with the Sinhalese extremists by announcing that separatist organizations would be banned. That automatically meant Tamil separatist organizations which include the main opposition party the Tamil United Liberation Front. Then by separating the Tamils and Sinhalese physically, shipping the Capital's Tamil population up to the predominantly Tamil area along the northeast coast of the island, while the Sinhalese there flee south, the

government proceeded to boost the cause of separatism by creating de facto partition.

To be fair to Jayewardene, it should be added that his options were limited. However he now seems to have realized the dangers inherent in what the government was doing. He is now desperately trying to backtrack. Instead of blaming Tamil terrorists and Sinhalese extremists for the conflagration, the government now points the finger at left-wing Marxists, accusing them of trying to destabilize the country in preparation for a Communist Coup and implying that they have been acting under orders from Moscow. The pro - Moscow Communist Party has been outlawed as have been the Trotskyite Equal Society Party and the People's Liberation Front, which was commonly held responsible for the 1971 riots that left several thousand persons dead. The leaders of all three parties have been arrested and the government is apparently considering breaking off diplomatic relations with the Soviets and other East European states.

It is very easy to blame outsiders for any country's problems — to find a scapegoat. Plainly what President Jayewardene hopes is that by telling Tamils and Sinhalese alike that they have been manipulated by foreigners, tempers will be calmed.

The trouble is that it may be too late. The country is heading toward partition. What has happened in these past ten days will have destroyed many Tamils' loyalty to Sri Lanka. They have seen the police and the armed forces stand idly by as Tamils were killed and beaten, their homes and businesses destroyed. In some cases it was the police and armed forces who led the attacks. Most Tamils must now be asking whether they have any future as Sri Lankans. The Tamils who account for only some 20 percent of the population control the lion's share

of the country's industry and commerce. They are comparatively wealthy and well educated. They were particularly favoured by the British in former colonial days.

This prosperity has aroused intense jealousy amongst the majority Sinhalese population. Even if the government brings the political situation under control, as it probably will, it will not put an end to the majority's feelings of resentment and jealousy. Not unnaturally therefore, the Tamils see their only hope in partition and they look to India to help them.

With Sri Lanka still seething with fear and racial hatred, the role of India is crucial in all this. Comparisons have already been made with Cyprus, with India envisaged as playing the role of Turkey, invading to protect the Tamils as Turkey did to protect the Turkish Cypriots in 1974. There are however, important differences. First India has never claimed or held sway over Sri Lanka. Secondly, the prospect of an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka is not one Mrs. Gandhi's government would relish. It would encourage Tamil separatists in south India. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gandhi has made it quite clear that India has a role to play in what happens. "It would be idle to pretend that we are not affected by what happened elsewhere", she announced, referring to events in Sri Lanka. It is a warning that President Jayewardene understands.

“He (President Jayawardene) should be told that Britain is no longer prepared to bankroll a man who is presiding over a campaign of near - genocide against part of his population”

New Statesman, London, 29th July, 1983

SRI LANKA is burning again. Several hundred Tamils have been killed in the past week, and at least 20,000 have been made homeless. Now the Sri Lankan government says that it is creating an emergency committee to provide food and shelter for the Tamil refugees. The Tamils can be forgiven if they do not show much gratitude for this act of charity, for this week's horrific violence, in which Sinhalese lynch mobs roamed the streets of Colombo, attacking anyone who happened to be a Tamil, is the direct fault of the Sri Lankan government itself.

For years, leading Sri Lankan politicians have encouraged their fellow Sinhalese to see the minority Tamils as second - class citizens. Matching action with words, they have introduced laws and regulations which have made it almost impossible for the Tamils to find decent education or employment. They have also super-

vised a programme of colonisation under which Tamil farmland has been handed over to the Sinhalese.

'Law and order' was one of President Jayawardene's main slogans when he was elected in 1977. Yet there is neither law nor order in Sri Lanka; Jayawardene himself has seen to that. Under the Public Security Act, the Police and army are allowed to bury or cremate dead bodies without any need for an inquest or post mortem. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, people can be detained for up to 18 months without trial or explanation. Torture has become a normal part of police procedure, as Amnesty International's report this month showed.

In Britain, there may be a tendency to view the violence in Sri Lanka as part of some unfathomable feud in a faraway country of which we know nothing. Yet Britain is inescapably involved. It was Britain, as the colonial power, which brought Indian Tamils to Ceylon to work the tea estates. It was Britain which encouraged the indigenous Tamils to help with the running of the colonial bureaucracy. When Britain departed, in 1948, the Sinhalese took over the country and began to exact their revenge. The plantation Tamils were stripped of their citizenship, and the indigenous Tamils were stripped of their jobs.

Even today, Britain's connections with Sri Lanka are close. Sri Lanka's main export, tea, is still controlled by the British companies who set the price. Sinhalese colonisation of Tamil areas is being helped by a huge irrigation scheme, partly paid for with British money. Certainly the Tamils themselves consider that Britain has some responsibility for their fate. Is it too much to hope that the British government may, at last, seek to make amends? In October, President Jayawardene will pay an official visit to London. He should be told that Britain is no longer prepared to bankroll a man who is presiding over a campaign of near-genocide against part of his population.

“One cannot but admire the creativity shown by the Jayawardene government in finding scapegoats for the violence against Tamils . . .”

New Statesman, London, 5 August 1983

AFTER TWO weeks of murderous attacks on Tamils in Sri Lanka, which have left hundreds dead and many thousands homeless, there is now a possibility that other countries may enter the conflict. On Monday this week UPI reported that President Jayawardene had requested military assistance from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Britain and the USA; it added that Pakistan and Bangladesh had ‘responded positively’.

The Sri Lankan government immediately denied the report and expelled the correspondent who had written it. A Foreign Office spokesperson in London told the NS that ‘the Sri Lankans have taken soundings on assistance, but we’re not prepared to go into details about what sort of assistance they were taking soundings on’. But he denied that Britain had been asked for military assistance.

Even if Britain does keep its distance, there is no guarantee that the countries of the Indian sub-continent will do likewise. Many Indians are now urging Mrs. Gandhi to send troops to northern Sri Lanka to protect the Tamils there. She has resisted these calls, but if forces from Pakistan or Bangladesh were to arrive in the island by official invitation, President Jayewardene's warning of an 'Indian invasion' could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Even if things do not go that far, relations between India and Sri Lanka will still have been seriously damaged by the events of the last fortnight. India has accused the Sri Lankan authorities of failing to stop the violence; Sri Lanka, in turn, has accused India of giving aid and comfort to Tamil separatists.

One cannot but admire the creativity shown by the Jayawardene government in finding scapegoats for the violence against Tamils. Apart from blaming the Tamils themselves (and their Indian friends) it has also suggested that the Soviet Union, the Vatican and Amnesty International are responsible.

The Tamils themselves are more interested in preserving life and limb than in taking orders from Yuri Andropov. There are now at least 75,000 Tamil refugees in 17 camps around Colombo, and they are worried that the army may not protect them from attack. Two boatloads of Tamils have already been ferried to the comparative safety of northern Sri Lanka, but at this rate of progress it will take at least a month and a half for all the refugees to be evacuated.

“I saw a minibus full of Tamils stopped by Sinhalese who poured petrol over it and set it on fire. All the doors were kept closed and several people must have watched the 20 Tamils burn to death”

Norwegian tourist Eli Skarstein, Oslo

OSLO, July 29 (AFP) — A Norwegian tourist who has just returned from Sri Lanka said she saw 20 Tamils burn to death in their minibus after it was set on fire by rioters. Eli Skarstein told the newspaper *Verdens Gang* she believed “hundreds, may be thousands” had died in the island’s riots between majority Sinhalese and the Tamil minority. She witnessed the burning on her way to Colombo International Airport on Monday.

“A minibus full of Tamils was stopped by Sinhalese who poured petrol over it and set it on fire. All the doors were kept closed and several people must have watched the 20 Tamils burn to death,” she told the paper here Friday. She said when she left with her daughter, after curtailing their three-week holiday on the island, the capital was an inferno. “There were burning houses everywhere and one of the main tourist attractions - the fortress of Colombo — was on fire”.

She said she had never been threatened herself. "The main target for the gangs was the Tamil population. Women, children and old people were being slaughtered", she said. The army and police had done nothing to stop the massacres and it was obvious the authorities were trying to impose a news blackout on the riots. "Not a single word was mentioned on the radio news about Tamils being killed" she said, adding that she did not believe the official government figure of 60 deaths.

More than 35,000 persons in Colombo and thousands more in the highland city of Kandy who have been made homeless by the violence are now housed in 17 refugee camps.

Meanwhile, a petrol bomb was thrown against the front door of the Sri Lankan Embassy in Hyde Park gardens, Westminster, London, early Friday but damage was slight. Police chased a dark - skinned man believed to have been responsible, but he got away. An embassy staff member put out the blaze with an extinguisher.

Honeymooners on the run

Violence followed them to

Tea country

New Statesman, London — 12 August 1983

TO ESCAPE the paralysing summer heat and ill health of the surrounding coastal areas of what was then called Ceylon, the British built Nuwara Eliya as a charming replica of rural England. Two weeks ago this small, and in many ways rather beguiling, Sri Lankan town became the focal point for much of the communal violence that has engulfed the island.

As the town burnt to charcoal and the Tamil inhabitants ran for their lives, I watched Sri Lankan soldiers on the spot stand idly by. While the officers in charge may have been in two minds about allowing the mob violence to spread, their rank and file were not. The soldiers on the street seemed quite willing to stand and look on as the inhabitants burnt one another's property, where this conformed to their own prejudices.

Nuwara Eliya is at the heart of tea plantation country; the western tourists' image of smiling tea pickers

clad in brightly coloured cotton saris could almost exist here. Its remote position, perfect for idling tea magnates and holidaying imperial army officers, ensured that the town escaped the great social and economic movements of modern times, and much of the racial turmoil of the last 30 years of Sri Lankan history - until now.

The curfew on Friday 29 July was a farce, serving only to keep civilian cars off the road. Although the troops did not actively participate in the mayhem themselves, they certainly did nothing to discourage it; crowds were allowed to roam the town at will. Many of the casualties of that day poured into the back of our hotel, seeking what treatment they could find. They maintained that much of the damage was done by imported thugs and 'communists' from Kandy and further west. How else could it be that a seemingly peaceful community imploded and itself destroyed what had taken years to build?

The answer is not so straightforward. The Tamil refugees who took to the hills that evening, and pilfered everything in their path, were running from a violent expression of racial and class hatred. Nuwara Eliya's demography makes it a leading candidate for conflict of this nature. Most of the working population is composed of Tamil plantation workers, who were originally imported by the British from South India. This majority co-exists with a moneyed Tamil middle class which owns 80 per cent of Nuwara Eliya's shops and other businesses, as well as much of the town's sought - after real estate.

Singhalese revenge for recent political killings could therefore turn neatly to an area of dense Tamil population which had the added attraction of a vulnerable and wealthy elite. The Singhalese peasants who I saw smash and vandalise one particular provisions store were

expressing not just a generalised hatred of a vicious minority who demanded their own state, but also frustration with a shopkeeper to whom they had owed money for years.

The mixture in the primitive Singhalese molotov cocktails was a blend of economic and cultural bitterness.

WE HAD ALREADY been in Sri Lanka for 10 days, on honeymoon, before the events of 29 July. We had started in Colombo; we then fled to Kandy to escape the violence; when it followed us there, we moved to Nuwara Eliya. Yet subsequent reports confirmed that the damage done to Nuwara Eliya was at least the equal of anything experienced elsewhere. When we arrived it had a church, numerous Tudor style cottages, the finest golf course in Asia and the 'Hill Club'. From this former colonial gentlemen's club overlooking the town, much of the destruction was clearly visible. By dusk on Friday 29 July, not one building in the central street was left standing; fire had spread to the hills, too, engulfing shops, homes and buses in an orange glow.

At the Club, the manager complained that he had expected a coachload of about 50 eager German tourists but he now had to content himself with three stranded couples, two of them English and one American. The staff of 30, isolated from their Tamil families, put on a brave face in going about their duties, even insisting that I wear a tie for dinner. But all our bags had already been packed.

For the following two days we were prevented from leaving the hotel grounds, but we were able to discern a significant change in the attitude of the military. Where previously I had been left unmolested, I now wandered as close as I dared to gain a suitable vantage point but

was spotted by a businesslike soldier who bundled me back into bounds with the help of the barrel of his old but menacing. 303 rifle.

By Sunday evening it seemed that the Singhalese were sated, since the curfew was now being strictly enforced. A peace had fallen on the town, broken only by the occasional army jeep and the immutable sounds of Sri Lanka's unique bird life. We obtained our curfew pass and left at dawn the following day. The sides of the road were adorned with lengthening food queues and crowded refugee huts. Surrounding villages too had been subject to specific firings where one or two shops in the main street had been destroyed. But this paled by comparison with the damage done to Nuwara-Eliya, a town whose centre had been incinerated in a single afternoon. As we departed, two days after the attacks, it was still smouldering.

Most of the Sri Lankan politicians are liars

David Selbourne

Sunday Times 31 July 1983

The horror of what has befallen the Tamils in the last weeks has echoed across the world. But it is the whole tormented state of Sri Lanka which has been wounded in consequence and will continue to be wounded, the Sinhalese included.

The Tamil community was cold - bloodedly scourged and looted as a collective punishment for the latest Jaffna ambush, by the Sri Lankan State's agents of destruction, the police, the army, plain clothes security forces, private hirelings, provocateurs, and the street thugs, acting together. Indeed, that the world has discovered, and it is overdue, is what the Tamils have known for a long time - that little distinction can be made in today's Sri Lanka between the forces of order and murder.

And so, it is always, when legitimacy collapses in a polity and a riot takes over, as it has done yet again in Sri Lanka. But, this time, world opinion has at least

reacted in full to the lot of the Tamil population, something which will greatly harm the status outside Sri Lanka of the cynical Sinhalese politicians who now misgovern the country.

For, even if the foreign press has hitherto been resistant to the plight of the Tamil people, coverage of the recent events has been huge throughout the world, and not only in those countries with special links with Sri Lanka. So that lying Sri Lankan politicians - and most of them are liars - will now have to reckon with an aroused international public opinion, which reaches down to the humblest man in the street who reads a newspaper or has access to a radio or television. In Italy, for example, where I was staying during the massacres, after my own expulsion from Sri Lanka, radio and press coverage of the attack on the Tamil people was substantial and continuous; the reputation of Sri Lanka and its present Government will not recover wherever the facts are known.

This is a great victory for the truth, even if at a bitter human cost for this unmasking to be achieved. But though no number of deaths can ever be weighed in the balance against such considerations, it means at least that Tamil suffering and tribulation have not gone unrequited. In addition, the politicians and soldiers who organised the attacks on the Tamil community - and then declared the Tamils* main political organisations illegal - have paradoxically, made their own rule over Sri Lanka illegitimate. For every state has a legal and moral obligation to protect the lives and liberties of all its citizens; if it cannot, or does not choose to do so, then the state and its legitimacy for those citizens ceases to exist. The mere demand in itself for a greater degree of political self-determination by a section of the citizenry can never justify the withdrawal from them of the ordinary protections of the law and constitution; particularly when the overwhelming majority of these citizens have not taken up arms, and do not intend to take up arms, against that State.

Yet this is precisely what has happened to the Tamils of Lanka, as the world has seen. In consequence, it can be argued that they in turn can have little political obligation and commitment to the Sri Lankan State, when it has so little obligation and commitment to them. President Jayawardene himself told the *Daily Telegraph* (July 11, 1983) openly that he had no interest in, or concern for, the lives of the people of Jaffna; so what obligation do they have to obey the laws of Sri Lanka? The answer, in law, is none.

In addition, to make not only Tamil organisation but Tamil aspiration illegal, and to punish with loss of civic rights, possessions and profession those who merely say they are in favour of a Tamil State has several effects. First, it guarantees the development of the separatist movement and puts a premium on violence. Second, it brings the Sinhalese rulers of Sri Lanka (with their plots, 'foreign hands' red scares and the rest of the standard nonsense) into justified ridicule and disrepute. And, third it ensures a convulsion in not only Tamil politics but also in Sinhalese politics.

President Jayawardene whose days in any case are numbered - as the increasingly vicious succession struggle now under way also indicates - is himself going to have to pay the price of this year of catastrophic political blunders for Sinhalese interests: After all, to help destroy an economy is one thing; but to help destroy the polity too, and its chances of survival as a stable state is another. Jayawardene, never serious about negotiation with the Tamils (as I gathered quickly from my conversation with him in 1982) is succeeding in both. It is a considerable achievement, for which the more far-sighted Sinhalese politicians and soldiers waiting in the wings will not forgive him, to have intimidated the Supreme Court, savaged the Parliamentary system, wrecked large sectors of the economy and shed the blood of thousands in the name of the nation. States,

particularly those already unstable and economically under great pressure, do not easily repair their institutions from damage as great as this. Neither will the Tamils, I should think, forget or forgive the violence against them in these last weeks. But of all the crimes of July, the most wicked single event - though it is invincible to particularise in such a sea of murder - must be the killing of Dr. Rajasundaram the Secretary of the Gandhian movement.

I was proud to regard him as a friend, and will never forget him. For a believer in non-violence and the relief of the needy to be beaten to death in his cell by convicts, assisted by the security forces, is the reward in today's Sri Lanka, so it seems, for a man who deserved the world's greatest honours for his prodigious effort of rehabilitation and resettlement of the Tamil plantation refugees. The Sinhalese state claimed that he, like the noble Catholic priests whom I saw brought to trial in Colombo, was secretly in league with the Tigers, but so, too, are millions of other Tamils, inside and outside Sri Lanka.

Rather, he deserves to be remembered as a great and tireless fighter for the most downtrodden of the world's workers; a man of energy and dedication whose achievements dwarf those of his persecutors. After all, there is nothing positive for which Sri Lankan history will remember President Jayawardene, or Cyril Mathew or the wardens of Welikade. But for men like Rajasundaram there will always be a memorial, always honour, the honour of being remembered with respect and affection by those whom he aided.

But what was done to Dr. Rajasunderam, and the other Tamil leaders, murdered by the State's agents while in their custody, as well as the attempt to destroy all effective representation of legitimate Tamil interests, is destined to

rebound on the Sinhalese. Indeed, it already has. Their crippled State - for it is their State and, now, no-one else's; -has been drastically weakened politically and diplomatically economically already deeply mortgaged to the World Bank, as President Jayawardene himself admitted to me in 1982; it has now suffered further devastation. And as Tamil refugees head once more towards the North, the problems for the Sri Lankan State apparatus of a de facto partition under the shambles and brutality of military rule must begin to deepen. Major General Tissa Weeratunge told me himself last year in Colombo that the Sri Lankan army was not winning the battle with the Tamil 'Tigers'; now, after mutiny and riot, the army will be even less capable of controlling the growing militancy of Tamil youth who could now never surrender their demands for self-determination.

The omens are ripe for a future of continuing revenge and reprisal. But those who presently rule Sri Lanka have been damned in the eyes of the world - and in the eyes of the increasing numbers of Sinhalese also - and that at least, is a step forward. Some day, since there can be no victory by either side over the other by violence, serious political negotiation will begin; for the first time in post-Independence Sri Lanka.

It will not be presided over by any of today's leaders, Sinhalese or Tamil. Events have overtaken them. But tragically, many more lives will be lost, and many years pass, before Sri Lanka's Sinhalese and Tamils co-exist once more - as they did before colonialism destroyed the political ecology of the island - under the political settlement which divides real power, as in the end it must be divided, between the two nations of Sri Lanka.

“Ever since Ceylon became independent in 1948, the Tamils have been a persecuted minority . . .”

Francis Wheen

The Times, London — 30 August 1983

During the last outbreak of serious communal violence in Sri Lanka, in 1981. I met a 74-year-old Tamil doctor standing in the blackened ruins of his house on Main Street, Jaffna. It had been fire-bombed by Sinhalese police officers a few nights earlier. The doctor told me that he had lived in the Sinhalese-dominated town of Kandy until 1977, but then his house there had been burnt down. “I had a good practice in Kandy”, he said, “but I moved here because it was the only place where I felt safe, where I could be among other Tamil people. Now my house here has been burnt down, so it seems I’m not even safe in Jaffna. Where can I go now?”

It is a question which more and more Tamils have been asking.

Some have answered it by emigrating, most commonly to Britain, West Germany or the United States.

Those who have stayed, however, have come to believe that there is only one way to protect themselves from the increasingly frequent Sinhalese attacks: the creation of a separate Tamil state - referred to as Eelam - in the traditional Tamil areas in the north and east of the island.

To the outsider, such a suggestion may seem wildly impractical - and ill - omened, if one reflects on the success rate of other partitioned islands, such as Cyprus or Ireland. But the Tamils argue that this is an unfair comparison. Elsewhere, they say, partition has created artificial edifices; Tamil Eelam, on the other hand, would be a recreation of the Tamil Kingdoms that existed in pre-colonial days.

If one remains unconvinced, the Tamils produce their clincher: 'What is the alternative?

It is difficult to think of one. Ever since Ceylon became independent in 1948, the Tamils have been a persecuted minority. Their language and culture have been downgraded; they have been discriminated against in employment and education; and they have been subjected to violent physical attack. Genocide is a word that must be used with care; but how else is one to describe the impulse which guided the Sinhalese lynch mobs this week?

Alarming numbers of Sinhalese now wish to see the Tamils driven off the face of Sri Lanka, and are more than willing to carry out the task themselves.

The Sri Lankan government must take its share of the blame for this. In recent years, President Jayawardene has from time to time tried to sound conciliatory,

admitting that some Tamil complaints might be justified. However, his action - or lack of it - has belied these soothing words, and in a television broadcast this week, he said that since the Tamils had so annoyed the majority community by advocating partition, he and his government had decided to calm things by making it illegal to urge the separation. The government, when presented with evidence that the army or the police have committed atrocities against defenceless Tamils, has usually reacted with a shrug of the shoulders. Sometimes, indeed, police misconduct has actually been rewarded. In two separate cases recently, the Supreme Court found that police officers had acted illegally; in both cases, the officers concerned were promoted soon after the judgement. The security forces have interpreted this as a licence to do as they please with impunity, and President Jayawardene has not seemed eager to disabuse them. Early last month he introduced a regulation which allows the police to cremate or bury dead bodies, if they think it "necessay", without any inquest or post mortem taking place.

Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, [which has been used almost exclusively against Tamils, suspects can be held without trial for up to 18 months. Three weeks ago Amnesty International published a report which suggested that Tamils detained under the Act had been tortured, both in army camps and by the police. President Jayawardene dismissed the allegations as soon as the report appeared, denouncing Amnesty as "communists". This reaction was consistent with his normal approach to the bearers of bad tidings. One month ago he ordered the closure of two leading Jaffna newspapers, Sathanthiran and the Saturday Review, which had printed accounts of attacks on Tamils in Trincomalee. At the same time he confirmed that in future all candidates for

Parliament would have to swear in an affidavit that they would not support the Tamils' demand for a separate state. All this was done in the name of "eliminating terrorism" - a reference to the Tamil Tigers, who have been held responsible for attacks on troops and police. It is a queer sort of logic which holds that the best way of eliminating Tamil terrorism is to ban all Tamil political parties and proscribe the main Tamil newspapers. But President Jayawardene, like many of his compatriots, seems to use the words "terrorist" and "Tamil" as if they were interchangeable these days. He told an interviewer this month: "I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people now. Now we can't think of them; not about their lives or of their opinion of us."

Given this hardening of attitude, it is hard to see how Sri Lanka's drift into civil war can be stopped. The government is determined that the Tamils' demand for Kelam must be silenced; yet each bout of communal violence merely strengthens the Tamils' conviction that a separate state is the only solution.

Eyes 'gouged out' in Sri Lankan gaol

David Beresford

in Colombo

The Guardian, London.

The Badulla massacre of civilians is the only one, apart from Jaffna, of which the Guardian has an account from a witness. But there are reports of at least one other, similar massacre in the town of Nuwara Eliya, near Badulla, in which 13 people are said to have been killed. Troops were again allegedly involved.

While accounts of these massacres are circulating widely among Sri Lanka's Tamil population, it is the massacres in the Welikada gaol which are attracting the most attention. There is particular interest in circumstances in which two alleged guerrilla leaders were killed.

The two men, Sellarasa "Kuttimani" Yogachandiran, leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation and a political writer and Ganeshanathan Jeganathan had been sentenced to death last year for the murder of a policeman.

In speeches from the dock, the two men announced that they would donate their eyes in the hope that they would be grafted on to Tamils who would see the birth of Eelam. The independent state for which they were fighting.

Secondhand reports from Batticaloa gaol, where the survivors of the Welikada massacre are now being kept, say that the two men were forced to kneel and their eyes gouged out with iron bars before they were killed.

One version has it that Kuttimani's tongue was cut out by an attacker who drank the blood and cried: "I have drunk the blood of a Tiger".

The two men were among 35 killed in the Welikada gaol on July 25. Another 17 were killed in the gaol two days later and the Guardian has obtained a first hand account of part of the fighting in this incident, including the circumstances in which Sri Lanka's Gandhian leader, Dr. Rajasunderam, died.

Dr. Rajasunderam was one of nine men, including two Catholic priests and a Methodist minister, who were moved out of their cells immediately after the July 25 killings - to make way for survivors moved into their cells on security grounds - into a padlocked hall, upstairs in the same block.

The nine, convinced that further attacks were coming, made repeated representations to the prison authorities on July 26 for better security measures. Assurances were given that they would be protected, but nothing was done.

At 2-30 p.m on July 27, hearing screaming and whistling outside, one of the priests looked out of a

high window and saw prisoners breaking in from a neighbouring compound, wielding axes, iron bars, pieces of firewood, and sticks. There was no sign of prison guards.

The mob, which was later found to have killed 16 prisoners in the downstairs cells, ran up to the hall and began breaking the padlock.

Dr. Rajasunderam then went to the door and cried out "Why are you trying to kill us? What have we done to you?"

At that moment, the door burst open and Dr. Rajasunderam was hit on the side of the neck by a length of iron. Blood was seen to spurt several feet.

"At that juncture, we thought we should defend ourselves," one of the prisoners related. "We broke the two tables in the hall and took the legs to defend ourselves.

"We kept them at bay. They threw bricks at us. We threw them back. Pieces of firewood and an iron bar were thrown at us. We used it to defend ourselves. It went on for about half an hour. They shouted: You are the priests, we must kill you."

The killing was eventually ended by the army, who moved in with teargas.

An inquest has been opened into the Welikada massacres, but the above details did not emerge. Prison warders claim that keys to the cells were stolen from them.

Lawyers for the prisoners, who have accused the warders of having participated, claim that they were not given the opportunity to bring evidence despite representation to the Government.

“ Was the aged President seeing phantoms, or was it a gimmick to gain Western sympathy . . . ? ”

The Week, India - August 14-02-83.

SARAYU Subramaniam quickened her pace. She had got off the bus near the Colombo General Hospital after calling on a friend and now had to walk nearly two furlongs to reach her house. Dusk was setting in and if she didn't get home before sundown, even her little brother in the orthodox Brahmin family would be furious.

Saraya shivered at the thought of walking down the narrow lane leading to her house as she turned the kerb. Oh, there is nothing to worry, she tried to console herself. Then she heard the wild howling. About a dozen people were running towards her, She saw they carried hatchets and iron rods, the murderous hate in their gleaming faces and, beyond them, flames leaping from the houses at the end of the lane. She tried to run, but the legs were treacherous, they stood rooted to the ground. "Kill her, kill that Indian bitch" someone shrieked.

After the first blow on the head, Sarayu did not feel the wrath of the senseless attackers. She did not know she had also received a deep stab wound on the left shoulder and an ugly gash on the back. "They left me for dead", she later told her father, who is a teacher, and all of her family have sought asylum in a refugee camp set up in a government school along with hundreds of others.

Far from the general hospital, Eli Skarstein from Stavenger stood on the balcony of her hotel room gripping the railing. "Pack up, Kristin. Quick", she shouted to her 15-year-old daughter and rushed to the room. The Norwegian tourist, who was in the tourists' paradise that was Sri Lanka for a two-week holiday, had a minute before seen the most horrible sight of her life. A mini-bus carrying Tamils had been set ablaze after pouring gasoline on it. All the 20 persons inside the bus, including women and children, burnt to death while hundreds stood witness. "It was ghoulis", Skarstein, once back home in Norway, told Oslo newspaper Verdens Gang.

Yellow and red tongues of fire leaped high from houses all over the capital as the Sinhalese rioters set their flaming torches to homes of Tamil settlers as if they were possessed by a demon. The fire, which cannot discriminate nor knows ethnic differences, spread to near by Sinhalese houses also and reduced them to ashes. Streets were littered with burning vehicles, stones and sticks and smoking corpses. Under the cover of the darkness diluted by the haze of the full moon, hundreds of homeless Tamils ran to temples and churches for shelter where many lay prostrate, mumbling agonised prayers. It was Sunday, July 24.

The night was tense with fearsome rumours like massacre of the Sinhalese minority in the northern Tamil-dominated peninsula of Jaffna, sighting of a mysterious

ship off the Colombo coast and attack on the Sri Lankan deputy high commissioner in Madras. There were even reports that foreign troops had landed on the island. The rumours which would later be proved false had, however, served their purpose. Sinhala passions were inflamed.

The rumours were floated after the announcement of the defence ministry that 13 soldiers were killed on July 23 in an ambush in Jaffna by Liberation Tigers, Tamil extremists demanding a separate state called Eelam for the Tamils who form 20 per cent of the total island population. The soldiers were travelling in a truck when a detonator activated from a distance exploded. Some of them jumped out and ran for cover but fell victims to a shower of bullets sprayed from all directions. The truck was blown up with hand - grenades.

Colombo, 375 km south of the perennially troubled Jaffna was plunged in Sinhala mob fury once the news reached the capital through the government controlled radio. The fuse of the holocaust that was to follow was thus lit by the government itself which also had taken much pains to conceal the fact that the army had carried out reprisals to avenge the ambushed soldiers. It also did not deny or confirm the terrorists' version that the soldiers had raped four Tamil women, two of whom killed themselves out of shame. The Tamil extremists too were not clear about the immediate provocation for the army men's ambush. Some said it was in retaliation of the killing of 'lieutenant' Lucas Charles Antony, alias Seelan, and another Tiger at the Meesali forest of Jaffna on July 15.

As whirlpools of insane anger drowned the precariously kept peace all over the island followed by the wave of looting, killings and arson unleashed by the rioting Sinhalese mobs, the government clamped down curfew on Colombo, Gampaha,

Kalutara and Jaffna. Colombo looked like a battlefield, with armymen chasing looters and shots ringing out from thorough-fares and bylanes. Despite the curfew, armed gangs rampaged through Tamil settlements like Bambalapitiya and a Ganesh temple in Wellawatte was burnt down.

Those who slept on Sunday night slept fitfully. Those who did not, tuned in the BBC, hoping for a correct version of the developments. It was in vain. The Sri Lanka government was scrupulously censoring all news and it seemed Jaffna was no longer a part of the earth. It was completely cut off: the Liberation Tigers had blasted off the main bridge connecting it to the island and telecommunications links were all down. On Monday morning the rumour spread that the Tigers had poisoned the water supply mains but it was never substantiated. Then came news about the shocking massacre in the maximum security Welikade prison of Colombo.

The violence of Sunday was only the prelude to the horrid death-dance the Sinhalese would stage throughout the week and after. The next day the voice of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation sounded desperate. "The city is full of lies. Believe us, don't believe anybody else", it said. Just before the announcement, 37 Tamil prisoners held in the Welikade prison had been brutally beaten to death by Sinhalese prisoners after wrenching sticks and iron rods from prison walls. Among those butchered were Yogachchandran, alias Kuttimani, whom the opposition Tamil United Liberation Front had nominated to Parliament and two other Liberation Tiger Leaders Thangadurai and Jegan. They were facing death sentence for killing two policemen in Jaffna last year. Top leader of Tamil Eelam Liberation Front and Gandhiyam Party too fell prey to the rabid frenzy.

ACROSS the shallow Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar, the people of Tamil Nadu and their political

leaders were becoming restive. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader M. Karunanidhi, who also has in the past voiced separatist demands on behalf of Tamils in India called upon the Indira government to send its troops marching to Sri Lanka. It is also an opportune moment for Karunanidhi to embarrass the Union government, his party having severed all connections with the Congress (I) after the dismissal of the DMK government of Pondicherry. He is trying to gain political capital out of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's reiteration that there was no question of India intervening in the Sri Lanka affairs.

Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress president P. Nedumaran back from a Tamil United Liberation Front meeting in Mannar, brought gory tales of inhuman violence and hinted that a 57-member boy scout team of Tamil Nadu visiting Lanka was in grave danger. (The boy scouts returned safe to Madras last week. Ruling all-India Anna DMK leader M.G. Ramachandran, not to be outdone, announced that government-sponsored bandh would be organised on August 7.

In Colombo the situation was worsening with every passing hour and riots were spreading to the port town of Trincomalee in the upland belt where the famous Temple of Tooth containing a dental relic of Lord Buddha is located. Sailors of the Lanka Navy went on a rampage in Tamil plantation labour settlement in the pilgrim centre and burnt nearly 200 shops.

Hundreds of tourists, who had come well in advance to watch the glorious Perahera celebrations at Kandy pilgrim centre on August 23 rushed to the airport with their bag and baggage. At the Pettah Bazaar, the big business centre in Colombo, Industry Minister Cyril Mathew, who has been accused of leading an attack on a former Tamil

minister's residence, stood watching the shops burn and the rioters pursue their victims with drawn weapons. Beside the lungi clad Mathew was Lands Minister Gamini Dissanayake. A little away from Galle Face the body of a 12-year-old boy was found dangling from the staircase of an apartment with a broken beer bottle stuck in his stomach.

At Kandy in the central hills, once a powerful Sinhala Kingdom which did not experience subjugation till the British ousted the Portuguese and the Dutch from the island hundreds of Tamils were bludgeoned and burnt. At Anuradhapuram, after a lull in the violence on Tuesday, mobs rampaged through this ancient historical town and unscrupulous elements and anti-socials joined in the looting. In a Jaffna prison, warders opened fire after three Sinhala inmates were lynched. For the first time, Sri Lanka President J. R. Jayawardene admitted a pattern in the violence and looting which he said was engineered by an organised force. His cabinet members, including Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed, repeated the charge like obedient choir boys.

Before the shock waves could subside, came the report that 17 more prisoners held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the notorious Public Security Ordinance were murdered in the Welikade prison by Sinhalese inmates. Amidst rumours that Jayawardene had lost control over the army, the soldiers concentrated on a two-pronged attack: against the rioters and against the Tigers who had come in large numbers from the northern parts to Colombo and were sniping at the soldiers from vantage positions they had taken on roof-tops. The civil strife on the Resplendent Island (that is what 'Sri Lanka' means) had become a pitched street battle. The attacks on the army by the Tigers were quick and sudden and they were in military uniform.

There were violent reactions in other parts of the world. In Paris a Sinhala student was thrown out of the window from the seventh floor of a building on July 28 after a clash between Tamils and Sinhalese and two more would be killed later. In London a petrol bomb was thrown at the Sri Lankan embassy while before the Indian high commission in London hundreds of Tamils lit candles and sat up the night. In Tamil Nadu, a Sri Lankan student was shot dead at St. Thomas Mount and a Sinhala student was injured. In Tiruchi, far away from Madras, a private bus driver lost his cool after being stopped by an anti-Jayewardene procession and went on a rampage, crushing 13 persons to death.

As Indian External Affairs Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao was closetted with Jayewardene in Colombo, 13 Tamil youths were roasted alive at Colombo's Main Fort railway station by the security forces who had caught them while trying to sabotage the track. At Galle, south of Colombo, armoured cars patrolled the streets and at Borella, Air Force copters were flying low, almost strafing the houses.

Maradana looked ghostly, and a million uprooted Tamils headed for the ciannish safety of Jaffna their stronghold. The state department of the United States issued a statement in Washington, conveying the impression that it would stand by in case of any eventuality. The statement read: "The department is deeply concerned by this violence because of our warm relationship with Sri Lanka and our support for its independence, territorial integrity and unity".

Sharp differences of opinion in the Jayewardene cabinet were meanwhile becoming explicit and in desperation the government tightened the press gag, forbade Tamil United Liberation Front leader A. Amirthalingam from leaving the country and in a sudden move banned the three

communist parties — The Communist Party of Sri Lanka, the militant Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the Nava Lanka Sama Samaja Party. A bill would soon be introduced in Parliament to proscribe all separatist demands.

Stewart Slavin, a UPI correspondent, dropped a red hot brick saying that Jayewardene had sought military assistance from US, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh and that it was planning action against Russian and East German diplomats. Shockingly enough, it was found that the Soviet embassy had 300 personnel on its staff in Colombo which was viewed by the government with grave concern. In Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, the Union Government gave open support for the bandh organised by regional parties and in Parliament many members cried for Jeyawardene's scalp.

Ten days after the start of the orgiastic riots, the death toll crossed 2, 000. though officially it was less than 300. Tamil Organisations put it well above 4, 000 and about a lakh refugees who might eventually land in India were lodged in filthy, barbed - wire fenced relief camps even after evacuation of about 800 Tamils to Jaffna by Indian ship Bharat Seema. Nearly Rs.500 million was lost in the looting and the burning of factories, business houses and banks which would prove to be a hard blow to recover for the Sri Lankan Economy which has been very delicate even otherwise. Said the state - run Daily News: "It was apparent that apart from the human misery, the damage caused to the country by this violence which left piles of smouldering embers where homes and prosperous business once stood, would be tremendous".

More than the appalling blood-bath in ethnic riots which have assumed the dimensions of a civil war, the charge that some foreign powers are planning to invade the island

has to be viewed with utmost seriousness. President J.R. Jayewardene has not yet divulged who the foreign powers are but the targets of his attack are obvious: India and the Soviet Union.

Whatever be the truth of the matter — whether the aged president is seeing phantoms, or it is just a gimmick to gain the sympathy of the western nations in an hour of dire need, or his fears are justified - it is a fact that Sri Lanka had made moves to bolster its defence forces in anticipation of an invasion. Sri Lankan forces are woefully inadequate to defend the country in the event of an invasion having only 17,000 personnel in its three services. Likewise the number of weapons and armoured cars and aircraft it has is limited.

Though Sri Lanka had denied, that too not very categorically, that it had approached the United States, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh for military assistance and expelled Stewart Slavin who flashed the news, there was no doubt in New Delhi or elsewhere that Jayewardene did seek help from the four nations. External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao was very positive when he said in Parliament that there was substance in the UPI report and that India was considering 'options' to meet the developments.

While the British Foreign office has confirmed that it had received such a request from Sri Lanka, the United States said there was no question of giving weapons to Sri Lanka. But the same day, the United States agreed to deliver sophisticated Harpoon missiles to Pakistan, to whom it would not be embarrassing to place the weapons at Sri Lankan disposal if it so desires.

What is significant is that Sri Lanka did not seek help from either India or the Soviet Union which had rushed military equipment to the country to quell the insurgency

of 1971. In fact, most of the aircraft the Lankans now have are those left behind by the Russians under an agreement of longterm deferred payment sale.

Jayewardene has been making provocative statements ever since he assumed office in 1977. Heading the liberal social democratic United National Party, he has been drifting towards western powers. One of the few Non-aligned countries to openly denounce the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka also has indirectly welcomed American and British naval presence in the Diego Garcia. Further, Jayewardene had virtually signed a deal with an oil company of America giving it lease rights over oil storage tanks in the strategic harbour town of Trincomalee. The deal was abandoned in the last minute following protests that the arrangement would give formal access to the US navy in the area. Jayewardene now plans to call global tenders but it fools nobody since the contract can still be bagged by the Americans.

When the Indian government voiced apprehensions over the issue, an overly confident Jayewardene said: "We will give it to anybody we like. We must have friends in the world". Equally nonchalant was his observation when questions were raised about Sri Lanka's stand on Afghanistan. "If Indians invade us for taking a different attitude, that's the worst they can do. What are we frightened of anybody in the world?... If I am alive I will carry on the movement against that invasion".

'If India invades us' has been an explosive refrain in the litany of charges Jayewardene has been making all these years. Barely two days before he conferred with Indian External Affairs Minister of the strife-torn island, Jayewardene repeated the refrain. He was quoted in Colombo's independent newspaper Sun as saying that "If India by any chance even decided to invade us, we will

fight and may be lose, but with dignity. Then we will go into exile and come back to our country later". This was despite Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi's repeated assertions that India would not interfere in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

In fact, Jayewardene had tried to whip up anti-Indian feeling by making a statement a few months ago that former prime minister Srimavo Bandaranaike had feared an invasion by India during the Bangladesh war for having given refuelling facilities in Sri Lanka for Pakistani air force planes and that she had rushed to the then US president Richard Nixon for help against possible Indian reprisal. Srimavo in her rebuttal reminded Jayewardene that she had met Nixon in October, two months before the Bangladesh war started in December 1971.

Jayewardene government's stunning accusation that the communist parties, which have now been banned, had instigated and trained the Liberation Tigers and infiltrated the Sinhalese rioters with the help of Soviet government cannot be dismissed all too lightly. Jayewardene's pro-west policies and increasing connections with his "friends in the world" of whom he often boasts cannot have been to the liking of Moscow and the communist parties who would have been happy if Sirimavo could come back to power.

Sirimavo has always been looking the Moscow way and in 1964, during her first term as the prime minister, had expressed displeasure at the US sending nuclear warships to the Indian Ocean. It is also to be noted that she had prior information about an aborted coup in 1968 against her successor ministry led by UNP leader Dudley Senanayake. Later when a Soviet naval squadron entered the Colombo harbour for a four-day visit, The Times of London noted that "the ship, cruiser and anti-submarine frigate, are part of Soviet fleet which has been in the

Indian Ocean for several weeks". However, the connection if there was any, between the attempted coup and the presence of the Soviet fleet was never established.

Soon after her return to power in May 1970, one of the major foreign policy decisions Sirimavo took was to grant recognition to the communist governments of North Korea, North Vietnam and East Germany and suspension of all relations with Israel. Ten days later, on June 24, she expelled the US peace corps from the country. And it was with Soviet weapons and sophisticated MIG aircraft that Sirimavo suppressed the insurrection led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, whose Che Guevara style guerrilla attacks were considered by the Soviet communist party to be Left adventurism.

The bonds between the Soviet Union and Sirimavo are still strong, despite the acute Sinhala chauvinism practiced by her Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the allegation that the Russians had actively encouraged the Liberation Tigers and also the rioters in order to topple the Jayewardene government and bring Sirimavo back to power cannot be easily brushed away. The allegation gains some respectability from the startling revelation that the Moscow embassy in Colombo had at least 300 personnel at the time of the riots. In normal circumstances, the embassy need not have had more than a dozen personnel, especially in a tiny and unimportant country like Sri Lanka. It is also noteworthy that Moscow has suddenly recalled its charge d'affaires in Colombo, Yezhov, who was at one time the No 2 man at the south Asian desk at the Kremlin. The embassy has told the Colombo foreign office that he has gone "merely on a short holiday".

Blood was running in the streets
of Serendipity. . . .

... and Antony Mascarenhas fled for his life
in Sri Lanka

Sunday Times, 31st July, 1983.

GASWORKS STREET, which runs through the Pettah, Colombo's wholesale food and dry goods area, is noted for two things: the gas company's fowering gas-bolder, and the public lavatory which, despite the stench, is anxiously sought out by passengers arriving at the nearby long-distance coach station.

Because of the countrywide dusk-to-dawn curfew, there were few passengers arriving on Friday morning. And since most of the shops in the Pettah market had been looted and gutted by fire earlier in the week, because they were owned by Tamils, the lavatory was unoccupied.

At about 10 a. m. - so I was told by half a dozen eye-witnesses - a young boy walked in and discovered a man quietly changing into what looked like a naval uniform. In the climate of suspicion that hangs over this lovely island - which glories in its ancient name, Serendib, the home of Serendipity - he concluded the

man was a "Tamil Tiger", like one of the seven terrorists killed by a naval patrol the previous evening at the nearby Fort railway station while allegedly attempting to plant explosive devices in a passenger train.

The boy ran out and raised the alarm. There is some confusion about what happened next. But the fact is that some soldiers went in and brought the man out. Then the crowd, which instantly materialises on such occasions, doused him with kerosene and set him ablaze.

I got there when the charred, naked body had been strung up by the boots from an electric pole outside the lavatory. A crowd of at least 1,000 people was looking at it with curious fascination, from a distance of about 50 ft. Young men with wooden clubs kept them away. Other men moved through the crowd selling lozenges at a halfpenny apiece.

The carnival atmosphere was broken by a loud explosion just out of sight, along the facade of gutted shops on the street. It was followed by rapid fire from light machine-guns. The crowd scattered as magically as as it had collected. We all took refuge in the concrete crescent of the bus station. There was a lot of firing. Then word got around: the Tamil Tigers were trying to blow up the gas holder, which supplies the capital's homes and hotels and power industry.

Friends living across the city later told me they had got information about this "terrorist attempt" only minutes after I had heard it on the scene. Apparently, bush telegraph has gone electronic. But what may have sparked the report was the arrival of an admiral's helicopter which, like the persistent Dragonflies I have seen over the Bogside in Londonderry, conveys the unmistakable message that something's amiss.

Sri Lankan Commandos, the equivalent of our own SAS, and trained by them, began arriving in Gasworks Street. About a dozen men, in camouflage dress and with light machine-guns at the ready, rapidly moved in to position behind the lavatory. There was a burst of clapping and cheering from the crowd.

Then, clearly reassured by the commandos' presence, the onlookers began to move forward. I went to the front of them. Nothing happened for about 10 minutes and I could hear the men with lozenges once more trying to drum up business behind me. We should have stayed in the concrete crescent.

There was a sudden crackling in the second storey of the gutted building across the road from me. It sounded like fireworks at first, but then there was a sudden cloud of smoke and the unmistakable crack of bullets exploding. Suddenly, I felt like the bottom man in a scrummage as at least a dozen of us tried to shelter behind a wall. Then we all got up and fled back to the security of the concrete crescent.

Meanwhile, the commandos were surrounding the area and firing into the building. Two small armoured cars, only slightly less venomous than the Belfast "pigs", turned up. There was more rapid firing. The helicopter kept a tight circle overhead. I managed to find a good observation platform on top of a bus, with two local journalists. A loud hailer kept calling out something in Tamil - obviously a warning to surrender. One of the reporters turned to his friend: "you know Tamil? Then you tell us what they are saying." The other man was clearly put out: "I don't understand the damned language," he retorted.

The irritation was understandable. Tamil has a dangerous sound in Colombo today. The hard fact is

that by a calculated act of violence, a small group of Tamil terrorists - estimated to number at the most not more than 400 hardcore activists - has virtually achieved its objective of dividing this country into two irreconcilable camps: the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

There are shades of Cyprus about the situation here. There have been situations of serious Sinhalese - Tamil rioting in the past decade, but apparently there is no going back now. The ambush of a military patrol last Sunday in which 13 soldiers were killed near Jaffna the main centre for Tamils in the north of the island, was the last straw for the armed forces.

For more than three years they have been straining at the bit as their colleagues and policemen were gunned down by Tamil terrorists, and while President Junius Jayawardene, aged 76, tried to negotiate a political settlement which took in the main grievances of the Tamils. Jayawardene was well disposed to do so.

During his long years in opposition to the overbearing, dynastic Bandaranaike regime, he had shared humiliation, even hardship, with Appapillai Amirthalingam, general secretary of the Tamil United Liberation Front.

When Jayawardene was swept into office with an overwhelming majority in the 1977 general elections, Amirthalingam, as leader of the second largest party in Parliament (17 members) became Leader of the Opposition. In keeping with his policy of establishing a righteous society Jayawardene began a political dialogue with Amirthalingam and his group to redress the Tamil grievances. He made Tamil one of the State languages. He removed disadvantages suffered by the Tamils under the previous government's policy of standardizing education, a process of positive discrimination in favour of Sinhalese students.

But Jayawardene had a hopeless task. The election^s that had swept him into office had also been employed by Tamil separatists, particularly Amirthalingam's party, as a referendum on their demand for the creation of Eelam, a separate Tamil state. The separatists won hands down in the 2 Tamil constituencies around Jaffna and obtained the mandate they wanted.

In these circumstances, even concessions Jayawardene made to the Tamils did not satisfy the hardcore separatists hell-bent on the partition of Sri Lanka. And those, such as Amirthalingam, who were trying for a political compromise within the unity of Sri Lanka, were increasingly isolated and looked down on as Uncle Toms.

Last October's presidential election, when Amirthalingam's party gave Jayawardene an uncontested run, was the first important confrontation between Tamil extremists calling for a boycott and the moderates. In May, during the parliamentary by-elections and local government elections in Jaffna, the extremists, attacking so-called "collaborators," caused widespread violence against Tamil candidates.

Polling in Jaffna was a disaster. The extremists won. At the same time there was an upsurge in violence against troops, the police, governmental institutions and government banks - all the hallmarks of classic terrorist provocative tactics. The armed forces appeared to be in confusion, not least because of a low level of military intelligence: blame for this fell upon the president.

Just as his predecessors had done, Jayawardene, on coming into office, had chosen his own team down to the base of the administrative pyramid. But intelligence officers, trained by the Israeli Mossad and the British M 15 - so I am told - were transferred to inconsequential duties. They were replaced by others more trusted by

Jayawardene and his party, but apparently less experienced. The inevitable result was that the Tamil Tigers gained the upper hand.

The breaking point came last Sunday when the government tried to bury the 13 soldiers killed in the terrorist ambush in Jaffna in a single service in Colombo's principal graveyard, instead of the normal practice of handing the bodies over to relatives for burial in their home villages. As a brave effort to dampen public emotion it totally misfired.

For one thing, the families of the deceased were brought in from the districts for the ceremony. For another, the bodies somehow failed to arrive from Jaffna at the appointed time. As the delay increased, so did the anger of the crowd. Soon relatives were jumping into the graves saying they would be buried with their sons, husbands and brothers unless they were given the bodies to take home for burial.

A reliable eye-witness said a crowd of more than 5,000 gathered at the cemetery, and the mood became ugly. The announcement that the funeral would have to be put back to the next day brought a fresh outcry. The crowd began to stone the police and was in turn dispersed with tear gas.

As the people ran from the cemetery they began to attack several Tamil shops along the route. The Borella area which has a concentration of Tamil shop - owners was the worst hit.

Throughout Monday, Tamil shops in the city were attacked and burned. Shop owners and assistants were asked to leave. The smart did. Those who resisted perished with their property. It is not known how many people died this way.

Buses and cars were also stopped and their Tamil passengers beaten up. Cars were burned and strewn all over the city.

The army was moved in to quell the disturbances by noon that day, but apparently without result. Eye witnesses say that troops seemed to turn a blind eye to what was going on. Next day, Tuesday, the looters took over, defying the curfew that had been imposed in the city, its two adjoining districts and the sacred hill city of Kandy.

On Monday night, 35 Tamil extremists - some convicted, others detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act - were clubbed to death in Colombo's Welikada Jail, the country's maximum security prison. The government says it was the result of a jail riot. But gossip in the city, and there is no way of proving it, points the finger at irate soldiers.

On Tuesday night, 130 men of the navy garrison in Trincomalee, the major port on the east coast, broke open the armoury. They then entered the town, which has a mixed population of Sinhalese and Tamils, and shot up parts of it. Damage or the casualties remain unknown, but sources say the men only agreed to return to barracks the following morning after they had received guarantees against disciplinary action.

By mid-week the trouble had spread all over the island and the government had to impose a 24 hour curfew throughout the country. President Jayawardene on Thursday night broadcast an impassioned appeal to his people for a return to sanity.

But disaster struck again on Friday morning. The incident on Gasworks Street fuelled fears that Colombo

itself might blow up with the gas works. A new wave of anti-Tamil sentiment flooded the city.

Affluent Tamils in Colombo, who had hidden to escape the mobs, were now singled out for attack in their homes, which were looted and burned. People seemed to be on a Tamil - catching spree.

In Hulstдорf, not far from where the country's courts are, the body of a Tamil man whose throat had been cut was brought from somewhere by handcart and dumped in the middle of the road. Someone from among the crowd stopped a passing motorcycle, syphoned off some petrol, poured it on the body and set it alight.

The head burned for some time and then the fire went out. The body was dragged further down the street and tossed on to a tyre which was set alight. It was still burning at 5 p.m when curfew was imposed.

The government is now faced with the task of quelling the most serious and widespread outbreak of violence since the country became independent in 1948, without sparking off a further chain reaction of killing and public retaliation.

“ In Sri Lanka... as in Lebanon,
private armies may ultimately
take over control ”

Sunday Times, London - 31st July 1983

BITTER hostility towards the Sri Lankan government is building up in India, especially in the south where India's own Tamils are concentrated. The prime minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, is under pressure to take decisive action, including sending an "evacuation army" to take distressed Tamils out of Sri Lanka.

Although Sri Lanka's Tamils are mostly of local origin, there are tens of thousands working on plantations and farms who went to the island from southern India over many years.

India is ready to airlift food stocks to the island's cut-off northern districts and has also offered emergency transport for any of the 50,000 Tamil refugees now in Colombo relief centres who want to return to India. But western officials doubt whether this would be enough to assuage the restive population in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Since the violence erupted on the island there have been daily demonstrations and attempted vandalism against Sri Lankan property in India. In one incident, a Sri Lankan student was shot dead by three masked assailants in the Tamil Nadu capital, Madras. A second student was taken to hospital with bullet wounds.

The Tamil Nadu government has come to a virtual standstill in a six-day period of state - wide protest which is not due to end until Tuesday.

Even if rescue attempts do go ahead - and there are strict limitations on how the Indians might tackle this there is great risk to Tamils moving across Sri Lanka in the hope of such a rescue. Tamil refugees in Colombo have asked to be sent to the northern, predominantly Tamil, tip of the island. But according to one prominent Tamil exile in London, "if they leave Colombo by road there's a chance they'll be slaughtered."

Tamil exiles accuse certain cabinet ministers of whipping up racial hatred to bolster support for President Junius Jayawardene's Sinhalese government. Now, they say, the persecution will be difficult to control.

Only one in every 100 Sri Lankan policemen is a Tamil. When security forces were ordered last week to protect Tamils in the seaport of Trincomalee and other cities, they reportedly joined in the looting and burning. No disciplinary measures have so far been imposed on the renegade servicemen.

Jayawardene (known as "J.R."), responded last week to the riots and killings by threatening to ban the Tamil political party unless it stopped advocating a separate Tamil state.

A devout Buddhist Jayawardene, lives modestly and diets on nuts and milk. His political instincts are strong.

Last December, he held a referendum that effectively by passed parliament and succeeded in adding six years to his presidential term.

As lawlessness and terrorism spread in recent months, the president banned bicycles - the island's main form of transport, in all Tamil regions. This forced more travellers into buses and cars, despite the fact that the president had just launched an energy - conservation campaign.

Other aspects of the crackdown have been more drastic. Amnesty International has found dozens of cases where suspected Tamil terrorists were denied water and food for days, after which the security forces rammed nails coated with chilli powder up their nostrils.

The unrest threatens Sri Lanka's booming tourist industry. More than 400,000 people including 35,000 Britons, visited the island last year. It is thought that 250 British holidaymakers and 500 resident UK nationals are there now.

In London, where the Tamil separatist movement will now be centred following President Jayawardene's banning of it, spokesmen said last week that the only tactic left to them is guerrilla war.

It is this which is increasingly worrying to India.

The despatch last week of India's foreign minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, to Colombo is, therefore, a delicate undertaking. He will concentrate on assuring the Sri Lankan leaders that India will not intervene. Yet officials in New Delhi are convinced that the violence is in large part a result of Sri Lanka's army and police turning a blind eye to anti-Tamil attacks.

“The first task of Jayawardene,” said one angry official yesterday, “is to control his own armed forces. From what we’ve seen it is the same, wanton killing that preceded Lebanon’s war. And there, as may happen in Sri Lanka, private armies ultimately took over control.”

Stranded tourists sip cool drinks as mobs riot

Ian Ward in Colombo

The Daily Telegraph London 30-07-83

THERE was a stark contrast in Sri Lanka yesterday. While renewed racial violence erupted in the capital, for stranded tourists the paradise idyll still existed.

Unable to take the normal sightseeing trips to east coast resorts or hinterland hill stations, they sipped long, cool drinks on the colonaded, palmfringed verandah of the famed Galle Face Hotel overlooking the Indian Ocean's relentless surf.

And as they gazed westwards across the blue of the incoming waves, columns of black smoke spiralled into a cloudless sky a few blocks to the east pinpointing the latest attacks by the street mobs.

On Thursday President Jayewardene said his government would never allow two separate states which is the wish of the minority Tamils. And his words placed the blame for the past five days of violence squarely on the group's three million population .

As the President outlined legislative measures he would take next week to make illegal all movements advocating separatism, observers felt his attitude could be a catalyst for further communal violence.

Meanwhile plans to ship out the first 2,000 - strong batch of Tamil refugees recently made homeless were severely cut back because of the uncertain security situation.

Instead, 350 refugees sailed for Jaffna, in the north, where the separatist movement has been active for years, aboard a coastal freighter last night. The province is 12 miles across the Palk Strait from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Later an announcement said the next refugee vessel would leave for Jaffna within a few days, with 400 Tamils aboard.

Officials had feared that moving the refugees from their make-shift camps in Colombo to the harbour could make them ready targets for further mob onslaughts.

But after the curfew was reimposed at 5 p.m. it was decided to move the first group to the dock area. The transfer took place at dusk and the ship sailed shortly after nightfall.

There are 30 refugee camps in the Colombo region, many established at police and railway stations plus schools and temples. And a figure of 20,000 refugees in the areas is thought to be well short of the total.

In one camp alone, at Ratmalana Airport, more than 6,000 Tamil men, women and children are crammed into two aircraft hangars. The privately-owned Upali internal airline has been asked to quit a third hangar to provide more space.

Three days ago the government let it be known quietly around the camps that three ships would be made available to transport Tamils to their ethnic stronghold in the northern regions around Jaffna. Similar transportation facilities were offered to Tamils during different communal riots going back nearly 30 years and officials appreciate the extreme anxiety of some one million Tamils scattered throughout the primarily Sinhalese population of the south and south-west.

There is very real fear that they might make an overland dash for the north and encounter more racial violence en route as they pass through the stronger Sinhalese sections.

Security officials are hoping that the seaborne transportation service will prevent any such desperate overland scramble.

Meanwhile in the central Fort area of Colombo yesterday troops fired on a group of alleged Tamil "Tigers" (terrorists) - in the confusion that followed several Sinhalese youths were injured as thousands of workers quit buildings to get any means of transport home.

Last night a government communique rejected rumours spreading through the capital that Tamil terrorists had infiltrated the city.

"These stories appear to have been believed and, as was probably intended, angry mobs came on to the roads damaging buildings, attacking people and stopping traffic," the statement added

Tamils in Britain protest

James Allan

The Daily Telegraph London. 30-07-83

SRI LANKAN Tamils living in Britain have joined a world-wide campaign by fellow exiles aimed at putting pressure on the government in Colombo to end the current violence.

In London yesterday demonstrations were held outside the Indian High Commission in the Aldwych and the Ceylon Tea Centre near Piccadilly. Today Tamils plan to march from Hyde Park to Downing Street seeking Mrs. Thatcher's support in sending relief aid into Sri Lanka.

Dr. R. Niththyananthan, headmaster of the West London Tamil School, said: "The international agencies must act quickly. There is an urgent need for food, clothing, shelter and medical supplies".

A medical scientist at St. Mary's Hospital medical School, Paddington, he said his name meant "always happy" but added sorrowfully that this was not true at the moment.

Reports getting through indicated that the situation was very grim. But information direct from Sri Lanka was difficult as obstacles were apparently being put in the way of telephone calls.

Even so Tamils were calling friends and relatives in places as far apart as Australia, Singapore, America, Germany, Mauritius, Fiji and India plus Britain.

Reports reaching different countries are being collated by the Tamil Information Centre in Thornton Heath. A 24 - hour switchboard is being maintained.

Tamils in Britain number upwards of 25,000. They are mainly professional people who began arriving in 1957 when a campaign in the island, known as Ceylon, was launched to end discrimination against the minority Tamils.

They now have temples in Wimbledon, Archway and East Ham and schools in Greenford and Wimbledon along with social and cultural centres and even their own Tamil Video Shop in Streatham. They also have their own monthly newspaper, the TAMIL TIMES.

Tamils in Britain are clearly convinced that the latest outburst of conflict has been organised by the island's government with the Army as the main spearhead. This was denied in London yesterday by the Sri Lankan High Commission.

Regarding the Island situation from a visitor's viewpoint Mrs. Sivakamy Mahalingam, a Tamil living in Twickenham, who arrived in Sri Lanka with her two sons, aged eight and seven, for holiday last Thursday, said at Heathrow yesterday that she was forced to cut short their stay.

She had gone from Colombo to stay with relatives in Mount Lavinia. There the house in which they were staying was attacked several times in one morning.

Mrs. Mahalingam said she saw thugs carrying long staves arrive in Government-owned vehicles. Her children were forced to leap a rear garden wall to safety before they managed to leave the district. As their car drove off it was pursued by a mob.

She had seen troops hand petrol to gangs to use to burn down a shop and decided to leave after her relatives told her to do so. "We are prepared to die but there is no need for you and your children to do so," they said.

Her aunt's house in Colombo was burnt down destroying most of Mrs. Mahalingam's clothes which she left in a suitcase. She managed to reach the airport by abandoning her sari and dressing as a Sinhalese woman.

Over a period of 25 years, Tamils in Sri Lanka have been humiliated, tortured, their belongings burnt and murdered by Sinhalese mobs and the state Armed Forces.

The worst period was in July - August 1983 when thousands of Tamil speaking people of Indian origin suffered at the hands of the rioting Sinhalese mobs.

This collection from the World Press is merely a drop in the ocean. There are many other Press reports and eye witnesses.

We request the readers to circulate this booklet after reading. Let there be more awareness of the fate of our country-men in Sri Lanka! Let us urge the Central Government to take positive firm action in Sri Lanka!

Publisher

Vivekananda Press
Madurai

Over a period of 26 years, Tamils in Sri Lanka have been humiliated, tortured, their belongings burnt, and murdered by Sinhalese mobs and the state Armed Forces.

The worst period was in July - August 1983 when thousands of Tamil speaking people of Indian origin suffered at the hands of the rioting Sinhalese mobs.

This collection from the World Press is merely a drop in the ocean. There are many other Press reports and eye witnesses.

We request the readers to circulate this booklet after reading. Let there be more awareness of the fate of our countrymen in Sri Lanka! Let us urge the Central Government to take positive firm action in Sri Lanka!

Publisher

Vivekananda Press

Madurai