

Chapter 2

SOME MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TAMIL POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

2.1 The Youth Congress

The first great political movement that took root in Jaffna was the Ceylon Youth Congress. This movement came into being around 1926 and had its base amongst the educated middle-class youth, especially young graduates of Jaffna from Indian Universities and the newly founded Ceylon University College, and high school students. It was greatly inspired by the Indian independence movement and looked up to its leading figures such as Mahathma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Like the Congress in India, the causes it advocated were secularism, a non-sectarian Ceylonese nationalism and independence from Britain. For this reason it enjoyed much respect from Sinhalese intellectuals in the South. It drew enthusiasm and morale boosts from visits of leading Indian personalities. Gandhi visited Jaffna in 1927 and Nehru in 1932. Kamaladevi Chattopadyaya who addressed the opening session of the Ceylon Youth Congress in 1931, is said to have taken Jaffna by storm. Not only leading personalities from India, but also eminent Sinhalese from the South, like S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike addressed Youth Congress sessions. It was at the Youth Congress sessions that S.W.R.D. advocated for the first time a federal constitution for Ceylon. Some of the leading personalities of the Youth Congress were Handy Perinpanayagam, J.V. Chelliah, S. Kulendran (who, later, was enthroned as the Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India), Orator Subramaniam, K. Nesiah, N. Sabaratnam, and A. E. Tamber.

The Youth Congress reached its high point when it organised in the Tamil areas a boycott of elections under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931, for the reason that the constitution did not offer Poorna Swaraj (complete independence). In the succeeding years the Youth Congress fell into decline, unable to resist the pressure of communal politics. Perhaps they were unable to come out with a leadership that could combine idealism with charisma, essential for mass based politics under universal suffrage. Nevertheless many of the Youth Congress figures were great men who left their mark. Consciences had been awakened on the caste issue and the ideals of cosmopolitan, secular democracy had been instilled in many young minds. Several of their leaders such as Handy Perinpanayagam, Orator Subramaniam, N. Sabaratnam and K. Nesiah went on to make a distinct contribution, and, as educationists, remained loyal exponents of their youthful ideals. They also maintained their ties with the leading contemporaries of Mahathma Gandhi into the 1970's. The most important legacy of the Youth Congress from the point of the present, is the position enjoyed by India in the minds of the Tamil People. India for the Tamils, came to represent high standards - virtue, moral edification and ideals of non-violence. Pictures of Mahathma Gandhi and other Indian leaders came to adorn many Tamil homes. This affection was enhanced by already existing ties of religion, education and language.

2.2 The F.P. and the T.U.L.F.

As a result of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's Sinhalese only bill of 1956, the Federal Party (F.P.) under S.J.V. Chelvanayakam became the chief repository of Tamil hopes and interests. Significantly, the Satyagraha campaign launched by the F.P. in 1961 was modelled on Mahathma Gandhi's example. From 1956 to 1983 Tamil political thinking developed under the impact of the anti-Tamil riots of 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981, and 1983 together with mounting discrimination and a series of broken promises by successive governments which promised to settle Tamil grievances. The uprising by the Sinhalese youth of the J.V.P. in 1971 had its impact on Tamil youth. By the early 1970's a section of Tamil youth in the universities and high schools had begun to think in terms of violence. But the F.P. continued to espouse non-violence. The official ideology of its successor, the T.U.L.F., remains non-violence to this day. The other events which had an impact on the Tamil Youth were, a system of standardisation introduced by Mrs. Bandaranaike's government in 1970 which made it more difficult for Tamil students to enter the University, and the birth of Bangladesh. These latter events made

a strong impression on their minds. At this point lessons in karate and judo began to be organised in Jaffna. A group of Tamil undergraduates at Peradeniya were in the ideological forefront of this new tendency. They began to think of economic self-sufficiency for the Tamil areas. But a fully fledged rebel movement like the P.L.O .was still only a distant possibility. Many of them thought of a simple plan inspired by Bangladesh. Their plan was to have a limited militant movement, plan for economic self-sufficiency and once U.D.I .was declared India was to come in and finish the job quickly. It may be noted that almost all of these pioneering youths have now left the country, for good.

The effect of all this was to weaken democratic ideals amongst Tamils. A new romanticism developed where political activists thought in terms of military structures, secret societies and undercover work. To have different opinions amounted to treachery. Tolerance and open discussion were no longer welcomed.

The Federal Party was quick to cash in on the new mood of totalitarianism. A senior journalist and a long time observer of Jaffna has this to say:

"In 1972 I was at a meeting where S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the leader of the F.P. was present on the platform. Mr. Kasi Ananthan, a popular platform speaker, who is now a member of the L.T.T.E., told the audience:

Mr. Duraiappa, Mr. Subramaniam, Mr. Arulampalam and Mr. Anandasangeri are enemies of the Tamil nation. They do not deserve a natural death. Nor do they deserve to die in an accident. The Tamil people, especially the youth, must decide how they should die....

"I knew that this was going to lead to anarchy. I was angry and said so to my colleagues. The only thing my colleagues could say in mitigation was that Mr. Chelvanayakam's hearing was bad and consequently he would not have known what was said. This was no satisfactory excuse for a party leader. This speech was editorially quoted in the Suthanthiran, a paper owned by Mr. Chelvanayakam. Such a speech which apparently had the blessings of the Tamil leadership was a foretaste of things to come. In the succeeding years we were taught unquestioning compliance with political authority. If the F.P. or its successor, the T.U.L.F., announced a three day hartal, we had to comply and stay at home; there was no question of discussion. Anyone who did not comply could have expected some young men to come and beat him up. The seeds were sown for the growth of totalitarian militant groups and for the methods of violence they employed."

It must also be mentioned that Mrs. Bandaranaike's government contributed to these developments by the methods it adopted. It arrested 42 Tamil youths in 1972 and detained them without charges for two years. These youths were mainly involved in protesting against standardisation which restricted the entrance of Tamils to the University. The actual offences were often nothing more than putting up posters. The Federal Party's mild demands for Tamil rights in parliament were treated with contempt. Dr. Colvin R. de Silva's constitution of 1972 had the ring of a deliberate slap on the face. Discrimination against Tamils and corruption became much more open. The one mitigating factor was that the import restriction policies of the government provided opportunities and prosperity for the enterprising Jaffna farmer. An event which had considerable impact on Tamil political thought was the police attack on the International Tamil Research Conference hosted in Jaffna in January 1974. Nine persons died by accidental electrocution during this unprovoked attack, which took place in the presence of international scholars. It was a measure of Mrs. Bandaranaike's arrogance that she refused to order an inquiry. The first shot in the Tamil insurgency was fired when Mr. Alfred Duraiyappa, the Mayor of Jaffna who was close to Mrs. Bandaranaike, was assassinated in 1975. Mr. Duraiyappa was a popular man whose funeral was well attended.

By 1976, the leading Tamil parties including the F.P., the Tamil Congress of Mr. G.G. Ponnampalam and Mr. Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress representing plantation Tamils and Prof. C. Suntheralingam, a prominent Tamil nationalist, had combined to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (T.U.L.F.). In this

year (1976) was adopted the Vaddukoddai resolution which put forward an independent state of Tamil Eelam as being the solution to the problems of the Tamils. This state was to be won by non-violent means.

It can be safely assumed that there was no viable plan to fight for such a state. In a public debate conducted in Chunnakam in 1975, presided over by Mr. Orator Subramaniam, two of Mr. Subramaniam's eminent students, Mr. N. Shanmugathan, Communist Party (Peking Wing) and Mr. V. Dharmalingam, M.P. (T.U.L.F.) debated the pros and cons of the separate state. Mr. Shanmugathan challenged Mr. Dharmalingam to state his plan of action. Mr. Dharmalingam replied that it was a party secret. Several in the audience clamoured for a more definite answer. Orator said later: "I had ties of friendship and respect to both my students and I knew that I was chosen as Chairman because in Chunnakam I was perhaps well qualified to control the crowd. Seeing that things were going too far, I intervened as Chairman and decreed that it was Mr. Dharmalingam's right to keep a party secret. But the simple truth was that there was no such plan." By now Mr. Chelvanayakam was in a state of poor health and Mr. A. Amirthalingam, the T.U.L.F. Secretary, had begun to play a leading role in the party. According to one report, Mr. M. Thiruchelvam, a senior member of the T.U.L.F. and ex-minister who was in Colombo at the time the resolution for a separate state was adopted, sensing danger, asked Mr. Amirthalingam, "What is the meaning of this?" Mr. Amirthalingam replied that this resolution was adopted under pressure from the youth and that when the time comes to negotiate with the government, a compromise can be reached. This, as future events showed, was the true position of the T.U.L.F..

2.3 The Years 1977-81

The new U.N.P. government which came to power in July 1977 raised hopes that it would solve the problems of the Tamils. It did away with standardisation for a time. Time showed that the government was only toying with the problem. The 1977 race riots made the average Tamil feel that the Tamils needed much firmer guarantees concerning their place in the country and an autonomous status for their homelands which would include control over colonisation. The government was in no way prepared to meet these reasonable claims. Instead ministers such as Cyril Mathew and Gamini Dissanaike used the resources of their ministries to further Sinhalese colonisation especially in the Eastern province. Cyril Mathew kept on discovering ancient Buddhist shrines in the Trincomalee area. The anger and helplessness of the Tamils provided a natural boost for militant groups.

One cannot deal with the question without looking into the manner in which Sinhalese fears were awakened. Having promised Tamil Eelam, the T.U.L.F. under Mr. Amirthalingam kept on saying that they had a secret plan to bring about this event. Having directly or indirectly aided the growth of the militant movement, the T.U.L.F. had to ride it. The secret plan story with elaborations drew applause from audiences. Rumours abounded to the effect that some foreign powers, overseas Tamils, or both, were to provide military succour for the birth of Tamil Eelam. Even by the end of 1977 many believed that fighter planes had been purchased for that task. The average person listening to speeches given by the T.U.L.F. took them to mean that non-violence was just a facade and that the real thrust was being planned by enhancing the militants' capability. But when pressed for comment by audiences of a different kind, the T.U.L.F. would become a group of urbane Western-educated gentlemen committed to non-violence. All this was not lost on the Sinhalese. When challenged by Sinhalese to condemn the militants' violence, the T.U.L.F. would hedge. There was no doubt, for instance, that the functioning of the banks was essential for the Jaffna economy and that the prosperity of the Jaffna farmer depended crucially on the banks. The police force was in many ways racist and flawed. Yet, it was also performing necessary functions towards the maintenance of order. Subsequently police were deployed to protect banks and vehicles transporting cash. Several of these policemen were killed on duty. Yet the Tamil public treated it as a sad, but necessary part of the Eelam game. The T.U.L.F. was silent.

As a result, a racist picture of the average Tamil as a scheming opportunist came to have a ring of credibility in the eyes of the average Sinhalese man. It then made it easier to arouse Sinhalese fears of being overwhelmed by Tamils and create the kind of feeling: "The Tamils should be taught a lesson". Provoking such distrust made the anti-Tamil riots of 1981 and 1983 more probable. At the same time the T.U.L.F. had no tangible means in its possession to safe-guard the Tamils from such an outcome. Meanwhile the T.U.L.F. neglected party democracy and its grass-roots organisation and had adopted secret negotiations with the government. This resulted in increasing dissatisfaction amongst its supporters.

The T.U.L.F.'s Vaddukottai resolution calling for a separate state of Tamil Eelam made a deep emotional impact on Tamils, both locally and abroad. But it took the 1977 anti-Tamil violence to give it life. Many middle class Tamils who had regarded Colombo as their home had agreed on principle that the Tamils must move back to their traditional homelands for their safety and economic prosperity and the preservation of their national identity and make them economically viable. Even before the 1977 riots, the Tamils had been becoming increasingly anxious because of discrimination in employment and in education. Several Hill Tamils had been displaced during the 1977 violence. A key problem as seen by the Tamils was the protection of border areas such as Trincomalee, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya, where the resources of the state had been used in settling Sinhalese. The 1958 and 1977 violence had shown that it was in these areas that Tamils were the most vulnerable. Although the school leaving Jaffna Tamil was very conscious that these areas were part of his homeland, experience had shown that it was not easy to motivate him to settle and make a living off the land - the earnings from which could be well above white collar government service salaries. Tamil refugees of Indian origin were readily accepted to fill this void. Many of the Tamil elite advocated this migration because they were cheap labour and would serve as a convenient buffer between the Sinhalese and the Jaffna Tamil. C. Chandrasenan, S. J. V. Chelvanayakam's son, once made a remark of such import to a foreign journalist. The leadership in settling these areas came from some highly motivated Tamils. Several of them later acquired links with the incipient militant movement. Three leading names amongst these pioneers were Mr. A. David, a senior Architect and the late Dr. Rajasundaram and his wife Shantini (nee Karalasingam) also a doctor. The husband and wife were in Britain when the 1977 riots broke out. They decided to return without delay to take up this pioneering work. While Shantini ran the Vavuniya clinic on a social service basis, Rajasundaram became the moving force behind the movement Gandhiyam. Gandhiyam was a charitable organisation through which agricultural advice, facilities and materials were provided for refugee families wanting to settle in project areas around Vavuniya. Volunteer workers ran schools and day care centres for children while providing advice and assistance to the elders. The U.S. agency C.A.R.E. supplied packets of Triposha -- balanced cereal food for children. N.O.V.I.B. and O.X.F.A.M. were amongst the charities that helped Gandhiyam. Within two years these former refugees were producing plentiful quantities of nutritious cereals such as Ulunthu, the prices of which reached a record low as a result.

Another organisation which became famous at this time was the Tamil Refugees Rehabilitation Organisation (T.R.R.O.). Amongst the committed officials of the T.R.R.O. were its founder President Nithyanantha and its founder Secretary K. Kanthasamy. Kanthasamy had been a very successful corporate lawyer and his life was to become one of selfless devotion to the cause of Tamil freedom, and the wider cause of human rights at an international level. His disappearance in mid-1988 was a result of the insidious growth of terror within the Tamil body-politic that was to destroy some of its finest sons.

The T.R.R.O. designed projects for the settlement of displaced persons, canvassed funds and implemented the projects either directly or through organisations such as Gandhiyam. The Kent and Dollar farms owed their origin to the pioneering spirit of some of the youth and elders of this time. Both were integrated agricultural settlements. Several Tamils living overseas became infected with this pioneering spirit when letters of appeal reached them. Groups of people sprang up in places like London, Singapore, and Ibadan (Nigeria), who held discussions on projects that could economically stabilise the Tamil homeland and collected money to send towards existing projects. The Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking Peoples

(S.C.O.T.) is an organisation of Tamil professional people that came into being in London during this period. In the Tamil homeland itself there was a sense of buoyancy as several professionals took up residence there and gave their time to designing and implementing economic projects. During these early stages, the militants were known to be present around the settlements, but few from the settlements had any links with them. The thrust was on economic development and rehabilitation. The leadership of the T.U.L.F. was unquestioned. Yet for all the enthusiasm overseas, the actual participation of overseas Tamils in terms of their numbers and resources was small. In Britain where the Ceylon Tamil settlers numbered tens of thousands, the annual income of the S.C.O.T. was only in the region of ,6,000. Those who started rehabilitation work in the field, had hoped for massive support from Tamils living abroad. They got their money. But nearly all of it from Christian charities in the West. Nevertheless Tamils living overseas maintained a keen interest in what was going on at home and the actions of the militants became the subject of much drawing room talk.

During the year 1978 the militant group, the Tamil Tigers, carried out a spate of bank robberies and killings of police officers. The most sensational of these was the killing of Inspector Bastianpillai and some other police officers who were with him, after the police had successfully apprehended some militants. Other sensational events were the robbing of the banks at Thirunelvely, Neervely and Kilinochchi (by the group P.L.O.T.E.) and the bomb blast which destroyed the Avro passenger aircraft plying between Jaffna and Colombo shortly after it had landed on the tarmac at Ratmalana and everyone had disembarked.

As a purely security problem, the Tamil militancy had gone beyond routine policing. But as a political problem, it was well within control. The T.U.L.F. was willing to settle for a fairly modest grant of autonomy for the Tamil areas that included some compromise on land settlement. The militants at this point of time respected the T.U.L.F. and were not challenging it. But the government decided to play tough, and given the racist attitudes of some of its leading members, every action of the government's began to be seen as punitive. An Act of Parliament in 1978 proscribed the Tamil Tigers.

Two events towards the end of 1978 alienated the Tamils further. Mr. Cyril Mathew, Minister for Industries in the U.N.P. government and a regular Tamil basher, had a press conference with P.P.G.L. Siriwardene, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Colombo. It was announced at this conference that evidence had been found to prove that Tamil examiners had cheated by awarding excessively high marks to Tamil candidates. The matter was debated in parliament . But no inquiry was ordered. The allegation sounded convincing to many Sinhalese. With the Tamils it left a bad taste. Many responsible Tamils who studied the matter were convinced that the allegations would not have stood up to an impartial inquiry. By allowing one of its ministers freely to make irresponsible allegations, the government had increased racial feeling against Tamils. The allegations also served as a smoke screen for the reintroduction of an indirect system of racial quotas for University admissions. It was the new U.N.P. government that had scrapped, as a gesture towards Tamils, the system of standardisation introduced by the previous government to restrict Tamil university admissions. Many Tamils would have agreed to the modification of the principle of pure merit by means of non-racial criteria to help the underprivileged. That would not have needed a drama which subjected Tamils to hurtful public vilification. This represented the same irresponsible streak in the Jayewardene government which made Jayewardene tell the Tamils who were victimised by the 1977 racial violence that they will have war if they want war. Discrimination against Tamils in government jobs continued as repeatedly pointed out in letters to the President by the T.U.L.F. leader, Mr. Amirthalingam

The other event was the cyclone that devastated the Eastern Province in December 1978. Tamil leaders and Members of Parliament complained bitterly about blatant discrimination against Tamil victims in the provision of relief. There were several instances where material assistance provided by foreign governments did not reach the victims. In one instance, it was revealed in parliament that a large quantity of good quality

sarees donated for the victims by India had been disposed of through a state trading agency. It was claimed belatedly in reply to a query in parliament that the proceeds from the sale went into the distress fund.

However, government indifference provided an opportunity for strengthening Tamil solidarity which was not missed. Again students from the University of Jaffna played a leading role joined in by social service and religious organisations. Students went from house to house collecting money for relief. A large number of lorries left for the East carrying cadjan [\[11\]](#)¹, food and clothing. It was indeed an exciting period where Tamil national consciousness was riding high. Everyone wanted to be part of it, even the passive U.N.P.-voting Colombo Tamils who had habitually cold shouldered the enthusiasm of their provincial brethren. These middle class Colombo Tamils had preferred to be known as urbane, cosmopolitan and English speaking and were usually not given to nationalist notions.

An important step in the government's effort at finding a military solution to the Tamil problem was the passing of the P.T.A. (Prevention of Terrorism Act) by parliament in July 1979. All the while the majority of Tamils were hoping that some compromise would be reached between the T.U.L.F. and the government that would settle the problem. But what happened after the passage of the P.T.A., though on a minor scale by today's standards, was to increase Tamil anger against the government and, consequently, support for the militants' cause.

The following extract from Prof. S. J. Tambiah's book, "*Sri Lanka - Ethnic Fratricide and The Dismantling of Democracy*" gives the main features of the P.T.A., together with comparisons with the corresponding British Act.

THE P.T.A.: The main features of the P.T.A. are: "It allows confessions made to the police possibly under duress, as admissible evidence. Moreover, the act declares that any document found in the custody, control, or possession of anyone accused of an offence under the Act, or his agent or representative, can be used in evidence, against him at his trial, without calling its author or maker into account, and the contents of such a document can be construed as evidence of the facts stated in it... The P.T.A. can be retroactive in its implementation... Provides for prison terms for conviction ranging from 5 to 20 years or life. These provisions of the P.T.A. have been interpreted by the police and army as an open door policy that permits arrest without warrant of any person... A person may be detained for periods up to 18 months if the minister had reason to suspect him of being associated with unlawful activity... It defines as unlawful certain acts, including the speaking or writing of words intended to cause religious, social, or communal disharmony, or feelings of ill will or hostility between communities or racial or religious groups."

THE BRITISH ACT: Prof. Tambiah offers a reply to those apologists for Sri Lanka who see the United Kingdom act, enacted in response to the situation in Northern Ireland as setting a precedent for the P.T.A.: "The U.K. legislation bearing the same name (Prevention of Terrorism) was adopted in 1974, repealed, and then re-enacted in 1978 with some amendments, It is much less far-reaching than its Sri Lankan counterpart in its infringement of human rights. For one thing, the U.K. act defines terrorism more narrowly as 'the use of violence for political ends,' and includes under this rubric any use of violence for the purpose of frightening any section of the public or the public as a whole. For another, the same Act limits the maximum period during which a person may be detained without charge at seven days; there is no way a person can be held incommunicado without trial for a prolonged period, as the Sri Lankan act permits. Finally the Act in the U.K. remains in force for 12 months and its continuance must be ratified by Parliament."

According to Virginia Leary ("*Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*", International Commission of Jurists, July to August, 1981): "A number of the objectionable features in the Sri Lankan Act are similar to the provisions widely criticised in the 1967 Terrorism Act of South Africa."

Following the passage of this act, the military was for the first time given an active role in the Tamil areas. The President's nephew, Brigadier Weeratunge, was sent to Jaffna in mid-1979 with an order from the President to wipe out terrorism by the end of the year. Soon afterwards, six Tamil youths disappeared after being taken into custody. The bodies of two of them, Inpam and Selvam, were found near the beach in Jaffna with gunshot injuries. Reports of torture became widespread.

Amongst Tamils in general, there was a feeling of optimism that they were forging ahead and that the government could not win. Rightly or wrongly, the Tamils were proud of the young and the militant youth. The nickname for a Tamil in the South changed from "Panamkottai" (Palmyrah nut) to "Kottiya" (Tiger). The Tamils no longer cringed, afraid of their identity being known. The Tigers gave them back a sense of identity and dignity. This was also the time that internal killings had started sporadically within the militant movement.

With this euphoria went many unresolved contradictions in attitudes as well as conduct. The economic development of Tamil areas went on at a very slow pace. Little capital was coming this way, whether from the government or from foreign sources. The government itself was part of the cause. Tamils complained bitterly that Colombo-based Tamil entrepreneurs who made large quantities of money from the Tamil man would not re-invest even a small fraction of it in Tamil areas. At the same time, they spent large sums doing favours for politicians. In the meantime dependence on Colombo increased. The pattern of migration was towards employment abroad, especially in the Middle East and was not calculated to increase economic activity in the Tamil areas. The money from overseas that was pouring in was largely spent on building houses, even on agricultural land, the purchase of jewellery and consumer items such as television sets and video-decks. Again profits were reaped by traders in Colombo. Travel between Jaffna and Colombo increased considerably. It was only a few who used their savings to start small industries such as mechanical workshops.

Many Tamils did see that they were treading on dangerous ground. But people were reluctant to speak out. The situation was made worse by the government's natural bent towards thuggery.

It was about this time that several left-wing political groups in the South who had been talking about armed action for years started looking admiringly at what the Tamil militants were doing. The latter had been successful in alarming the state. These were written about for the first time by Dayan Jayatilleke and were published in the Lanka Guardian. Some leftist intellectuals from the South even spoke of Tamil Eelam being the cradle of future revolution. Ideas of Lenin and Stalin on small nations of minorities featured in intellectual discussions dealing with minorities and secession. The traditional Left which had been somewhat discredited by its past performance was being splintered, giving rise to new groups such as the N.S.S.P. (Nava Sama Samaja Party).

To break the stalemate on the political front, the T.U.L.F. commenced discussions with parties of the Left (S.L.F.P., L.S.S.P. and C.P.) with a view to forming an electoral alliance. This was breaking new ground as the T.U.L.F. had been instinctively distrustful of the Left as opposed to the U.N.P.. Many critics maintained that such a bias flew in the face of experience and can be attributed to the natural Right-wing tendencies within the T.U.L.F.. Initial exchanges raised hopes. But the exercise was abruptly broken off by the T.U.L.F.. Sources within the T.U.L.F. confided that they did so on a strong indication that it may give rise to organised race riots against the Tamils. Negotiations commenced instead with the U.N.P. government under the mediation of Prof. A. J. Wilson (Lecturer in political science in Canada and son-in-law of S. J. V. Chelvanayakam) and Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam (American trained lawyer and son of an F.P. minister). Both had good relations with the government, whose open economic policies they agreed with. The result was the District Development Councils (D.D.C.s) which were meant to give the Tamils some control over their land and ease discrimination in employment by the devolution of certain subjects to the districts.

Moreover, these Councils were ill-fated from the start, when the Council elections in July 1981 resulted in such untoward incidents as the burning of the Jaffna Public Library by government forces. Moreover, this was the first time after the Duraiyappah killing that political terror by Tamil militants against rivals of the T.U.L.F. was displayed. Mr. Thiagarajah, a retired school principal, ex-M.P. and U.N.P. candidate was shot dead. Also killed was Mr. Nadarajah, a U.N.P. organiser.

Despite some disorganised interference by the government machinery, the T.U.L.F. was returned in all Tamil districts. But the District Councils did not work because the government was not genuinely committed to them. This put the T.U.L.F. at a seemingly dead end. The militant leaders became restive about accepting the paramountcy of the T.U.L.F.. Some of the T.U.L.F.'s backers too began to feel that the T.U.L.F. was ineffective. By July 1983 the initiative had passed on to the militants. Many observers felt that the T.U.L.F., whether under threat or not, had made a serious miscalculation in breaking off negotiations with the Left and coming to a deal with the government which the latter had no intention of honouring, whether under threat or not. Dr. A. J. Wilson was initially very positive about the political solution contained in the D.D.C.'s. But the success of the D.D.C.'s depended on willingness and foresight on the part of the government to devolve real power. On nearly all matters where a devolution of responsibility had to evolve, the centre used every hidden mechanism to maintain its hold. As a typical example, the Jaffna D.D.C. which proposed to start a ferry service between K.K.S. and Nagapatanam in order to ease considerably, travel to India which otherwise required an expensive and round about journey through Mannar or Colombo. The Jaffna D.D.C. was told to lay off on this matter. This was a bit of a joke because an unofficial boat service operated by competent mariners had always ferried people from Jaffna to India in less than three hours. As another example, since one of the Tamil fears was security, which was now a virtual monopoly of the Sinhalese state, there was provision in the D.D.C.'s for the creation of Home Guards. The T.U.L.F. had accepted in good faith that the wherewithal to train and maintain them would be forthcoming, for if not such a provision would have been meaningless. But this is how it turned out. A senior official described the position of these Home Guards as being that of a far less exciting version of the Boy Scouts. They would come paying their own bus fare, paying for their uniform and paying for their own cup of tea. It had no chance of getting off the ground. Ultimately the D.D.C.'s were left with a minuscule decentralised budget, not even amounting to one percent of the national budget. When such difficulties arose the T.U.L.F. would have discussions with the President and then announce that the matter had been resolved. These expectations too would be frustrated in due course.

The government inspired violence and attempts at cheating at the elections by themselves spelt a bad omen for the D.D.C.'s. Some people were killed in this violence. The burning of the Jaffna Public Library and the Eelanadu Press were widely regarded as acts of cultural genocide. There were as usual members of the local population who would use public distress for personal gain. Once again university students threw themselves into the task of reconstruction by forming well-organised teams to collect funds and books. [\[Top\]](#)

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¹ Term for a radical Marxist deriving from an uprising in Naxalbury in India

Chapter 3

AUGUST 1981 TO JULY 1983

3.1 Introductions⁵⁶

Going by the advice of the mediators, the T.U.L.F. had staked much on the success of the D.D.C.s. It had also persuaded a large section of the militant movement to back the D.D.C. proposals. The government's failure to deal honestly in this matter and on the other hand its own pursuit of terror against Tamils were to create a rapidly deteriorating situation between November 1982 and July 1983. It is an irony of Ceylonese politics that the T.U.L.F. and the C.W.C., representing Plantation Tamils and under Thondaman, should look upon the main author of present problems, the U.N.P., as offering the best of solutions. In this vain hope the T.U.L.F. remained silent waiting for the goods. The groundswell of Tamil opinion would not have tolerated the T.U.L.F. backing the U.N.P. in the Presidential elections in October 1982 and in the referendum. By calculatedly not taking a stand, the T.U.L.F. helped Jayewardene's U.N.P. to win both the Presidential elections and the referendum which was in any case won by widespread cheating. At the end of a series of broken promises, the U.N.P. pleaded once again that to keep its hitherto unhonoured promises to the Tamils it needed to win both elections and retain its parliamentary majority. The referendum which took place in December 1982 was in effect an undemocratic exercise depriving the people of this country of their right to choose their representatives. The excuse for this was that the government had discovered an undisclosed Naxalite [\[1\]](#)¹ plot. For this service to the U.N.P. in helping it to deprive the people of this country of their right to elect, the T.U.L.F. and the C.W.C. were rewarded with the July 1983 race riots followed by the sixth amendment expelling the T.U.L.F. from parliament. The C.W.C. was saved by its control over labour in a crucial sector of the economy as well as by India's entry into the affairs of this country. For a political party, to lose its combativeness and remain passive amounts to suicide. This was the fate of the T.U.L.F.. In many ways the challenge facing the Sinhalese in the South with the rapid rise of the J.V.P. in 1987 would have close parallels with the experience of the Tamils after 1977 -- particularly during the period under consideration.

While the T.U.L.F. was waiting in vain, every new issue brought forth a spontaneous outpouring of public spirit, led by the university students. These protests were non-violent and were often against actions of the government under the P.T.A.. The spontaneous character of these protests was different in quality from the stage managed affairs of the militant groups after 1985. The militant groups did benefit from the activities of the students before July 1983 and there was widespread public sympathy for the militants as "our boys". But those with a base, such as within the student community, could and did criticise the actions of the militants. The militants too had to take serious note of such criticism. Many observers feel that if this trend had continued, there would have been a militant movement accountable to the public and, therefore, amenable to public control. The July 1983 riots and the adoption by India of the militant groups changed all this. With material help from India, the militant groups became purely military organisations, accountable to the R.A.W. and not to the Tamil public. The latter became everyone's plaything.

There have always been those who argue that to build up resentment by provoking the worse instincts of the state is good for revolutionary fervour. But the misery, suffering, fanaticism and hysteria let loose by such a course on both sides of the division can hardly encourage democracy and freedom for those who survive. This appears to be a lesson ill-digested by the Tamils whose tragedy the South seems set to re-live. The failure of the community to clarify the moral issues would ultimately have a corrupting influence on the young who dedicated themselves to freedom.

3.2 Through the Eyes of the Saturday Review

What follows will be a run through the main events of this period as recorded by the Saturday Review, a weekly published in Jaffna. The title dates refer to the date of publication. It is appropriate to quote this

paper, because it reflected the sense of buoyancy felt in Jaffna during this period, punctuated by doubt and foreboding.

May 15, 1982:

"Undergraduates and students in the North and East boycotted lectures and classes yesterday (14 May) to protest the continued detention without trial, of Jaffna University undergraduate Apputhurai Vimalarasa for over a year at the Panagoda Army Camp. The undergraduates in the University of Colombo too joined in the protest by boycotting lectures in the afternoon while telegrams asking for the release of Vimalarasa have been sent to President J. R. Jayewardene by undergraduates of the other Universities."

Students distributing leaflets in connection with this protest were arrested by the police in all Tamil districts. On 17th May the undergraduates organised a massive demonstration in Jaffna defying a police ban.

May 29, 1982:

Under the front page headlines "Jaffna violence takes on a new ugly dimension", the Saturday Review reported the first well-publicised political killings: "Political youth violence which began seven years ago with the killing of the then pro-government Mayor Alfred Duraiyappah on 27 July, 1975, has been following a predictable course ever since, assumed a new dimension on Wednesday 26th May when a popular social worker and a Tamil liberation activist, P. Iraikumar (27) was gunned down along with his friend T. Umakumar (28) at Alaveddy, by a gang of seven youths. Alaveddy, a village about ten miles from Jaffna town is in the Kankesanthurai constituency represented by Tamil United Liberation Front leader A. Amirthalingam.

"Iraikumar, a Cultivation Officer, was the Organising Secretary of the Tamil Ilaignar Peravai Viduthalai Ani (Tamil Youth Front Liberation Wing). He had previously been a member of the youth front aligned with the T.U.L.F. and had edited a pro-T.U.L.F. paper Ilaignar Kural (The Voice of the Youth) in 1976." Iraikumar had been a critic of the T.U.L.F.'s after breaking away from the party when it accepted the D.D.C.s. Other sources confirmed later that militants aligned with Uma Maheswaran were responsible for the killings. One killing began as a misadventure. The other followed as a cover up. The Saturday Review had neglected to commit itself to its readers on whether or not the "new dimension" was part of the "predictable course". These were still the early days of internecine killings. Press-men did not yet find themselves writing under duress. The Saturday Review published a powerful editorial in the same issue:

"The political heat, denied an external outlet, is turning inwards now. Violence of course is at all times destructive, but violence is now changing direction. It is becoming self-destructive. In fact there is a new terrifying chill in the political wind. The air is getting hotter with a new political intolerance. Brother is turning against brother; guns taught to shoot at targets, find that the targets are no longer there. A society which learnt to put up with killings, by looking over its shoulder and recognising a goal at a distance thought there was a thing called justifiable homicide, as in law. Now they don't see the goal anymore. It has been politically vitiated...

"The killing of Iraikumar and Umakumar, as we see it is more than mere killings: it is more than terrorism. It shows all the portents of a new ugly face in the Tamil man's political life. A society, bereft of a rationale for homicide, is now turning to suicide...

"The truth is that there is a new underground force in the making, an underground force without ideals, which if allowed unchecked could even bring about a state of civil strife in Jaffna, and plunge the whole peninsula into chaos. This has to be nipped in the bud, and if there is one leader who has sufficient weight and authority to do this, it is Mr. Amirthalingam."

There was to be civil strife which reached a feverish height with the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash in late April 1986, 47 months later. There was a state of prolonged chaos. When this happened there was no dilemma for the editorial writers of the Saturday Review, or for any other journal in Jaffna. If they did not take a holiday, as they did, they would have been regarded as mad men "turning to suicide". The new forces were not without ideals. In the case of the L.T.T.E. these ideals had the character of religious devotion. But these had little to do with Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality.

The editorial writer quoted above reflects the popular attitude to violence amongst Jaffna men. They would maintain that they did not like violence, except that it was sometimes necessary. They would personally avoid killing. Except for medical men and scientists working on vivisection, those involved with killing, such as butchers and dog catchers, were categorised as being from so called low caste groups, as in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. (Thomas More knew little about India, which makes his ideas all the more remarkable.) They had the authority of the *Mahabharata*, where the men who killed in battle were regarded as a caste group - namely the Kshatriyas. Even as the militant groups grew in strength and despite the talk of "our boys", for the upper reaches of Tamil society they remained essentially an alien caste group. The elite, both locally and abroad, who provided material and moral support for the militants, could frequently be heard saying unashamedly, sometimes referring to the Mahabharata, that it may be the business of the fighters to obtain freedom; but the business of ruling, however, must be in the hands of those who are wise and educated. The latter often meant the sons of the elite who were abroad. The militants of course were aware of this and for many of those who had sacrificed successful careers at school, this was hard to bear. Thus the Jaffna man's ambivalence towards violence also extended to an ambivalence towards the militants, who in turn felt that others were trying to use them. This may partly explain the cynicism and hatred of the L.T.T.E. towards the civilian population which reached new heights in 1987. The editorial writer, like everyone else, was moved to questioning and doubting over the two killings in May 1982. Yet, like others, he avoided answering the question whether there was a rationale for homicide that does not lead to suicide. Note also the hope reposed on Amirthalingam in a dark moment.

The Saturday Review of 5 June, 1982 said that following the mass protests, Vimalarasa who was not tried for over a year, was brought before the Court of Appeal by the army authorities on Monday, 31 May. A bench consisting of Justices Seneviratne and Abeyawardene gave time till 19 July for the State to file affidavits and fixed the trial for 26 July.

The issue of 12 June announced that Vimalarasa and nine other detainees had been released on 7 June, two days before the T.U.L.F. leader Mr. Amirthalingam was to meet President Jayewardene on the matter. The paper speculated that this move to steal the wind from Amirthalingam's sails may have been in order to woo the Tamils directly before the President's first official visit to Jaffna. Another probable reason was that having been pressurised into going to Court, the government may have discovered that its case was weak. This was often the case with arrests under the P.T.A.. This victory gave the students a new prestige.

5 June, 1982:

Under the heading Tiger File, The Saturday Review reported the incident which heralded India's role in this country's affairs. It quoted the Indian Express of 21 May, which reported the incident of the 19th at Pondi Bazaar on its front page: "According to the police, there was a confrontation between two groups, and in the process, Prabhakaran (28) alias Karikalan and Sivakumar (24) alias Raghavan opened fire with unlicensed revolvers on Mukundan (Uma Maheswaran) and Jotheeswaran (22). Jotheeswaran sustained four bullet injuries in his leg and was admitted to the Rayapettah hospital. Mukundan escaped in the melee. On hearing gun-shots, Deputy Inspector Nandakumar of the Pondi Bazaar Crime Detachment rushed to the spot with his staff and arrested the culprits."

The Saturday Review further added that Uma Maheswaran who had got away on his motorcycle was captured after a massive police search at a railway station on 25 May. Two revolvers and a vial of cyanide were found on his

person. The incident represented the bitter split between the Liberation Tigers and P.L.O.T.E. that was now surfacing openly. Many Tamil Nadu politicians and lawyers got into the act trying to patch up the split. The militants went along expressing regret over the incident together with a desire for unity. The PTI quoted both parties as feeling that continued disunity between them could only jeopardise their real object of achieving Tamil Eelam. Uma Maheswaran who had been a surveyor by profession, expressed appreciation for the way the Tamil Nadu police had treated them. When he required some books on surveying, the Tamil Nadu police had brought them to him after a prolonged search in several bookshops. It all looked homely enough. "Boys will be boys. They will shake hands and be friendly in the interests of a higher cause," was the general feeling around. The Saturday Review reflected the public view in expressing a hint of satisfaction that powerful attempts at obtaining extradition by the Sri Lankan government were failing. It quoted the SUN's front page headline: "TAMIL NADU POLITICOS GIVE PATRONAGE TO TIGERS: TREMENDOUS FINANCIAL BACKING AND 'SAFE HOUSE': M.G.R.'s life too threatened by terrorists". That was six years ago. The naive belief that the central government in India was bowing to Tamil Nadu pressure seemed a satisfactory explanation to both sides in Ceylon. We all lived in a cynical world where everyone thought he could cleverly use the other to get his own ends. Many Tamils thought they could use India to get Eelam. Who was master of the game would emerge much later. But for the moment all eyes were on the two boys - both makers and victims of history. We could thumb our noses at the Sinhalese. It was a time for some rejoicing. Tomorrow would take care of itself.

12 June, 1982:

An excerpt from an appreciation to the late Bishop Leo Nanayakkara by P. Arulanantham reads thus: "In 1973-75 there were many destitutes on the streets of Badulle, most of whom were persons displaced from the tea estates. Bishop Leo was the organiser behind the organisation of the Beggar Rehabilitation Camp, with the help of official and private bodies who were willing to help. He was a practical man. Bishop Leo was a champion of the oppressed. He studied the problem of insurgents taken into captivity in 1971 and took practical measures to help them. He consistently expressed the view that the Tamils and the Tamil language should enjoy equal rights in this country."

3 July, 1982:

"Three policemen and a Police driver were shot to death by unknown gunmen who ambushed a Police jeep at Nelliady junction in the Point Pedro area, Jaffna, at about 7:30 p.m. on Friday the night of July 2. The dead policemen were Gunapala, Arunthavarajah, Mallawaratchi and Ariyaratne (driver). The O.I.C., Point Pedro, Inspector I. Thiruchittampalam and Constables Sivarajah and Ananda were admitted to Jaffna hospital with injuries. The assailants are believed to have escaped in a passing car."

The editorial commented: "If the killed are those who become victims of circumstances, the killers are themselves victims of circumstances. If a government cannot find ways to stop creating and fostering these circumstances, that government had failed in its duty by *all* its citizens."

That was obviously true. Most Tamils then thought that such sentiments represented the end of the matter as far as they were concerned. Then again they were depending on a provenly undependable government to wake up and deliver the goods, thus being party to the drift.

The issue of 18 September in its lead story stated that the General Council of the T.U.L.F. was likely to take a decision that would enable the Tamils to keep away from the Presidential elections altogether. The issue of 25 September gave an instance of the kind of interference with the process of the law by the government that increasingly made Tamils sympathise with militants.

25 September, 1982:

"The Mallakam Magistrate, Mr. C. V. Wigneswaran, discharged Lieutenant Mandukodi de Saram and Privates K. J. Silva and R. T. Silva on 22 September, on the instructions of the Attorney General Mr. Shiva Pasupati. The three army men were earlier remanded and then bailed out in connection with the shooting of a lame youth Kandiah Navaratnam at Atchuvvely on the night of 20 February."

16 October, 1982:

The following is an excerpt from an article by Dayan Jayatilleke on the J.V.P.'s stand on the National Question (the Tamil - Sinhalese division). The J.V.P. (Peoples' Liberation Front) leader Rohana Wijeweera was one of the contestants of the Presidential Elections: "He (Wijeweera in a public speech) accused the U.N.P. government of sending 'innocent' police and military men to their deaths. He also accuses the S.L.F.P. of promising Swaraj (Own Rule) through its spokesman K. B. Ratnayake, to the Tamils... Comrade Wijeweera also proceeds in the course of his masterly analysis of the National Question, to provide his audience with the doubtless useful and very relevant data that five top police officers are Tamils. In fact he is kind enough to provide his young Sinhalese audience with their names in what he fondly supposes is a Tamil accent. Rohana's boast that his is the only party to hold meetings in the North, is in the same spirit as that of a gangster who boasts that he and his boys were tough enough to go into the North side of the town, i.e. territory controlled by another gang, and return in one piece. In other words he is telling his constituency that it is he and his party, rather than the U.N.P. and S.L.F.P., that are tough enough to deal with the Eelam threat."

23 October, 1982:

The Saturday Review reported an attack by a militant group on a police station. The group was later identified as the L.T.T.E. (Tigers): "Three policemen on duty at Chavakachcheri Police Station were shot dead in a lightning dawn attack by a party of armed youth on Wednesday, October 27th. About 12 hours later the Police imposed an instant 12 hour curfew from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. in the Jaffna district creating panic and confusion among the public. Guns and ammunition were also stolen at the Police Station along with some files. The weapons consisted of two sub-machine guns, nine rifles, 19 repeater guns and two shot guns. The dead men are P.C. Kandiah of Mirusuvil, P. C. Karunanadan of Uduvil and P. C. Tillekeratne of Kegalle. A remand suspect in a murder case who happened to be under lock-up at the Police Station, Kandiah Selvam, also died in the cross fire.

"P. C. Jayatilleke who had jumped down from the upper storey of the Police Station was injured by the fall. He had been admitted to the Jaffna General Hospital along with Sergeant Kandiah who suffered gunshot injuries. Two more remand prisoners, Karthigesu and Aiyathurai were also wounded. It is believed that there was an exchange of fire for about 15 minutes... It is believed that two of the youths have been injured and that one of them could have died. Army personnel who went to Chavakachcheri after the attack discovered spent cartridges and unexploded bullets."

Papers in the South added that the attackers had to leave abruptly as one of the policemen took up a hidden position and started sniping at the attackers.

The security forces in the North had not yet been brutalised to a point where their reflex action would be to go about on a rampage killing prisoners and civilians at random.

The same issue of the Saturday Review announced in its lead story that, having won the presidential elections (J. R. Jayewardene, U.N.P., 52.91%; Hector Kobbekaduwa, S.L.F.P., 39.07%. Mrs. Bandaranaike was prevented from appearing or canvassing for the SLFP because of a questionable suspension of her civic rights.), the government was planning to hold a referendum in order to extend the life of the parliament by six years. The referendum to be held before Christmas would seek a simple yes or no from the voters. This surprise move came at a time when the country at large was expecting general elections to elect a new parliament. The move was

deceitfully packaged to attract the support of Tamils who had been repeatedly tricked. The story went: "Speculation is rife in Jaffna that the T.U.L.F. leader, Mr. Appapillai Amirthalingam, may be offered high office in the Government that would eventually lead to the formation of a National Government in the country... Certain constitutional changes that require a two-thirds majority are believed to be under contemplation that would facilitate this process. The holding of a referendum seeking the extension of the life of the parliament by six years from August 1983 and a complete revamping of the Cabinet and Parliamentary Group are believed to be steps that will help in this direction... It is believed that such a government that will cut through party differences and draw in talent from non-U.N.P. sources could not only help in the continuity of the government's economic programme but solve the vexing 'TAMIL PROBLEM' as well."

Thus the government which had repeatedly dishonoured its word to the Tamils was now inviting the Tamils to trust it once more in order to cheat the entire country of their right to elect.

The paper was soon undeceived as it started publishing protests from all over the country. The Civil Rights Movement (C.R.M.) in three statements referred to the "dangerous and unprecedented nature of this step which threatened the very basis of democratic parliamentary government founded on periodic elections of the people's representatives." It pointed out that "the move was in breach of Sri Lanka's obligations under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights." Ceylon had only the previous year celebrated 50 years of universal adult franchise.

R. P. Wijeratne writing from Colombo said: "The bizarre spectacle of honourable ministers and M.P.'s of the governing party being submitted *en masse* to the indignity of handing over undated letters of resignation to their leader is further evidence of this kind of cynicism. Apart from the mutual distrust revealed by these arrangements, the complete surrender of wills and independence by representatives elected by the people, to a leader however estimable, will certainly not enhance their prestige and standing in the eyes of the people."

In a telegram to the President, the C.R.M. pointed out that the referendum was neither free nor fair, because an emergency was in force, under which several opposition newspapers (including Aththa) had been prevented from publication and had had their presses sealed.

In a letter signed on behalf of the M.I.R.J.E. (Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality) by its president Fr. Paul Caspersz, a doughty fighter for minority rights, an appeal was made to the T.U.L.F.. It was asked to refrain from being drawn into discussions with the government on the national question until the conclusion of the referendum and to participate actively in a campaign for the preservation of the fundamental rights of the people to elect their own M.P.'s. It further deplored efforts at that juncture by the government to place before Tamil-speaking people, token concessions as solutions to their problems and considered such overtones opportunistic and intended to compel the T.U.L.F. to soft-pedal its campaign against the Government's proposal at the referendum.

This provided an opportune moment for the T.U.L.F. to take up a principled stand and resume its combative role. A principled stand could have meant only one thing - totally to oppose the fraud the government was trying to inflict on the entire country. This would have given both the Tamils and the T.U.L.F. a new prestige countrywide. Mr. Amirthalingam could be combative when he wished to. But since the late 1970's the party organisation had been in a deeply frozen state, with the younger elements slipping away into militant ranks. When the matter of the referendum was brought before parliament, the T.U.L.F. showed its lukewarmness by speaking against it while at the same time not registering a single protest vote. The same puzzling attitude was displayed by the T.U.L.F. during the general strike of mid-1980, which the government put down with large-scale repression. In support of the strikers, university members, teachers and trade unionists organised a one-day hartal and march in Jaffna. The T.U.L.F. declined to join. When questioned, a very senior T.U.L.F. member replied that the matter was a "Southern problem". Here was a classic instance of divide and rule. The T.U.L.F. had voluntarily submitted the Tamils to ghetto politics, when with a little vision it could have enhanced respect for the Tamils. The government kept the

T.U.L.F. quiet by means of a few perks for parliamentarians and the promise of "jam tomorrow" for the Tamils. But as in that famous song "Tomorrow never comes", the result was a dangerous isolation of the Tamils, putting them entirely at the mercy of the government. The T.U.L.F. is a product of Tamil society. The preoccupation of its elite has not been with doing the right thing or the principled thing, but with doing what seems clever and convenient. Thus at that time (1988) when people should have been trying to restore democracy by forging links with all democratic sections in the South and by improving Sinhalese-Tamil relations, they seem to have been holding onto another will-o-the-wisp. The only idea coming from the Tamil elite today was a plea to India to negotiate with the L.T.T.E. - meaning, give them (the L.T.T.E.) something so that they would be left alone. As an eminent public man put it in words that cannot mean anything: "The Tigers and the Indian Army are our two precious eyes. We cannot be without either one of them." This is the counterpart of the T.U.L.F.'s stand in the early 1980's.

13 November 1982:

The Saturday Review quoted a press report, according to which President Jayewardene told his District Ministers that he had an assurance from the T.U.L.F. leadership that it would not actively canvass against the referendum. The Saturday Review further said: "An interview the Secretary General of the T.U.L.F. (Tamil United Liberation Front) and Leader of the Opposition, Mr. A. Amirthalingam, gave a Colombo week-end paper recently fuelled speculation that the T.U.L.F. leader may be offered high office in a "National Government" as forecast by the Saturday Review in its issue of 23 October.

"Mr. Amirthalingam made it quite clear, in the course of the interview, that the T.U.L.F. will not boycott Parliament nor join any so called 'common front' in campaigning against the referendum." Mr. Amirthalingam further added: "Even if the Government carries the referendum through, we will remain in Parliament until August 3, 1983 when this term runs out. At this point the General Council will decide as to who should represent the T.U.L.F. in parliament for the extended period."

Thus it appeared to the T.U.L.F. leadership that it could imitate the undemocratic example set by President Jayewardene, who had obtained undated letters of resignation from his parliamentary group to set up a tame parliament after the referendum. It seemed a bargain to the T.U.L.F. -- the price was for it to remain non-committal. To be doubly sure, the government did some arm twisting as well. The same issue reported that the Government had ordered its officers in the North and East to turn down all requests by T.U.L.F. M.P.s - the small mercies afforded to keep them in hope: "Education authorities in the North and East were summoned to Colombo to be told bluntly not to oblige the T.U.L.F. M.P.'s requests for transfers and appointments... Meanwhile the appointments of 15 bank employees recommended by the T.U.L.F. M.P. for Vavuniya, Mr. T. Sivasithamparam, have been cancelled." All requests to the Education authorities were to be reported to the head office in Colombo, so that M.P.s wanting favours would have to go to the government directly.

Looking back one can hardly understand why the T.U.L.F. subjected itself and the Tamils to this loss of self-respect and humiliation on the basis of promises that were not likely to be honoured. A dedication to principle could have saved the Tamils from the calamity that was to come. The betrayal of democracy by the T.U.L.F. at this point may be compared with that by well-heeled Tamil gentlemen in Parliament voting for the bills of 1948 which made plantation workers of Indian origin, also fellow Tamils, non-citizens. At that time Mr. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, the founder of the T.U.L.F., did the honourable thing in passionately opposing that bill. But the old habit of the Tamil elite being voluntary slaves to the Sinhalese ruling class, from whom they received patronage, had not changed.

27 November, 1982:

In the meantime things were taking a different turn, involving spontaneous mass protests over the detention of several prominent Tamils on suspicion of being involved with militants: "Tamil politics entered a new mass agitational phase in Jaffna this week, following the arrests and questioning of several Roman Catholic, Methodist and Anglican priests in connection with terrorism and the Neervely Bank robbery of 1981 and the peremptory ascribing of guilt to the members of the clergy by the State-controlled and other media in Colombo.

"Whole-day protest fasts and sit-ins are being held throughout the peninsula with the Tamil United Liberation Front itself actively mounting a chorus of protests. On Tuesday 30th, there will be a collective one-day fast in both the North and the East, demanding an end to the arbitrary detention of the priests and University Assistant Lecturer Nithyananthan and his wife Nirmala, the abolition of the prevention of Terrorism Act and an end to State terrorism."

The arrested priests were of course the Rev. Fr. Singarayar, the Rev. Fr. Sinnarasa (both Roman Catholic), Rev. Jeyatilakarajah (Methodist) and the Rev. Donald Kanagaratnam (Anglican, Vavuniya). Dr. Jeyakularajah (Puttur Mission Hospital), brother of the Rev. Jeyatilekarajah was also arrested. The Rev. Kanagaratnam, formerly principal of the Pilimalawa Theological seminary, was released shortly afterwards. He had resigned his principalship at the seminary after some Sinhalese members made an issue of his refusal to raise the national flag on Independence Day 1978 on the grounds that the Tamil speaking part of the nation had suffered grievous oppression during the 1977 race riots. He had then gone on to found Unity House in the border area of Vavuniya to work for Sinhalese-Tamil amity. He had good personal relations with the Sinhalese of that area. Rev. Singarayar was finally released after the July 1987 Accord. The rest had escaped to India from Batticaloa prison. They and Fr. Singarayar had narrowly escaped during the two prison massacres in July 1983.

On the lighter side, soldiers who had been sent to search the home of the Nithyanandans, in the same compound as that of Nirmala's parents, Mr. & Mrs. Rajasingam, were asked to wait there. The soldiers felt bored, having nothing to do. They went about plucking flowers and made a large garland, which was then presented to the cow tied in the compound.

Previously, in the issue of 20 November, 1982, the Saturday Review had strongly protested the slanderous allegations being made with impunity against those arrested, in the Southern press, with a lead piece titled "STOP THIS PEN AND DAGGER JOURNALISM."

11 December, 1982:

Writing in the section "Political Causerie," the Colombo based columnist Gamini Navaratne, dealt with President Jayewardene's allegation of a "Naxalite Plot," as the excuse for holding the referendum in place of the General Elections. The alleged Naxalites were a group of Mrs. Bandaranaike's S.L.F.P., which led the presidential campaign of its candidate Mr. Hector Kobbekaduwa. According to President Jayewardene's information, this group had planned to assassinate him, a few other Ministers, Mrs. Bandaranaike's son Anura and the Armed Services Chiefs, among others. According to him, they would thereupon do away with the constitution and imprison Mrs. Bandaranaike. Except for farcical dramas like the questioning of Mr. Kobbekaduwa, nothing was ever proved then or in later years.

Gamini Navaratne referred to several instances where members of the U.N.P. had openly indulged in violence and where no action had been taken: after the 1977 elections, in June 1981 during the D.D.C. elections, in August 1981 when communal violence had been unleashed in many places including the plantations and after the Presidential elections. The persons who attacked the meeting of the Sinhala Balamandalaya had no action taken against them, even after they had been identified by others. Navaratne added: "Unless action is taken against them, could sections of the opposition be blamed if they regard the latest coup allegation as a cover for the Government, while keeping the S.L.F.P. machinery effectively strangled, to distract people's attention from the looming

economic crisis, instil fear in their minds about a "Naxalite", (that is Communist) threat and stampede them into saying "Yes" at the Referendum by clever manipulation of the state-monopolised mass media?"

Protest against the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the recent arrests reached a high point in Vavuniya when steel helmeted police used batons and tear gas inside St. Anthony's Church at Rambaikulam on 15 December.

18 December, 1982:

"Hundreds of girls, women, children and men - including Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Christians - began a protest fast on Wednesday on the church premises. As scheduled, a silent march headed by school-girls with mouths gagged and wearing black badges had just come to the road when police pounced upon them, dragged the girls by their hair, and kicked and baton-charged them when they defied police orders to disperse. The baton charge took place when the girls sat on the ground refusing to move. Then the police stormed into the church and baton charged protestors who sought refuge there.

"Nine people were arrested including the Gandhiyam's Dr. Rajasundaram, Mr. M.S. Kandiah (Social Worker, 75 years old), T.E.L.F. Secretary M. K. Eelaventhan, Dr. K.S.N. Fernando and David Naganathan. Tension was high in Vavuniya following the Police rampage and all shops put up their shutters."

Dr. K.S.N. Fernando was a Sinhalese doctor attached to Vavuniya hospital and a dedicated human rights activist. He was subject to much abuse by Sub-Inspector Gunasinghe for being an alleged traitor and was badly assaulted by the policeman who also took revenge on him for having earlier filed an affidavit before the Supreme Court. After his arrest Dr. Fernando was at one point beaten unconscious. The Sub-Inspector who indiscriminately assaulted participants, also threatened to kill a Kumarasinghe if he was there. Kumarasinghe was a Sinhalese activist for the Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality (M.I.R.J.E.) in Vavuniya.

The government's handling of these protests was fuelling Tamil anger without in any way reducing the momentum of the protests. The spate of public protests continued. The students of the University of Jaffna organised a large demonstration on 26 January, 1983, followed by a 4 day fast starting on 1 February, 1983.

The results of the referendum were announced on 23 December, 1982 the day after polling. The "Yes" vote to extend the term of the government came to 54.66% of the valid votes, with the "No" vote amounting to 45.34%. Of registered voters, 70.7% voted as opposed to 80% in the Presidential elections. But that was not the whole story. The Government had used its machinery, both official and unofficial, to perpetrate election fraud on an unprecedented scale. This was a country where elections had traditionally been reasonably clean. It was some time before the details came out.

In his book, "*Sri Lanka: The Holocaust and After*", (Marram Books, London, 1984), L. Piyadasa rightly argues that, in a country where voter participation has been traditionally high, as much as 86.7% in 1977, the natural instinct of the people would have been to say that they wanted elections to elect their own representatives, even if only to return the U.N.P. with a massive majority. This consideration itself made the result of the referendum highly improbable. All indications are that there were many untoward happenings starting with the partiality of the police. Piyadasa rightly argues:

"Moreover, opposition polling observers were, in a large number of carefully checked cases, prevented by threats of murder or of having their homes burnt, by false arrest, assault and robbery of documents, (e.g.: identification) from functioning as polling observers. Officially appointed presiding officers were intimidated and manhandled when they challenged impersonators or tried to stop thuggery within polling booths by legally unauthorized persons. Many voters were prevented from voting freely or voting at all. This was done openly, with police connivance or collaboration, by U.N.P. thugs in many ways, including compelling voters to show how they had marked their papers

and preventing people known to be members of "Vote NO" groups and parties from leaving their homes. Very prominent in the organising and carrying out of the violence and intimidation were Paul Perera (who was not long afterwards nominated to be an M.P.), and a gun wielding M.P., Anura Bastian, whom the President appointed Deputy Minister in charge of the Home Guards soon afterwards! There was impersonation on a scale never before attempted in Sri Lanka. In one polling booth, the Presiding Officer had counted one person voting 72 times, and had officially reported this to his superior. In most of the country it required real courage to vote "No" in these conditions."

There were other minor miracles too. In Mrs. Bandaranaike's electorate Attanagala, she as the leader of the S.L.F.P. decided to withdraw all her observers and party agents from her electorate. This was after her agents were brutally and repeatedly beaten up and threatened with death. In this electorate where she had received a massive majority in 1977, the "Yes" votes counted after the polling were 35,747, as against 22,531 for Jayewardene at the presidential election!

In the Jaffna district, the voter turn out was 290,849 - 60% of registered voters - of whom 91.3% voted "No," no that is, to extending the life of the parliament. The voter turn out was 46% for the presidential elections. The voter turn out would certainly have been much higher if the T.U.L.F. had actively campaigned for the "No" vote. The registered voters in Jaffna numbered 493,705. The voting population in Ceylon was 8,148,015. The majority claimed by the government was 535,240. All Tamil districts voted for having General Elections: Vanni - 64.9%, Trincomalee - 56.4%, and Batticaloa - 60.1%; so did, in general, the districts of the deep South, despite the intimidation: Kalutara - 50.4%, Galle -52.6%, Hambantota - 55% and Matara -49.2%. It is these last named districts that form the base for the J.V.P.'s current (1988) insurgency against the government. The government's proposal to continue the present parliament for another term received its highest support, with the malpractices, in the areas with a high estate Tamil population whose leader Mr. S. Thondaman was a minister in the government: Nuwara Eliya - 72.7%, Badulla - 69.9%, Kandy - 62.2%, and Matale - 73.5%. This was an irony, in view of the legislation against this community in 1948/49 by a U.N.P. government of the time.

It may be mentioned that the vote in the Laggala electorate in the Matale district was challenged. The Sun had reported on 23 December, that the voters had been cut off from their polling stations as a result of floods and earthslips. But out of an electorate of 35,129, 26,115 registered their votes at the referendum, as compared with 17,354 at the presidential polls!

In the Tamil districts, the low voter turn out (60-70%), together with the somewhat indecisive vote (except in Jaffna), can be attributed to the failure of the T.U.L.F. to form a common front with the parties wanting general elections and mounting a campaign to underline a sense of urgency. The excuse normally offered by the T.U.L.F. and Mr. Thondaman's C.W.C. (Ceylon Workers Congress representing Tamil Plantation Workers) for neither campaigning against nor supporting the government, is that the former coalition government of Mrs. Bandaranaike which included the two major Left parties, the L.S.S.P. and the C.P., had completely ignored them. This was true. But at the same time the present U.N.P. government only listened to them nominally. It had already showed a tendency to use race riots as a political weapon in August 1981 in which many of the victims were plantation Tamils supporting the C.W.C.. President Jayewardene, while blaming some of his own party in moving words, did nothing to discipline them. The unkindest cut of all was to come in July 1983. The only real option that had been open to the T.U.L.F. and the C.W.C. was to take a principled stand on behalf of the democratic rights of the whole country and oppose the government. This would have increased their prestige throughout the country and possibly brought them out of marginal patronage politics into national politics. The position of the Tamils too would have been rendered more secure in the long run.

To many it would seem unbelievable that the T.U.L.F. under a once combative leader like Amirthalingam, should sit back and allow things to drift waiting for the promised jam. The T.U.L.F. too had reflected the general lack of conviction about democracy amongst the Tamil elite, whose public conduct was for the most part based on patronage. Although not very evident at that time, the T.U.L.F.'s inactivity during the referendum had cut it adrift

from its political base. The Jaffna voter had shown that he had a mind of his own by registering a 91.3% vote against the government's proposal. Despite the T.U.L.F.'s lukewarmness, 60% (14% more than in the Presidential elections) had taken the trouble to go and register their opinion. For a political party to indulge in secret talks without actively articulating the feelings in its own constituency, spelt political suicide.

President Jayewardene could now afford to treat the Tamils and their representatives with contempt. As far as his immediate ambitions were concerned, he had the Tamils in his pocket, as he did his party's M.P.s. The Tamils were now subject to his whims and his irresponsibility. He was not going to give them jam. He was going to give them cake in the sense in which Marie Antoniette meant it, when the Parisians asked for bread.

1 January, 1983:

Little attention was paid to the vote in the deep South at this time. In a *post-mortem* of the referendum by Staff Writer Suresh in the Saturday Review, it was pointed out that the electorates of 5 Cabinet Ministers, 5 Deputy Ministers and 19 U.N.P. M.P.s "voted clearly for a dissolution of the present government." Most of those were in the deep South.

But in early 1983, with the Tamils in the President's pocket and the South under the heel of the Police and the U.N.P. goon squads, the fraud was accepted meekly. Given the situation of burning anger and humiliation below the surface in the South, a mounting insurgency in the North and the government's control over the media, the government with its characteristic irresponsibility and cynicism, found it very natural to direct Sinhalese feelings to find release in an orgy of anti-Tamil violence.

8 January, 1983:

The Saturday Review sensed the new mood of repression. In its lead piece titled "WE SMELL DANGER," it had this to say: "We have been tipped off by friends from various quarters, some of them surprising quarters close to government decision making processes, that we are now under very close surveillance and scrutiny and the axe might fall on us any time."

In a climate of increasing repression in the South, which began with the break up of the 1980 general strike and the advent of the multi-nationals which began to disrupt life even in remote villages, the Left felt helpless. The only Sinhalese area where there was some active opposition to the state was in the Moneragala District, where some Leftist groups were helping the villagers to resist the takeover of common lands by sugar multinationals, through protest campaigns. For this reason, many Left leaning persons and organisations in the South were looking to the North for inspiration, where there was popular resistance to the government. The Ceylon Teachers' Union (with 47,000 members) and the Revolutionary Marxist Party, had in June 1982 issued statements opposing the extradition from India to Ceylon of Mr. Prabhakaran and Mr. Uma Maheswaran, arrested in India a few weeks earlier.

22 January, 1983:

The Saturday Review carried an interview with Bala Tampoe, General Secretary of the C.M.U. (Ceylon Mercantile Union) which contained this extract:

But he said he could already see young men who had neither names nor labels, but only lessons and experience, who were converging to form a new radical opposition to the oppressive government. "It is such earlier unheard of people like Kuttimani and Thevan who have the stuff in them to form a truly revolutionary force." Though most of the Leftists are demoralised after the debacle in the Presidential and Referendum polls, Mr. Bala Tampoe is very optimistic. He said: "I see history as waves. So far we have been in the receding wave. But even in the gloomy

oppressive atmosphere of Jayewardene's rule, I can now see an advancing wave that will soon shatter all tyrannical forces ahead of it."

19 February, 1983:

The following appeared in a Saturday Review article by a Southern Leftist, Kusal Perera:

The Left would have to fight for a broad unity among the working class at factory level on transitional demands, where the right of self-determination of the Tamil people would be included. The Tamil Trade Union Federation will have to come out of hibernation and join actively any such working class unity.

In short, the Left and the Tamil militants will have to forge a massive anti-government mass-movement with the working class at the head of it. That would be the only process of achieving an Eelam, for separation to be possible under this crisis ridden, capitalist, semi-dictatorship.

Another left party, the N.S.S.P., a break away group of the old L.S.S.P., led by Vasudeva Nanayakkara and Vikramabahu Karunaratne, made a considerable impact in Jaffna and even acquired a following amongst students. It advocated self-determination for the Tamils. Its base in the South too was small, but was concentrated in certain areas. Its leader, Mr. Nanayakkara, later fought a remarkable by-election after the July 1983 violence, which got the government truly worried. Unlike the old ways of fighting elections, the N.S.S.P. laid down its policy towards Tamils clearly before the Sinhalese constituency. The threat was taken so seriously that President Jayewardene himself made a campaign appearance. There was a high incidence of state thuggery. Many believe that Mr. Nanayakkara actually won the by-election.

However the Left was too divided at this time to make an impact. It could not decide on a single candidate for the Presidential elections. It was mainly romanticising about future possibilities, often put forward as certainties, as in Bala Tampoe's case, cited above. However the interest shown by the Left in the South helped to give the Tamil militants a Leftist image.

The Saturday Review's issue of 19 February, 1983, also reported a court-room drama which made a powerful impact in this country as well as amongst Tamils living abroad:

This happened on Thursday when Senior Defence Counsel N. Satyendra, concluding his *voire dire* proceedings of the Neervely Bank Cash Robbery told court: "As regards my clients, the accused, I wish to state publicly from this Court of record, that in the presence of those individuals who belong to my community and who have been prepared to sacrifice what is perhaps the most precious possession of any individual - his very life - for the cause of liberation of their people, I feel humble."

The accused in this case are: Navaratnarajah, Thangavelu (Thangadurai), Selvarajah Yogachandran (Kuttimani), Siva Subramaniam Sri Sabaratnam (Thevan), Nadarajah (Sivapalan Master), Sundaram Sri Sabaratnam, who is absconding and Vaithilingam Nadesadasan."

It was this group from which the T.E.L.O. claimed its antecedents and was led by the third named Sri Sabaratnam. Kuttimani and Thangadurai died during the prison massacre of 25 July, 1983. What would not have been dreamed of by the public at this time was that the T.E.L.O. leader would be killed 39 months later on the orders of the leadership of Mr. Prabhakaran's Tigers.

5 March, 1983:

The unprecedented court drama had its second act on 24 February, 1983 when the first accused, Thangathurai, made a moving statement before the court. Subsequently the six accused were sentenced to life imprisonment on two counts and 15 years of rigorous imprisonment each on two other counts. The presiding High Court Judge was Mr. C. L. T. Moonemale. Thangathurai's speech may have been a historic speech had his political heirs become successful. At that time it had an effect on the Tamils from which all militant factions benefited. The third anniversary of the Welikade prison massacre took place shortly after the decimation of the T.E.L.O. by the Tigers which rekindled some of the scenes of the July 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom. In several places attempts to distribute leaflets commemorating the prison massacre in which Kuttimani and Thangathurai died were stopped by the Tigers.

Thangathurai's moving speech in Tamil eloquently recalled the historic experience of the Tamils and contained these lines: "We are not lovers of violence nor victims of mental disorders. We are fighters belonging to an organisation that is struggling to liberate our people. To those noble souls who keep prating terrorism, we have something to say. Did you not get frightened of terrorism when hundreds of Tamils got massacred in cold blood, when racist hate spread like fire in this country of yours? Did terrorism mean nothing to you when Tamil women were raped? When cultural treasures were set on fire? When hundreds of Tamil homes were looted? Why, in 1977 alone 400 Tamils lost their lives reddening the sky above with their splattered blood. Did you not see any terrorism then? It is only when a few policemen are killed in Tamil Eelam and a few million rupees bank money robbed that terrorism strikes you in the face... But my fervent prayer is that innocent Sinhalese people should not have to reap what power hungry Sinhalese politicians have sown. These tribulations are a boon bestowed by God to purify us. The final victory is ours."

At this point student unrest in all of Ceylon's Universities was taking shape. What must have disturbed the government was the co-ordination between the student bodies of the different universities. This was sundered in the climate of racism following the July 1983 disturbances. However this did not bring peace to the Universities in the South which came to be known as more closed than open. The mood of racism fostered by the government, accompanied by frustration with the government itself, provided fresh opportunities for the J.V.P. in the coming years. However, the mood at that time was captured in a report in the Saturday Review: "Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act". This was one of the main demands of undergraduates of all universities and university campuses in Sri Lanka who carried out a one-day token boycott of lectures on 24 February. The undergraduates have also demanded that the government keep its hands off the Universities. This demand refers specifically to the statement made recently by University Grants Commission (U.G.C.), Chairman Dr. Stanley Kalpage, that legislation is on the way to take over the administration of the universities and his threat that the U.G.C. would cancel the scholarships and loan facilities of students who go on strike... The third demand of the undergraduates was that students of the Kotelawala Defence Academy should not be admitted to the University of Colombo.

12 March, 1983:

This issue reported mounting unrest in Jaffna over the detention of three students. It went on: "Meanwhile a wave of discontent is sweeping the University Campuses throughout the country. The Colombo University strike went into the second week while undergraduates at Peradeniya, Kelaniya, Ruhuna and Batticaloa began boycotting all classes on Monday protesting the 'Police brutality' unleashed on the strikers at Colombo and Sri Jayewardenepura Universities."

Around this time events were gaining a new momentum. On 4 March two Army vehicles were ambushed near Kilinochchi injuring five soldiers. On 14 March Government Officers wielding clubs and batons, claiming to act on the orders of the Assistant Government Agent set fire to 16 huts belonging to hill country Tamils in a refugee settlement at Pankulam, Trincomalee District. The refugees were supported by Gandhiyam. This was a sign that the state was preparing to use an iron fist against communities, as opposed to individuals as in the past.

On 5 April 1983, a march organised by students protesting the P.T.A. was beaten and broken up by a Police tear-gas attack. The marchers had initially avoided a Police cordon by starting from the Cathedral grounds instead

of the grounds of St. James' Church, Main Street, as earlier announced. (The news that was immediately alarming was the government crackdown on Gandhiyam.)

9 April 9, 1983:

"Gandhiyam Society, the only major voluntary service organisation engaged in community development projects in Tamil areas in Sri Lanka and the only active body looking after Tamil refugee resettlements, was raided by a combined team of Sri Lankan Army, Police and Criminal Investigation Department officials on Wednesday, 6th April at 10:00 a.m. The Organising Secretary of Gandhiyam, Dr. S. Rajasundaram, was himself taken away to an unspecified destination. Since there was no warrant for his arrest and since no reasons were given, it is believed that he was taken into custody under the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act."

30 April, 1983:

The death of Navaratnarajah in Army custody further aroused Tamil indignation over the treatment of prisoners under the P.T.A.. The lead story in the Saturday Review read: "There were twenty-five external injuries and ten internal injuries in the deceased Navaratnarajah's body. The contusions in his lungs could have been caused by blows. I am of the opinion that death was due to cardio-respiratory failure, due to multiple muscle injuries and contusions of the lungs. In my opinion, adequate treatment from an institution would have saved his life." So said Dr. N. Saravanapavananthan, A.J.M.O., submitting his medical report in the inquest of 28-year old Navaratnarajah of Trincomalee who died in Army custody at the Gurunagar Army Camp, Jaffna, on the 10th of April. Navaratnarajah was arrested two weeks previously on suspicion under the P.T.A.."

N. Saravanapavananthan, Professor of Forensic Medicine, Jaffna, is one of those souls as unbending as his native palmyrah. He can be trusted never to compromise his professional judgement. After the inquest on Navaratnarajah was completed, the police searched the documents in the mortuary for the file. But Prof. Sara had taken the precaution of keeping the file in a safe place. He was an old hand at this work. In 1971 as Judicial Medical Officer in Galle during the Sinhalese youth insurgency, he could not be prevented from exhuming a whole heap of bodies near Giniganga - bodies of youngsters massacred *en masse* by security forces. The I.P.K.F. was compelled to treat him with respect, even when on an occasion he reversed the opinion of another doctor in the case of a rape complaint. The same issue of the Saturday Review reflected the feeling of alienation felt by the Tamils in a hard hitting editorial, titled "AWAY WITH THIS ABOMINABLE ACT". It contained these words:

"The first of such laws was promulgated in the very year of 'freedom' - the Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948, which effectively excluded a section of the Tamils from citizenship. Then came the Indian and Pakistan Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949 and the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949 which disenfranchised a large section of Tamils. Then came the Sinhalese Only law in 1956, making every Tamil in this country, irrespective of what doctorates some of them held, virtual illiterates in their land of birth. The Prevention of Terrorism Act is now over three years old. What has the government achieved by it up to now?"

30 April 30, 1983

This issue highlighted the detention and torture of senior Architect, Arulanandam David, President of Gandhiyam, at Panagoda military barracks. In a telegram sent to the president, Lawyer Kumaralingam stated that detainee Rajendran was passing blood and was suffering from frequency of micturation. Lawyers gained access to David through a court order after David had been forced to sign a confession under torture.

The same issue also drew attention to countrywide repression. A meeting of the Civil Rights Movement held on 15 April 1983 and presided over by its Chairman Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe expressed concern at the growing indications of police misconduct. It listed in particular: assaults against journalists at Kotmale; assault and

unlawful detention of a 17-year-old boy at the Kandy police station; assaults against women strikers at Ekala; assaults against students at Jayewardenepura; death of a suspect held in police custody at Matale; assault against pavement hawkers in Colombo; and assault against former M.P. Mrs. Vivienne Gunawardene.

Following the announcement of local government elections three U.N.P. men in the North were shot dead (Ratnasingam, Rajaratnam and Muttiah). This brought to five the number of U.N.P. men killed (with Thiagarajah in 1981, and Thambapillai in November 1982). In a leaflet by the L.T.T.E. claiming responsibility for these killings the T.U.L.F. was branded as an evil force which was Eelamist only in connection with elections. The L.T.T.E. called for a boycott of the elections scheduled for 18th May, causing some leading T.U.L.F. candidates to withdraw and U.N.P. members to leave the party. At one meeting (8 May) when militant youths fired into the air, everyone, including the speakers on the platform, ran away except for the T.U.L.F. Secretary General and Leader of the Opposition, Mr. A. Amirthalingam.

14 May 1983:

This issue of the Saturday Review had this to say: "Tamil Undergraduates and a few Tamil lecturers fled the University of Peradeniya on Thursday and Friday following assaults by some Sinhalese undergraduates. Some Tamil students have been admitted to Kandy hospital with injuries. A few days back a student group had staged a Tamil translation of Jean-Paul Satre's "Men Without Shadows". The torture and cruelty by the Nazi soldiers of French resistance fighters was suspected of being portrayed in a way as to resemble local conditions. Later pamphlets issued by the L.T.T.E. were found pasted on the Science Faculty walls".

Another provocation for the violence seems to be the tarring of the English and Sinhalese lettering at the entrance to the University. This incident was suspected of having been engineered. A long standing tradition at the Faculty of Engineering held when Sinhalese students protected fellow Tamil students. Elsewhere Tamil students were told: "No campus and no Eelam for you bastards."

The turn out for the local polls on 18 May was low for reasons varying from support for the L.T.T.E. to fear. The L.T.T.E. went beyond the boycott call and attacked a polling booth: "About 64 houses, three mini-buses, nine cars, three motor-cycles and 36 bicycles were set on fire by Army men on a rampage at Kantharmadam in Jaffna on Wednesday the 18th evening and night as soon as a state of emergency came into force a 5:00 p.m.. This is believed to be the Army's "reply" to the killing of Corporal Jayewardene by militant youths at a polling centre in the vicinity an hour earlier."

21 May, 1983:

The army had now accepted collective reprisals as a weapon. In two months the army would take on unarmed civilians. The Saturday Review contained a report by Dr. M. S. L. Salgado, J.M.O., Colombo, indicating that the Gandhiyam secretary Dr. Rajasundaram had almost certainly been badly assaulted and tortured.

The incidents at Pankulam and Kantharmadam marked a conscious new trend in the government's thinking. What took place at Kantharmadam was not a spontaneous action. It was systematically done after a senior officer arrived and gave an order. With the exception of one goat there was no loss of life. The crossing of the Rubicon which set the stage for indiscriminate mass killing came with the announcement by a Defence Ministry spokesman that: "The armed forces and the police in the North are to be given legal immunity from judicial proceedings and wide ranging powers of search and destroy". The University students in Jaffna came to the fore in collecting money and materials and providing relief for the victims at Kantharmadam.

4 June, 1983:

The lead story in the Saturday Review quoted the statement published in the Sun: "Under such circumstances soldiers were compelled to react as during a war particularly in their role of fighting armed terrorists who had no compunction about killing servicemen or members of the public. In view of this it has been felt that police and service-men in the North should be given the freedom of the battlefield rather than having their morale sapped through conflicts with legal niceties. This is not a peacetime situation and the police and services must be provided with adequate safeguards when attempting to control the problem".

The new immunity was Emergency Regulation 15A of 3 July 1983 which allowed the security forces to bury or cremate bodies of people shot by them without revealing their identities or carrying out inquests. It was widely believed that these new powers were a direct reaction to the evidence proffered by A.J.M.O. Dr. Saravanapavanandan at the inquest of Navaratnarajah who died in army custody. This was not an issue connected with the "freedom of the battlefield." It was murder of a helpless captive. In general Tamils became both angry and frightened. They rightly believed that the government was arming itself with powers for some course of action that went beyond dealing with an admittedly deteriorating law and order situation.

Almost 12 hours after the government's announcement of tough new measures under the Public Security Act, Mr. Thilagar, a hospital employee and U.N.P. candidate for the municipal elections was shot at 6:15 a.m. on 4 June, at the Jaffna hospital. If the government was heading towards lighting the tinder, the militants were determined to help things along.

The same issue of the Saturday Review also carried news of an army rampage in Vavuniya: "Service personnel destroyed the Gandhiyam farm at Kovilkulam, about one and a half miles away from Vavuniya town on Wednesday 1st June. The rampaging servicemen who came in trucks destroyed the crops and huts and set fire to the farm buildings and vehicles. Three tractors and a van were burnt."

This happened after a four man guerrilla group flung bombs at an airforce jeep and then opened fire, killing airmen U. L. M. Perera and W. A. Gunasekera. This happened at the vegetable market where the airmen were shopping. It may be noted that this incident took place before the announcement of new measures and there was no loss of civilian life. The guerrillas were later identified with a group within the P.L.O.T.E..

The 4 June issue further reported that on 30 May, Sabaratnam Palanivel, a young van driver of Valvettithurai was dragged into the Valvettithurai army camp and shot dead by Corporal M. Wimalaratne. This happened around 4:30 a.m. when Palanivel was driving home after taking some relatives who wanted to catch the Trincomalee bus. Later an army truck ran over the dead body. This was the last time army offenders were brought before a Magistrate. Hence forward the situation in the country was to be qualitatively different. During the course of the Tamil insurgency, every death up to this time was an issue that aroused keen concern. Over the next five years, both freedom and value of life would continue to decline, not only in the North, but also in the South.

11 June, 1983:

A last plea for sanity was contained in a telegram sent to President Jayewardene on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement, by its secretary Desmond Fernando. The subject was the new powers being granted to the security forces. Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe, the president of the C.R.M. was to die a broken man on 23 October, the same year - broken by the blood letting that was to envelope the whole country. The C.R.M. felt a frequent need to refer to the events of 1971 involving the Sinhalese youth insurgency, which led to its formation when the Left government of Mrs. Bandaranaike was in power. This was because Jayewardene's chosen tactics to dismiss the counsels of the C.R.M. was to brand it a Communist or Communist inspired (and hence subversive) organisation. That was how the destructive mind of the government worked. Quoted below is an extract from the telegram, published in the Saturday Review of 11 June, 1983:

"The granting of such powers will create again the excesses of 1971 when similar powers resulted in deaths under torture, indiscriminate killings and execution without trial by security forces, which usurp functions of courts in determining who is a terrorist and who is not; and leading to slaughter of many never established to have been involved in insurgent activities. Revocation of this horrifying regulation was one of the main demands of the CRM at its inception in 1971.

"... It must guarantee that all such persons are dealt with by due process of the law and in keeping with the fundamental principles of justice... *for otherwise a government would be flouting the principles of justice that are vital to democracy in the very act of claiming to defend democratic institutions.*

"The Working Committee of the C.R.M. also points out that the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights which Your Excellency's Government has signed specifically provides that the right to life and the right to protection from torture cannot be derogated from even at a time of emergency threatening the life of the nation."

This plea came against a background of racist attacks throughout the country. The situation in Trincomalee was particularly grim, where the Saturday Review of 11 June reported one killing and several bomb attacks. The fact that these racist attacks were taking place while there was a curfew on, strongly suggested the connivance of the armed forces.

The situation there was to get worse in the weeks to come. In one incident several Tamil passengers travelling in a van were attacked and burnt with the van. Several Tamils who experienced these harrowing days in Trincomalee said that during curfew, racist hoodlums would attack them at home, and if they tried to flee, the security forces would shoot them as curfew breakers. It was clear that the government had decided to use brazen force to drive away Tamils from several areas of the North and East where they felt relatively safe. Especially targeted were the Trincomalee District and the settlements where Tamil refugees from the 1977 violence had after several years of hard work become economically stable. There was the chilly nip of unreason in the air.

On 2 July, 1983, the Saturday Review was sealed by the state just before its front and back pages could be printed. With all its shortcomings it had been a voice of humanity. Before the referendum fraud of December 1982, it had done for the whole country a courageous service, which the press in the South was constrained from doing, by giving articulation to a wide spectrum of voices from around the country protesting at the deception. It had done much to secure an impressive vote in Jaffna against the government, despite the T.U.L.F.'s silence. Henceforward to stand up for reason and humanity in Ceylon, was to become several times more dangerous - in the South as well as in the North. Shortly after the July 1983 violence, Mr. S. Sivanayagam, the paper's editor, would seek exile in India.

When the paper resumed publication several months later, its role would be very different, one of its main tasks being to catalogue a seemingly endless series of gory happenings. Constraints on press freedom would come from unexpected quarters. The old interest in political debate and development issues would be vastly reduced. One would miss contributions from readers on the importance of the Palmyrah Palm, heritage matters, problems of the Vanni farmer etc.. The optimism and the sense of forward movement were gone. Many of the lights had gone out. The sins of omission and commission had much to do with this. Even as the paper was being sealed, it was preparing for a future that was qualitatively different. The unpublished issue of 2 July, 1983 had the following lines from its future editor, Gamini Navaratne, B.Sc. (Econ.) London, author of "The Chinese Connexion," and for 30 years a Westminster style lobby correspondent: "If I have my own way, I will send most of the present politicians to the moon. That's where they really belong." That was saying a lot about the future.

We see that during the years 1977-83 there were two main currents in the Tamil community outside the scope of parliamentary politics. One was to build up village level organisations of communities, economically viable and conscious of their dignity and rights as persons and communities. Their main weapon was to express, nonviolently,

a feeling of public anger and outrage when this dignity was violated. Such a tendency was represented in Jaffna by the activities of the students.

The other tendency was represented by the L.T.T.E. and sections of the P.L.O.T.E.. Their hit and run attacks against the state, especially the police and the armed services, were creating a momentum of their own. This tendency underwent rapid expansion after July 1983, marginalising the people. Groups such as the E.R.O.S. and the E.P.R.L.F. concentrated mainly on grass-roots work amongst the masses before July 1983, and did continue with this for a time afterwards. But with India's entry and its adoption of the militant groups, all of them became primarily military organisations.

The failure of the Tamil leadership during this period was its lack of determination to move decisively to resolve both intellectually and in practice its ambivalent attitude towards violence. The murder of Dr. Rajasundaram during the second Welikade prison massacre of 27 July 1983 marked the end of an era. Much imaginative and dedicated work by individuals who gave all they had was forgotten. By 1988 few lips would utter the name of Dr. Rajasundaram. We are without a sense of history or a sense of gratitude. That explains what became of us. There is something fatally sick in a community that expends inordinate emotion on every passing scene, forgetting the last and unable to make the connections with the events that had gone before. A return to sanity will also involve a sober evaluation of our past. Many believe that if the July 1983 violence had not intervened, the first tendency would have overcome the second. [\[Top\]](#)

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¹ Sinhalese in Sinhalese

Chapter 5

THE GROWTH OF THE TAMIL MILITANCY

5.1 Post 1983

The aftermath of the 1983 race riots brought a flood of recruits into the militant groups. The militant movements had become fractured in 1980 with the split between Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran. The latter went on to found P.L.O.T.E. (Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam) and the former the L.T.T.E. (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). India's role in Sri Lanka's internal affairs assumed a new phase in 1981 when it refused to deport to Sri Lanka Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran who had got themselves locked up in police custody over a gun fight at Pondi Bazaar. The Sri Lankan government claimed that they were wanted as criminal suspects. After the 1983 riots all militant groups based themselves in Tamil Nadu. The other significant militant groups are the T.E.L.O., the E.P.R.L.F. and the E.R.O.S.. All of them received succour from India and were monitored by the Indian intelligence organisation R.A.W. (Research and Analysis Wing). By unofficial estimates 3,000 Tamils had been killed and the stock of the Sri Lankan government in international opinion reached an all time low. India had also offered its offices to reach a political settlement. Instead of cutting its losses and reaching a settlement with the Tamils, the government first agreed to proposals put forward by the Indian Special Envoy Mr. G. Parthasarathy, and then dragged its feet. A Minister for National Security was appointed in January 1984 it became evident that Mr. Parthasarathy's proposals had been rejected in all but words. Many Sinhalese critics of the government felt that it was fatally idiotic to trifle with India in this manner. The government repeatedly claimed that India was going to invade Sri Lanka. But to more perceptive observers at that time, the possibility of invasion seemed very remote. While the international press claimed that Tamil militants were receiving training in India, India stated that there were only Tamil refugees on Indian soil. The true situation became one of the open secrets of the day. In consequence of all these, the result in Ceylon was a mounting military campaign by the government which increasingly became a campaign of indiscriminate terror. This was paralleled by an increasingly effective Tamil insurgency.

5.2 The Militants in Politics

By the time of the cease-fire of 18 June 1985, the militants had reached a dominant position in the Jaffna peninsula. Sri Lankan troops there were confined to barracks. Militarily the T.E.L.O. had come to rival the L.T.T.E.. The P.L.O.T.E. was well trained and armed, but claimed that it was building up for military action rather than for a guerrilla campaign. When the L.T.T.E., T.E.L.O., E.P.R.L.F. and E.R.O.S. formally united a short time before in April 1985 to form the E.N.L.F. (Eelam National Liberation Front), this gave a considerable morale boost to the Tamil population. Up to this time the Tamil population had hardly differentiated between rival groups. They were all referred to as boys and even Tigers. A short time after the cease fire the people began to realise that there were several disturbing trends. The formal unity of the E.N.L.F. was a facade and the boys were not going to listen to the people. About this time a novel, titled Puthiyathor Ulakam (A New World), was published by a dissident group of the P.L.O.T.E.. The book was about how young men with high ideals and a desire to sacrifice themselves for the good of their people, were drawn into a militant group which tried to pervert their original good intentions into a bizarre totalitarian conformism. Those who would not fall in line were tortured and brutally destroyed. Sources from this dissident group known as the "spark" group, claimed that about 90 members of P.L.O.T.E. had been so killed. There have also been a considerable number of authenticated internal killings within the L.T.T.E. and T.E.L.O. organisations. A large number of these killings took place on Indian soil. People began to wonder if India was indeed committed to democracy, justice and the well being of the Tamils. For what then had the police in Tamil Nadu been doing all these days?

Another reason why these groups were not accountable to the people was that their dependence on the people was minimal. The people were mainly demonstration fodder. During 1984 and in the first half of 1985 the Citizens' Committees had filled the gap left behind by the self-exiled M.P.s. The committees were made up mainly of people of standing and were independent of the militant groups. To them fell the task of collecting information on army atrocities and making representations to the army and the government. One of the tasks performed by them was to make representations on behalf of the numerous youths who were being detained. The Citizens' Committees earned for themselves considerable credibility in the eyes of foreign journalists and in those of several embassies. The first blow to the mood of optimism which followed the ceasefire

resulted from the murder by the L.T.T.E. of Mr. C. Anandarajan, Principal of St. John's College, and a leading member of the Jaffna Citizens' Committee. Many people acted in the belief that they still had certain democratic rights. Senior students at St. John's College went around putting up condolence posters. One editor who editorially questioned the killing was taken away and warned. The members of the Jaffna Citizens' Committee which asked the schools to observe a day of mourning received visits where the threatening undertone was clear. The main charge against Mr. Anandarajan, was the trivial one of his having organised a cricket match of Jaffna Schools versus the Sri Lankan Army, in the belief that it was in the spirit of the cease fire. It may be noted that about 15 months later in the middle of war leaders of the L.T.T.E. would fraternise on T.V. screens with Sri Lankan army officers, of whom Captain Kotelawela became well known.

A little earlier Mr. Gnanachandran, A.G.A. (Assistant Government Agent), Mullaitivu, had been assassinated and sixteen charges against him were issued in a leaflet. A highly educated man who was close to the L.T.T.E. gave the following extraordinary tale in justification of the assassination: In 1985 the people of Mullaitivu went through a difficult period due to Sri Lankan army action. The story went that Rajiv Gandhi telephoned President J. R. Jayewardene to protest about problems in Mullaitivu. President Jayewardene denied that such problems existed and in support of his claim asked Rajiv Gandhi to talk directly to the man on the spot and connected him on to A.G.A. Gnanachandran in Mullaitivu. A.G.A. Gnanachandran is said to have backed the President's claim. When asked how the militants got to know of this, the narrator of this story was sure that the conversation must have been overheard by an office employee at the switchboard who in turn would have informed the L.T.T.E.. Jaffna had now descended to trial by leaflet, gun, speculation and theatrics. The feeling of being besieged made the man in Jaffna accept all rumours and innuendoes that furthered the "Tamil cause," without examination. A few felt that things had gone fatally wrong. But most felt that the boys understandably made some small mistakes and that they would come around.

In another incident the army wanted all men in an area of Navaly to report at their camp the following day. A militant group came later and ordered that no one should go. Gunaratnam was a strong Jehovah's witness who felt that not to go after agreeing to do so was to have told a deliberate lie. He maintained that since he had done nothing wrong he should go and perhaps expound his religious convictions to the soldiers. He did go. He was later interrogated by the militant group who could not appreciate his point of view. He was then executed. His agonised sister believes to this day that her brother is somewhere alive.

An example of trial by theatrics was the murder of a man popularly known as Rajanikanth by the T.E.L.O.. A resident of Kalviyankadu, he was an ironsmith who sometimes did some favours for the T.E.L.O.. It is said that once he had seen some members of the T.E.L.O. indulging in some unseemly behaviour with some girls. Rajanikanth proceeded to scold them as boys would be scolded by an older man. Later he was abducted by a faction of the T.E.L.O. and displayed on a stage at Nelliady Junction.

A T.E.L.O. member dressed up as a woman came on stage and accused Rajanikanth of having raped her. The woman was given a knife and was asked to mete out an appropriate punishment. Rajanikanth was stabbed to death in a gruesome manner in public view. This happened during the second quarter of 1986.

Another phenomenon which came to Jaffna after the June 1985 cease fire was the prevalence of extortion and often very brutal robberies. People's houses were broken into by armed men, and after beating and sometimes torturing, their jewellery and other valuables were taken away. Appeals were made editorially and by posters to the militant groups to fulfil their obligation of policing, now that the Sri Lankan army was confined to barracks. But no militant group came forward to condemn these robberies or to do anything about them. Privately many of them expressed the feeling that these things have to be done in a liberation struggle to acquire resources. By several accounts, all militant groups indulged in robberies. Different militant groups became notorious in different areas. The game seemed to be to rob and try to put the blame on another group. The T.E.L.O. was the most noted in Jaffna town where the people were most articulate. This turned out to be useful for the L.T.T.E.. It may be mentioned that the robbery at Perumaal Temple in the heart of Jaffna, took place while an L.T.T.E. sentry was at hand. People once more lived in terror.

Although there was formal unity in the E.N.L.F. in response to popular demand, they made no attempt to work together. It was well known that Prabhakaran, the L.T.T.E. leader, and Sri Sabaratnam, the T.E.L.O. leader hated each other. The assassination of T.U.L.F. M.P.s Mr. Dharmalingam and Mr. Alalasunderam of 2 August, 1985, is an example of the methods by which one militant group tried to score over the others. Mr. Dharmalingam and Mr. Alalasunderam were amongst the T.U.L.F. M.P.s who continued to reside in Jaffna. On the basis of testimonies given by several persons who had talked to T.E.L.O. exiles in India, it is believed that this is how it happened: The L.T.T.E. leader Prabhakaran reportedly made a strong threatening speech against the T.U.L.F.. Sri Sabaratnam the T.E.L.O. leader then gave secret instructions to his men to assassinate the two M.P.s expecting that Prabhakaran would get the blame and the discredit.

As expected the L.T.T.E. was largely blamed. In an independent testimony, a P.L.O.T.E. sentry near Mr. Dharmalingam's residence identified a vehicle in which the assassins came as belonging to the T.E.L.O.. Another example of how the militant leaders functioned was given by T.E.L.O. exiles. Sri Sabaratnam was a leader whose presence gave a sense of awe to his men. Sometimes some members would complain to him about difficulties such as conditions in the camp. Sri Sabaratnam would listen with fatherly concern and go away promising redress. Later others would come and beat up the person who complained and nothing would change. Evidently the militant leaders had learnt a good deal from the methods of their predecessors in parliamentary politics. Only their adaptations were more frightening.

5.3 The Changing Character of the

Militants

The 1977 riots together with the lack of progress on the parliamentary front motivated many impressionable and able young men to look towards the militant movement by the late 1970's. It was inevitable that the University of Jaffna should become a focal point for leadership as well as ideological direction. Many students became involved and several members of the staff became active sympathisers. The risks involved were considerable. In 1980 the University students put out a paper called the Unarvu (Sensation) which was backed by the L.T.T.E.. The paper put forward several Marxist slogans. The involvement of certain university persons gave a mistaken impression that the L.T.T.E. was a Marxist organisation. About the same time the faction of the Tigers which the following year adopted the name of the P.L.O.T.E. started a paper with the name Puthiya Paathai (New Path). This paper took a political line critical of traditional parliamentary politics as well as of the hit and run tactics of the L.T.T.E.. After two issues of the latter, Mr. Sunderam, a prominent person in the P.L.O.T.E., was assassinated by the L.T.T.E. while at the printers to bring out an issue of the paper. The official reason given by the L.T.T.E. was that the members of the organisation were signatories to a pledge not to leave the organisation and join or start another - which Sunderam had breached. But other observers say that Sunderam was a very able organiser and military man; and Prabhakaran felt that allowing him to work outside his organisation may create another rival to his own. This was the first internal killing to surface publicly, although there had been several others before. Following this two L.T.T.E. sympathisers Irai Kumaran and Umair Kumaran were killed by the P.L.O.T.E.. Though people were alarmed, these incidents were not taken to be a sign of a deeper malaise. By 1986 these internal killings were to reach epidemic proportions.

The students of the University contributed considerably to the groups of the militant movement. The dedication of many of the students was such that they left their academic careers and went to rural areas and the Eastern Province to work for their organisations. Such persons were by nature intelligent, sensitive and bound to insist on democratic accountability from their leaders. With the rise of internal killings and autocratic leadership, these students became disillusioned. By 1985 many of them started quitting their organisations to lead quiet lives. According to the testimony of their friends, several of those students who died, ended their lives in a state of utter disillusionment. The last three student union leaders up to 1985 had deep seated problems with the L.T.T.E.. Two of them left the organisation and one died while doing refugee work. Of the University students who joined the organisation in the early 1980's, only one remains within. By the latter part of 1985 the role of the students in the militant movement underwent a radical change. The students on the whole felt that the militant groups had gone very much astray and were locked in a war of attrition with each other. This, they felt had brought the community to a dangerous brink. The main thrust of student action now was to reform the militant movement through criticism and persuasion, to provide relief for refugees, to mediate between the public and the militants and to foster unity among the militant groups. Usually the students did not go for confrontation with the militant groups. But they raised specific questions regarding their conduct. They questioned the killing of Mr. Anandarajan and called for an explanation. They publicly questioned the T.E.L.O. over the killing of Rajanikanth. In April 1986 a demonstration from Vadamaratchi protesting the killing by the T.E.L.O. of T.E.L.O. members Das and four of his colleagues was fired upon. The students negotiated with the E.P.R.L.F. and P.L.O.T.E. to protect and shelter the demonstrators. The bodies of three demonstrators killed were taken to the University. In doing refugee work the students involved took considerable risks in going to difficult areas. In 1984 eight students died while transporting relief supplies to Mullaitivu.

In this role the students were respected and also feared. Until the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash, the L.T.T.E. found the students movement useful. Though it no longer provided recruits, its criticisms were mainly directed against the T.E.L.O.. One reason for this was that the L.T.T.E.'s actions were more secretive, and could not be directly ascribed. Following the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash the L.T.T.E. moved to suppress the students. With the Vijitharan affair in November 1986, the break was complete. Henceforth, the students

were scared and silent spectators. This virtually ended the University's role in the militancy. Students of the past who had helped the growth of the militancy with dedication felt that they had been meanly used. The intellectual polish of the students had been useful. The leadership of the L.T.T.E., which was dominant by the end of 1986, proved that it had a mind of its own -- a totalitarian mind.

The July 1983 riots saw many new recruits pour into the militant movements. The trouble fomented by the government in the Eastern Province in 1984 found a large number of eastern province youths joining the militancy. The motivation of these youths was very different from that of their more intellectual and reflective predecessors from the University. Revenge, anger and utter helplessness were now leading motives. But the ground work had already been laid by the articulate students who had roamed the villages holding meetings. This suited the militant leadership. The new recruits would do what they were told, and not ask awkward questions. The L.T.T.E. could now drop its pretences concerning internationalism and socialism and show itself as a tightly controlled military organisation. The T.E.L.O. never had any pretences about intellectual leanings. By September 1985 a large number of refugees from the Trincomalee district were flooding into Jaffna, and these refugees who were very desperate were widely used in demonstrations. Many boys in their early teens from the refugee population joined mainly the E.P.R.L.F. and the T.E.L.O.. The E.P.R.L.F. was the first to recruit girls. The L.T.T.E. was however more discriminating in its recruitment. By December 1986 the L.T.T.E. was the dominant militant group having alienated and disbanded the other militant groups. Its military task was now much heavier, and it faced a severe man power shortage. Under these circumstances the L.T.T.E. was encouraging recruits even in their early teens. Jaffna's Old Park had now become a show case for the L.T.T.E., where children watched the drilling going on after school and would sometimes run away from home to join. Others might first join their friends who were on sentry duty and later join fully for the thrill of it. By mid-1987 girls too were being trained for a military role. Distraught parents became a regular sight around L.T.T.E. camps crying and begging for their children who had run away and joined the movement. One would sometimes see comical scenes of mothers chasing their daughters from an L.T.T.E. camp and dragging them home, with both daughters and mothers in tears. One lady teacher who observed some of the teenage L.T.T.E. boys at Old Park coming after a bath, wondered sadly, how the community can allow such innocent ones, who hardly knew what they were doing to throw their lives away for an obscure cause. The wife of a specialist doctor said, that she actually saw the young boys in the L.T.T.E. camp next door play the children's game called "hide and seek". The militant movement had come a long way from its origins amongst the undergraduates of Peradeniya, who talked, theorised and then went abroad. Death, disillusionment and assassination had removed most of the able and mature leaders from amongst the militants. Their average age dropped perhaps from 22 to 14 or 16. The few leaders who remained enjoyed absolute authority over their unquestioning ranks.

The following two conversations give some insight into the minds of the younger militants.

1. A T.E.L.O. refugee in London: "I feel bad about seeing all these posh cars in London. That was one thing I did not lack in Jaffna. Whenever we saw a new kind of car, we would stop it and drive around for a bit."

2. From ex-members of the T.E.A. (Tamil Eelam Army) in Tamil Nadu: "Our camp was at Vetharianiam. Every afternoon we would drive in a van at a particular time. We used to have a bit of fun by cutting into the school girls who were returning home. One day, by accident we knocked three of them and two died. Anyway, we went to our camp, had lunch and slept. We were awakened by stones falling on our roof. We went out, saw an angry crowd and we fired into the air and dispersed the crowd... When we were in Karainagar and wanted a good meal, we would drive our truck with the L.M.G. (Light Machine Gun) at the ready at full speed towards the beach and would fire some volleys into the sea. On our way back, the villagers would ask what happened. We would reply the the Sri Lankan navy tried to attack the island and that we repulsed them. We would then be invited to a meal of mutton curry and pittu [\[1\]](#)."

The T.E.A. was a marginal group under "Panagoda Maheswaran," who was an engineering student at the University of London. Though an able military man, his group had no political outlook. Maheswaran's greatest asset was his improvisation. After leaving Jaffna, he reportedly set up a workshop in Tamil Nadu to fashion shotguns. When an intrigued person asked him for an explanation, Maheswaran replied: "I choose the battlefield according to my equipment." The L.T.T.E. on the other hand would take the same kind of recruit and motivate him to take the L.T.T.E.'s cause as a religion for which he would give his life. But the immaturity, cynicism, and unconcern for civilian life shows through.

A point to be noted is the manner in which individuals were affected by the nature of the organisation they joined and the frustrations it engendered. A medical student, who was known as a pleasant young man to his friends, later became a notorious torturer within the T.E.L.O.. After July 1983, almost a whole class of senior boys at Hartley College, Pt. Pedro, joined the T.E.L.O.. Most of them were bright students from an elite school with good G.C.E. A. Level grades (from the government conducted common high school exam in the island). They made the sacrifice in the belief that within two years Eelam will be won, enabling them to get back to their careers. An observer who knew several of them, had this to say: "As time went by they realised that the struggle would be on for much longer than two years. They developed a grievance against those of their erstwhile colleagues who had gone for careers and studies abroad and had prospered. While having come to realise the shortcomings and limitations of their organisation, they were too proud to leave it and join another. They would rather work to bring the T.E.L.O. into prominence as against other groups, for their personal ambitions and prospects of power now hinged on the success of the organisation to which they were committed. Their grievance extended to a contempt for those who pursued ordinary civilian interests. They regarded themselves as superior to civilians who were obliged to accept their idea of what was good for them." It would surprise many who knew the Tamils as an intelligent and highly educated community, that a combination of moral and intellectual lethargy, together with a misguided pragmatism, enabled them to build such high

fantasies about the boys. On to their slender and fragile shoulders were thrust, all the responsibility for the moral and physical well-being of the community, trusting that barring a few 'small mistakes', all would be well.

5.4 The rise of the L.T.T.E.

In early 1985, the P.L.O.T.E., L.T.T.E. and T.E.L.O. were considered fairly evenly balanced. At the time when 7 L.T.T.E. men were killed in a quarrel with the P.L.O.T.E. at Chullipuram, the L.T.T.E. preferred discretion to valour. When quarrels developed between the L.T.T.E. and the T.E.L.O., neither seldom did anything more than go out on motor bikes and take pot shots at "sentry boys" in the rival group. These sentry boys, who were youngsters with no military training and in their early teens, were usually deployed with hand grenades to throw and run if the alarm had to be raised.

In reprisal for the killing by the Sri Lankan forces of 70 civilians in Valvettithurai and the damage to the homes of Prabhakaran and several other L.T.T.E. leaders, the L.T.T.E. on 14 May 1985 conducted what came to be known as the Anuradhapura massacre. A few L.T.T.E. men drove into Anuradhapura and gunned down about 150 persons with ruthless efficiency and got away. In the ancient Sinhalese capital, the government forces were caught off guard. This gave the L.T.T.E. the reputation of being an efficient "killer machine," that was to be both feared and respected. The many who approved of the Anuradhapura massacre little realised that such readiness to play around with lives of Sinhalese would result in making Tamil lives more insecure.

However, around January 1986, it was a general belief among Tamils that no single group could proceed alone against the might of the Sri Lankan army. Attempts by the Sri Lankan Army in early 1986 on an L.T.T.E. camp at Suthumalai and a subsequent thrust into Tellipallai, were repulsed by all the groups acting together, including the T.E.A.. The T.E.L.O. provided critical help in saving the day when troops landed by helicopter and attacked the L.T.T.E.'s camp at Suthumalai. This was publicly acknowledged by the L.T.T.E.. It had been rumoured for some time that the "Das faction" of the T.E.L.O. in Vadamaratchi had some differences with the leader Sri Sabaratnam. Das was an able military man -- and this faction was said to form the military backbone of the T.E.L.O.. The L.T.T.E.'s opportunity came when in April 1986 the Bobby faction of the T.E.L.O. treacherously shot dead Das and 4 of his colleagues. They were shot dead while visiting a colleague in the Jaffna Hospital. This resulted in the Das faction leaving the T.E.L.O. and going into exile, considerably weakening the T.E.L.O.. Towards the end of the month the T.E.L.O. moved several of its men outside Jaffna, ostensibly for operations against the Sri Lankan army. At the same time the L.T.T.E. moved many of its men into Jaffna and the word was put out that it was going to attack one of the Sri Lankan encampments. A crucial advantage possessed by the L.T.T.E. was a modern communications system with wireless sets. The L.T.T.E. took on the T.E.L.O. at the end of that month. The pretext was a minor tiff arising from both groups calling a hartal for the men they had lost at sea, about the same time. After one week of fighting the L.T.T.E. was supreme in Jaffna. The T.E.L.O. leader Sri Sabaratnam was killed on 7 May. The methods used by the L.T.T.E. were reminiscent of the shock tactics used against Sinhalese -- during the Anuradhapura massacre. In a way the Anuradhapura massacre had come home and the ghosts of the dead were to haunt us for years to come.

The manner in which the T.E.L.O. members were killed, shocked Tamil people everywhere. Many died without knowing what hit them. Twelve were killed near Manipay while they were asleep. Several were caught unawares, shot and burnt at junctions at Thirunelvely, Mallakam, and Tellipallai. Eight persons were killed at the camp behind the St. John's principal's bungalow. One person was thrust into a car, which was then exploded, leaving severed limbs strewn around. On hearing this the St. John's College principal, Mr. Gunaseelan, who was in hospital, had a relapse which forced him into an early retirement. Many of the T.E.L.O. members who were from areas outside Jaffna had to flee in fear without knowing the streets or where they were going. The people were so terrified, that few found the courage to give shelter to the fugitives. While this unprecedented display was on, people stood mutely at junctions and watched, as persons hardly dead, were doused and burnt. Hardly anyone protested, which is understandable. Some went home saying things such as: "We have produced our own Hitlers." Others gave a display of that opportunism that had become a characteristic feature of Jaffna. Some shop keepers offered aerated waters to those who had exhausted themselves putting on the show. Some students at the University attempted to take out a procession to stop the fighting but had to abandon it. The fighting was over in less than a week and Sri Sabaratnam was killed in circumstances which are not clear. Most sources agree that he was wounded in the shoot out, while his two companions escaped. Sri Sabaratnam then stood up and requested an opportunity to talk to Kittu, the Jaffna L.T.T.E. leader. He was then gunned down. Whether he was killed personally by Kittu and whether the order to kill him came from Prabhakaran himself, or from Kittu, are matters on which the various reports disagree. All this time the Sri Lankan army had remained quiet except for a bit of helicopter firing here and there. Outsiders saw the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash as fatally weakening the militant cause. Kautiliya, a columnist for the Sunday Island asked satirically whether the L.T.T.E. had taken a sub-contract with the Ministry for National Security to take on the T.E.L.O..

Subsequently the L.T.T.E. launched a propaganda campaign where two reasons were given for its action: 1. The T.E.L.O. were a group of criminals who had harassed the people and had robbed them. and 2. The T.E.L.O. was acting as the agent of Indian imperialism.

To substantiate these accusations, the L.T.T.E. announced that all recovered stolen items, jewellery, electrical goods and cars were being returned. In fact several cars taken over and used by the T.E.L.O. and allegedly stolen television sets and video-recorders were put on display near Windsor Theatre and were claimed by members of the public. But little or no jewellery was returned. However the jewellery robbed from Thurkai Amman Kovil [\[2\]](#)¹ at Tellipallai mysteriously reappeared and the wrath of the god was averted. Most people came to terms with what had happened and thought it was good. The first reason given by the L.T.T.E. had a strong influence in Jaffna town. The E.P.R.L.F. too returned several television sets and vehicles saying they were no longer needed. Several people who wanted the E.P.R.L.F. to keep these things found themselves left with no choice but to accept them. Amongst the E.N.L.F. partners only the E.P.R.L.F. found the courage to organise a protest rally for the killing of Sri Sabaratnam and the betrayal of the alliance. The E.R.O.S. remained quiet and began to be patted on the back

by the L.T.T.E. as a good organisation, suitable for those who were not good enough for the L.T.T.E.. The press and the Church too came to terms with the new dispensation. The Roman Catholic Church under Bishop Deogupillai, who had been an outspoken critic of Sri Lankan army action did not use its strong base and its moral authority to protest against the fatal trend of cowardice and moral torpor within the Tamil community. The Morning Star, the journal of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (C.S.I.) commented editorially in a piece under the title, The Merry Month of May, that it had been held that the militant cause had been weakened by what had happened. It went on to allude that this was not necessarily the case as was proved by the militants' success in repulsing the subsequent Sri Lankan offensive. Moreover it said that the people had stood shoulder to shoulder with the militants during the subsequent bombing of Jaffna. The Jaffna man was a very wise man who made a virtue of following the path of least resistance. That the path had to change direction frequently was of no consequence.

Claims have been made by the apologists for the action against the T.E.L.O. that India had ordered the T.E.L.O. to destroy the L.T.T.E., thus giving the L.T.T.E. no choice. The reason given for such an order, it is said, is that the L.T.T.E. refused to toe India's line. Even assuming that India had expressed such a wish, whether the T.E.L.O. took it seriously is another matter. Granting a certain amount of cockiness on the T.E.L.O.'s part, it is hard for an observer then in Jaffna to believe that they had seriously entertained such an ambition for the near future. They were disorganised and divided as well as lacking in a communication network. Looking at the circumstances and Sri Sabaratnam's remarks at Kalviankadu, it does not appear that the T.E.L.O. was looking for a clash. It has also been mentioned that the T.E.L.O. had at that time moved a large number of trained men out of Jaffna while the L.T.T.E. did the opposite amidst rumours that they were to take on a Sri Lankan army encampment.

A significant circumstance was a serious division within the T.E.L.O. made worse a month earlier by killing by the Bobby faction of 5 leading members of the Das faction. A similar circumstance minus the assassinations was to precede the L.T.T.E.'s taking on the E.P.R.L.F., 7 months later - namely, the split arising from differences between Padmanabha, the E.P.R.L.F.'s political leader and Douglas Devananda, the leader of its military wing.

A short time after the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. incident, an E.P.R.L.F. leader told a leading citizen that his leadership had asked the L.T.T.E. leadership what they really wanted and to state the terms on which they could work together. He further added that no reply had been forthcoming.

On the question of India, most Tamils had unreal expectations of altruism on India's part, while they revelled in thinking how smart they were in using India to get Eelam. They knew the nature of Indian politics and thought they could manipulate it for their ends. The two aspects of altruism and baseness that governed the Tamil man's perception of India corresponded to the sentimental and the real. Equally, talk of any militant group being independent of India was meaningless after the initial surrender in exchange for arms, training, base facilities and recognition. This would be sharpened later after

September 1987 by the L.T.T.E.'s successive contradictory positions involving considerable amnesia. The real sufferers would be the Tamil people. The thought that India could have interests, legitimate as big power politics goes, weighed little on people's minds.

Following the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash, the L.T.T.E. understood the feelings of ordinary people. Loudspeaker vehicles went about telling people not to talk about or analyse what had happened. This was the first publicly announced act of censorship. Previously the L.T.T.E. and the T.E.L.O. especially had visited newspapers to tell them not to write about certain incidents.

About 20 May, 1986, the Sri Lankan government launched a limited offensive to test the strength of the militant movement after the excision of the T.E.L.O.. The column that advanced from Elephant Pass turned back at Pallai. One group broke out of the Jaffna Fort and established a beach-head at Mandaitivu, providing a safe means of supplying troops at Jaffna Fort, for, helicopters landing inside the fort were subject to fire from nearby. The Sri Lankan army also succeeded in widening the perimeters of its camps at Thondamanaru and Valvettithurai. Until May the question amongst civilians was, when would the militants make an attempt on one of the army camps. The question now was when would the Sri Lankan army make an all out attempt to recapture Jaffna. It was well understood that the L.T.T.E. would make a formidable foe.

An aspect of L.T.T.E. dominance that made it acceptable to the general public was that robberies virtually ceased. The poor and the middle classes were left alone. The L.T.T.E. made mutually beneficial arrangements with wholesale merchants and big businessmen to the satisfaction of the latter. They could now enjoy their profits without the nuisance of being occasionally kidnapped for ransom. Before May 1986, if a man allegedly committed a fraud, the first militant group to discover it would descend on him, most likely in the night, to carry out an investigation. Occasionally, the victim would be lamp-posted (shot after being tied to an lamp post), or would be let off after negotiating an appropriate fee. After May 1986, several goods, aerated waters and cigarettes went up in price. In the best of times petrol sold at Rs. 19 per litre as against Rs. 13.50 per litre south of Vavuniya. Huge profits were made by dealers. Transport bottlenecks in a way proved a blessing to many peasants and labourers who were thrown out of work by the war. Many turned to transporting petrol to Jaffna on a small scale by bicycles and selling it by the bottle on the roadside. In this at least, the Sinhalese and Tamils on the border of the Northern province co-operated for their mutual prosperity. Another example of how the Jaffna economy worked was given by a head teacher from Chavakachcheri. Soon after the commencement of Operation Liberation on 26 May 1987, refugees from Vadamaratchi flooded into Thenmaratchi and the demand for rice was great. The normal price of a bag was Rs. 230/. A mill owner who had a very large quantity of rice paid Rs. 50,000 tax money and sold his stock at the rate of Rs. 400 per bag, making an astronomical profit.

It was now expected that the L.T.T.E. would soon make a bid for sole dominance. Only the E.P.R.L.F. (Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front) seemed to be in a

mood to challenge the L.T.T.E.. The E.R.O.S. (Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students) and the T.E.A. accepted L.T.T.E.'s dominance. The E.R.O.S. was a much smaller group which one time acquired for itself in the popular mind a reputation for intelligence and discipline. But its allegiance to Marxism was more doubtful, together with its concern for Sinhalese civilians. The talk of some of its leadership and its ranks gave the impression that it appealed to gut feelings of narrow nationalism. Its killing of Mr. Kathiramalai, a Sarvodaya worker, left strong doubts about its commitment to fairplay.

The middle of 1986 saw a series of sensational bombings carried out in the South. The main incidents were the explosion which destroyed an Airlanka Tristar passenger airliner which was being loaded for take-off at the Katunayake airport; the explosion in the C.T.O. (Central Telecommunications Office) building in the heart of Colombo Fort; the explosion at the Elephant House aerated water factory; and the explosion at the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (C.P.C.) depot at Anuradhapura. The civilian dead numbered several tens. Like the Anuradhapura massacre it was an adoption by the oppressed of the methods of the oppressor, and hence also the disease of the oppressor. The explosion at the C.P.C. depot at Anuradhapura also represented a move away from impersonal terror. An explosive charge was placed inside a petrol bowser from the Puloly Multipurpose Cooperative Stores (M.P.C.S.) that had gone to collect fuel from Anuradhapura. Several bowsers from Jaffna were in the petrol queue. It was reported that two persons who went in the bowser were amongst those killed. It was widely claimed in the international media that the parties responsible for these bombings were connected with the L.T.T.E., or the E.R.O.S. or both. The T.E.A. was also mentioned because of its association with the bomb meant for the Airlanka flight, which exploded instead at the Madras, Meenambakam airport in 1984.

No group claimed responsibility for these attacks. But according to Tamil sources living abroad, responsibility was claimed privately by senior persons in a militant group that ostensibly valued above all, intelligence, research and scholarship. There were also explosions in public transport buses carrying mainly Sinhalese passengers near Vavuniya. Two of the victims were an elderly Sinhalese gentleman and his son, who had been unswerving in their hospitality towards Tamil public transport workers.

Besides blurring in the minds abroad of the distinction between terror by the Sri Lankan state and that by Tamil militant groups, another consequence of this incident was to make petroleum fuels, aerated waters and gas more expensive and scarce in Jaffna.

It has been said by many that such acts against the Sinhalese population made the Sinhalese think seriously about the Tamil problem. It did make them think, but only in a perverse sort of way. One could see, for instance in editorials, the pressure mounting for peace talks when terror is seen as being too close for comfort. Equally, there was pressure for a final military thrust, during transient spells of seeming military successes, such as during Operation Liberation. This made the whole affair a destructive game involving extensive media manipulation in the absence of any change of heart and any democratic resurgence.

For the time being, life in Jaffna was relatively peaceful, barring occasional shelling by the Sri Lankan army. The L.T.T.E. concentrated on bringing all key institutions under its control. The Citizens' Committees caused no problems. Except at the University, this operation needed neither force nor intimidation. The L.T.T.E. was subtle and discerning in this matter. In the hospitals and in the administration, doctors and officials were left with enough discretion to protect their self respect. Dissent from individuals was tolerated provided this was not articulated through mass movements or other militant groups. An attempt at an L.T.T.E. sponsored Journalists' Union through some journalists who had come over to its side foundered, because the majority of the journalists found it too hard to swallow. The pretext given by the L.T.T.E. for summoning a meeting of journalists was that it was concerned that journalists in Jaffna were not being paid the salaries stipulated by the government in a gazette notification. The editor of the Uthayan, together with others, spoke to the effect: "The question of salaries is a matter for the journalists themselves, and not for a militant organisation. No one is going to control what we think or write." These brave words however, were not reflected in practice. Everyone knew that he would be a brave man to go beyond certain limits. The Eelanadu management dismissed a journalist, whose presence it apparently thought was embarrassing under the new dispensation. (This journalist, Mr. Shanmugalingam, has not been seen after being abducted by the L.T.T.E. on 6 November, 1989.) The L.T.T.E. went ahead with organising rural courts, vigilante committees and bodies such as cultural and development committees. The L.T.T.E. was privately cynical and disrespectful of persons who served on these bodies. A top L.T.T.E. leader once asked an old friend and senior journalist: "Those who were with us in the days when the going was dangerous and we were hounded by the Sri Lankan forces now refuse to touch us with a broomstick. But those who are joining us in large numbers now are persons whom we would have once classed as anti-social elements. Why is this?" The friend replied: "You should have no difficulty in finding out yourself."

The population of Jaffna fell in line. People who had once shown the spirit to resist the oppression of the Sri Lankan state now enjoyed the peace of the animals in George Orwell's Animal Farm. People would now get about unconcerned if a neighbour mysteriously taken away then disappeared. Some who were not prepared to do this were students of the University of Jaffna. In the circumstances they acted bravely during the Vijitharan and Rajaharan affairs. It is a comforting thought that the idealism of youth cannot be quelled.

The two incidents took place in quick succession around early November 1986 and gave rise to what became the last mass protest in Jaffna against the violation of basic freedoms. It did not, like the mass protests against the Prevention of Terrorism Act in the early 1980's, exude a sense of buoyancy and forward movement. This was more a rearguard action. When it ended, many of its leaders had to go into hiding or seek exile. Many of the leaders and hundreds of ordinary women from the lower reaches of society had displayed rare courage in doing something that was both essential and at the same time was shirked by their so called betters. The two incidents concerned had independent origins.

Arunagirinathan Vijitharan was a third year commerce student from the University of Jaffna who was generally unknown until he was missing from his boarding house on 4 November 1986. The question was, why Vijitharan? He was by all accounts an ordinary fun loving student with no political affiliations. It was this aspect of it that left some doubts about the cause. Had he said something mildly offensive to a person of some importance as students are wont to do? One may never know.

An action committee was formed by the students. They did not accuse anyone. They simply maintained that the four functioning militant groups were responsible for the security of persons in Jaffna. Further, they had sentries everywhere, making it unlikely that persons could disappear without their knowledge. The militant groups were called upon to do their acknowledged duty and restore Vijitharan. Privately, the students admitted that they were afraid and were in no mood to confront any militant group. A senior University official who was talking to the militant groups on the matter, expressed the feeling that the students had acted too hastily in making the matter public. On the other hand, the students felt that if they kept quiet, the chances of students disappearing one by one was greater. Not having received a satisfying response, the students commenced a campaign of fasting on 19 November in which six persons, both boys and girls began a fast in a temporary cadjan shed in front of the administration block.

For the next ten days the University became the centre of attraction for all those who had been suppressing their feelings about what was going on. An important group of people who joined the students were residents, especially women, from Passaiyoor. That had to do with a separate incident, concerning the death of Edward.

Passaiyoor is a fishing village three miles East along the coast from Jaffna town. These people were Roman Catholics and were by nature spontaneous in their collective response to perceived aggression against them. Edward had returned from Saudi Arabia and the family was said to be sympathetic towards the L.T.T.E.. They had consulted the parish priest on the matter of a land dispute with a neighbour, and not being satisfied, had invited Malaravan, the Ariyalai leader of the L.T.T.E.. During the hearing, Edward's mother reportedly said something offensive to Malaravan, who in turn is said to have raised his hand against her. Edward then slapped Malaravan. Edward was later asked to call at the Ariyalai camp for an inquiry. Fearing what may happen, Edward contacted the parish priest. The latter went to the camp and got an assurance that Edward would be released after a short inquiry and that no harm would befall him. The parish priest accompanied Edward to the camp and waited. Edward was taken in. Twenty minutes later the priest was told that Edward was dead. The priest fainted and was admitted to hospital. Those who went to see the body said that hardly a bone was left unbroken. Then things took a turn that was unusual for Jaffna. A large group of women gathered at the local church and protested for several days, displaying hand written posters. The middle-class based women's organisations, including the Mothers' Front, had lost their voice in the face of internal oppression.

The university students went out and addressed students from the higher forms in schools, who in turn came out and joined by sitting on roads and joining processions. An

element of irony was added to the proceedings when the L.T.T.E. leader V. Prabhakaran commenced a Gandhi style fast in Madras when the Indian police confiscated his arms and communications equipment. A non-violent protest was on for the return of instruments of violence. Rival processions for the student cause and Prabhakaran's cause sometimes crossed each other.

At this point many diverse opinions came to be expressed, most of them agreeing that the students should give up their fast. Some felt that the students were excellently performing a very necessary task; but the community did not deserve the deaths of those who were fasting. If they died, six prospective leaders would be lost while people would shrug their shoulders and go on as before. Then little would be achieved. Many were hostile. They thought that the Tamils were being divided in the face of the main enemy, the Sri Lankan state, when they should be uniting behind the L.T.T.E.. Students were made heart broken and angry by an opinion expressed by a member of the staff who said that the students were making an absurd issue over one missing person when several L.T.T.E. men were dying fighting the Sri Lankan army. They were dismayed that such persons could not see the issues at stake and that one could in time come to mean hundreds. Besides, passive acquiescence by the community in such developments during a fight for freedom, would lead to its opposite, thus negating all sacrifice, including the militants' sacrifice.

The Jaffna press played it diplomatically by giving equal prominence to statements by all parties. The E.P.R.L.F. backed the students. The E.R.O.S. characteristically sat on the fence. The students were painfully aware that their protest could become interpreted as anti-L.T.T.E. and backed by rival militant groups who did not wish to confront the L.T.T.E. directly. A speech delivered by an E.P.R.L.F. leader at the university, the contents of which did not receive prior approval from the students, gave further room for this impression.

Two of the student leaders were former members of the P.L.O.T.E. and the E.P.R.L.F.. However, available information strongly suggests that they were not principally anti-L.T.T.E., but had rather become disillusioned with the anti-democratic militarism of all the groups, now enjoying Indian patronage. There was strong pressure on the students to give up the protest, and the L.T.T.E. too was embarrassed by it. But the problem was how to end it. A mutually acceptable formula had to be found. Even admirers of the protest felt that it had gone on long enough and that no further purpose would be served by its prolongation. A number of persons and organisations came to patch up a settlement, including the University Teachers' Association (U.T.A.). Some wanted to do some good. Others had reasons which were more complex.

The L.T.T.E.'s conduct was puzzling. They could have in the first instance said that they sympathised with the students and would make every effort to trace Vijitharan. Then there would have been no protest. But they took an aggressive line. School children who joined the protests were threatened by leading L.T.T.E. men at both Mahajana College, Tellipallai, and near Jaffna Hindu College. In the latter instance a student's name was singled out. The U.T.A. invited Kittu for a meeting in the Senior Common Room, where

he was introduced as "our General." The session was marked by the silence of the staff, making one wonder why the meeting was called. Kittu took the line that if a militant group had abducted Vijitharan, they are not going to admit it amidst all this protest. He may be released, he said, far away at some distant time. He also made the point that traitors like Selvabala cannot be given amnesty on the grounds that they were students or on any other pretext. He was referring to a student from the Jaffna College Technical Institute who was said by the L.T.T.E. to have been armed and paid by the Sri Lankan army to assassinate Kittu and other key L.T.T.E. leaders. Selvabala was killed after he made a Singapore style T.V. confession on the L.T.T.E.'s station Niedharshanam.

Eventually a formula for ending the fast was reached. The L.T.T.E. gave a pledge to look for Vijitharan. Like many of the tales of intrigue, the truth about Vijitharan may not surface for years to come. For the University students, it ended for the time being their role in public affairs. With all their weaknesses and drawbacks, their role had been a noble one. They had been forced into tasks where others more mature and experienced than they ought to have given the lead. For the Tamil people, another light had gone out. Vimalaswaran, the student leader who led the protest fast, paid a heavy price for his defiance of the new order. He was assassinated in July, 1988.

The natural defiance of the women from the lower classes remained a remarkable feature as opposed to the pliability of upper class women. Village women in the East went out with rice pounders to stop the internecine fighting during the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash. When the L.T.T.E. took on the E.P.R.L.F. on 14 December 1986, women from some low class villages in Jaffna near Keerimalai and Mallakam defied the L.T.T.E. by sitting on the roads armed with kitchen knives and chillie powder. The same women were to prove a nightmare to the Indians when they arrived. After October 1987 some of these women in the Pt. Pedro fish market decided that they would charge the Indians higher prices. This was noticed by a customer who took his turn after an Indian soldier. When asked, the fisher lady replied, "They came here to eat, did they?"

One newspaper editor who came out well during the affair was Mr. S. M. Gopalaratnam of the Eelamurasu. He had once served as editor of the Eelandu and was made editor of the Eelamurasu a short while before the protest. During the crisis he wrote several bold editorials and articles. The need for unity amongst Tamils was something he felt strongly about. When the L.T.T.E. took on the E.P.R.L.F. he wrote an editorial expressing his concern for the hundreds of youths who had died in disillusionment with a feeling of being abandoned. He said that the Tamils' failure to unite had left them exposed before their enemies. Barely two months after he took over, the paper passed under L.T.T.E. management. However the L.T.T.E. treated him with respect and quite often he had his way. An unsolicited tribute was paid to S.M.G., as he was fondly called, by the management of the University Senior Common Room: During the time S.M.G. wrote his independent editorials the Eelamurasu was the only paper to be kept out of the Common Room. With the new L.T.T.E. management of the paper from 1 January 1987, the paper reappeared in the Common Room after a month. As regards S.M.G., the L.T.T.E. may have shown higher standards than that citadel of intellectual freedom. The L.T.T.E. often respected those who dealt with them honestly.

5.5 Differences among the Militants

The public had up to now thought of the L.T.T.E. as a monolith. But in the second half of 1986 differences, rivalries and personal ambitions within the L.T.T.E. which had a politics of its own began to surface and were talked about. Sources with good connections talked of differences between the Jaffna leader, Kittu and the then Vavuniya leader Mahattaya. The latter is said to have felt that those in Jaffna were being spoilt by glamour and a relatively easy life. Following the events of May 1986 several senior L.T.T.E. men left the group. One of them was Kandeepan who was in charge of the Islands. After leaving the organisation he simply stayed in his home at Ariyalai without wanting to see any of his former colleagues. The L.T.T.E. apparently wished to talk to him in order to persuade him to rejoin. Kandeepan was a competent military man who had pioneered the use of sea-mines. The lower ranks had been reportedly disoriented by the departure of several senior men. After refusing to see Kittu on two occasions the third time he was surrounded in order to force a meeting. But Kandeepan ran into his house and swallowed cyanide. The L.T.T.E. delayed the confirmation of his death and forced the family to perform the last rites in the early hours of the morning. Before his death Kandeepan had complained to one of his old friends that during the clash with the T.E.L.O., his organisation had promptly sent reinforcements to the Islands. But when the Sri Lankan government made an attempt on Mandaitivu, Kandeepan had submitted a plan which only required a modest quantity of arms. The organisation had not, he had complained, responded to this request. Mandaitivu was lost and Kandeepan was heart broken.

The Mannar leader Victor was killed in Adampan during a skirmish with the Sri Lankan army during October 1986. Thirteen Sri Lankan army personnel were killed during this skirmish and two were captured. Victor's body was brought to Jaffna with the two prisoners and nine Sri Lankan corpses. In the first exhibition of this kind, the two prisoners and the corpses were exhibited at Nallur Kanthasamy Kovil, while thousands filed past. Victor's body was taken in state to several parts of Jaffna to be viewed by milling crowds. Kittu considerably boosted his image by speaking at these meetings. His statement that Victor like all the L.T.T.E. leaders was in the battle front with his men, was reported in the press and seen as a direct challenge to Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran had been in Madras for the previous few years. The feeling was also around that Prabhakaran would make an attempt to cut Kittu down to size. It is believed the Prabhakaran's coming in January 1987 to Jaffna had something to do with Kittu's ambitions.

On 14 December, 1986, the E.P.R.L.F., the P.L.O.T.E. and the T.E.A. were disbanded by the L.T.T.E.. In the Northern Province the E.P.R.L.F. fled its camps without a fight. Several E.P.R.L.F. leaders were arrested and many of them were tortured in order to make them disclose locations of hidden arms. At this point one may point to what seems a qualitative difference in outlook between the L.T.T.E. and other groups. The L.T.T.E. men were trained to carry out orders from the top blindly. There is no doubt that the other groups have displayed the same kind of courage in confronting the Sri Lankan army. But when it came to an open confrontation with a fellow militant group, the other groups seem to have been handicapped by a certain amount of reluctance and confusion. There was a certain amount of inhibition about killing fellow Tamils. An observer living close to the E.P.R.L.F. camp at Uduvil said that there was a split amongst the ranks as to whether they should go in for a bloody fratricidal confrontation with the L.T.T.E. or simply go into hiding. Before this could be resolved, the L.T.T.E. came and caught them unprepared. This left them with no option but to disperse. Like the split in the T.E.L.O. which the L.T.T.E. took advantage of, this time a split in the E.P.R.L.F. between Douglas Devananda, the leader of its military wing, and the leadership under Padmanabha was a chance the L.T.T.E. had been waiting for. In the middle of this confusion the E.P.R.L.F. had challenged the L.T.T.E. politically over the Vijitharan affair.

While the E.P.R.L.F. had expected a military response from the L.T.T.E., it was undecided as to what it should do.

The P.L.O.T.E. in Jaffna had a strong base amongst the high caste, middle-class Tamils in Valigamam North and Central. They also had a political programme which emphasised work amongst the masses. These combined to give it an image in certain quarters as a disciplined organisation in dealings with the people. However P.L.O.T.E. members have been used by the high castes, on several occasions in disputes with the lower castes. P.L.O.T.E. had suffered discredit as a result of internal killings in Tamil Nadu and from at least two gruesome incidents in Jaffna. Five of its own women cadres were killed by members of the P.L.O.T.E. at Maniamthoddam, Jaffna, in 1985. Also in early 1985, seven L.T.T.E. sympathisers who were putting up posters in Chullipuram, were badly tortured and killed by P.L.O.T.E. men under Kandasamy (Chankili). By mid-1986 the organisation had suffered from neglect from the leadership in India and was poorly armed. With the dissolution of the T.E.L.O. there was a very real threat that the Sri Lankan army may overrun Jaffna at any time. Here the P.L.O.T.E. cadre in Jaffna earned the respect of the population for the sentry work it did around army encampments. It used its training to advance towards Jaffna Fort, along K.K.S. Road behind a barrier of advancing sand bags. Its men crawled through drains and other cover to install land mines fairly close to Jaffna Fort. When hints were given that the P.L.O.T.E. was to be disbanded the P.L.O.T.E. sentries withdrew from Jaffna town exploding their land mines. Thereupon, the Sri Lankan forces fired back thinking that they were being attacked and a senior prefect at Central College was killed. The disbandment of the P.L.O.T.E. and the E.P.R.L.F. created a crisis in the manning of sentry points, making it even more likely that the Sri Lankan army would attempt to break out if the current negotiations failed.

By this time the L.T.T.E. in Jaffna, under Kittu, had established friendly personal relations with Captain Kotelawela of the Sri Lankan army and leading personalities amongst the Sinhalese, such as Vijaya Kumaranatunga, Vincent Perera and the Rev. Fr. Yohan Devananda. Kittu and his deputy Raheem became celebrated personalities in the South. The L.T.T.E. and the government gave the impression that a move for a negotiated settlement was on. A set of proposals, called the December 19th proposals, which had been drafted with India's help were announced by the Sri Lankan government on the 26th of December for discussion. The L.T.T.E. announced that it was taking over the civil administration of Jaffna from 1 January 1987, although in practice this could have made little difference. The government in turn announced a fuel and firewood blockade on Jaffna. Prabhakaran moved to Jaffna in early January 1987 after several years in India. The crisis had entered a new phase.

5.6 The Eastern Question

By 1985 youths from districts in the Northern Province outside Jaffna and from the Eastern Province which had been ravaged by Sri Lankan military action which included massacres, were playing a numerically dominant role in the militant groups. Unlike the articulate youth of Jaffna who had joined in the early 1980's because of ideals of national liberation and a feeling of collective humiliation, these rural youths had been subject to some harrowing experiences at first hand. By the end of 1985, those of the Tamil residents of Trincomalee district outside the city who were alive, had become refugees. The L.T.T.E. leader Pulendran, who came to be feared by Sinhalese, is said to have seen most of his family killed by Sri Lankan forces before his eyes. In such a situation the killing and counter-killing of Tamil and Sinhalese civilians became

the order of the day. Yet the leadership of the militant movement was mainly Jaffna-dominated. After mid-1985, Jaffna enjoyed relative peace whilst the other Tamil areas continued to be at the receiving end. The majority amongst the T.E.L.O. youths killed in May 1986 were from the rural areas. The E.P.R.L.F. continued to be active in the Batticaloa district after it was wound down in Jaffna in December 1986.

One factor which distinguished the militant movement in the East was that ideological and group differences were over-ridden by a feeling that they were all Eastern Province Tamils united through the experience of common suffering, who must stand together or perish. Group differences mattered far less than in Jaffna. Often they shared camps and meals. When the L.T.T.E. was given orders by radio to go for the T.E.L.O. in May 1986, the killings in the East were far fewer than in Jaffna. At Sambur, according to a T.E.L.O. source in Trincomalee, T.E.L.O. members who were having a meal were called out by members of the L.T.T.E. who had been erstwhile friends. The T.E.L.O. men were unaware of such orders having been given and went out as if to meet friends, when their leader and two others were killed. At Sambaltivu, according to a Trincomalee resident, women went out with rice pounders to ensure that there was no killing. This was in contrast to suburban Jaffna where people watched mutely during the killings. However, during December 1986 when the L.T.T.E. went after the E.P.R.L.F., some villagers in rural Jaffna protected the E.P.R.L.F. cadre by blocking the roads, armed with knives and chillie powder.

When the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash started in Jaffna, Kadavul, the Batticaloa leader of the L.T.T.E. and former agriculture student, promptly summoned a meeting of leaders of all militant groups in Batticaloa. They issued a joint statement that the problems of the East were different and should be handled differently. Kadavul, a native of the East, gave a personal assurance that all militants in Batticaloa would be protected. The L.T.T.E. command in Jaffna then radioed two of its commanders Kumarappa and Pottu, both of Jaffna origin, who were in Batticaloa, to carry out the assault on the T.E.L.O.. Several T.E.L.O. members were killed. Kadavul left the L.T.T.E. and went abroad.

An academic from the Batticaloa University and a close follower of events also told us that the L.T.T.E. taking on the E.P.R.L.F. in December 1986 worked very much to the detriment of the Tamils in the East. The E.P.R.L.F. had begun to prove itself effective against the dreaded S.T.F. (Special Task Force). It had just carried out a series of successful landmine attacks against the S.T.F., thus restricting its movement. The L.T.T.E.'s protracted battle with the E.P.R.L.F. opened the field to the S.T.F.. The S.T.F. started the new year in 1987 with the Kokkadichcholai massacre in which scores of Tamil civilians were murdered. The L.T.T.E. was forced to withdraw from one of its strongholds.

A consequence of these developments and the desperate plight of Tamils of the East, was that leaders of the Eastern Tamils were generally amenable to a settlement on the basis of the December 19th proposals which envisaged separate provincial councils for the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The powers devolved in policing and land settlement were generally deemed inadequate, but were the subject of negotiation. In Jaffna which was relatively secure, a more hawkish mood prevailed, backed by L.T.T.E. propaganda, an enfeebled press and a section of the articulate intelligentsia. Those in Jaffna who felt

that the Tamils, now dangerously weakened, must in the common interest use India's good offices to negotiate the best possible settlement, sometimes found through experience that they should not express themselves too loudly. Inevitably there arose a widespread feeling amongst Eastern Tamils, that the Jaffna based Tamil leadership had failed them. The Eastern Province Tamils will in the years to come have to resolve the question of their dealings with Northern Tamils and their relations with Muslims and Sinhalese in the East, whom they have for neighbours. The question is proving a thorny one today. [\[Top\]](#)

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¹ Temple

¹ Lakh = 100,000

Chapter 6

1987: THE BUBBLE BURSTS

6.1 Retreat to Jaffna

The L.T.T.E. showed little interest in negotiating on the basis of the December 19th proposals. With Prabhakaran's arrival, the public felt that Kittu as Jaffna leader would in due course be eclipsed.

As the year commenced the Special Task Force (S.T.F.) made rapid gains in the East forcing the L.T.T.E. out of several of its strongholds and establishing new camps. Describing the terror of civilians, a member of the Batticaloa citizens committee said: "The S.T.F. was given a blank cheque to kill, assault, torture and imprison civilians. This was used with terrifying effect. Foreign correspondents were kept out."

In the North, outside Jaffna, all areas populated by civilians were overrun by late February and several new camps were established by the Sri Lankan army. The recently built up air power had been used to good effect. India had apparently placed restrictions on the L.T.T.E. acquiring an effective counter to the government's air power. It is noteworthy that the Sri Lankan army's attempt nearly a year earlier, to establish control over the Kilinochchi district had failed when all militant groups were active. A worried L.T.T.E., withdrew most of its men from other areas and concentrated them in Jaffna. Significantly, key L.T.T.E. leaders from other areas, including Mahattaya from Vavuniya, and Radha from Mannar, made their appearance in Jaffna. This meant that the threat to Jaffna was indeed taken seriously.

This brings us to certain aspects of the L.T.T.E.. From 1985 it had been a common feature of all militant groups to attract a following by successfully bringing off sensational military operations. The T.E.L.O. which was considered a marginal group rose to prominence after its colourful attacks on the Chavakachcheri Police Station and on a troop train at Murukandy in December 1984 and January 1985, respectively. What a particular group stood for became, if anything, of marginal interest. As a corollary, the people accepted the role of spectators and often admirers. This reciprocal development went in the direction of the militant groups confining the people rigidly to this role. Advice was seldom taken. The L.T.T.E. went a step further and confined the people to the role of devotees. Those who sensed danger and wished to offer their counsel were silenced with varying degrees of politeness. The reduction of the people to devotees of the political religion of the L.T.T.E. was the culmination of a process begun by the T.U.L.F. in the early 1970's. The F.P. and later the T.U.L.F. had demanded allegiance to one party as embodying the destiny of the Tamil nation. All others were branded as traitors of various shades.

Its own following which the T.U.L.F. could keep in tow with rousing speeches, the L.T.T.E. now had to manipulate by deeds of valour which testified to its virility. The religion of the L.T.T.E. also provided for its devotees the emotional excitement of blood sacrifice. The sacrificial victims were those chosen by chance and sometimes by choice, to die in operations.

It became a regular routine that when some L.T.T.E. member died, wailing music would be broadcast over loud speakers. The roads would be decorated with coconut and plantain trees. Loudspeaker vehicles would go around announcing the deaths in melodramatic tones. Then crowds would file past the coffins by the thousands. Such occasions were used to generate hysterical emotions. This may explain Thileepan's death by fasting two months after the Accord. The L.T.T.E. felt a need to prove that its members were still willing to die and that it had not lost its grip.

Unlike the higher religions which tended towards equality of men and even living creatures, the L.T.T.E.'s religion was hierarchical. The common people counted for little

except as devotees. Militants from other groups, whatever their contribution, were counted as criminals or anti-social elements. Only L.T.T.E. members could make sacrifices, be counted as martyrs, and become gods in a heavenly place reserved for them. Such a creed was expressed in one of Thileepan's last statements.

One should not under-rate such a religion which has a resemblance to the official religion of the Third Reich. The power of such a religion to captivate men's minds, make them forget all norms of civilisation and morality and weld them together as a hysterical and destructive force, is enormous. But most Tamil civilians were looking for security. Little did they realise that what the L.T.T.E. was offering them was permanent conflict, destruction and suicide, for accepting which they were not going to be thanked. Events of the coming months were to make this abundantly clear.

Following the Sri Lankan army's rapid advances in January 1987, the L.T.T.E. felt a pressing need to hit back. On the 14th of February an ingenious attempt was made on the Navatkuli army camp. The Andreisz Company which was located next to the Navatkuli camp used to supply drinking water to the Sri Lankan army. The L.T.T.E. took over the company's water bowser and placed charges in its tank, which would explode when the water dropped to a certain level. According to reports the water tank by some freak developed a leak. The bowser was taken into a lane at Kaithady. According to one report a welder was brought to repair the leak. By some accident the bowser exploded. Amongst the ten L.T.T.E. persons killed were three senior leaders, Kugan, Curdles and Vasu. The presence of Kugan who was second in command to Prabhakaran and close to him, suggests that Prabhakaran was in direct command of the operation. Forty civilians were reportedly killed. The operation had to be abandoned. The L.T.T.E. announced the deaths through loud speakers and its notice boards. A disturbing aspect of this announcement was that the civilian deaths were not mentioned.

Even the newspapers gave very little publicity to the civilian deaths. This set the precedent for developments to come. Not surprisingly it may be noted that both the Sri Lankan government and the L.T.T.E. were superstitious. The digits in dates normally chosen by the L.T.T.E. for major operations would add up to five, whereas for the government it would add up to eight. People would normally expect L.T.T.E.'s initiatives on the 5th, 14th and 23rd of a month and government initiatives on the 8th, 17th or 26th of a month.

The government resumed aerial bombing of Jaffna on the 7th of March. A massive barrage of shelling from Jaffna Fort killed 17 civilians at Windsor Theatre junction and injured 50. A shell also fell on the hospital for the first time.

In the early hours of the morning on Monday, 30 March, shells again fell on the Jaffna hospital. Eight patients were killed in Ward 19/20. Two nurses and an attendant were injured. It may be noted that the ward affected was a medical ward having elderly heart patients. It should also be noted here that this shelling was strongly condemned by India. When the National Security Minister suggested that the shell was fired by the L.T.T.E., noting the fact that the shells came from the direction of the Fort, the Indian

ambassador J. N. Dixit is said to have remarked sarcastically that the L.T.T.E. has a special shell which goes forward and then turns back.

On the night of 30 March, a bomb was thrown at the L.T.T.E.'s Jaffna leader Mr. Kittu, while he was visiting a friend living on 2nd Cross Street, Jaffna. One of his body guards, a youth from Mannar, was killed. Kittu himself was admitted to the hospital and had one of his legs amputated. The news came out that some prisoners had died on the evening of the following day at the L.T.T.E.'s Brown Road camp. The B.B.C. broadcast a news item which claimed shortly afterwards that a large number of prisoners held by the L.T.T.E. had been killed, following the attempt on Kittu. Some sources put the number at 70. In an atmosphere of mounting rumours, the L.T.T.E. issued a press statement on the 6th of April claiming that prisoners grabbed some weapons and tried to escape and that in the ensuing battle, two L.T.T.E. guards and 18 prisoners were killed. A member of the E.P.R.L.F. who escaped during the incident and later went to Batticaloa submitted an affidavit to the following effect: "Several of us prisoners were kept in a room at the L.T.T.E.'s Brown Road camp. In the evening Aruna (L.T.T.E.'s former Batticaloa leader) burst into the room and opened fire at us with an automatic weapon. Three of us managed to escape through another door and get away. Eighteen were killed during that incident."

Aruna is known to have been close to Kittu. In publishing the L.T.T.E.'s statement on the incident, the Jaffna daily Murasoli, of 6 April, 1987 announced in banner headlines: "18 Criminals killed." This represented new levels of opportunism in journalism. The L.T.T.E. statement had not claimed that the dead were criminals. The L.T.T.E. is believed to have killed several other E.P.R.L.F. members in other camps at the same time. One whose death was widely talked about at that time was E.P.R.L.F.'s Dr. Benjamin, who had worked with refugees. The Saturday Review after consulting a senior member of the L.T.T.E. reported that in all about 50 prisoners were killed. The identities and affiliations of Kittu's would-be-assassins were never revealed.

On 2 April, the attack by the L.T.T.E. on a mini-camp at Valvettithurai was repulsed with the L.T.T.E. suffering five dead. An ambulance carrying five persons injured by shelling from Pt. Pedro hospital to Jaffna was shelled by helicopter at Vallai-veli, killing the patients and the ambulance driver.

A senior figure in Jaffna put across to Minister Thondaman the idea of a cease-fire over the traditional Sinhalese-Tamil new year, to be used to set the scene for negotiations in order to restore peace. Mr. Thondaman asked the cabinet for a fortnight's cease fire. The cabinet agreed to a unilateral cease fire of nine days from 11th - 19th April. This was rejected by V. Prabhakaran who stated that he would consider a cease fire after the 20th of April. It was to be expected that such a response from the L.T.T.E. would have been seen by the outside world as puerile diplomacy bordering on intransigence. Though the senior figure in Jaffna felt that the government's announcement of the cease fire was sincerely intended, Prabhakaran's stand had widespread sympathy from a people who had come to believe that all the blame for the situation lay with the government. The aerial bombing and shelling of the civilian population had made the

people deeply distrustful of the government. Reports of government breaches of the cease fire started appearing in the Jaffna press. Given the situation, whenever government forces shelled, it became difficult to determine who provoked and who retaliated.

On 16 April 1987, 150 Sinhalese, many of them civilians returning to Trincomalee after new year festivities at Anuradhapura, were off-loaded from their buses and massacred at Kituluttuwa. The L.T.T.E. was widely blamed and the government claimed that the massacre was led by L.T.T.E.'s Pulendran. Shortly afterwards, on 21 April, a car bomb exploded at the Pettah bus stand in Colombo, killing over 100 civilians. The attack was widely attributed to a Tamil militant group, believed to be either the E.R.O.S. or the L.T.T.E.. International opinion drifted away from sympathy for Tamils, towards approving a Sri Lankan government crack down on Tamil militants.

In the early hours of 22nd April, an L.T.T.E. party under Radha's command attacked the jetty at K.K.S. where cement bags from Lanka Cement Ltd. (L.C.L.) were being loaded into a waiting ship. This is again an example of the L.T.T.E.'s daring and capacity to improvise in order to stage sensational suicidal attacks. These attacks were usually accompanied by a heavy civilian toll and made the government more brutal and intransigent. It put the civilian population in further jeopardy while providing grist for the L.T.T.E. to further its religious appeal. The security precautions at the entrance to the jetty were elaborate. Lorries loaded with cement went North from the L.C.L. plant and had to queue up as they reached the K.K.S. - Keerimalai Road before crossing into the premises of the harbour which were under Sri Lankan army control. As the lorry that had just unloaded came out, the first lorry in the waiting queue crossed the road into the harbour premises. During the crossing a security officer from L.C.L. walked some distance with the lorry. The L.T.T.E.'s plan was a high risk, ingenious strategy and hence unexpected by the army. According to sources within the L.T.T.E., its members compete with each other to volunteer for such suicidal missions.

L.T.T.E. men were hidden in a lorry with a wall of cement bags to disguise it as one going to unload. The lorry was parked in a lane towards the land side, a few yards from the crossing point, but hidden from the army. Calculating that the concentration of the army sentries will be at a low ebb in the early hours of the morning, as a lorry which had finished unloading came out of the harbour, the L.T.T.E. lorry made a dash and got in front of the one which was to enter. This went unnoticed by the army sentries who were poised on the water tank. The L.C.L. security guard was too shocked to react and followed on foot the L.T.T.E. lorry which had been allowed inside.

Once in, the L.T.T.E. men opened fire killing 18 soldiers, and were soon out again. The army was angry. They got hold of five L.C.L. security guards and killed them. One of those killed was Sergeant Mylvaganam, who had earlier been a police sergeant. Another L.C.L. foreman was dragged out of the bathroom and shot. At the time of the attack 70 labourers were employed in loading cement bags at the jetty. Fortunately for them, the Sinhalese ship's captain, fearing reprisals against them, took them aboard and put out to sea. These workers were put ashore several hours later after the captain obtained the assurance that the workers would not be molested. The Sri Lankan

government overplayed its propaganda card when it wrapped bullet bands around the bodies of the L.C.L. security officers killed and displayed them on the state television Rupavahini as terrorists killed. Any intelligent viewer would have found the body of 55-year-old Sergeant Mylvaganam with greying hair, appearing as that of a youthful terrorist, too much to swallow. A more intelligent way of lying would have been to avoid the extras and blame the killing of Tamil security officers on the L.T.T.E.. This again indicates how the government treated the whole question as a military problem and was not interested in making overtures to Tamil opinion. This worked to the L.T.T.E.'s benefit.. If the government troops had been disciplined to avoid reprisals against civilians, it could have exposed the futility of the L.T.T.E.'s action. But the government had very different ideas. The next six weeks were to see an unleashing of random impersonal terror against Tamil civilians.

The people of K.K.S. and the workers at the two cement plants had been dismayed by the L.T.T.E.'s action. The L.T.T.E. had given the workers at the cement plants an assurance that it would not interfere with their work. Working relations between the army and the cement plants had been fairly good. The citizens' committees in the area had worked out an unwritten agreement between the L.T.T.E. and the army, allowing the latter free use of the K.K.S. - Palaly Road. This enabled the civilians to stay on in that area. Now all this came to an end. With an increasing number of landmine attacks by the L.T.T.E., the army took to shooting at civilians. Several civilians were shot dead, including Dr. Viswaranjan who was returning home to K.K.S. on 25 April, after working at the Jaffna hospital. This led to the total exodus of civilians from K.K.S., Myliddy and Maviddapuram. On the meaningless suffering of all these people, aided by the Sri Lankan government's intransigent brutality, was built the expanding edifice of the L.T.T.E. religion. The random shelling and aerial bombing of the Tamil civilian population commenced on 22 April. Emotional support for the L.T.T.E. increased. People asked what India was doing. A senior Indian official told a newspaper editor, that after the Pettah bomb blast and the Kituluttuwa massacre, India had lost the moral right to protest. The destructive policies of the L.T.T.E. and the Sri Lankan government received mutual sustenance from each other.

The people around K.K.S. had for a year tried a policy of live and let live with both the L.T.T.E. and the Sri Lankan army. Through its supporters within the cement plants the L.T.T.E. had enjoyed some privileges there. A workshop engineer had resigned and gone abroad in January 1987 after an L.T.T.E. party gave him their "first warning." The engineer's professional pride did not allow him to give in to certain demands. He had also been alarmed by the readiness with which people played with the safety of their colleagues for the sake of power and influence. The policy of live and let live without a principled stand was doomed to failure. The cement plants were closed on 22 April.

Another incident which influenced the local mind was the landmine attack by the L.T.T.E. on an army patrol on 25 March 1987. Subsequently the severed foot of a Sri Lankan soldier with a boot on it was exhibited successively at the Maviddapuram temple and Tellipallai junction. For its part the Sri Lankan army shelled these two places on successive nights. On the first night a temple priest lost his leg. At Tellipallai junction,

Mr. Venugopal was killed. On the 31 March, the L.T.T.E.'s Jaffna leader Mr. Kittu lost a leg in a grenade attack. Many of the Hindu folk at Maviddapuram, steeped in a belief in karma, formed their own conclusions. Nevertheless, the exhibition of gore had attracted sizeable crowds. This followed the exhibition of the dead bodies of nine Sri Lankan soldiers at Kandasamy Kovil four months before. There was taking place a transformation of sensibilities. Many Hindus were disgusted, but silent.

The Sri Lankan government commenced random shelling of the civilian population in Jaffna, together with aerial bombing on 22 April. One could hear shells falling in quick succession in widely separated places, usually around 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Most would quickly take their families into the house or into a trench if they had one, and say their prayers. The aerial bombing was often off the mark. The Sri Lankan air force tried four times to bomb an L.T.T.E. camp in Pt. Pedro situated in the crowded market area, and finally finished the job with a bulldozer a month later, after taking over Vadamaratchi at the end of May. About a hundred civilians were killed up to 26 May as a result of the bombing and shelling.

On the 1st of May, the L.T.T.E. defied the government ban on May day processions countrywide, and organised a massive rally commencing at Urumpirai junction, and ending with a public meeting at Kandasamy Kovil. Vans, buses and lorries were commandeered and were used to ferry people from distant places. L.T.T.E. cadres knocked on doors and asked people to come. Some flatly refused. Others went with varying combinations of consent and fear. The majority who went, did so willingly or out of curiosity.

At the meeting, the L.T.T.E.'s rising star and Kugan's brother, Yogi, gave a rousing speech. It was a frank statement of what the L.T.T.E. was offering its subjects. Yogi said: "Even if 35 lakhs [\[1\]](#)¹ should die, we will not be deterred from our goal of Tamil Eelam." He went on to indicate that a small fraction of the present population of Tamils is enough to people the state of Tamil Eelam. Few were alarmed by such frankness. The Tamil man was far from being suicidal, although the L.T.T.E.'s critics had come to term its brand of politics, cyanide or suicide politics. The Tamil man very much loved material security. (Curiously, the L.T.T.E. again and again stressed the need to safeguard territory. There was no corresponding stress on safeguarding life.) The fact that nearly every household in Jaffna had constructed an air raid shelter at an average cost of Rs. 1000/- showed that they were unlikely candidates for suicide. For sometime, disenchantment with the manner of the L.T.T.E.'s campaign and its indifference to the fate of civilians had been expressed by affected people from Mannar, the Eastern Province and parts of Jaffna. These had fallen on deaf ears amongst articulate folk in suburban Jaffna. For many, the manner in which the L.T.T.E. had ruled Jaffna was acceptable. There were disappearances -- a minor problem. But people could make money unmolested. Travel agents, employment agencies, those who ran coach services to Colombo, and contractors continued to make their money. The coach operators and the L.T.T.E. found it mutually advantageous to cut train services to Colombo. (Coach fares came down from Rs. 200/- to Rs. 65/- when train services resumed after the Accord. The Sri Lankan army too had good relations with the operators.) But now was approaching a time when all this might have to change and misery was going to be the common lot. When the L.T.T.E. started proceeding alone in May 1986, it had offered the people of Jaffna, "order within and security from attacks by the Sri Lankan forces." This worked well for a while, but had crumbled with time.

The Sri Lankan army had been tightening its noose by the establishment of new camps at Vasavilan, Kattuvan and Mandaitivu over the months. The Sri Lankan strategy was simple. It would create diversions from various points, such as Jaffna, Pt. Pedro, Kayts, V.V.T., Elephant Pass and Palaly. One of these would be the real column that would advance under air cover and establish a new camp. Even in the latter half of 1986,

support from the E.P.R.L.F., E.R.O.S., P.L.O.T.E. and T.E.A. had been crucial in countering the Sri Lankan advance, though the L.T.T.E. hated to admit it. The counter-strategy developed by the militant groups was to have sentries posted with walkie-talkies. When an advance was sighted, the main body of fighting men, who would be mobile in pickups and mini-vans, would be summoned. This was effective up to a point. But in 1987, the L.T.T.E. was clearly over-stretched. When the Sri Lankan army advanced to Kattuvan on 28 February with just one covering helicopter, hardly any resistance was offered. According to a resident of that area, the sentry had radioed Kittu for reinforcements. He was aghast when Kittu simply ordered him to chase the army back.

On an earlier occasion, the army had attacked Kattuvan by land and air, causing the L.T.T.E. sentry to flee. The army then withdrew. In the evening Kittu arrived on the scene in his car. He left his men and walked alone into the dusk. The short and balding figure sat down by himself to reflect, his brow furrowed. He had dispatched tens of C.I.A., Mossad and C.I.D. agents in his time, without giving it any more thought than he would in deciding to have a cup of tea. Here was the man, who during the Vijitharan affair kept the University dons awestruck, while he poured out his contradictions. Their silence was as if to say, "Yes, General." The highest in Jaffna had waited on him. He had played with the lives of others and had gambled with his own. Mendis, his own friend and Jaffna leader of the P.L.O.T.E., had died in his custody. Friendship did not stand in the way of such things. Amongst his men, there were those who resented his flamboyance. But in battle, they trusted his leadership as few others' was trusted. We may never know what passed through his mind. For the first time, perhaps, he was a worried man. Did he have a premonition that his rising star would soon have its setting?

Perhaps, the development of the L.T.T.E. leadership is related to something deeply ingrained in the human psyche appearing in the evolution myths of ancient lore. Many of the L.T.T.E. leaders had lived like the ancient gods. Like Wotan in Niebelung's Ring and Keat's Hyperion, gods who reach their limits of action must wish for self annihilation. This is probably just a fancy that may explain one aspect of their development. Motives are complex things and the L.T.T.E. leadership was moving in several directions at the same time. Many of its leaders, Mahattaya, Kittu and Kumarappa, were either married or were on the verge of it. Their leader Prabhakaran was the father of two. The leadership had also demonstrated on several occasions that it was interested in an arrangement where it would have settled power. In late 1986 Kittu had made overtures to leading personalities and the media in the South. There had been a good deal of comings and goings and much secret talk. After the Accord of July 1987 much of the L.T.T.E.'s performance had been a bid for power. The agreement reached with India during secret negotiations at the the time of the fast, talked almost exclusively of power. In fact, they wanted exclusive power, and to this end, they pushed their gambler's luck to the brink. But the five demands put forward during Thileepan's fast to death, of September 1987 had nothing about demands for power. When the L.T.T.E. wanted something, it was prepared to play with the lives of its own men and with those of civilians. The impasse resulting from the suicide in custody of 12 L.T.T.E. members on 5 October 1987 and the subsequent massacre of Sinhalese, was part of a pattern. By provoking a crisis the L.T.T.E. seemed to hope for a decisive outcome, with perhaps help

from Tamil Nadu. Their message seemed to say: "Accept our terms, for if you try anything else, we can sour things for you."

When India took on the L.T.T.E., Prabhakaran said in a message: "We have been forced into fighting to protect ourselves. India must assume full responsibility for harm resulting to the people." This was indeed, a most queer stand for someone who claimed leadership and on whom it fell to protect the people. The war dragged on. After the worst killing was over, the L.T.T.E.'s deputy leader Mahattaya, in a letter to the Indian authorities, sued for an end to the fighting. A key demand was a return to the *status quo* of 28 September which offered 7 out of 12 places on the interim council for the L.T.T.E.. Behind all the gore and the Homeric drama, there was a bid for something tangible -- namely power. There were the usual somersaults of traditional politics. For this reason it will be wrong to romanticise the L.T.T.E.. Every human being is ridiculous most of the time. Lord Byron, the most romanticised poet, confesses this frankly in his work Don Juan.

At the same time, the leaders of the L.T.T.E. were proud men. They were proud of what they had achieved and did not like being trifled with. India recognised this up to a point. The Tigers were prepared to risk all they had in pursuit of a goal, in addition to risking everyone else. The religious element in the L.T.T.E. has already been mentioned. They also invoked other gods. Kittu was a pious Hindu, who was also given to lighting candles at Christian shrines. The element of calculation increased, the higher one went up the hierarchy. At the bottom, there was an unquestioning religious zeal facilitated by the impressionable boyishness of the new recruits.

In May 1986, the L.T.T.E.'s admirers in Jaffna viewed them as a military force which offered them physical and material security. Between January and May 1987, a series of military reverses ensured that this offer was no longer good. The L.T.T.E. had compensated for this by substituting a religious appeal. When Yogi announced on 1 May 1987 that even if 35 lakhs die, they would stay their course until Eelam is achieved, people took it as the metaphorical expression of a religious sentiment. This was after all common enough in these parts. Politicians in the South had sworn to fight India down to the last drop of their blood. Even those members of the public who were the L.T.T.E.'s most ardent supporters did not relish the thought of departing this world. Yet they applauded. That the prospect of mass suicide was being seriously held out by the L.T.T.E. did not really sink in. The L.T.T.E.'s saying one thing and the public hoping for and understanding something else, was to have several more repetitions. No one looking back can complain that the L.T.T.E. had not made itself clear. The May day rally was held in the precincts of the Nallur Kanthasamy temple. The choice of venue itself was a sign of things to come. A massive crowd, numbering several tens of thousands had been brought to Kanthasamy Kovil in defiance of a government ban. The possibility of a shell attack from the Fort or firing from a helicopter was very real. Had this happened the scene of disaster would have made good propaganda. The fortunate fact that sanity prevailed and such an attack did not take place was again publicised as a victory for the L.T.T.E.. It had successfully defied a ban which was observed in the rest of the country. Either way the L.T.T.E. would have won. Yogi's words literally meant that the human cost was

immaterial. Civilian casualties were used for propaganda abroad. But inside, L.T.T.E. casualties were announced with religious fanfare, while civilian casualties received scant attention.

6.2 The Navaratne episode

It was now clear to many that the Sri Lankan government was preparing to launch an offensive to recapture the entire peninsula. Few doubted that they would succeed. The prospect of the entire Jaffna peninsula being turned into a refugee camp, like the Eastern Province, was very real. Several persons felt that a group of leading citizens should talk to the L.T.T.E., with a view to persuading them of at least talking to the government on the basis of the December 19th proposals. There were at this time several channels of communication between the government and the L.T.T.E.. One of these was the editor of the Saturday Review, Mr. Gamini Navaratne. He had been the editor of the English Weekly published from Jaffna during the crucial period which followed the 1983 riots. Being Sinhalese, his role was a delicate one in which he was often misunderstood. Having been a lobby correspondent he knew the senior parliamentarians well. He had the ability and guts, to push his luck to the edge in publishing news of human rights violations by the government. Unlike editors in the West, Mr. Navaratne was aware that restrictions were placed on journalism by the contending parties to the conflict, all of whom had much to hide. He was keen that the truth should somehow be brought out, and in this his performance was well above the standards in this country. While being critical of Jayewardene's handling of the ethnic crisis, Mr. Navaratne did have an affectionate regard for him. He did look upon certain of the militant leaders with a paternal affection. Among them were Kittu and Raheem of the L.T.T.E., the E.R.O.S. leader, Balakumar, and the late Dr. Benjamin of the E.P.R.L.F.. He often expressed the feeling that the boys had done a great job in standing up to the Sri Lankan forces, and yet they were just boys who needed help in the form of mature counsel. The December 19th proposals, he felt, were a reasonable basis for negotiations, and that unless a settlement was reached fast, Jaffna would collapse under the strain. No doubt, events proved him right. He was forthright in expressing these views, which were accepted by a section of the public. But another uncharitable section of the public were deeply suspicious of him. In the highest circles in Jaffna he was accused of being an agent of one kind or the other including being J. R.'s agent. Now that Kittu and Raheem were under a cloud the leadership of the L.T.T.E. was suspicious of him. Mr. Navaratne's recent attempts to talk to the L.T.T.E., regarding the December 19th proposals had met with rebuffs. Where others had taken the hint, Navaratne was not so easily put off.

On 11 May, a group of persons met independently at the university to discuss an approach to the L.T.T.E. with a view to averting the looming prospect. Navaratne heard of this meeting and arrived at the university. He spent a few minutes giving his views on the subject and went away after wishing them luck. It was on this occasion that the full extent of the L.T.T.E.'s spy network at the University was revealed. A highly fanciful rumour was sent out by some senior persons to the effect that Mr. Navaratne was at the University to organise a petition against the L.T.T.E., that was to be presented at the S.A.A.R.C. Editors' Conference. It was a shocking revelation that both amongst the staff and students, colleagues were spying on colleagues, with little thought of the possibility that they might put their colleagues in grave danger. Navaratne was followed and placed under arrest by a medical student. The manner of his arrest was disrespectful and gave no consideration to his invaluable services. After an investigation led by Mahattaya himself, the L.T.T.E. was convinced that they had been fed with bad information, by some of their so-called senior advisors. Mr. Navaratne was released four days later. It was a sign of the wretched state of Jaffna that in the face of disaster, some of its elites could do no better than to cast speculative aspersions on a man who, after all, believed that he was doing something for the people. Several months later, after the L.T.T.E. had lost its position of control in the wake of the Indian offensive, some in the L.T.T.E. recognised the value of independent journalism. A high ranker in the L.T.T.E. told a senior citizen that they would like Mr. Navaratne to continue his editorial work in Jaffna. The senior citizen replied: "Had Mr. Navaratne been here on the night of 5th October, you would have made a bonfire of him in the Jaffna Hindu College grounds."

The 5th of October was the night when the L.T.T.E. launched a manhunt against Sinhalese residents in Jaffna.

6.3 The closing of Jaffna Hospital

Another episode pertaining to this period was the government's attempt to close down Jaffna hospital. A letter from the Ministry of teaching hospitals dated 27 April reached the hands of the Medical Superintendent, Jaffna, on 3 May. This letter contained an order for him to close the Jaffna hospital by the 8th of May. This was a sign that the government was getting ready for an offensive. The government had received bad publicity on account of shells falling on Jaffna hospital and the casualties resulting from it. Many of the doctors admitted that given the army's order to fire back when fired upon, it was inevitable that even if the army commanders were careful, shells fired from the Jaffna Fort would fall on Jaffna hospital. The army had the unenviable task of maintaining a mere presence in Jaffna. For the rest, the soldiers were cooped up and vulnerable to missiles fired from outside. In January 1986, the army was ordered to retaliate with cannon, up to a radius of 1 kilometre from the Jaffna fort. The commercial hub of Jaffna and the hospital fell within this distance. This marked an escalation of the conflict in terms of civilian cost. By the middle of 1986, shells had been aimed at targets 3 miles from the Fort. One aimed apparently at an L.T.T.E. camp killed the bridegroom and the bride's father when it exploded amidst a wedding party. As time went by the shelling acquired a more indiscriminate character. Snipers too were brought in later. Several ordinary citizens getting about Bankshall Street and K.K.S. Road fell victim to snipers. One army officer, regarded as a considerate man, told a Tamil friend that they would sometimes watch from the fort in the night in a state of fear. When they sometimes observed fire directed at the Fort, it could easily appear to come from the hospital. At the same time the staff at the hospital had obtained from the militants a guarantee that their premises would not be used to fire at the army and were certain that the guarantee had been honoured. But in such a volatile environment, the danger to the hospital was there. A rational way out of it would have been a truce in the Fort area. But when lethal means are available, rationality tends to go out of the window. Cannon came in handy when the army was in a bad temper and wished to take it out on the civilians.

The press in Jaffna mentioned only the shelling by the army. But many journalists would admit that there was also constant provocation by firing things into the Fort. If the L.T.T.E.'s conduct during the hospital crisis of May 1987 did anything at all, it added weight to the suspicion that its attitude towards civilians was basically cynical.

Cynicism was widespread in this conflict and was in the long run destructive to all who employed it. If a landmine went off in a remote village, the army would hit the civilians hard in the hope that it would destroy the militants' support base. One way or the other the militants would welcome the government action as bringing in additional support for their cause. It was an extension of July 1983. A case of how this cynicism deepened enmity between groups was that of a young member of the E.P.R.L.F. from Batticaloa. He was travelling along Hospital Road, when he got a bullet in the back. This would normally have been associated with a sniper in the Fort. This boy later said in hospital, that he had looked back as he lost consciousness and fell down. He had only seen L.T.T.E. sentries. He claimed that the bullet extracted from his body was not from a sniper rifle but was fired from an M-16. Rightly or wrongly he had formed his conclusions and was extremely bitter.

The order to close Jaffna hospital gave rise to widespread shock and panic. This came at the height of indiscriminate shelling resulting in casualties, who but for Jaffna hospital would have faced death. The Tellipallai and Pt. Pedro hospitals too had been hit by shells, and after the shelling of an ambulance from Pt. Pedro on 4 April, the transport of patients became a precarious activity. The short supply of petrol added to the complications. By 6 May, Jaffna had virtually become a ghost town. Shops shifted their goods and residents fled their homes. This too was a tricky affair. Those lucky enough to

rent a house in the interior had to move again on discovering that the house had once been a militant camp. Such places were considered fair game for Sri Lankan bombers. The hospital started discharging most of its patients from Monday the 4th of May. It is a tribute to the grit of the common man that most services kept functioning during this fearsome period. The banks remained open for a few hours in the mornings. Life went on against a background of shell blasts and firing from L.T.T.E. sentries.

Mrs. Sivapakiam Nadarajah, a long term resident in front of Jaffna hospital, was on 5 May, packing her things to send them away to Chavakachcheri. One then witnessed the amazing spectacle of a milkman, who calmly dismounted from his bicycle and rang his bell for someone to fetch the milk. He then lazily looked up at the sky and at the twittering birds on the trees. His whistling could be heard between shell blasts. Three shells fell only 90 minutes later on a building opposite the new Out-Patients' Department (O.P.D.) in the hospital, about 40 yards to the West of Commercial bank. This demonstrated the kind of risk involved. That the thought of death was writ large on people's minds was evident. Asked how he came to terms with coming to work given the risk involved; Mr. Arul Gnanaseelan, an employee of the Commercial Bank said: "I trust in God and come to work. If He has a purpose in keeping me alive, I will live. If it is time for me to go, it is in His hands." Mr. Mohanachandran, another milkman, said, covering his anxiety with a smile, that distributing milk had become a cumbersome business. When he went to the homes of some of his customers, he had to ring his bell for a long time and wait on the road listening to the music of the shells. This was because many of his customers were inside trenches. During a slight pause, the customer would cautiously emerge, make a dash for the gate, collect his milk in a pan and then beat an unceremonious retreat. He added: "I too spend the nights in a trench with my family in Kopay. One must understand the feelings of those soldiers too. They must be feeling pretty rotten after the Pettah bomb blast and the Kitul-uttuwa massacre." The people of Jaffna can be proud, that amongst the humble ranks of its milkmen, can be found the right material for the world's most intrepid war correspondents.

In the meantime, representatives from amongst the hospital authorities and the G.M.O.A. (Government Medical Officers Association) went to Colombo to make representations concerning the case for Jaffna hospital. Even before the closure threat, the region's largest hospital with 1150 beds, was down to having 550 patients. The main body of the G.M.O.A. in Colombo was sympathetic to the need to keep Jaffna hospital open. So was the Ministry for Teaching Hospitals, which had even earlier argued against the closure. In consequence of their discussions with the L.T.T.E., the doctors from Jaffna felt that the L.T.T.E. would go along with any reasonable arrangement to keep the hospital open. The L.T.T.E. did have sound military reasons for keeping the hospital open. If the hospital was to be closed, the town would be abandoned. For, this would remove all restrictions placed on Sri Lankan military activity. The L.T.T.E. would thus lose the civilian cover which made it possible for it to maintain a presence around Jaffna Fort. When the news of the closure order came, the L.T.T.E. backed a demonstration in which a large number of medical students took part. The demonstrators demanded that the hospital staff should defy the closure order and stay put. Some suggested that if the hospital was shelled and some doctors got killed, it would so much the more embarrass

the Sri Lankan authorities. The doctors pointed out that things may not work that way. A shell for instance could fall at a harmless distance away from a ward, causing a patient a minor cut. The patients would then promptly desert the hospital, effectively closing it. The hospital staff would then have nothing to show for defying their ministry. The L.T.T.E. by all accounts was worried.

In Colombo, the Jaffna Hospital doctors received crucial support for their cause from the Indian High Commission. Given the wide ranging pressure, the President and the National Security Minister agreed to lift the closure order if a fire-free zone could be negotiated around the hospital between the L.T.T.E. and the Sri Lankan army. For while the G.M.O.A. accepted the word of the Jaffna doctors that the hospital to the best of their knowledge had not been used to fire at the Jaffna Fort, the National Security ministry stood by the contrary. It was then felt that such an agreement of a fire free zone would solve the problem. This was a victory for common humanity. In their enthusiasm, the doctors took it upon themselves to arrange such negotiations. It was agreed that the telephone link between the fort and the hospital would be restored and that Captain Kotelawela who had previously developed a rapport with Kittu, Rahim and some other L.T.T.E. leaders would be available at the Jaffna Fort on the afternoon of 10 May. Hopes rose high. One of the Jaffna newspapers got wind of this from what was thought of as a private talk and stated that the planned negotiations were announced at a press conference at the hospital.

At this point the L.T.T.E. pounced on the doctors. They were found fault with for arranging meetings for the L.T.T.E. without their authority. Further, they said, it was through the press that they were being informed of this meeting. Apart from a possible technical blunder involving the press, the doctors felt that they were acting for the common good. No commitment at this time was forthcoming from the L.T.T.E.. Later the doctors learnt from Captain Kotelawela that he had contacted the L.T.T.E. independently and had arranged to meet with them the following morning. Captain Kotelawela further added that he had come on "multiple missions" and had not sounded as if the hospital matter was amongst the key subjects. It was learnt the following morning that the L.T.T.E. had not kept its appointment, assuming there was one, with the Captain who had been kept impatiently waiting. Subsequently the L.T.T.E. put forward a demand that since it could not trust the government, it was willing to talk if 5 persons nominated by them would be present. These included Dr. Ratnapriya, National Secretary of the G.M.O.A., and the Rev. Fr. Yohan Devananda. The L.T.T.E. should have known that its demand that a representative of the International Red Cross, the I.R.C., should be present would not be met. The government agreed to 4 of the delegates and added that while it cannot admit an I.R.C. representative, the L.T.T.E. could choose anyone else from this country it could trust. The doctors suggested that the L.T.T.E. could as a compromise, suggest an employee of the Indian High Commission.

The L.T.T.E.'s effective rejection was protracted. In the meantime, the matter had received so much publicity that the government found itself unable to go ahead with the closure of the hospital. The L.T.T.E. had played its characteristic game, abusing the good intentions of the Jaffna doctors, the goodwill of the G.M.O.A., and the residual

decency in the government to gain its own ends. For the moment the L.T.T.E. had won. It was to try the same gamble during Thileepan's fast in September, win for a start, and then lose by overplaying its hand. For the Sri Lankan government, it was the end of the road for negotiations which it had tried perhaps half-heartedly in deference to international opinion and some members of its cabinet. It had strengthened its drive for a military solution to its Tamil problem by silencing critics within and showing up the L.T.T.E. as implacable and irresponsible in the eyes of the world. In this sense the Sri Lankan government had not lost. For its part, the government had not behaved as though it was dealing with human beings over whom it claimed sovereignty. Even the Geneva convention provided for far better treatment during war for the population on the opposing side. A senior citizen with personal contacts at the Indian High Commission, said at this time that India was not more than nominally interested in pushing the December 19th proposals. It would appear that India was building up a case for direct intervention of some kind. The decision was taken perhaps, sometime between January and May 1987. When the Sri Lankan government had launched an offensive earlier in the year, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India had warned that if a political solution is not reached, the level of violence in Sri Lanka "will" increase. The message was not lost in Colombo. The L.T.T.E.'s actions, together with the government reprisals against the Tamils, had served to build up India's case.

In one respect, the support received by the Jaffna doctors for their cause from the Indian High Commission was fateful, as events proved. During the Indian offensive on Jaffna later in October that year, the Jaffna hospital authorities assumed that because India had in the past been a friend of the hospital, she would exercise extreme consideration for the hospital during the offensive. As it turned out, the need for the hospital had been as great in October as it had been in May. Several hundred persons, ordinary men, women and children, who were victims of Indian shelling were in need of urgent medical care. When the Indians took Jaffna town on 21st October, there were no signs that they had given any thought to the hospital.

A medical Consultant, reflecting on the events of May in light of October's harrowing experiences, said: "One can now appreciate the National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali's wanting to close Jaffna Hospital. He knew that if an attempt was to be made to take Jaffna, while advancing from the Fort, something embarrassing was bound to happen at the hospital. Having faced bad publicity over the years, the Sri Lankan government was used to thinking along these lines. The Indians did not seem to have a clue." Another Consultant-Professor on the same subject said: "We should have closed the hospital on 11 October. But people are concerned about patients and they are used to cutting it fine. By their past concern, the Indians had encouraged us to do this."

On the other hand, the Sri Lankan government had learnt much from this experience of May. When they launched Operation Liberation three weeks' later, they took extreme care over Pt. Pedro hospital. The Sri Lankan army was helped in this by the fact that the L.T.T.E. had withdrawn from the area around Pt. Pedro hospital a day before the army advanced from Nelliady. The Indian army did not have this advantage. One should be careful not to make comparisons from this. A few months earlier the Sri

Lankan air force had bombed the hospital at Adampan. Adampan was a remote area in the Mannar district. The operation in Jaffna, thanks in part to India, had to be done under the spotlight of international publicity. The difference between Adampan and Jaffna was well understood by the Sri Lankan government. If the L.T.T.E. had learnt anything, it was the value of bad publicity for the other side. During the Indian offensive of October, the L.T.T.E. would itself commission lawyers to obtain affidavits from victims, for whose misfortune, the L.T.T.E. must itself share the responsibility.[\[Top\]](#)

07.11.1985

Namalwatta, Morawewa, Trincomalee
Armed terrorists shot dead 10 Sinhalese villagers;

18.08.1985

Namalwatta, Trincomalee
Armed terrorists shot dead six Sinhalese villagers;

14.08.1985

Arantalawa, Vavuniya
Armed terrorists shot dead seven Sinhalese and set fire to 40 houses;

02.08.1985

Thrikonamadu, Polonnaruwa
Armed terrorists shot dead three bhikkhus and three civilians at Ruhunu Somavathiya temple;

11.06.1985

Dehiwatta, Muttur, Trincomalee
Thirteen Sinhalese settlers shot dead by armed terrorists;

30.05.1985

Mihindupura and Dehiwatta, Muttur, Trincomalee
Five Sinhalese settlers shot dead by armed terrorists;

14.05.1985

Wilpattu, Anuradhapura
Armed terrorists shot dead 18 Sinhalese in the forest reserve;

14.05.1985

Anuradhapura
Armed terrorists invaded the town and shot dead 120 Sinhalese and injuring 85 others.
This includes pilgrims who were inside the Sri Maha Bodhi premises;

01.12.1984

Kokilai, Mullaitivu:
Armed terrorists shot dead 11 Sinhalese settlers;

30.11.1984

Kent Farm, Vavuniya
Armed terrorists shot dead 29 Sinhalese settlers and injured several others;

30.11.1984

Dollar Farm, Vavuniya
Armed terrorists shot dead 33 Sinhalese settlers and injured several others;

