

"Tamil's flight to despair"
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INTERNATIONAL

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Tamils are causing trouble between West Germany and its western neighbours. Tamils have turned up in Holland, France and Switzerland. It is not clear in every case how they got to these countries, but it is assumed that some crossed from West Germany in the hope that things would be better over the border. West Germany's neighbours are now grumbling that it should watch its borders more carefully. A group of Tamils was recently deported to West Germany from Holland. When Switzerland found it was giving hospitality to Tamils, it sent two officials to Sri Lanka to find out what was going on. They reported that there was no reason for Tamils to seek asylum. Mr Heinrich Lummer, a West Berlin senator, says the movement of the Tamils is an "immoral trade which abuses the right of asylum". It is at least that.

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FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

SRI LANKA AND WEST GERMANY

This is a curious tale of the Tamils of Sri Lanka, and how they are being exploited in Europe. It starts with the fact that at least 11,000 members of Sri Lanka's minority community, which is having a difficult time in its home island, have now moved to West Germany. Most have come to Germany by an odd route, flying first to Vienna, Copenhagen, Zurich or Amsterdam, then taking the East German airline Interflug to East Berlin. From there they cross the border into West Berlin, which accepts them because, under West German law, nobody claiming asylum can be turned away without an investigation, which can take up to two years; longer, if an appeal against the decision is made. After three weeks the Tamils are moved from Berlin to other parts of West Germany.

been killed in the fighting between the guerrillas and the security forces. In some areas tension is high between the country's 11m Sinhalese and its 2m Tamils. Those leaving the country may argue that, although Sri Lanka has political freedom, they are afraid to exercise their political rights.

So far, according to the West German interior ministry, more than 8,000 Tamils of the 11,000 known to be in the country have formally asked for political asylum. But one estimate puts the number in West Germany as high as 30,000. Some Tamils, while claiming political refugee status at the frontier, may not have gone through the formality of registration. Also, while the head of the family may register, his wife and children may not consider it necessary.

West Germany is convinced that almost all of the Tamils in the country have been told that they will live better there than at home. Mr Günther Britz, the head of the aliens department in West Berlin, said on April 15th that Tamils have been lured to West Germany by

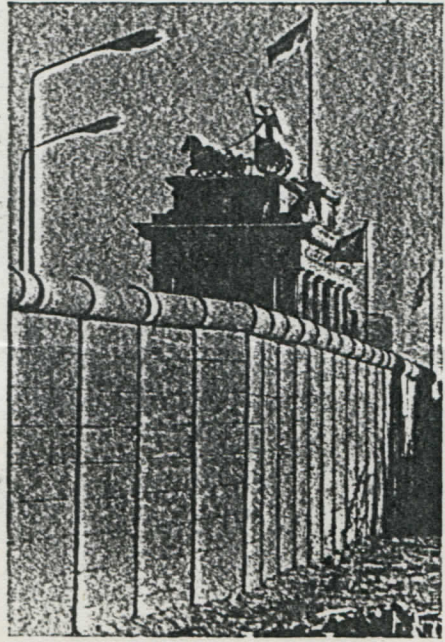
"fantasy stories" that the country is a land of easy money. Many Tamils are living in poverty, but some have got work, doing menial jobs that Germans do not want. Others have turned to crime. Six Tamils were accused of drugs offences last month. Nevertheless, although some Tamils write dispirited letters to relatives in Sri Lanka, there is no sign that the flow of arrivals is diminishing. Many of the Tamils in Germany are young, in their twenties. Few are over 35. They believe the advertisements in Tamil newspapers that promise golden opportunities in West Germany, and happily sell their possessions to raise the fare.

Mr Britz criticises Sri Lanka's national airline, Air Lanka, for transporting Tamils to Europe on one-way tickets without visas. A Sri Lankan flying to a West German airport would be allowed entry only if he had a return, or ongoing, ticket and a visa. The East Berlin route avoids these formalities. Air Lanka, which is not one of the world's busiest airlines, has done well out of the Tamils. According to Tamils interviewed by Mr Britz's staff, they pay \$2,000 for the whole trip, Colombo to Berlin, a substantial part of which goes to Air Lanka.

Interflug and the Soviet airline Aeroflot, which also carries Tamils to Europe, are making money from the Tamils too. More important, West Germany believes that Russia and East Germany are using the Tamils to make political mischief.

Having brought so many Tamils into West Germany, they can claim that Sri Lanka is in chaos, although in reality there is communal peace in much of the island. The Russians and their allies probably do not believe that the Tamil guerrillas will achieve their aim of an independent state, but it would suit them if it did come off, since they believe a Tamil government would be sympathetic to Russia. The Soviet fleet would like a base at Trincomalee, in the north-east of Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, the insurgency is an embarrassment to the pro-western government of President Junius Jayewardene. Money from some of the Tamils who are managing to make a living in Germany is being sent home to support Tamil separatism, according to Mr Britz.

The Russians and their friends, on his argument, are grateful for anything that causes a nuisance to West Berlin and to West Germany generally. As a bonus, the



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