

SRI LANKA

# The Aftermath



GANESHA'S temple had never seen so many supplicants, all with unanswerable prayers. Colombo's Tamils call it Pillaiyar Kovil, and its ornamented gateway on Galle Road in the Wellawatta area is flanked by carefully incinerated Tamil shops. Wellawatta was a genteel Tamil ghetto. Now the temple is a refugee camp, and cheek-by-jowl stand three others at Kathiresan Hall, Saraswathy Hall and Hindu College, all pockets of nameless despair, galleries of stricken faces. There is little talk, no laughter, here and there a paroxysm of spent grief.

Colombo's refugee camps, which once housed 90,000, had dwindled in number last fortnight, and the 13,000 Tamils left behind had nowhere to go—descendants of estate workers brought over from India by the British, they had missed the repatriation bus, holding neither Indian nor Sri Lankan citizenship, were stateless and unwanted. Not for them the options available to the indigenous Jaffna Tamils, 40,000 of whom had fled north by ship, train or bus, or to the lucky ones who owned Indian passports and could expect refuge beyond the Palk Strait.

**Pathetic Condition:** G.M.K. Naidu came to the island in 1935 from South Africa. The export clerk's 12-member family was attacked by a Sinhala mob at 1.30 a.m. on July 25 in the Peliyagoda area. Naidu escaped in his shirt and sarong; his son-in-law's van was burnt. "For two days we hid with a friendly Sinhala family," he says, "and then he was himself threatened. I applied for Indian citizenship in 1970. My son-in-law lost a gunny-bag factory in the 1981 violence. This time we have been wiped out. Where do we go?"

His mutilated hand covered with a piece of cloth to ward off the flies, S. Krishnasamy nervously touches his left ear, obscured by a sticky bandage. A waiter in Ambal Cafe on Armour Street, Krishnasamy went to a nearby temple to worship on the Sunday the violence exploded. Waylaid by a mob, he was tossed into a burning shop and then dragged out by some samaritan. His family in Kegalle has not been heard of.

"Look at the food we get," says R.T. Sadanandan, a laboratory assistant in Colombo's Medical Research Institute. "Undrinkable tea in the morning, watery milk and biscuits for the children, soggy rice and a weak curry at noon, a quarter-pound of bread and coconut sambol (chutney) at night. Some of us haven't had a bath for two weeks. Where is the aid the Government is getting?"

**Homeless Refugees:** Just before dawn on August 22 the vessel Bharat Seema slipped out of Colombo's harbour, on an 11-hour journey to Tuticorin. The ship carried 340 so-called India-Sri Lanka passport holders, people who had been fortunate to have beaten the October 31 1981 deadline for obtaining Indian citizenship. There were 540 such refugees in the St Thomas Prep School camp next to the American Embassy on Galle Road. "Most of these refugees are estate workers who have managed to get here from places near Colombo," says Nirupama Rao, first secretary in the Indian High Commission, who is in charge of repatriation.

Tamils in a refugee camp: ethnic tragedy







The refugees who didn't make the ship lacked travel documents, or family cards issued by the Sri Lanka Government. All the estate workers had fled to Colombo because their lines—quarters—had been burnt down on the estates.

One of those who failed to board the Bharat Seema is a frightened, dumpy man, grey stubble framing unkempt spectacles. Mahalingam Acharya, 64, came to Sri Lanka in 1948 from Madurai in Tamil Nadu. A goldsmith by training, his shop in Urgodawatte was burnt down by maddened Sinhala neighbours in 1958. Since then Acharya had been eking out an existence by reading horoscopes. He could not foresee his own fate. On July 25 his house was set upon by a howling gang of Sinhala youths and his wife was killed before his eyes. Acharya wanders around the St Thomas camp, waiting for his papers to be issued, wistfully watching the refugees who are preparing to leave for India, their passports being stamped by a harassed Sri Lankan immigration officer at a rickety school desk in the playground.

Each family leaving for India has been promised a compensation of 1,000 Sri Lankan rupees (Rs 400). But that amount will be paid into an Indian bank at a later date. Manel Abeysekera, the bustling Foreign Office coordinator of the camp, claims that the food, supplied by the Ceylon Hotels Corporation, is not bad at all. "Nobody's assessed the damage to these refugees' property," she says, "and so we are not paying any compensation, except the 1,000 rupees."

**I**N EVERY camp last fortnight the authorities were busy trying to get people to leave, either giving them dry rations of rice, flour and sugar and asking them to go home or to the friendly north, or cutting down on food rations in the hope that more would leave. Hundreds of refugees who trickled in late from around Colombo or from the estates around Nuwara Eliya and Hatton were turned away.

M.S. Croose, 29, is the eldest of four brothers and three sisters, and all of them have somehow got into the St Thomas camp for Indian passport holders, although they are stateless. "I have been trying since 1976 for an Indian passport," says Croose, who trained as an electrician, "but I wasn't lucky. I couldn't take a job in the Middle East because I was stateless." Croose's uncle K. Suppiah is luckier. A fishmonger in the St John's market in Pettah, the overcrowded commercial area that was devastated by the Sinhala in the July violence, Suppiah owns an Indian passport and can at least expect sanctuary in that, to him, strange country.

Colombo's refugees were only the tip of the iceberg. Although government spokesman Douglas Liyanage cheerfully told newsmen every day that the refugees were all "going back" to a normal life, he was being disingenuous. Thousands of Indian Tamil estate workers who had hidden for weeks in the island's central highlands after their

homes were destroyed were steadily fleeing by bus—and even on foot—to hastily set up refugee camps in Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and Jaffna in the north. The majority of these workers had been affected by earlier violence in 1977 and 1981 and had fled north then too, returning to the estates after the violence abated. Said M.E. Pius, the parish priest of



Disaster-stricken Tamils: no solution in sight



Kilinochchi Roman Catholic church: "We have already set up five camps in our town since August 13 and housed more than a thousand refugees. This is only the beginning. In 1977 there were more than 10,000 of them." The refugees are living in tents in open spaces in the small Tamil town, and Father Pius says there has been absolutely no

food aid from the Government—and even the maximum permissible food allowance per refugee per day is only SL Rs 7.

And so the tragedy unfolds. Every few years there is a venting of the Sinhala spleen, and a mass movement of terrorised Tamils to the north and east of the island, an unending cycle of pain and disillusionment. "This time

we will not go back," says Santhanam, who worked up the courage to travel with 15 others by bus from Matale in the island's centre on August 24. "They set fire to our houses in the night," sobs his wife Unnamalai, "and the owners of our tea and cocoa estate could not help us. We hid for two weeks in the jungle. We will never go back."





President J.R. Jayewardene had promised in a speech at Delhi's Non-aligned summit in February this year that Sri Lanka would eventually grant citizenship to the one million stateless Tamils. But the Government's attitude last fortnight had visibly changed, and Commissioner General of Essential Services Bradman Weerakoon announced that nearly two-thirds of the stateless Tamils wished to go to India. Increasingly, the Sri Lankans seemed anxious to rid themselves permanently of the stateless Tamils, and an editorial in the militant Sinhala daily *Sun* summed it up. Indian emissary G. Parthasarathi, who arrived in Colombo on August 25 in search of a "permanent solution" to the Tamil problem, was obviously going to be faced with the tricky stateless question. "India, seemingly altruistic towards the ethnic crisis in Lanka," said the *Sun*, "cannot really overlook the natural desire of thousands of people of Indian origin."

Parthasarathi's mission, as he put it at Katunayake airport, was "delicate and difficult", but nobody in the Sri Lankan Foreign Office believed that the low-key negotiator from India could achieve even a semblance of a settlement. A week before Parthasarathi's arrival President Jayewardene told a group of Indian correspondents that he envisaged "no role" for India in settling the Tamil problem, although his government would welcome any emissary.

**Tense Situation:** Indeed, Parthasarathi's visit came in the midst of a tense, crackling stalemate across the island. The Sri Lankans had not been amused by the extraordinarily warm reception accorded to Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) Secretary-General Appapillai Amirthalingam in Delhi barely a few days after Jayewardene's special envoy, his brother Hector, had travelled to the Indian capital to brief Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and External Affairs Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao.

Once again the mood in Colombo and across the Sinhala heartland turned against India as Parthasarathi's visit drew closer. "The trouble," said a senior Foreign Ministry official, "is that the average Sinhala thinks India is populated by 700 million

Tamils. He therefore does not view the Sri Lankan Tamils as a minority community. He is always afraid of being swamped."

As rumours of a bomb attack on the densely crowded Esala Perahara festival in Kandy spread, the Government nightly put out stern warnings on radio and television against *agents provocateurs*. Jayewardene himself acquired two tough British bodyguards last fortnight from Assets

by US Ambassador John Reed, who returned unexpectedly from a six-month vacation on August 8 and met Jayewardene four times in a single day, advising him to turn to his neighbours for help. Jayewardene then spoke to Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq on the hotline to ask for help, but Zia stalled and later informed Mrs Gandhi about Sri Lanka's extraordinary request. Hector Jayewardene was asked about it when Mrs

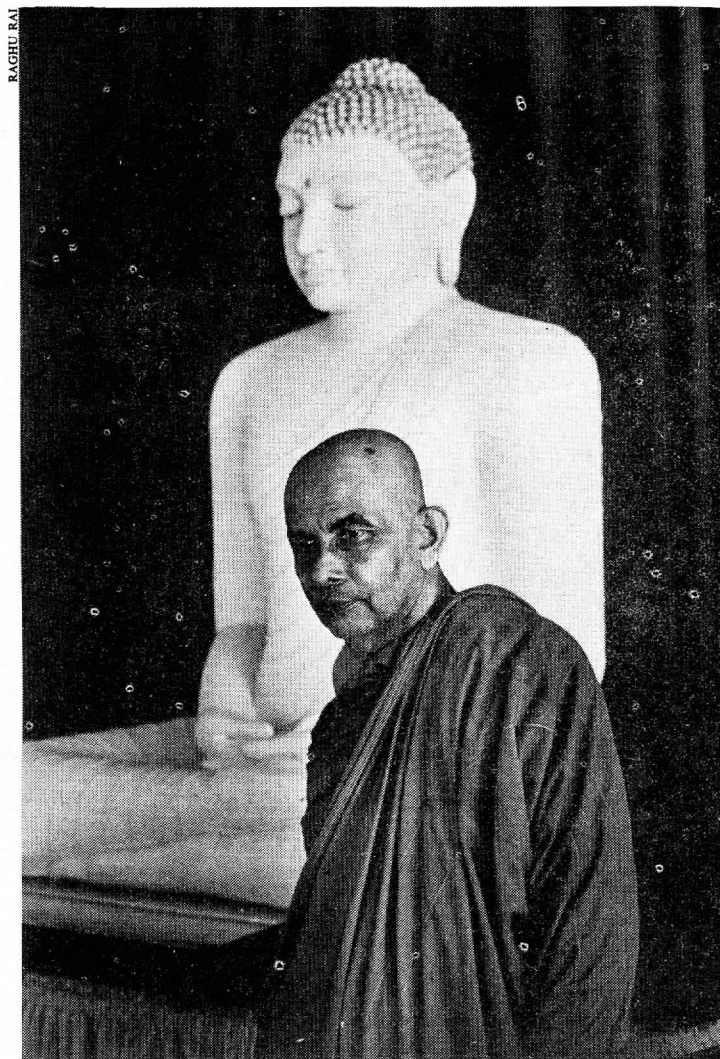
Gandhi met him in Delhi, and the panic buttons in Colombo were again punched. Soon after returning to Colombo, Hector embarked on a lengthy tour of South-east Asian capitals, again to ask friendly countries like Singapore and Malaysia for contingency military assistance.

In Delhi, Amirthalingam made it clear that his party would not participate in talks with Jayewardene if there were any pre-conditions. "Although we have accepted India's good offices," he said, "we will certainly not go back on our separatist mandate." Significantly, Amirthalingam also said that the TULF would consider any "reasonable alternative" short of separation, possibly a greatly enhanced autonomy for the Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east in a federal structure.

On August 19 Amirthalingam flew to Madras, where he spent the following days waiting for the ferry service from Rameshwaram to Talaimannar to be resumed in order to return to Sri Lanka, and drumming up support for the concept of a Tamil Eelam (nation). But the Government of India made it clear that it did not wish to see Sri Lanka divided into Tamil and Sinhala enclaves, and in a speech broadcast on August 22, almost exactly a month after the killing of 13 soldiers in Jaffna triggered off mass ethnic violence, Jayewardene reiterated his

inflexibility. "We have decided," he said, "that in future we will not have any talks with any party that wants to advocate the separation of Sri Lanka." The country's Sixth Constitutional Amendment, passed early last month, had also effectively banned the TULF for its separatist platform.

**Tricky Issue:** It was evident, therefore, that there could be no immediate negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and the TULF. "I see little possibility of a settlement unless Parthasarathi calls the tune,"



**Buddhist chief priest Pannaseeha: militant views**

Protection International, a London-based security firm headed by retired police commissioner Sir Robert Marks. They were hired after Air Lanka Chairman Rakitha Wickremanayake flew to London to negotiate with Marks.

**Polite Refusal:** INDIA TODAY has learnt that Jayewardene's request for contingency military aid from the United States and Britain was met with the message that Sri Lanka fell within India's "sphere of influence", and this message was driven home

(Left) Tigers founder Sivakumar's vandalised statue





said TULF President M. Sivasithamparam in Jaffna. "We are prepared to consider a federal structure, but the security of the Tamils should be in our hands. If no talks are possible we are prepared to go underground—even to go abroad."

As the fortnight progressed, the TULF found itself caught in a bind. By accepting India's mediatory role, it could not now embarrass Mrs Gandhi by insisting on separation. INDIA TODAY has learnt that both Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam have secretly met Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas, in Jaffna, to try and persuade him to accept a settlement short of separation. "There is nothing wrong with federalism," says Sivasithamparam. "It is not contradictory to compromise in a difficult situation. Even India demanded *poorna swaraj* in 1929, but accepted the Government of India act in 1935."

Even if the two sides were to talk, Jayewardene is certain to face resistance to any settlement from the hardliners within his government, who feel that the ruling United National Party (UNP) has already granted too many concessions to the Tamils. Matters have not been helped by the continuing refuge granted to fugitive Tamil guerrillas from the island's north in Tamil Nadu. 'Lieutenant' Chelvanayagam, the guerrilla who led the ambush on the army convoy in Jaffna on July 23, was seriously wounded in the crossfire. Significantly, the injured Tiger was rushed by boat to Tamil Nadu, and died in a hospital in Vellore. Jayewardene himself pointedly advised Tamil Nadu not to give sanctuary to the guerrillas. "I do not give refuge to Punjabis asking for Khalistan," he said.

**Sympathetic Approach:** Indeed, as dozens of expatriate Sri Lankan Tamil leaders converged on New Delhi in mid-August, and Amirthalingam was joined in Madras by three other TULF MP's, India's impartiality seemed questionable. Mrs Gandhi and External Affairs Minister Rao granted audiences to many Tamils, including M.K. Eelaventhana, secretary of the militant Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF) which broke away from the TULF in 1981. Eelaventhana has been in India since February this year. "The prime minister seemed terribly sympathetic, and promised 'appropriate action'," he said. "Our leadership has been our ruin. We have ceased to believe in parliamentary democracy. Sri Lanka has become a mobocracy. What we need now are freedom fighters, not debaters."

Given the extreme sensitivity about India's intentions in Sri Lanka, Mrs Gandhi is moving cautiously in what she has termed a matter that "equally concerns Sri Lanka

JAFFNA

## Tamil Sanctuary

THE ARMY checkpoint at Mada-wachchiya 180 km from Jaffna marks the invisible border between Sinhala and Tamil territory, and the sloppily dressed soldiers nervously fingering their sten-gun triggers expect every traveller going north to prove that he is not a Tiger.

Jaffna looks like a little Tamil Nadu, and its diligent citizens have painted every Sinhala road-sign over with tar. The Grand Bazar is plastered with graffiti

and posters extolling the valour of the Tamil boys killed by the "occupation army" while fighting for their Eelam. The Tigers' bush telegraph is impressive: on August 24, the entire town observed a hartal and sent up 31st-day prayers in memory of guerrilla leaders Thangadurai and Kuttimani, who were slaughtered by Sinhala prisoners inside Colombo's Welikade prison on July 25.

Occasionally an army convoy, a few rickety armoured cars and an odd truck, roll out of the Palaly camp, and the soldiers amuse themselves by carrying long poles and knocking a few pedestrians or cyclists over.

**Lying Low:** "There are shortages all round," says Government Agent Devanesan Nesiah, "and we are rationing petrol, diesel, kerosene, food. All train services to the north were suspended after the boys burnt an entire train at Jaffna station on July 1, and supplies are not coming in fast enough." More than 40,000 Tamils displaced by the violence in the south have sunk without a trace into Jaffna's warm embrace. "There has been a systematic attempt to terminate the Tamil presence in the south," says Nesiah.

The Tigers never reveal their names, but they are willing to talk. One of them, a swarthy, saturnine orator, sits in a dark bedroom in a sympathiser's house. "No talks with Jayewardene can ever succeed," he says. "Sinhala chauvinism was so strong that they even challenged India's might."

The Tigers are confident that India will soon send in troops to help them liberate Eelam. But the Tigers are themselves divided. Velupillai Prabhakaran leads the most powerful group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE); Uma Maheswaran, recently released from prison in Madras, leads the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE); Kuttimani, who was killed in prison in July, led the Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA). Then there are lesser groups like the Marxist-Leninist Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) led by a mysterious young man called 'Tall Sri'.

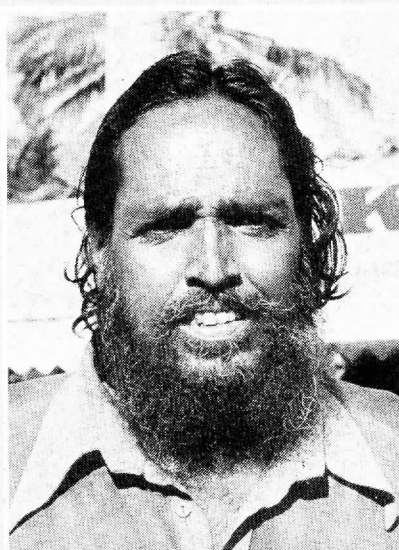
**Violent Philosophy:** Sometimes the Tigers kill each other, too. 'Oberoi' Devan (his real name is Kulasegaram Devasegaram) was a steward in the Lanka Oberoi in Colombo before he took up arms. Devan took over leadership of the TELA after Kuttimani's imprisonment,

RAGHU RAI



Prabhakaran: fighting for Eelam

RAGHU RAI



Thuraiaratnam: "Sinhalaes are all savages"

and was rapidly rising to prominence within the guerrillas' scattered ranks. On August 14 Devan was killed by assassins from the LTTE.

Devan's parents, brother and three sisters quietly mourn his death in their home in Urumpirai village, just outside Jaffna. But the Eelam fire burns strongly; his sister Kulanayaki Ratnabalan, a lawyer in Colombo, says he was killed because of jealousy. "Devan's tactics were different from Prabakaran's," she says quietly. "He did not attack the army, he only wanted the Government to withdraw its repressive machinery from our territory. We feel no bitterness towards

Prabakaran. He is also fighting for Eelam."

Urumpirai is the cradle of Tigerhood. The guerrillas' founder, Ponnudurai Sivakumar, hailed from this village. Captured in June 1974 soon after the movement began, Sivakumar killed himself by swallowing potassium cyanide. "That day," says an old man, "Jaffna saw a huge procession of boys. Each one of them drew blood from his thumb and smeared it on his forehead, vowing never to rest until Eelam was achieved."

**Growing Anger:** Thangadurai was the only ideologically sound leader the guerrillas ever had. After his capture in

1981, the movement began to splinter, and Prabakaran's Tigers are acknowledged to be the most reckless and blood-thirsty.

Whatever mixed feelings Jaffnaites may have had about the slaying of 13 Sinhala soldiers on July 23, the army's shooting spree in the town the following day wiped out all commiseration. Forty-two people were killed in broad daylight by the frenzied soldiers, seven of them schoolboys returning from private tutorials.

Not far from Sivakumar's statue, hanging upside-down from its pedestal after the army attacked it with iron rods, an impromptu crowd collects as M. Thurairatnam, a local trader, talks about his dreams. "If the Tigers hadn't been around," he says, neck veins bulging, "we would have been annihilated long ago. Every last soul in Tamil territory is prepared to fight for Eelam. India should send in troops as soon as possible. How many Sinhalaes speak Tamil? They are all savages, we can never live with them."

The Roman Catholic church in Jaffna has been drawn into the battle for Eelam. Two priests, A. Singarayar and P. Sinnarasa, were arrested in November 1982 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and narrowly escaped being killed in the Welikade prison mayhem last July. "Some other priests have been taken in for questioning," says Father Michaelsamy, vicar-general of Jaffna. "It all depends on what these people call terrorists. If there are young people with problems we try to help and guide them. We don't ask who they are."

**Divisions:** The Catholic clergy in Sri Lanka has split down the middle, and Frank Marcus Fernando, Bishop of Chilaw in the south and president of the Episcopal Bishops' Conference, recently issued a statement condemning the separatist movement in the north. "The Government has succeeded in dividing the Church," says Michaelsamy.

The Tigers are meanwhile girding for a long and violent struggle with Colombo. "What future is in store for babies yet to be born?" asks the commentator in a half-hour video film that shows the effects of last month's violence in unflinching colour. "How many more need to be killed like dogs in the streets?" And as an army convoy rumbles out of the Mathagal camp, all traffic draws to the roadside to let the soldiers pass, eyes averted. The only occasions on which Tamils and Sinhalaes in Jaffna exchange looks is when their eyes are at the opposite ends of a gun barrel.



Tamil martyr Devan's mother and sister: all for the cause



and India". Adroitly alternating pro-Tamil gestures with expressions of interest in Sri Lanka's integrity, it is not conceivable that India will at this stage step in to carve up Sri Lanka.

"We think Mrs Gandhi is trying to make political capital out of this situation," says a Colombo journalist. "By playing the role she has, she will reinforce India's Big Brother image in the region. At the same time she will earn substantial support in Tamil Nadu by seeming to protect Tamil interests in Sri Lanka." If general elections are held next year, that strategy would undoubtedly yield votes for the Congress(I) in Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, a separate Tamil territory in Sri Lanka would actually encourage political parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which gained popularity in Tamil Nadu after advocating secession in 1964, to lift the separatist banner again.

**"WE HOLD** no illusions about either Jayewardene or Mrs Gandhi," said Sivasithamparam. "The President is adept at setting up violence from one side, and then placating from the other side. If he told Mrs Gandhi that his security forces could control the situation, why did they stand and watch and even participate in the violence? And we have no illusions about India's military intervention to liberate Eelam, either."

In Colombo, Rural Industrial Development Minister S. Thondaman and his aides were huddled in the office of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), discussing strategy. The Indian Tamils' major political wing, the CWC, had joined Jayewardene's UNP Government in 1977 after the Tamil estate workers were promised substantial benefits.

However, promises like equal wages for men and women plantation workers, parity of plantation wages with other industries, and citizenship rights have all been forgotten by the Government. Apart from a wage increase of SL Rs 55 in 1978, the workers have not benefited at all from Thondaman's presence in the Cabinet, and suffered violence and displacement in ethnic riots in 1977, 1981 and this year.

"Now it is a question of survival for the Indian Tamils," says Thondaman. "There is pressure on me to resign. Why should I? Today a statement from me as a minister carries more clout than from outside. When India signed repatriation agreements with Sri Lanka in 1964 and 1974, the Indian Tamils' leaders were never consulted. India is also morally responsible for the safety and security of the Tamils. If this government cannot



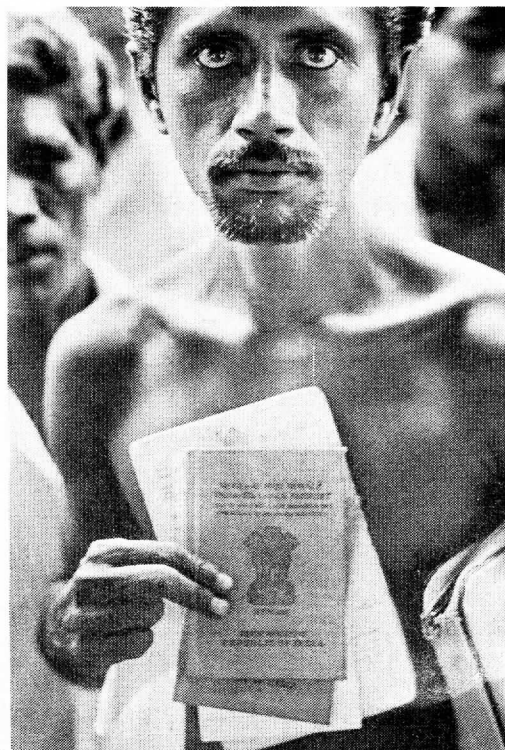
Sivasithamparam (left) and Thondaman: groping for advantage

ensure our safety, we will ask the stateless Tamils to go back to India."

Adds P. Devaraj, director of the Congress Labour Foundation: "We have to work within the existing political framework, unlike the Jaffna Tamils of the north. We thought that by participation we could fight extremist elements in the Government. But this time's violence has wiped everything out."

**Grim Future:** The future looked extremely grim for the Indian Tamils, and more than three weeks after the orgy of violence first ripped through the island, at least 32 estate workers were killed in fresh attacks by Sinhala mobs in Badulla in the south-eastern highlands. But extreme Sinhala Buddhist sentiment was as intractable as ever, and the Venerable Madihe Pannaseeha Maha Nayaka Thero summed up the feelings of the clergy at the Bhikkhu Training Centre at Maharagama outside Colombo.

The chief priest of the Vajirarama Temple and one of the island's most militant  
**A Tamil displays an India-Sri Lanka passport escaping the hate**



monks, Pannaseeha alleges that as many as 261 Buddhist shrines and monasteries in the island's north and east have been destroyed by the Tamils. "The British gave all facilities of jobs and education to the Tamils and set people against each other," he points out. "This was the price we paid for allowing Tamil invaders from south India to stay back because of our hospitality. We allowed the Tamils to stay anywhere in the island, even to intermarry. In 1977 there were over one lakh Tamils in Colombo, but only a few thousand Sinhala soldiers in the north."

Pannaseeha insists that Buddhism has made the Sinhala people extremely tolerant. "Ever since 1977 the Tamils have been scheming to divide the island. Jayewardene gave them many concessions in the 1978 Constitution. We have lost too much ground. There are 50 million Tamils in south India. Does the Indian Government accept Tamil for government work? Here you find Tamil even in postage stamps," he says emphatically.

Bhikkhu Ampitiye Sri Rahula, director of the training centres, is equally indignant. "We bore all this for six years," he says, "but it came to a boil. Doesn't India have similar problems in Punjab, Assam and Kashmir? Doesn't Britain have Northern Ireland? Buddhism teaches about action and reaction. We won't even have standing space if the Tamils get their Eelam. Amirthalingam has even said that the Tamils should skin Sinhala and make shoes for themselves."

**Ironie Contrast:** Such blinding prejudice contrasts jarringly with the seated, serenely smiling statues of the Buddha that dot the island. The tragedy is illustrated by the story of Inspector T.I.B. Bastianpillai, a Tamil policeman who served his government loyally. In April 1978 Bastianpillai and two other Tamil policemen were killed in an ambush led by 'Lieutenant' Chelvanayagam when they tried to raid a Tiger training camp in the northern jungles.

Five years later the same guerrilla led an ambush that took 13 Sinhala soldiers' lives in Jaffna, setting off the unprecedented chain reaction of ethnic violence that brought Sri Lanka to its knees last month. On July 29, Bastianpillai's home in Colombo's Dehiwela area was destroyed by a Sinhala mob that looted everything in sight. In the madness that gripped the island, destroying lives and property, Sinhala and Tamil could no longer be friends, only implacable enemies on either side of the ethnic line.

In the weeks to come, India will be faced with the ticklish problem of the stateless Indian Tamils, most of whom now no longer believe they can live on in Sri Lanka. Last week Indian High Commissioner S.J.S. Chhatwal's residence in Colombo was besieged by destitute Indian Tamils who lacked Indian citizenship but wanted to flee to what they saw as their only haven, and Chhatwal was forced to ask for security

forces to remove the demonstrators to a camp.

The TULF on its part appeared to be veering towards a negotiated federation of Tamil and Sinhala areas in the island, but the Tigers in the north were unwilling to accept any solution short of separation. If the TULF eventually signs an agreement with Jayewardene, it might be made the target for reprisals by the Tigers.

Jayewardene himself may face a revolt from within his ranks if he is seen to be giving in to Tamil demands. With India unwilling to step in to effect a Cyprus-like division of the island, the alternative would then be a protracted and brutal civil war, an eventuality that would forever wrench serendipity from the lexicon.

—CHAITANYA KALBAG  
in Colombo

## TAMIL NADU

# Shifting Loyalties



THE EFFECTS of the Sri Lanka violence on Tamil Nadu may be more far-reaching than was initially foreseen. Galvanised by the wave of spontaneous indignation that swept through the state, Tamil Nadu's political leaders lost no time in getting the most political mileage they could out of the event with the result that a virtually total realignment of political forces has taken place. It has precipitated the Congress(I)'s final break with the DMK and pushed it closer to the ruling AIADMK led by Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran.

The event that captured the public mind the most was the 175-km trek from Madurai to Rameshwaram of 700-odd marchers led by Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress (TNKC) President P. Nedumaran. They planned to cross over to Talaimannar in Sri Lanka by country boats and catamarans. Nedumaran had said at the start: "We want to reach Sri Lanka and lend a hand to our Tamil brethren there." Thanjavur Ramamurthy, TNKC vice-president said militantly: "What if all the boats have been removed from the shore? We will swim across. Even the sprawling waters of the sea cannot contain our feelings of righteous rage."

**Anti-climax:** However, the end was a bit of an anti-climax. By the time the marchers got to Rameswaram, all the boats had disappeared. Nedumaran and another marcher were literally pushed into a leaking boat by their followers and shoved out into the waters. Somehow the boat, with the two leaders clinging to supports for dear life, made it to a launch anchored a furlong from the shore and the two quickly clambered to safety. Later, of course, Nedumaran claimed that he had been arrested. But District Collector M.S. Srinivasan clarified that nothing of the kind had occurred.

Eye-catching as Nedumaran's gambit

was, the political jockeying in the state had deeper significance. The three-and-a-half-year-old alliance between the Congress(I) and the DMK finally snapped when the DMK party President, M. Karunanidhi, launched a scathing attack on the Centre for its handling of the Sri Lankan situation. The DMK had succeeded in shifting the focus from Sinhala oppression to the inaction of the Central and state governments, with Karunanidhi demanding the use of Indian troops.

Meanwhile, the ruling AIADMK party has been trying to shrug off rather than openly decry the anti-Centre and anti-state agitations of the DMK. Voicing his opinion, Chief



MGR (left) and Karunanidhi: making political hay

Minister Ramachandran said: "Karunanidhi's strong advocacy of a separate Tamil Eelam is his personal opinion. Various expressions of sympathy regarding Sri Lanka Tamils are just expressions of sympathy and they should not be taken very seriously as if they are based on principles and logic." MGR's stand on the issue has been largely responsible for further improving relations between his party and the Congress(I).

The recent Rajya Sabha poll from Tamil Nadu reinforced the Congress(I)'s view that it would be better off with the AIADMK, when G. K. Moopanar was elected with the support of their legislators. The split between the Congress(I) and the DMK had been in the making since the former decided to contest the Tirupattur Lok Sabha by-election in 1981 on its own.

Whether MGR agrees with Mrs Gandhi's approach fully or not, the only other alternative would have been to take an anti-Centre stand and match Karunanidhi's often shrill and hysterical stance. The drift towards an

alliance seemed to be his only option under the circumstances. Concluding his statement on Karunanidhi's stance, MGR said: "I myself do not know what is the right manner at the right time as regards Sri Lanka." The joint stand taken by the Congress(I) and the AIADMK in adopting a pro-Tamil stand in Sri Lanka and simultaneously following Mrs Gandhi seems to have paid off after the Centre's handling of the issue. Mrs Gandhi's success in getting Sri Lanka to accept India's "good offices" to resolve the Tamil problem in that country represents for both parties a major diplomatic coup.

**High Stakes:** Karunanidhi's desire to appear as the supreme defender of the Sri Lankan Tamil cause made him stake a great deal on adopting a hardline approach. The president of Tamil Nadu's Congress(I), M. Palaniyandi, accused Karunanidhi of indulging in stunts and political gimmicks. Talking to INDIA TODAY, he said: "Though the genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka is a fact, Karunanidhi is guilty of unleashing popular passions for narrow political gains." Commenting on the demand to send Indian troops to Sri Lanka, he added: "It would have been neither possible nor fair on the part of the Indian Government to do that." Ram Jethmalani, vice-president of the BJP, also came out strongly against the DMK president. He said: "Irresponsible talk of invasion by India has diverted attention from the real crime and enabled the Sri Lanka Government to pretend that it was a political victim of some kind of aggression."

The DMK on the other hand firmly believes that it has been instrumental in making Mrs Gandhi assume a sterner posture towards Sri Lanka. Karunanidhi claimed: "We made the prime minister at last use the word 'genocide' to describe the happenings in the island republic." He also dismissed accusations of having indulged in political stunts: "When I demand that Indian troops be sent to Sri Lanka, I don't mean that troops should be physically sent across. Mere threat of invasion, dangling of the big stick by India will help in containing Sinhala militancy." But while the debate continues it is obvious that the Sri Lankan crisis has triggered off much more than ethnic indignation in the state.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI