



BLACK JULY - ARCHIVE OF QUOTES

Quotes collected from various sources on the topic of Black July



BOOK: SINHALAYAGE ADISI HATURA ("THE UNSEEN ENEMY OF THE SINHALESE")

Written By: Cyril Mathew in February 1970

Instead of taking steps to relieve the up-country villagers of the sufferings they have endured for untold years, it has instead granted a secure and well-planned political freedom to these 300,000 or so Tamils who are living on the plantations, in the centre of our country, who don't even speak Sinhalese but only know the Tamil language. By thus enjoying political rights, the foreign Indians will, in the future, become the majority race and subdue the up-country Sinhalese.

The Indian trade unions always expect that the state will grant their members citizenship rights on humanitarian grounds.

In fact, the local population, the Sinhala peasants who are living in the up-country areas, deserve to enjoy these human rights more than do the Indians, who speak a strange language, observe strange religious and cultural practices and who were deposited in the central part of the country by the British without so much as a 'by your leave'. Not for any reason should they be allowed to take even one step that will permit them to trample on the Sinhala Buddhist culture of the up-country Sinhalese and strengthen their power in the up-country areas ...

— From *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* ('The Unseen enemy of the Sinhalese'), by Cyril Mathew, 1970. Chapter 1 ("The Indo-Ceylon (Implementations) Pact") (reproduced in "The Mathew Doctrine." *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.129-130.)

By granting citizenship to 300,000 Indians, with all political rights, we add their number to that of those 134,187 who have already received citizenship under the Indo-Pakistan Citizenship Act. With this expansion of figures, the up-country Sinhalese who has been waging a life-and-death struggle for many years will be completely subjugated. Thus, not only will 450,000 Indians gain special rights to employment in the plantations, but they will also be entitled to purchase land, be given land under Land Settlement Schemes and obtain employment in the state and local government sectors. They will even take power in Village Councils and other local government bodies. Finally, after balancing off the power between the Sinhalese parties, they will become the determinants of our national politics. Thereby, the 'honour' of converting the up-country areas, which have for over 2,500 years been a Sinhalese kingdom, to an Indian state - or rather the 'honour' of making Sri Lanka a part of India will belong to the United National Party ...

— From *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* ('The Unseen enemy of the Sinhalese'), by Cyril Mathew, 1970. Chapter 1 ("The Indo-Ceylon (Implementations) Pact") (reproduced in "The Mathew Doctrine." *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.130.)

... If we genuinely come forward to keep the up-country Sinhalese from becoming a minority and to protect their rights against the Indian voters, we must know that whether Indians' names are entered on electoral lists in an illegal manner by certain corrupt officials, or whether some bankrupt politician seeks the help of the Indian voters to keep a government that is losing its stability, in power, the results will be the same. Either way, the local Sinhalese will be totally submerged by the large number of Indians who have been registered on the voters' lists and be reduced to the status of a minority community ...

— from *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* ('The Unseen enemy of the Sinhalese'), by Cyril Mathew, 1970. Chapter 4 ("The four demands of the Federal Party") (reproduced in "The Mathew Doctrine." *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.130-1.)



...the only solution to the problem which is now being faced by the Sinhalese people is that of uniting under the banner of Sinhala Buddhist culture and supporting whichever of the two parties (the UNP or the SLFP) which will openly and sincerely oppose the anti-Sinhala demands of the Federalists and the Indians ...

— from *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* ('The Unseen enemy of the Sinhalese'), by Cyril Mathew, 1970. Chapter 4 ("The four demands of the Federal Party") (reproduced in "The Mathew Doctrine." *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.131.)

As Sinhalese who wish for peace and development, whether we be Buddhists or of any other religion, let us pray that no massacre of the type that took place in Malaysia on 13 May 1969 in a racial riot will ever take place here.

Any person who reads this book with care will realise that there is a systematic growth of Tamil forces in this country, in opposition to the Sinhala Buddhist culture and the political and economic background of Sri Lanka. As matters now stand, it would be useless to merely say 'Let there be peace'. If there is to be peace, all of us Sinhalese should set out on a firm plan of action to ensure the growth and development of future generations of Sinhalese in security and to ensure the defence of our rights and aspirations against foreign powers.

— from *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* ('The Unseen enemy of the Sinhalese'), by Cyril Mathew, 1970. Chapter 10 ("The future of the Sinhalese") (reproduced in "The Mathew Doctrine." *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.133.)

Oh you Sinhalese, who are full of patriotism and nationalism, we pray that, just as the disaster you are preparing to leave for the future generations of Sinhalese, by permitting the governments that you have set up in your name to betray Sinhalese rights, one by one, thereby strengthening Tamil power, is very clearly visible to us, it will become as visible to you also. We pray that your political blindness will vanish, and that you may see the truth!

Let us unite as Sinhalese to repress the threats of the Tamils!

— from *Sinhalayage Adisi Hatura* ('The Unseen enemy of the Sinhalese'), by Cyril Mathew, 1970. Chapter 10 ("The future of the Sinhalese") (reproduced in "The Mathew Doctrine." *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.133-4.)

1977 ANTI-TAMIL RIOTS

Faced with country-wide riots and racial violence directed against the Tamils within weeks of assuming office in 1977, Jayewardene at first refused to take any action: 'we do not wish to declare emergency ... it means the complete elimination of the freedoms of the people with regard to arrest, detention and legislation by gazette and avoiding parliament'. The armed forces (almost exclusively Sinhalese) reportedly encouraged attacks on Tamils in the South, while the police force (95 per cent Sinhalese) used its radio network to inflame the situation further by spreading false rumours. Soon, hundreds of Tamils were dead and thousands had fled for refuge in the North and East.



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— *"The state against Tamils."* Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.98.

1981 ANTI-TAMIL RIOTS

The Public Library in fact contained irreplaceable literary and historical documents, and this book burning by Sinhalese police has come to signify for many a living Tamil the apogean barbarity of Sinhalese vindictiveness that seeks physical as well as cultural obliteration.

— *on the Jaffna Public Library burning in 1981. from Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.19.*

And then, on 31 May [1981], an unidentified gunman fired some shots at an [District Development Council] election meeting, and the tense atmosphere exploded into state-sponsored mayhem. With several highranking Sinhalese security officers and two cabinet ministers, Cyril Mathew and Gamini Dissanayake (both self-confessed Sinhala supremacists), present in the town, uniformed security men and plainclothes thugs carried out some well-organised acts of destruction. They burned to the ground certain chosen targets - including the Jaffna Public Library, with its 95,000 volumes and priceless manuscripts, a Hindu Temple, the office and machinery of the independent Tamil daily newspaper Eelanadu, the house of the MP of Jaffna, the headquarters of the TULF, and more than 100 shops and markets. Four people were killed outright. No mention of this appeared in the national newspapers, not even the burning of the Library, the symbol of the Tamils' cultural identity.

— *"The state against Tamils."* Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.100.

The government delayed bringing in emergency rule until 2 June [1981], by which time key targets had been destroyed. On 4 June, emergency rule was extended throughout the country, and lifted five days later. Meanwhile, the government had no intention of postponing elections, despite the fact that the signs were hardly auspicious. It was determined to win at least one seat in Tamil territory. On the morning of polling day, TULF leaders were arrested: they were later released, with no explanation given. After the elections, several of the ballot boxes were tampered with, and some were never produced for counting. But, in spite of this, TULF won all the seats in Tamil areas.

After the elections were over, there was no respite for the Tamil people. While Sinhalese MPs fulminated against opposition colleagues, and discussed in parliament how to best kill them, Tamil peasants were actually being murdered by organised gangs in the border areas of Batticaloa and Amparai. During July and August, Tamils in the East and South, including the hill country plantation workers, were terrorised and made homeless. Women were raped, and at least twenty-five people perished. The attacks, many by well-organised goon squads, were widely believed to be directed by members of the ruling UNP, among them close friends of the President.

— *"The state against Tamils."* Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.100-1



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Throughout the rest of 1981, under the cover of a country-wide state of emergency, the army indulged in acts of violence in Jaffna District - assaulting schoolchildren, hitting out at people on the streets, burning houses and a bookshop. In November, under the pretext of 'hunting for terrorists', soldiers entered an agricultural farm in Vavuniya where eleven families of plantation workers, victims of earlier hill country violence, had been settled by the Gandhiyam Society. This organisation, formed in 1976 for community and social service, had carried out most of its work among destitute Tamil refugees. Now Gandhiyam volunteer workers were assaulted by the military, and hung by their feet. A few days later, forty soldiers shot at close range a youth described in the newspapers as a 'most wanted terrorist' who was at the time on bail from police custody. By the beginning of 1982, it was clear that the army intended to stay in Jaffna. To quote an eye-witness writing in the January 1982 Tamil Times: 'the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, and specially the Jaffna Peninsula, presents an appearance of a recently occupied territory, army personnel and vehicle movements being evident everywhere during day and night. Almost the entirety of the armed forces of the state has been deployed, with all the modern military hardware at its disposal'.

— *"The state against Tamils."* Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.101

In March, the security forces attacked the Gandhiyam settlement at Pannakulam in Trincomalee, and on 6 April they arrested and tortured the Gandhiyam secretary, Dr S. Rajasunderam, and president, S.A. David, accusing them of harbouring 'terrorists'. Shortly after, two young men and two young women who were distributing leaflets at Vavuniya calling for the release of Dr Rajasunderam were arrested and possibly tortured. Gandhiyam offices in the North were also shut down. Since this was the sole charitable organisation working for the rehabilitation of plantation Tamil refugees, the social implications were grave.

— *"The state against Tamils."* Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.101

JULY 1983 AND IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

Direct Proof:

My only evidence of government involvement [in the July 1983 anti-Tamil violence] is a letter I received from a U.S. citizen, unknown to me, who had worked in Sri Lanka in the late 1950s. This was George Immerwahr, a United Nations civil servant, who wrote the following to me on 13 February 1985:

... the most shattering report came from a friend who was a civil servant; he told me that he had himself helped plan the riots at the orders of his superiors. When I heard him say this, I was so shocked I told him I simply couldn't believe him, but he insisted he was telling the truth, and in fact he justified the government's decision to stage the riots. When I heard this, I telephoned an official in our own State Department, and while he declined to discuss the matter, I got the impression that he already knew from our Embassy in Colombo what I was telling him.



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A negotiator of the Government of India who was dealing at the time with the situation in Ceylon told me that after his meetings with Ceylonese government leaders, he obtained the impression that they themselves were party to the pogroms against the Tamils.

— from *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.173

On 24 July 1983, the day after the worst anti-Tamil holocaust, I phone the President and after discussing one or two urgent matters, asked him why he had let down the T.U.L.F. when their leaders had gone out of their way to honour the undertakings they had provided – something which I, as the intermediary, was certain they had done. The President's answer was unconvincing.

— from *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.212.

President J. R. Jayewardene's complicity to the Riots, official statements:

President Jayewardene's actions against the Tamils after July 1983 defy straightforward explanation. One of his frequent excuses to me was that he did not want to erode his political base. This political base, which he shared with Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was 'the land, the race and the faith'. During 1978-83, my years as an intermediary, the President successfully kept the Buddhist monks and Buddhist pressure organisations at bay. But the price of being able to resist them was that he had to reduce the substance of devolution that he promised to me and the T.U.L.F.

— from *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.213-4

The worst India can do is to invade us. If they invade us, that is the end of the Tamils in this country.

— President Jayewardene, in an interview with *India Today* in 1984. (reproduced in *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.222)

The time has come for the whole Sinhala race which has existed for 2,500 years, jealously safeguarding their language and religion, to fight without giving any quarter. ... I will lead the campaign. ...

— J.R. Jayewardene, then a U.N.P. leader, June 1957. (reproduced in *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.222)



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I was reluctant to write this book, and for a long time after 1983 I could not resolve the matter in my conscience. A major factor was that I was close to President J.R. Jayewardene in the critical phase from 1978 to 1983. But as I kept reading with horror the operations by security forces of the island state, I realised I could no longer be a silent witness.

— A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, in the preface of *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, 1988.

Jayewardene, when he broke his silence on 28 July, spoke to much the same effect. He expressed no sorrow for what had befallen the country; he had no words of sympathy for the victims. Instead, the anti-Tamil violence was deemed a just retribution for the death of the thirteen Sinhalese soldiers. The President did not call on the security forces to restore law and order, and bring the looters and arsonists under control. His message was quite a different one: he warned the Tamil people that, under a new law, anyone who refused to sign a declaration disavowing separatism could suffer loss of property, travel documents and be barred from public examinations. The tone of the speech fueled the fury of the mobs, and violence flared up with a new vehemence on 29 July.

— “The state against Tamils.” Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.104-5

The Sri Lankan government failed to give adequate protection or even assurance of protection to Tamils while they were being attacked. The President himself maintained an inexplicable silence during the first four days of violence. When he addressed the nation, he had no word of sympathy for the victims. His attitude to the Tamil people may have been indicated in what he stated to Ian Ward in an interview published in the London Daily Telegraph on 11 July 1983:

I have tried to be effective for some time but cannot. I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people now ... Now we cannot think of them, not about their lives or of their opinion about us.

— from “Human rights violations in Sri Lanka.” *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.126.

... I am not worried about the opinion of the Jaffna people now... Now we cannot think of them. Not about their lives or of their opinion about us... The more you put pressure in the north, the happier the Sinhala people will be here... really, if I starve the Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy...

— from an interview with J.R. Jayewardene by Ian Ward. *London Daily Telegraph*, 11 July 1983.

... In an even more inflammatory move, it was decided to have a mass public funeral for the soldiers in Kanatte, the main cemetery in Colombo, on Sunday 24 July.

Thousands of people arrived at the cemetery but the bodies failed to appear. Having been kept waiting for several hours, the restive crowd was told that the funeral had been cancelled. Large sections of the crowd dispersed towards busy Borella town near the cemetery. Within minutes, Tamil establishments in Borella went up in flames. There is some evidence that those responsible for the attacks on Tamils in Borella were not those who were at the cemetery.



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This raises some worrying possibilities which President Jayewardene had no intention of investigating: he probably knew the answer.

Jayewardene's home is only a stone's throw away, and there is not the slightest possibility that he could not have seen Borella on fire. However, there were no orders from him to the police or the armed forces to stop the arson and murder, nor was a State of Emergency declared. With the number of police and armed forces on the streets, there is no question that they could have controlled the situation if they had wanted to, or were ordered to.

— *"Sri Lanka's Week of Shame: The July 1983 massacre of Tamils – Long-term consequences."* Brian Senewiratne.
http://sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/07-28_Consequences.php?uid=1866 Published 28 July 2006.

And not until the fifth day, on 28 July, did President Jayewardene finally appear on national television. ...

In the course of that address, the President did not see fit to utter one single word of sympathy for the victims of the violence and destruction which he lamented. If his concern was to re-establish communal harmony in the Island whose national unity he was so anxious to preserve by law, that was a misjudgment of monumental proportions.

I have yet to meet a single Tamil at any level in Sri Lanka or out of it who does not remind me of this glaring omission at the first opportunity. Nor are they reassured by the programmes for relief and rehabilitation of the victims which the Government has in fact since installed: at the time of my visit, six months later, around 10,000 homeless Tamils were still in refugee camps.

— *Paul Sieghart. "Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors". Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka in January 1984 on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists and its British Section, JUSTICE. International Commission of Jurists, March 1984.*

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

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

— *from "The Tamil Tragedy" by Chaitanya Kalbag. India Today. 31 August 1983, pp.14-23.*

Minister Cyril Mathew's role in leading the Riots:

Sri Lanka is a Sinhala history and nothing else.



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— Cyril Mathew, Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs, at the 29th Annual Conference of the United National Party, December 1983. (reproduced in *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.222)

If the Sinhala are the majority race, why can't they be the majority?

— Cyril Mathew, Minister of Industries and Scientific Affairs, in Parliament, 4 August 1983. (reproduced in *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986.)

Much of the foreign press had apparently no difficulty in identifying Mathew as the main instigator of the violence. The London Economist had this to say:

The Tamil-baiter the Tamils fear most is an influential cabinet minister, Mr Cyril Mathew. He has been accused of having engineered the Sinhalese counter-terror through his followers in the party's trade union. He denies this vigorously, but goes on to prosecute his anti-Tamil case with files of underlined clippings and his own speeches, glossily bound under such titles as 'Diabolical Conspiracy'. His arguments about the folly of placating the Tamils and the need to crush terrorism before talking are echoed by many of his fellow ministers. (6 August 1983)

It is worth noting that most of the petrol that was used to burn shops, homes and vehicles was kept ready in white cans at the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, which comes under the jurisdiction of Industries Minister, Cyril Mathew.

— "Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust." N. Shanmugathan. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.73-74.

According to India Today's sources, Mathew, who also heads the UNP's own powerful labour union, Jathika Sevaka Sanghamaya, 'was directly responsible for pin-pointing Tamil-owned shops and factories to be destroyed.' (31 August 1983). ... He has, in parliament, on the debate to amend the constitution so as to ban parties which advocate separatism (i.e., the TULF), defended the violence. 'The Sinhalese were frustrated for years, they were discriminated [against]. If the Sinhala is the majority race, why can't they be the majority?'

— "Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust." N. Shanmugathan. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.74.

Minister Gamini Dissayanake's role in justifying the anti-Tamil sentiment:

They [Tamils] are bringing an army from India. It will take 14 hours to come from India. In 14 minutes, the blood of every Tamil in the country can be sacrificed to the land by us.

Who attacked you [Tamils]? Sinhalese. Who protected you? Sinhalese. It is we who can attack you and protect you.



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— *Gamini Dissanayake, Minister of Land and Land Development, 5 September 1983. (reproduced in The Break-Up of Sri Lanka, by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, 1988. p.222)*

Even today, Thondaman has spoken in parliament supporting Mr. Amirthalingam and the struggle of the people in the North for their rights. Our Buddhist priests and Sinhala youths have been enraged by this. We have calmed them with great difficulty.

Who attacked you? Sinhalese. Who protected you? Sinhalese. It is we who can attack and protect you.

They are bringing an army from India. It will take 14 hours to come from India. In 14 minutes, the blood of every Tamil in the country can be sacrificed to the land, by us.

It is not written on anyone's forehead that he is an Indian Tamil or a Jaffna Tamil, a Batticaloa Tamil or up-country Tamil, Hindu Tamil or Christian Tamil. All are Tamils.

We have decided to colonise four districts including Mannar with Sinhalese people by destroying forests. A majority of Sinhalese will be settled there. If you like you also can migrate there.

— *Gamini Dissanayake, Minister of Land and Land Development, president of UNP-controlled Lanka Jathika Estate Workers' Union, addressing the executive committee of his Lanka Jathika Estate Workers' Union at 'Sri Kotha', Colombo, 5 September 1983. (reproduced in "Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust." N. Shanmugathan. Race & Class, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.74.)*

Genocidal dimension of the violence:

The conventional and agreed-upon story is that the most proximate cause or trigger was the ambush of an army truck and the killing and mutilation of thirteen soldiers at Tinneveli, a place in the Jaffna district in the heart of the Sri Lankan Tamil territory, which had been under army occupation for some time. This ambush was made by a group of Sri Lankan Tamil youth who call themselves the "Liberation Tigers" of Tamil Eelam, and whom the government refers to as terrorists. The army of occupation, some 1,200 troops at the time, was composed almost totally of Sinhalese. Indeed, the armed forces (but not the police) in Sri Lanka today are virtually filled by the majority Sinhalese, and the Tamil minority are virtually excluded from serving in them. In 1983, Tamils at best formed only 5% or less of a standing army of around 11,000 regulars and about 2,000-4,000 volunteers. Even more disconcerting is that there has been virtually no recruitment of Tamils into the armed forces, and very little into the police force, for nearly thirty years. Except for the age group close to retirement, Tamils are today virtually unrepresented in the armed forces and heavily underrepresented in the police force if we take their population size as a criterion, a criterion that most Sinhalese automatically invoke in their favor.

— *from Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.15.*



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During the debate on the sixth amendment to the constitution on 4 August 1983 (Hansard, Volume 24, no. 13), Mr Cyril Mathew made no secret about his views on the cause of the violence. He stated that he was not speaking as a cabinet minister but as a representative of the Sinhala people. Referring to the destruction of the Pettah shopping area of Colombo, which was a virtual Tamil monopoly, and to government plans to rebuild it, he said, 'The Sinhala people want to know what you are going to do? They [Tamils] are like maharajas there. A Sinhala trader cannot even get a finger in. It is this injustice which has been festering like a wound for twenty five years. Only a spark was needed. That spark fell on the 24th of July.'

— from *"Human rights violations in Sri Lanka."* *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.127.

Lest anyone not take seriously the idea of conquering Tamil lands for the Sinhalese, let it be pointed out that Mathew had a modus operandi for this. He has located what he alleges were former Buddhist places of worship in the North and East which he claims have now been converted into Hindu shrines and their names changed. He wants to reclaim these places and bring them back to their original position as Buddhist shrines and monasteries. The plan is exceedingly simple. It is to use the Building Materials Corporation and other Corporations under his Ministry (Industries) to repair or build anew these so-called Buddhist shrines, install a Buddhist priest and then plant a colony of 100 or 200 Sinhalese as dayakas to support the priest and the monastery. This programme of work has apparently advanced a long way. Even after the disturbances, Minister Cyril Mathew canvassed these views openly at a recent meeting held at Galle at the opening of the Duttugemunu Vihara. This speech was reported in the Tamil daily, *Virakesari* on the 29th September, 1983. In the course of his speech, Mathew called upon Sinhalese Buddhists to volunteer to go and live near these allegedly former viharas in the North and Eastern provinces. He estimated the number of such viharas at 276.

— *"Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust."* *N. Shanmugathan.* *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.73

But what I find most extraordinary is that, to this day, there has been no attempt to find out the truth through an official, public and impartial enquiry, when the situation in the country cries out for nothing less.

— *Paul Sieghart. "Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors". Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka in January 1984 on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists and its British Section, JUSTICE. International Commission of Jurists, March 1984.*

But for days the soldiers and policemen were not overwhelmed: they were unengaged or, in some cases, apparently abetting the attackers. Numerous eye-witnesses attest that soldiers and policemen stood by while Colombo burned. Were they following their own communal instincts, or signals from above?

— from *"Sri Lanka Puts a Torch to Its Future". The Economist. 6 August 1983, pp. 25-26.*



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One-fourth of Colombo's population is Tamil, and by the first week of August, three-fifths of the Tamils, 90,000 in all, had crowded in terrified disarray into 15 refugee camps, euphemistically called 'care and welfare centres', fleeing from the marauding Sinhallas. Almost every refugee had escaped with just the clothes on his or her back, and for days on end the women sat surrounded by their squealing infants, eyes glazed unable to comprehend the catastrophe that had sliced their lives in half.

— from *"The Tamil Tragedy"*. *India Today*. 31 August 1983, pp. 14-22.

Organisation and pre-planning:

More than any other previous ethnic riot, the 1983 eruption showed organized mob violence at work. Gangs armed with weapons such as metal rods and knives and carrying gasoline (frequently confiscated from passing motor vehicles) and, most intriguing of all, because it indicates prior intent and planning, carrying voter lists and addresses of Tamil owners and occupants of houses, shops, and other property, descended in waves to drive out Tamils, loot and burn their property, and sometimes kill them in bestial fashion. These gangs frequently had access to transportation – they traveled in buses or were dropped off at successive locations by the Colombo coastline trains.

— from *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.21.

As *The Times* (London) of 8 August 1983 put it: "This time [unlike in earlier riots] the Government detected plain signs of deliberate organization. The rioters, seeking out Tamil homes and burning them, had a particularly detailed knowledge of who lived where and who owned what." *India Today* (New Delhi) of August 31 confirmed this report: "The mobs were armed with voters' lists, and detailed addresses of every Tamil-owned shop, house, or factory, and their attacks were very precise." Most of Wellawatte, the ward in Colombo where Tamils were concentrated, was burned; so were large portions, and entire lanes, in the wards of Dehiwala and Bambalapitiya.

— from *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.21.

A third disconcerting feature of the 1983 riots was the complete breakdown of law and order, a breakdown that was caused as much by the active participation or passive encouragement of the ultimate guardians of law and order—the police and the army—as by inflamed criminal excesses of the civilian marauders. There were several instances of the authorities' active or passive condoning of the destruction of life and property.

— from *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.24.

The *New York Times* (Sunday, 7 August 1983) reported that "Sri Lankan Army troops pulled 20 civilians off a bus and executed them two weeks ago in retaliation for a Tamil guerilla attack that killed 13 soldiers, a government spokesman confirmed today." This was up north in Jaffna.



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Elsewhere, in Trincomalee, the beautiful, coveted harbor on the east coast, where Tamils and Sinhalese (the majority of the latter being considered by the Tamils as recent intruders) were poised in equal numbers, sailors from the Sri Lankan navy ran amok, themselves setting a bad example for the civilians to follow. The sailors, later assisted and accompanied by civilians, ran riot, killing and looting and setting houses and shops ablaze. Morawewa, a district of Tamil residential concentration, was reduced to ashes.

— *from Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.25.

Army personnel actively encouraged arson and looting of business establishments and homes in Colombo and absolutely no action was taken to apprehend or prevent the criminal elements involved in these activities. In many instances army personnel participated in the looting of shops.

— *The Times (of London)*, 5 August 1983. (reproduced in *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986.)

President Jayawardene said in a television interview yesterday that troops and police had sometimes encouraged the anti-Tamil violence. The President told a BBC interviewer: “I think there was a big anti-Tamil feeling among the forces, and they felt that shooting the Sinhalese who were rioting would have been anti-Sinhalese; and actually in some cases we saw them encouraging them.”

— *The Times (of London)*, 9 August 1983. Also in *The Guardian (of London)*, 9 August, 1983. (reproduced in *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986.)

One of the houses burnt in the Sinhalese violence belonged to the editor of “Virakesari” which is owned by Mr. Wenceslaus, father-in-law of Mr. Vijay Amirtharaj, Indian Tennis Star. But the ‘Virakesari’ building was left intact. This was not by sheer oversight—but a deliberate omission! Sri Lanka President Mr. Jayawardene was born in this building and the Sinhalese rioters were not prepared to commit the sacrilegious act of pulling it down!

Does this not clearly indicate to the world as to who masterminded the riots? In spite of this Mr. Jayawardene is making futile attempts to shift the burden and making a number of unconcerned persons scape-goated!

— *from Genocide in Sri Lanka*, by M.S. Venkatachalam, 1987. p.47

But the Prime Minister’s words convey nothing like the scale of the violence which occurred on the 25th, the 26th, and over the rest of that week. Tamil shops, houses and business premises were systematically fired. In Colombo at least 500 cars—some with drivers and passengers inside—were burnt. Tamil-owned buses, running between Colombo and Jaffna were burnt. Tamil patients in hospitals were attacked and killed – some had their throats cut as they lay in their beds. Tamil doctors had their dispensaries and houses burnt and destroyed. In Welikade jail Tamil detainees were brutally and cold-bloodedly murdered, over two separate days. Thirty-five were killed on the 25th, another



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seventeen on the 27th in a 'prison riot', allegedly by Sinhalese prisons who somehow got out of their cells, somehow got weapons, and somehow could not be restrained by their (armed) prison guards. (In Jaffna jail, about the same time guards were able to shoot down and kill four Tamil prisoners allegedly attempting to escape.) Altogether, fifty-three Tamil prisoners died in Welikade, their bodies smashed and mutilated.

— *"Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust."* N. Shanmugathan. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.65-66.

Sri Lanka's capital city for most of the last fortnight looked like it had been taken by a conquering army. Street after street lay empty to the gaze, although the dawn-to-dusk curfew had been lifted, and small, watchful groups of Sinhalese dotted the side-walks, providing flesh and blood counterpoints to the hundreds of burnt-out shops and factories and homes that lined the once bustling markets and roads. The arson was professional, charred shells fallen in on themselves, with blackened signboards announcing Tamil ownership hanging askew, here and there a liquor shop with hundreds of broken bottles littering the floor, or a jewellery mart with showcases battered in and the gold and the gems carefully removed before the torching. Fifty yards from the Indian High Commission, right next door to the police headquarters, stood a huge block, blackened and devastated. 'The shops in this block had heavy grille doors,' recalled an eye-witness, 'so an army truck was used as a battering ram to break through them, and then the soldiers sprang in with Sinhala battle cries to claim the lion's share of the loot.'

— *an article published in India Today. Reproduced in "Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust."* N. Shanmugathan. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.66.

As a result of the decision to bury the soldiers in Colombo many people, relatives and friends and villagers from the homes of the soldiers, collected at the cemetery. Many people who would have attended the funerals had they been held in the separate birth-places of the soldiers, had come to Colombo to attend the ceremony there instead. There may have been as many as 300 persons from each area and, in addition of course, many other people from Colombo were at the cemetery as well.

According to observers the crowd which collected (reported in one paper as consisting of 10,000 people) was restive. There was a delay in the arrival of the bodies, and, by the time of their arrival, feelings were running very high.

— *"The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983."* Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in *Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege* by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.11.

Senior members of the government, members of opposition parties, lawyers, members of citizens' groups, people affected by the violence, and international aid workers interviewed were all consistent in stating that, from the beginning of the disturbances, many people in the mobs in the streets possessed election lists containing the names and addresses of all those who lived in particular streets. The lists indicated the houses in occupation by Tamils and also whether the owner of a house was Tamil, Sinhalese or Muslim. The possessions and houses of Tamil people were then systematically attacked. If a Tamil family were living in a house rented from Sinhalese owners the house itself was not damaged but the furniture and property of the Tamils within it would be destroyed. In many streets all the Tamil-owned shops were destroyed but those owned by Muslims or Sinhalese were spared. The same thing happened with houses. ...



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— *"The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.13.*

... the killers, the arsonists and the looters did not rise from the ranks of the most disadvantaged. It was Colombo that was burning on 23 July 1983. The fires spread to other towns and distant bazaars later. The social complexion of the marauding mobs was markedly urban – not only such marginal metropolitan groups as shanty dwellers, but strong-arm brigades and 'rapid-deployment forces' which recently emerged under political patronage and semi-educated youths tantalised by a new cult of violence and captivated by newly acquired life-styles.

— *"Paradise — and Hostage to the Past." Mervyn de Silva. Far Eastern Economic Review, January 26, 1984, pp. 22-23.*

People identified as Tamils as a result of the questioning were told to get out of their cars, and their cars were set alight. If they were Sinhalese they were allowed to go, although often demands were made for petrol from the car, and the petrol was then used in the destruction of Tamil property. Early in the week the mobs were relatively orderly; later in the week many of the aggressors were reported to be drunk, having rifled liquor stores. This made the encounters even more terrifying for those stopped.

— *"The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.14.*

One thing is quite clear: they did not start spontaneously. On the morning of 24 July, many people apparently went about their ordinary business in Colombo, with no forebodings and no expectations of anything untoward. And then, suddenly, the streets were full of goondas, Tamil houses and shops were on fire, Tamil possessions were being destroyed, and Tamils were being killed. Nor was this merely the observation of a few individuals: it is vouched for by the government itself. In a speech made in the immediate aftermath, on 29 July, Dr. Anandatissa de Alwis, the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, said this:-

"Look at some of the facts that you know yourself ... There was a pattern about this, wherever the rioting took place. The similarity of the action of those who took part in it. How can there be a pattern if there was no leadership? Pre-planning, instruction about what each group was to do. You saw for yourself, for example, that although riots took place, burnings of houses and shops took place in widely different parts of the city and its suburbs, there was a distinct method in every case. The rioters came along, took out the people from their homes, or the employees and proprietors from the shops, put them on the road, then carried some of the goods on to the road and set fire to them. Then they proceeded inside the workshop, or factory or house, to set fire to the rest. Now, if this happened in Borella and didn't happen in Nugegoda, then there is no pattern. Then there is no unity of design. There was no instruction. But wherever it happened, it was exactly in the same way. This was the pattern. Of course there was looting, but there were - according to information now in the hands of the Government - definite instructions not to loot. This instruction was given apparently in order not to attract public disapproval and resistance to what they were doing, or the people doing it. Further, the looting that took place was an activity in which the locals took part. (As you know, the



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thugs and hooligans you find in every street junction were happy to do the looting once the job had been done).

So, to that degree, there was a pattern. Another thing that everybody noticed, or most people noticed if they were looking, was that the looters, or the people who came to burn and pillage, carried lists of names and addresses. They knew exactly where to go. They didn't search. They looked at a piece of paper, looked at a number and there they were. Therefore, there was a pre-planning. We now understand from the information in the hands of the Government that these names and addresses were taken from the Register of Electors, from the Parliamentary Voters' Lists, and were prepared very much in advance for an occasion such as this, the timing of which was left for various events which might or might not have happened, or might or might not have been engineered."

Clearly, this was not a spontaneous upsurge of communal hatred among the Sinhala people - nor was it, as has been suggested in some quarters, a popular response to the killing of 13 soldiers in an ambush by Tamil Tigers on the previous day, which was not even reported in the newspapers until after the riots began. It was a series of deliberate acts, executed in accordance with a concerted plan, conceived and organised well in advance. But who were the planners and organisers, responsible for what they began, and for all its foreseeable consequences in killings, maimings, and loss of property, necessarily followed by a major setback for Sri Lanka's economy?

— Paul Sieghart. *"Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors". Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka in January 1984 on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists and its British Section, JUSTICE. International Commission of Jurists, March 1984.*

Displacement of Tamils as refugees domestically and abroad:

Apart from those killed – the government admitted to a death toll of 350, but the suspected numbers are larger, the Tamil estimates nearing 2,000—the largest immediate tragedy was the number of refugees who had abandoned their homes and their jobs and were crowded in the terrified disarray into some fifteen refugee camps in Colombo (called "care and welfare centers"). The estimates of the refugees in the Colombo camps alone ranged from 80,000 to 100,000. In *The Guardian* (9 August 1983) David Beresford wrote: "The Sri Lanka Government told foreign diplomats last night that about 100,000 people needed homes, clothes, household goods, and food for between three and six months, following last month's communal violence." The government also estimated that some 18,000 households were affected.

— from *Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.22.

It will be some time before the full toll of these weeks of fire and brimstone is known, partly because so many Tamils have fled their homes. The refugee camp population had reached 76,000 by the end of the first week, according to official figures released by diplomats. On July 29th the first boatload of displaced Tamils set off for the relative safety of Jaffna. Other boats, including three lent by India, will continue the sea-lift.

— from *"Sri Lanka Puts a Torch to Its Future". The Economist. 6 August 1983, pp. 25-26.*



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Colombo's refugee camps, which once housed 90,000, had dwindled in number last fortnight, and the 13,000 Tamils left behind had nowhere to go — descendants of estate workers brought over from India by the British, they had missed the repatriation bus, holding neither Indian nor Sri Lankan citizenship, were stateless and unwanted. Not for them the options available to the indigenous Jaffna Tamils, 40,000 of whom had fled north by ship, train or bus, or to the lucky ones who owned Indian passports and could expect refuge beyond the Palk Strait.

— from *"The Aftermath"* by Chaitanya Kalbag. *India Today*. 15 September 1983, pp. 66-76.

Just before dawn on August 22 the vessel *Bharat Seema* slipped out of Colombo's harbour, on an 11-hour journey to Tuticorin. The ship carried 340 so-called India-Sri Lankan passport holders, people who had been fortunate to have beaten the October 31, 1981, deadline for obtaining Indian citizenship. There were 540 such refugees in the St Thomas Prep School camp next to the American Embassy on Galle Road. 'Most of these refugees are estate workers who have managed to get here from places near Colombo,' says Nirupama Rao, first secretary in the Indian High Commission, who is in charge of repatriation. The refugees who didn't make the ship lacked travel documents, or family cards issued by the Sri Lanka Government. All the estate workers had fled to Colombo because their lines, quarters, had been burnt down on the estates.

One of those who failed to board the *Bharat Seema* is a frightened, dumpy man, grey stubble framing unkempt spectacles. Mahalingam Acharya, 64, came to Sri Lanka in 1948 from Madurai in Tamil Nadu. A goldsmith by training, his shop in Urugodawatte was burnt down by maddened Sinhala neighbours in 1958. Since then Acharya had been eking out an existence by reading horoscopes. He could not foresee his own fate. On July 25 his house was set upon by a howling gang of Sinhala youths and his wife was killed before his eyes. Acharya wanders around the St Thomas camp, waiting for his papers to be issued, wistfully watching the refugees who are preparing to leave for India, their passports being stamped by a harassed Sri Lankan immigration officer at a rickety school desk in the playground.

Each family leaving for India has been promised a compensation of 1,000 Sri Lankan rupees (Rs 400). But that amount will be paid into an Indian bank at a later date. Manel Abeysekara, the bustling Foreign Office coordinator of the camp, claims that the food, supplied by the Ceylon Hotels Corporation, is not bad at all. 'Nobody's assessed the damage to these refugees' property,' she says, 'and so we are not paying any compensation, except the 1,000 rupees.'

In every camp last fortnight the authorities were busy trying to get people to leave, either giving them dry rations of rice, flour and sugar and asking them to go home or to the friendly north, or cutting down on food rations in the hope that more would leave. Hundreds of refugees who trickled in late from around Colombo or from the estates around Nuwara Eliya and Hatton were turned away.

M.S. Croose, 29, is the eldest of four brothers and three sisters, and all of them have somehow got into the St Thomas camp for Indian passport holders, although they are stateless. 'I have been trying since 1976 for an Indian passport,' says Croose, who trained as an electrician, 'but I wasn't lucky. I couldn't take a job in the Middle East because I was stateless.'

— from *"The Aftermath"* by Chaitanya Kalbag. *India Today*. 15 September 1983, pp. 66-76.



Targeting of Tamils' businesses, economic fallout:

The same newspaper [The Guardian, 9 Aug. 1983] went on to report the second terrifying aspect of these riots: aside from Tamil homes, there was systematic destruction of shops and commercial and industrial establishments, many of which employed Sinhalese labor, and which were an essential arm of the UNP government's policy of economic development. Beresford reported that government officials aid in the same briefing session for donor countries: "About 100 industrial plants were severely damaged or destroyed, including 20 garment factories. The cost of industrial reconstruction was estimated at 2,000 million rupees (£55 million). This did not include damaged shops."

— *from Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.22.

Around the same time in early August, the New York Times supplemented the information on the scale of the economic destruction: "The shells of [Tamil-owned] businesses line Galle Road, the main waterfront thoroughfare, their scorched signs forlornly advertising the names that marked them for destruction. Lakshmi Mahal, pawnbroker, or Ram Gram stores and florist. ... Damage estimates are uncertain and incomplete, but the total economic loss has been placed at \$300 million or more, and 150,000 are said to have been rendered jobless. ... About 10,000 foreign tourists were here when the trouble started. All but about 1,500 have left." A significant portion of the jobless included Sinhalese workers, some of whom had participated in the very destruction of their own places of work.

— *from Sri Lanka – Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*, by S. J. Tambiah, 1986. p.22-23.

The violence was vicious and bloody. But what distinguished it from many other communal Asian riots was the way that the mob singled out specific business premises. In street after street in Colombo groups of rioters hit only at factories (as well as homes) owned by Tamils. Their careful selectivity is apparent now. In each street individual business premises were burned down, while others alongside stood unscathed. Troops and police (almost exclusively Sinhalese) either joined the rioters or stood idly by. President Jayewardene failed either intentionally or because he lost control to assert his authority quickly enough to stem the damage.

— *from Financial Times*, 12 August 1983. (reproduced in "Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust." N. Shanmugathan. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.66-67.)

Whereas, in the past, communal violence had been sporadic and spontaneous and directed against people, the violence now was not of this nature but clearly directed against property, means of livelihood and production. The aim of the first attacks was destruction only, though looting did follow. However, it seems that the looting was carried out by gangs different to those involved in the destruction. It was reported by many people, including some Sinhalese, that in some instances students from Buddhist schools followed on behind the first rioters and that some Buddhist monks were seen amongst the gangs.



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— *“The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983.” Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.12.*

Very many of those rendered jobless are Sinhalese. The disaster has not had adverse consequence for the Tamils alone. Thousands of Sinhalese have, as a result of the destruction of Tamil property, suffered severe dislocation in their own lives. For instance very early in the week of violence, 40 Tamil-owned factories around Colombo were reported to have been destroyed with the loss of 25,000 jobs and, after the violence, Mr. Premadasa, the Prime Minister, was reported to have stated that 150,000 jobs had been lost, and that 90% of these jobs belonged to Sinhalese people.

— *“The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983.” Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.12.*

The losses are still being added up in the statistical department of the central bank, which has sent out teams of accountants and surveyors to do an on-site census of destruction. The preliminary estimate of \$150m worth of damage to commercial and residential property — equivalent to about 4% of Sri Lanka’s GNP — is almost certainly too low, because it is based on book value; replacement costs might be five to 10 times higher. It also excludes the value of lost stocks, lost output and lost export orders.

— *from “Sri Lanka Puts a Torch to Its Future”. The Economist. 6 August 1983, pp. 25-26.*

Last fortnight’s violence threw another estimated 50,000 people out of work, the majority of them Sinhala, and resulted in a loss of 3 billion Sri Lankan rupees (Rs. 120 crore).

— *from “The Tamil Tragedy” by Chaitanya Kalbag. India Today. 31 August 1983, pp.14-23.*

Redirection of blame for riots onto Tamil political parties, communist political parties, and Tamil Tigers:

This July 23, 1983, was the sixth anniversary of Mr. [President] Jayawardene’s rule in Sri Lanka. On the same day, 13 army men were killed in an ambush, allegedly by liberation Tigers or some such terrorists! It is generally known fact that this was a sequel of the rape of 4 Tamils, all inmates of a hostel, by army men and among them 2 committed suicide subsequently. Though this is dismissed by the authorities as a ‘mere story’, there are evidences to show that the rape actually took place and only the culprits concerned were attacked in this ambush!

Mr. Ashish Ray has written in “Sunday”, that “while this (ambush against army men) was probably an important spark that has set off the conflagration, what has not come to light is the possibility of an outrage by soldiers on a girls’ college in Tinnavelly in Jaffna in the last week of July.”



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— *from Genocide in Sri Lanka, by M.S. Venkatachalam, 1987. p.21.*

Some argue that the killing of the thirteen Sinhala soldiers in Jaffna was the cause. This is simply to beg the question. That was not the cause. ... When men, Sinhala or Tamil, put on a uniform and acquire the licence to kill, they, themselves, stand the risk of being killed. This has nothing to do with their race. The armed forces are the main form of the state machinery which the government maintains to repress both the Sinhalese and Tamil people. The same Sinhala soldier who is today killing a Tamil in the North and getting shot at in return, will, tomorrow, in the South, gun down a Sinhalese when ordered to do so, indeed, was the case in 1971. ... Some others argue that the violence against the Tamils was a natural reaction to the cry for a separate state of Eelam. If that was so, why were the poor plantation workers of Indian Tamil origin attacked? They or their leaders never asked for a separate state. ... So much for the easy rationalisations. When one sifts the evidence, two factors become very clear. Firstly, it is obvious that, in every area, the attacks were carried out with absolute precision: the attackers were supplied, in advance, with exact details and addresses of all Tamil premises. The systematic nature of the savagery was commented upon widely by foreign eye-witness reporters. Secondly, in every area, eye witnesses identified the looters and arsonists and murderers as government supporters. The fact that the armed forces actively participated in this holocaust, or at best remained inactive, can only be explained by the fact that they were sure of protection.

— *"Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust." N. Shanmugathasan. Race & Class, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.69-70*

It looks increasingly as though, since July 1983, the mass media has been used directly by the government to spread downright lies and propaganda. For example, the Sun on 25 July reported (on official authority) that the funerals of the soldiers were to be held at Kanatte when the Prime Minister himself was later to say that a decision had been taken against such a move. The result was the massing of angry Sinhalese mobs. J.R. Jayewardene used the media repeatedly to exonerate himself from blame - resorting to quite obvious untruths - he did not find out about the Welikade massacre until it was too late to hold inquests, he did not know about the excesses of his armed forces in Jaffna, but he did know that the pogrom of July 1983 had been part of a left-wing plot.

— *from "Human rights violations in Sri Lanka." Race & Class, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.121.*

All reports indicated a great deal of on-going hostility between the armed forces and the civilian population of the northern province. This is documented in more detail later in the report in Section IIa xv) and xvi).

The ambush of the 13 soldiers was carried out in this climate of tense hostility. Quite apart from the general animosity which was reported, there were allegations that the ambush was in retaliation to a very recent raping of several Tamil girls by soldiers.

— *"The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.8.*



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Violence erupted also in places such as Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla and Bandarawella. On each of these occasions it followed a similar pattern. The incidents were started off by people coming in from outside the districts, lists were used to identify Tamil property and systematic attacks were made upon it: the local people were then encourage to follow with further depredations.

The uniformity of this pattern has led to allegations that there was considerable organisation behind the events. Many people interviewed were of the opinion that, although the eruption of violence may have been triggered off by the reaction to the ambush of the 13 soldiers, this was only the flash-point and that, had that ambush not occurred, something else would have acted as a catalyst to spark off the violence.

— *“The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983.” Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p.13.*

It has been estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 Tamils were slaughtered in the "Black July" carnage—including 53 young Tamil political detainees lynched in the capital's main prison—and about 150,000 made homeless. Some of these refugees migrated to the north in search of relative safety while others fled across the sea to the Tamil province in south India. Numerous eyewitness accounts of the July 1983 atrocities suggest that UNP activists organized and led the killings and the arson of Tamil homes and business, and that in many places police and even military personnel joined the rioters. President Jayewardene failed to condemn the violence or express sympathy to the survivors; instead he blamed Tamils for bringing it upon themselves. The government then proceeded to bar TULF parliamentarians elected in 1977 from participating in parliamentary proceedings.

— *from Contested Lands by Sumantra Bose, 2007. p. 28.*

Suppression of media (foreign & domestic) during the riots:

Journalists from other countries, including India, were virtually being held incommunicados. Their reports were lacerated with the blood red pencil of the censor who cut out all that she found was “objectionable”. Many journalists stopped writing reports altogether since what remained after the censor went through them was a few lines. More enterprising of the scribes, however, smuggled out their reports through persons leaving the country.

All hotels in Colombo were under ordered from the Government not to allow the journalists use their telex and making a telephone call to India was an impossibility during the last week of July.

— *Patrick Jonas, reporting in The Week. (reproduced in Genocide in Sri Lanka, by M.S. Venkatachalam, 1987. p.45.)*

The censor was highly capricious and slashed out news without any sense of reason. Photography had been banned and one photographer had his camera smashed.



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Journalists were no longer issued curfew passes. They were given passes to go only from their hotels to the office of the censor.

— *William Claiborne, Delhi-based South Asia correspondent of Washington Post. (reproduced in Genocide in Sri Lanka, by M.S. Venkatachalam, 1987. p.45.)*

Somehow he [William Claiborne, Delhi-based South Asia correspondent of the Washington Post] managed to get some information and reported that shops and restaurants of Sri Lanka nationals of Tamil origin were selectively burnt and Sinhalese shops and establishments had been left intact –even their name boards were not touched by the hooligans and looters!

— *from Genocide in Sri Lanka, by M.S. Venkatachalam, 1987. p.45.*

Barely hours after I touched down in Colombo, I was kept under strict surveillance. My phone was tapped, my notes confiscated. Getting a curfew pass proved to be a Herculean task. The inspector in charge of issuing a pass refused to give me one, saying with genuine concern that if I stepped into the street during curfew it would be suicide....

— *Anita Pratap, in Sunday weekly magazine (India). (reproduced in Genocide in Sri Lanka, by M.S. Venkatachalam, 1987. p.47.)*

The suppression of information critical of the government extends to foreign journalists and agencies. Jayewardene expelled journalist David Selbourne in June 1983, smearing him as a marxist troublemaker, and a month later a UPI journalist was expelled for exposing Jayewardene's call for foreign arms. Amnesty International and the British Guardian, which have both published damning reports on the violence against the Tamils, have been discredited in the Sri Lankan parliament and press.

— *from "Human rights violations in Sri Lanka." Race & Class, XXVI, 1 (1984). p. 120.*

Note: A speech by David Selbourne can be found below.

The killing of the 13 soldiers was reported immediately by the media and the names of the soldiers were published, but the killing of the civilians by the soldiers on the following day was not reported. Had the deaths of civilians in Jaffna on July 24th been reported events might have turned out very differently. Two weeks later the President in answer to a question asked at a press conference is reported to have said that he had heard that some 20 civilians in Jaffna had been killed by troops on a rampage, and indicated at the time that he had then only just been informed of the killings. Even then that information was not made public in Sri Lanka. It was, however, published in the British newspaper, The Guardian, and in other foreign newspapers, and several people whom we met had learned of it from those sources.



— *“The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983.” Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. p. 10.*

Psychological impact of the Riots:

In a sense, it was the mental agony and the trauma, the scars in the minds of people, that were worse. Imagine finding yourself overnight without a roof over your head, all your life’s possessions and savings gone up in flames, your wife’s thali-koddi and other jewellery stolen, yourself standing with only the clothes you wear and also realising that many of your relations and friends are in the same plight and that, in many cases, the sources of employment had disappeared?

Can there be anything more demoralising? It is a terrible feeling. It was a feeling that thousands of Tamils underwent during that terrible week in July. The Tamils could not understand how the Sinhalese people, among whom they had lived reasonably peacefully all these years, could have nurtured such venom and hatred against them. The greatest loss is that the Tamils have lost confidence in the Sinhalese. They can no longer feel secure in the South.

— *“Sri Lanka: the story of the holocaust.” N. Shanmugathasan. Race & Class, XXVI, 1 (1984). pp.67-68.*

Food shortages and inflated prices are one result. The Tamil industrial base, built up over generations, is no more. Censored news broadcasts are mainly about the efforts of government agencies to fill the food gap. These two weeks of terror will cripple Sri Lanka materially for years, but the damage to the national psyche may be even longer-lasting. A separatist movement can sometimes be stamped out by determined repression. Two alienated communities cannot be welded back together by similar means.

— from *“Sri Lanka Puts a Torch to Its Future”*. *The Economist*. 6 August 1983, pp. 25-26.

‘The Tamils have dominated the commanding heights of everything good in Sri Lanka’, explained the soft-spoken Cambridge-educated finance minister. Mr Ronnie de Mel is too sophisticated to use the term on the tip of many Sinhalese tongues these days — the need for a ‘final solution’ to the Tamil problem. But, even for him, the ‘only solution’ is to ‘restore the rights of the Singalese majority’.

Restoring Singalese rights is a code phrase for dislodging the Tamils from their disproportionate influence over large sectors of the Sri Lankan economy. This is what the Singalese mobs set out to do when they put their torches to thousands of carefully targeted Tamil factories and shops. Now the government is a bout to advance this process by expropriating all damaged properties. Many Tamils will assist them by leaving the country.

— from *“Sri Lanka Puts a Torch to Its Future”*. *The Economist*. 6 August 1983, pp. 25-26.



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

A 28 year-old systems analyst, a Sri Lanka n Tamil who wishes to remain unidentified, had an even ghastlier experience to relate: 'That morning, we were having a meeting in the office when we heard the sounds of mob fury. We went out onto the balcony and what we witnessed was systematic looting and arson by a merciless mob. The leader had a voters' list with him to identify Tamil houses. They would mark a Tamil house, forcibly enter, smash the furniture and window panes, drag the inmates out and kill them. Another passing mob would stop cars, extort patrol and set fire to what was left of the houses. I rushed home and told my parents we must leave. Hardly had I said that when we heard the next house being ransacked. We grabbed our passports and a change of clothes and rushed out. A Sinhalese swung at me with a spear. Luckily, a Sinhalese shopkeeper nearby stopped him by telling him we spoke Sinhalese and had done a lot of social work locally. It was like being born again when we got out of the country.'

— from *"Tamil Nadu: Backlash"* by S.H. Venkatramani. *India Today*. 31 August 1983, p.18.

Colombo's refugees were only the tip of the iceberg. Although government spokesman Douglas Liyanage cheerfully told newsmen every day that the refugees were all 'going back' to a normal life, he was being disingenuous. Thousands of Indian Tamil estate workers who had hidden for weeks in the island's central highlands after their homes were destroyed were steadily fleeing by bus — and even on foot — to hastily set up refugee camps in Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and Jaffna in the north. The majority of these workers had been affected by earlier violence in 1977 and 1981 and had fled north then too, returning to the estates after the violence abated. Said M.E. Pius, the parish priest of Kilinochchi Roman Catholic church: 'We have already set up five camps in our town since August 13 and housed more than a thousand refugees. This is only the beginning. In 1977 there were more than 10,000 of them.' The refugees are living in tents in open spaces in the small Tamil town, and Father Pius says there has been absolutely no food aid from the Government — and even the maximum permissible food allowance per refugee per day is only Sri Lankan Rs. 7.

And so the tragedy unfolds. Every few years there is a venting of the Sinhala spleen, and a mass movement of terrorized Tamils to the north and east of the island, an unending cycle of pain and disillusionment. 'This time we will not go back,' says Santhanam, who worked up the courage to travel with 15 others by bus from Matale in the island's centre on August 24. 'They set fire to our houses in the night,' sobs his wife Unnamulai, 'and the owners of our tea and cocoa estate could not help us. We hid for two weeks in the jungle. We will never go back.'

— from *"The Aftermath"* by Chaitanya Kalbag. *India Today*. 15 September 1983, pp. 66-76.

Welikade political prisoners massacre:



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The government sat silent during days of terror. It sat silent when one of the most horrendous crimes of the country's history was being perpetrated in Colombo's high security Welikade prison. On 25 July, while the city lay under a total curfew and helicopters circled the prison roof, between 300 and 400 armed prisoners massacred thirty-seven political prisoners: all Tamils held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act who had been transferred to Colombo for 'security' reasons. Among the dead were Kuttimani and Jegan, both symbols of Tamil resistance. Two days later, without government silence being broken, the same macabre nightmare was re-enacted, and eighteen political prisoners were butchered in the prison, including the Gandhiyam Society's Dr Rajasunderam. A senior minister later said that the Sinhalese were only 'pacified' after the massacre at Welikade.

— *"The state against Tamils."* Nancy Murray. *Race & Class*, XXVI, 1 (1984). p.104

There is of course one recent event that was scarcely calculated to instill such confidence. The last outbreak of communal violence began on 24 July 1983. For day after day, Tamils (of both the "Sri Lankan" and "Indian" varieties) were beaten, hacked or burned to death in the streets, on buses, and on trains, not only in Colombo but in many other parts of the Island - sometimes in the sight of horrified foreign tourists. Their houses and shops were burned and looted. Yet the security forces seemed either unwilling or unable to stop it - indeed, in Jaffna and Trincomalee, some members of the armed forces themselves joined in the fray, claiming an admitted 51 lives. Seen from the Tamil point of view, either the Government had lost control of the situation, or it was deliberately standing by while they were being taught a lesson. The first massacre in Welikada jail took place on 25 July, and claimed another 35 lives. The second - allegedly foreseen by the prison staff - came two days later, and claimed another 18. Not until the very end of that second episode was a special army unit sent in, to save the lives of the few remaining Tamil political prisoners.

— Paul Sieghart. *"Sri Lanka: A Mounting Tragedy of Errors"*. Report of a Mission to Sri Lanka in January 1984 on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists and its British Section, JUSTICE. International Commission of Jurists, March 1984.

JULY 1983 WITNESS TESTIMONIALS

Sri Lanka's Week of Shame: an eyewitness account

N.Sanmugathan

Leader, Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist), writing anonymously in *Race &*

Class, A Journal for Black & Third World Liberation

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For the second time in my life (the first was during the 1958 communal riots), I had to undergo the indignities associated with being a Tamil in Sri Lanka. This time, it was under the Dharmista (Righteousness) government of Junius Richard Jayewardene.

Although communal violence has been frequent in Sri Lanka, it had previously always been contained. But not so, this time. It was a horrifying nightmare – looting, burning, murder on an unimaginable scale. Colombo resembles a bombed city in places – charred and blackened, roofless gaping buildings where prosperous houses, shops and factories once stood. What is dreadful to realise is that the whole operation was planned and carried out with virtually



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military precision. Tamil and Indian houses, shops and factories had quite clearly been marked out earlier. And although everything took place so quickly and over such a large area, giving the idea of spontaneity, everywhere the pattern was the same. As the BBC is reported to have said: 'The idea seems to have been to destroy the economic base of the Tamils.' It was an attempt at genocide.

Someone seemed to have planned the whole thing and waited only for an opportunity. And the opportunity came on the night of 23 July, at about 11.30 pm, when the so-called terrorists of the North, carrying on an armed struggle for a separate state of Eelam for the Tamils, ambushed and killed thirteen soldiers who were all Sinhalese (the Sri Lankan army is almost entirely Sinhalese). This sparked the fuse.

The army had shot and killed two 'terrorists' in the North a week earlier. The Tigers, as the Tamil militant youth call themselves, had been planning a retaliation. They had lured the army out several times on false information. Then, on 23 July 'information' about the whereabouts of some 'terrorists' was fed to the army. Ignoring an order not to go on night patrol, armed soldiers went out in two vehicles. They were easily ambushed. A detonator, which had recently been stolen from the Kankasanturai cement factory, was used to blow up the vehicles. When the soldiers got out, they were shot down from all sides. Thirteen died on the spot, two were wounded.

Sunday

Colombo received the news on Sunday, the 24th. By evening, crowds had gathered at Colombo's main cemetery where, apparently, the government had made an attempt to bury the bodies. Nobody knows why the government decided on this step, instead of returning the bodies to the areas from which the soldiers came. It seems to have had some confused idea of reaping political capital by rousing hatred among the Sinhalese against the 'terrorists'. In any event, a crowd of thousands surrounded the President's house at Ward Place (not his official residence) and demanded the bodies. The crowd was tear-gassed. But the government retreated. That night, a section of this crowd started the communal violence by setting fire to Tamil houses at the Borella end of Rosmead Place (near the cemetery).

By seven in the evening, I received the news of the attack on the army. All Tamils started phoning each other – expecting the worst, but hoping for the best: At about 1 o'clock, on the morning of Monday, the 25th, I was woken by a telephone call from a Sinhalese friend telling me that Tamil houses in Rosmead Place were burning. It was the start of a nightmare that was to last for days.

Monday

The morning newspapers, despite press censorship, published in headlines a statement from the Defence Minister announcing not merely the killing of the thirteen soldiers but also that their funeral, with full state honours, would be held that morning. This was nothing but sheer provocation. Thousands gathered near the cemetery and began looting and burning in every direction. Within hours, Colombo was caught up in the worst holocaust it had ever experienced. Tamil shops and houses were singled out and looted and burnt, while many Tamils were murdered – 500 in the first two days it was estimated. More than 500 cars and lorries were burnt and their wreckage left on the roads. Liquor shops owned by Tamils and Indians were looted and the mobs got drunk. The Indian-owned chain of liquor shops – Victoria Stores – were all looted.

There is no doubt that someone had identified the Tamil houses, shops and factories earlier. Seventeen industrial complexes belonging to some of the leading Tamil and Indian industrialists were razed to the ground, including those of the multi-millionaire and firm supporter of the ruling party, A.Y. Gnanam (the only capitalist in Sri Lanka to whom the World Bank offered a loan), and the influential Maharaja Organisation. The Indian-owned textile mills of



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Hidramani Ltd, which used a labour force of 4,000 in the suburbs of Colombo, were gutted. So was K.G. Industries Ltd, Hentleys Garments, one of the biggest garment exporters, and several other large textile and garment manufacturing establishments geared for export. The Indian Overseas Bank and the Bank of Oman were set on fire. Several cinemas owned by Tamils were destroyed. The list is endless. The suburb of Wellawatte, where the largest concentration of Tamils had lived, resembled a bombed town. It will have to be re-built. Probably the worst affected area was the Pettah, the commercial centre of Colombo, where Tamil and Indian traders played a dominant role. Hardly a single Tamil or Indian establishment was left standing.

A most distressing aspect of the vandalism was the burning and the destruction of the houses and dispensaries of eminent Tamil doctors – some with over a quarter of a century of service in Sinhala areas. Tamils form a good proportion of Sri Lanka's medical profession. More than one doctor is rumoured to have been killed in Colombo and in other cities.

While all this was happening, the police and the armed forces were more conspicuous by their absence. They either looked the other way or joined in the looting. The army was the worst offender. Several onlookers have reported that army men traveling in lorries waved merrily to the looters, who waved back. No action whatsoever was taken to disperse the mobs. Not even tear-gas was used. The criminal gangs gained in confidence.

During the day, as more and more reports came of increasing violence, I debated whether to move to a safer place with my family. We were living near the heart of the city. But I put off the decision, hoping against hope that the situation would improve, although we had been watching smoke spiraling from burnt houses half a mile away. By this time, about three other Tamil refugees with two small children had taken shelter in our house. Their houses had been attacked. To make matters worse, the telephone failed. Not just my telephone, but all adjacent telephones. We were effectively cut off. By about five in the evening, smoke erupted from two houses which were burning scarcely a hundred yards away. We could not delay any more. Eight adults and three children all vaulted over the high back wall of our house and took shelter at the Muslim house behind ours. Huddled together in the back verandah – lest we be spotted – we lived through a nightmare which I would not care to have repeated.

Tuesday

As soon as dawn broke, we returned to our home and, on our way, saw the charred remains of the two burnt Tamil houses. Again, the debate as to whether we should leave for safer places. By ten in the morning, Sinhalese friends came by car and we decided to move. Our family split up to go to two different houses. I went with a nephew to a Sinhala friend's house in Ratmalana, a suburb where several factories and houses had also been burnt. I had to keep a low profile in my friend's house so that people would not see that he was harbouring Tamils.

While it is true that the Tamils will never forget or forgive the chauvinistic and, criminal elements from among the Sinhalese who wrought havoc on the properties and the persons of the Tamils, it is equally true that they salute those brave and good-hearted Sinhalese who sheltered a large number of Tamils at great risk to themselves. It was with one of them that I sheltered.

We were still under the curfew imposed the previous day. In fact, the friends who took us away in their cars had to have curfew passes from the police. But the fact that a curfew had been imposed was no safeguard – the looters and communal gangs were now confident that the police and the armed forces would not act against them. By now, it was being openly whispered that the government, to all intents and purposes, had lost control of the armed forces. Only the navy, which alone had not suffered casualties from the terrorists, was supposed to be reliable. In fact, when the Prime Minister toured Colombo to see the damages for himself, he was escorted by the Naval Commander.



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Wednesday

As Wednesday dawned, there were still sporadic incidents. The curfew was lifted at dawn to enable people to buy necessary provisions. But food shortages had hit the country – not for lack of stocks, but because the distribution system had broken down. The sacking of 3rd Cross Street and 4th Cross Street at Pettah, the business centre of Colombo, meant that the wholesale trade in rice, which was dominated by Indians, had been disturbed. Most of the grocery shops and retail outlets in and around Colombo were in the hands of the Indians or Tamils. Their destruction meant immediate shortages of foodstuffs. Although basic essentials were available in small quantities, many things, like cigarettes, became unobtainable. Queues formed for rice and bread and sugar.

By mid-day, I heard the horrible news about the murder of thirty-five Tamil detainees inside Welikade prison. It was a terrific shock that jolted everyone – Tamil and Sinhalese. Looting and burning by unidentifiable gangs, who then disappear, is one thing. But the killing in cold blood of prisoners, who had been committed to prison by courts of law and whose safety was the responsibility of the prison authorities, is quite another. Very few believed the story that these killings were the result of a prison riot. How did the other prisoners get out of their cells? Where did they get their weapons? And, most important, who put these Island Reconvicted Criminals next to the detainees and in the same building? And when?

And even if one overlooked the first killings, how to explain the killing of a further seventeen Tamil detainees on the following day? What were the prison authorities doing for twenty-four hours? Why didn't they send the Tamil detainees to a safer place? This coldly calculated murder of Tamil prisoners, held in custody inside a prison, will be an eternal blot on the Sri Lankan government that nothing can wipe out. An army officer who had visited the prison morgue told me that the detainees must have been attacked with clubs and knives. Kuttimani had been badly slashed. Among the second batch of murdered Tamil detainees was Dr Rajasunderam, the respected leader of the Gandhian movement, based in Vavuniya, which had done yeoman service in resettling refugees of Indian origin from the plantations who had fled an earlier communal conflict.

My Sinhalese friend with whom I was staying was visibly moved by this outrage within the prison. He quoted the following stanza from W.H. Auden, written on the occasion of the death of Yeats:

Intellectual disgrace
Stares from every human face
And the tears of pity lie
Locked and frozen in each eye.
He told me that his tears were not locked
and, as I watched, they fell from his eyes.

Thursday

Rumours were flying fast about the possibility of an Indian invasion – even that Indian troops had already landed in Jaffna. This was, of course, a response to the three-hour debate on the Sri Lankan situation in the Indian parliament and to the telephone conversation that Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had with President Jayewardene, in the course of which she asked him to receive Indian Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao, whom she was sending to Sri Lanka on a fact-finding mission.

Sporadic incidents continued and the food shortage worsened. Another Sinhalese friend brought me some rice and flour. It was reported that seven suspects allegedly carrying small arms and bombs in a bid to destroy Fort station, Colombo's main railway centre, were shot and killed.



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In the late evening the President made a much delayed speech on TV – everyone wondered why he had not addressed the nation earlier. What a sorry performance! There was no condemnation of the communal violence that had taken place; not even a mention of the killing of the Tamils or of the murders inside the prison. His speech was a justification of the violence by the Sinhala mobs and a virtual invitation for more. He said that the actions of the Sinhalese were a reaction to the Tamil demand for separation. He spoke not as the President of Sri Lanka, but as a Sinhala president. In the course of his speech, he announced that legislation would be brought to ban all parties and movements advocating separation, and that severe penalties, including loss of civic rights and the right to practise their professions, would be imposed on members of such parties.

I went to bed that night with the feeling that Tamils in Sri Lanka were not mere step-children but abandoned children. All India Radio announced that Indian Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao would be coming to Sri Lanka the next day.

Friday

My daughter and son-in-law had gone home the previous day and reported that the area around our home was relatively quiet. But I could not find transport to get back home the same day. Petrol, by now, was scarce. However, after breakfast, a friend picked me up and drove me home. And, of course, the sorry sight of burnt shops and houses all along the way. Queues everywhere. My telephone was working, but failed again within an hour or so of my returning. Just before noon, we heard the rumour that there was renewed trouble and that the streets were full of people – running and looting.

What had happened was this: at Gas Work's Street, in the Pettah, someone had thrown a bomb from the top of a building at some soldiers. The soldiers had fired back and killed two people – both Sinhalese. A soldier had mistakenly shot himself. The rumour then spread that the northern terrorists had landed in Colombo and were attacking the army. Within minutes, the roads were choked with people – some fleeing from the terrorists and others preparing to fight them. For a few moments the roles were reversed, and the Sinhalese were fleeing from the alleged Tamil Tigers. In the rush, several Tamils were killed. One of them was cremated where he fell on the road. Apparently, according to all subsequent reports, the violence that took place in the streets on Friday was pretty serious. The curfew was imposed at 2pm, and continued during the entire weekend.

The state radio had openly to discount the rumour before calm was restored. Earlier, other rumours had been used to create tension and chaos: that Palaly airport in Jaffna had been captured by the Tigers; that the military hospital in Jaffna had been attacked; that the Buddhist High Priest of the Nagadipa (an island off Jaffna) Vihara had been killed (it was found that he was alive and well in his village temple in the South where he had gone on personal business); that foreign troops (meaning Indian) had landed in the North; and that the army had suffered severe casualties in the North and (according to some reports) had withdrawn to Vavuniya. All these rumours were officially discounted over the radio by a government spokesman.

For the first time, the army shot and killed some looters – fifteen according to radio reports. If such stern action had been taken by the government on the very first day the trouble started, it could have been nipped in the bud.

The Indian Foreign Minister arrived by special plane and had talks with the President, the Prime Minister and a few cabinet ministers. He also flew by helicopter to Kandy, the hill capital, and met with officials of the Indian High Commission. He is reported to have offered any type of help that Sri Lanka needed, particularly foodstuffs and medical supplies. It seems also to have been agreed that India would send a ship to transport people of Indian origin from the refugee camps to Jaffna in the North. This was reported by All India Radio.



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By now, nearly ten refugee camps had been set up in Colombo to house those Tamils who had been rendered homeless. The figures rose from 20,000 to 50,000 within days, and then reached 79,000. Conditions in the camps were horrible, almost primitive. The Ratmalana airport hangar, which was got ready to house 800 refugees, accommodated 8,000. According to an inmate, there was hardly standing space. There were over 2,000 infants and 500 elderly people, with only one doctor to serve them. Water was scarce and food was inadequate. Similar camps had also been set up in Kandy, Matale, Badulla, etc., where serious incidents had also taken place. Several service organisations were volunteering to look after the refugees.

In the evening, the Prime Minister spoke on TV and radio. For the first time, it became clear that the government was attempting to shift the blame for the communal violence on to those opposed to the government. The Prime Minister, without naming any party or organisation, said that this was an attempt to topple the government by forces that were defeated at the presidential elections and at the referendum and who were jealous at the economic growth the country was making under his government (sic!).

Saturday

The curfew that had been imposed on Friday afternoon was extended to Saturday and Sunday. It was announced on the radio that 600 looters had been arrested, and that those guilty of looting or murder would be punished with death or life imprisonment. Punishment for selling, buying or retaining stolen property would be imprisonment for ten to twenty years. The radio report also discounted a rumour that Sinhala peasants in the up-country were getting ready to attack plantation workers of Indian origin and vice versa.

The Minister for State, Ananda Tissa de Alwis, came on TV and radio to suggest that what had happened was not just a Sinhala/Tamil communal clash but a deep-seated plan to overthrow the government. He also accused an unnamed big power as having master-minded the operation which, he claimed, had been well planned. For the first time, it was suggested that certain political parties who had secret connections with the northern terrorists were behind the violence. Still no names were mentioned.

But the identity of these parties was soon revealed when the radio announced that the Peoples Liberation Front (JVP), the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the Communist Party (CPSL) were behind the riots and were proscribed for the duration of the emergency, and that severe penalties, including death or life imprisonment and loss of civic rights, would be imposed on those having contact with the proscribed parties or failing to report them.

To any intelligent political observer in Sri Lanka this accusation must seem ridiculous. The NSSP and the CPSL had never taken up communal political attitudes, except for a short time in 1964, after the fall of the first coalition government of Mrs Bandaranaike. The JVP had been openly anti-Indian Tamil during its 1971 insurrection, but had dropped that stance since and not revived it. There is no doubt that the CPSL and the JVP, which both had close ties with the Soviet Union, were brought in to lend credence to the theory that the Soviet Union and certain Eastern European countries had master-minded the communal violence.

But most of those who witnessed the scenes of looting and arson recognised the gangs as being UNP elements with particular allegiance to two prominent cabinet ministers – one of whom had been revealed as the force behind the communal violence that took place a month previously at the eastern sea port of Trincomalee. The employees of certain corporations under the ministers and the members of the proUNP trade union of which one minister is president seem to have played a major role in these riots.

It is also significant that a virulently anti-Tamil book in Sinhala, entitled Protect the Buddhist Religion, by Minister Cyril Mathew, had been circulating for some time. It was distributed free of cost. Besides, if the government wants people



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to believe that the nationwide disturbances that took place were due to the JVP, the NSSP and the CPSL, then these parties must indeed be powerful parties!

It is also easily forgotten that the provocation to violence was offered by the government itself, when it announced the funeral of the thirteen dead soldiers at Kanatte for the morning of the 25th. It was the crowd of thousands that gathered there that set on foot the communal violence.

Sunday

All India Radio announced that the Indian Foreign Minister had returned to New Delhi and reported to Indira Gandhi that the situation in Sri Lanka had not been brought under control, and that the conditions in the refugee camps were not satisfactory. It also announced that India was willing to send security forces to Sri Lanka to bring the situation under control, if requested.

I heard that on Tuesday, two Tamils about to leave Sri Lanka by Air Lanka were shot dead by air force guards as they walked to the plane. This incident was witnessed by a Swiss passenger on the same plane.

The Indian radio had been announcing protests and demonstrations all over Tamil Nadu. There had been demonstrations in Bombay and several in Delhi, opposite the Ceylon High Commission, in which MPs of several parties had taken part. M.G. Ramachandran, chief minister of Tamil Nadu, led an all-party delegation from Tamil Nadu to New Delhi to voice concern about events in Sri Lanka to the Indian Prime Minister.

In the evening Minister Gamini Dissanayake went on TV and the radio to repeat the previous day's arguments of his cabinet colleague.

During the day, I spent my time telephoning my Tamil relations and friends. Only in two or three cases did I get an answer. As for the rest, the people had either left for safer places or were in the refugee camps. One of my brothers lived in an area which had escaped the communal flames, but my youngest brother had been assaulted by a mob and robbed of Rs. 900/- – his house was saved from the flames by his Sinhala landlord. My son-in-law's mother and elder brother's family had a tough time in an up-country town and ended up in the refugee camp. Their newly built house had been burnt down. Several of my cousins had their houses burnt.

Monday

Several of my Sinhala comrades called to inquire about my safety. I was touched. Some of them brought foodstuffs, like rice, flour, sugar, biscuits, etc. The generosity of the kind-hearted Sinhala friends became apparent. It was almost as if they wanted to atone for the guilt of the rest.

I received a call from Trincomalee from a friend who told me that, following the incidents at Colombo, there was a fresh outburst of communal violence which left most Tamils homeless. They had taken shelter either at Nilaveli or Muttur. From Jaffna I received a telephone call telling me that there had been no incidents – contrary to the wild rumours that there had been heavy fighting between the army and the terrorists.

I learnt the sad news that, in the small up-country town of Matale, the number of refugees had swelled to 8,000. Among them were my son-in-law's mother and his elder brother's family. Incidents seemed to have taken place at plantation towns like Badulla, Nuwara Eliya and Deniyaya, although no details were available. The refugees in Kandy had swelled to over 12,000. At the University of Peradeniya alone, there were 8,000 refugees.



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Reports came in from South India about acts of self-immolation by Tamils in protest against the violence on Tamils in Sri Lanka. There were also reports of a petition by about seventeen MPs from the British House of Commons to the Prime Minister calling for the cancellation of the October visit to the UK of President Jayewardene, 'the Butcher from Sri Lanka'. A 2,000-strong demonstration was also reported in London in protest against communal violence on Sri Lankan Tamils. A petrol bomb had also been thrown at the Ceylon High Commissioner's residence in London.

Meanwhile, TV stations in the USA, Europe and even the Middle East were showing pictures of Sri Lanka in flames. Apparently, foreigners in Sri Lanka at the time of the outbreak of the violence had not been prevented from taking photographs and filming the scenes of looting and arson. This led to anxious calls from all over the world. Meanwhile, many foreigners — having had a bitter taste of paradise — were leaving in droves and were clogging every available plane out of Sri Lanka. The tourist industry, which had become the second biggest earner of foreign exchange (next to tea), had taken a serious beating — from which it is doubtful it could recover.

Tuesday

Today saw a further procession of Sinhala friends to our home — to bring whatever foodstuffs they could lay their hands on. By noon, we were over-stocked! Things were reported to be returning to normal. The curfew was relaxed and people went out to buy whatever foodstuffs they could.

All over Tamil Nadu in South India, a complete one-day general strike and hartal was observed to protest against the violence on the Tamils in Sri Lanka. It was joined by central government employees in the state. For the first time, a strike took place with the support of the central government, the state government and all political parties of Tamil Nadu. Hunger fasts, meetings and demonstrations took place all over, while in many cities effigies of President Jayewardene were burnt.

Indian Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao reported to both houses of the Indian parliament on his recent visit to Sri Lanka and the discussions he had with the leaders of the Sri Lankan government. He told parliament that there was some substance in press reports that Sri Lanka has appealed to foreign powers for assistance. But he said that it was mischievous to state that this assistance was called for against India. The Sri Lankan High Commissioner in New Delhi had issued a statement denying the news. The Sri Lankan government also expelled an American correspondent of UPI who had sent out the news.

With the restoration of relative calm, the question arose of the future of Tamils in the South of Sri Lanka. Some of the refugees from the camps were already on their way home to Jaffna by ship. More ships were being got ready. India, too, was sending three ships to transport refugees from South to North. What about their future? Could they return to their business, their professions, their employment? Many had had their homes destroyed. There was no place to which they could go. Could they live among the Sinhalese again? What could they do? They could not all go back to Jaffna because there was no economy to support all of them. It is a good guess that most professionals — the doctors, engineers and accountants — would seek jobs abroad. It was already reported that Canada and Australia would ease entry restrictions for Sri Lankan Tamil professionals. All who could would leave Sri Lanka. What about the others who form the majority? Only the future can tell. If one must live, one must live with dignity. Otherwise, life is worthless.

The radio reported that although thirty-one people from the proscribed parties were on the list to be arrested, only eighteen had been detained. The rest had gone underground. Among the latter were the main leaders of the JVP and the NSSP. Severe penalties were announced for anyone harbouring them or failing to report their presence.

Wednesday



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Bread supply to our doorstep resumed. It was a sign of return to normal. Offices had reopened. But no Tamils reported for work.

The government announced the convening of parliament for Thursday to discuss the sixth amendment to the constitution, by which all parties advocating separation would be banned and severe penalties imposed on members. Concretely, this meant that the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), with seventeen seats in parliament (its leader is the leader of the opposition), would be banned. This was basically a stupid move because it meant the government would have no one to talk to.

In the evening, the radio announced a speech by the President to his cabinet. In it, he came out with the fantastic story that, when he had called the first round table conference of political parties for 20 July, he had intended to discuss a solution of the Tamil problem, including granting greater powers to the Development Councils, the withdrawal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, a general amnesty to all those arrested under it (anyway, only a few have been left not murdered) and the withdrawal of the army from the North. But, he moaned, all parties had boycotted the talks and thus prevented him from discussing his proposals for the solution of the problem.

There could be no greater political lie! It brings into question the political honesty of the President. He seems to forget that six years have passed since his government came to power and that, during this long period, he has done nothing (despite election promises) to bring about a settlement of the Tamil problem except more and more repression. He also seems conveniently to ignore his own interview with the Daily Telegraph a couple of weeks ago wherein he had said that he did not care for the opinion of the people of Jaffna and that the conference was only to discuss the question of the suppression of terrorism in the North. Obviously the President had to resort to these blatant falsehoods in order to defend himself against international condemnation.

Sri Lanka's image in the world had sunk low indeed! A Sinhalese specialist doctor returning from London a few days ago had said that he was ashamed to call himself a Sinhalese when he was abroad. The radio also announced that the Constitutional Court, consisting of judges of the Supreme Court, had ruled today that the sixth amendment (barring two sections) was not inconsistent with the constitution. It will undoubtedly be passed in parliament tomorrow. It is unlikely that the TULF will attend. If prisoners can be murdered, anything can happen to MPs.

(This is the 4th of 6 incidents given in: "The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. pp.25-31.)

The following events are reported to have happened to 5 families living close to each other in Karallapona, near Colombo. Their houses were attacked and burned on July 26th. All 5 families then moved into a camp for displaced persons. In the camp the sanitary conditions were so bad that the men decided to go back to their houses to see if they could wash there. While they were doing this a crowd collected at their houses and all 5 men were hacked to death and burnt. All of them had been senior government executives. At the time no one knew why the men failed to return to the camps. Their wives and families left the camps to travel by ship to Jaffna still not knowing the fate of their husbands, but this is the report which now has been transmitted to them.

(This is the 5th of 6 incidents given in: "The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. pp.25-31.)



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At Badulla, a senior lawyer, Mr K. B. Nadaraja, a man now in his 80s, was in his house with his son who is also a lawyer, now employed in Germany. The son was in Badulla on holiday with his children. This family was highly respected in the district. A gang arrived and chased the family from the house. Another lawyer sheltered them, and for this act he was threatened with the same fate. The family was rescued by members of the German Embassy. Mr. Nadaraja and the rest of the family are reported now to have left Sri Lanka.

(This is the 6th of 6 incidents given in: "The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. pp.25-31.)

Also at Badulla the District Judge, Judge Suntheralingam had to flee for his life and was rescued by police.

I heard many other similar accounts of disaster and, in Jaffna, heard also accounts from the families of victims who had been shot at point blank range by soldiers in their own homes on Sunday 24th July. I have not recounted any details of these particular incidents due to the fact that it might put the victims' families in some danger.

There was no suggestion that these people had any involvement with the separatist movement or with the militants.

(This is the 2nd of 6 incidents given in: "The Communal Violence in Sri Lanka, July 1983." Report by LAWASIA, February 1984. Reproduced in its entirety in Sri Lanka: Serendipity under Siege by Patricia Hyndman, 1988. pp.25-31.)

I was told by a senior government official that, on Monday July 24th, at 10.30 a.m. Tamil lawyers came to the Justice Department asking for police protection. Their offices were being attacked and burnt. The Inspector-General of Police was contacted and was asked to provide police protection for the lawyers. The reply was that no help could be given as the situation was the same all over Colombo and all the forces were out.

The government official, who was Sinhalese, made ten trips in his own car to take Tamil lawyers to safety and, in the process, he also was almost massacred. He returned to his office at 6.30 p.m. shocked. He said that city which had seemed quiet when everyone had arrived at work that morning had been in flames and total chaos by mid-day.

By Bala, a reader of sangam.org, who contributed his testimony to the website. Accessed from <http://www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=465>. Published July 24, 2004.

Like thousands of other Tamils who lived in Colombo, I also have a story to tell about July 1983.

At that time, I was a University of Colombo Law Faculty Student. At that time, in the Colombo University Law Faculty there were around 30 Tamil Students. The Medical Faculty also had Tamil Students, but it was in Kinsey Road in Borella.

I was boarding in a Burgher lady's house behind Summit Flats (Don Carolis Ave) with some other faculty students. In that house, in another room, there were some working people.



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On Sunday, July 24 we heard about the Thirunelvely attack and talked about that, but didn't pay much attention about it because we are very busy on preparing for the next day's exam. Around 7.30 Sunday night I went to the Saiva Hotel at Thimbrigasaya Junction to have my dinner with one of my junior batch-mates. When we having the dinner, we were discussing about the exam in Tamil. In the middle, my friend told me that all the people sitting around us were staring at us. I told him to ignore that. But a waiter, an old man, came to our table and whispered "*Thambimar*, situation is not good. Have your dinner quickly and go to your room." After that only, we realized something was wrong. We asked the same waiter to pack some string hopper parcels for the other boarders and rushed to our room and told the others about the situation and advised them not to go out. After discussing about this, we went to bed.

Next morning around 5.30 one of the boarders in the next room, who had left for work on his motorcycle, returned. When we saw his face, we realized something bad had happened. He told us that all the Tamil shops in the Thimbrigasaya Junction, including the one in which we had had dinner, were burnt. We didn't know what to do. We have to go to the University because at 9.00 o'clock we had an exam paper. At that time, Mrs. Chandrahasan was one of our lecturers and head of the department for the Law Faculty.

Some of our batch (or college) mates were living in Moratuwa, Wellewatte, and Narahenpita. One of our batch mates who were living in Narahenpita flats was attacked that night. We thought that they cannot come for the exam and decided to go to Mrs Chandrahasan's house and ask her to stop the exam. We walked to her house around 8 a.m. and told our situation and asked her to stop the exams. Then Mr. Chandrahasan told us that he had talked to J.R. and he had told him that the riots were only around the Kanata area, but everything would be OK. Mrs. Chandrahasan told us that, as the exam had been scheduled already, they could not stop it, but she assured us that, if anybody could not sit the paper, she would do something for them and asked us to write the exam.

From her house we went to the University and found that everything seemed normal. The roads were busy with vehicles and we saw most of our batch mates had already arrived. We were very happy to see them, but we had a discussion and thought of skipping the exam. We were not in a mood to write the exams, too. But later we decided to write the exam and went into the exam hall.

While I was writing the exam, I ran out of paper sheets. I called for extra sheets. When I got the sheets from one of our Tamil lecturers, I noticed her hands shivering. I looked up and asked her what had happened. Instead of talking she just gestured for me to look outside. When I looked I saw smoke all around the University. I couldn't continue writing the answer papers and went out of the hall.

Fortunately, at that time the University of Colombo Student Council was in good hands. It was led by a leftist Group called the Pathirana (later Mr. Pathirana was killed by the JVP) Group which was very friendly with us. They told us they would protect us and asked us not to worry. But how could we stop worrying? We asked them whether they could arrange some accommodation within the Campus compound.

But after some discussions with the University authorities, the Student Council told us that we could stay in the University Hostel situated close to Dhummulla Junction. They arranged a University van and asked us to get into the van. Sinhala boys stood on the footboard of the van. While we were going towards the Dhummulla Junction, around 11.30 a.m. we saw a car burning, and thugs attacking an Indian restaurant (Shanthi Vihar.) The thugs stopped our vehicle and said they wanted to search for Tamils. The Sinhala Students who were in the footboard replied in filth and told the driver to drive on. My heart was almost stopped. We were hiding among Sinhala students.

The Aquinas Hostel was within a hundred meters from the junction. We were taken there and were locked in a room and ordered by our Sinhala friends not to come out of that room. (I have to mention about this Student Group. They were against the JVP Student Union and very friendly towards Tamils Students. This Group was fully eradicated by the



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JVP later). I think the curfew was clamped down in the afternoon and the University announced that it was closed and asked all the students to leave the University premises. At the hostel a Sinhala student was talking about attacking us, but he was brought before us and was kicked severely by the Pathirana Group as a warning for others. The other Sinhala students were also busy going home or taking part in looting outside. Some students also brought some looted items to the hostel. Pathirana went out to collect some food and came back with some food and terrible stories. I think we stayed in that hostel one night and, after the Hindu College camp opened, we were dropped at the make-shift refugee camp that was set up there.

On July 29th I went from the refugee camp to my room to collect my ID card. From my room I walked towards the Aquinas hostel to see my Sinhala friends. Then one Sinhala lady came running towards me and told me not to go in that direction. She told me "*Putha me patha ende eppa. Kottia Awa*". But I kept walking and saw Pathirana and the group were standing at the gate and watching outside. Right away Pathirana scolded me and asked me to go to the room quickly and told me about the Kottia Awa story. He told me that he had seen nine Tamil bodies on that day and refused to let me go to the refugee camp on that day. But I told him my friends at the camp would be worry about me. Then Pathirana and his Group walked with me from Bambalapitua to Hindu College, posing as a group of Sinhala thugs singing Sinhala baila songs and waving. Pathirana visited us several times in the refugee camp and visited us even in Jaffna when we were struggling after the displacement.

While *this student group protected the Tamils students*, some Sinhala students of the Law Faculty and the Medical Faculty attacked the Tamil students.

By Esan Satkunarah. Submitted to sangam.org. Accessed at http://sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/08-02_Precursor.php?uid=1875 Published on August 2, 2006.

July 23rd 1983 was a sad and unforgettably black day for the Tamils. Many people, including local and international historians, still believe the killing of 13 Sinhalese soldiers by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was the main reason for the July, 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom in Sri Lanka. Contrary to this belief, the gap between Sinhalese and Tamils widened well before the July 1983 riots due to an unprovoked attack on the Tamil students by the Sinhalese students in Peradeniya University on May 11th, 1983.

The May 1983 attack on the Tamils students in the University had a very damaging effect on the Tamils and their sense of belonging to Sri Lanka. I was at the University of Peradeniya studying first year science at that time. The ugly face of majoritarianism cropped up in a leading educational institution in Sri Lanka for the very first time. I did not realize that the precursor to the July, 1983 pogrom would take place in a leading educational institution like Peradeniya University.

I had a feeling of shock and numbness as I witnessed the educated Sinhalese students' violence against their fellow Tamil students first hand. It was doubly shocking and horrifying to witness those Sinhalese students, many of them our own batch-mates, whose hands were soaked with Tamil blood. Tamil students experienced the brunt of hatred by the majority Sinhalese students' community for 3 consecutive days. The University authorities, intellectuals, and the country's ruling authorities did very little to stop the violence against the Tamil Students during those 3 days.

I was living and sharing a room in James Pries Hall in the Peradeniya residences with 3 of my colleagues. The leading UNP student wing of Peradeniya had planned their blood-thirsty attack on the Tamil students meticulously. Weapons like steel rods, cycle chains, wooden rods from broken chairs and tables, knives and ropes were gathered and well hidden in many surrounding places where they could easily be accessed for the attack, which was about to take place



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against their fellow Tamil colleagues. Tamil students, including myself, were unaware of what would be the worst night of our lives in the educational institute where we were living and studying with our wonderful dreams and hopes about our futures.

A first year engineering faculty student, Balasooriyan, who was a co-editor of a University Tamil Magazine, was accused of being "Tiger" just because he prepared a cartoon with a picture of a dove in a cage chained to a large metal ball. This picture actually was famous in Sri Lanka at that time, as Amnesty International (AI) used this picture and lobbied around the world to free the political prisoners. The Colombo media angrily reacted to the AI stand and accused them as being biased towards the freedom fighters. Reproducing AI's cartoon was enough for Balasooriyan to be accused of being a member of the Tigers. In sharp contrast to what he was accused of, the magazine Balasooriyan was a co-editor of was critical of the Tigers and their methods of struggle.

In spite of this fact, Balasooriyan was beaten up by the Sinhalese students and including his own batch-mates. The university authority handed him over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Colombo, he was taken to Colombo for interrogation and he was assaulted severely by the CID for several days before he was released without charge.

As continuation of this event many Tamil students were attacked and beaten up severely with all kinds of weapons by their fellow Sinhalese batch-mates and other students in the University for three days; some of them even fell from balconies to escape the attacks and broke their legs.

The conduct of the University administration and the authorities was unprecedented at that time. Tamil students were asked to continue to attend the lecture sessions during these periods even though the Tamil students felt they needed to go away from the University to their homes to reflect on what had happened to them from May 11th to May 13th, 1983. The University authority failed to provide the Tamils students with a safe environment to continue their studies.

The motive of the attacks on the Tamils students was to evict them from the University permanently. The unprecedented behavior of the university administration helped the attackers to reach their aims. Almost 95% of the Tamil students left the University and went back to their homes.

While the majority of the Tamil students stayed in their home, the conduct of the University was unprecedented again, as they continued to conduct lectures and even the yearly exams. The university authority shown very little - if not no - sympathy at all towards the Tamil students at the time of these crises.

July 1983 witnessed thousands of Tamils being killed and hundreds of them burnt to death by the Sinhalese mobs, which were well aided by the state forces. Many hundreds of Tamils also lost their hard-earned properties and they were made refugees overnight in their own country by their fellow citizens and sent back to Jaffna from the Sinhalese area.

The Sinhalese government and its law enforcing agencies did next to nothing to prevent this pogrom against the unarmed and innocent Tamils.

By K.W. Submitted to sangam.org. Accessed at http://sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/08-02_Precursor.php?uid=1875 Published on August 2, 2006.

More on the Same Incident at Peradeniya



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I just want to add some more info to Easan's note. I was an assistant lecturer at that time at Peradeniya University. Here is what happened and how this was triggered by the UNP'ers.

Some of the students of the UNP front got hold of some Tamil students from James Pieries and Hilda Obeyasekara halls and took them (First year students) by force and starting from the Medical faculty that is closer to the main entrance, they forced the Tamil students to strike out the Sinhala names on all the signs and name boards. When they reached the Hilda area after erasing all Sinhala names along the way, those Sinhalese students shouted that they have caught some pro-tiger students who were painting the Sinhala names out. Then, as pre-planned, their fellow UNP students fanned the flame by shouting and hitting the Tamil students. The message was passed on to other halls and all the students started hitting and chasing away the Tamil students.

Some students came to my residence at the campus and informed me. I had a motorbike at that time and, as I was able to speak thoroughly in Sinhalese, I was able to save some Tamil students to a certain extent and helped them to move away from the campus. Most of them climbed Hantana Hill, stayed for the night and flew to Kandy town and escaped from there.

I want to mention two interesting things that happened at that time. While the UNP'ers started this, the students who saved the Tamils were JVP student activists. As most of us know, Akbar Hall was out of the campus area and it was difficult to escape from there as it was very visible. However, JVP students took most of the Tamil students to their rooms and prevented the other Sinhalese students from attacking those students. I heard that the JVP'ers even fought with the UNP'ers to safeguard the Tamils. (It is sad that the attitude of the JVP is changed now).

The plan, as I heard from some Sinhalese students, was to close down the campus and send all the students home. The returning Sinhalese students would start riots from wherever they went. Being a staff member I attended staff meetings and I mentioned this in the meetings. Thanks to the authority for not closing the campus and keeping all Sinhalese students in the campus. By this, the plan to start the riots was prevented.

We can re-call how the 1977 riots started when Jaffna Campus Sinhalese students left the campus and spread the story that Sinhalese girls were raped and boys were manhandled and started those riots.

This incident at Peradeniya campus was clear additional evidence that the July pogrom was a pre-planned, organized event.

Mr. S.A. David, the president of the Gandhiyam movement. (Mr. David was President of Gandhiyam when he was arrested a few months prior to Black July. He was in Welikade during the Black July riots. Refer to Nancy Murray article for more details.)

There were two violent massacres in the Welikade prison in Colombo, during which 53 Tamil prisoners, arrested on suspicion of terrorist activity, were killed.

In addition to other prisoners, there were also in the jail at this time 73 Tamil political prisoners who had been arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. These people had been detained originally in army custody at Panagoda Army Camp, but recently had been transferred to the Welikade prison.

FIRST MASSACRE:



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In the massacre which occurred on July 25th all of the prisoners held in B3 and D3 were massacred and killed.

On July 25, 1983 the Sinhala prisoners attacked the detainees in the Chapel Section of the prison and murdered 35 persons, among whom were Kuttimani, Jegan and Thangathurai. From eyewitness accounts, Kuttimani's eyes were gouged and his blood drunk by his attackers. After killing six Tamils including Kuttimani in one wing, the attackers killed 29 Tamils in the other wing. A boy of 16 years, Mylvaganam, had been spared by the attackers, and was crouching in a cell. A jail guard spotted him and stabbed him to death.

The 35 dead were heaped in front of the statue of Gautama Buddha in the yard of Welikade prison, as Minister Athulathmudali so aptly described as "a sacrifice to appease the bloodthirsty cravings of the Sinhala demons."

Some who were yet alive raised their heads and called for help but were beaten down to death in the heap.

The attackers then made entry into the other wing through openings in the first floor but the jailers there refused to give the keys and persuaded them to leave.

SECOND MASSACRE:

Twenty-eight Tamil detainees in this wing were transferred to the ground floor of the Youth Ward and nine of us were accommodated on the First Floor.

All was quiet on the 26th. On the 27th at 2:30 pm there was shouting around Youth Ward and armed prisoners scaled boundary walls and started to break open gates in the youth Ward. Nearly 40 prisoners armed with axes, swords, crowbars, iron pipes and wooden legs appeared before our door and started to break the lock.

Dr. Rajasundaram walked up to the door and pleaded with them to spare us, as we were not involved in any robberies or murders and as Hindus we did not believe in violence and as Buddhists they should not kill. The door suddenly opened and Dr. Rajasundaram was dragged out and hit with an iron rod on the head. He fell among the crowd.

The rest of us broke the chairs and tables and managed to keep the crowd at bay for half an hour. The army arrived and with tear gas dispersed the crowd. Then the 2 soldiers lined up 8 of us and were taking aim to shoot when the Commander called out from below to them to come down. Then the soldiers chased us down and all who escaped death were lined up on the footpath in front of the youth Ward. As we walked out, we saw corpses of our colleagues around us and we heard prisoners shouting that it was a pity we were allowed to live.

We were ordered to run into a mini-van and removed out of the prison compound and loaded into an army truck. We were ordered to lie face down on the floor of the truck and a few who raised their heads were trampled down by the soldiers. All along the way to Katunayake Airport some soldiers kept cursing the Tamils and Eelam, using obscene language. We were kept at the airport until early morning. We were refused even water. We were then taken into an Air force plane, ordered to sit with our heads down until we reached Batticaloa Airport. From there we were taken in an open van to Batticaloa prison. We felt we had returned to sanity and some measure of safety.

AFTER JULY 1983



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We also find in the violence that took place, from the 25th of July, there is a certain pattern of leadership, where gangs of youth were going about in vans and bicycles and motor-bicycles and cars, inflaming their supporters in various towns and the city and violence and arson took place after that. We found that in Colombo, we found it along the Colmobo-Kandy-Galle Road, we found it in Kandy, Badulla and Bandarawela. That is not a sudden outburst of mobs, surely? But was planned and carefully nurtured over a period of time. We found also that the murder of thirteen of our soldiers in Jaffna took place on a very significant day, the day being 23rd of July 1983. It was six years before that on the 23rd of July 1977, that I myself and my Government was sworn-in. Exactly on that day, also a Saturday, that we find this outburst, beginning with the death of 13 soldiers in Jaffna. That was the signal for the uprising which took place in certain parts of this country. I would therefore like you to remember that we had the JVP, which initiated the insurrection of 1971, who were released by me, as I thought we would give them a chance, return to the democratic system, contest the elections. But having lost the Presidential election, having lost the referendum, having lost the by-elections, they thought the only way to return to power before the six years were over was by violence.

— J. R. Jeyawardene, in his speech delivered to the nation on August 22, 1983. Published in "His Excellency the President's Address to the Nation on 22.08.83". Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan Government Information Department Government Press.

The Last week of July of 1983 saw the peaceful calm of Sri Lanka shattered by a wave of ethnic rioting. Much has been written of the long history of terrorism by minority groups in the North which precipitated this catastrophic reaction from the majority community in the South; much will probably be said in the future of the national tragedy brought about by the agitation for a separate State in Sri Lanka.

When the story comes to be written, people may well ask of those who preached the doctrine of separatism: who wanted a separate State in Sri Lanka?

— from the preface of "Sri Lanka – Who Wants a Separate State?" Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan Department of Information. 28 Nov 1983.

SPEECHES REPRODUCED IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST TAMILS IN SRI LANKA, 23-24 APRIL 1984.

Publication Information: The Proceedings of the International Conference on Human Rights Violations Against Tamils in Sri Lanka. 23rd and 24th April 1984. Madras: The World Tamil Youth Federation.

Note: David Selbourne is one of the journalists mentioned above who was evicted by the Sri Lankan government for sending reports on Black July to the outside world.

Prof. David Selbourne, Ruskin College, Oxford

Hon'ble Speaker, distinguished friends, Leaders of the TULF, my fellow delegates and Ladies and Gentlemen.

As you can observe for yourself it is right for me to describe myself as an outsider. But I think it is unnecessary to be a Tamil to understand the words "Aiyoo – Ammah, amah". Every son, every mother understands such words. They are



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part of a universal language of grief which I know from my visits to Sri Lanka is heard in every Tamil household. This language requires no Translators. This languages requires no interpreters. It is the common languages of humanity. It is the common language of the tormented and it is mankind which must respond to the language which understands itself so well.

My presence today speaking for myself, is the least that is possible to do to exercise a human duty to stand up and to speak up for the civil liberties, for the human rights, for the human dignities of my fellow human beings. It is not difficult to be here or to speak in these terms to show that it is a level which goes far beyond the reports of Amnesty International issues such as this one. Or the reports of the International Commission of Jurists. Those are the levels which the International community understands the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Previous Speakers have spoken about the gross violations of human and civil rights in Sri Lanka, the breach of International covenants, "the inhuman and the degrading treatment" as Amnesty International described it of prisoners held in custody. And I think the international community has begun to be aware of the enormity of the July crimes and for me, speaking as a Lawyer, the equal enormity of the failure to bring those who committed those crimes to justice. The admitted involvement of the Sri Lankan State in those crimes is to me, speaking for myself, an astounding act of cynicism, that it should on the one hand admit the preplanning of those crimes. As Mr. Ananda Krishna Rao said, to point at themselves, to the systematic nature of what took place in July and yet to have failed to mobilise the ordinary processes of the law under the Rule of Law in order to bring the malefactors to justice.

Now there is another aspect of this which is truly international. It is we, the other nations of the world who have become, in part, responsible for tackling the problems of the flight of Tamil Refugees from their own country. It is not possible for the Sri Lankan Government to wash its hands like Pontius Pilate of the crimes which it had itself committed and on the other hand to blame the members of the international community for taking a legitimate interest. Whether as civil right workers, whether as Journalists, whether as lawyers, whether as politicians, it is impossible to blame such people for responding to the fact that it is we who must share with the Tamil people, the moral obligations and practical difficulties of providing homes for those who have been driven from their homeland. In this respect, it is very much an international issues.

For myself, I have the honour as you know of being expelled from Sri Lanka. What I find unacceptable in my own treatment as a responsible Journalist working for "The Guardian" working for 'The New Statesman', working for the 'Illustrated Weekly' of Bombay; What I find unacceptable is that without having any explanation and in deeply offensive circumstances, I should have been removed from the country late at night surrounded by members of the Internal Security apparatus; removed by Jeep from my Hotel and taken in intimidating circumstances to Colombo Airport for the presumed crime of having attempted to tell the truth as far as I could judged it as an outsider. An Hon'ble profession and under obligation to seek out the circumstances of ill doing and to report them to the world which has every entitlement to know. There is a right to know.

Now in the circumstances of my expulsion I can say here for the first time that I am even more deeply offended by the export to the United Kingdom of Sri Lankan masses; of intimidation of people like myself who are carrying out our ordinary profession or moral obligation in this respect.

I have here a letter which I have not actually revealed before which I have kept to myself for my own reasons but which I think is necessary to discuss openly because it is so offensive to the norms of civilized practice. Because this kind of deep violation by the Sri Lankan authorities requires to be known. As you are aware that these are not private matters even when I received secret communications, anonymous letters, telephone calls to England in my own home for exercising the rights of a United Kingdom citizen under the British Law to speak as part of my professional occupation and to write in the British Press. Why should I and my wife or my children receive night time phone calls



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from within the United Kingdom ordering me with what insulting impertinence to keep my lips sealed in my own country.

I can quite understand the Sri Lankan authorities feeling alarmed at about the reporting of the Sri Lankan affairs in the Sri Lankan Press. God knows that the news is not reported in Sri Lanka but to try to extend the impediments to a free press on the other side of the world seems to be deeply offensive. "You have created" says the letters from Colombo. "You have create da very bad image of Sri Lanka by publishing distorted and misleading news. May be you have received rewards from the Tamil Tigers." Now continues this courteous letter "because of a few dirty black dregs like you, the whole confidence in our country has broken down." But how strong must the Sri Lankan State be that two or three articles in some newspapers can bring down the whole state apparatus. "Our Sinhalese Lions," continues this letter, "Have the aim of Killing all those who actively support Eelam. You," (The word you is underlined) "are one of them. We will take revenge within 3 months from today. Either we will kill you or one of your children, who is under 15 years of age, if available," "But", says this letter, making a special exception for women, "not your wife." "To avoid this make a public apology in person to the President of Sri Lanka". Militantly signed 'Sinhalese Lions' and I am informed my apology (which needless to say I will not make for telling the truth) must be published in the Sri Lankan Daily Newspapers. These are relatively minor matters compared with the torments which the Tamil People themselves have suffered in Sri Lanka. I don't make a great deal of this I treat this with the contempt it deserves. No journalist will be intimidated by this kind of thing.

Nevertheless its importance is this: that in many years of reporting on Indian political affairs; in many years of reporting which included reporting often of or very hostile kind on the Indian emergency for example, about which I wrote a book, I never received such letters. Not once in India did any one seek to interfere with my freedom of movement or freedom of expression and whatever criticisms may be made of the Indian political system by outsiders a greater degree of freedom existed in that society as seen by the fact that even a bitter critic of the erosion of civil liberties emergency in India should have been allowed to say what he wished to say.

The international community to which I was referring before is well aware of the kinds of facts that Mr. Sambandan has produced. The nature of the prevention of Terrorism Act is well understood to be what the International Commission of Jurists has called it 'an ugly blot on the Statue book of a civilized country'.

Even in Northern Ireland where 2300 people not 230, but 2300 people have lost their lives since 1969; we do not have a prevention of Terrorism Act which contains provisions of the kind which are on the Statute Book in Sri Lanka. There is a bitter struggle going on in Northern Ireland: deeply offensive in similar ways to what offends us in Sri Lanka, deeply offensive to civil liberties and human rights in the United Kingdom also. Yet the prevention of Terrorism Act only permits the detention in custody without being brought before a magistrate for 7 days. Not 18 months but 7 days when there have been 2300 deaths since 1969 in a country whose population is a fraction of Sri Lanka's. So, I think the International Commission of Jurists is right to argue that the prevention of Terrorism Act, more wide ranging in its provisions than even the legislation of South Africa, is far in excess of what would be required for the Sri Lankan authorities to deal with their admittedly difficult internal problems.

The secret burial of bodies to which the previous speaker referred is a provision which exists no where else in the World, even in those countries facing much more severe internal political problems than Sri Lanka. It is a provision which lawyers and civil libertarians know is a license to murder. Churchmen, Jurists, human life activists find provision 15..... deeply repugnant to the most basic canons of civil liberty. It is offensive to religion as well as offensive to law. It offends some of the deepest cultural commitments of a people that insist on the respectful treatment of the dead. The abusive treatment of the living is one thing but contempt for the dead insults a people such as the Tamil people with deep respect for the proper observation of those rites which will be fitting for the dead to every society.



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Now I want to end by making reference to two other features which seem to be important. The failure of the Sri Lankan Government to hold a kind of serious inquiry into the events of July; the failure to make amends for the killing of so many innocents who included my friends, which included the cruel killing of one of Sri Lanka's noblest sons Dr. Rajasundaram. Such kind of atrocity of a man whose efforts in defence of the most down trodden in Sri Lanka were truly noble and heroic, a Gandhian, a man dedicated to the cause of redeeming and relieving human sufferings, that he should have been so brutally done to death without remedy and without redress and without an inquiry. If such a man can be done to death without inquiry, without the bringing of the guilty to justice, then it will probably fall to International Tribunals to carry out an inquiry into the July events. One of the positive suggestions that I intend to make during these discussions will be some kind of Tribunal on an international basis with distinguished judges, or ex-judged and juries from other countries should take evidence on what transpired in those days and hold their hearings in a place where those who give evidence and testify to what took place, can be heard, and arrive at some conclusion as impartially and objectively as possible. I hope this proposition might be discussed.

I end with a plea to the distinguished political prisoners. Presently in Sri Lankan jails such as Fr. Singarayer and Mrs. Nirmala Nithyanandan, who cannot be left forgotten in Sri Lankan jails. It appalls me as an outsider that more is not being done in forums of India and outside to focus upon the plight of people such as they who have been caught up in a net of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. There are many others, thousands may be of Tamil Youth who are now in custody and it is in a sense, wrong to pick on particular individuals to highlight their particular plight. Other matters of a more political kind are not for me to discuss. Nevertheless it seems to me that as in the case with political prisoners in the jails of other detentions, there are certain individuals whose integrity and dignity requires them to be made a focus of international attention. And I would urge on this meeting to consider this proposition also.

But one thing does strike me. President Jayewardene has recently told the Indian press that he is continuing to preserve democracy in Sri Lanka. We in the international community in whose countries are refugees from this democracy, who find this democracy strangely undemocratic. We in the international community are entitled to reply to President Jayewardene. 'If you are continuing to preserve democracy in Sri Lanka, will you please use different methods.' He has also said (and I keep my files carefully) that he is stuck. 'I am stuck' says President Jayewardene. Stuck is the word he uses. 'I am a prisoner of circumstances'. He is not a prisoner in Pangoda or Elephant Camp. He is a prisoner of circumstance. 'I am a prisoner of the law', he says 'I am a prisoner of the constitution' and 'I am a prisoner of the political party.' 'I cannot throw my weight about'. And yet consider a moment. President Jayewardene is prisoner in his own country. He is head of State: President Jayewardene is head of State. President Jayewardene the prisoner who is stuck is the head of the executive. The prisoner President Jayewardene is head of the Government. President Jayewardene the prisoner is head of the party. Minister of Defence, the prisoner President. Jayewardene appoints the heads of the armed forces, the Ministers of his government, President Jayewardene, the prisoner, head of the government, the head of the party, the C-in-C of armed forces and the Minister of Defence all rolled into one figure. What is it that prevents him from assuming responsibility in his own country for the action of his own executives and security forces? And it is the failure on the part of the Sri Lankan government to accept responsibility for their own deeds and misdeeds which has brought us here. Because it is us; we and many others who are not here, who now bear the responsibility in their terms for dealing with those who have fled from this Sri Lankan democracy.

Let me end by saying that it is an honour to be here in Madras, and I am sure that I speak for the rest of the delegates. I am grateful to you for your hospitality, for the warmth of your friendship. And I individually salute you here in your absence and thereafter call you my Tamil brothers.

Mr. Karl Henrich Nygaard, Group Leader, Human Rights Committee, Norway



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Honourable Minister, Leaders of the Tamil Parties, Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very thankful to be invited to this conference to learn about the situation in Sri Lanka. Before I left Norway, I promised my Tamil friends to give you the greetings from this small country up in the cold North.

Totally there are 350 Tamils in Norway, 200 of them live in Bergen, my home town. Last year after the massacres in Sri Lanka, they took initiative to collect the members of all political parties in Norway, to give the information about the situation for Tamils. This meeting resulted in a solidarity group for Sri Lankan Tamils—The Tamil Human Rights group. I represent this group here today. This is a local initiative of their Local politicians in this town. I promise to bring back to Norway all the information which will come out from this Conference.

It is necessary to inform people all over the world about the Sri Lankan situation. But what can we do? We in Europe, we in Norway? We can first of all bring information about the situation. This conference is a place to get such information. Secondly we must put pressure on our own government to use pressure on the Sri Lankan regime through direct contact with Sri Lanka through United Nations and other International Organisations. Last year, my group had meetings with the Foreign Minister of Norway to inform him and the Government of Norway about the Sri Lankan Tamils and their situations. We tried to do this year too. The third thing that we must do is the proposal which came from Mr. Selbourne. It is a very good proposal. There must be an International Tribunal as soon as possible. I think Norway which has had such Tribunals before in our country will support that thought.

I am very thankful to be here and I will give all the information back to my friends in Norway.

Madam Joyce Yedid of the Bar Association of Quebec and Member of Amnesty International

Hon'ble Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like first of all to thank you for giving me this opportunity of possibly sharing certain experiences that we have had in Canada. And, secondly, to emphasise, possibly, the importance of this kind of conference, at the international level.

Canada is very far away country and the only knowledge that we had of Sri Lanka was a paradise in the Indian Ocean, a land of abundance and beauty. No one knew about the problems, economic, cultural and ethnic, of that land.

The first inkling that occurred were quite misleading. Into Canada trickled rumours from West Germany that there were hundreds and hundreds of refugees in Germany, in France and in various other countries from Sri Lanka. The Canadian Government considers these people as economic refugees. And economic refugees are not refugees as recognized under international Law since according to Canadian Law which repeats the words of the Geneva Convention in 1951, 'A refugee is a person who escapes persecution only for the following five reasons namely race, religion, nationality, membership in a special group and political opinion'. An economic refugee is not a refugee in Law. So we were warned and advised that there were a large number of alleged refugees in European countries who were on their way to Canada. That was the first information to change the idea of Sri Lanka, a Paradise which existed in the minds of most of the population; and even so, I would not say most of the population, but people involved with the refugees.

I was not personally involved with any of the early arrivals from Germany, because these were the first refugees that came. And I think that kind of experience, I merely repeated to you so as to emphasise the importance of hosting this kind of conference; the importance of publicising to the world what the situation is. I certainly have no intention of addressing myself to the sources of the problem. They may be cultural, they may be historical, they may be a



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combination or racial. I am quite sure that there are many people here much better suited and eligible than I am to discuss these matters. But one thing is sure in countries like Canada, very little is known about the source of the problems and this I think accounts for a great deal; ignorance accounts a great deal for the lack of understanding and possibly lack of sympathy.

So what I would like to urge is the necessity of undertaking on an International scale the kind of Publicity and information campaign that would permit the world to see and understand the source as well as the manifestation of the problem. On the legal foundations I don not think I want to address myself either, not with standing the fact that I am an attorney because I am quite sure that there are many more distinguished delegates here who are Members of the Bar or Members of the Judicature who can address question far better than I can. Certainly I have no intention of repeating or expanding any Prevention of Terrorism Act or emergency legislation, or violation from the legal point of view.

I think that what I would like to share with you is possibly the experience of most of the workers involved in refugee work in Canada. There are possibly two or three thousand people who are claiming refugee status in Canada and I have seen and spoken to a large number of them personally. And in fact what I would like to share with you is the emotional cost and the physical cost of the violation of human rights.

In Canada, we have instituted a system that provides for so called group refugees but the Tamils of Sri Lankan do not appear at the present time to fall within any such category such as the boat people or Groups of people who seem to qualify as refugees. They undergo the individual process of refugee which is a very long and very painful process. Mr. David Selbourne mentioned the necessity of having a court of Law, some sort of International Tribunal where it would be possible to record evidence. But that is what we do everyday in Canada. People are placed under oath and have to explain and justify why they are refugees. And I can tell you that I have heard hundreds of stories.

The majority of refugees that have come to Canada fall within a certain frame work. The earliest arrivals are possibly the most involved members of the TULF and other political groups and organisations. They primarily appear to be young men who were politically active for possibly reasons that originally were not necessarily violation of human rights in a physical sense namely; there was obviously clear discrimination of a legislative nature which led to frustration, which led to political involvement; and which led to the repression by the police and army. Those young men fled wherever they could. Originally, I believe, to Germany, France and other European countries.

Unfortunately, the German system either unwittingly or by policy did not accept them. In fear of returning to their country they started to flock to Canada known as a country that welcomes and treats the refugees fairly. These were the first refugees that we saw in Canada. The refugees who came in the summer of 1983 came primarily of directly from Sri Lanka. They are essentially but not exclusively refugees from Colombo. They are not heavily politicised. They are not young men and women who were fighting for their lost rights. They were people whose homes were burnt, whose families were injured, whose businesses were destroyed, and who in very actual and immediate fear for their lives took the first plane out of Colombo. Canada just happened to be a place they came to. That's the second group of refugees and it included as well many members of the Tamil community living in Singalese areas. The experiences that they recount are not in abstract terms anything that I want to discuss.

But what I want to talk about are the consequences of the violation of human rights and the consequences of importance that we can see are obviously the disruption and the destruction of family units. And I think this is the primary element that we noticed. In Canada this may not seem as devastating as it appears to the Tamil Community. Canada is not a country where family are very closely knit. So if a young man and a young woman or three young men leave the family and go to foreign lands it is not necessarily a tragedy. But I think one has to understand that within the compacts of Tamil life it is a tragedy. It is a tragedy to the family but, who, may be, find some relief in the



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knowledge and hope that at least their children are safe. Because, needless to say, that every family wants their children to be safe; whether they are Tamil, Canadian, British, or anything else. So, there is a certain comfort I supposed, in the knowledge that one's children are hopefully free and certainly safe. But nonetheless, I think the process of family destruction and disruption is a very serious one.

The other consequences that we witnessed are divergent according to where the refugees come from and how well they are able to integrate into Canadian life.

The young men and women who are in Canada and they are primarily young men, and most of them came from Colombo but some of them came from the North; these young men and women face very difficult life in Canada. The climate is different, the geography is different, the economic conditions are different. They find themselves without family, without the support of family, without a frame work, a net work that gives support to the Tamil culture which we do not have in Canada. That very real thing is one of the first obstacles and one of the first difficulties.

The second type of difficulty we noticed is that they exhibit all the tragedy of refugees as opposed to immigrants. Immigrants choose to leave their homelands. Immigrants decide that life is too difficult in one's own lands: I will pack up and take my family and leave. Refugees live in a perpetual state of wishing to return to their homelands. And I think that is characteristic of most of the Tamil young men and women that we have in Canada. They have a yearning to return to their homelands and everything is considered temporary. In Canada, they live with the hope and expectation that one day they are going to their home. And I do not know if you understand really the consequences of living under these conditions, but they are grave and very difficult in terms of home cost.

We have in Canada many young men who are coming out of prisons in Jaffna, Batticaloa, Elephant Camp and other Sri Lankan jails and who fled their country. This has led to another type of problem that we have noticed. A lot of these young men have suffered in a very physical way. They carry the marks of their torture: letter brands on their body with hot Irons, Cigarette burns all over their body; scars. These we know from testimony, from medical reports. Some of these scars are apparent and some of these have continuing effects. It is very common among Tamil young men to be vomiting blood after 3 years: they are still doing it at home in Canada. A lot of Tamil young men have serious stomach problems. A lot of them have permanent injuries to their limbs, bodies and to their hearing. They carry the marks of their detention in very many respects and some of these will be permanent.

They also carry other marks which cannot be seen but which are much more real in the sense: fear, hatred. Some of these young men and women have admitted to me that they repeatedly wake up in terror, screaming. And that is true, especially of the young men from the North who are more tougher because they have been in prison more often, they have been tortured more often, and more extensively. So I suppose they are tougher but how much tougher can you get?

The people Colombo, a year after, are still, in my opinion, in a state of shock. All of them repeatedly told me that they suffered nightmares of their burning homes or of the mobs and thugs coming towards them with iron bars and other implements of attack. And I think, as many speakers have mentioned before that ultimately the government will have to accept responsibility for that. It was either unwilling, or unable to control the mobs and it will have to accept responsibility for the situation. I have spoken to some of the Tamil women who have been raped and the consequences are devastating. The young men and young women in Canada are continuously living and reliving those experiences. And every time that there is trouble anywhere in Sri Lanka there is a rush for the telephones to find out whether their families are safe or unsafe. These may be undocumented things. But nonetheless we can see and feel the anxiety and the terror with which these young men and women are living.



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I want to conclude with one remark. Their hopes and dreams are to come back home. With all this, Sri Lanka is still their home. But what I think is very tragic, is this. It appears to me as an outsider that the youth, the Tamil Youth of Sri Lanka is outside the country. It is the people who have been bereft of its youth and a nation deprived of its youth is in fact deprived of the future. This is one thing which I think we should all think about.

EVICION OF TAMILS FROM COLOMBO, JUNE 2007

Even by Sri Lanka's standards, the forced eviction of 375 Tamils from the capital of Colombo last week seemed a step too far. The June 7 evictions, carried out by police and soldiers in a nighttime raid on areas of Colombo populated by the Tamil ethnic minority, was the latest chapter in the brutal civil war that pits government forces against Tamil-separatist militants in the country's north. "We were herded into buses like cattle and even when we were told we could go back to Colombo, we were warned to finish our work there and go back to our home towns [immediately]," says a 19-year-old who gave his name as Ramalingam, of the raid in which he was swept up. ...

Local human rights groups accused the government of a policy tantamount to ethnic cleansing — some evictees had as little as half an hour to get ready according to activists, and many were bused to places where they knew no one. The government defense spokesperson Keheliya Rambukwella initially said that there had been no forced evictions, and that all those who had left the capital had done so voluntarily. Later, other government officials said that those evicted had been suspected of plotting to bomb government installations in the capital. ...

But human rights groups say the new sense of fear instilled in Tamil civilians won't disappear anytime soon. "When they [Tamil civilians] ask us whether we could guarantee that this would not happen again, we can not give an answer, there is a lot of fear among those who got caught in the drive, it will take some time for them feel safe here in Colombo," says Rukshan Fernando of the Colombo-based Law and Society Trust, which is helping some of the Tamils who returned to the capital after the Supreme Court ruling.

— " 'Ethnic Cleaning' in Sri Lanka?" *Lasantha Wickrematunge. Time, 11 June 2007.*

Armed Sri Lankan police today packed hundreds of ethnic minority Tamils into buses and drove them from the country's capital to war-torn northern and eastern districts - an effort, say police, to clear the city of "terrorists". In a series of night-time raids, police stormed Tamil areas of Colombo and forced people staying in cheap guesthouses to leave at gun point. In all, 291 men and 85 women were sent off in seven buses to districts that are on the frontline of fierce fighting between Tamil separatists and the Sri Lankan army. Human rights groups described the police action as tantamount to "ethnic cleansing". ...

— "Sri Lanka accused of ethnic cleansing of Tamils." *Randeep Ramesh, South Asia correspondent. Guardian, 7 June 2007.*

Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, yesterday, compared the plight of the Tamils under the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration, to that of the Jews in Germany during World War 2 and of Black Africans, during the apartheid era in



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South Africa. Speaking in Parliament on the government led eviction of Tamils in Colombo, Mr. Wickremesinghe said that Jews and Black Africans had faced similar persecution in the past, at the hands of Germans and Whites respectively.

He said the government's actions violated the Constitution, which clearly stated that all citizens of Sri Lanka must be free from torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and had the right to free movement and to choose their area of residence. "We are also concerned about the security of the country. If the government suspects anyone they can produce that person before a magistrate and remand the suspect, or release the person," he said.

He noted that when people were evicted from the lodgings in such an arbitrary manner, they would return in anger to blast bombs. Mr. Wickremesinghe added that the situation would bring shame upon Sri Lanka at the European Parliament sessions, and queried as to why the government was creating such a crisis for the country.

— *"Ranil on forced evictions of Tamils." Daily Mirror, 8 June 2007. Ranil Wickremasinghe's commentary on the forced evictions of hundreds of Tamils from Colombo in June 2007. Ranil Wickremasinghe is the nephew of J.R. Jayewardene, and was a minister in the J.R. Jayewardene government during Black July, 1983.*

Correspondents say that hundreds of Tamils, many from impoverished rural areas, live in boarding houses in Colombo while they seek work at home or abroad. Many ethnic Tamils complain they have been deliberately targeted by the security forces, detained and searched.

One man forced to board one of the buses called the private local radio station Sirisa FM from a mobile phone. "The police came and took us and put everyone on the bus," he said, saying the bus was about 32km (20 miles) outside the capital, heading northeast. "We don't know where we are being taken."

Human rights campaigners and other observers say they are shocked at what they say is a serious violation of human rights. "This is almost like a variation of ethnic cleansing," Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu of the independent Centre for Policy Alternatives think-tank told Reuters. "It is quite appalling."

— *"Police evict Tamils from Colombo." BBC News, 7 June 2007.*

At the last police station in Wellawatte, just south of Colombo, the returnees were made to go through a registration process that took another three hours. "We were herded into buses like cattle and even when we were told we could go back to Colombo, we were warned to finish our work there and go back to our hometowns, and not stay on in Colombo," said 19-year-old Ramalingam from Jaffna.

— *"Sri Lanka: Gov't in Serious Image Crisis." Amantha Perera. IPS News Service, 11 June 2007.*

"We have to do search operations and when we arrest suspicious people... you don't know who is who," he said.

"We can't arrest 300 people and then detain them," he added.



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"So you tell them: 'You don't have any legal business in Colombo, there is a security problem in Colombo, you are the people who are suspected of... we don't want to detain you, go back to your homes.'"

— *Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, quoted in "Sri Lanka accuses 'bullying' West" by Roland Buerk, BBC News, 12 June 2007.*

Letter to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper on 9 July 2007:

Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister
Langevin Block
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing to you to express my deepest concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka, and also to urge the Government of Canada to take necessary measures to serve those in the northeast who cannot easily access the Canadian High Commission in Colombo.

Last month's expulsion of about 400 Tamils from Colombo has been soundly condemned by reputable human rights organizations and by the international community. I have seen statements by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence claiming that only those who could not provide a valid reason for being in the capital were evicted. Such statements only confirm that Sri Lankans of Tamil origin do not have freedom of movement in Sri Lanka, or free access to the capital.

My constituency office staff as well as constituents of Tamil origin have told me of the great difficulties experienced by those in the northeast who need to travel to the High Commission in Colombo, especially on immigration matters. In one case, a family member of a constituent died during the long delays attempting unsuccessfully to send paperwork and subsequently to travel to the capital. For many, travel to Colombo is impossible.

My colleague, Hon. Dan McTeague, has written to you to ask that Canada consider opening a consulate in Jaffna that is capable of providing immigration services. I strongly support this suggestion, if it can be done securely and without undue risk to personnel.

I urge your government to take immediate steps to address this situation, and I would appreciate being kept informed of how your government is responding.

Sincerely,

Mark Holland, M.P.
Ajax-Pickering