

CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES
REFUGE

c/o Refugee Documentation Project, York University
4700 Keele Street, Downsview Ontario M3J 2R6

REFUGE

c/o Refugee Documentation Project,
York University, 4700 Keele Street,
Downsview, Ontario M3J 2R6

Editor:

Howard Adelman

**Technical Editor and
Circulation Manager:**

Cathy Mickalakos

Editorial Assistant:

Alex Zisman

Publishing Advisory Board:

Douglas Cohen, Montreal
Claudio Duran, Toronto
Arie Van Eek, Burlington
Daniel Ferguson, Toronto
Michael Pitman, Toronto
Linda Weigl, Regina

Typesetting and Layout:

Publications Department,
York University

Refuge is dedicated to encouraging assistance to refugees, by providing a forum for sharing information and opinion on Canadian and international issues pertaining to refugees. It is published five times a year, in October, December, February, April and June. It is a non-profit, independent periodical supported by a grant from the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission; by private donations; and by subscriptions. It is a forum for discussion, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of its funders, staff or Editorial Board.

All material in *Refuge* may be reproduced without permission unless copyrighted or otherwise indicated. Credit should be given to the author or source if named.

Subscription rates for one year are \$10.00 for individuals and non-profit organizations and \$20.00 for libraries and institutions. Please enclose payment with your order. No discounts can be given for American funds because of bank charges for foreign cheques.

Logo design:

Dreadnaught Cooperative Inc.,
Toronto

Second Class Mail Registration No. 5512
ISSN 0229-5113

Sri Lanka's Agony

by

Howard Adelman

JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka – This is not an easy city to get to.

It took me two days to come here from Colombo, the capital, just 400 kilometres (246 miles) away. And when I finally arrived, I was turned away by soldiers. The main problem in travelling is that Sinhalese drivers are afraid to enter the northern province, where the majority of the population is Tamil. They fear Tamil terrorists will attack and kill them. And here in the north, the Tamils fear the fury of the Sinhalese-dominated army, which on several occasions has wreaked a bloody revenge for Tamil killings. On both sides, the fear is very real. And its causes were clearly demonstrated on my journey by bus to this city of 850,000. Our Tamil bus conductor was beaten up by an army officer who punched him repeatedly on each side of the head, then kicked him in the shins with his heavy army boots. The apparent reason for the beating was that the bus was overcrowded, although in fact it was the least crowded bus I travelled on in Sri Lanka. A diplomat in Colombo later suggested the real reason was that the conductor had allowed me, a foreigner, on the bus to Jaffna. We had stopped on the outskirts of Jaffna for a security check. Only the women, a Tamil Jesuit priest and myself were allowed to stay on board. The other men were lined up along the road, searched and interrogated. I felt outraged as the conductor was beaten, but didn't interfere, and everyone else seemed to accept the beating as a routine event. The stories people have been telling me

may explain the passiveness of the Tamil passengers. I was told of innocent bus passengers being shot by soldiers, of 1,000 young men arbitrarily arrested and held as suspected terrorists in a detention camp near Galle on the south shore, of a priest shot by soldiers near Mannar on Jan. 6, of a Methodist minister shot the week before, of 100 youths who have disappeared and are not known to have fled across the narrow strait to India.

The government enforces tight restrictions on the use of cars or bicycles. Escape routes across the Palk Strait are patrolled by the Sri Lanka navy, which also blocked the path of infiltrators from terrorist training camps in India. While I was in the north, one boy was killed and two others wounded when they were intercepted while fleeing by boat to India.

The homes of civilians suspected of assisting terrorists in any way are dynamited. I counted four houses blown up on the main road into Jaffna. One Tamil opposed to separatism, the only northerner I spoke to who still believes in the unity of Sri Lanka, told me of a brand-new house in Jaffna which was dynamited. The occupants had fled when a mine went off under the road four houses away and the soldiers took this as evidence they were in association with the terrorists, and blasted their home. It's not just disgruntled Tamils who make such charges. Former prime minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, now leader of the Sri Lanka opposition and no friend of

Tamil separatism, publicly echoed the charges a few days later.

While northern Tamils live in daily fear of the overwhelmingly Sinhalese security forces, they also fear one another. A guerrilla group known as the Tamil Tigers, I was told, had executed a Tamil girl because her brother was suspected to be an informer. The Tigers themselves are divided into at least 11 groups. The main ones are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam led by Velupillai Prabhakaran and the People's Organization of Tamil Eelam led by Uma Maheshwaran. Tamil youths from the Karaiyar Hindu sect have used violence and the indiscriminate response of the Sinhalese army to discredit the older, non-violent leaders of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which embraces mainly Vellala Hinduism. TULF, a legal political party, was represented in parliament until 1983 when the government put through a constitutional amendment which required a pledge of loyalty to a unified Sri Lanka. TULF legislators wouldn't sign the pledge. They were not allowed to take their seats in parliament and the northern Tamils were effectively disenfranchised.

The largely Sinhalese population in the south of the island have little sympathy for the idea of special status for the Tamils, let alone statehood. Every Sinhalese I spoke to said he or she would support the individual rights of Tamils but not their rights as a community because that could lead to a permanent division of the island. However, these ordinary Sinhalese are afraid to travel into, let alone settle in, the mainly-Tamil north because of the dangers. A recent massacre in a Sinhalese settlement in the heart of Tamil territory was uniformly cited by Sinhalese civilians as the reason for avoiding Tamil areas. So there is in fact a partition of the island into Sinhalese and Tamil areas anyway. In the south there is another large minority, the Moors or Moslems. They speak Tamil and sympathize with Tamil demands for collective rights in language and culture, but not with the call for an independent Tamil state. Moors told

me they were afraid of Sinhalese attempts to purify the culture of the island. They said Sinhalese moves to strengthen the position of the Sinhalese language and the Buddhist monks would weaken the Moors' linguistic and religious rights.

When I first sought to go to Jaffna, tourist guides and government officials told me it was impossible, too dangerous, but they were very polite about it. After all, they said, Colombo airport was built with Canadian aid and Sri Lanka is Canada's largest single foreign aid recipient. Eventually, I found a former prison guard who said he would take me to Jaffna by car. But long before we reached the Tamil area, as we approached the ancient capital of Anuradhapura the next morning, the man told me he would go no further. He had no fear, he said, since fear was linked with desire and he had risen above desire by following the eight-fold Buddhist path. However, his wife had not even reached the first level and she was still capable of fear. She had told him not to go on.

An hour later I was in a Sinhalese-driven minibus on the way to Vavuniya, the crossing point into Tamil territory. An army officer there said I was free to go north by road, but there was no bus or car heading that way. I had to return to Colombo. I discovered a train ran to Jaffna and I was on it when it left Colombo at dawn the next day. In seven hours it took me within 40 kilometres of Jaffna but it could get no closer because the line ahead had been blown up. The train shared the same fate four days later and 33 soldiers and civilians died in the explosion. I transferred to a bus, which took me to the outlying districts of Jaffna. It was there that the army officer savagely beat the bus conductor. The women, the priest and I sat in the bus for almost an hour and during all that time the conductor, only a few feet away, was being beaten up, off and on, by the same soldier. He moaned as the punches thudded into his head and the boots bashed his legs. There would be a question, an answer,

another pummeling. Then I was ordered off the bus by other soldiers who, in contrast, were extremely polite to me, even apologetic.

What are you doing here? I told him I had come to see someone, a lawyer. He didn't insist on the name, didn't even ask for my passport. When I said I was from Canada he became very friendly. He talked repeatedly on a walkie-talkie. Finally, he said: "I'm sorry. You cannot stay here. Foreigners are not allowed to come to Jaffna." Later, I found out that I could have walked to the lawyer's home in five minutes. Finally, the soldiers reached a decision. They stopped a passing truck and ordered the driver to take me to Elephant Pass army base, 50 kilometres away, to be questioned by their superiors. There was no way a foreign professor was going to be allowed into the major army operations area of Sri Lanka's bloodiest combat zone.

ELEPHANT PASS, SRI LANKA

ELEPHANT PASS, Sri Lanka - In northern Sri Lanka an ethnic crisis that turned to terrorism has developed into a civil war.

The south, mainly Sinhalese, still debates the national question - whether Sri Lanka should be a unitary state or one country with a degree of autonomy for the northern and eastern Tamil districts. The debate and aborted negotiations have not resulted in even a little progress. Meanwhile, a virtually 100 percent Sinhalese army occupies the northern Tamil districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya. It is in daily battle with the major Eelam terrorist independence movement, the Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the People's Organization of Tamil Eelam.

What appears to have happened is that the battle is no longer between a handful of terrorists attacking police posts and engaging in shootouts with army patrols.

The civil war label definition applies because actions of the armed forces, the inaction of the Sinhalese political leaders and the impotence of the older Tamil ones, have led the bulk of the northern Tamils to empathize with and even support the Eelam terrorists. The Sinhalese may long for a simple unified state. But the military situation, politics, religion, culture and even geography will only allow the aspirations for a unitary state to be realized at great political and human costs -- if it is feasible at all. Power sharing on a large scale now appears Utopian. In fact, the political winds have been blowing in the opposite direction.

The Tamils of the north were effectively disenfranchised when their non-violent separatist representatives were prevented from taking their seats in parliament in 1983. On Dec. 22, 1982, an unprecedented national referendum was used to extend the life of the large majority government for another six years, so they had no opportunity to express a political voice until 1988. Where they do have a vote, in municipal elections, less than 15 percent of the Tamils in Jaffna opted to exercise their franchise, presumably as a form of protest. Since jobs in the government and positions in the military are related to patronage, the effective political disenfranchisement of the Tamils compound their economic woes.

Originally, the prime issues were cultural -- language and education. Tamil was designated a "national language" (the Moor minority also speak Tamil at home), and the Tamil language in principle was given a role similar to that of French in Ontario. In practice it has meant very little since the government evidently does not even have typewriters with Tamil script. In the 1950s Sinhalese was made the only official language of Sri Lanka. The link language, English, did not even remain as a required school subject. Educational grievances compound the problem.

Even though the Tamil proportion of the university population, according to the official statistics, is double that of their ratio of the population (25 percent versus 12½ percent) in the professional faculties, Tamils are no longer accepted into programs on the basis of merit alone since Sri Lanka has an affirmative action program for the Sinhalese majority. This has significantly reduced Tamil opportunities for higher education.

There is a danger that the conflict may be internationalized. The Tamil situation is the major source of conflict between India and Sri Lanka. Many Western observers think an Indian invasion is plausible, perhaps even probable. Many Sri Lankans see superpower involvement stemming from Soviet and American rivalry for the facilities of Trincomalee once a great British naval base. One Moslem even assured me that World War III will start after India invades Sri Lanka, when Washington backs Sri Lanka and Moscow supports India. This unlikely scenario does not seem farfetched for those in Sri Lanka who cannot accept that unresolved internal tensions have turned their island into a battleground.

There are no favorable signs for an internal peaceful settlement. The situation might change if the Sinhalese majority were to make a genuine proposal for devolution of political power so that the demands of the Tamil north for linguistic, cultural and economic self-expression might be met. But the government has not made such an offer, seeming unwilling to accept the idea of a federal system. Sirima Bandaranaike, former prime minister of Sri Lanka, the opposition Sinhalese leader, has in recent days at least acknowledged the reality and depth of the crisis and the inadequacy of the present reliance on military solutions and the lack of discipline shown by the security forces. Bandaranaike caused a furor this month when she accused security forces of killing innocent Tamils.

There has been a partition of the island -- in fact if not in law -- for years because of the concentration of Tamils in the north and east of the country and because the Sinhalese are afraid to go into these areas. The government policy of encouraging Sinhalese to settle on land in Tamil areas to improve the ethnic mix is highly unlikely to work in the north given Sinhalese fears. But it may work in mixed areas in the east such as Trincomalee where the Tamil plurality is already threatened. When National Security Minister Lalith Athulathnudali speaks of the government policy of resettlement on the basis of ethnic population ratios in order to settle "people favorable to us in areas plagued by terrorism and to put the unfavorable people among us," it seems at least to this Western outsider to be divorced from reality.

The separation of the island re-enacts ancient history in which the conflict is rooted. Sri Lanka has been subject to waves and waves of conquest which repeatedly forced the capital of successive Buddhist kingdoms further south. The Sinhalese have always felt that their language, culture and religion were under constant threat from northern invaders. Since the Sinhalese are also at the bottom of the heap economically, their own current grievances build upon the historic fears. The Sinhalese laboured for British plantation owners, worked for Indian import/export firms, were clerks in Muslim and Tamil businesses, compete for jobs with better educated and trained Tamils and Moors, and have had no role in executive banking levels.

These historic fears and economic circumstances are the warp and woof of a religious tapestry that provides the coherent framework for the Sinhalese position. Sinhalese sacred Buddhist texts are a reminder of the long continuity and constant struggle to protect the religious and ethnic identity of the Sinhalese and the Buddhist traditions of the island from the "infections" of Tamil Hinduism.

KILL
are h
gues
plea
in a
hote
chi
entr
the
see
the
Yes
anc
tra
wa
sta
kill
Me
bo
arr
ing
A
ne
sl
cl
sa
a
s
e
t
l
c
p

KILINOCHCHI, SRI LANKA

KILINOCHCHI, Sri Lanka — Shots are heard. It is 2:15 a.m. I am the only guest in a hotel that seems much too pleasant to be set amid rice paddies in a hotbed of terrorist activity. The hotel is on the outskirts of Kilinochchi just south of Elephant Pass, the entry to the Jaffna peninsula. This is the heartland of the Tamils who are seeking an independent homeland in the northern province of Sri Lanka. Yesterday a police officer was shot and killed here. Four days later the train that brought me to the north was blown up after it left Kilinochchi station. Thirty-three passengers were killed, mostly Sinhalese soldiers. Most of the Tamils decided not to board at the last minute, but the army ignored this clue to an impending tragedy.

Another shot breaks the night's stillness. I cannot tell the direction of the shooting but it does not seem very close. In spite of the bullets, I feel far safer here than in the army barracks at Elephant Pass. The army camp is strategically sited at the narrow entrance to the finger-like peninsula that points into the straits toward India, only 35 kilometres (22 miles) away.

I had been ordered off a bus by the army in the outskirts of Jaffna because the city, the biggest Tamil centre in Sri Lanka, is closed to foreigners. I was sent by truck to the army base for unstated reasons. Now, on the long narrow porch of the barracks, I sat on a cement wall talking with the Sinhalese soldiers and looking at their Tamil prisoners. I asked the two captives a question, but the soldiers told me the prisoners had been forbidden to speak. The two young men, the soldiers said, would be taken north for interrogation, then south to Galle on the south coast, where they would be put in an internment camp. One soldier told me the two boys — they seemed to be about 20 — had been captured with guns and grenades in the bush. Yet they didn't seem dirty enough for this to be accurate, for their feet and sarongs seemed unusually clean for barefooted guerrillas fighting in rice paddies and scrub. They showed no

signs of being wounded or even of having been handled roughly.

The Sinhalese soldiers are very friendly to Canadians, but they are very haphazard about their military duties. For instance, when I was riding on trains the soldiers loaded on the front and back of the trains jumped on and off to guard each station at which we stopped. Although they kept their guns pointed toward the bush, their faces and eyes were turned on the train and the passengers. They would easily have been taken by surprise in an ambush. They seemed far less disciplined and trained even than the militia-men I encountered during the summer war of 1982 in Lebanon. But how you judge discipline may depend somewhat on the eye of the beholder. A priest told me that the Sri Lankan soldiers nowadays are much more disciplined than in the past — because they no longer engage in drunken sprees in which they burn houses of Tamils and shoot their occupants. While the killing of civilians now was just as arbitrary, he said, the style was more systematic.

Ordinary Tamils I met in travelling to Jaffna claimed that more than 700 innocent civilians have been killed in the last six months, with the rate of killing rising dramatically in the last month. Few of these civilians were thought to have any connection with the Tamil terrorists.

An officer at Elephant Pass offered a bed in a bunkhouse, but I was able to decline when the security police ordered four men in a truck they had stopped to drive me on to the hotel at Kilinochchi. The 13-kilometre (8-mile) trip took about 90 minutes. Curfew had arrived and the driver took a roundabout route by back roads to avoid army patrols. I used the opportunity of the ride and dinner later to question my Tamil companions. One who spoke broken English had once owned three shops — small tobacco and grocery stores and a larger franchise operation — in Galle. All three had been looted in early 1983 and two of the shops were severely damaged; his house had also been looted during the Galle

riots. Unlike the riots in Colombo months later on July 23, 1983, the shops and homes were not torched. In the Colombo riots, sparked by an attack of the Eelam Tigers — Tamil terrorists — on a patrol of Sinhalese soldiers that left 13 dead in Jaffna, 387 Tamils were killed according to official counts, and up to 2,000 according to unofficial ones.

The earlier Galle incidents suggest that although the trouble in the north may act as a catalyst for mob violence, such incidents are insufficient to explain the type of violence and its extent. Further, Galle suggests how sharing power might help prevent violence. A recurrence of the early 1983 events was evidently prevented by appointing a troika as police supervisors — a Moslem, a Tamil and a Sinhalese.

Though language and education are issues for almost all Tamils, they are not sufficient to account for the independence movement. The focus of concern is economic. For example, the ex-Galle businessman had become a mortal supporter of the Tigers after losing his shops in the riots. Unlike most Tamil businessmen, he had insured at least one of his shops. But he had been unable to collect the insurance. When I looked at the policy he pushed at me, I saw why. It had the typical clause excluding coverage from acts of violence resulting from civil disorder. His petitions to the government had not yielded a rupee in compensation for his losses. Yet, he complained, when Sinhalese property in the north is destroyed by Tamil fighters, the government pays 10 times the compensation, and does so immediately. After the riots in Galle, his family had fled in fear to his original home in the village of Karaitivi on the island northwest of Jaffna. Their refusal to return south compounded his economic difficulties as there was no opportunity now to make a living in the north.

There just are no job opportunities there now. An estimated 25,000 to 100,000 fishermen are unemployed (the official government figures are

13,041) because the Sri Lankan navy has banned their boats from setting out from shore for security reasons. With all the Tiger bank robberies only one bank remains open to serve almost a million people. Nor do the banks risk loans to Tamils in such situations. The former businessman from Galle could not even get a loan to re-establish his business in the south even though he had 20 years of demonstrated business success. One of his nephews, the younger one, he told me, had joined the rebels. His sister now worried all the time. But he thought it was just as dangerous for young people if they did not join. The driver of the truck agreed. Now 26, he had been managing director of a small Tamil business that was destroyed in 1983. He had fled north for safety. Though unemployed most of the time, he would earn the equivalent of about \$9 for this three-day trip from Jaffna to Colombo and back. Three days earlier, he had been arrested, held for six hours, interrogated and then released. He had not been beaten or mistreated. "But my brother was shot in December," the man from Galle said. "He was a rice farmer. He was never political. He was just in the fields, and the army shot him."

Caught between Tamil terrorism and army repressive measures, the north has been economically devastated. Tourism is dead. Business investment is nil. There is limited transport. The fishing industry has been halted. The natural link across the 22-mile-wide Palk Straits to India has been severed. Shops are closing for lack of business. Professionals have many fewer paying clients. It is even difficult to get to the doctor or a hospital.

CONFERENCE

The Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees

SPRING CONSULTATION

DATE: May 30, 31 and June 1, 1985
 LOCATION: Scarborough Foreign Mission Centre 2685 Kingston Road
 Scarborough, Ontario

Letters to the Editor

We have, in the past, been fortunate to have a very enthusiastic spokesman on behalf of our Vietnamese Boat Refugees, Mr. Lloyd Jones of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, of whom you have probably heard either directly or indirectly. It is due to his efforts that a keen interest has been awakened among churches and other organizations in Canada to sponsor refugees from Hong Kong. We, in turn, have offered to provide limited funds for the care and maintenance during the first year of resettlement of the refugees. I am sure you all realize how difficult it is to find donors to keep this fund

going. We have, therefore, reached the conclusion that in order to save time and money and to simplify matters we should, from now on, be in direct contact with sponsors. If there are any questions that you would like answered, please do not hesitate to write directly to us as Mr. Lloyd Jones is no longer representing Hong Kong Christian Service as Resettlement Field Coordinator in Canada.

For your information we attach our "Conditions and Procedures Governing Sponsorship Funding".

L. Stumpf, Officer-in-Charge

HONG KONG CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Migration Services Department Conditions and Procedures Governing Sponsorship Fund Transaction

1. Hong Kong Christian Service, Migration Services Department, Kowloon, Hong Kong, guarantees to make financial contributions, according to the following sliding scale to bonafide organizations in Canada who are sponsoring the resettlement of Vietnamese boat refugees from Hong Kong to Canada: -

Single person CD\$2,000.00
 2 persons (or married couple)
 CD\$3,000.00
 3 persons CD\$3,500.00
 4 persons CD\$4,000.00
 5 persons CD\$4,500.00
 6 persons CD\$5,000.00

2. Upon request, a separate letter of guarantee will be addressed to the sponsoring agency. The letter will state the name or names of the refugees whom the Canadian agency is sponsoring, as well as the exact amount which Hong Kong Christian Service guarantees to contribute towards the resettlement of the refugee/s.

3. Once Hong Kong Christian Service has received verified evidence that the visa or visas have been issued by the Canadian immigration authorities, the amount guaranteed by Hong Kong Christian Service will be transferred without delay.

4. Hong Kong Christian Service is not in a position to transfer money to the sponsoring agency upon the agency's filing an application for a visa. Generally, a period of several months will elapse between the date of application and the date the visa is issued. This would entail the resources of Hong Kong Christian Service being frozen for a considerable period of time, without any knowledge of whether a visa will finally be granted. A negative outcome would necessitate the transfer of the money back to Hong Kong, causing an interest and exchange loss.