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In the Name of ‘Peace’: Terror stalks the North-East

“The calm confidence- or ecstasy- of the political leader who sends masses of humanity to their death for the sake of a shining distant future is indeed abominable. Equally abominable is the complacency of those liberals willing to rain terror from the skies while they prate about the virtues of pragmatic gradualism. Repulsive moral certainty is not limited to fanatics, while to refuse to act in clear circumstances where the consequences are apparent can have its own tragic results.” [“Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them” by B.Moore 1972, 27-8]

In this bulletin, we will look at recent developments in the North-East in the context of December’s parliamentary elections that brought the UNP to power, resulting in the present peace process. First, we will look at the not unexpected deterioration of human rights in the North-East, the mounting tragedy of child soldiers and the growing, but unspoken, problem of refugees amidst expectations of peace. In presenting the public with a superficial façade of restoring normality, the unseen developments that are in reality strangling life in the North-East are being muffled. We will also trace the LTTE’s attempts at projecting itself politically and assess the extent of its success in doing so. We end with a note of concern about the peace process.

1. The LTTE’s decisive victory

While killings by the LTTE are at present finely targetted to kill or paralyse any person or group showing signs of independence and instill fear, it has found newer ways of consolidating and expanding gains made through terror. A phenomenon that has gathered momentum in recent times is the move by the LTTE to bring all Tamil political parties, NGOs, journalists and even independent Christian churches under umbrella organizations amenable to its control.

In doing this, the LTTE has cornered many who are inherently opposed to their politics into paying lip service to their totalitarian claims. At the level of political parties this resulted in the formation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) that includes the TULF. While for example the TNA holds the LTTE to be the sole representatives of the Tamil people, key TULF leaders have been observed squirming and muttering objections whenever this claim about sole representatives was made in their presence. The LTTE

has thus been able to project itself in the political arena using the TULF's considerable traditional base while avoiding a direct electoral context.

The taming of the TULF is an object lesson in the LTTE's methods of terror. Its terror has a dimension beyond being simply vindictive and irrational. One cannot play safe with the LTTE. The TULF MPs killed by the LTTE thought themselves to be playing safe. They all but acknowledged its totalitarian claims, never criticised it publicly and remained obligingly silent when their own colleagues were picked off by LTTE killers, one by one. People are thus driven to be cautious to the point of not risking doing anything that may be taken amiss by the LTTE. It is a degree of terror that a state cannot match.

The control the LTTE has achieved is far from being confined to the Tamil community. In the discourse about the LTTE in this country, hardly ever is the moral dimension raised. For the Sinhalese chauvinist camp who had in the 1980s and early 1990s lent complicity to state terror in dealing with the Tamils, it is not a moral issue, but a matter of failed state terror and seemingly successful LTTE terror. Thus when forced to deal with the LTTE, an essentially hard-line party as the UNP could advocate appeasement as a pragmatic measure, without the rights and wrongs of its past violence against the Tamils coming into it. Of course, for many, there is nothing novel in this, since they perceive the same mindset among the elite everywhere. In this approach, there is also a strong tendency to disregard several inconvenient aspects that have an impact on the crisis, by trivializing them.

More decisive in our situation are the attitudes of the liberal camp, the peace lobby, church and civil society groups in Colombo. Along with their Tamil colleagues, they have largely ceased to question crimes by the LTTE, particularly against its own people. In the belief that they should do nothing to rock the peace boat, they are propelling it towards another disaster. They carry on as though it is the LTTE's right to indulge at pleasure in political killings, conscription and recruitment of children. This is reflected in the huge silences and distortions in their statements made as peace and election monitoring groups. By purposefully ignoring the fascist controls that are shot through the whole fabric of Tamil society, they find no difficulty in detecting near hundred percent Tamil support for the LTTE as their sole representatives and sole arbiter in any peace process. Any active opposition to the LTTE within Tamil society that continues at heavy cost is regarded by them a nuisance, rather than an essential pre-requisite for a return to sanity.

There is an even greater danger that is being lost sight of. The readiness of an influential segment of society in Colombo to overlook violations by the LTTE, is a sign that they feel no moral indignation towards killing in general. This moral torpor in turn leads to widespread confusion about the nature of the LTTE, giving it opportunity to influence national life at several critical levels. Its influence in the elections just concluded is likely to have been far higher than one would allow. It is well known that the expectation of being taken off the LTTE's hit list, and in turn being able to campaign freely, decided the alignments of many politicians in the North-East. The extent to which such considerations influenced Muslim, Sinhalese and Hill Country politicians remains an open question. If we comply with the logic of fascist control in the North-East, it will

have grave implications for the South too. Such attitudes and their consequences will set the scene for a return of state terror with a vengeance, backed by an upsurge of chauvinist sentiment.

First, we look at the recent developments in the North East in the wake of the elections, and the subsequent peace process.

2. Political killings and the attack on dissent

With a cease-fire in force and expectations of peace talks, the LTTE, as expected, has started its campaign of eliminating dormant and purely individual dissent. Owing to the ban on it imposed by several countries, the campaign is at present low key, so as not to attract too much attention.

In Mannar, on 24th December 2001, the LTTE killed **Anandaraja** (34), father of one child and former member of the LTTE. Two days earlier **N. Pradeepa**, another civilian, was killed by the LTTE in the same area.

A. (name and certain details suppressed) was a member of the dissident *Theepori* group of the PLOTE whose courage against internal killings in the group was widely admired. Its members quietly settled down into civilian life. However, when the LTTE took total control of the North in the 1990s, it saw them as a threat and a number of them were eliminated in its torture camps. Having survived all that, **A.** married and settled down in the Vavuniya area and taught there for 15 years.

Several members of the LTTE led by **Kobu**, a senior intelligence man, came to **A.**'s house in early January 2002 at 8.00 PM. When his wife told them that he was at a function, **Kobu** asked her to fetch him while they waited. Seeing that her husband had the advantage of a crowd at the function, she asked them to go there, as her children could not be left without her. The LTTEers became angry and left after telling her that her husband was a traitor and they would kill him.

At the funeral house **A.** was told that there was a man to see him. **A.** ascertained from the man that he was from the LTTE. He also sensed that there were others hidden in the dark. On being asked to come to the junction for a chat, **A.** asked him to come into the house. The man insisted that they only wanted to help him. **A.** agreed and excused himself to go into the house to fetch an article of his. He went through the house, jumped over a couple of fences and hid himself in the undergrowth. Then he heard a commotion with the whirr of motorcycles. He later found safe refuge.

In the meantime, afraid to stay alone, **A.**'s wife went with her children to a neighbour's. The LTTE broke into his house and removed **A.**'s diaries.

Vijayanathan Vithiatharan (29) had left the PLOTE about six years ago and lived at 242 Sea St., Navatkudah, Batticaloa Dist.. He was a fisherman who sometimes criticised the LTTE after drinks. **Elil**, **Yogarajah** and **Amuthavasan** of the LTTE arrested him at his home on 16th January 2002 and took him across the lagoon. He was executed at Kothiavalai in the Vavunativu DS Div. on 20th January 2002.

These cases illustrate the general trend, which may reach catastrophic proportions similar to that in 1990-91 as the LTTE tightens its grip. The killings are now generally in outlying areas and the tendency would be for them to spread to urban centres. There is already a situation where civil society in both the North-East and the South do not want to hear of underlying trends that disturb their complacency concerning the peace process. As it is, the LTTE is trying to impose a deadening conformity where the people live in lies and the truth cannot escape. Then there will be no burden on anyone's conscience.

3. The true disposition of the Tamil voter

Claims widely touted on the basis of the election results that the Tamil voter has endorsed the LTTE and its claims can be seen to be highly defective. These will be taken up later. Even where people have voted for the TNA, their general preference has been towards the TULF old guard whom the LTTE is in the process of obliterating. Thus a vote for the TNA is not a vote for the LTTE. Of course in Kiran, where LTTE depredations concerning child conscription have been phenomenal, many people voted for TNA candidate **Kumaraguru** as a Kiran man. But this is a far cry from endorsing the fate of their children.

On the basis of the vote count, only 46% of the Tamil voters in the Batticaloa District (allowing for those who could not vote) have voted for the TNA. The corresponding figure for Jaffna is about 34%. Taking into account organised impersonation for which the TNA had a free hand, the figures will drop significantly. In Jaffna, this would drop to about 25%. In general, a high proportion of the Tamil voters did not vote at all.

This contrasts with the lively interest in voting by the Muslims of Batticaloa District. Their 60,000 or so votes were almost evenly split between three parties, once more exposing the canard that the Muslims are united and conspiratorial. This also points to the cause of Tamil apathy. There are no issues discussed at elections, no freedom to air alternatives. People hear the same wild speeches, the same slogans and nothing changes. There is no hope, only continual tragedy all the way. This is the legacy of fascism.

The LTTE machine however knows better than anyone else does that the recently concluded general elections did not endorse the LTTE as the sole representatives of the Tamils. The success of the TNA was also limited. LTTE agents are now publicly floating the slogan that there should only be one political party among the Tamils. Intimidatory articles to this effect are appearing in the Tamil Press. It is being stated openly at public meetings in the East by TNA MPs (e.g. **Vellimalai**) and candidates. In Jaffna, it is being pushed by LTTE agents at the University.

With all the shortcomings of the elections in the North-East and the choice before the people being deliberately curtailed, the TNA has inevitably received a mandate. Irrespective of the LTTE's manoeuvres against particular individuals, or in their favour, there is no doubt that several of the elected MPs from the TULF, and **Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam**, enjoyed considerable popular sentiment from nostalgic associations. Moreover, the TULF's traditional base was crucial to this mandate. It is a mandate for peace and certainly not one for another round of war, as the LTTE may choose to interpret it in the coming months.

With the announcement of local council elections for March, the machine has gone into action. According to local sources, about 4th January, a group led by a leading personality from the **Tamil Net** and including **Prasanna** (TELO candidate) and a local journalist who writes for the *Virakesari*, visited the EPRLF (V) office in Valaichenai. The latter were told by the visitors that they should either contest elections under the TNA or stand down. They were told in effect that good people like them should not do unwanted things. It was also made clear that no other party would be allowed to contest. There have been a number of reports of civilian supporters of the EPRLF (V), who allegedly worked for it during elections, being harassed, assaulted and sometimes detained for several days by the LTTE. Such incidents have taken place in Chenkalady, Valaichenai and Mankerni.

For the LTTE, however, there are material ends at stake in suppressing dissent and imposing a regime of systematic violations. This is to do with military objectives that can be achieved only at utterly inhuman cost to a ruined and wasted community. Nowhere is this more evident than in the conscription of very young children.

4. Forced conscription of child soldiers: the ultimate tragedy

There is mounting incidence of reports from the East that read like something out of the notorious African slave trade. On the morning of 20th January some distraught parents rushed into Batticaloa from Vavunativu with reports of an LTTE round up to press gang children. The LTTE, these reports said, had appeared around the villages of Kannankudha, Karaikantivu and Thandiyady in the Vavunativu DS Division. A number of children were reported hiding in the undergrowth along the lagoon shore. The LTTE, it is said, subsequently left, taking a number of children along. Earlier, similar reports had come from Pattipalai, Vellavelly and Vaharai.

Such events would seem less a fantasy if one faces the fact that since August 2001, during the election campaign and afterwards, the LTTE has gone on insisting that each family should contribute a child for its army (see our Bulletins [26](#) & [27](#)). The stridency and degree of force have intensified after the cease-fire. In fact around 20th November 2001, the LTTE took about 35 children from the Petthalai area. Six days later, the parents went to Theelivattai across the lagoon from Santhiveli to talk to the LTTE. They were scolded and sent back.

More ironically, the demand that parents must give children to the LTTE has been aired by some TNA candidates during the election campaign. Among them were **Vellimalai** and **Sathyananthan** (see below). When the Army closed the entry point from Vaharai at Mankerni at 10.00 AM on election day, Sathyananthan made a public statement to those at the polling station. Referring to the Government's utter disregard for the democratic rights of the Tamil people, he told them that they now have no choice, but for each family to give a child to the LTTE and join its struggle.

The event also has a revealing sequel. After the elections, as part of its general campaign, the LTTE wanted Sathyananthan's son in his mid-teens, born to his wife in Kathiraveli, Vaharai. According to local sources, Sathyananthan took his son and went to stay with his second wife in Welikanda.

In the Kiran area the pressure on child recruitment intensified after the elections leading to families moving out of the area. The houses of those who left were broken into by the LTTE, looted and sometimes burnt. About 10th December 2001, the LTTE broke into the houses of the following in Kiran and removed the tiles, for their having quitted without giving a child:

1. **Manoharathas, Teacher,**
2. **Thillainathan, Overseer,**
3. **Pooranasingam, GM, Kiran Co-op, and**
4. **Paskaran, Headman (GS)**

North of the Batticaloa District being a poor area, the days after the elections saw about 150 young adults joining the LTTE. This was the time there was a rising expectation that the new government would hand over the administration of the North-East to the LTTE, which meant jobs. It seemed that pressure on child recruitment might ease up. This expectation was short-lived. The Government and the LTTE agreed to a cease-fire on 24th December 2001, but for the people there was little to celebrate.

The LTTE moved into towns to freeload from Muslim shops and to extort from Tamils and Muslim civilians alike. In areas along the main road from Valaichenai to Kallar where the LTTE's movements were hitherto inhibited, the LTTE came in and started demanding children and money to set up offices. Where the children were extremely young, the LTTE often demanded a written declaration from the parents that they would give the first child that comes of age – reportedly 12 years. We note that many of the conscripts are in this age group. Those with no children had to pay money. When the people complained to the Army and STF, they were told that the new government would take offence if they tried to stop the LTTE's activities. The best they could do was to offer the people the security of their camps.

By early January, some new MPs of the TNA and other failed candidates went about the district addressing meetings, often in school halls. The new stridency of the speeches could only give people the jitters. Vellimalai, MP, insisted that parents who do not give a child to the LTTE are traitors. The struggle for Tamil Eelam, he said, has reached a peak and no one can stand in its way. “*We will first try to talk to the UNP government and obtain Eelam,*” he said, *“failing which ‘we’ will ‘hammer and smash’ our way to victory”*. Some witnesses have testified to references about using strong-arm methods in Parliament, if necessary.

In the meantime schools in the rural areas were grinding to a halt as the LTTE's threats and demands on children became more vocal. Families were quitting to Batticaloa Town and Colombo or were keeping their children at home. The LTTE let it be known (e.g. Periya Kallar) that if the parents do not hand over a child by 24th January when the cease-fire was due to end, they would forcibly remove a child and pull out.

In Kiran East, from after the elections, to date, at least 40 houses of people who quit the area have been burnt by the LTTE. Further names of some householders are:

Kovinthan, Manoharan, Kanthasamy, Perinpam, Subramaniam, Jeevarathinam and Sinnathurai.

The following persons were forcibly removed from their homes in Kiran East, their ages are given in brackets:

1. **Miss. Thevaranjini Selvarajah (28)**
2. **Miss. Kala Kanthasamy (14)**
3. **Miss. Dharshini Sundaram (12)**
4. **Miss. Sutha Kanagaratnam (13)**
5. **Mas. Kanthan Sinnavan (13)**
6. **Mas. Kanthasamy Suthaharan (14)**
7. **Mas. Kanthasamy Kanapathipillai (15) of Kinnaiady**

A particular reason for the LTTE to be angry with E. Kiran is that it is the home of its senior commander, Karuna. They are annoyed that the people of the village have not set an example by showing eagerness in giving their children to the LTTE.

Priyadharshini from Vellavelly was a pupil schooling in Batticaloa Town. Her family had a tragic history, which had prevented her from visiting her village in the LTTE-controlled area for many years. Her elder brother **Pararasan** had been a member of the TELO when the LTTE launched a murderous attack on it in 1986. Pararasan escaped owing to the clandestine exertions of another sister. Upon finding this out, the LTTE stabbed her to death. Following the much-acclaimed recent cease-fire, Priyadharshini made a journey to Vellavelly. On 19th January 2002, she was abducted by the LTTE for service in the machine her family dreaded.

Another matter of deep concern is just beginning to be talked about. A large number of the LTTE's child deserters are in hiding, some of whom have made it to the mainland. The others are in the wild close to the villages, with their kith and kin secretly taking food to the innocent fugitives in their own land. Sources in the village of Pandariaveli spoke of about 16 deserters in the area. The following were abducted by the LTTE for military service from Munaikkadu, but succeeded in escaping:

- 1) **Mas. Pakiarajah Mithileswaran(16),**
- 2) **Mas. Subramanian (16) and**
- 3) **Mr.Kanagasabai Raguvaran (18).**

The LTTE detained their parents as hostages and released them some days later in late January, apparently after recovering their children. On 23rd January, about 40 children in uniform were brought to Kokkadichcholai by the LTTE. The parents were allowed to talk to them and give them sweetmeats bought from the local shop.

Child abduction in the environs of Mutur

A similar pattern of child conscription has been in evidence around Mutur in the Trincomalee District. Both in Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts the LTTE has been putting up its own checkpoints close to those of the security forces. Those going into LTTE controlled villages around Mutur are now required to surrender their identity card to the LTTE, bringing about a high level of surveillance that sits ill with high expectations of peace. The stark reality is of a draconian, militarised regime.

Here too the last few months have seen a high level of child conscription, but more by waylaying them on the streets. The control here is so strong that principals and teachers have been dragooned into giving pep talks to the children urging them to join the LTTE. The following cases, mainly from Senaiyoor and Sambur, during November and December 2001, illustrate the situation in the area. Dozens of children around 13 years old carrying guns can be readily seen in the villages.

Miss. Mythili (15), was caught by the LTTE while returning from school. Her parents who heard about it and rushed to the camp, found that her earrings and books had been taken away. They fought with the LTTE and brought her back home.

The following three were forcibly taken:

Mas. Ramu Mathiyan (12), mother Vellai. The father works as a mason and labourer.

Mas. Lohithan (11), father a farmer.

Mas. Sivan Thangan (16), owned a bullock cart. Was forcibly taken while returning from work in his cart.

More recently, particularly after the cease-fire, nearly everyone has been forced to undergo military training. They have been told that they should be prepared to go to war anytime that they are ordered. The strictness with which this is enforced is illustrated in the case of **Ramu (19)** of Sambur, who had done his A. Levels. He has been forced to undergo training despite having an artificial leg. None of this was however allowed to disturb the rosy prospects for peace painted in the media.

5. A world of fantasy

The media have flocked to the Vanni to take in the rare photo opportunities into the exotic and mysterious, now being laid out by the LTTE. Talking about reciprocity and equality, **Tamil Chelvam**, the smiling LTTE spokesman, has called for a lifting of restrictions and normalising of life so that the Tamils and Sinhalese can live as equals, and for a lifting of the ban on the LTTE. Here the fantasy begins.

Today, the Tamils in the North-East are being subject to the abduction of their children, political violence and both the Tamils and Muslims to systematic extortion and kidnapping for ransom. These gross inequalities and injustices are being imposed by self-styled liberators with the complicity of the Sri Lankan government. While the Sri Lankan

forces are removing check points and allowing the LTTE to move into areas under their control, the LTTE is imposing new barriers to monitor its own people.

The list of persons being called and threatened or detained for extortion is simply enormous. Among prominent persons taken and not released is the Vaharai DS, **Mr. Balasubramaniam**, who was taken from his home in Batticaloa and is now believed to be held in Unnichchai. **Mr. Kathirkamanathan**, DS, Batticaloa, is said to have been warned and sent back, apparently regarding failure to make collections from his staff.

In Pandiruppu that is under STF control, an LTTE man called Sudar is running an extortion racket under their very noses. People are sent messages to report to a certain house. Among those summoned are reportedly some doctors and **Dr. Parasuraman**, who performed yeoman service to the Karaitivu citizen's committee during many dark years. As regards children, the inactivity of the security forces has spelt further disaster. Although we have received individual testimonies of recent abductions by the LTTE for its fighting cadre, from areas closely controlled by the security forces (e.g. a boy successful in his A. Levels from Periya Kallar and due to enter for medicine and a worker in a video shop in Iruthayapuram East), the true extent is not known. The people are terrified.

We give a typical example of the routine terror that people in the East live through, all the way down from Trincomalee. **Maheswaran** (45) of Karunkalichcholai, Petthalai, in North Batticaloa is the father of a boy and four younger girls. He owns a tractor with which he ferries limestone and sells it to Muslim traders. LTTE men went to his home and demanded Rs. 2. lakhs and a child. Maheswaran refused and told them that they could kill him and do anything they liked. The LTTE men proceeded to attack Maheswaran and left him with a swollen chest. He was asked to report at Vinayapuram.

Maheswaran borrowed a Cabal 90 motorbike from a Muslim friend and went to Vinayapuram to meet Inpuniyan of the LTTE finance section. When Maheswaran asked for time to pay the money, Inpuniyan took possession of the motorbike and told him that he would get it back only upon paying the money. Later, **Mrs. Maheswaran** scraped a total of Rs. 50,000 from friends and got a youth to take her to Inpuniyan on a push-bike. (Her son had gone into hiding.) She was seen coming back crying miserably. On 26th January, Maheswaran told people he met on the road that he had purchased poison for Rs. 25/- and they would see him no more. He swallowed poison the next day and was admitted to Batticaloa Hospital.

Confronted with events of this kind under their very noses, the typical answer of the security forces is, '*Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe must decide*'! The LTTE's interference in the most routine civil liberties becomes more bizarre all the time. For some months now the LTTE has been applying pressure on registrars of marriages in the East. This is because parents tend to register children very young in an attempt to obviate conscription. Tamil mothers in their early teens are common in parts like Mutur.

In Batticaloa at present, registrars are so scared that they try to pass the buck when approached to register any marriage. On 26th January, a remarkable story spread by word of mouth in the Chenkalady area. A wedding was said to have been taking place in Ward

5 (probably Eravur) with photographers clicking away. The festive occasion, it was said, was rudely interrupted when the LTTE came in and abducted the couple. We did not get at the details, but the report is consonant with the prevailing atmosphere. We also reliably learn that leading schools in Batticaloa (e.g. Shivananda, St. Michael's, Anaipanthi, Central and St. Vincent's) have been told by the LTTE not to accept pupils from the area under their control as boarders!

The cease-fire and the prospect of an interim administration in the LTTE's hands notwithstanding, the LTTE is acting as though it is in a hurry to mine the East. It is now setting up a parallel Kacheri at Arasaditivu in the Pattipalai DS Division. Senior administrators have been called and ordered to send copies of all transactions to them. All projects must have their approval.

People in rural areas north of Batticaloa have seen the LTTE transporting to the coast in the night, items such as cooking vessels, generators, motors and Mortein in large quantities, to be transported by sea to Vaharai. On 22nd January, a Caravan van belonging to Unico Marketing Ltd. of Kurunegala, bringing Rs 2.5 lakhs worth of electrical items for sale in Batticaloa, was hijacked in Eravur by two members of the LTTE. At the time of writing, neither the vehicle, goods, nor the three Sinhalese occupants (**Jayasinghe** the driver, **Dharmasena** and **Taraka**), have been traced.

All kinds of demands are being orchestrated by the LTTE as though they are the first priority of the Tamil people. What can be more convincing than when these are aired by candidates and MPs of the apparently hugely successful TNA and leading social figures. At the recent 'Tamil Inspirational Festival' at the University of Jaffna, poor **Vice Chancellor Balasundarampillai**, who two years ago, with VC Batticaloa, signed an appeal by academics for the re-election of Chandrika Kumaratunge, called for the removal of army camps to restore normalcy. Making similar demands in Batticaloa, **A. Selvendran**, TNA candidate and head of the NGO consortium, called for a repeal of the PTA. The list goes on.

These are perfectly legitimate demands. But they do not touch issues related to the prevailing total abnormality and terror of the LTTE. If the LTTE were a genuine liberation group that protected the rights of the people, these demands would have more resonance with the interests of the people. Dismantling draconian laws should be an integral part of the peace process. We in our reports have argued that the PTA is an objectionable law that has long been used arbitrarily, especially against Tamils of humble origin, but has proved itself costly and ineffective. But today, no Tamil intellectual or writer in Sri Lanka is harassed by the PTA or any other law for articulating pro-LTTE views. They are even free to use the media as an instrument of LTTE terror.

For example, in an article in the *Sunday Virakesari* of 20.1.02, a Colombo-based academic urged the registration of the TNA as a party to carry forward the struggle, as dictated by the LTTE, with a single voice. With reference to objections, especially by the TULF, he said: "*If they carry on doing politics or seeking positions, thinking that ending the war alone is sufficient, the struggle will inevitably be retarded. Further, they will have to bear the consequences for having deceived the people.*" This is the language used

from TULF platforms in the 1970s to instigate the murder of their political opponents. The *Virakesari* was then responsible enough not to highlight bilge.

While the LTTE lobby demands the removal of the PTA, the pertinent issue today is the imposition on the Tamil people by their sole representatives of something far more insidious. Although unwritten, this may be compared with Hitler's famous Enabling Law, *Law for Removing the Distress of People and Reich*, of 1933. This was used by the Nazis to legitimise the removal and extermination of opponents, who were already reeling from systematic thuggery, and to impose a totalitarian state.

Thus for the LTTE, the peace process, holding out for them the prospect of uninhibited power, has meant dusting up its old intelligence files. This entails making a list of people whom the Great Lord has suffered to live too long, and for whom the time has now come. The cases of A. and two others given above are clear instances of this happening. We have also received testimony of the LTTE making inquiries in Vavuniya about dissidents living in Colombo, in anticipation of the UNP government giving them a free run in the City as Premadasa did.

The LTTE, as revealed by its actions, has not deviated one whit from its agenda. Instead, we are witness to a brand of *newspeak*! It has absolutely no intention of restoring normalcy for the people. When it calls upon the Government to relieve first the day-to-day needs of the people, what it means is the day-to-day needs of the LTTE. The LTTE hailed the Government's decision to allow a free flow of most goods into the Vanni. But almost at the same time, prices of goods in Jaffna shot up by 15% and more, imposing new hardships on the people. This happened after the LTTE reorganised taxes on shipping agents in Colombo moving goods to Jaffna and distributed monopolies among them. It has become taboo to talk about it. Hardly an MP or newspaper will raise the matter.

A public demonstration against the arbitrary price hike was organised in Jaffna on the initiative of the PLOTE, with the EPRLF (V) and the New Democratic Front joining in. **Maheswaran, MP** and minister, who was earlier a partner in, and later in opposition a vocal critic of, high prices of goods in Jaffna, had the Police arrest, and hold for some hours, several leaders of the protest!

The LTTE will make sure that even the relief enjoyed by people in the Vanni will be short-lived. Indeed even as the Government removed restrictions on goods, the LTTE put in more senior persons and notably tightened up the issue of passes to people leaving the Vanni. Maintaining war psychosis and a sense of frustration is necessary for the LTTE, lest the people start thinking deeply about peace and start questioning the regime imposed on them. For instance, the LTTE quickly put a stop to any expectations of normality in the East.

This was spelt out in a speech in North Batticaloa on 19.1.02 by Thangavadivel, MP, a bachelor. He spoke about '*Veerat (Brave) Thamilan*' and '*Adangatth (Unconquered) Thamilan*', expressions that were music to the ears from TULF platforms 25 years ago, and now a sordid memory. He said that they would fight if the Government does not accede to their demands. He added that there will be no jobs or rehabilitation, until the

LTTE is given its due place. Of course, there is little said about the Tamils having their due place, they are being given a taste of it! So much for the day-to-day needs of the Tamil people!

Against the irony of the Government's eagerness to speed up rehabilitation work in the North-East, there is a steadily mounting refugee problem, which seems, amidst the euphoria, too unseemly to talk about. There is a growing influx into Colombo both of families fleeing child conscription and also of those who feel anxious on account of their personal political views. This time, the Western embassies can rest assured that a large number of refugee claimants are genuine. We also learn that should well wishers open a refugee camp in Colombo, it would fill up in no time with a large numbers from the East. People are agonised by being unable and afraid even to talk about their suffering – 'Who will listen to us, who will do something to help us?'

We now examine the recent parliamentary elections, which illustrate how the LTTE can and does use the lack of moral scruples among local and international civil society to its advantage. In the process the perception of reality is violently distorted.

6. The LTTE's Strategy

It is well known that during 2001 the LTTE was facing a tremendous shortage in its fighting cadre. Militarily, the situation was stalemated. However, the Southern polity lacked the ability to make a decisive political gesture that would have broken the back of the problem. There was a lack of governance on the part of the PA government that was pre-occupied with the question of survival in Parliament. The UNP then in opposition was obsessed with capturing power in the short term at any cost. Its approach to the ethnic question did not aim at a solution, but rather at turning Tamil votes in its favour and in keeping the LTTE quiet for a while to stabilise the Southern economy, and hence its hold on power. The LTTE planned out its strategy accordingly.

The present international climate entailed that it had to show itself amenable to a political solution. It also precluded a sensational use of terror. While it had cornered itself into going for a separate state at any cost, faced with declining population resources it could not prolong the war indefinitely. Events indicate that it was working towards a decisive engagement that would place the Sri Lankan government in a highly compromised position.

Some time after the Sri Lankan Army took Jaffna in 1996, the LTTE's uncompromising hostility towards other groups and political parties began to change. With amenable individuals the process had begun even earlier. The ACTC leader **Kumar Ponnambalam**, earlier a sworn enemy of the LTTE, started making overtures to the LTTE in 1994 to work out a mutually profitable arrangement. The TELO in Vavuniya, even while working with the Army in Vavuniya and torturing LTTE suspects, reached a commercially lucrative arrangement with the LTTE to aid the smuggling of banned items to the LTTE-controlled area. LTTE gunmen began to be seen in TELO offices in Vavuniya, in 1997.

The LTTE soon saw the advantage of using its erstwhile sworn enemies to articulate itself politically. Another sworn enemy, **Suresh Premachandran**, took away a faction of the EPRLF and made a deal with the LTTE in 1999, as did TELO leader **Adaikkalanathan** (Selvam). Thus, without placing itself before the electorate, the LTTE could back the others and demand its price. For the others, from a position of hardly being able to campaign at elections, they could now enter parliament with the full force of the LTTE's terror aiding their campaign.

However, the only party having a traditional base in Tamil society was the TULF. Although the party faced a low period in exile in the 1980s, in the absence of a solid alternative, people have tended to come back to it. On the LTTE's part, it undertook a campaign of selective assassination of persons from other parties and groups who showed signs of honour and independence. In the second round of killings of TULF leaders beginning in 1997, **Neelan Tiruchelvam** was the fifth to be assassinated. Months later, by 2000, the TULF had almost buckled down. The process was completed by the assassination of the popular Batticaloa MP, **Nimalan Soundaranayagam** in November 2000.

The final nail, as it were, was driven into the coffin when a divided TULF was dragged into the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in time for the December 2001 elections. The other parties in the TNA were the ACTC, EPRLF (Suresh) and TELO. The LTTE's aim was to use the TULF's base, downsize the TULF old guard, and in their place put in members of the other three groups along with its own nominees. To this end the TULF old guard had been severely enfeebled by assassination and those who took their place were often weak figures lacking the proverbial charisma of the old guard. To the LTTE, the result was a perfect tool.

The idea of the TNA was floated when Parliament was dissolved by the President and the holding of elections in December 2001 was announced. By this time the LTTE had established a number of front organizations and had secured almost complete control over the Tamil media in both Colombo and the North-East. An important role here was also played by the group in Batticaloa, known as the *Oodaham* or *Media*. Prominent in this group are the editor of *Tamil Net*, the *Virakesarai* columnist who tried to say that parents around Batticaloa were voluntarily giving the children to the LTTE, and a leading figure in Batticaloa's NGO Consortium and the local newspaper, *Thinakkathir*. Their names featured prominently in bullying and cajoling the TULF and ACTC into the TNA.

The three mentioned were once leading 'traitors' in the LTTE's book. The first was a key member of the PLOTE. The second was Public Relations Officer in the North-East Provincial Council that was provided security by the Indian Army. The third was a Central Committee member of the EPRLF. This is an example of the LTTE's new approach. Such persons were bound to show even greater zeal in crushing dissent against the LTTE.

Batticaloa: Preparing the field

The LTTE had the final say in the TNA's electoral list for Batticaloa. Although the TNA was contesting under the TULF's name and symbol, of the eight, the two from the TULF

proper were relatively weak candidates. Vellimalai came in as an ACTC candidate. **Thangavadivel**, a retired professional, from Araipattai and Inthirakumar (Prasanna), a TELO man, were nominated by TELO. **Navaratnam**, the earlier local council president from Araipattai and TELO strongman, closely associated with the security forces, had been killed by the LTTE in 2000. That was when the TELO leadership was moving close to the LTTE!

The remaining three on the list were direct nominees of the LTTE. One was Sathyanathan. The story of another, **Kumaraguru**, is again illustrative of the LTTE's new use for 'traitors'. Kumaraguru from Kiran was during the 2000 elections, and until very recently, UNP organiser for the area. He had started life as a painter in the Valaichenai paper mills, and thanks to the patronage of **K.W. Devanayagam**, former UNP minister and MP for the area, finished as assistant superintendent. He was also an uncle of Karuna, senior LTTE leader. The other LTTE nominee was Selvendran, president of the NGO Consortium.

Perhaps because of its disparate membership and LTTE backing, the TNA had a certain appeal. But the extent of that appeal, as we shall see, is highly exaggerated. The Federal Party had long complained that the Tamils were losing out because of their divisions and the Tamils welcomed the formation of the TULF in the mid-1970s. The TNA was welcomed in Amparai and Trincomalee, where the Tamils were a minority with their representation threatened. The TNA also on the surface exuded a sense of the Tamils forgetting old enmities and coming together.

Moreover, the Tamils wanted peace desperately, which wish the LTTE had repeatedly frustrated. The TNA would also have struck some as a means of coaxing the LTTE along and making it negotiate. Perhaps it was a means by which a large number of children conscripted by the LTTE could be brought home?

7. Elections in the Batticaloa District: An air of unreality

Following the December 5th 2001 general elections, the claim has been widely made, particularly by the NGO and peace lobby in Colombo, that the Tamil voter has endorsed the LTTE by returning 15 TNA (TULF) candidates as MPs among a total of 18 Tamil MPs from the North-East. We take a closer look at Batticaloa District, the heart of Tamil nationalism in the East.

Conscription by the LTTE, especially of children, was a burning issue in the rural parts of the District, especially the LTTE-controlled area, from August 2001. Those familiar with the area spoke of considerable hostility towards the TULF for being silent over child conscription. Even foreigners and locals who were in Batticaloa to monitor the elections found people voicing their discontent with the LTTE over conscription quite openly.

There was also a remarkable event in Paduvankarai (in the LTTE controlled area) barely 8 days before the elections. As usual Great Heroes Day was observed by the LTTE in Talawai on 27th November. The crowd was unusually large, numbering 30 to 40 thousand. Not expecting such a crowd, the LTTE found that there was a glaring shortage of refreshments. Moreover, they found the crowd boisterous. The attendance on this

occasion had been swollen by families and relatives of children forcibly conscripted by the LTTE since August. They had flocked there in the hope of catching a glimpse of their children. However, very few of the children were seen. Having hung about for half a day with little or no food, the crowd went away, openly angry and disappointed.

The widespread anger and disgruntlement over child conscription, makes interpreting the election results an endorsement of the LTTE, highly fanciful. What's more, the sense of unreality was further heightened by the rhetoric of some TNA candidates on the TULF list, **Krishnapillai** (better known as **Vellimalai**) and **Sathyanathan** among them. They openly advocated that each family must give a child for the LTTE's struggle.

Vellimalai's story is instructive on how people get trapped in their own rhetoric and hypocrisy and are forced to live out a lie. Vellimalai from Palugamam was a state-employed bus driver, whose children had generally done well in their studies. He was an ACTC candidate in the elections of 2000 where his party fared worse than the PLOTE and failed to win a seat. Both Vellimalai and the ACTC had rhetorically identified with the LTTE.

Vellimalai's daughter got married to a tax collector from the LTTE's finance section. His taking this son-in-law to Colombo and helping him to go to the West reportedly earned the displeasure of the LTTE. When the LTTE's **Karikalan** called a meeting in Palugamam last August and demanded that those present set an example by each giving a child, Vellimalai felt obliged to accede. At this time Vellimalai took poison under disputed circumstances and was hospitalised. One version is that Vellimalai could not bear the LTTE taking his son, who was in his mid-teens. The one more widely believed is that while Vellimalai relented, his wife strongly objected and moved with her children into the Army-controlled area.

After the loss of his son to the LTTE, Vellimalai and a few others from Palugamam in a similar plight, went around in ceremonial white, demanding that the other parents too should follow them and donate a child to the LTTE. This made them very unpopular at that time. However, Vellimalai, according to sources close to him, had made a plea to the LTTE, after being elected MP, that it would be difficult for him to function in that capacity while his son is with them. The LTTE, according to this source, agreed to release the son. Others in the village have said that the son has not been seen in the area, and are thus unable to comment on the release.

It is against the burning issue of child conscription that the elections took place. This basic fact militates against any suggestion that the people supported the LTTE or saw no alternative to giving in to its suicidal demands. The LTTE gets its opportunity in the first instance by the refusal of others to face basic human realities.

8. The result in Batticaloa

We pointed out that while capitalising on the TULF symbol and sentimental appeal, the TULF component had been dwarfed in the TNA. Some of the TULF's stronger candidates were disallowed by the LTTE. For example, **M. Vimalaswarwan**, an earlier TULF candidate in the Batticaloa list, had evinced a much stronger following than

Vellimalai in the same caste and community base around Palugamam. He had failed to get elected because this communal vote had been divided between the TULF, ACTC and the PA's **Ganeshamoorthy**. This time the LTTE knocked down **Vimalaswaran** in favour of the highly obliging Vellimalai. Under these constraints, and with no outstanding personalities, the preference votes in the TULF list were somewhat evenly divided on the basis of narrower and local associations such as caste, clan and area (e.g. Palugamam, Araipattai, Kiran etc.). The range in which each candidate scored was from 15,000 to 25,000.

The three candidates elected were the TELO nominee, Thangavadivel from Araipattai, Vellimalai and TULF's Joseph Pararajasingham. Although all candidates ritually spouted LTTE rhetoric, none of the direct LTTE nominees was elected. Even if one grants that about 21,000 Tamils, who wished to vote, were prevented from voting, the total of 86,284 votes obtained by the TNA was a great disappointment, given 282,079 registered voters in the District, of whom 78% are Tamil and the balance Muslim. Of the 5 MPs elected, two are Muslim (one PA & one SLMC).

In fact what the TNA obtained in 2001 is about the sum of what the TULF (54,448), ACTC (6968) & TELO (3909) obtained in October 2000 along with a part of the votes that went to the PLOTE (9030) and PA (16,510) in the same election. Had the wish of the PLOTE, which had done better than the ACTC, to join the TNA been granted, it would have obtained a seat in Batticaloa. The TNA did little to stir the enthusiasm of the Tamil voter who previously stayed at home, to go and vote.

To hide their disappointment, the pro-LTTE lobby dragged a red herring claiming that the Security Forces had prevented 70,000 Tamil voters from casting their vote. The NGO lobby in Colombo too has highlighted this claim, at the expense of ignoring the whole history of intimidation and murder that cruelly debased the electoral process (e.g. Executive Director, PAFFREL, *Daily News* 13.1.02). We will now examine this claim.

9. The controversy over voters from the LTTE-controlled area

Five voting centres were set up in the Batticaloa District for voters from the LTTE controlled area to cross checkpoints into the government controlled area and cast their vote. These were mainly CC5 in Mankerni in the Kalkudah electorate for those from Vaharai, CC12 at Valayiravu near Batticaloa and CC19 and CC20 in the Pandiruppu electorate for voters from Paduvankarai. However the entry point to CC5 was closed at 10.00 AM after being opened duly at 7.00 AM. The entry point to CC12 remained closed. These two were under the Army. CC20 in Kurukkal Madam under the STF was closed about 1.30 PM, after CC19 in Pandiruppu was closed a little earlier. Elsewhere in the Vanni (17, 000 registered), those from the LTTE-controlled area were not allowed in, but in Mutur, in the Trincomalee District, the Army allowed the voters in.

It was later reported in the *Sunday Times* defence column, that the closures stemmed from two intelligence reports filed by the IGP, one from the Special Branch and the other from the Directorate of Internal Intelligence. These were reportedly to the effect that the LTTE would infiltrate along with the voters and attack the security forces. We checked with a retired senior official, who in turn was informed that the SB filed no such report.

They also discounted a report of that nature by the DII. The Army Commander in turn cited reports submitted by the IGP, supplementing Army Intelligence reports, and his lacking the men to provide adequate security (*Island*, 4.1.02). The matter is yet to be cleared up.

If one is looking for a political conspiracy, quite apart from the PA, SLMC or UNP, it is not at all certain if the TNA and LTTE themselves were keen that the people from the LTTE controlled area should vote after the orgy of child conscription. Election monitors who came from outside were repeatedly told by LTTE sympathisers, who were effectively dominant among local monitors, that 70 thousand voters from the LTTE-controlled area were longing to come and vote, but only if bus services are adequate. Some of the monitors from outside became suspicious over the repeated emphasis. The Army too would have heard such talk.

During an inspection of the polling centre at Mankerni, the monitors were briefed by LTTE sympathisers about their anxiety over EPRLF (V) pressurising voters coming from Vaharai. This too was strange, since the party concerned maintained a small presence in Valaichenai, having no capacity to intimidate anyone.

On Election Day itself, monitors at Mankerni rushed to the army colonel's office and asked for an explanation for the closure. He first said that if the voters were coming on their own, that was fine, but if the LTTE was bussing them, there was a problem. He added that an order had come at mid-night to close the entry point. This did not square with his closing it at 10.00 AM.

Technically, and morally, it was the Government's duty to ensure that every adult citizen had the facility to vote. In Trincomalee, advance measures had reportedly been taken by TULF's Sampanthan to talk to the Army and ensure that voters from the LTTE-controlled area would not be hindered. Given that there was an abnormal situation, no one appears to have taken similar measures in Batticaloa to provide reassurance to the Army who may have entertained some real fears.

However, there is good reason to believe that complaints by LTTE sympathisers in this regard are not entirely sincere. In CC3, CC4 and CC5 in the environs of Valaichenai, the TNA obtained only a total of 5678 votes against 4259 by EPRLF (V), a small left party, terrorised and intimidated, having been able to put up only a weak campaign. The only reason for this party's fair showing in this locality was that the people were aware of some other party with a human touch to vote for. This is a very poor area that had suffered much from the LTTE's depredations of forced recruitment. It was also the area of **Nimalan Soundaranayagam MP**, who was killed by the LTTE. As suggested above, the LTTE machine had been concerned about the voting in such areas, and the result confirmed their fears.

We will now work out the number of Tamils who wished to vote, but were denied the opportunity. Looking at polling stations where the voters were almost exclusively Tamil and where polling was normal, the proportion who voted is about 70%.

At Mankerni, we find that about 4,000 Muslim votes were polled (SLMC about 3600, UNP & PA together 960). The total registered at Mankerni is 17,400, and the total polled about 8000. This means that about 13000 Tamil voters are registered at Mankerni, of whom 4000 voted. Given a 70% poll among Tamils, this means that about 5000 Tamils who would have voted at Mankerni, were not allowed to cast their vote. The other places where polling was disturbed are easier to deal with, because the Muslim population is negligible. The corresponding figures of those intending to vote, but not permitted, in the remainder, are: Paddiruppu (CC20): 3500, Ambalanthurai (Kurukkalmadam) (CC19): 2000, and Valayiravu (CC12): 8000. We allow 3000 for Chenkalady, which too was closed for persons from the LTTE-controlled area, but cannot be readily identified in the returns.

This makes a total of about 21,000 who intended voting and were not allowed. It represents 30,000 (i.e. $21\,000 \times 10/7$) registered Tamil voters. These figures are probably on the high side, since many from the LTTE controlled area have been steadily leaving. Taking the Tamil voters to be 78% of the registered voters, i.e. 220,000, we find, after allowing for those prevented from participating that: about 70% of Tamil voters, voted; the TNA polled 46% of the registered Tamil vote and 63% of Tamil votes polled.

This is far from being a grand mandate for the LTTE. In Jaffna, where Tamil voters had no anxiety over Tamil representation going into the hands of other ethnic groups, we see a dominant picture of voter apathy.

10. Vote rigging in Jaffna

The estimated adult population in Jaffna is about 300,000 whereas over 600,000 polling cards are distributed, since a large number of deceased and non-resident persons have not been struck off the lists. Hence the ability to win elections has also involved being able to collect excess cards in an organised manner and have them cast by mobile serial impersonators. Until the last elections, the EPDP had been the main beneficiary of this excess. However this time the TNA and the UNP were contesting the elections with the LTTE's backing, having a formidable organisation behind them to downsize the EPDP.

The EPDP drew attention to itself and played into their hands by obtaining a Supreme Court ruling that voters are not obliged to show their identity cards. The EPDP's brutal attack on TNA campaigners at Velanai on 28.11.01 resulting in two deaths, also turned large numbers of voters away from the EPDP. The failure of the Tamil parties who rejected the LTTE's extremism to form a common front, and offer the people a clear alternative, too, cost them dearly in both Jaffna and Batticaloa.

The LTTE's strategy was to promote the UNP as a counter to the EPDP among business interests, and on the other hand to promote amenable individuals in the TNA using the base of a decimated TULF – the 'arch traitors'. Over the years the LTTE had killed seven members of the TULF old guard in Jaffna. Once more, redeemed 'traitors' were on the march.

The UNP in Jaffna was led by ('Kerosene') Maheswaran, who, during the earlier UNP regime, had made a fortune using his connections to smuggle essential items into the

LTTE-controlled Vanni. Catering to the same vein of politics as the LTTE, *Uthayan*, the widely read Jaffna daily, supported both the TNA and Maheswaran. *Uthayan*, with the mainline Tamil media, orchestrated the line popularized by the peace lobby that President Kumaratunge was obstructing peace. Against this background, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaffna called upon the people to vote for peace!

The commercial family behind *Uthayan* was clearly looking to Maheswaran for a revival of their fortunes. When **Maheswaran** was not appointed minister for Northern Rehabilitation after the elections, *Uthayan* ran an acrimonious lead item (12.12.01) blaming the TULF and TELO. **Sabra Unico Finance** that was associated with the *Uthayan* group collapsed in 1993 with mostly pensioners in Jaffna losing Rs. 60 million. One member of the family left the country with Rs. 46 million and has not since been heard of.

The election results tell a story of their own. The total number of votes recorded as polled was 197,279. Of the 186,598 valid votes the TNA (TULF) obtained 102,324 (54.8%), EPDP 57,208 (30.65%) and UNP 16,245 (8.7%), winning respectively 6,2 and 1 seats. Senior TULF members **Anandasangari** and **Mavai Senathirajah** topped the list with more than 33,000 preference votes each. Next came ACTC's **Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam** (29,641) and **Vinayagamoorthy** (19,472), followed by **Raviraj** of the TULF (19,263) and **Sivajilingam** of TELO (17,859).

Both the successful ACTC candidates had very little contact with Jaffna previously. During the 2000 elections when 132,733 votes were polled, the ACTC obtained 10,648 (8.94%), less than the UNP's 11,431. Then TELO, of which Sivajilingam was a candidate, obtained less than 2400 votes. Also remarkably, prominent public figures in Jaffna on the TULF (TNA) list, for the recent elections, such as **C.V.K. Sivagnanam** (15,513 votes) and **C. Sivamaharajah** (11,296) failed to get elected. The last person on the TULF list obtained 5869 votes.

Even more remarkably, **Suresh Premachandran**, with hardly a popular base in Jaffna, beat **Sivamaharajah** with 13,302 preference votes. His party, EPRLF (S) obtained less than 2000 votes at the previous elections of 2000. Another indication is the postal vote that is fairly representative. Suresh came one before last, with 141, as against Sivamaharajah's 246 and Anandasangari leading with 561. Sivamaharajah was an old TULF man who became popular and well known for making the Tellipalai Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society a model of success. This leads us to the LTTE's manipulations.

Suresh Premachandran, earlier EPRLF Secretary General, held the sinecure of Advisor to the Ministry of Fisheries under the PA government until about late 1999. When questions were raised in his party about the undemocratic nature of its leadership and the misuse of huge funds, he took a breakaway faction of the party (EPRLF (S)) and moved close to the UNP and LTTE. He reversed his rhetoric appropriately. Another indication of the new game was the arrest by the Army of two suspected LTTE infiltrators in Jaffna with EPRLF identity cards. In his new role, through such connections, Suresh became close to the LTTE-controlled student body at the University.

According to student sources in the University of Jaffna, a group of students led by N. from Mullaitivu met **Suresh** at Millenium Restaurant about a day before the elections. N. gave Suresh about 4000 polling cards and discussed the assignment of students to cast these. On instructions from the LTTE, other groups of students were, according to these sources, similarly assigned to cast votes also for **Sivajilingam** and **Ponnambalam**. Moreover, it is known that a group of medical students was assigned to **Maheswaran**. These sources also said that university students organised about 20,000 impersonations on Election Day and this is only a fraction of the total impersonations for the TNA and UNP.

On Election Day itself, attention was drawn to impersonations by often unruly EPDP agents. But these were mainly confined to Jaffna Town and the Islands. Elsewhere, the EPDP was on the defensive. **Maheswaran** was widely seen with his security detachment, bullying, abusing and threatening supporters of parties opposed to the LTTE, including women. The extent of impersonation by the TNA came to light in the coming days, but is now widely accepted. Estimates range from 30% of the TNA's votes to figures significantly higher.

In early January, **Prof. C. Sitrapalam**, the newly elected Dean of Arts at the University of Jaffna, addressed the students. He urged the students to concentrate on their studies, so as to erase the black mark they have earned through being linked to ballot rigging. The Professor is an old TULF stalwart. Speaking at the 'Tamil Inspirational Festival' in mid-January, student leader Gajendran claimed that the students had proved to the world that the LTTE are the sole representatives of the Tamil people!

11. Beating the carcass of democracy

From the evidence presented above, we may say that the hard-pressed Tamil people are in fact looking for alternatives to the present reality of utter hopelessness. The example of EPRLF (V) around Valaichenai is important in this respect. Electorally, it is an insignificant left party. Its leader, **Varadaraja Perumal**, who once headed the North-East Provincial Council was, in 1990, forced to seek refuge in India by developments that followed the UNP-LTTE rapprochement. The party was haunted by its associations during that period of bitter and intense political violence. After Perumal's return, with the maturity gained, he and his party have been articulating saner options for the Tamil people. Running against the tide, the party is anti-chauvinist and stands essentially for a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka.

However, its local impact in Valaichenai was only based on its ability to show a human face. It only participated in the local council and did some voluntary service (*shramadana*). As a problem for the LTTE, it was a mere drop in the ocean, hardly worth bothering about. But like any fascist group, the LTTE is habitually nervous about small things.

Sundaramoorthy Jeevanandamorthy (26) was attached to the EPRLF (V) in Valaichenai. He and his wife, **Malar**, had a child. On the 28th October 2001, after the elections were announced, he went at 5.30 AM to perform volunteer service (*shramadana*), when he was shot dead by the LTTE.

Muthusamy Anushamoorthy attached to the Chenkalady EPRLF (V) office, became the next victim. On 22nd November 2001, he was shot dead close to the office by **Mahendran** of the LTTE, a native of Commathurai. The deceased leaves behind his widow **Samivel Usalakumari**.

The two murders above were calculated to make it impossible for the party to campaign for the elections, which it was contesting as Independent Group No. 4. This attitude of the LTTE illustrates the impossibility of mobilising the people behind alternative opinion that is necessary for peace. These killings are a continuation of the process that included the murders of **Cheliyan Perinpanayagam** and **Nimalan Soundaranayagam**. It is a situation where persons of social standing such as principals, teachers and government officers who are privately scathing about the LTTE's politics dare not appear at elections for alternative parties or even discuss their views with students. Hence the tragic intellectual poverty in the University of Jaffna. This also makes elections largely meaningless.

The LTTE's first attack on the TULF old guard began in the late 1980s. In 1989, the same year it killed Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran, it killed Sambandamoorthy, a senior and tough TULF candidate in Batticaloa during the elections held on 15th February 1989, after calling him for talks. It is reported that Sambandamoorthy had assaulted his killers before being killed on 7th March 1989. The LTTE instinctively targetted anyone who could organise resistance. It was in October 2000 that the LTTE first tried to project itself politically through inserting its supporters on TULF and ACTC lists. It also eliminated **Cheliyan Perinpanayagam**, a writer and effective mayor of Batticaloa with good accountability, who became a strong candidate for the PA.

The result of the 2000 elections was however a disappointment for the LTTE. **Sathiyananthan**, a principal and now acting director of education, from Vaharai, was the LTTE nominee on the TULF list. He came sixth on the TULF list with 5,924 preference votes as against 16,542 by the leading candidate **Nimalan Soundaranayagam**. Only **Soundaranayagam** and **Pararajasingham** were elected. Even the PA secured a seat with **Ganeshamoorthy** obtaining 9,132 preference votes. The ACTC which orchestrated a rhetorical pro-LTTE line obtained only a total of 6,968 votes as against the PA's 16,510.

One could see why the LTTE is wary of putting itself to the test at elections. Within a month of the results, a peeved LTTE killed **Nimalan Soundaranayagam**.

12. Making the Peace Process Work

What is most alarming today is the general silence about the harsh realities on the ground and a pretence that all is fine with the peace process. Peace and church groups have rushed in to praise the Government's professionalism in dealing with peace matters. Were not many so starry-eyed about peace, one might have been inclined to say that an important side of the process looks cynical rather than professional. After all, there is knowingly a refusal to face the fact that what is going on in the East is plunder in the name of peace.

Apart from other matters, there is most dreadfully a dereliction of the Government's duty to protect very young Tamil children from being criminally inducted into a life of brutality. Where a government cannot actually prevent it, it has a duty to raise it and pursue it in an appropriate manner. Indeed, when it is political survival that primarily motivates both the Government and the LTTE, it is the ignoble that tends to dominate. Further, many ministers in the present government have had previous experience in dealing with the LTTE under President Premadasa. They connived with the LTTE to the point of aiding it to capture and transport Tamil dissidents to torture camps in the North, chained to passenger vehicles. It was a dastardly piece of cynicism that cost the country and the security forces dearly.

In these circumstances, it falls to the other actors concerned in the peace process to safeguard children's rights and create normal conditions on the political front as well. A huge responsibility falls on Norway that has been called upon to play a facilitating role. We need to put mechanisms in place to monitor not only violations of the truce between the State and the LTTE, but also the use of terror and violations against the civilians by both sides. This is the time for the office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict to play a crucial role in this regard.

It is, moreover, only right that the NGO community and other civil society groups should campaign for some concrete measures rather than issue ritual statements. The lists of names provided by us are not meant to become part of a database to study children in war, and to present papers in academic fora, but mainly to aid timely action to stop crimes against them. No one can today give shoddy reasons for the continuation of inhuman practices. A cease-fire is in place and many powerful interests are pushing for permanent peace. Is it a crime against peace, simply to demand that children in the North-East, and their parents too, be allowed a semblance of normality?

It is against all reason to believe that the unity of this country can be preserved through appeasement of the LTTE. Surrendering to it the arbitrary right to decide what is good for the Tamil people would again prove disastrous. The Government's present calculations may leave little room for it to take any real interest in the basic human rights of the Tamil people. Bringing these issues to the forefront, therefore, rests with civil society organizations that are concerned about Human Rights and Peace.

From the developments sketched out above, the LTTE's game plan is clear. Through its front organisations it has made a series of demands – remove the ban, the PTA, Sixth Amendment etc., remove army camps and so on. There will be more to come. It will try to lead the Government on, taking the demands one by one. Disputes on the way will be built up as pretexts for breaking off. It is notable that as the end of the ceasefire on 24th January approached, speeches from the TNA machine in the East became shriller. The LTTE too had made the 24th the deadline for parents to hand over their children, threatening outright abduction otherwise. This has the appearance of a dress rehearsal.

While putting on an air of moral superiority over the passive Government and making its demands, the LTTE has been brazenly plundering, particularly the East, to build up its

military machine. This has been watched with trepidation, nowhere more keenly than from Jaffna. One observer put it aptly: *“We are seeing the making of two immense tragedies here. There is on the one hand, the crime against a host of poor children and their families in the East. But the LTTE’s real target is here, in Jaffna, where the blood of these children will be shed. That would be the bigger tragedy, where thousands of poor soldiers and civilians will be slaughtered, and the place will be left a rank mess of rubble. If things go on as at present, there is nothing more to be said.”*

The peace process can yield benignant results only if the facilitators and others in positions of influence take a clear position on certain basic values. They should insist on the LTTE making tangible concessions to guarantee the human rights of Tamil and Muslim civilians, to match every measure of relaxation on the government’s part. The LTTE has no excuse to further obstruct the right of Muslim refugees to return to the North. The concerns of the Muslims in view of past massacres and present abductions are grave indeed. The subservient tone of the SLMC leader’s appeal to the LTTE leader, is another sign of the unhealthy direction of events.

Unlike the earlier PA government, the UNP government has the advantage of the PA in opposition co-operating in measures to bring about a political settlement. This is the cornerstone of permanent peace and should be the first item on the agenda. Without a clear strategy regarding the political solution, when the inevitable happens, the rest of the world will remain unconvinced about whether the Government was serious.

At this late hour at least, it is important for civil society groups to come out of their torpor and face the disturbing realities. Peace cannot be achieved through complicity in sacrificing Tamil dissent, and ultimately the whole society on the LTTE’s altar.

The NGO idea was originally to help the weak and the marginalised. However, where the Tamils are concerned, the confusion of the Southern NGOs stems partly from failing to take an honest account of their own society’s recent violent turmoil. The undermining of the process of justice for atrocities during that period, meant that rhetoric aside, there was a passive acceptance of the principle ‘Might is Right’. In time this led them to woo, or at least be comfortable with, front organisations of forces like the LTTE, and even develop a contempt for their hard-pressed opponents. Thus on the Tamil issue, for a number of groups and individuals, peace means being on the side of the oppressor, aiding the crushing of the weak and marginalised.

Forging a culture where human rights and democratic norms have their due place is not going to be served by legitimizing totalitarian and fascist political formations. There can never be a united Sri Lanka with fascism in the North-East. A fascist order taking root in the North-East would result in an onrush of Sinhalese extremism and a demand for total militarisation of the South. The pollution in one part of the country must necessarily spread like a cancer. It may already have gone too far.

* *The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR(J)) was formed in 1988 at the University of Jaffna, as part of the national organisation University Teachers for Human Rights. Its public activities as a constituent part of university life came to a standstill following the murder of **Dr. Rajani Thiranagama**, a key founding member, on 21st September 1989. During the course of 1990 the others who identified openly with the UTHR(J) were forced to leave Jaffna. It continues to function as an organisation upholding the founding spirit of the UTHR(J) with its original aims: **to challenge the external and internal terror engulfing the Tamil community as a whole through making the perpetrators accountable, and to create space for humanising the social & political spheres relating to the life of our community.** The UTHR(J) is not at present functioning in the University of Jaffna in the manner it did in its early life for reasons well understood.*