

SRI LANKA

# The Tamil Tragedy



THE 35-km ride from Katunayake International Airport into Colombo in a slow Mitsubishi coach driven by a nervous Sinhala is enveloped in silence. Almost every Indian visitor is heading for the Lanka Oberoi, or the Galle Face, or the Ceylon Intercontinental—hotels that have escaped the attention of mobs in search of hiding Tamils. Suddenly the colour of a visitor's skin is crucial—if it is dark, and he looks nervous, he is liable to be mistaken for a Tamil, and Tamils venturing out of doors in Colombo are asking to be lynched.

Sri Lanka's capital city for most of last fortnight looked like it had been taken by a conquering army. Street after street lay empty to the gaze, although the dawn-to-dusk curfew had been lifted, and small, watchful groups of Sinhalas dotted the sidewalks, providing flesh-and-blood counterpoints to the hundreds of burnt-out shops and factories and homes that lined the once bustling markets and roads. The arson was professional—charred shells fallen in on themselves, with blackened signboards announcing Tamil ownership hanging askew, here and there a liquor shop with hundreds of broken bottles littering the floor, or a

jewellery mart with the showcases battered in and the gold and gems carefully removed before the torching. Fifty yards from the Indian High Commission, right next door to the police headquarters, a stone's throw from the presidential palace, stood a huge block, blackened and devastated. "The shops in this block had heavy grill doors," recalled an eyewitness, "so an army truck was used as a battering ram to break through them, and then the soldiers sprang in with Sinhala battle cries to claim the lion's share of the loot."

**Violent Orgy:** That burnt out hulk was only one of the scores of landmarks of violence—shells of destroyed buildings, wrecks of cars and, above all, the scars in the minds of people—that remained from Sri Lanka's week-long orgy of violence that erupted with lightning speed at the end of last month and left in its wake not only a nation embittered and embattled, divided perhaps irretrievably along ethnic lines, but a relatively prosperous economy in ruin, Indo-Sri Lankan ties strained close to breaking point and a country at war with itself.

One-fourth of Colombo's population is Tamil, and by the first week of August, three-fifths of the Tamils, 90,000 in all, had

crowded in terrified disarray into 15 refugee camps, euphemistically called 'care and welfare centres', fleeing from the marauding Sinhalas. Almost every refugee had escaped with just the clothes on his or her back, and for days on end the women sat surrounded by their squealing infants, eyes glazed unable to comprehend the catastrophe that had sliced their lives in half.

The Sri Lankan press was censored, and so was the foreign press corps, and foreign correspondents were granted curfew passes that restricted their movement between their hotels and the office in the Fort area of the Director of Information where Don John Francis Douglas Liyanage, a brisk, balding bureaucrat and secretary to Information Minister Ananda Tissa de Alwis, presided over daily press briefings. Liyanage's daily message of increasingly rosy pictures of a "normalising" situation contrasted too sharply with the reality of Colombo, a city like a pressure cooker with the lid on; of streets pocked with gutted buildings and sprinkled with long lines of people queueing up during non-curfew hours to buy a few eggs, or some rice or even cigarettes.

**Frightened City:** In the short space of a few vicious hours of bloodletting it had become a city thickening with anger and fear, the Tamils expecting a knife in the back

Troops patrolling Colombo streets



at every step, or the Sinhalese freely giving way to a bubbling rage. The most dangerous of all misconceptions abroad that frenzied week was that every Indian is a Tamil, and that every Tamil is a terrorist.

Tamils in Colombo had benefited vastly from President Junius R. Jayewardene's open economy. They opened thousands of retail food outlets, or small groceries called 'boutiques', or jewellery shops, import-export firms, and there were even a few millionaire tycoons controlling coconut processing, textiles, or construction material.

But that prosperity is now in jeopardy, perhaps forever. The tragedy was that most of the Tamils in Colombo did not want a separate nation, Eelam, which is the cry of the Tamils in the northern districts centred in Jaffna. Indeed, the majority of the victims of the latest violence were the so called Indian Tamils: those who migrated to Sri Lanka in the last century to work on the estates, and they have traditionally been uncomfortable with the ethnic Jaffna Tamils who have been there for centuries.

**Discrimination:** According to the 1981 Sri Lanka census, there were 8.25 lakh Indian Tamils (5.5 per cent of the population), and 1.8 million Ceylonese (Jaffna) Tamils (12.6 per cent of the population). The Indian Tamils live mostly in the districts of Colombo, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Ratnapura and Kegalle—traditional tea-garden and Sinhala areas. The Jaffna Tamils are concentrated in

## DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION



Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, and Mullaitivu, along the island's northern and eastern coast.

Successive Sri Lankan governments have discriminated against the Indian Tamils. In 1948 they were disenfranchised, and two agreements signed between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments in 1964 and 1974 provided for the repatriation of 6 lakh Indian Tamils to India, with Sri Lanka granting citizenship to the remaining 3.75 lakh. Until February this year, only 4.05 lakh of the Indian Tamils had been granted Indian citizenship, and over a lakh of these still await repatriation. Sri Lanka has also been tardy with its side of the arrangement and owes 1.96 lakh citizenships.

The Jaffna Tamils, however, have historically been a distinct entity, and even under the Portuguese and the Dutch the Tamil kingdoms in the north were separate and independent. The British brought the two communities together for the first time in order to facilitate administration, but since independence in 1948, there have been outbreaks of Sinhala rage against the Tamils in 1956, 1958, and then four times so far in Jayewardene's regime. In recent years, the Tamil desire for a separate nation has crystallised into armed revolt from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a guerrilla band consisting of not more than 200 armed youths. The Jaffna Tamils feel they are second-class citizens in Sri Lanka, and echo their late leader S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, who said in 1975: "Our basic mistake was not to ask for independence when the British left."

A ravaged Colombo hotel





## VIOLENCE

# Web Of Hate

**T**HE KILLINGS and looting and arson in Colombo began on July 24, in the late evening, after the bodies of the 13 soldiers killed in an ambush the previous day at Thinnaveli in Jaffna in the far north had been brought to the capital. When President J.R. Jayewardene went to the capital's Kanatte General Cemetery to see the bodies he was turned back by a hostile group of soldiers who stoned his car. Then the madness exploded, tearing through the heavily Tamil-populated suburb of Borella, in the city's east, and the mobs poured down Thimbrigasyaya Road, setting upon every unwary Tamil, looting and pillaging.

On Monday July 25, and then Tuesday, the fires spread to the Tamil areas of Wellawatta, Dehiwala, Bambalapitiya, and Kollupitiya. Not a single Tamil house in Wellawatta was left standing, and mirrored in the eyes of the thousands of refugees is the memory of the wolf-packs that went marauding through the streets, while the police and the army stood by, cheering them on, even on occasion joining in.

**Genesis:** The madness was long in the making. Ever since the referendum in December 1982, which perpetuated the steamroller majority enjoyed by Jayewardene's United National Party (UNP) in Parliament, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam stepped up their sporadic attacks on the security forces, killing at least 40 until early July.

The Government retaliated in equal measure, clamping military rule and a state of emergency on Jaffna, Vavuniya and Mannar districts, using the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with impunity. On June 3 this year came the most draconian measure—Emergency Regulation 15a, which allows the security forces to bury or cremate the bodies of people shot by them without revealing their identities or carrying out inquests.

It was a measure that provoked New Delhi to sit up and take notice. On July 20, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in New Delhi, B.P. Tillekeratne, was summoned to the External Affairs Ministry and told that the Government of India viewed the latest Emergency Regulation, and attacks on Indians, with concern. Tillekeratne sent back an angry cable to Colombo, and the Government, and its servile press, launched a hate campaign, calling the Indian move an interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs.

**Growing Tension:** The same day the

army banned all bicycle traffic in Jaffna—for the Tigers are known to pedal up to an unsuspecting soldier, blow his head off, and make off with his weapon—allowing cyclists to travel only with special permits. Two days later Parliament passed an urgent bill to force Tamil refugees in Vavuniya and Trincomalee, plantation labour that had fled previous violence in the Kandyan tea estates, to return to work.

In late June the Tigers had carried out one of their most daring raids at Kankesanturai, the harbour at the tip of the Jaffna peninsula, overcoming an army platoon guarding a government cement factory and making off with army

horrendous killings took place on July 25 and 27 in Colombo's Welikada Prison, when Sinhala prisoners broke into the cells of 'terrorist' Tamil inmates and mercilessly slaughtered 53 of them. Twenty-eight Tamil prisoners were shifted from Welikada's Wing C3 to the youthful offenders' section after 35 of their fellow prisoners were killed on July 25, but two days later the Sinhala prisoners broke into that section too, overpowering prison guards who did not seem too anxious to stave them off and killed 18 more.

Among those killed was Dr Somasunderam Rajasunderam, secretary of the Gandhiam Movement that had been



Crowds in front of a wrecked building in Colombo: an uncontrolled frenzy

uniforms, a battered typewriter, and a cache of dynamite.

In mid-July, news came through that the army had gone on the rampage in Jaffna, even raping some Tamil women, two of whom later committed suicide, all of whom were inmates in a Jaffna hostel.

The ambush was the flash-point that set Sri Lanka aflame. Thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers were killed when their convoy was attacked with the stolen dynamite and gunfire near Thinnaveli, in Jaffna district, on July 23, and when their bodies were brought to Colombo the following day, Sinhala anger exploded in a 72-hour orgy of killing and pillage.

**Systematic Killings:** The most

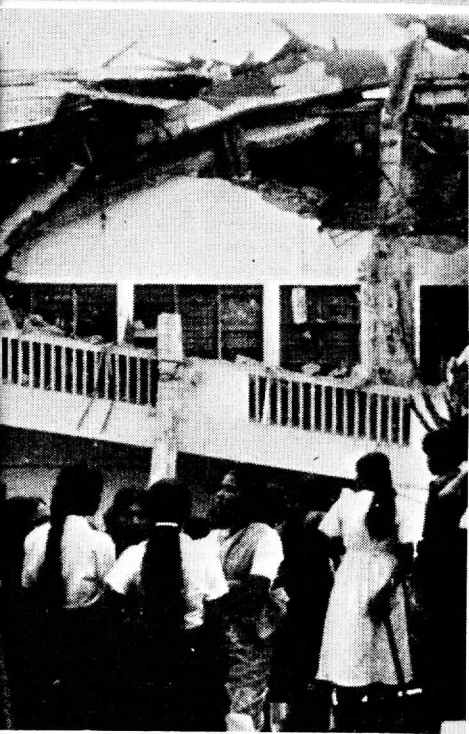
rehabilitating Indian Tamil refugees from the plantations in Vavuniya and Trincomalee. Rajasunderam had already spent over three months in army custody, undergoing torture in various camps.

Officially, the Sri Lanka Government has admitted that 267 Tamils were killed in mob violence until August 2, that there were over 1,500 cases of arson, nearly 100 cases of looting, and 300 cases of 'mischief', that at least 1,000 looters had been arrested, and a few even shot dead. But censorship saw to it that figures of those killed by the security forces were withheld; in Jaffna alone the army reportedly killed more than 80 Tamils in retaliation. The Tamils believe

that well over 1,000 were killed.

"I fled with my lungi, and with no shirt on, into a camp on July 25," says a prosperous Tamil businessman in Colombo who was 'close' to the UNP and receiving information about violence in other towns. "The first night I wrapped my shoes in a newspaper and used them as a pillow. For two days the camp inmates spent all their time hunting for a glass of drinking water."

**Organised Terror:** In Kandy, Nuwara Eliya's market area, and Matale, every Tamil house and shop was systematically looted and burnt. All highway traffic was stopped by Sinhala gangs to check for Tamils. Every-



of destruction

where, eyewitnesses said, the Tamils had stayed at home when curfew was clamped down—and the mobs had had an open field during curfew, when the maximum violence occurred. Trincomalee was ravaged twice by rebellious Navy personnel who broke barracks.

Overnight, the physical division of Sri Lanka that the militant Tamils of the north had been clamouring for seemed to have occurred in people's minds. Everybody was distrustful of everybody else, and even the Tamils in the refugee camps refused to divulge their names. Said a young doctor in the Kathiresan Hall camp at Wellawatta: "All I want is to get out alive."

**Inadequate Sops:** When elected by a landslide margin in 1977, Jayewardene held out a few sops to the Tamils. These included a provision in the new Constitution, which came into effect in September 1978, whereby Tamil joined Sinhala as a national language, although Sinhala continued to be the sole official language; the setting up of District Development Councils (DDC) which the president promised would lead to devolution of power; and a new admissions policy for universities, which has led to a rise in Tamil admissions, in contrast with the discriminatory policy followed by Mrs Bandaranaike's government.

But such measures did not evoke satisfaction among the Tamils. The DDC's were given few powers, and most district ministers, even in the Tamil stronghold of Jaffna, were Sinhala. The use of Sinhala as the official language posed tremendous problems for the Tamils, whose schools rarely taught the Sinhala language. And since university admissions were based in large part on the basis of districts—only six of the country's 24 districts having a Tamil majority—Sinhala students once again enjoyed an advantage over their Tamil counterparts.

The Jayewardene Government's Tamil slate is far from clean in other respects. An Amnesty International report released on July 6 details the reign of repression and terror let loose by the security forces in the north and east of the island. Amnesty International points out that the Sri Lankan Prevention of Terrorism Act (1979) is far more draconian than similar acts in South Africa and Britain, allowing for 18 months' detention without trial, arbitrary arrest, and practically unchecked powers of torture and interrogation of suspects.

**Seeking Sanctuary:** After last fortnight's violence, the wealthier Tamils either fled into the sanctuary of luxury hotels or took the first flight out of the country. During the first week of the violence at least 20 Indian High Commission staff with their families had to be placed in expensive hotels—because they had all been staying in the lower-middle-class suburb of Wellawatta, where the rents are low, but where the houses, densely bunched together, made easy targets for the mobs.

The eradication of the Tamils led to another piquant situation—there were no outlets for essential food supplies during non-curfew hours, and while looted video-recorders were selling for 500 Sri Lankan rupees on the pavements the Government desperately asked for help in distributing food.

Most of the makeshift refugee camps were in school buildings or Hindu temple courtyards. Inside the camps, the cowering

Tamils talk in whispers. "The CID is all around us, in plain-clothes," says Dr Ganapathy Raja, at the Vinayakar Kovil camp in Bambalapitiya, "and we have to smuggle ourselves in and out of the camp. We can't even reach outside for help." The sanitation is atrocious in the camps, and by week's end dozens of refugees have come down with acute dysentery—some say even cholera—and an entire wing of the Colombo General Hospital has been cordoned off to house sick refugees.

**T**HE VIOLENCE spread, the inferno engulfed other towns—Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya and Trincomalee—the Government chose to explain it as a "spontaneous Sinhala reaction to atrocities committed by Tamil terrorists". But there was a cold-blooded method to the madness. The mobs were armed with voters' lists, and detailed addresses of every Tamil-owned shop, house, or factory, and their attacks were very precise. There was little honour among the marauders—on the second day the Tamils were set upon by Colombo's Moors, or Muslims, but on the third day the Sinhala mobs turned upon the Muslims too, at Nugegoda in Colombo's south.

At fortnight's end, most government offices in Colombo had lost their substantial Tamil staff. Senior Tamil officials, like the food commissioner of Sri Lanka, the director of Sri Lanka Telecommunication, and officials of the Indo-Sri Lanka Microwave Network had been missing from their homes for weeks.

Also badly hit were three of the island's biggest industrialists—K. Gunaratnam, whose empire included textiles, film distribution, and transportation; A.Y.S. Gnanam, who started life as a street peddler and rose to control a major manufacturing firm St Anthony's Hardwares, and the Syntex and Asian Cotton Mills, and was formerly a member of the Board of Governors of the Free Trade Zone; and Rajamahendran Maharaja, whose group was one of the largest in Sri Lanka, manufacturing cosmetics, trading and distributing imported products, and contracting large chunks of the Mahaweli project programmes. Along with the Hirdaramanis and the Jafferjees, Sindhi and Bohra businessmen who have established strong footholds over the last 50 years, the total loss suffered by these industries was estimated at 2,000 million Sri Lankan rupees (Rs 800 crore)—and their destruction led to the loss of 1.5 lakh jobs.

Most astonishing of all was the manner in which President Jayewardene reacted to the violence. For a leader who does not want his country to break into two, the president was singularly chary of identifying—and



TAMIL NADU

## Backlash

**I**NEVITABLY, the fall-out from the anti-Tamil carnage in Sri Lanka settled on Tamil Nadu where reactions ranged from the frenzied to the farcical. Life in the state was almost totally paralysed as a bewildering succession of strikes, road and 'rail roko' agitations, sporadic incidents of violence and a plethora of processions erupted in the wake of the Sri Lankan crisis.

The week-long agitation was capped last week by the resignations from the state Assembly of DMK President M. Karunanidhi and K. Anbazhagan, deputy leader of the DMK in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, in protest against the Centre's ineffectiveness in dealing with the Tamil situation in Sri Lanka. Though in general the state-wide protests and burning of Jayewardene's effigies were spontaneous actions, it was patently clear that the grief-stricken state's political bosses were bent on milking the issue for political gain. Karunanidhi lost no time in demanding a half-day bandh the day after the Sri Lankan riots erupted and issued an appeal to the prime minister to "send troops to Sri Lanka to save the lives of Tamils".

Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran avoided his usual dramatics and after a four-hour Cabinet meeting declared a week-long mourning period in the state and also issued a call for a state-wide bandh. Not only was the bandh supported by all the political parties but by the Centre as well, a clear corollary to the new-found romance between the Congress(I) and the AIADMK. All central offices and undertakings were shut down and train services to and from the state suspended for the day.

**Horror Stories:** The emotional and angry reactions were undoubtedly fuelled by the tales of horror related by Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils who fled the island state in the wake of the violence. M.L. Vasanthakumari, Carnatic musician who was in Colombo on a concert tour at the invitation of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), returned to Madras visibly shattered by the experience. "My escape from Colombo was providential," she said. "We were staying with an industrialist friend and on July 25, we received a call from the SLBC asking us to leave immediately. We had barely left the house when it was set on fire by a Sinhalese mob. After that we huddled ter-

rified in a hotel room for four days before we were able to board a Madras flight. It was a horrible experience."

A 28-year-old systems analyst, a Sri Lankan Tamil who wishes to remain unidentified, had an even ghastlier experience to relate: "That morning, we were having a meeting in the office when we heard the sounds of mob fury. We went out onto the balcony and what we witnessed was systematic looting and arson by a merciless mob. The leader had a voters' list with him to identify Tamil houses. They would mark a Tamil house, forcibly enter, smash the furniture and window panes, drag the inmates out and kill them. Another passing mob would stop cars, extort petrol and set fire to what was left of the houses. I rushed home and told my



Tamil family at Trivandrum airport

parents we must leave. Hardly had I said that when we heard the next house being ransacked. We grabbed our passports and a change of clothes and rushed out. A Sinhalese swung at me with a spear. Luckily, a Sinhalese shopkeeper nearby stopped him by telling him we spoke Sinhalese and had done a lot of social work locally. It was like being born again when we got out of the country."

**Political Moves:** All this has only spurred opposition political leaders to whip up popular communal and cultural

frenzy. Kamaraj Congress President P. Nedumaran has already set off with a huge following on a padayatra from Madurai to Rameshwaram with the intention of crossing over to Talaimannar by country boats. The Dravida Kazhagam has announced a protest march against what it calls the Centre's indifference to the Tamilian ordeals in Sri Lanka while the DMK has announced a programme to burn copies of the Sri Lanka bill banning political parties which advocate separatism.

The *piece de resistance*, however, is the resignation of the chief whip of the Government in the state Legislative Council, E.R. Janarthanam "to work for the cause of Tamils in Sri Lanka". Janarthanam has been put in charge of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) office which opened in Madras last week. Political observers interpret these moves as an attempt by the Opposition to force MGR's hands and pressurise him, on moral grounds, to resign from the chief ministership.

**Close Relations:** The Tamils in Tamil Nadu have a close affinity with their counterparts in Sri Lanka. Like the Gujaratis who went to East Africa and the Punjabis who went to Britain and Canada during the days of the British Empire, most of the Tamils in Sri Lanka have close relations in India. Tamil films, music, periodicals and Kanjeevaram saris keep the close relationship going between the Tamils living in two sovereign countries, separated by the narrow Palk Straits. Very often, marriages take place across the sea and a Sri Lanka Tamil always comes to Tamil Nadu for shopping whenever there is a wedding in the house.

In other words, it is as if members of the same family are living not far from each other, separated by the narrow strait. Which is why the Tamils in Tamil Nadu get enraged when their brethren are subjected to periodic repression in the island. This is also why racial violence in Sri Lanka becomes a major political issue in Tamil Nadu where the AIADMK and DMK vie with one another in resorting to populist gimmicks.

MGR will have to take a definite stand if the anti-Tamil violence in Sri Lanka erupts once again—a prospect that is frighteningly real. As the wife of a national daily correspondent based in Colombo predicted grimly after she managed to escape to Madras with her two children, "The ghost of food riots are looming larger every day. The worst is yet to come."

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

condemning—the very forces that were pushing the Tamils into a corner and the country into disintegration. Almost as though he were a Nero fiddling while his Rome burnt, Jayewardene went on the air only four days after the carnage exploded with a speech unique in its rationalisation of lumpen frenzy.

With not a word of sympathy for the terrorised Tamils, who had never before been set upon with such ferocity in the Sinhala heartland, the president said that “the time has come to accede to the clamour and the national respect of the Sinhala people” by outlawing the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the Tamils’ only legitimate political party in Parliament and the largest opposition group with 16 MP’s in a house of 168 where the ruling UNP has 139 seats.

In fact, only after the violence had abated by August 8 did Jayewardene admit to western correspondents that the news of army atrocities in Jaffna two weeks before the ambush and killing of 13 soldiers on July 23 had been “deliberately” withheld from him. “Discipline is a problem in the army,” admitted Jayewardene blandly.

At one stroke, instead of firmly taking things in hand, Jayewardene had chosen the path of appeasing Sinhala sentiment. “I cannot see, and my government cannot see,” he said, “any other way by which we can appease the natural desire and request of the Sinhala people.”

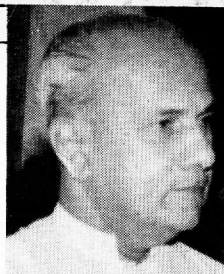
**Harsh Measures:** After appeasement came the search for a “hidden hand”. On July 30 the Government banned three left parties—the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—which had, under Rohan Wijeweera’s leadership, led an insurrection against prime minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike’s government in 1971—the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), and the Communist Party (Moscow). Twenty of their leaders were arrested over the following days, but Wijeweera and NSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara went into hiding.

Simultaneously, government ministers, and the press, raised the spectre of a communist-inspired plot to destroy Jayewardene’s open economy and to divide the country. Despite censorship, the *Sun*, a virulent Sinhala paper, demanded the closure of the Soviet and East German embassies. By fortnight’s end, however, allegations that the Soviet Union was fomenting trouble, and that a number of Soviet diplomats were about to be expelled, had died down.

Ironically, the JVP’s Wijeweera had been released from imprisonment by Jayewardene in October 1977, and JVP cadres, the vanguard of the ‘new’ left, had even been cosying up to the UNP Government. All three banned parties in any case had been roundly rejected by the electorate in the 1977 elec-

tions, and the Communist Party’s sole MP, Sarath Muttettuwegama, was unseated by the Supreme Court on July 22 after an election petition filed against him was upheld.

**Hardline Threat:** None of these manoeuvres, which later events have proved to be red herrings, deflected from the unpalatable fact that the president was facing a strong threat from hardliners within his government, and that the violence had been encouraged by these elements as a means of scaring the Tamils. What Jayewardene did not bargain for was a combination of jumpy and rebellious troops and a shadowy group of Sinhala Buddhist fanatics, led by militant bhikkhus (monks) of the Eksath Bhikkhu



Mathew: key role

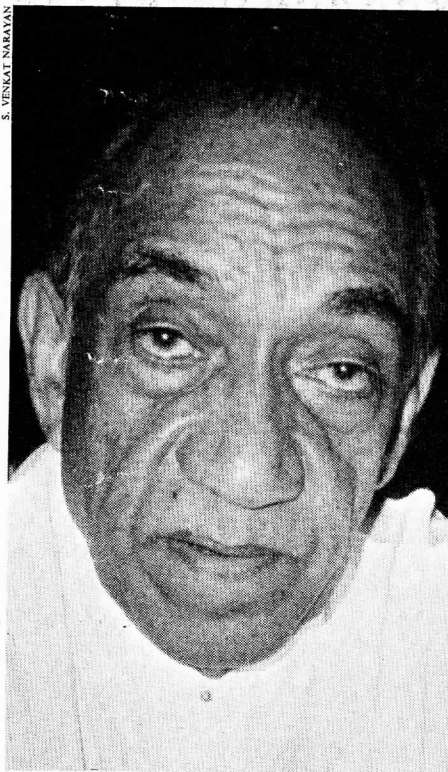
Minister Cyril Mathew, a militant Buddhist zealot, UNP Chairman N.G.P. Panditharatne, minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, who controls a large youth cadre, and UNP Secretary Harsha Abeywardena;

► The prime minister’s cabal, led by Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. Although Premadasa belongs to the lowly Hinna caste, his acumen and manoeuvrability have made him a frontrunner in the succession sweepstakes;

► The Gamini Dissanayake faction, led by the young minister for lands, land development and the Mahaweli Project. Dissanayake has emerged as Jayewardene’s protégé after the death of heir-apparent and tycoon Upali Wijewardene in an air crash earlier this year;

► The Ananda Tissa de Alwis faction, led by the unprepossessing information minister. De Alwis may be a stopgap arrangement if a leadership vacuum arises after Jayewardene.

Sources say that Industries Minister Mathew, who also controls the powerful labour union Jathika Sevaka Sanghamaya, was directly responsible for pinpointing Tamil-owned shops and factories to be destroyed. In Parliament on August 4, during the debate on the Sixth Amendment to the Sri Lanka Constitution, which has effectively banned the TULF on the grounds that it advocates separatism, Mathew defended the violence by saying: “The Sinhala were frustrated for years, they were discriminated (against). If the Sinhala is the majority race, why can’t they be the majority?” Mathew is also the leader of the island’s backward Vahumpura community, which comprises over a third of the population and has been at a disadvantage traditionally *vis-à-vis* the Tamils in jobs and business.



Jayewardene: unsatisfactory measures

Peramuna, which first came into prominence in 1956.

Currently, Jayewardene, who is 76, is facing sustained opposition from different power groups in the Government, all jockeying for the first position in the race to take the president’s place. The groups:

► The security group, with close links with the armed forces and staunchly anti-Tamil, led by Cabinet Secretary G.V.P. Samarasinghe, Presidential Secretary W.M.P. Medikdiwela, and Defence Secretaries Colonel C.A. Dharmapala and General S. Attygalle;

► The party caucus, led by Industry

**M**OST disturbing of all, however, was the carefully floated rumour that India’s armed forces were about to invade Sri Lanka, possibly to bring off a Cyprus-like division of the island. In what was obviously an orchestrated chorus in the censored press, the Sinhala were swamped by news of the angry and emotional reaction to the carnage in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) vied with each other—even resorting to an all-state bandh on August 2—to protest against the genocide let loose against the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Most Sinhala Sri Lankans, and even many Tamils, believe that India is a safe haven for Tiger guerrillas on the run from



## REGIONAL SECURITY

# The Indian Doctrine

**T**HE CARNAGE in Sri Lanka has spawned an Indian doctrine of regional security. The doctrine has received prompt implicit or explicit approval of the regional as well as international communities. It can be explained in the following terms: India has no intention of intervening in internal conflicts of a South Asian country and it strongly opposes intervention by any country in the internal affairs of any other. India will not tolerate external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian implication. No South Asian government must therefore ask for external military assistance with an anti-Indian bias from any country.

If a South Asian country genuinely needs external help to deal with a serious internal conflict situation or with an intolerable threat to a government legitimately established, it should ask help from a number of neighbouring countries including India. The exclusion of India from such a contingency will be considered to be an anti-Indian move on the part of the Government concerned.

**Power Confirmed:** This regional security doctrine reflects, on the one hand, the reality of India's preponderant power position in the South Asian region and, on the other, the South Asian consensus that there should be no interference by any country in the internal affairs of any other. It goes two significant steps further. First, it asserts India's right to be included in any regional assistance sought by a South Asian country to deal with a serious internal conflict situation. Secondly, it stresses that assistance in such contingencies should be regional rather than by individual countries.

An important aspect of the Indian regional security doctrine is that it emerged from a series of conversations between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and leaders of the Opposition. It is therefore cushioned on a national consensus.

In the early days of the massacre of Tamils in Sri Lanka, President Jaye-

wardene faced a rebellion in certain sections in Sri Lanka's miniscule army. He also feared a coup by right-wing elements in the army. Faced with the two threats, Jayewardene tried to placate the extremist elements among the Sinhals as well as in the Sri Lanka army by allowing some journalists to write about possible Indian military intervention.

At the same time, he made secret diplomatic soundings of four governments, those of the United States, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh, for military assistance in the event of a serious break-

India. He said: "We are looking into all aspects of these reports and are also in touch with several governments including those specified in the press reports to emphasise the nature of Indian concern at the existing situation in Sri Lanka and at the possible future course of developments including any foreign involvement of this kind in the region."

A flurry of diplomatic activity ensued in the Indian foreign office. The four governments and others were immediately told that while India was inevitably deeply concerned with developments in Sri Lanka, it had absolutely no intention of intervening. At the same time, India would not tolerate intervention by any other country within or

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



H.W. Jayewardene and Mrs Gandhi in New Delhi: concerned but detached

down of the law and order situation in Sri Lanka. The two moves got meshed together in newspapers to create an impression that Jayewardene was seeking military assistance from the four countries to cope with a possible military intervention by India.

**Diplomatic Moves:** Facing an excited and angry Parliament in New Delhi on August 1, Minister for External Affairs P.V. Narasimha Rao announced that there was "substance" in the press reports that Sri Lanka had sought military help from the four countries even though the Sri Lankan Government had stoutly denied the reports. Rao made it clear that the "foreign power" against whom military help had been sought was

outside the region. It was made clear by implication that intervention by a third power might compel India to intervene.

What has caused considerable satisfaction in New Delhi is that the Indian position, which amounts to an Indian regional security doctrine, was immediately accepted, albeit tacitly, by all concerned. The foreign ministers of Pakistan and Bangladesh were in Delhi when Narasimha Rao made his pronouncements in the Lok Sabha. In informal conversations with the Indian foreign minister, the two foreign ministers made it clear that even if their governments received any request for military help from Sri Lanka they had no desire to get involved in the Sinhala-Tamil conflict.

US Chargé d'Affaires Marion Creekmore assured the Indian foreign office that no request for help had been received from Sri Lanka by the US Government and that Washington did not wish to get involved in the Sri Lankan conflict. Similar assurances were also forthcoming from Britain.

**Adverse Reaction:** Public opinion in Bangladesh and Pakistan reacted adversely to the killing of Tamils in Sri Lanka because among the victims were many Muslims. Bangladesh Martial Law Administrator Lt-General H.M. Ershad cancelled his scheduled state visit to Colombo. In a cable to Jayewardene from the Maldives, Ershad protested the killing of Tamil Muslims in Sri Lanka and cited this as the reason for the cancellation of his visit. No such protest came from the Pakistan Government.

However, the killing of Tamil Muslims is not the only reason why Pakistan and Bangladesh have stayed away from the Sri Lankan developments. It is not even the main reason. In the current state of India-Pakistan relations, General Zia-ul-Haq has no intention whatsoever of provoking India and destroying all that has been achieved in the last two years toward normalisation of the relationship. No ruler of Bangladesh can easily contemplate getting involved in an explicitly anti-Indian military involvement in the region.

The Indian regional security doctrine has had a sobering impact not only on the rulers of Sri Lanka but also on the extremist anti-Tamil Sinhala groups as well as the Tamil community. Jayewardene had a long telephone conversation with Mrs Gandhi on August 5 in the course of which he assured her that he had not asked for external military help nor had the intention of doing so. He also sent as personal envoy his brother, H.W. Jayewardene to New Delhi for detailed discussion on how the two countries could cooperate to bring the conflict to an end and to rehabilitate the Tamil victims as quickly as possible. Jayewardene had two separate meetings with Mrs Gandhi and also met Rao and senior Foreign Ministry officials during his crucial visit.

The extremist Sinhala elements realised that an attempt to overthrow the regime in a coup might invite Indian or South Asian intervention. The Tamil community on its own part realised that there would be no Indian intervention on their behalf and they must somehow learn to live with the Sinhala majority in peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

—BHABANI SEN GUPTA



Biased Sri Lankan cartoon: a servile press

the security forces, for the Tamil Nadu coast is only 40 km by sea from Talaimannar. The Madras High Court did not help matters by ordering the release on July 28, on conditional bail, of three Tiger leaders held in prison in Madras, Uma Maheshwaran, Jotheeswaran and Sivanesan. The Tamil Nadu Government added fuel to the fire by not opposing the Tigers' bail application.

The anti-Tamil sentiment in Sri Lanka, therefore, metamorphosed into distinctly anti-Indian feeling as the troubled fortnight drew to an end. On July 31, a pseudonymous columnist, Migara, wrote in Colombo's *Sun* that Jayewardene feared imminent attack by India, and that Sri Lanka would seek external assistance if the attack came.

When UPI Correspondent Stewart Slavin was expelled from the country on August 2 for reporting that Sri Lanka had asked for military assistance from the United States, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Government merely cited his violation of censorship rules, but only four days later officially denied his report, after the Lok Sabha had been agitated by the report. External Affairs Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao said the Government of India felt there was substance in it, and the External Affairs Ministry politely warned foreign missions in New Delhi that any armed interference in Sri Lanka would be considered as a move hostile towards India.

**Indian Concern:** When similar Sinhala violence against the Tamils was unleashed in August 1981—and in Jayewardene's regime it has exploded with clockwork precision every two years since 1977—an Indian tourist was killed and the president telephonically apologised to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This time, at least 2,500 Indian citizens, most of them shoestring-budget tourists from Tamil Nadu journeying to Kataragama, a temple in Sri Lanka's deep

south, were trapped in the violence.

Narasimha Rao was refused permission to visit any camp when he flew to Colombo on July 28. "Rao ostensibly came to express India's concern," says an official of Jayewardene's secretariat, "but he held out a veiled threat to the President that India might be forced to take 'drastic action' if the killings continued. Jayewardene told him to go ahead and carry out the threat."

Nevertheless, on August 7, two days before he sent his brother H.W. Jayewardene to New Delhi to discuss the crisis with Indian leaders, President Jayewardene directly accused India of harbouring and helping Tamil terrorists. "If India decides to invade us," he had told the *Sun*, "we will fight and maybe lose, but with dignity." The message wasn't new, and indicated a deep-rooted anxiety, for last May Jayewardene had told *The Hindu* in a lengthy interview: "Supposing she (India) invades, our principles are not in any way tarnished by India's invasion. Take Sri Lanka and rule it. (You) can't rule 15 million people if they are opposed to it. If I am alive I will carry on the movement against that invasion."

**Telephonic Talks:** The Government of India's response to this phobia was measured, and yet firm. On July 31 Mrs Gandhi told Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, who led an all-party delegation to Delhi, that New Delhi viewed the Sri Lankan crisis as a national problem, and not as one confined to Tamil Nadu. On August 5, Mrs Gandhi spoke to Jayewardene on the telephone, the second time in 10 days, and said that India would not interfere in Sri Lanka's affairs in any way.

"At the same time," the prime minister later told the Lok Sabha, "I pointed out to the president that developments in Sri Lanka affect us also. Sri Lanka and India are the two countries which are directly concerned.





Food queues in Colombo: like a war-torn city

Any extraneous intervention will complicate matters for both our countries."

That was the basis of India's strategic perspectives (*see box*) but it failed to take into account the traditional Sri Lanka insecurity with its northern neighbour which compels Colombo to bristle at times of such crisis. "From here," says a Colombo journalist, "our perception of India is obscured by her bulk. To our north-west looms Tamil Nadu, and to us the Tamils of India or of Sri Lanka are indistinguishable."

Indeed, Sri Lanka Tamil politics have frequently spilled over into Tamil Nadu, and the Tigers, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF) and the TULF all have offices in Madras. Mrs Gandhi is obviously reluctant to lose all support in Tamil Nadu, where Chief Minister Ramachandran has played an off-again on-again game with the Centre in his relations. "There are 55 million Tamils in Tamil Nadu," says a senior official in the Home Ministry, "and if they are agitated about Sri Lanka we cannot ignore their sentiments."

The repercussions in India of the violence were not long in coming. The majority of the victims of violence were Indian Tamils, and at fortnight's end only a third of the refugees, numbering roughly 30,000, had chosen to wait in line to go to Jaffna by ship, air or train. Substantial numbers of Indian Tamils were trying to flee to India. Said a Tamil

businessman, who lost everything he owned: "No place is safe for us. The Indian Tamils feel they will be second-class citizens even in an Eelam ruled by the Jaffna Tamils. We will feel safe only in India."

**I**N JAFFNA, the Tigers were reported to be planning large-scale reprisals against the security forces, only holding themselves in abeyance until all the refugees left the camps in the affected cities. The army had been confined to barracks in the north after it killed at least 100 Tamils in retaliation for the ambush.

The Sri Lankan army has never seen action, and it totals only 14,000, with another 6,000 volunteers. Earlier this year 97 soldiers of the Raja Rata Rifles, a regiment created by Jayewardene, revolted in Jaffna and were sacked. Jayewardene himself has admitted that sections of the army are restive and rebellious.

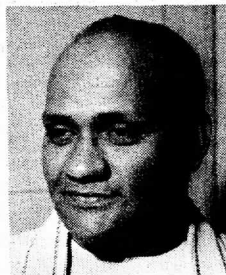
**New Course:** On August 7, the day after Parliament passed the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, outlawing parties that advocated separatism, the 16-member TULF parliamentary group met in Vavuniya to decide future strategy. The TULF has been riven by internal strife in the recent past, with a vocal section

demanding achievement of a Tamil Eelam by resort to arms. The TULF MP's decided not to take an oath forswearing separatism.

The MP's will automatically lose their seats if they do not attend Parliament for three months. On August 9 the TULF said that it would take to armed resistance to defend itself against a "savage form of state terrorism." At fortnight's end, the TULF issued an appeal to the United Nations to send a peace-keeping force into Sri Lanka.

"The TULF was formed with non-violent objectives," said A. Amirthalingam, the party's secretary and leader of the Opposition in Parliament, "but the people in the north are very disturbed and can no longer live with the Sinhala people. As every refugee ship arrives in Jaffna, the tales of horror grow. India should insist that the Sri Lanka Government restores law and order."

"The TULF could also amend its objective to one of self-determination instead of separation," says another TULF MP, "or we can operate underground. The right of self-determination includes the right to secede, but also to freely determine our political status, which could be like Quebec's in Canada. Our party cannot operate in the present form." "The latest round of vio-



Amirthalingam



Tamil refugees waiting in camps: "No place is safe for us"

lence," says TULF MP Neelan Tiruchelvam, "has put the finishing touch to the eradication of the Tamils. This time the Tamil professional and entrepreneurial class has been destroyed."

**Changing Support:** The Indian Tamils had voted overwhelmingly for Jayewardene in the 1977 elections, and the promises he held out had bought the Ceylon Workers' Congress, led by S. Thondaman, the largest trade union of Indian Tamil plantation workers, into the Government. But today Thondaman and his two Tamil colleagues in the Cabinet are reported to be reconsidering their support if the Tamils continue to be subjected to a campaign of attrition.

The radicalisation of the TULF, and the antagonisation of Jayewardene's Tamil vote banks, are only some of the products of the latest violence. As more and more affected Tamils crowd into the north, there are indications that support for a protracted and armed struggle for separation will snowball, bringing the Tigers the kind of mass support they had so far been lacking. In a matter of days, the Sinhala-Tamil equation has changed permanently, and neither community now believes it can exist alongside the other.

The economic effects of the violence promise to be even worse. Already, Sri Lanka is reeling under an inflation rate of nearly 35 per cent. This year's budget deficit

will amount to 23.4 billion Sri Lankan rupees (Rs 936 crore), and the country has been seeking increasing infusions of foreign aid. Other economic indicators are equally grim—a trade deficit of 21 billion rupees (Rs 840 crore), unemployment currently at a record high of 5 lakh, and a rupee that has been devalued, during the Jayewardene regime's six years, from 7.89 rupees to the dollar in 1977 to 24.20 after the latest devaluation on July 4.

**Unemployment:** Last fortnight's violence threw another estimated 1,50,000 people out of work, the majority of them Sinhala, and resulted in a loss of 3 billion Sri Lankan rupees (Rs 120 crore). Worse, foreign investors will now be wary of stepping into so volatile a situation. Refugee rehabilitation and reconstruction of the destroyed houses and factories will swallow huge chunks of money, and last fortnight Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel issued a desperate appeal to western nations for help.

The Tamils who have already fled Colombo, and those who will leave as soon as they can, will leave a yawning gap in key sectors of the bureaucracy and the trading communities of the cities. The Tamils dominated Sri Lanka's telecommunication service, the railways, and the postal administration, and these crucial services have already suffered grave setbacks because of staff losses.

Most seriously affected is Sri Lanka's image in the international community. Overnight, it has changed from a well administered paradise into a grotesque parody of Third World capriciousness. Condemnation of the killings and arson has been uniform worldwide, but Jayewardene faces his toughest problem in relations with neighbouring India, where attitudes have hardened and lasting distrust sown. What Sri Lanka required most urgently last fortnight was conciliation and statesmanship, but Jayewardene seemed incapable of providing either. Due in no small measure to the vacillation of its leader, the island republic had stepped to the brink of the precipice.

Midway through the violence and terror, Sri Lanka Foreign Minister A.C.S. Hameed took off for Geneva to attend a world conference on racism. That irony symbolised a government that had lost touch with one-fifth of its population, a ruling class that had brutally and callously pushed a minority into a corner from where it could only fight back with every shred of anger and ferocity at its command. Above all, the Government's indifference towards the long-term implications of the forces it had unleashed illustrated the cynical double standards that have taken firm root in Theravada Buddhism's "last citadel"

CHAITANYA KALBAG in Colombo