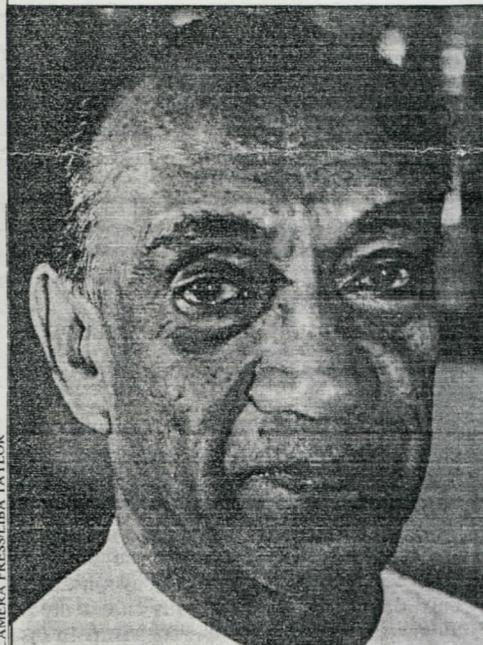


REGIONAL REPORTS



விடுதலைப்புலிகளும்
தமிழீழசுதந்திரப்போராட்டமும்

A president and his problems: Jayawardene, left; boatload of fleeing Tamil refugees; face of the young Tiger, right

Colombo rides the tiger

Sri Lanka The government seems likely to continue to slug it out with the young Tamil guerrillas now that talks have broken down between President Junius Richard Jayawardene and Appapillai Amirthalingam, leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front, on the demands of Sri Lanka's biggest minority for *Eelam* — a separate state carved out of the predominantly Tamil-speaking northern and eastern provinces.

It will wait for an initiative from Amirthalingam to resume the second option of negotiations to resolve the ethnic problem.

Tamil guerrillas operating from bases in South India's Tamil Nadu and in the north and east of Sri Lanka are blowing up bridges, ambushing and killing penny packets of soldiers, and laying mines to destroy army-convoys or troop trains.

Miraculously, a backlash resembling the savage ethnic violence of mid-1983 against Tamils living in the capital and other predominantly Sinhalese areas has been averted — partly because of the government's vigilance in enforcing curfews whenever communal trouble has appeared imminent, and partly because the Sinhalese are satisfied that the army is doing something about the guerrillas.

"Socking it out is just not going to help," National Security Minister Lalith Athulathmudali says, though he may well be tempted to seek a military solution, given the results of his recent visit to Washington at the invitation of US Secretary of State George Shultz.

The security forces have now got special radar equipment to monitor guerrilla

movements across the Palk Strait, the 24km of sea separating Tamil Nadu from Tamil homelands in north and northwest Sri Lanka, and the US will train local technicians to operate the system. Also a special army unit is being trained by former members of Britain's elite SAS commando group.

These troops could be more effective and disciplined in their responses than the so far amateurish Sri Lankan army, which has reacted with frenzy against Tamil civilians whenever colleagues have been killed.

The government could choose to have an Ulster on the cheap. In Ulster, though, the population's loyalties are divided between the government and Sinn Fein, whereas the Tamils sympathise almost totally with their militant youth.

The authorities are receiving more information from Tamils about guerrilla activists — the whereabouts of landmines and other booby traps for example. But this is a reflection of local villagers' fears of savage, indiscriminate army reprisals.

Some security officials are encouraged by the citizens committees operating in Jaffna, capital of the northern province. Again, this is self-serving; the committees want to ensure that food supplies reach the areas where transport has broken down as a result of guerrilla operations. In any case, the committees are also demanding the withdrawal of the army.

Far from winning hearts and minds, a necessary condition for successful anti-guerrilla operations, the army's reliance on indiscriminate arrest and other forms of violence against local civilians is driving

Tamil youth to South India to join the struggle to avenge what they see as a national humiliation by a Sinhalese army of occupation.

The army lacks the manpower to escalate its operation and wipe out the guerrillas. Athulathmudali says that anti-guerrilla operations are costing about Rs2-million (about US\$75,700) a day. "At Rs750-million (about US\$28-million) a year, this is not much, about 1.5 per cent of the national budget," he says.

But security is diverting resources, from national development, and local officials say that its cost could double this year. Also the "ethnic war" is discouraging foreign investors and tourists. The big hotels have been operating on occupancy rates of about 25 per cent at the height of the tourist season.

Embittered by the thought that Amirthalingam let him down by scuttling the proposals he put up at the recent all-party conference on the ethnic problem, Jayawardene is in no mood to come up with new ideas or enter fresh talks with the Tamil leader. He is determined that any fresh initiative should come from the Tulf.

The President's commitment to a just solution is unquestionable. In the last four years he has performed daringly on the ethnic political trapeze. He first proposed devolving some powers for regional economic development to a new structure of district development councils. Such a move would have met many of the Tamils' grievances about discrimination in employment and the use of their language.

Jayawardene told me in February 1983 that he planned to apportion part of a

Asia

Official sources in Colombo have identified several camps in North India and South Indian Tamil Nadu where militants seeking to set up *Eelam* are being trained for military action and intelligence gathering for guerrilla operations in the Tamil-speaking north and east of Sri Lanka. The Indian government denies any official involvement in these alleged camps. Its response to inquiries about secret camps is that, if they exist, they are centres for physical training run by the militants themselves.

The militants fall into several groups, identified by acronyms: EPRLF (Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Front); Telo (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation); PLOT (Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam); Eros (Eelam Revolutionary Organisations); Tela (Tamil Eelam Liberation Army).

The addresses given are where the groups are located; the training is at sites near these camps.

MILITARY TRAINING IN TAMIL NADU

Groups	No. trained	Period of training	Location of camp	Subject of instructions	Name of instructors
T.E.L.O.		05.05.83	Large house at No. 777 or 977	Unarmed combat Weapon Training .303 Rifles, AK 47 Kalashnikov or T 56, Pistol/Revolvers	Subedar Major Narashimma Varman
T.E.L.O.	Not known	Oct. '82 05.05.83	Parangimalai and at a place about 40 km from the Madras Airport	Firing practice, Leopard crawl, Monkey crawl, Ghost walk, Close quarter unarmed combat, First aid, Preparation of Molotov cocktails, Fire-fighting, Endurance test	Indian Instructors
T.E.L.O.	300	26.09.83 25.09.84	Salem Kollimalai Kanjipuram	Drill, PT, Military subjects	Ex Subedar Major Narashimma Varman of the Indian Army
T.E.L.O.	Not known	30.10.83 19.07.84	Kollimalai, Kanjipuram	Physical training, Military subjects	Ex Subedar Major Narashimma Varman of the Indian Army
T.E.L.O.	360	Later part of 1983	Kollimalai, Kakavel	AK 47, G3, pistols, SLR, LMG, SMG, No 36 Browning revolvers, Rocket launchers, 2" Mortar, explosives	
T.E.L.O.	24	Nov. '82 Aug. '82 (1st visit)	Anna Nagar (2 months), Parangimalai, in close proximity to Meenambakkam Airport (1 month)	Physical training, .303 firing	Ex Subedar Major Narashimma Varman of the Indian Army
	700	Mar. '84 Aug. '84 (2nd visit)	Salem (2 months)	G3 Rifles, AK 47, Military subjects	Ex Subedar Major Narashimma Varman of the Indian Army
T.E.L.O.	350	19.10.83 19.06.84	Kanchipuram	Military subjects	Ex Subedar Major Narashimma Varman of the Indian Army Rajah - retired Army soldier
P.L.O.T.	Not known	21.05.83	Sengalpattu Presawakkam	Physical training, Weapon handling	
P.L.O.T.	Not known	12.03.83 12.09.83	Sengalpattu, Thanathur, Kongurukolam in Erodi	Military tactics, Guerrilla warfare, Jungle warfare, Handling of weapons, .380 & .450 revolver, 22 air rifle	Sekar
T.E.L.A.	300	Not known	Valachchari & Thenikramam	Physical training, Weapon training	Alagasamy, a retired Indian police officer and an Ex-Indian Army officer

World Bank loan to development councils in the north and east for ports, irrigation and other infrastructure. M Sivasithampar-am, a moderate Tulf leader, welcomed the proposals. "For God's sake, ask Jayawardene to get the money across fast," he said. But the development council plan was not properly implemented by the bureaucracy, Athulathmudali says. "Some ministers did not wish to delegate their authority through decentralisation."

After the 1983 riots and the rush of refugees to India, Jayawardene attempted to ease heightened Tamil suspicions of Sinhalese intentions and goodwill with another initiative. On the advice of G Parthasarathy, the foreign policy adviser to Indira Gandhi who became an intermediary between the Sri Lankan government and the Tulf, Jayawardene agreed to set up provincial councils - wider administrative units than the district councils to which powers affecting regional development, the language of administration, socio-economic development and some aspects of education and welfare would be devolved. Finance, the army, policing, defence and the judiciary would be the

responsibilities of the central government.

It was a quasi-federal structure with a second chamber to reinforce national unity and act as an outlet for the expression of minority grievances. After swiftly agreeing to the proposals in principle, Amirthalingam equally abruptly dismissed it when it came before the all-party conference. Athulathmudali says this was a big mistake. "If the Tamils had not hurriedly rejected the plan, if they had reserved their comments, the President would have been compelled to push for the best," he says.

Because Jayawardene had ensured that all government moves on the ethnic question were taken at his initiative, he was able to hold down dissent in his cabinet on concessions to the Tamils. Now the issue has been thrown to an emotional, irrational public arena of tribal fears.

Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa is for nothing more than district development councils, though he favours a smaller administrative unit for decentralisation of authority. A council of Buddhist monks is opposed to provincial councils, favouring the district council as the unit for decentralisation. Former leader Sirimavo

Bandaranaike would do nothing to improve her own Freedom Party political base among Sinhalese Buddhists. She says that monks should be consulted and that elections should be held to resolve the contentious issues.

"You cannot now go down the devolution road," Athulathmudali says, adding: "It is not easy to sell." He would emphasise fundamental rights and use the courts to eliminate specific cases of discrimination against the minorities. The US courts have played a key role in advancing the rights of the black Americans and other minorities, he says.

The criticism that has erupted will not threaten Jayawardene's authority. The council of monks is only a fragment of the Buddhist clergy, who always ride the crest of a political wave but cannot stir up a storm. Also rivalries within the Cabinet have left the presidential succession unresolved, and the opposition is fragmented. Jayawardene will turn the criticisms to his advantage in any new negotiations with the Tamils.

India is asking Amirthalingam to go back and negotiate. It has suggested that he abandon the demand that two or more provincial councils be allowed to merge because it arouses Sinhalese fears that such a fusion could lead to the creation of a separate Tamil state. Indian officials say they are against the creation of mini-states like *Eelam* since they encourage super-power manipulation and become a factor in regional instability.

The gut issue in the ethnic problem is distrust. More than five centuries of invasions by Tamil kings and marauders are deeply engraved in the psyche of the Sinhalese. Tamil invaders ravaged the Buddhist culture and Sinhalese civilisation, destroying the irrigation systems on which that civilisation was based and forcing the Sinhalese to retreat to the less congenial hills. British colonialism used indentured Tamil labour to work the tea and rubber plantations in what was left of the Sinhalese heartland in the hills.

These historical experiences are the key to understanding why the Sinhalese reject solutions to the ethnic problem which smell of *Eelam*. A state based on Tamil-speakers would reduce Sinhalese living space to the already overcrowded south and southwest.

Furthermore, *Eelam* in alliance with the 42-million Tamils in Tamil Nadu would be a threat to a constricted Sinhala state.

The Tamils, for their part, will not look to Sinhalese goodwill for a resolution of their grievances over employment and settlement. Nor will they depend on a majority Sinhalese army and police force to ensure their personal safety, as at least four race riots since 1957 have demonstrated. Two previous agreements on the devolution of powers to the Tamil areas have been torn up under pressure from the Sinhalese politics of the street.