

**THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS  
FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS, JAFFNA  
(UTHR(Jaffna))<sup>1</sup>  
Sri Lanka  
Information Bulletin No. 26**

**Date of Release : 20<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

**The Vanishing Young and the Silent Agony of Sunset Shore  
(Paduvankarai)**

**1. The LTTE–Controlled Areas: Some Singular Developments**

Most of the developments were not unexpected, and yet some are remarkable. In the Vanni itself, recruitment by the LTTE has, even more, taken on the characteristics of abduction. A typical scene was outside the Madhu Church camp, where Fr. Selvarajah who is in charge has been notably strict in preventing LTTE activity inside the premises. However, the refugee children have to attend school outside the camp.

Recently, children returning from school were confronted by LTTE recruiters having a white van with tinted glasses parked nearby. Individual children were cornered by groups of recruiters. Expressions of reluctance by the children were met by the recruiters with severe abuse. Teachers passing by were helpless witnesses to this press-ganging. A child showing the slightest sign of weakness was loaded into the white van. Those caught were then spirited away into the unknown, leaving the parents completely in the dark.

In earlier years, as recently as to 1996 in Jaffna, the white van with tinted glasses struck terror into the hearts of Tamil civilians as the symbol of abduction teams of state agencies, whose victims joined the ranks of the ‘disappeared’. That the LTTE should use the same menacing symbolism for a different category of ‘disappeared’ has carried a strong message on the futility of seeking the children taken away. Frequently, the saga comes to a close many months later, with the LTTE bringing home a sealed coffin containing organic matter.

Other similarities to the practices of the State too have recently been in evidence. The LTTE cleared jungle and shrub on both sides of roads frequently used by LTTE vehicles. Some of these areas are now said to ‘look like a playing field’. This followed reports since Spring of mine attacks on LTTE personages moving in vehicles. But many doubt the State’s capacity to mount such attacks. The result is a distinct impression among the people that there is a crack within the LTTE. They have also noticed coming from within some subtle propaganda against the top leadership. However, LTTE members have told some people that acts of sabotage are

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*<sup>1</sup> The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR(J)) was formed in 1988 at the University of Jaffna, as part of the national organisation University Teachers for Human Rights. Its public activities as a constituent part of university life came to a standstill following the murder of Dr. Rajani Thirunagama, a key founding member, on 21st September 1989. During the course of 1990 the others who identified openly with the UTHR(J) were forced to leave Jaffna. It continues to function as an organisation upholding the founding spirit of the UTHR(J) with its original aims:*

*To challenge the external and internal terror engulfing the Tamil community as a whole through making the perpetrators accountable, and to create space for humanising the social & political spheres relating to the life of our community. The UTHR(J) is not at present functioning in the University of Jaffna in the manner it did in its early life for reasons we’ll understand.*

being committed by some other group with local help. They had reportedly dug up several mines. There is some mystery here since confusion about its iron-like control is a state of affairs the LTTE leadership would neither allow nor, least of all, admit. Nevertheless, despite an outward air of brazen confidence, supported by the successful suicide attack on Katunayake Airbase and International Airport on 24<sup>th</sup> July, there is an air of desperation in the LTTE's current recruitment drive.

The LTTE appears dissatisfied with the results of earlier methods of recruitment involving martial propaganda and psychological pressure. Currently in the Vanni, LTTE loudspeakers blare propaganda in the evenings till late, and again in the mornings, making it impossible for children to study. What has created unprecedented alarm among civilians, however, is the high-handedness of recruiters in the interior of the Batticaloa District. Meetings in villages have been addressed by senior leaders including Karikalan, Robert and Ramanan.

## **2. Fiction and Fact in Paduvankarai**

From early August 2001, there were in the Batticaloa District families regularly moving from the LTTE-controlled area, Paduvankarai (Sunset Shore) in the western interior and Vaharai, to stay with relatives in the army-controlled area. The *Sunday Virakesari* of 12<sup>th</sup> August, carried an astonishing report by a regular columnist who often writes on the East. Quoting wireless services 'based in the West', he claimed that at the temple in Arasaditivu, 43 sons were handed over by parents to the LTTE after a benediction conferring on them a 'commission of heroic endeavour' (*Vettithilakam*). It is well-known that the same coterie of local correspondents feed Tamil radio stations in the West, although the writer distanced himself from the report by citing an 'echo'.

The 'echo' also found expression in the *Uthayan* published in Jaffna and came to be spread by word of mouth as parents in the East voluntarily handing over their children to the LTTE *en masse*. Such stories are systematically concocted and relayed by Tamil pressmen and others who have escaped to urban centres, and who in their wildest dreams would not let their children go anywhere near the LTTE. The dreadful reality reveals once more the deep schisms by which the Tamil community has been divided, and fenced with fantasies, to facilitate manipulation by a fascist agency.

The true state of affairs is that in recent meetings in the interior of the Batticaloa District, LTTE leaders have made draconian demands. They have demanded, often from temple premises, that each family should submit one or two of their children to the *movement*. The old slogan trotted out many times in past years is again being repeated – that this is to be their final battle, and they had plenty of weapons, but not enough fighters.

This has been, however, the first time that virtual conscription was openly decreed. The penalty for families that did not comply is that their properties will be seized and their lands eventually given to 'martyr' families. In effect, the families not complying would be left vagrants, forfeiting their means and livelihood. The properties of those who fled the LTTE controlled area have already been officially sealed and confiscated.

Far from the impression that the Tamil media have attempted to convey, the LTTE's actions have created a state of utter bewilderment and horror among the population. Leaders of civil society and religious leaders who have over the years become inured to recruitment of children by the LTTE, have expressed alarm in their private councils. This has also to do with a class of parents in relatively more stable circumstances feeling the pinch of LTTE recruitment, as they have not felt before.

A token of a change of approach was evident when LTTE recruiters failed to target the Thanthamalai and Karadiyanaru Hindu festivals of early Summer. A large number of devotees go to the LTTE controlled area for the festivals. Those whom the LTTE netted during such occasions were often from insecure homes – that were largely the result of war, death and economic deprivation. In such cases the parents had no voice and largely bore their grief in silence.

The better-off frequently lived in the belief that their children would not be induced to join by LTTE propaganda. Many of them sent their children to schools in the government-controlled zone, such as to those in Batticaloa or Kalmunai. The LTTE's new policy of recruitment left all parents, irrespective of means and position, with no avenues for escape. All hope of escaping or of retrieving their child has been denied. It is this that made the crucial difference.

Our sources in these areas tell a heart-rending story completely at variance with the 'echoes' reported exclusively in the Tamil media - that parents were handing over their children to the LTTE at temples with enthusiasm and ceremony. The truth is that the parents were left broken and prostrate. It was left to the children to take the initiative and solve their problem. As usual among rural folk, it was often the case of a younger boy or girl volunteering to go, reasoning out that the elder son or daughter would be more useful to the parents at home.

Once again we are witness to a dismal feature in Tamil society, whereby this use of crass thuggery by the LTTE is explained away. An argument put forward in circles not directly affected by this conscription, is that the Government, which is not interested in peace, has forced the LTTE to fight this war. Moreover, they argue, since conscription is admitted in Western democracies for national defence, the LTTE cannot be blamed too much. This is a perception constantly drummed out by the Tamil media and elite.

However, deep down, Tamils who have experienced the LTTE in close proximity are cynical about the LTTE's peaceable intentions. But many of them give credence to falsehoods as an easy means of justifying their own passive complicity in a series of outrages against the people.

Nevertheless, a larger share of the blame rests with the Sinhalese polity in general and the two main political parties – the PA and the UNP – in particular. For more than four decades they have been unable to do anything decisive to convince the ordinary Tamil, the school-teacher and priest on the ground, that they are committed to a just political settlement to the grievances of the Tamils. Instead, the regular experience of the Tamil people - the unpunished violations by the State, reflexive aerial bombing after a strike by the Tigers and the occasional cow-hand deliberately killed by an army patrol - easily support the oft repeated proposition that the Government's intentions are baneful.

A continuation of this state of affairs would be suicidal for Sri Lanka and suicidal for the Tamil people. We give below a comprehensive picture of the situation in Paduvankarai (Western Shore of the Lagoon) and Vaharai.

### **3. Report on the Situation**

**Early Signs:** During May and June this year the LTTE, using local thugs, orchestrated attacks on two evangelical Christian groups in Panichchankerni, near Vaharai. These groups were firmly pacifist and were opposed to military service. This incident will be dealt with more fully in the next bulletin.

There were two major Hindu festivals in the LTTE-controlled area – Thanthamalai in July and Karadiyanaru in early August. Large numbers of devotees, young and old, went through army checkpoints to attend these festivals. Vehicles and vendors were seen in large numbers. Looking back, the fact that LTTE recruiters did not target the young on these occasions, unlike in previous years, was the sign of change in the air.

**The Recruitment Drive:** From about the second week of August, LTTE political leaders showed action videos and conducted meetings on Saturdays and Sundays in all areas including Vaharai, Pattipalai, Vellaveli, Vavunativu, Ambalanturai, Munaikkadu, Kokkadichcholai, Kadukkamunai, Palugamam, Porativu, Munaitivu and Pankuda Veli.

Generally, after the meetings LTTE-appointed village headmen, with LTTE personnel, fanned out going house by house, demanding a member for the ‘final battle’. Compulsory military training is also being enforced, with elders and government servants having to do 1 hour a day. Hundreds have been taken for full-time military activity – in the region of a hundred or more in most areas mentioned above, making a total so far of about 1500.

In the area of Palugamam, Porativu and Munaitivu, many are government servants, educated unemployed, jewellers or students in high school or university. A number of them called a meeting with the LTTE and pointed out that they had generally helped the LTTE financially or otherwise, and many had been arrested by the Army. Moreover, they pointed out, many of them are resident outside for work or study. Initially it was believed that a compromise was struck between the people and the LTTE. But this is not borne out by subsequent reports.

In the poorer areas around Valaichenai, including Vaharai, the LTTE for some time prevented many who work as labourers in the army-controlled area from leaving, so as to facilitate compulsory training. Recruitment in this area appears to have taken even cruder forms.

Vaharai is about the poorest and most deprived area in the district. Following a propaganda meeting in the area, the trailer of a tractor used by the LTTE was loaded with children, despite the fervent protestations of the mothers. The mothers ran after the tractor when it took off. LTTE personnel then levelled their guns at the mothers threateningly to turn them back.

#### **4. A Funereal Atmosphere**

A witness described the atmosphere in Valaichenai North, including Vaharai, Puliankandaladi and Vellaiadimadu as ‘a strange emptiness with people huddling in their houses with their children’. Reports from elsewhere have been similar. The Thanthodreesvarar temple festival was held in Kokkadichcholai on 20<sup>th</sup> August and the Roman Catholic festival at the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour at Aithiyamalai on 2<sup>nd</sup> September. These festivals traditionally draw huge crowds. This year too public transport was provided, with buses plying from places such as Mandur. But by comparison, the pilgrims this year were a small trickle and were mainly women past their youth.

As soon as the LTTE came to a home and demanded a child, the atmosphere instantly changed to one of a funeral. Led by the father and mother, the family began wailing as though the corpse of a loved one were in the house. Usually the LTTE gave them two days to produce a child before them or forfeit their property. After two days they would call home again and perhaps give them a further three days. In several instances where the parents refused outright, they were allowed to take their children and leave for the army-controlled area, forfeiting everything except what they were wearing.

In many instances the LTTE recruiters were persistent. Mothers who talked back were humiliated. The wife of Kanagesweran (Kanakanayagam?), the 50 year old orderly at the government dispensary in Palugamam, who talked back to the recruiters was forced to perform *thopukaranams* (squatting and standing in turn, holding the ears with crossed hands). Her son and daughter were then taken away by the LTTE. The orderly who then attempted to commit suicide by swallowing poison was warded at the ICU in Batticaloa Hospital on 11.9.2001 (discharged 19.9.)

In the Kokkadichchola area, about three mothers who showed strong resistance have been locked up. The number of such instances is enormous and every person has a story involving a close relative. A man from Palugamam spoke of the LTTE holding his sister in custody to hand over her daughter. A government employee from Aithiyamalai said that his cousin's husband was being held captive to release one of his sons, who in turn are bitter about the way their father was treated. (How many such boys and girls who are bitterly disillusioned with the LTTE are forced to serve out their fate in the LTTE?) In Palugamam there was angry resistance to the LTTE's imposition and many parents are being held in custody.

A government employee in Batticaloa from Palugamam was known to be close to the LTTE and was reputed for carrying messages and intelligence. However this time the LTTE has placed him in custody, demanding an elder son. If he did not comply, they have threatened to take away his 7 year old son.

There is fear of getting involved even when the problem concerns the immediate family. A man's sister who is a CARE volunteer has been taken away by the LTTE. From that day his mother has been crying, pleading with him to do something. However, he is afraid, to go and talk to the LTTE because he has four children of his own.

There have been a number of suicides and attempted suicides by distraught parents during this recruitment drive as hinted above. One of those who committed suicide by taking poison is the postal peon in Kokkadichchola. Another who attempted suicide and is warded in Batticaloa Hospital is Mr. Vellimalai from the Mandur area, who was a Tamil Congress candidate at the parliamentary elections concluded in 2000. Both of them lost a son or daughter to the LTTE. This is just the tip of the iceberg. The full picture will never emerge. Such incidents take place all the time and are nearly always covered up. Only, this time, it has become a minor epidemic.

To give some idea of the magnitude of such instances, a government employee from Punnakkulam near Porativu was asked about his village. He said that he is personally aware of the suicides of the father and mother of a child, and the father of another child, both from his village, committing suicide after their children were taken away by the LTTE. For parents the slightest glimmer of self-doubt that they sacrificed a son or daughter to save their property would quickly explode into an unbearable pang of guilt.

A. Pathmavathy of Unnichchai, Karadiyanaru, took poison on 10.9.2001 after her son was forcibly taken away by the LTTE the previous night at 10.30 PM. She was admitted to Eravur hospital and discharged two days later. Sivanesan, the postal peon at Palugamam was admitted to Kaluwanchchikudy hospital after he attempted suicide about 12.9.2001, after his son was taken away by the LTTE.

Some of the children, who by these draconian measures were dragooned into the ranks of the LTTE, took it with an air of diffidence, often seen in those bowing to the inevitable. In Aithiyamalai, four girls ordained for military service got together, partook of a feast that they had prepared, and went off to their fate.

The number of children attending schools has also dwindled to a trickle. Several teachers have reported 'nil' attendance. Consequently, the LTTE has ordered teachers to go house-by-house and persuade the parents to send their children to school. In many homes, their young had in earlier years joined groups that were annihilated by the LTTE. Today the same parents are under compulsion to give another child to the LTTE.

The LTTE leaders maintain that parents are bringing their children voluntarily and that they are not taking children below 16. This is of course a piece of official fiction. The recruitment teams, who are assigned areas, are under pressure to produce numbers and age is not a criterion for them. Our sources are aware of a number of 14 year old children having been taken. Mothers under pressure to give a child are not taking chances. Even children aged 12 are being hidden at home.

In such instances the mothers often have to face the hostility of neighbouring mothers who have already lost a child to the LTTE. This is a typical instance of how the LTTE divides people, destroys their humane instincts and thrives on a politics of envy and death.

In Batticaloa town where a mood of complacency prevails, some have received letters asking them to bring recruits for the LTTE. Fear is slowly building up that the recruitment may extend to the army-controlled areas. Rumours are in circulation of the LTTE visiting fringe areas and asking for children.

Kaluwankerny lies close to Kiran, north of Batticaloa. On the 19<sup>th</sup> September, the LTTE's area leader, Kutty, came to Vipulanantha School at 11.45 AM and demanded from the principal that he wanted to take away 40 children for training. The Principal and teachers told him that he cannot remove children from the school while the children are under their care. Kutty pulled out a pistol and placed it against the principal's forehead. Suddenly the LTTE guards warned Kutty that an army patrol was coming there on a tip-off. Kutty escaped through the backyard and drew off with his guards in a vehicle.

As the recruitment drive goes on, large numbers have been pouring into the army-controlled area. About 1200 refugees have come into Valaichenai after losing everything. Scores of families have also arrived in Chenkalady. We understand that the Police in the district have recorded 900 families coming into the army-controlled area. Other civilian sources estimate the total number of families displaced at around 2000. In Vaharai, the LTTE has ordered all parents who sent their children out to Valaichenai, to go and bring them back, or face the confiscation of their property. It is estimated that in each village in the LTTE controlled area, two or three houses have been confiscated by the LTTE. In the meantime the LTTE has attempted to sow confusion and detract from the ongoing outrage by sending out leaflets, warning people living near army camps of an imminent attack.

A particular incident illustrates the fear that the experience with the LTTE has instilled in people's minds. A family of 7 arrived in Chenkalady from the LTTE controlled area. They were photographed by the Army. Suspecting that the photograph would reach the media, the family decided to split and stay separately. It gives some idea of the fear of talking about their experience. Despite innumerable violations by the LTTE, hardly a case has been reported to the Human Rights Commission.

As is generally the case, the spontaneous resistance to this recruitment drive came from the humbler and unsophisticated sections whose minds had not been muddled by an excess of caution. In Kokkadichcholai, a 24 year old farmer, with no militant background, assaulted

LTTE recruiters harassing some of his neighbours. He was assaulted in return and left with a bruised eye. Yet, he remained defiant and unconcerned about being marked. This was the spirit on which the Tamil militancy in the East was founded, that was then hijacked and debased by the LTTE.

There have been extraordinary reports of the perseverance and innovation of parents in protecting their children from the LTTE. A vegetable seller who trades in the army-controlled area bundled his son into a sack and brought him across on the carrier of his bicycle in the guise of normal cargo. There are two words that aptly describe Tamil civil society and the Tamil media who have tried to disguise this outrage and, most of all, glorify the self-proclaimed liberation group that inflicted it – these words are SHAME & BETRAYAL. The cry from the heart of those familiar with the plight of the people living in uncleared areas is: "Please pray for the people, pray for peace that the children may come home!"

### **Factors Behind the Recruitment Drive**

It is well-known that most of the LTTE's recruits are young and politically immature. A key factor in the LTTE's success is the manner in which it has handled these unpromising recruits. Charged with emotion against the 'atrocities of the Sinhalese State' and sent into battle, they have performed wonders against superior numbers and superior weaponry, however, at an unsupportable social cost to a small, declining population base. Yet, given time and opportunity to think, or during intervals of inaction, these recruits get other ideas. Desertion, one could say, is endemic. The cases below who surrendered to the Army in Jaffna earlier this year, and were interviewed by journalists, present a fair picture:

1. **Miss. Yogarathy Thamotherampillai (15):** Father was a fisherman in Jaffna who was killed by the Navy in 1997. She, with her mother and seven siblings, moved to the Vanni during the exodus from Thenmaratchy in July 2000. LTTE recruiters visited her school in Mulangavil in October 2000 and took her along with three other girls. The latter included: Renuka Thambithurai (13) and Kayanthini Sivalingam (15). 3 of the fathers of the four girls had been killed by the Sri Lankan forces.

All of them decided to run away and return to their mothers. Their plan having failed, they decided to quit officially by going through a course of punishment. In the meantime, having completed their training, they were ordered to do battle in Kilaly, Jaffna, in mid-January 2001. Before that the three other girls had deserted and Yogarathy was captured in Jaffna during the battle.

2. **Mas. Nimal Navaratnarajah (14):** Has a younger sister and his father is a mason. His parents who were injured in cross-fire during the LTTE's attempt to overrun Jaffna in June 2000, were transported to Killinochchi Hospital by the LTTE. The family then moved in with the father's sister in Vattakacchi when the parents were discharged from hospital 3 days later on 5<sup>th</sup> June. On the same day recruiters from the LTTE propaganda wing cornered him in the Vattakacchi market and asked him to join. When he refused, they accused him of loitering while others in Batticaloa and Amparai (the East) were fighting to liberate Jaffna, braving supersonic fighter aircraft.

The recruiters then reassured him that he need not fear confronting the Army. They would, they explained, concentrate artillery fire at the Army from a safe distance, and they would then move in and establish a base as the Army withdrew. They would then shell again, establish another base and so on. After 15 minutes of unsuccessful persuasion, they thrust Nimal into a van and took him away, crying.

On 10<sup>th</sup> September, after training in a group of 80 at Viswamadu, he was enrolled in the elite Charles Anthony Brigade. On 1<sup>st</sup> October, he deserted and went home for the umpteenth time. He was again brought back, beaten and punished. He was repeatedly beaten by several leaders. He was taken to Jaffna for a battle in mid-January 2001 and was captured in Jaffna by the Army.

**3. Mr. Sivananthan Saravanamuttu (23)** from Kanagarayankulam, Mullaitivu: Joined the LTTE aged 16 in 1994, when the LTTE held a propaganda meeting and demanded that one from each household should join them. He deserted and got back home when his father died. During the Sri Lankan Army advance in 1997, he was picked up in a round-up of deserters and given punishment duties near the frontline. He was injured at Karipaddamurippu and after 3 months in hospital, was again injured in Killinochchi in August 1998. He deserted again from Raghavan Base, Killinochchi, in March 1999. He was caught and thrust into a punishment bunker. He then gave a letter of quittance and submitted himself for 18 months of punishment duties.

In January 2001, he was taken along with others under punishment or on Border Force duty to dig bunkers in Kilaly, Jaffna. Three days later shells started falling around them. While his companions escaped, Sivananthan was left injured in the leg. He then noticed a small boy (Nimal above) who too had got isolated in the heat of battle. He got Nimal to fetch him water from a pond in a plastic bag. The two were then picked up by soldiers, who first assaulted them.

There are then many cases of members of the Auxilliary and Border Forces in the Vanni, who were taken to the front after repeated acts of desertion, despite strenuous protestations by wives or parents, and were killed or captured.

The cases from the North above are representative rather than exceptional. They were captured because the turn of events on the battlefield left them with no choice. No one with the choice of escape would surrender to the enemy on the battlefield. The main battles have been in the North, and for Northern cadre, their homes and villages being closeby has given additional force to thoughts of desertion as a practical proposition. In several cases in our previous bulletins, escapees have found shelter in their villages and with relatives.

In all these instances of escape or capture, the boys and girls are in a political vacuum. Taken out of the LTTE's influence, they become ordinary boys and girls, totally devoid of the fire with which they were charged under conditions of martial regimentation. Given the age group involved and their strong ties to their homes, it would be remarkable if desertion is not an endemic phenomenon.

The recruiters' belabouring of the boy above (13 or 14 at that time) with claims of others from Batticaloa and Amparai fighting for the liberation of Jaffna, has a significant ring of bitterness representing institutional thinking.

Moreover, the signs are that the LTTE leadership is at present worrying about a hostile force, or forces, having penetrated the Vanni and directly or otherwise giving opportunity for counter-opinions to be aired. This also entails the leaders having anxieties about running their institution with young persons, many of whom repeatedly run away and are caught and brought back.

There are thus many reasons why the LTTE leadership would prefer to place greater reliance on Eastern cadre for battles in the North – the main battlefield. For Eastern LTTE members stationed in the North, desertion is not a prospect open to them. They are cut off from their villages and relatives, and the new localities are strange to them. This was evident in the tragedy of May 1986 when the LTTE launched its putsch against the fraternal group TELO in Jaffna. Most of the TELO victims massacred were young Easterners. We may surmise that the current recruitment drive in the East is mainly in preparation for projected battles in the North.

### **The LTTE's Strategic Opportunity and the Cost**

A number of teachers and government officials in the uncleared area, and leaders of civil society in the Batticaloa District, who were all appalled by recent developments, have made representations to LTTE leaders at various levels. Most of them believe that the LTTE has a cause. They have pointed out to the leaders that the LTTE were being insensitive and not facing the reality, if they believed that the parents were submitting their children voluntarily. On the contrary, it was stressed, they were doing it under necessity with deep sadness and barely concealed bitterness. Further, the minimum age of 16 set by the LTTE itself was being widely observed in the breach. They further impressed on the leaders that they were greatly harming their cause when the rest of the world was forcing the Sri Lankan Government to talk peace with the LTTE. This, they pointed out, was the most inopportune time for the LTTE to lose public support by this behaviour and, besides, alienate world opinion. However, the LTTE appear to have been moved.

The ongoing recruitment operation around Batticaloa is being directed by Karikalan, a useful and docile Eastern face in the LTTE. Over the years able Easterners who understood the delicate position of Tamils and called for unity among Tamil groups and a sensitive approach to the Muslims, left in disgust. Karikalan, who in 1990 was hearing representations from Muslim leaders anxious to reach accommodation, had no scruples over massacring Muslim civilians a few weeks later, when not even the excuse of a provocation was available.

In the East, the Tamil civilians had it rough from the LTTE even as it boasted to visitors of a show piece ordered regime in Jaffna during the early 1990s. Although the LTTE showed its nasty side to the people of Jaffna at crucial moments (e.g. October 1987 and 1995), there was a semblance of strict order in its regime, even in matters such as intimidation and extortion. The people had some idea of where they stood. This has not been the case in the East. The abler Eastern leaders having made an exit, the general run of area leaders are reputedly ruffians who are answerable to no one.

There have been cases of leaders using the death threat against civilians in the very first instance of asking for money. People in the East fear talking back to local LTTE leaders, as is fairly common in the North even today, since they have no idea of what they might do. The quality of leadership in the East is further exemplified by the regular occurrence of local LTTE leaders coming across, often with hoarded loot, to surrender to the Army, and then joining the hunt for their erstwhile companions. This is a situation that resulted from the LTTE's atrocious political strategies. There is little doubt that the LTTE leadership regards the East with cynicism, as little more than a pool of cannon fodder.

The foundation for the tolerance of the LTTE's impositions was of course laid by the pillage and mass-murder inflicted on the Eastern Tamils by the Sri Lankan Forces, particularly during the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. The people's experience of the LTTE's machinations have been more than counter-balanced by this historical legacy that is continually being reinforced by their experience of the State. Their experience has left a deep conviction that the Sinhalese

polity will continue to obstruct any justice to the Tamils. The PA government too is far from facing up to this historical legacy, and has indeed played at suppressing it.

During the course of its history, the LTTE has repeatedly made pernicious choices, leaving it only with the option of going for a separate state to stabilise itself. The general paralysis in the Sinhalese polity, and institutions of the State, has given the LTTE a strategic opportunity that it can hardly afford to miss.

We are thus bound to see more intense and harsher forms of recruitment by the LTTE. The tears will continue to flow in Sunset Shore and elsewhere in the North-East. Those taken from the East will not even be given the dubious honour of a sealed coffin containing decaying plantain stems being brought home for the mourners.

With all its poverty and alienation, India was able to nurture a Gandhi, the Blacks in America a Martin Luther King and South Africa, Nelson Mandela. Here ironically, the more urbanized and sophisticated Tamil society could produce only a Prabhakaran, along with his suicide cult and child sacrifice in the name of liberation. It has no connection whatsoever with Islamic fundamentalism. The most prominent and articulate among the propaganda wing of the LTTE are cassock-wearing Christian priests and pretentious “liberal” intellectuals, sitting cosily in Western Capitals. Why cannot any among the religious leaders of the Tamil community condemn this atrocious and ludicrous behaviour openly? Condemning such inhuman behaviour does not justify the Sinhalese State, its failures or its crimes. Rather, it would help the Tamil community to struggle for its dignity, using its creative energy rather than rely exclusively on its destructive energy.

Unfortunately, the world order is dominated by the same logic at a different level and breaking it seems an enormously difficult task indeed. We see this in the recent heinous crime in US, both in the nature of the tragedy itself and in the dominant response to it from influential sections in the West. But our only hope is that there are strong institutions and opportunity for democratic dissent that would eventually restrain the ignoble and urge the saner options. However, the strident chauvinism drowning the saner voices, brings us face to face with the dark recesses and destructive potential everywhere.

Every crisis engenders both the bad and the good in humanity. In Sri Lanka, the former is still dominant over the latter. In the Tamil community, this dominance extends over all aspects of life. That is the saddest part. The goodness exhibited by individuals from all communities is wasted, while the others are unable harness it for the common good.