

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE GODS AND THE STARS

MUCH of downtown Colombo, the sea-port capital of Sri Lanka, resembles a birthday cake. There are pink sandstone buildings, ornate and cathedralesque, with Victorian arches and white parapets. Massive structures in Regency style blend in miraculously with austere statues of Queen Victoria and other relics of nineteenth-century Ceylon, which recall vast tea plantations, a beneficent British administration, and a Ceylonese aristocracy that flourished under the Raj. In March, which is the hot season, most of the city's million inhabitants, ignoring the oppressive heat, clog its tiny squares. On stately Galle Road, which has for a century served as a young people's promenade, slim young women, some in traditional saris, others wearing Western frocks, smile coquettishly at street-corner Johnnies. Young men whizzing by on Japanese motorbikes have long hair and wear faded jeans, in marked contrast to the colorful sarongs still favored by an older generation. Boutiques teem with shoppers, and although most of the hotels in the city are half empty, fashionable Western women bask at swimming pools beside the sea. Colombo has done little to erase its colonial past—as if it had sought safety in preserving an old-fashioned look. But the look is an illusion. Guards now check your parcels before you enter a boutique. Truckloads of commandos hurtle past the sunbathing women and people strolling on the manicured green. In Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo's most fashionable quarter, matronly women in pearls search their Fiats and their Mercedeses for hidden bombs. Only forty miles from the city, Army checkpoints—huge concrete blocks, battered oil drums, and railway ties bristling with steel nails—loom suddenly in the roadways. Weary soldiers manning them warn you to be off the roads by dark. Colombo is probably the safest place in Sri Lanka, but no place in Sri Lanka is really safe.



ern India around 500 B.C. and established magnificent Buddhist kingdoms on the island's north-central plains. As Buddhism was supplanted by Hinduism in its Indian homeland, the Sinhalese came to view themselves as the protectors of the Buddhist faith. The Tamils were dark-skinned Dravidian Hindus from southern India, who arrived in smaller numbers a few hundred years later and established a rival kingdom on the island's Jaffna Peninsula, in the north, and on the eastern coast. Their symbol was the tiger, and at one period, during the tenth century, all of northern and much of central Sri Lanka was ruled by the Chola dynasty as a province of South India. A third, smaller ethnic group consisted of Muslim descendants of the Arab traders.

Until 1983, this lush teardrop of an island off the southern tip of India seemed to many observers almost perfect, a tropical paradise. Buttressed by a thriving free-market economy, it was one of the Third World's few democratic states, and had one of the Third World's highest literacy rates. It also had the world's second-oldest continuous written history, and it had been the subject of travellers' tales since the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien arrived in the fifth century. "Lanka" means "the resplendent" in Sinhalese, and, according to the Mahavamsa—the country's first epic, early history—as the Buddha lay dying he proclaimed, "In Lanka, O Lord of gods, will my religion be established." Enchanted Arab traders called the island Serendip, and the young Rudyard Kipling found on it "things wonderful and fascinating innumerable."

Yet beneath this surface Sri Lanka also carried the burden of a two-thousand-year history in which its population was divided into two hostile and mutually suspicious camps—those of the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. The Sinhalese—the name means People of the Lion—were Indo-Aryans who arrived from north-

The Sinhalese and the Tamils fought off and on until the sixteenth century, when the island, divided and exhausted, was colonized by the Portuguese. They brought Catholicism, and were succeeded by the Dutch, who developed inland trade. The British arrived in 1795, and almost immediately set about uniting the island, which was now called Ceylon, and establishing one of the best of the British-colonial education systems. The country, with its tea, rubber, and coconut plantations, was prosperous and relatively quiescent, although there were muted charges by the Sinhalese that the British favored the Tamils and were following their customary expedient of "Divide and rule." In any event, the Tamils certainly thrived under the British, seizing the educational opportunities and embracing English as their tongue. Although they made up only eighteen per cent of the population, they did well in the Civil Service, and they tended to be better off economically than the Sinhalese. Under the British, there was no significant independence movement, and it could be said that Ceylon's independence, in 1948,

came essentially on India's coattails.

At that time, there was little hint of sectarian strife. The Sinhalese and the Tamils ruled jointly, the rulers being the élite of Ceylon's colonial "old boys" club. They had grown up playing cricket and rugby together, had shared membership in the fashionable clubs, had gone through university together. They appeared to consider themselves Ceylonese, not Tamils or Sinhalese.

Then, in 1956, a fervid nationalist government, led by the Sinhalese aristocrat S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, was swept into power, cushioned by an eclectic mixture of Buddhist monks and intellectuals, peasants, and unemployed youth. Although the Sinhalese have always been in the majority (today they make up seventy-four per cent of a population of sixteen million, and dominate the government and the Army), they, too, have long seen themselves as a threatened minority. The Sinhalese, as any Sinhalese will tell you, are the only Buddhist Sinhalese in the world; and even though their island has less than three million Tamils, there are fifty-five million more just ninety minutes away, in India. One of Bandaranaike's first acts as Prime Minister was to substitute Sinhalese for English as the island's official tongue. With that, an era of linguistic nationalism was triumphantly launched. The Tamils, who speak the Dravidian language of India's southern Tamil Nadu state, had been apprehensive before. Now they were alarmed. "That was when we went from the solution to the problem," a Harvard-educated Tamil, who was once a member of the island's parliament, has said.

Things got steadily worse. In 1971, new, government-sanctioned university-admission regulations had the effect of requiring Tamils to score higher than Sinhalese on entrance exams. With the central government and many businesses being conducted in Sinhalese, Tamils had already been under a distinct handicap when they competed with Sinhalese for jobs—and now Sinhalese politicians made it still more difficult for them to obtain new positions. Between 1956 and 1980, the Tamils' share of government jobs dropped from fifty per cent to eleven per cent.

As early as 1956, "language riots" had broken out in Colombo and other parts of the country, and they have occurred intermittently ever since. Over the years, voices began to be

CEPPAGNA

The heights, fastnesses, are sharp and wild: olive trees scatter into the open, die out, and, beyond, higher, dandelions sweeten

thin air: sheep go up where spring grass winters into hay: there the black bear runs and knows a way old as rocks: the wolf, crisp

with practices, whirls, and the moon burns his eyes: when the shepherd, his third week, runs out of food, he is, except for greens, out—homeless,

wineless, lampless, wifeless: his eyes feed lean on the liquor of stars, and just gravity gets him back to earthly hungers.

—A. R. AMMONS

heard calling for autonomy in the heavily Tamil north. And in 1972 thirty teen-agers, led by a seventeen-year-old named Velupillai Prabhakaran, proclaimed that their established politicians were no longer protecting their rights, and set up a guerrilla organization on the Jaffna Peninsula. They called it the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or L.T.T.E. ("Eelam" means "precious land.")

By 1977, when Junius Richard Jayewardene, a pro-American Sinhalese, became Sri Lanka's fifth Prime Minister, Tamil pressures for more autonomy were considerable. And Jayewardene's landslide victory (his United National Party won eighty-five per cent of the parliamentary seats) gave the Tamils a measure of hope, for he was considered far more moderate than his predecessors—especially Bandaranaike, who was assassinated in 1959, and his widow, Sirimavo, a Socialist, who succeeded him the following year. Most important, Jayewardene was not considered a Sinhalese chauvinist. Also, for the first time, a Tamil, Appapillai Amirthalingam, became leader of the opposition,

and there now seemed reason to believe that ethnic grievances would be addressed.

The following year, Jayewardene rewrote the constitution to adopt a French-type Presidential system, and became President. He thereupon appointed a fiery nationalist named Ranasinghe Premadasa as the country's Prime Minister and moved swiftly to deal with the Tamil problem. He opened negotiations with the Tamil opposition on how power could be devolved, through either district or regional councils. The Tamils were represented by Amirthalingam's Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a group of eighteen parliamentarians who had little in common with the Tamil militants in the north. Now they came under increasing pressure from the militants. At the same time, President Jayewardene was finding formidable foes in the Sinhalese nationalists in his government and party, and in the country's thirty thousand powerful Buddhist monks. One of Jayewardene's vulnerabilities, belying his considerable intelligence, was his persistence in looking at the Tamil situation as a terrorist problem rather than as a communal one. He dithered and vacillated. So did Amirthalingam. The negotiations turned into a series of lost opportunities, and outright mistakes. By the time I first visited Sri Lanka, in early 1983, this once idyllic island was already drifting toward chaos. I returned to the island several times a year, and on each occasion, however grim my expectations, I was startled anew by the deteri-



oration of the country's integrity as, bit by bit, paradise became irretrievable. The turning point came in July of 1983.

IT happened not in a typical ambush site—an isolated ravine, or a hairpin turn in the mountains—but in an upper-middle-class neighborhood on the outskirts of Jaffna, where Tamil homes were well appointed and adorned with gilded statues of Hinduism's sacred cows. Velupillai Prabhakaran, who was now twenty-eight, carried out an attack on an Army convoy with thirteen other guerrillas, dressed in fatigues and armed with AK-47s and strings of grenades. He had been planning the attack for more than six weeks, and it was his most daring operation since he formed the Tamil Tigers. The guerrillas now numbered about five hundred and were weather-hardened and tough. They came from the fishing villages of the Jaffna Peninsula, such as Valvedditturai, where their forefathers had been smugglers and pirates, plying the waters of the Indian Ocean.

The Tigers had already launched sixty assaults in 1983, ranging from political assassinations and raids on banks to executions of suspected informers, who were shot and left hanging from Jaffna lampposts. The guerrillas had also become far more politically adept than the ragtag teen-age idealists of eleven years before. When they called for a boycott of municipal elections in the northern districts in May, 1983, as much as ninety-five per cent of the electorate stayed away in some areas.

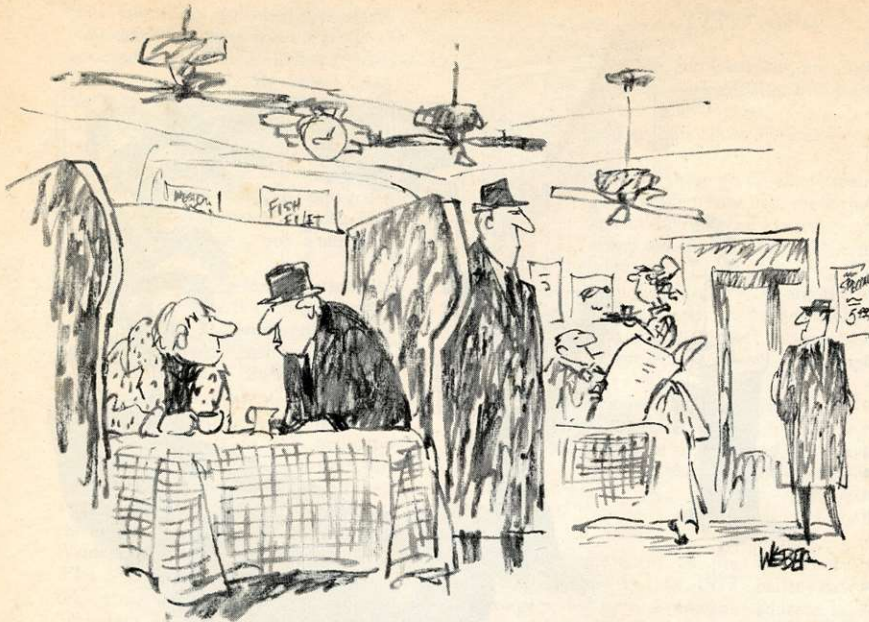
Prabhakaran, a handsome young man with flashing eyes, known to his friends as Thamby (Little Brother), was an impressively elusive leader—he had slipped past soldiers and police many times, once disguised as a peanut vender, another time as a priest—and, indeed, could have been mistaken for a rich, eccentric undergraduate. He was born in Valvedditturai, into the lowly Karaiar, or fishermen's, caste. (He eventually married into the higher



"Crocuses! It's spring!"

Vellala caste.) At the age of four, he saw his uncle burned alive in the language riot of 1958. He has said that his childhood was lonely and that he was painfully shy, especially "in the matter of mingling with girls." He was a Boy Scout. His father was an educated government civil servant, employed as a district land officer in the Jaffna Peninsula. Prabhakaran adored his father, and once told a journalist, "I was brought up in an environment of strict discipline. . . . My father set an example. . . . He would not even chew betel leaves. People say in our area: 'When he walks, he does not hurt even the grass under his feet.'" Prabhakaran has also said, "I used to read books on the rise of Napoleon and his exploits. This kind of history held special appeal." In groping for an answer to a political question in recent years, he has often quoted from the Mahabharata, the ancient Indian epic of legendary battles and struggles between glorious kings. He had only a high-school education,

however, having gone underground when he was seventeen. He is said to be an unerring marksman, who can hit a cigarette with a pistol shot at a hundred paces. (For inspiration, he likes to watch Clint Eastwood videocassettes.) He may have been trained in Cuba. He certainly modelled the Tigers on Fidel Castro's original guerrilla group, and from the start the L.T.T.E. has been a tightly controlled organization that has kept its strategy and movements secret through threat of public execution. It has also regularly shot up rivals from other Tamil militant groups. But Prabhakaran is not a Marxist in the traditional sense. In fact, his political thinking seems a bit muddled, and the labels pinned on him have ranged from extreme rightist to extreme leftist. All that can be said for certain is that he is an extremely militant and angry Tamil nationalist. He and his men wear cyanide capsules around their necks as a special badge of membership and determination—and, of course, as



"I've got a little job for you, Kretchmer. I want you to infiltrate the I.R.S. and sow the seeds of compassion."

a means of avoiding interrogation under arrest. He is a strict disciplinarian, who neither smokes nor drinks—he also does not drink coffee or tea—and is something of a puritan; he demanded celibacy and sobriety of his fighters in the movement's early days.

The story of how Prabhakaran met his wife, Madivadani, is a tale often told in Sri Lanka. In 1984, a group of Tamil law and medical students at Jaffna University—Madivadani among them—went on a hunger strike, vowing to fast "unto death" to compel the government to address the problem of discrimination against Tamils. The prospect of these future Tamil leaders starving themselves to death so angered Prabhakaran that he and a unit of his Tigers swept onto the campus, bundled the students into trucks, and took them to a hospital, where they were force-fed. One of Madivadani's friends, a fellow law student, who participated in the fast, has told me that Prabhakaran shouted at his future wife, "We can't afford this idiotic self-sacrifice!" and informed her sternly that the first obligation of potential Tamil leaders of her generation was to stay alive to help the Tamil people.

The 1983 ambush in Jaffna, which

killed thirteen government soldiers—Prabhakaran is said to have killed nine of the men himself—unleashed an unprecedented wave of violence and a chain of events that changed the face of Sri Lanka. In retaliation, mobs of Sinhalese youths—who were almost certainly encouraged by some government ministers and officials—together with members of the security forces and political-party thugs, went on a five-day rampage of burning and slaughter that swept across the south of Sri Lanka into the east and the central plains. For the deaths of thirteen Sinhalese Buddhists, a thousand Hindu Tamils lost their lives. All over the island, Tamil homes, shops, and businesses were burned. Three hundred million dollars' worth of property damage was done in Colombo alone, where a third of the investments and businesses had been Tamil-owned. In all, a hundred thousand Tamils lost their homes.

ON August 1, 1983, nine days after the carnage began, I asked President Jayewardene, a Buddhist and a religious scholar, if he still believed in God.

He immediately replied, "Look around you. Does He exist here?"

We were in his drawing room in Colombo, but he was referring to the scene in the streets, where just a few days earlier temples were burning and markets and factories were being gutted. In the countryside, tea plantations were in flames.

"Buddhism is a non-violent religion," I said. "Isn't there any way all this hatred can be overcome?"

"All religions have a following in this country—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam. If they haven't succeeded, I doubt very much whether I can. All human dreams evaporate one day."

The personal toll on him must have been enormous, I suggested. He was seventy-six, and his eyes looked tired. But, despite the presence and bearing of one born into an affluent, cultured family.

He smiled. "Enormous? There must be a word that is larger. But manageable nonetheless. Yes, I was holding Sri Lanka up as a model to the world. And giving up now would be cowardice. I'm not a coward. I still believe in myself."

Jayewardene—he is called J.R. by his friends—is a Goigama, a member of Sri Lanka's highest Sinhalese caste. He is an extremely well-read man—one of the most literate of the Third World leaders. His father, a Supreme Court judge, was a Christian, and his mother was a Buddhist, and he had a classic British-colonial upbringing, including a Scottish governess. As a young man, he developed wide cultural interests, studied piano, and formed the habit of reading the *London Times*. He achieved considerable success at cricket, rugby, tennis, and boxing, and is still a cricket buff. Although he was baptized a Christian, he converted to Buddhism in his twenties.

Jayewardene has a genuine sense of historic mission and of his own historic destiny. In 1946, as a young lawyer and parliamentarian from Cey-



lon, he stood before the world's leaders during the Peace Conference in San Francisco to plead for fair play for the defeated Japanese. At that time, too—despite an earlier flirtation with Marxism—he clashed repeatedly with Soviet generals and Kremlin bureaucrats, and by the time the Peace Conference came to an end he had solidly established his pro-Western credentials. A co-author of the Colombo Plan for Asian economic development, which was drawn up by Ceylon and Australia after the Second World War, he was an internationalist and a secularist. His faith was devout, yet for decades he had assiduously shunned Sri Lanka's militant Buddhist clergy.

Jayewardene was seventy when he became Prime Minister, in 1977, and, once in office, he was apparently determined to stay personally in charge—hence his changing of the constitution to become President. (When he pleases, he disdains the niceties of democratic politics.) In 1982, having been reelected for another six years, he immediately froze the electoral cycle with a referendum delaying general elections and extending the mandate of his parliament for yet another six years (with the result that there have been no parliamentary elections for more than a decade).

I asked President Jayewardene how much time would be needed to rebuild what had been destroyed.

"It is impossible to measure," he said. "Physically, of course, we can rebuild. But minds, attitudes, friendships? I cannot speak of time."

Though the government had proclaimed a shoot-on-sight curfew during the July, 1983, violence, there was no visible military protection at the Presidential home, a comfortable, unpretentious two-hundred-year-old bungalow. Jayewardene has lived there since his marriage, in 1935. Ceremonial guards, in red-black-and-gold uniforms, stood smartly at attention, but none of them were armed, and only a handful of plainclothes security men were in the garden, lolling under stately eucalyptus trees. Yet several blocks away, in the Victorian city center, troops and sharpshooters lined the intersections and perched in trees. The once colorful Pettah Market, which had been the center of Colombo's wholesale food trade, was a charred ruin, with nearly all its shops destroyed. The nineteenth-century railway station had become a makeshift morgue, its white parapets discolored by fire and smoke. Nevertheless, President Jayewardene insisted that he would not seek a military solution to his nation's political strife.

The country's fate, it had become clear, rested for the moment in the hands of two men: Jayewardene and Prabhakaran—the one a Buddhist, the other a Hindu. One, a member of Sri Lanka's highest caste, the Goigamas, who were destined to rule, had come of age in the best universities and the private British clubs. The other, born into the post-independence generation, and of the Karaiar caste, had come of age learning to reassemble a revolver blindfolded, in the remote Jaffna Peninsula. Both were austere, perhaps to

a fault, in their personal lives. Both were unpredictable, mystifying their closest advisers by charting one course of action and abruptly changing their minds. Both believed in astrology, both were captives of myth. Both had become increasingly intransigent ethnic nationalists. If neither seemed strong enough to demolish the other, neither seemed weak enough to fall.

AFTER the 1983 riots, thousands of frightened young Tamils flocked to the guerrilla training camps, and in the Jaffna Peninsula there was a growing movement for a separate Tamil nation, to be called Tamil Eelam. The dynamics of history and geography, prejudice and fear had coalesced dangerously around religion, language, and race. An island the size of West Virginia, with only sixteen million people, had been divided by an invisible serpentine line. Beyond the sacred Buddhist city of Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka's first capital, established in the center of the northern plain in the fourth century B.C.—citadel of the Vijaya dynasty, and home to ninety kings—a barrier now existed between the Tamil-dominated north and the Sinhalese south. Above that line, spreading to the isthmus of Elephant Pass and the Jaffna Peninsula beyond, the government's writ ended, and control was being consolidated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. For two and a half years, beginning in 1985, the Army units in Jaffna remained in their forts and base camps, under siege in their own country, as the Tigers swept out of the peninsula through the Northern Province and into the east.

In January, 1985, during a visit to the Northern Province, I was astonished at how much things had changed in only six months, largely because of the Sri Lankan Army's breakdown of discipline. On the road to the district capital of Mannar, the potholes grew steadily larger and more gaping. Houses and shops had been burned out in the villages. In one village, a hospital was recognizable only by its Red Cross, visible above black-

ened walls. Arrogant but nervous government soldiers in battle fatigues brandished their automatic weapons, peering from sniper positions in the trees. Some carried the sophisticated AK-47s. No one knew where these weapons had come from. Rumor had it that they'd come from Pakistan—pilfered from a secret Afghanistan fund set up by the C.I.A.

"We are despised here," an Army commander, a soft-spoken graduate of the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, told me at his field headquarters, near Vavuniya. "We are an army of occupation, and just cannot cope with the situation. Every week, soldiers run amok. For the first time in all my years of service, I've literally had to slap men from the ranks, and I've had to lock up large numbers to prevent them from going on a rampage." Over twenty-five per cent of the Sri Lankan Army was then posted in the north—thirty-six hundred men—but was clearly unprepared to wage a war. The Army, which had been formed only after independence, was at its best at parades and cricket matches.

Mannar was just a small fishing village on an island connected by causeways to the Northern Peninsula. Government soldiers had attempted to seal it off. "They're all terrorists," a young corporal, referring to the villagers, told me at a roadblock outside Mannar. He was fidgeting with his rifle. I couldn't believe how young he was—barely old enough to shave. He popped his head in a back window of my car. "You may pass for one cigarette," he said.

In Mannar, barricades and barbed-wire fences and burned-out oil drums had replaced the once colorful storefronts of the marketplace. In August, the Army had burned the market to the ground in retaliation for a Tiger strike against an Army convoy on a deserted road. No one could remember exactly where the Tiger strike had occurred, but it was more than thirty miles from Mannar.

In the dormitory of St. Xavier's, a secondary school—it had been established by Christian missionaries during the Raj—I spoke with Brother Hilary Joseph, a Tamil priest in his fifties. Of Mannar District's largely Tamil population of twenty thousand, seventy per cent were Catholics—a heritage of the Portuguese. With a bright-colored sarong wrapped in precise layers around his waist, and speaking Oxonian English, Brother Hilary was a product of an earlier age.

He had gone through the British educational system, in which Tamils and Sinhalese alike were instructed in English. Since 1956, when the official language became Sinhalese, the language of school instruction had been Sinhalese or Tamil. It was the beginning of Sri Lanka's post-independence divide. The sons of Brother Hilary's generation, from both communities, no longer knew each other.

As vice-president of the Mannar Citizens' Committee—a panel monitoring human-rights abuses and Army atrocities—Brother Hilary, like a growing number of other Tamil priests, was being drawn increasingly into Sri Lanka's war. "I will tell you how things have changed," he said. "Everyone lives in dread here. No one sleeps at home. All the villagers sleep in the jungle. We sleep at the bishop's house. Two priests were killed in the last fortnight by the Army. It's a regular priest hunt."

He pulled out a diary, which had been squirreled away in a filing cabinet, and for the next two hours he methodically recited events: the Army raid on Mannar's market; a curfew imposed on fishermen; eight employees of the Mulran post office lined up and shot dead; scores of peasants shot as they planted paddy in the villages of Mulran, Parapangandal, and Uyilaalangum; an Army raid on the Holy Family Convent, with the nuns stripped of their wristwatches, gold crucifixes and chains.

One "retribution" had begun early on a December morning after a convoy of three Army jeeps hit a land mine, and the first jeep was blown away and a soldier killed. Thirty soldiers went

on a six-hour rampage, and a hundred and fifty Tamil civilians were killed. At Talari Junction, the soldiers stopped a government-transport bus. The driver was a Muslim, the conductor a Sinhalese. The conductor told the soldiers, "If you're going to shoot the passengers, shoot me first." They shot him, and then shot thirty passengers. The wife of the village teacher in Parapangandal was breast-feeding her baby when the soldiers came. They killed her and, in a display of marksmanship, shot off the baby's toes. "It took three days just to transport the bodies," Brother Hilary said. "There is no longer any petrol, no longer any movement. Life is dying here."

(In Colombo, the response of the National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali, to such atrocities was always the same: "They were all terrorists. No innocent civilians were killed.")

A young choirboy entered, his face flushed. Something had happened in Talaimannar, a fishing village at the western tip of Mannar Island, forty-five minutes away. The soldiers had come that morning. We decided to go there ourselves, travelling on rickshaw or on motorbike. We nearly collided with an Army tank.

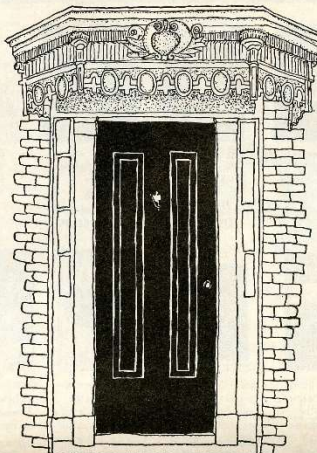
For the last three miles, from Pesali to Talaimannar, we saw defoliation everywhere. Dense groves of twisted palmyra and coconut palms had been charred into black brittle. Over vast stretches, trees had been chopped to the ground. All cover was gone; only sand dunes remained. It was the government's answer to infiltration by the Tamil militants, whom everyone called "the boys." As we entered Talaimannar, a horrible smell rose from open sewers. Labyrinthine streets oozed mud. No one had been permitted to leave the village for two months, and we were the first outsiders who had been able to get through. We could see the coast of India, twenty-four miles across the Palk Strait.

"The soldiers took away eight youngsters this morning," an old fisherman said. He was tall and solemn, a local patriarch. "No reason. Perhaps they were looking for the boys." The parents of the youngsters didn't know where they were—they had joined "the disappeared."

"Fascists!" the old man shouted.

Two young women approached us, trying to sell bangles. They said their children had no food.

As we walked along the beach, the



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old man shouted, "Siege! Siege! Siege!" On the horizon was an anti-quoted ex-American patrol boat flying the Sri Lankan flag; it was enforcing a naval zone of "surveillance." All of Talaimannar's two hundred and fifty fishing boats had been tied up for months. They littered the beach as far as the eye could see, their hulls painted yellow, red, and orange. They all flew small white flags. Talaimannar's livelihood had ended in November, 1984—as had that of twenty-five thousand fishermen—when the government, to stop infiltration from India, prohibited fishing off a wide swath of the north. "Fishing means boats. And boats mean terrorists," the old man said. There was spittle on his beard. "Simplicity. Stupid. And, I might tell you, the boys are still getting in."

BY the spring of 1987, the violence was clearly beyond control. Both Sinhalese and Tamils were predicting endless war. The almost inevitable failure of intermittent peace talks was accompanied by assaults and summary executions carried out by government military, paramilitary, and vigilante groups, and by fresh outrages by the Tamil militants. Nearly every day, in-

nocent people were killed. More than six thousand people had died since Prabakaran's ambush in 1983. (Today, the figure has reached twelve to sixteen thousand, according to human-rights groups. As recently as March 5th, nineteen men, women, and children were killed by a terrorist mine in the Eastern Province.)

After the ambush, Prabakaran had left Sri Lanka and set up his headquarters in Madras, the capital of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, whose chief minister, the late M. G. Ramachandran, provided him and other Tamil separatists with sanctuary and bases, while the central government, in New Delhi, authorized their training by the Indian Intelligence agency RAW. It was said in India at the time that Indira Gandhi had approved the policy, to enhance her domestic political standing among the fifty-five million Tamils of Tamil Nadu. In any event, the policy constituted a safety valve to prevent a resurgence of separatist ambitions in Tamil Nadu itself. India had also become increasingly uneasy about Sri Lanka's links with what it perceived as two of its more interventionist neighbors, China and Pakistan. Before the Tamil insurgency,

New Delhi's relations with Colombo had been formal and correct, but it had not had good relations with its other neighbors for years. By 1986, Prabakaran's Tigers and the other Tamil separatist groups had thirty-nine training camps in the swamps and jungles to the south of Madras. One consequence was that the rebel soldiers were far better trained and disciplined than the Sri Lankan Army was. Many of the guerrillas had Indian passports, and skipped across to Jaffna with ease; it was a ninety-minute ride by powerboat. The Sri Lankan "surveillance" had little effect, and about two hundred militants—Prabakaran himself sometimes among them—came and went each week.

When Rajiv Gandhi succeeded his mother, in 1984, India's Sri Lankan policy became even more pronounced, and Gandhi's critics began to compare India's support of Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka with alleged support by Pakistan of Sikh separatists in the Indian Punjab. In his early dealings with Jayewardene, Gandhi, who had had no experience in foreign affairs, relied heavily on personal contact, and often displayed an extraordinary naïveté about the complexities of Sri Lanka.

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Then, in 1985—even though he was still arming the Tamil militants—he announced that he was opposed to a separatist Tamil state, and urged a compromise. He reached an agreement with Jayewardene on December 19, 1986, for a reasonable devolution of power, in which the Tamils would administer the Northern Province through a provincial council, with powers of land distribution, policing, and education firmly in their hands. The ethnically mixed Eastern Province—which the militants claimed as part of their traditional homeland—would be split into Tamil and Sinhalese areas. But Prabakaran refused to accept the agreement, reportedly telling Gandhi, "In serious politics, it won't do to concentrate on talking. You must go through actions and then you talk." He insisted on a merger of the north and the east, and, piqued by Gandhi's pressure, abruptly packed his bags and his .357 Magnum and returned to Jaffna in early January of 1987. Just before he left, an old friend of his father's who lives in Madras expressed concern about his going back. "Don't fret, Uncle," Prabakaran told him. "I have an uncanny hunch about impending military attacks and

attempts to capture me." He laughed. "Besides that, the gods and the stars are looking after me."

In Jaffna, Prabakaran resumed his underground life, moving from town to town and village to village, often staying in one place for only a night. He lived surrounded by books on small-arms tactics and guerrilla warfare and by his Clint Eastwood videocassettes. He kept a pet leopard cub, named Sita, after the heroine of the Ramayana.

Last April, two terrorist acts brought matters to a head. On the seventeenth, a Friday, forty rebel gunmen surrounded three buses, two trucks, and a van on a lonely stretch of road a hundred and twenty miles northeast of Colombo. They separated the passengers into three groups—Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils. Most of the hundred and twenty-eight Sinhalese were unarmed members of the security forces and their children and wives who were returning from a Buddhist holiday. All of them were shot at point-blank range; the two other groups fled. The Good Friday Massacre, as it came to be called, was followed five days later by an explosion outside a bus station in Colombo's

busy Pettah Market. It engulfed ten crowded buses in a huge fireball, and a hundred and thirteen people died. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but President Jayewardene blamed the Tamil Tigers and another militant group, the Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS), which specializes in explosives and bombs.

When word of the Pettah bombing reached the President, he retired to his study, and he made no public appearances for several days. More and more, it was being said by the Presidents' friends that he appeared to lack the political will to push through a settlement. "He's not a very good leader at moments of crisis," one of his friends told me. "He thinks, he intellectualizes, he temporizes. He should simply act."

"At the time of Pettah, Jayewardene did nothing, he said nothing," a Western diplomat said to me last summer, with incredulity. "This was the worst disaster to befall Sri Lanka. It happened in the middle of Colombo, not in an unknown village in the north or east. Yet it was the Prime Minister, not the President, who visited the area, the hospitals, the morgue. That is characteristic of J.R. He waits. He sees the reaction of his



Wordsmiths

ministers, of the country at large. He sits on the fence interminably, then comes down on the majority side. He's got away with this rather splendidly in the past, but I don't think he can do it much longer. It clearly shows a weak President."

As Jayewardene vacillated, new power in Colombo appeared to have devolved upon Jyotindra Nath Dixit, the Indian High Commissioner, a post equivalent to ambassador. He was an unflappable career diplomat who had been in Colombo for two years, after serving in Afghanistan. A portly, animated figure, always smoking a pipe, Dixit, who is known as Mani, was widely esteemed as a trouble-shooter and verbal fencer. Unobtrusively, he visited the bus station with two senior aides. He had the authority to make policy and was a powerful voice in charting Indo-Sri Lankan affairs, and he placed an urgent call to New Delhi that night to inform his government that the explosion signalled yet another escalation in Sri Lanka's war. Within twelve hours, six Sri Lankan Air Force planes had begun bombing suspected guerrilla targets in the Jaffna Peninsula.

A MONTH later, on May 26th, Jayewardene unleashed his military forces in major strength. The Sri

Lankan Army launched Operation Liberation, to recapture the Jaffna Peninsula. It was a carefully prepared offensive, involving four thousand troops, helicopter gunships, amphibious landings, and aerial bombings. The attack had been planned in three stages: first, an assault on the Tigers' stronghold of Vadamarachchi, in the strategic salient of the peninsula's northeast; then a move westward, accompanied by a move up from the south; and, finally, an attack on the heavily defended Tiger stronghold of the city of Jaffna itself.

But after two weeks, at the end of Stage One, the offensive paused. It had already divided the Cabinet and the Army, and had prompted India to intervene—an action that was probably inevitable. In the middle of the Army's campaign, five Soviet-designed Indian Air Force AN-32 military transports, escorted by four Mirage jets, had air-dropped more than twenty-two tons of food and relief supplies to the Tamils. This move transformed New Delhi into an active participant in the four-year ethnic war. By flaunting its vastly superior air power as it violated the airspace of its small Indian Ocean neighbor, New Delhi had reaffirmed its role as the regional superpower, and the Tamils

new, floating population of a hundred thousand refugees. Below us, thick black smoke marked the burning of a rebel arms factory and fuel store. Blasts shook the ground at the airbase of Palaly, where rebel equipment was being destroyed. In what had been densely populated villages, there was no sign of life. If the villagers had returned to their houses, they were all hiding.

Though the area seemed remarkably small in proportion to the time involved in taking and securing it, General Cyril Ranatunge, the Joint Operations Commander, explained when we landed at Palaly that many houses had been booby-trapped and roads had been mined. "We were being very cautious, and very, very slow," he said.

A small man in his late fifties with a clipped mustache and Etonian ways, General Ranatunge was called out of retirement in August of 1985 by President Jayewardene to train the growing Sri Lankan Army—specifically, to instill a sense of discipline into a wildly undisciplined lot. From a largely ceremonial force of eleven thousand in 1983, the Army had more than doubled, to twenty-five thousand, in only four years, and the total strength of the security services had gone from

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of Jaffna were certain that India would continue to aid them.

On the last morning of the offensive, I was flown to the north with a group of correspondents accompanying Cabinet members and some of the top Army brass on an Army-sponsored tour. As we passed over Vadamarachchi, now in government hands, the painfully slow advance of the Sri Lankan Army was clearly evident. We covered in minutes ground that had taken the Army days to win.

The offensive had cost an estimated five hundred lives—at least sixty-two soldiers, a hundred and thirty guerrillas, and upward of three hundred civilians. Villages had been looted or reduced to rubble, creating a

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thirty-three thousand to seventy-five thousand. Defense spending had increased seventeenfold since 1981, and in 1987 a staggering \$500 million was being spent on Sri Lanka's war. Under General Ranatunge, leadership and training had improved dramatically, and though there were still many reports of excesses, there was no longer credible evidence of civilians being routinely massacred.

Back in the air, looking down at the parched villages, barren of irrigation, barren of industry, barren of jobs, I remembered what a young Tamil Tiger told me several years ago: "Ours, in a sense, is a generational as well as an ethnic and a religious revolt. We are fighting against a system that gives us no chance in the north."

The scorched plains of the Jaffna Peninsula, dotted with spindly, dried-out palms, were the poorest area of Sri Lanka, but the per-capita gross national product was only \$363 a year. Now the nation was spending \$1.3 million a day on its ethnic war.

We touched down on a dusty field and disembarked—National Security Minister Athulathmudali, four other ministers, two generals, and the foreign journalists. The journalists were

meant to confirm the government's assertion that Valvedditturai, the village on the Vadamarachchi Peninsula where Prabakaran was born, had not been carpet bombed during the offensive, as Prime Minister Gandhi had charged earlier. We were able to do so, yet also had to report that this once pretty town, with allées of coconut palms lending grace to its buildings, had been devastated by the fighting; row after row of buildings lay smashed beyond repair. We were also meant to see for ourselves that the people were not starving, as Gandhi, in justifying his airdrop, had claimed they were—and we saw no one who was.

Athulathmudali's role was to launch a "hearts, minds, and stomachs" campaign to win over the villagers, so they would help to prevent the area from falling back into the Tigers' hands. The villagers were not in a receptive mood. Upon capturing the village, nine days earlier, the Army had rounded up and removed all the men between fifteen and forty-five. Only women, children, and some old men remained. In all, four thousand men had been taken away from the Vadamarachchi Peninsula.

Athulathmudali, a Sinhalese who

speaks Tamil, is a law graduate of Harvard and Oxford—he was president of the Oxford Union—and a carefully cultivated man. He had been chosen by President Jayewardene to save Sri Lanka from military collapse. I have heard him described as brilliant and cunning, as a patriot and a chauvinist, and as an egocentric and ambitious man. It was generally agreed that he was interested in becoming the next President of Sri Lanka. Protected by a tight knot of security officials, he smiled and talked in an urbane style as he made his way among the villagers. He gently held the hand of a distraught father whose sons had disappeared. He promised mothers, "We will do all that we can. Make your petition, and I promise that the innocent will be released with the least delay." Then he added, somewhat ominously, "There are the guilty, the not so guilty, and the innocent, and we have evolved what I believe is the best method of separating them." (By late July, a half to two-thirds of the detainees had been freed. In Colombo, I saw a young man from Valvedditturai. One of his little fingers had been cut off before he was released.)

Of the eight hundred thousand

Tamils in the Jaffna Peninsula, many were not convinced that they had a future in Sri Lanka. At the ramshackle Point Pedro Base Hospital, in the village of Puloli, where we landed next, an angry young Tamil doctor, his face drawn and tired, was treating traumatized people for burns. He told me that "the desire for Tamil Eelam is stronger than ever before." He exclaimed, "Liberated? Hardly!" and went on, "People are frightened. They are scared for their property and scared for their lives. They have no defense against the Army; nobody can question the Army's acts. And the Sri Lanka Army has proved that it's little more than a band of riffraff terrorists. When the Tigers were here, people felt secure, and the Tigers will come back, you mark my words. They're waiting in the villages just beyond. They haven't been defeated. They have simply withdrawn."

What did he expect of India, I asked the doctor.

"They should recognize Eelam and liberate us," he said, "as they did in 1971, when India sent her Army into East Pakistan and created Bangladesh."

The hospital, I learned, was desperately short of doctors and nurses, blood plasma, and medical supplies. Seventy-five women and children and a hundred and twenty men, some moaning and crying, were then in the surgical ward. Many had been terribly burned on the first day of the Army's assault, when an Air Force plane dropped a barrel of gasoline—a primitive firebomb. It fell into a crowd of people who had fled the Aman Temple, in a village called Alway, when shooting occurred inside. No one believed that the dropping of the barrel had been an accident. Lying on one bed were a twenty-year-old mother and her two daughters, aged three and one. Third-degree burns covered their bodies, and much of their skin had been burned off. Gray, weblike matting covered one little girl's back. The smell of burned flesh was overwhelming.

As I left the hospital, seven women appeared from behind the trees and approached me. They were tall and handsome, and were dressed in starched, bright-colored saris, dazzling against the rubble and debris. They told me they were teachers from Point Pedro's J. Methodist High School, and had lost husbands or sons or nephews. Truckloads of soldiers swung by us, and the women looked

alarmed but continued to tell me their stories. As they talked, we were gradually surrounded by a group of dazed, staring old men.

"Every house in Point Pedro lost two or three boys and girls," one of the women, a Miss E. I. Nalatambi, said. "Eighty per cent were educated—they were students, waiting to take their exams. Everyone from thirteen to fifty-three was taken. The soldiers even took away the physically handicapped—the deaf and dumb."

"My nephew was taken."

"So were my grandsons," an old woman cried, grasping my arm. "My grandsons, Madam, here are their identity cards."

Schoolboys in white shirts stared earnestly from the photographs.

The crowd had now grown considerably, and I was told that the Army's procedure had been the same in all the villages—Puloli, Point Pedro, Valveditturai, and scores of others in the Vadamarachchi countryside.

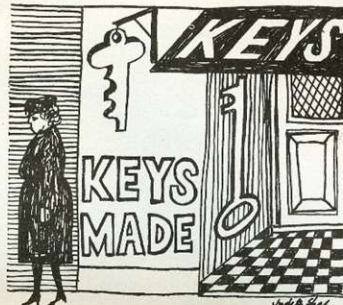
"The Army dropped leaflets before dawn, warning us that the war would begin," an old man said. "They told us to go to the temple or to the schools. Eighteen places had been designated as safe havens." Those were not sufficient for Vadamarachchi's population, of a hundred and twenty thousand. "Many of us chose to remain in the bunkers with the Tigers. At least, we knew who they were." The old man, a retired surveyor, became increasingly agitated as he spoke. "Then came first light, and no further warning at all. The planes came in at five-forty-five in the morning, and for twelve hours they bombed and bombed."

BY the summer of 1987, the pressures on the Jayewardene government were immense. They came from a variety of sources: from the disgruntled lower ranks of the Army; from a now badly faltering economy, no longer propped up by a high

world price for tea; from international public opinion and the powerful political voices of Washington and New Delhi. Also, Sinhalese anger was building.

After the April bombing of Pettah, the mood of the Sinhalese was "ugly and sour," a Western diplomat said. "They were angry over what they perceived as the regime's inability to tame the Tigers and protect the Sinhalese." The anger had infused new life into an outlawed Sinhalese Marxist group, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (J.V.P.), or People's Liberation Front. The Sinhalese equivalent of the Tamil Tigers, it had left a trail of blood when, in 1971, it staged a three-month armed insurrection in an effort to overthrow the Bandaranaike government. At least ten thousand people were killed by the security forces as they put the rebellion down. The J.V.P. then helped instigate the anti-Tamil mayhem in July of 1983. A cadre-based movement that has been compared with the Khmer Rouge, the J.V.P. and its leader, Rohana Wijeweera, who studied medicine in the nineteen-sixties at Moscow's Patrice Lumumba University, were now inciting Sinhalese nationalists in the south, preaching an anarchic mixture of chauvinism, Trotskyism, and nihilism. The J.V.P.'s strength had grown to an estimated two thousand hard-core members, according to a Sri Lankan Intelligence official. It welcomed deserters from the Sri Lankan Army into its ranks, and was believed to have cadres within the Army as well. (Last year, it raided five military arsenals, with inside help.)

With President Jayewardene's popularity at its lowest ebb in years, the former Socialist Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike had returned to the political scene, and Buddhist monks in saffron robes and carrying bamboo fans began shuffling barefoot through the streets of Colombo with loudspeakers, charging that the Jayewardene government had betrayed the Sinhalese. President Jayewardene's Cabinet was increasingly divided on how to deal with the war, and, following the Army's Vadamarachchi offensive, ministers began publicly parading their differences. Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa festooned his residence with Buddhist flags and went about the country, enrapturing audiences with tales of the first hero-king, Dutugemunu, and his epic fifteen-year campaign against



the Tamils, which ended in 161 B.C. with the recapture of Anuradhapura.

The deteriorating situation was of particular concern to India and the United States. Either could have helped Colombo achieve a military solution—in New Delhi's case, by evicting the Tamil armies from their bases in India's south, or, in Washington's, by supplying Sri Lanka with a hundred million dollars in credits for military equipment and sophisticated arms—but both had refused to act.

Neither country had anything to gain from a prolonged guerrilla war. For India, it would almost certainly mean becoming even more embroiled. Rajiv Gandhi did not favor an independent Tamil Eelam. The precedent would be too dangerous, with the Sikhs in the Indian Punjab escalating their separatist campaign, and tribal warfare simmering in India's north-east. Yet the sensitivities and the crucially needed political support of India's fifty-five million Tamils meant that he could hardly be seen to push Sri Lanka's Tamil guerrillas out of Hindu India into the hands of an army of Buddhist Sinhalese. Washington's dilemma was only slightly less acute.

Sri Lanka was the largest recipient in South Asia, in per-capita terms, of United States economic assistance (this despite a reduction from \$75 million in 1984 to \$33 million for the 1988 fiscal year). The Voice of America was about to establish one of its largest transmission centers outside the United States on this strategically placed island, where American warships made routine recreational stops. And, in an often hostile region, President Jayewardene had been a reliable American ally. Yet the United States did not wish to find itself portrayed as an arms supplier to a country bent on racial oppression, however much of an oversimplification that portrayal might be. Thus, a political settlement would let both Washington and New Delhi off the hook, and both countries continued to press for an agreement after the Army offensive in the north came to a halt.

GENERAL NALIN SENEVIRATNE, the commander of the Sri Lankan Army, is a Sinhalese moderate. A highly regarded officer, he was commissioned in 1953 and trained at Sandhurst, at India's National Defense College, and at the United States Army

Engineering School. From January, 1984, to February, 1985, he was the Jaffna area commander, besieged in the old Dutch fort. He had thrown the government in Colombo into an agitated state with a controversial memorandum, making it clear that a military solution to the warfare was impossible.

When I saw him last summer, in his office in Colombo, after the Vadamarachchi offensive, I reminded him of that conclusion.

"Well, the situation has certainly improved," he said. "But the Army is occupying the same area in the town of Jaffna as it was in 1984."

I asked him if the Army would attempt to take over the town.

"That's a decision for the politicians. The casualties would be immense. They would be four times the casualties of Operation Liberation. It would not only be hand-to-hand combat, door-to-door—it would be mouse-hole-to-mousehole. In Valvedditturai, the militants had made holes in the walls of houses. They'd removed tiles from the roofs. Everything possible was used to shoot at the soldiers. The taking of Jaffna would be at a very high cost. But we cannot control the

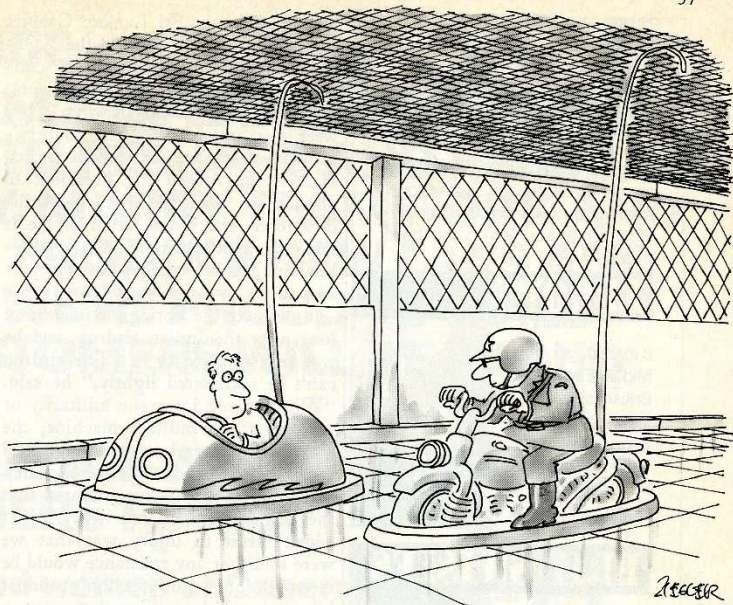
peninsula if we don't control the town."

"Am I correct in thinking that a 'Vietnam syndrome' has begun among Sri Lanka's generals, who now believe increasingly that they are fighting a political war?" I asked him.

He smiled. "Are you implying that the politicians don't know what they're doing? I coordinate very closely with the National Security Minister. We don't get the impression that the politicians don't know what they're about." He went on to say that there had to be a political solution to Sri Lanka's war.

NEELAN TIRUCHELVAM, a highly respected, Harvard-trained Tamil lawyer, author, and former member of parliament, had been a negotiator in six years of talks on granting some form of autonomy to the Tamils. But after the anti-Tamil carnage of July, 1983, the government required all Tamil members of parliament to take a loyalty oath, swearing that they opposed even peaceful efforts toward separatism in the north. The sixteen members from the Tamil United Liberation Front refused and were expelled from the parliament. Neelan Tiruchelvam was one of the few expelled TULF members of parliament who were still in Colombo (Appapillai Amirthalingam, the TULF leader, had fled to Madras) and, aided by his wife, Sithie—also a lawyer—was now the chief spokesman for the Tamil moderates in Sri Lanka. I met with Mr. Tiruchelvam in Colombo in June. His eyes were lively and, despite the pressures of the war, still conveyed a smile. "By driving us out of the political arena, the government made the people feel they had no effective democratic alternative," he told me.

It was a bad blunder. Not only did it force the Tamil movement underground, thereby handing it over to the militants, but when the government wanted to reopen negotiations there was no one to negotiate with. Prabakaran, despite nudges from India from time to time, had simply refused to come to the table unless an ever-growing list of preconditions was met. Only a very brave or a very foolish Sinhalese politician could agree to such largesse. "It is now time to negotiate," Rajiv Gandhi is said to have told Prabakaran in November, 1986. "You can do it from a position of strength. Go to the table



and we'll make you chief minister of Jaffna."

"I'm already chief minister of Jaffna," Prabakaran replied.

In April of 1987, after the Sri Lankan Air Force pounded suspected guerrilla camps, Prabakaran went to New Delhi and again met with Gandhi.

"Perhaps it's time to talk," Gandhi is reported to have said.

"I can't," Prabakaran is said to have answered. "I'm too weak."

I asked Mr. Tiruchelvam what the consequences would be of the Army's drive in the Vadamarachchi Peninsula.

"They risked a great deal," he said.

"Not only did they further antagonize the civilian population—the sheer humiliation of old people being asked to run, then being shot at for no reason at all—but, even more important from the Sinhalese side, they compromised the integrity of Sri Lanka by provoking the Indian airlift. India's active involvement will make it far more difficult for the Jayewardene government to sell any agreement to the Sinhalese. The airdrop was meant to convey a message that was double-edged. Rajiv was saying to the government, 'If you're going to continue military aggression against the Tamils, we are clearly on their side.' The second message was to the Tamils in the north

and east, and it was 'You have to look to India for your ultimate defense, not to the Tamil Tigers in the region now.'

Mr. Tiruchelvam is an indefatigable worker, who keeps copious files on the government's violations of human rights, and, as the father of two teenage sons, he is concerned that an entire generation of young men has been lost. "The young rank and file of the militants have been five years without education now," he said. "The same is true of the soldiers. And there is intoxication in the power of a gun. Village life and family life are being ripped apart. We are a very small country, yet at least fifty-four hundred Tamils are in jail, many of them brutally tortured; hundreds of others are missing; and at least six thousand people have died. Every town, every village, every hamlet in the north and east has been intimately affected by this war."

A. C. S. HAMEED, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, is a courtly Muslim who favors safari suits. He sits in an elegant, teak-paneled office, dwarfed by an enormous desk, and always has a cigar at hand. He and the Finance Minister, Ronnie de Mel, and the Lands Minister, Gamini Dissanayake, were the most outspoken

moderates in the Sri Lankan Cabinet last summer. They opposed the Vadamarachchi offensive, and were concerned about President Jayewardene's increasingly authoritarian ways. They were also unsettled by the country's growing disregard for human rights. Hameed has urged the President to disband the country's brutal paramilitary force, the Home Guards. He is not only a humanitarian but a Muslim, and Muslim villages have been attacked.

I met with the Foreign Minister not long after the Indian airdrop, and he was very troubled by it. "The airdrop can't be considered lightly," he said. "Whether you intervene militarily or without a full military machine, the violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity is the same. We were given a demarche of thirty-five minutes that the planes were on the way. What added insult to injury was that we were told that any resistance would be met with force. You just don't conduct bilateral relations like that—not a country like India. Nobody should have to teach India the tenets of diplomacy."

Hameed had been Foreign Minister since President Jayewardene came to power, and had seen Indo-Sri Lankan relations rise and fall like a seesaw. I asked him if there was any way that relations between the two countries could improve if India continued its active support of the Tamil militants.

"We have lived with it for nearly four years, and we have no effective ways of preventing it. In Tamil Nadu, the terrorists constitute a state within a state. They could not function as effectively as they have without state patronage."

"Is Rajiv Gandhi able to control the Tigers, or have they gone beyond his reach?"

"We have seen firm evidence that India has control. When an American couple were kidnapped in Jaffna in 1984, India did a bit of arm-twisting and the Americans were released."

The Minister declined to say what Sri Lanka expected from the United States, but one of his aides told me that the government was disappointed that Washington had not put more pressure on New Delhi to expel the militants. All that Hameed would say of the superpowers during the interview was "We have neither the blessings nor the destabilizing influence of either of them."

When I asked the Minister if the Muslims felt threatened by the war, he

urged me to visit the Eastern Province and see for myself.

WE set out from my hotel in Colombo in a car filled with picnic baskets, bottled water, and plastic bags. My driver, Raja, who was one of only three Colombo drivers still willing to travel to the east, had warned, "The water is fetid. There will be no food at the hotel." A Sinhalese friend of mine named Nirmala de Mel—an anthropologist who runs a travel agency—was coming with me, and Raja had lectured us so sternly that we looked as though we were going off to war.

As we skirted the Central Province, I was reminded of a 1985 trip through the Central Highlands and its tranquil tea estates. They were still colonial, though the British had long since left; they were also the home of "the other Tamils," separated by history, politics, and caste from those fighting for statehood. These Tamils were low-caste Indian Tamils—many of them Untouchables whom the British had brought to Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century to work the tea plantations. They had come as bonded laborers, and now their descendants numbered nearly a million (five and a half percent of the population) and lived peacefully in the Central Highlands and the south. It was the Ceylon Tamils, the highest-caste Brahmans and the Vellalas—who had been in Sri Lanka for more than two thousand years, heirs of proud Tamil kingdoms—who were now fighting for an independent homeland.

On that 1985 trip, I had watched young women plucking tea, their golden nose rings and forehead markings identifying them as Indian Tamils, not Ceylonese. Most of them were "stateless," caught in the ebb and flow of the ambivalence of Indo-Sri Lankan relations. Of all Sri Lanka's ethnic communities, the Indian Tamils were the most heavily exploited and the most widely ignored.

Several years before, a young Tamil militant had tried to explain to me that the Indian Tamils, who lived under ghastly conditions, simply weren't worth fighting for. "Is it caste?" I asked him. "Aren't the Indian Tamils' circumstances just as inequitable as those of the Tamils in the north?" He seemed somewhat embarrassed by my questions, as he should have been. He was a graduate of the London School of Economics, and a Marxist at that.

I saw him again last summer, in



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Madras. Now approaching middle age, he had laid down his arms. But he had a new project: he was bringing the "revolution of the proletariat" to the lofty hill estates, recruiting young Indian Tamils who, he said, were being "exploited."

Three of the five major Tamil separatist organizations—excluding the Tamil Tigers—were working in the tea estates today, but it was the high-caste Vellalas who were recruiting the Untouchables, not members of Prbakaran's lower Karaiar caste. Both Indian Tamils and Muslims were now, for the first time, beginning to ask themselves who they were, and debating which side they owed their allegiance to. With whom did they identify—the Tamils or the Sinhalese?

Once Nirmala, Raja, and I had crossed the border into the Eastern Province, we came upon signs of war. In every village, mourning flags flew from stucco or dung houses, from mosques and temples—a sea of green, white, yellow, and black. Farther south, in Batticaloa, we were told, no one went out at night, and the young men who had not fled the area never went out at all.

The Eastern Province had a unique form of terror, provoked by a controversial plan for depopulating Tamil villages there and resettling them with Sinhalese. This so-called West Bank scheme envisaged sending two hundred thousand armed Sinhalese, trained in self-defense, to Tamil-dominated northern and eastern districts, where they would be settled on government-owned land. The program was launched in 1984, and a vital part of it was the Home Guard militia. Fashioned by National Security Minister Athulathmudali, the force now numbered some twenty thousand men. (Thousands of settlers had arrived in the Eastern Province since 1984, and in a number of bloody encounters Tamil guerrillas had driven them off the land.)

Finally, we reached the magnificent port of Trincomalee. In 1775, Lord Nelson called it the finest natural harbor in the world. Today, it stood in faded splendor, bruised and divided, for Trincomalee was Sri Lanka's most sensitive city, and the Eastern Province was the most sensitive and most vulnerable of the country's nine provinces. Its population was forty-two per cent Tamil, thirty-three per cent

Muslim, and twenty-five per cent Sinhalese—Sri Lanka's most intricately woven provincial tapestry.

Every effort toward a peace settlement had faltered on the question of the east. The Tamil militants claimed it as part of their traditional homeland, and saw Trincomalee as their natural capital city, to be developed into a commercial center rivalling Hong Kong. But the Jayewardene government, well aware of the strategic and commercial importance of the port—it was the headquarters of the Sri Lankan Navy and a center for containership trade—was determined not to allow it to fall into Tamil hands.

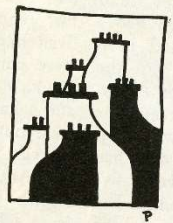
"So in the Eastern Province we have the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, the police and the Home Guards, the Special Task Force, and just ordinary thugs. In Jaffna, they

at least have only the Army—only one enemy to face," Mrs. Subashini Varathan, the secretary of Trincomalee's Citizens' Committee, explained to me in the book-lined study of her home. The committee, a panel of distinguished doctors, lawyers, economists, and priests, had documented evidence of fifty-two Tamil villages in the Trincomalee District which had been totally or partly destroyed. The Army was pitted against the Tamil militants; paramilitary forces attacked civilians at will; every ethnic community was hostile to every other. "You must be prepared to die even when you take the bus," Mrs. Varathan said.

Refugees, mostly Tamil and Muslim but with a sprinkling of Sinhalese (their number increased dramatically before the end of the year), were camped helter-skelter outside Trincomalee. They traded accusations, and by night many turned into vigilantes and staged retaliatory raids.

The ethnic divide was so great that neighbors no longer spoke. The luxurious beach hotels were empty, and industry had collapsed. Residents and journalists alike constantly mentioned Beirut. "Like Beirut, we have lost a whole generation," a committee member told me. "The wounds will never heal."

One of the more fearsome groups in the Eastern Province is the Special Task Force (S.T.F.), a paramilitary force of hardened storm troopers trained by British mercenaries. It is controlled by President Jayewardene's son, Ravindra Vimal. Even some of



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the President's closest advisers fear that the S.T.F. could become Jayewardene's Praetorian Guard. It had earned a reputation—and the condemnation of Amnesty International—for brutalizing the east, with torture and illegal killings, especially in the area of Batticaloa. Its strength had risen to six thousand four hundred in the Eastern Province, and its killings were indiscriminate. The Army tried to stop the S.T.F. troops, but to no avail. "They shoot anyone who is frightened and runs away when they come," I was told by Sam Tambimuttu, secretary of the Batticaloa Citizens' Committee. "And if one of their men is killed then they shoot anyone who simply stands still." Tambimuttu, a Tamil lawyer and businessman, came to meet me at my hotel with a suitcase that contained hundreds of affidavits from political prisoners who had been badly tortured, and hundreds more from relatives of prisoners who had disappeared. According to a June report by Amnesty International, more than five hundred Tamil prisoners had disappeared over the previous thirty months. Mr. Tambimuttu had the names of all of them—five hundred and eighteen persons. One of them, Sivaguru Balasundaram, was only twelve years old.

It was impossible to tell how many political prisoners were being held, because Sri Lankan security officials consistently denied that people had been arrested, even though eyewitnesses swore that they had been. Mr. Tambimuttu and other human-rights activists estimated that there were about six thousand Tamil political prisoners packing Sri Lanka's crowded, filthy jails. The worst, I was told, was the Boosa Army Camp, in the south. Consisting of rows of low, white-washed buildings surrounded by barbed wire, it held thousands of Tamil prisoners, none of whom had been tried.

Many recent arrivals were from Batticaloa. The S.T.F. was cordoning off the district's villages and arresting everyone between fifteen and forty-five; many of those arrested were then tortured, for no apparent reason. Prisoners, their hands tied behind their backs, were suspended from the ceiling and beaten with heated iron rods. It was called "helicopter training," and Mr. Tambimuttu had documents showing that for every fifteen who went through it at least one died.

The S.T.F. also regularly set fire to Tamil villages in the Eastern Province. I visited four that had been totally or partly destroyed, by the S.T.F., the Home Guards, the Army, or a combination of the three. The village of Uppuveli was two miles north of Trincomalee. It had once had three hundred families, seventy-five per cent Tamil, the rest Muslim. But from July of 1983 to January of 1986 Uppuveli had been systematically devastated. Today, it held no trace of human life; the jungle had moved in. As we approached Uppuveli Junction, the signs of destruction began. Houses

snuggled in coastal palms were masses of rubble; here and there a precarious wall rose out of nowhere. It could have been an archeological site. At the gutted Vairavar Temple, a statue of the goddess Kali was charred black. Everything else had been looted.

THE villages of Kinniya and Alankerly were on a tiny neck of land hidden away in one of Trincomalee's many harbors, and were accessible only by boat. Kinniya was Muslim; Alankerly was Tamil. For generations, the two villages had lived happily side by side. Now they were part of Sri Lanka's divide. Sri Lanka's 1.1 million Muslims (seven and a half per cent of the population) were not a cohesive group. Although the vast majority were descended from the Arab traders who came in the eighth century, others had arrived from Malaysia, and had been in Sri Lanka only for the last hundred years. They were concentrated in the Eastern Province, along its filigree coast, and had traditionally lived among the Tamils, spoken their language, and shared their lives. But their leaders were conservative and had always supported the government of the Sinhalese majority.

As I waited at the tip of China Bay for the ferry to Kinniya, I was caught up among people and chickens, ox-driven carts, burlap bags of rice and sugar—everything was crossing. A group of young men surrounded my driver and asked where we were headed. Why were we here? An outsider made people nervous. Raja told me that that had not been true in the past.

"You mustn't go to Alankerly," one young man warned us. "It's been taken over by the boys." "The boys" in this instance meant not just the Tamil Tigers but also other separatist groups. In the east, the Tigers' rivals still retained some strength. "We used to live there," the young men told us, "but we



"But do you think we can fit our relationship into a studio?"



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never go back. The boys will take you hostage."

Three bewildered-looking policemen with automatic rifles stood guarding the ferry stop. The boats didn't run later than five-thirty, because after dark the boys would steal the engines. Finally, we boarded the rickety ferry, a wooden platform with a Yamaha engine at one end. Our car was kept from sliding off by two small rocks. As I looked around at the passengers, it was the young men who most struck my eye. They squatted on the floor of the ferry or hung from its sides, and I wondered how many of them were the boys.

A palm-studded peninsula sprang up before us, lapped by the sea. Fishing boats and tea stalls dotted a beautiful white sand beach. Kinniya was a swirl of arabesque lattices, minarets, and mosques.

After the ferry docked, we set off, following a narrow, sandy path that connected the two villages. Dark, dense forest engulfed us. I asked Raja to keep his eyes open for "the boys."

"You do that, Madam," he answered. "I'm looking for mines."

In Alankerly, I found the village schoolmaster, a sombre bald man with heavily lined eyes who was always addressed as Mr. Konamalai. I asked him what had happened there.

Until July 23, 1986, he said, Alankerly had been a bustling village of a hundred and fifty families. Now there were seventy-five. The Muslim Home Guards from Kinniya, along with the S.T.F., had arrived at three in the morning and burned forty-eight houses to the ground.

Why had they done it?

Mr. Konamalai answered, "It was a response to the boys." Then he said, "No one will permit anyone to live in peace! The politicians, the Army, the boys, the Home Guards—no one thinks at all about the villagers."

The violence began in May of 1986, when two boys from Alankerly, both Tamil Tigers, had gone to Kinniya to collect some sweets during a Muslim festival. The Muslims knew they were Tigers and alerted the police. The boys were arrested, and joined the "disappeared." Two days later, a hundred Tamil Tigers took revenge, marching through Alankerly from their base camp in the jungle, ten miles down the road. When they arrived in Kinniya, they burned ten buildings to the ground. How many villagers died and how many fled is still not known. The villagers of

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Alankerly knew it wasn't over. "Then, on July 23rd, twenty-five Muslim Home Guards from Kinniya and ten men from the security forces arrived," the schoolmaster said. "They burned down half the village. Everyone fled to the jungle that night. Sixty-one families never returned. Were they arrested? Killed in the jungle? Or did they flee? We have no idea. We simply sit and wait."

One man, a paddy manager, showed me a copy of a letter he had written to his superior in Trincomalee:

SIR,

I beg to inform you that the following properties of mine were damaged, burned or stolen by the security forces: One Honda motorcycle, one sewing machine, one push-bicycle, two stools, one umbrella large, one umbrella small, 10 gunny sacks, and many dresses of my wife.

I asked Mr Konamalai why Alankerly had been singled out.

He answered, fatalistically, "We had committed two sins. Two members of the Tigers came from our village. They were decent, honest boys. A hundred others were down the road, and we allowed them to march through our village on their way to Kinniya."

The Tamil villagers of Alankerly no longer tended their paddy fields. The fields were outside the village, three miles away, and seven miles beyond them was the base camp of the boys.

Back in Trincomalee, a Muslim magistrate I'll call Ahmed began to explain the Muslims' position. Ahmed lived in a Tamil-Muslim neighborhood, and outside his stucco bungalow he flew three mourning flags—green for Muslims, yellow for Buddhist monks, and white for everyone else who had died in Sri Lanka's war.

"The situation is such here in the east that whatever you say you'll offend the security forces or you'll offend the boys. We're caught in the middle," Ahmed said. "We've always lived with the Tamils, we're Tamil-speaking, but in the past most Muslims were fervent supporters of the government. Now, with the Eastern Province hanging in the balance and the Muslims tottering on the brink, we're being courted, then terrorized equally by the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Look at Nilaveli." Nilaveli was a village just to the north. "It's a stronghold of the Tigers, but it has a large Muslim population. The young Muslim men come to Trincomalee for provisions, chilies, and rice. They usually come by

bicycle, and are stopped over and over at Army checkpoints. The Army accuses them of taking food for the Tamil Tigers. Then, when they finally reach Nilaveli, having been humiliated by the Army at every checkpoint on the road, the boys find them and say, 'You've gone to town. Have you gone to give the security forces information on us?'" He burst out, "For God's sake, let us live in peace! We are thirsting for it, like a vast desert thirsting for rain."

On top of a filing cabinet in Ahmed's study were pictures of Winston Churchill and the writer Arthur C. Clarke. A wizened old mullah was in the kitchen teaching Ahmed's teenage daughter passages from the Koran.

As Brother Hilary Joseph had done in Mannar, Ahmed pulled out a ledger from the filing cabinet, its pages yellowed with age. It held a record of four years of abuses against Muslims in the east.

"We are a minority within a minority," he said sadly. He began reciting from his ledger. Young Muslims tortured by the security forces for allegedly assisting the boys; young Muslims humiliated by the boys for being alleged government informers; a Muslim butcher accused by the boys of dealing in stolen cattle. Before the mosque authorities could take any action, the butcher was found dead. On June 14th, thirteen Muslims were killed when a land mine exploded under their van. "Today," Ahmed said, "none of us know where we are."

The old-guard Muslim leadership had written to President Jayewardene on April 14th, asking for a separate Muslim province in Amparai District, in the east. The younger generation had joined the Tamil Tigers, the Sinhalese-dominated village Home Guards, or a shadowy Muslim guerrilla organization that called itself the Jihad. Another generation, another culture, was now behind the gun.

Ahmed bitterly resented young Muslims' having been caught in the fray. "The government most certainly recruited Muslims into the Home Guard in order to split the Tamils and the Muslims," he declared. "Any government would like to snatch us; so would the boys. It's like a game of rugby, and we are the ball."

If the Muslims were asked to make a choice today, where would their sympathies lie if the Eastern Province were given to the Tamils?

"That's a very difficult question,"

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Ahmed said. "There is a clash of loyalties. The Muslims in the east are divided. A small section supports Tamil Eelam. Another section objects. If it happens, we'll just have to accept it. The views of the silent majority? Nobody knows. The situation is so sensitive that people are afraid to talk."

Ahmed was about to put his ledger away, but before he did he recited dates and names of Muslims who had been kidnapped, many of whose families he was representing in court. No one knew who had snatched them—the security forces or the Tamil militants. "It's individual acts of terror against the Muslims," he said. "There have been no rampages of the security forces through Muslim villages, as there have been through Tamil ones. They have not destroyed Muslim villages. But"—he hesitated—"the effect is the same. The Sinhalese forces want us to leave."

IN Trincomalee's old Raj center, though the bungalows had been neglected and the gracious lawns had gone to seed, there was still the feel of the British around the naval base. The pride and joy of the Empire, Trincomalee was Britain's first naval possession on the coast of Ceylon. It remained a British base until 1957, and its sixteen sweeping harbors and tiny interwoven bays had concealed the entire Eastern Fleet of the Royal Navy during the Second World War. The port's magnificence was apparent; so was its geopolitical importance as a gateway to the Bay of Bengal. It was also the best port in the Indian Ocean for basing a large surface fleet.

"It is extraordinary," the acting Armed Forces Commander, Colonel Ananda Suriabhandari, told me in the briefing room of the area military-command headquarters. "Its depth is limitless, it can camouflage a hundred to two hundred ships. It is breathtaking. And everyone wants it."

It had been rumored strongly for a number of years that the United States wanted Trincomalee as a base for the Seventh Fleet. Washington took its first tentative step toward this goal in 1985, when the Sri Lankan government gave approval for an international consortium, headed by a United States company, Oroleum, to lease three hundred oil-storage tanks that the British had built in Trincomalee. The scheme collapsed, because of falling oil prices, the worsening of the

war, and New Delhi's very strongly expressed concern.

Many American commentators had suggested that if the Tamil Tigers—"radical leftists," they called them—ever established Tamil Eelam, Trincomalee would likely become a friendly Soviet port of call. That was not really the point. It was India, the major power in South Asia, that openly coveted Trincomalee. And New Delhi, though it was clearly closer to Moscow than it was to Washington, had its own ambitions as a regional superpower, and found President Jayewardene's pro-Western policies increasingly nettlesome. It was particularly vexed by the involvement of Israel, China, and Pakistan in Sri Lanka's war—Pakistan's, of course, being the most vexing of all.

Israel had helped Sri Lanka set up an intelligence and counter-insurgency system; Pakistan was training two hundred Sri Lankan troops each year and, in June, had responded favorably to Colombo's request for a system of anti-aircraft defense. China, too, had answered President Jayewardene's call and agreed to provide defense equipment, as had South Africa. And an odd assortment of British mercenaries were dashing about. They were members of the Keeny Meeny Services, which, according to the congressional testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, had provided mercenaries to assist the Contras in Nicaragua. Such mercenaries had been in Sri Lanka since 1984. Veterans of the Special Air Service (S.A.S.), they were co-piloting combat helicopters and training the S.T.F.

"We will get help from the Devil himself if necessary," President Jayewardene told me in 1984 of his decision to bring in the Keeny Meenies and to invite the Israelis back to Sri Lanka for counter-insurgency work. (Diplomatic relations had been broken off in 1970, when Mrs. Bandaranaike returned to power.) "No other country was prepared to help us, and we had asked them all—the Americans, the British, certain European countries," Jayewardene said. "And if we don't stop the terrorists now Sri Lanka could be turned into the Northern Ireland of the Indian Ocean."

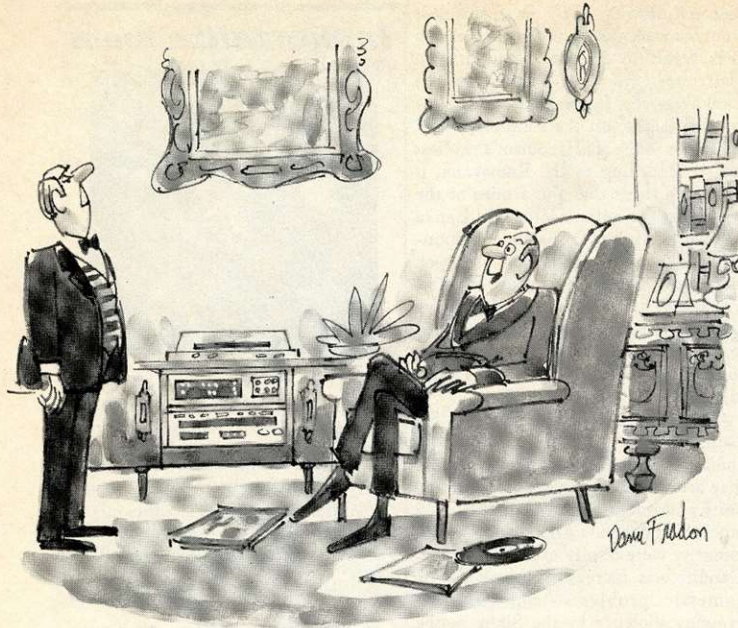
ON June 3, 1987, while President Jayewardene's Army was moving through the Jaffna Peninsula, Rajiv Gandhi had given an order that

nineteen fishing boats be dispatched from Rameshwaram across the narrow Palk Strait to deliver "humanitarian assistance" to the Tamils in Sri Lanka's north. Rameshwaram, the Island of Light, on the southern tip of India, is one of Hinduism's holiest spots. According to the Ramayana, it was from there that the armies of the god Rama set sail to capture Sri Lanka and slay Ravana, the island's demon-king. Gandhi's undertaking had been more like a maritime comedy. His fleet was leaky, and Sri Lanka's tiny Navy blocked its passage, and the boats had to return to base. This rebuff and the consequent loss of face had led Gandhi to parachute the relief supplies.

"The unity and integrity of Sri Lanka are very important to us," an Indian diplomat had told me, "but they are not nearly as important as the unity and integrity of India." It was a fanciful statement. India's unity and integrity were hardly under threat, but Gandhi was increasingly besieged by domestic problems—not just the growing violence by the Sikhs in the Punjab but also allegations of scandal touching his closest friends and aides, and defections from his Cabinet—and he badly needed a foreign-policy success. He was also becoming weary of Prabhakaran and his Tamil Tigers.

The Tamil separatists, a dizzying array of groups and ideologies, had battled each other for a decade, and Prabhakaran had consolidated his power through deadly shootouts with his rivals over the past two years. Five major groups now survived, and, though still deeply distrustful of one another, they were roughly aligned in two major camps. The Tigers worked closely with EROS, which specialized in explosives, yet EROS's dexterous leadership kept a cautious foot in the other camp as well, for it was the three other groups—the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, or E.P.R.L.F.; the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, or TELO; and the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam, or PLOTE—that were now receiving training from RAW.

Many Tamil intellectuals exiled in Madras distrusted Prabhakaran and held him responsible for the continuing disunity among the separatist groups. "His extreme nationalism will take us to Fascism," a leftist Tamil intellectual told me last summer. "And he has erected extraordinary barriers of caste." This was an allusion to the Tigers' origins among the fishermen's caste. In reality, the Tigers' inverse



*"Fenton, bring me my pipe, my bowl,
and my Nat King Cole records."*

caste barriers were crumbling; many of the Karaiar commanders had been replaced by Vellalas, from the higher, landed farmers' caste, and many field commanders were university students or graduates. Nevertheless, the rival groups wanted him out. "It is the right time in Tamil politics for India to take the upper hand and control Prabhakaran," the intellectual told me.

On June 18th, fifteen anti-aircraft guns provided by RAW left Rameshwaram for Sri Lanka by boat, along with nearly five hundred fighters from the three Indian-backed separatist groups—men who had just completed a two-month training program in the use of anti-aircraft guns which was conducted by Indian Intelligence officers in the foothills of Uttar Pradesh. Now Prabhakaran's rivals had a system of anti-aircraft defense.

Thirteen days later, Jyotindra Nath Dixit, the Indian High Commissioner, just back from consultations in New Delhi, called on President Jayewardene. The President was under great pressure. Not only was a military victory over the rebels impossible but his Finance Minister at the time, Ronnie de Mel, had just returned from a Paris meeting with representatives of the

major Western donors of aid to Sri Lanka. Fifty per cent of his country's budget was financed by foreign aid, and although the donors had committed six hundred and twenty-five million dollars for the current year, they had also presented de Mel with an ultimatum. If foreign aid was to continue, they said, there must be a settlement by the end of the year. And the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, concerned about Sri Lanka's rising defense expenditures and its debt servicing, were making the same demand.

In the course of a series of meetings with Dixit, Jayewardene initially declared that he would not go beyond what had been agreed upon between India and Sri Lanka on December 19th—a semi-autonomous Tamil administration in the north, which, through an elected provincial council, would have wide power over land distribution, education, and security. After two weeks of negotiations, however, he agreed to a provisional merger of the island's north and east. The resulting new, enlarged province would be governed by a semi-autonomous, Tamil-controlled provincial council until a referendum could allow

the Tamils, the Sinhalese, and the now critically important Muslims of the Eastern Province to decide where they belonged. The settlement was a tricky one for Jayewardene, for he also had to work around the opposition of his hawkish Prime Minister, Premadasa, whose hatred of India was such that he often referred to Gandhi and his late mother as "the calf" and "the cow." On July 16th, while Premadasa was on an official visit to Japan, the new agreement was presented to the thirteen-member "Inner" Cabinet at a hastily convened secret meeting at the President's home. In an unprecedented arrangement, Ambassador Dixit was present, to "clarify" any points. With Premadasa absent, the Inner Cabinet was split six to six on the plan, but after much confusion, some bitterness, and a few threats the ministers agreed to leave the matter in the President's hands.

In some two weeks of his hectic shuttle diplomacy in an Indian Air Force plane, carrying drafts, maps, bits of paper, and an Oxford pocket dictionary in a padlocked attaché case, Dixit met with the leaders of the Tamil moderates and of the various separatist groups. The agreement was refined to reflect a number of the guerrilla leaders' primary concerns, and all of them except Prabhakaran agreed to the final draft. Prabhakaran objected to the referendum on the merger of the north and east, fearing that the easterners might undo the merger when they went to the polls, and also objected to a requirement that the rebels lay down their arms prior to the Sri Lankan Army's withdrawal from the north and east. On July 24th, he was airlifted from Jaffna to New Delhi, along with key aides, in a flotilla of Indian Air Force helicopters. He remained in India, still objecting, for the next ten days.

Gandhi waited while his foreign-policy advisers attempted to cajole or coerce Prabhakaran. The Sri Lankan government had already announced that Gandhi would fly to Colombo to sign the agreement on Wednesday, July 29th. At midnight on Tuesday, six hours before Gandhi was to emplane, Prabhakaran was driven from the government-owned Ashok Hotel, where he had been staying, to the Prime Minister's office, in the elegant viceregal complex of South Block. It was the two men's first meeting since Prabhakaran had arrived, and they talked, argued, and threatened each other until dawn. Prabhakaran still re-

fused to support the agreement or to lay down his arms. He was driven back to the Ashok Hotel and, guarded by elite Indian commandos, was placed under virtual house arrest.

That morning, Gandhi left for Colombo to sign the accord, carrying with him an exchange of letters, still not in final form, that would give India a powerful voice in Sri Lanka's foreign and defense affairs. Gandhi was determined that in return for helping Jayewardene to end the war he would achieve some of his own regional and geopolitical goals.

SMOKE hung over Colombo and debris littered its stately boulevards as Gandhi and his party were whisked through deserted streets to the official residence, President's House. All of Sri Lanka was under a twenty-four-hour curfew after two devastating days of Sinhalese rioting that had begun as a peaceful protest by Buddhist monks. The monks, divided over how to protest the accord, which they saw as tantamount to granting the Tamils their visionary homeland, had gathered at Colombo's old Bo Tree, similar to the one under which the Buddha had found enlightenment. "Let us fast," said the elders. "No," said the young monks. "Let us march." Crowds swelled around them. Then the angry chanters turned into a mob. Sri Lankan authorities were certain that the J.V.P. was leading them. The mob lashed out at anything that was part of the infrastructure, attacking government buildings and gutting a central telephone exchange. Scores of burned-out buses cluttered the Victorian green. Seventy people had died, and all around Colombo, the astrologers noted, the skies were filled with crows.

The document that Rajiv Gandhi and J. R. Jayewardene were about to sign was a five-page Memorandum of Understanding, which needed the approval of both nations' parliaments. Whether it would be ratified by the Sri Lankan parliament was not at all certain. Though Jayewardene had given his deputies a tongue-lashing only days before—he'd threatened to dissolve the legislature and call new elections if they didn't endorse the accord—the United National Party was divided. Premadasa, who had returned from Japan, was noticeably absent from the reception for Gandhi, and so were three ministers, including Lalith Athulathmudali, the powerful National Security Minister.

According to the agreement, elec-

tions for provincial councils, including the new, single council for the north and east, would be held throughout the island within three months. However, the precise powers of the councils were not defined. The referendum on the merger of the north and east would be held in the Eastern Province on or before December 31, 1988, unless postponed by President Jayewardene.

In a move that was bound to unsettle the Army's lower ranks, the Army was confined to barracks in the north and east, and to only those barracks that had existed prior to the Vadamarachchi campaign. Thus, the Army relinquished all the territory it had so painfully gained. The Tamil rebels would, of course, lay down their arms, a general amnesty would be granted, and the draconian state of emergency would be lifted in the Northern and Eastern Provinces by August 15th.

Sinhalese, Tamil, and English would be Sri Lanka's official languages. India agreed to deport any Sri Lankans who from its soil engaged in terrorist activities or advocated separatism; to provide Sri Lanka with military assistance; and to help police the Palk Strait in joint naval patrols.

Gandhi's mixture of casualness and impatience was apparent to those present as he and President Jayewardene sipped tea in the high-ceilinged eighteenth-century drawing room of President's House and aides put the final touches on the letters that the two leaders would exchange. The letters proved to be the most controversial part of the accord, for they showed that Gandhi had indeed realized some of his geopolitical goals.

President Jayewardene pledged not to permit Trincomalee or any of Sri Lanka's other ports to be used for military purposes by any country "in a manner prejudicial" to the interests of India; he also agreed that India and Sri Lanka would jointly develop Trincomalee's potentially lucrative oil-storage tanks, and guaranteed that no foreign broadcasting facility in Sri Lanka would engage in "military or intelligence" work—a stipulation clearly directed at the Voice of America. As for Pakistan, Israel, and China, any assistance from them was for all intents and purposes precluded by a stipulation that Colombo would consult with New Delhi before bringing in any "foreign military or intelligence personnel."

Many Sinhalese and Tamil moderates who basically supported the accord were unsettled by India's new

and very substantial role in determining Sri Lanka's foreign policy and controlling its defense. In the fashionable bungalows of Cinnamon Gardens, worried Sinhalese were asking whether their eighty-year-old President had bartered the country's independence for uncertain peace. They recognized, however, that in any event India was bound to play a major role in Sri Lankan affairs. Sri Lanka could not defeat the Tamil Tigers without India's support and without the closing of their training bases and political headquarters in Madras, nor could it stand against India's vastly superior military might.

"Your visit has been one of the most controversial since Prince Vijaya came here, twenty-five hundred years ago," Jayewardene told Gandhi. "He created the Sinhala race. I hope your visit will help it to re-create and refurbish itself." Jayewardene's words were clearly unpalatable to many Sinhalese, as was evidenced by a twenty-two-year-old sailor in the Presidential Honor Guard who attempted to hit Gandhi over the head with his rifle butt. Jayewardene, looking on, said, rather strangely, that the sailor appeared to be suffering from sunstroke.

AFTER the agreement was signed, Prabakaran was allowed to return to Jaffna, and on August 4th more than a hundred thousand people flooded the grounds of the city's ancient Hindu temple, and spilled over into narrow streets and crowded onto rooftops, to see the man who had been underground for so many years. Prabakaran mounted the podium with three Tiger military commanders and other political aides. Out of military uniform, his hair now speckled with gray, he looked more like a portly businessman than like a guerrilla leader. And he had left his suicide capsule behind. The large crowd gave him a rousing reception appropriate to a conquering hero, and he addressed them from a raised wooden dais festooned with the Tigers' red banners and red-and-yellow flags. Their cheering contrasted starkly with the grim look on his face.

His address was sober, not inflammatory, and he surprised everyone by announcing that the Tamil Tigers had agreed to lay down their arms. "We had no choice," he said. "We had to toe the Indian government's line. We were not prepared to go into battle against the Indian Army, and are bowing to geopolitical realities and

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superior military strength. But this is an Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, not a lasting solution. We not only did not sign this agreement, we were not consulted. We were presented with it as a fait accompli. The only lasting solution is a separate Tamil state."

He said that he would not accept the post of chief minister of the newly merged north and east, but that the Tigers would contest the scheduled provincial-council elections. He left his own future open, only vowing to continue the separatist struggle "through other methods and means"—a statement that was worrisome to the governments of both Sri Lanka and India.

As Prbakaran left the temple grounds, in a blue minibus, surrounded by guerrillas still brandishing their Soviet machine guns, the war-weary people of Jaffna cheered wildly; no one was certain whether they cheered because the war appeared to be over or because the thirty-two-year-old fisherman had done more than anyone else to give them back their Tamil identity and their dignity.

On August 5th, at Palaly Airbase, now the headquarters of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force, the chief of the Tigers' political wing, who was known as Yogi, handed his 9-mm. Beretta pistol to General Sepala Attygale, the Sri Lankan Secretary of Defense, as a symbol of the Tigers' compliance with the turnover of arms. General Attygale put his hand on the weapon to acknowledge the surrender, and presented Yogi with a rolled-up document declaring a general amnesty. Five Army trucks filled with weapons sped onto Palaly's one small airstrip, disgorging nearly two hundred weapons—AK-47s, heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, 150-mm. mortars and rocket launchers, and a good number of rusty Second World War rifles, bandoliers, and submachine guns.

No one had seriously expected the forty-five hundred Tigers, or the eighteen hundred other armed militants, to hand in all their arms. The key question had been how many weapons would be considered enough. Major General Harkirat Singh, the commander of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force, which was charged with enforcing the ceasefire and the surrender of arms, had said that if he was not satisfied with the quantity and quality of arms received he had the writ to go out and search for more, but he had also said that he expected to receive

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two thousand weapons. Sri Lankan Intelligence sources had estimated that the militants had at least six thousand weapons at hand.

Jayewardene, who only three months earlier had compared Rajiv Gandhi to Hitler, now told foreign correspondents, "I believe in personal friendships, and in foreign-policy friendships; and I am placing my entire trust in my personal relationship with Rajiv Gandhi to guarantee Sri Lanka's peace." (Two Indian Leander Class frigates, whose combined complements included three helicopters and at least eighty Marine commandos, were standing by in Colombo's port to evacuate Jyotindra Nath Dixit and President Jayewardene in an emergency.) Jayewardene also said that Sri Lanka must accept the regional domination of India. "We can't stand up to any country. They can conquer us," he said. The President was bitter that the major Western powers had abandoned him to India. "The world's powers have accepted that India is the great power in this region," he said, "and America won't lift a finger to help me without asking India." He had requested military assistance from the United States, Britain, Pakistan, and China the previous week. Only Washington had responded, and only to send spare parts. "You never know with these big powers," Jayewardene said. "You can't trust anyone." Displaying a bewildering mixture of humility and authority, eccentricity and wit, the "old man" of Sri Lankan politics had taken full responsibility for the four years of civil war. On the day the accord was signed, he had told a hushed press conference, "My own lack of intelligence, lack of foresight and courage were to blame"—for his not making concessions to the Tamils sooner. He was asked what had happened to make him change his mind, and answered, "The combination of the stars and the planets was most auspicious during July."

IN truth, the Tamil Tigers never stopped fighting. They had handed in what was estimated to be only twenty per cent of their weapons, and within six weeks of the signing of the peace pact they had eliminated more than a hundred and fifty members of rival separatist groups, mainly in north-central Sri Lanka and in the east. They invaded homes, waylaid buses, and opened fire in the streets. The passive Indian Peace-Keeping

Force and the policymakers in New Delhi were clearly amazed. Refusing to rise to the challenge, the peacekeepers permitted the internal warfare to rage, thereby sapping their credibility in the eyes of ordinary Tamils, who had initially welcomed them as guarantors of their safety and of an elusive peace.

At the same time, Prabhakaran seemed to be doing well in negotiations for control of the semi-autonomous interim council for the north and east. He demanded and received a majority of the council's twelve seats. Then, according to the Tigers, on October 3rd things came apart when seventeen of their members, including three of Prabhakaran's most trusted aides, were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy off the northern coast as they were bringing arms from India in a trawler. National Security Minister Athulathmudali insisted that the men be brought to Colombo for interrogation—a move that Indian officials strongly opposed. Athulathmudali won out.

As the seventeen men moved across the tarmac of Palaly Airbase toward a waiting Indian Air Force plane, Kumarrapan, a senior Tiger commander, nodded, and they all swallowed the cyanide capsules that hung from their necks. All but four died. The bodies were returned to Jaffna, where tens of thousands of Tamils paid homage to the thirteen as they lay in state.

Prabhakaran's reaction to the mass suicide was quick. The Tigers' first victims were eight Sri Lankan soldiers they were holding captive, and the next were four policemen; all twelve were murdered on October 5th. The following day, the Tigers issued a statement formally announcing that they were opposed to the peace plan, and they began a rampage in the east. They hijacked trains and buses, and shot the Sinhalese passengers or hacked them to death. In Batticaloa, they rounded up Sinhalese men, women, and children and killed them. All told, they killed more than two hundred people in four days.

On October 9th, General K. Sun-



darji, India's Chief of Army Staff, flew to Colombo to consult with an outraged Jayewardene and with Sri Lankan government officials and members of the general staff. Mincing few words, Jayewardene demanded that India meet its obligations under the peace accord: it must disarm the Tigers; otherwise, he would be compelled to send the peacekeepers home. Stung into action, Indian forces set out the following day upon Operation Pawan (the word means "wind"), to destroy the Tamil Tigers as a guerrilla organization, beginning with their stronghold in the city of Jaffna.

It is impossible to say how many died in the battle that followed, but the number was at least two thousand people—between seven hundred and a thousand of them civilians. (The Catholic Church of Jaffna disputes the generally accepted civilian toll, claiming that between three thousand and four thousand civilians lost their lives.) Of the Tamil Tigers, between three hundred and four hundred died in the battle for the city, and the Indian Army lost more than five hundred soldiers and twenty-five officers. (This is the figure that Indian defense officials concede privately.) It was the highest death toll that the Indian Army had suffered since the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War—evidence of astonishing blunders and miscalculations on the part of the fourth-largest army in the world.

As Soviet-built Mi-24 helicopter gunships emptied their formidable arsenal of rockets and rapid-fire shells, the Indians showed that they were prepared to take extreme measures to put the Tamil Tigers down, yet the Tigers, improbably, held out for seventeen days. Despite the huge disparity in firepower and numbers (some nine thousand Indian troops were involved), twenty-five hundred guerrillas, many barefoot and dressed only in shorts or in wraparound, skirtlike lungis, held the Indian Army at bay. No longer a ragtag group of fishermen's sons, the Tamil Tigers had evolved into one of the most effective guerrilla forces in Asia. They had been trained, after all, by the Indian Army and India's RAW. Yet the Indians now fatally underestimated their former protégés' dedication and strength, their fighting skill, their insane bravery, and their intimate knowledge of the local terrain.

In late October, the Indian Army duly claimed to be in control of Jaffna, but it proved a hollow victory. During

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the last days of the battle, Prabakaran and twelve hundred Tiger fighters slipped through the Indian net into the swamps and jungles; other guerrillas, many of them teen-agers, remained behind. After coating their weapons with grease and wrapping them in plastic sheeting, they hid them, dropping them into the myriad lagoons and harbors of Jaffna, or burying them in the powdery red soil. Then they slipped quietly into the refugee camps dotting the north. A nameless, faceless army, unknown and unseen, had blended into the civilian population from which it came. One Sri Lankan Intelligence official concluded, two months after the battle began, that as a fighting force the Tamil Tigers had survived largely intact.

For the guerrillas the loss of Jaffna was, of course, a psychological and logistical blow. Not only had it been a secure base of operations, and a crucial port for resupply, but they had grown accustomed, over the years, to operating in an open, quasi-governmental fashion there, controlling the television and radio stations and the local press.

However, the advantage is shifting to their side again, as a full-fledged guerrilla war takes its toll in the east and the north. Booby traps and mines set by the Tigers, often with the aid of civilians, have made the Indian troops jumpy and confused, and they patrol in a perpetual crouch to avoid sniper fire. The soldiers have shot and killed civilians—sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. According to lawyers and human-rights activists, there is strong evidence of widespread atrocities by the Indian troops in Jaffna and the east. They have reportedly raped women and pillaged homes and shops. (On December 15th, a Sri Lankan court found six Indian soldiers guilty of raping Tamil women during house-to-house searches in the north.)

In the south, militant Sinhalese organizations, led by the J.V.P., have been responsible for an upsurge of violence, including robbery and murder, that is directed against the Jayewardene government. The President himself survived an assassination attempt in August—when an assailant exploded grenades and sprayed machine-gun fire in the parliament building—and most of his ministers and members of parliament are under heavy-armed guard; a thirty-thousand-man private defense militia is being established to protect them. Most members of parliament who belong to

the ruling party stay hidden away in Colombo, not daring to return to their constituencies. By the end of last year, one middle- or lower-ranking party or government official had been killed somewhere in the country almost every day since the peace accord was signed.

WHEN I returned to Colombo a few weeks ago, I had no sooner got into my car at the airport than my driver, Kawi, began, "It's awful, Madam. Horrible! How many killings? How many bombs? People don't have time to discuss the north and the east any longer. They're too worried about what's happening here in the south."

The road from the airport to the city was hung with mourning flags, and inside the capital's principal art gallery the body of Vijaya Kumaranatunga lay in state. He was Sri Lanka's most popular film star and a socialist politician, and had become a cult figure among the young. He had been gunned down outside his residence, presumably by Sinhalese extremists, and on the day of his funeral Colombo was paralyzed. More than a million people had come in buses and trucks from all over the country to file past his flower-strewn body and pay their respects; among the mourners were students and teachers, Cabinet ministers and monks, President Jayewardene, and a six-member delegation from the Tamil Tigers, who had arrived under the cover of darkness the previous night. To many, the killing of Kumaranatunga had become a symbol of the senseless, uncontrollable violence that had taken over.

Eight months after the Gandhi-Jayewardene accord, the agreement is in tatters, and in the east and north more than sixty thousand Indian "peacekeepers" are occupying a fourth of Sri Lanka's countryside. And in the face of a vengeful guerrilla army, an increasingly hostile civilian population, and a peace agreement that has brought none of its promised rewards, India's peacekeeping operation shows every sign of becoming a painful long-term occupation—one that invites comparison not just with Ulster but with Vietnam and Afghanistan. Indian forces are bogged down in a foreign country, fighting a counter-insurgency war they cannot hope to win.

Throughout Sri Lanka, there is a feeling of irresolution and drift, and the popularity of President Jayewardene is again very low. He will com-

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plete his second Presidential term in February, 1989, and is perceived increasingly as both victim and symbol of Sri Lanka's war. Normally a politician of extraordinary skill, he gambled his future on India and, at least for the moment, has lost. Thus, as he has done so many times before, Jayewardene has retreated behind his enigmatic veil.

There is anger and incomprehension among many Sinhalese over the Jayewardene government's having effectively surrendered control over the Northern and Eastern Provinces to the Indian Peace-Keeping Force. This, coupled with Sri Lanka's endless violence (including the incipient insurrection in the Sinhalese south, which has tied up fifty thousand troops of the Sri Lankan security forces), has fuelled popular demands for early parliamentary elections; the term of the present parliament extends through the summer of 1989.

Many, perhaps most, Sri Lankans—Tamils and Sinhalese alike—are increasingly apprehensive about the very survival of their country as a unified state. Apparently unsure of his own mind, President Jayewardene has said that there will be no voting in the Northern and Eastern Provinces until peace is achieved, and the next moment, with intelligence reports of atrocities piling up on his desk, he has said that the provincial-council elections called for by the peace accord could be held between April and June this year (they were to have been held by December 31, 1987, at the latest). Although the accord was ratified by the Sri Lankan parliament in November, none of its major provisions have thus far been carried out.

For the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (which is costing New Delhi more than three million dollars a day), it is a matter of face and honor that the provincial polls be held—after which, at least technically, some of the unhappy peacekeepers would be eligible to go home. But no one, including the Indians, is under any illusion about the difficulties of holding them. It will be impossible to have peaceful elections unless the Tamil Tigers and the J.V.P. bless the polls, and a new wave of large-scale violence could be precipitated when a hundred and twenty-five thousand Tamil refugees in India are repatriated and find that Sinhalese are now occupying their former homes.

The conflict in Sri Lanka—independent India's longest war—is rapidly becoming an embarrassment for

Rajiv Gandhi, who already has a long list of political problems at home, but he dismisses the growing criticism in the Indian press and parliament as the Indian death toll mounts, and insists that Sri Lanka is not becoming India's Vietnam. Indian flags now fly throughout the north and east, and those areas are blanketed with Indian Army checkpoints and small Army camps, yet thus far the Indians have been unable to intercept the vessels plying the east coast which ferry to the Tigers ammunition and weapons, now most often from Singapore.

Mani Dixit is being cynically referred to as the Viceroy by the Sri Lankan elite, and, to my astonishment, Sinhalese friends have spoken to me proudly of how "the lad" Velupillai Prabhakaran kept the Indian Army out of Jaffna for more than two weeks. Ironically, the rising tide of criticism of the tactics and behavior of the Indian troops has at last brought Sinhalese and Tamils to a consensus—the Indian "peacekeepers" must go home. "The depth of the ethnic divide remains," Dr. Kingsley de Silva, Sri Lanka's preeminent historian, told me over lunch. He is a good-humored, white-haired Sinhalese moderate. "It

cannot be bridged in a hurry. But this consensus now exists. The Sinhalese resentment of India has always been there, and what happened when the Indian troops arrived in the north was that the Indians saw Jaffna, and the people of Jaffna saw the Indians, and neither liked the other very much."

Dr. de Silva, who is Jayewardene's biographer, supported the President when he signed the peace accord. "In retrospect, what went wrong?" I asked him.

"The President is normally a very clever politician, but he severely underestimated the depth of Sinhalese opposition to any deal with India," de Silva said. "He also seriously overestimated the influence that India could exert on the Tamil Tigers to get them to lay down their arms. But I think something good will come out of this. There is now a realization among the Tamils that they have to look south, to Colombo, instead of north, to India. Also, I think there's a realization in the Sri Lankan government that the Tamil Tigers, defanged, would be a better bet to negotiate a political settlement with than any other group in the country, including the Indians."

Shortly after my lunch with Dr. de

Silva, Sri Lankan government officials let it be known that they had received "several signals" in recent weeks that the Tigers were interested in opening talks. Two government ministers, Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake, the Minister of Lands, were attempting to initiate such talks.

Dixit is far less optimistic. When I visited him recently at the Indian High Commission in Colombo and asked about a possible timetable for the withdrawal of Indian troops, he replied, "Any timetable is speculative at this point. It is a highly volatile situation. And if Sri Lanka insists on the premature withdrawal of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force, Sri Lanka will be divided. I say this because it is having a great deal of trouble with the J.V.P. in the south, and the L.T.T.E."—the Tamil Tigers—"are not fully subdued in the north and east." When I brought up the possibility of direct talks between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan government, Dixit said, "I'm not certain these talks will take place. There is a firm understanding between my Prime Minister and President Jayewardene that no arrangements will be made without India's involvement and In-

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dia's advice." He went on to say that he, too, had been receiving overtures from the Tigers in recent weeks, indicating that the Tigers want a ceasefire and want to open talks. "But we're not sure of their motives," Dixit said. "And this time we want to be very, very sure that they really want to talk, and that this is not just a tactical move."

ALL that I had heard about Jayewardene in recent weeks led me to expect to encounter a disillusioned man when I went to see him, at the old parliament building—a relic of the Raj—in the last week of February. He doesn't take pressure well, I had been told, and tends to withdraw into himself. Despite his great intelligence, acumen, and skill, it was also being said, he was becoming increasingly idiosyncratic and bizarre, and age was beginning to tell. In November, he told a journalist from the *Madras Hindu*, "About Jaffna I must say that I am rather ignorant, although we have people coming and telling us about the situation." Some people in Colombo were saying that Jayewardene had been greatly depressed by a strange incident that occurred last summer. On June 11th, one of Buddhism's most sacred days, the President, accompanied by ministers and aides, went to the sacred ancient capital of Anuradhapura for the blessing of a reconstructed stupa built by Dutugemunu, one of Sinhala's most revered kings. As the monks, outside the stupa, began their solemn blessing, part of its wall collapsed. Interpreting the event as a most inauspicious sign, Jayewardene turned pale and quickly left the ceremony. On returning to Colombo, he ordered that no mention of the collapse of the stupa be made in the Sri Lankan press.

The security at the old parliament building at the time of my visit was unprecedented. My purse and my briefcase were checked by hand twice in the reception area, and the foyer bristled with electronic equipment and metal scans. I was politely asked to leave my purse behind, and take only my notebook and pen. I was then escorted into the private office of the President.

As he greeted me and offered me orange juice, I was taken aback, for his manner was ebullient. Age has weakened his hearing, and noise from the explosions during the August assassination attempt damaged it further, but he now had a new hearing aid, and,

at eighty-one, he looked younger and better than he had in years. It became clear as he spoke that he was still far more politically adept than his sometimes odd public statements would suggest.

I asked President Jayewardene if he was having second thoughts about the peace accord.

"Not at all," he said. "I am still convinced that this is the only way to bring Sri Lanka peace."

When did he think that peace would come?

"In the north and east, when the L.T.T.E. surrenders. And when that happens, even if terrorism still continues throughout the island, I'll be entitled to say, 'There is peace in Sri Lanka,' because terrorism in the modern world cannot be totally eliminated."

"Does that mean that Sri Lanka will never be as it was before—that terrorism will always be a factor?" I asked.

He frowned and shrugged. "That's the modern world," he said.

Would he agree to direct talks between his government and the Tamil Tigers?

"No," he said. He thought a bit, and added, "Yes, if three conditions are met. If they accept the peace agreement, surrender their arms, and give up violence, then, yes, I would agree to direct talks."

A million Sri Lankans, out of a nation of sixteen million, had come to pay their last respects to Vijaya Kumaranatunga, I said. Was this the way Sri Lanka's silent majority was finally protesting the endless bloodshed?

"I hope so. I truly hope so." For the first time during our interview, the President looked tired. "Perhaps the death of one man can bring reason—reason that has escaped us for so many years."

"The anti-Indian feeling sweeping Sri Lanka is extremely high," I said. "My Sinhalese friends have expressed admiration for the Tamil Tigers for standing up to the Indian Peace-Keeping Force, and my Tamil friends have told me that the Indian Army is ten times worse than the Sri Lankan Army was."

"Well, yes," the President said. "On your second point, the Sri Lankan Army has behaved much better than the Indian Army. But these Sinhalese friends of yours annoy me. Principles should not be changed for political expediency. Don't these peo-

ple remember that the Tamil Tigers used extreme violence against a democratic government? Principles should not be so easily changed."

I reminded President Jayewardene that he had once told me he was a perennial optimist.

"I still am," he responded cheerfully. "Why shouldn't I be?"

After all that had happened, what was it that fuelled his optimism?

"I don't know what it is," he said. "I don't know enough about the how and why and wherefore. But, my religion, my books . . . I was born a Virgo. And I am still an optimist, despite everything." He smiled, displaying his considerable charm.

When I asked him if he feared assassination, he spoke of the three attempts on his life—in 1958, 1976, and 1987—almost as one removed. "I don't fear death," he told me. "But it's good to be alive—alive and working."

I gently broached the subject of a third Presidential term. It was being strongly rumored that the President would not step down, as scheduled, in February, 1989, even though he would have to amend or disregard the constitution to stay on. I had also heard that he had recently been reading biographies of Konrad Adenauer and Cardinal Fleury, the eighteenth-century French Chief Minister, both of whom ruled through their eighties. At fashionable Colombo dinner parties, the question of what J.R. was planning to do was on everyone's lips. So far, he had maintained a rigid silence on the subject.

"Ah, I wish I knew where I'd be one year from now," Jayewardene said.

"Will you perhaps still be here after February, 1989?" I asked.

"Yes, certainly. I will be here in my present position for some time."

I asked him what, after ten years in office, he considered his greatest achievement.

He laughed, and said, "My greatest achievement is that I'm here."

—MARY ANNE WEAVER

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