

**Findings on the
TAMIL COMMUNITY**

City of York

Summer 1995

Balagowri Vicky Kandasamy

York Community Services

December 21, 1995

Dear Colleague,

Please find enclosed a copy of our 1995 **Findings on the Tamil Community in the City of York.**

Production of this report was for the purposes of program planning within York Community Services. Findings and recommendations represented in the report are the opinions of the author/researcher and not necessarily those of York Community Services.

If you should like further information, please feel free to contact our **Executive Assistant, Duncan Farnan.**

Yours truly,

Bill Sinclair
Program Coordinator

TAMIL COMMUNITY IN THE CITY OF YORK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

- I. Geography of Sri Lanka
- II. History of Tamils
- III. Divisions in Tamil Community
- IV. Tamil Immigrants and Refugees in Canada
- V. Geographical Distribution of Tamils in City of York
- VI. Difficulties that Tamil Refugees Encounter
- VII. Health Issues for the Tamil Community
- VIII. Service Needs of the Tamil Community
- IX. Cultural and Community Gatherings
- X. Outreach Strategies for the Tamil Community
- XI. Appendices: Research Notes
- XII. Appendices: Canadian Newspaper Articles

I. GEOGRAPHY OF SRI LANKA

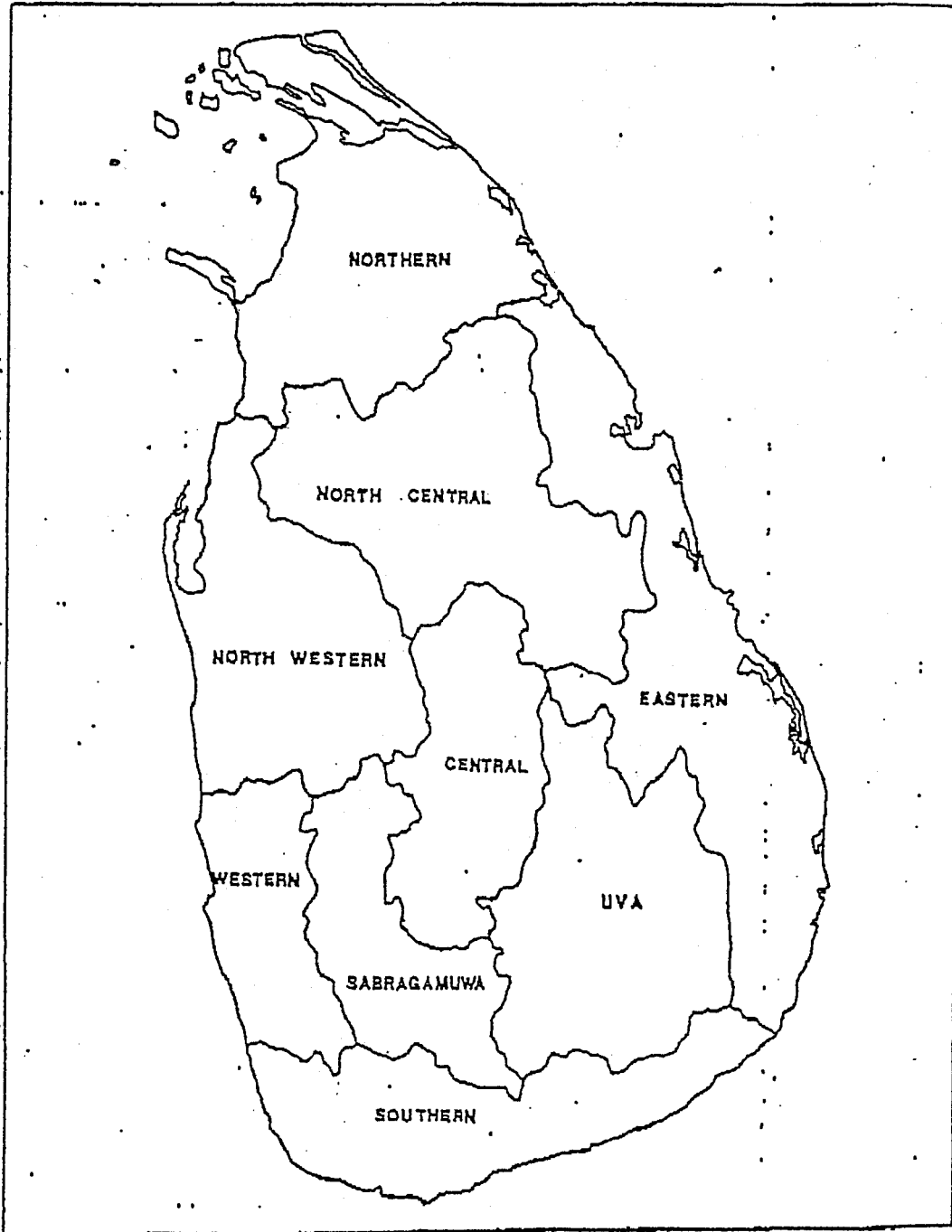
A. GEOGRAPHY OF SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is one of the most beautiful islands in the world. This island is located on the south coast of India with an area of 25,332 square miles - half the size of England. It is 270 miles long and 140 miles across at the widest point. It is shaped like a pear with the northern end narrower than southern part, and it is divided into 9 provinces. Sri Lanka has some beautiful mountains in the southern part including Adam's Peak, a famous landmark in each religion in Sri Lanka.

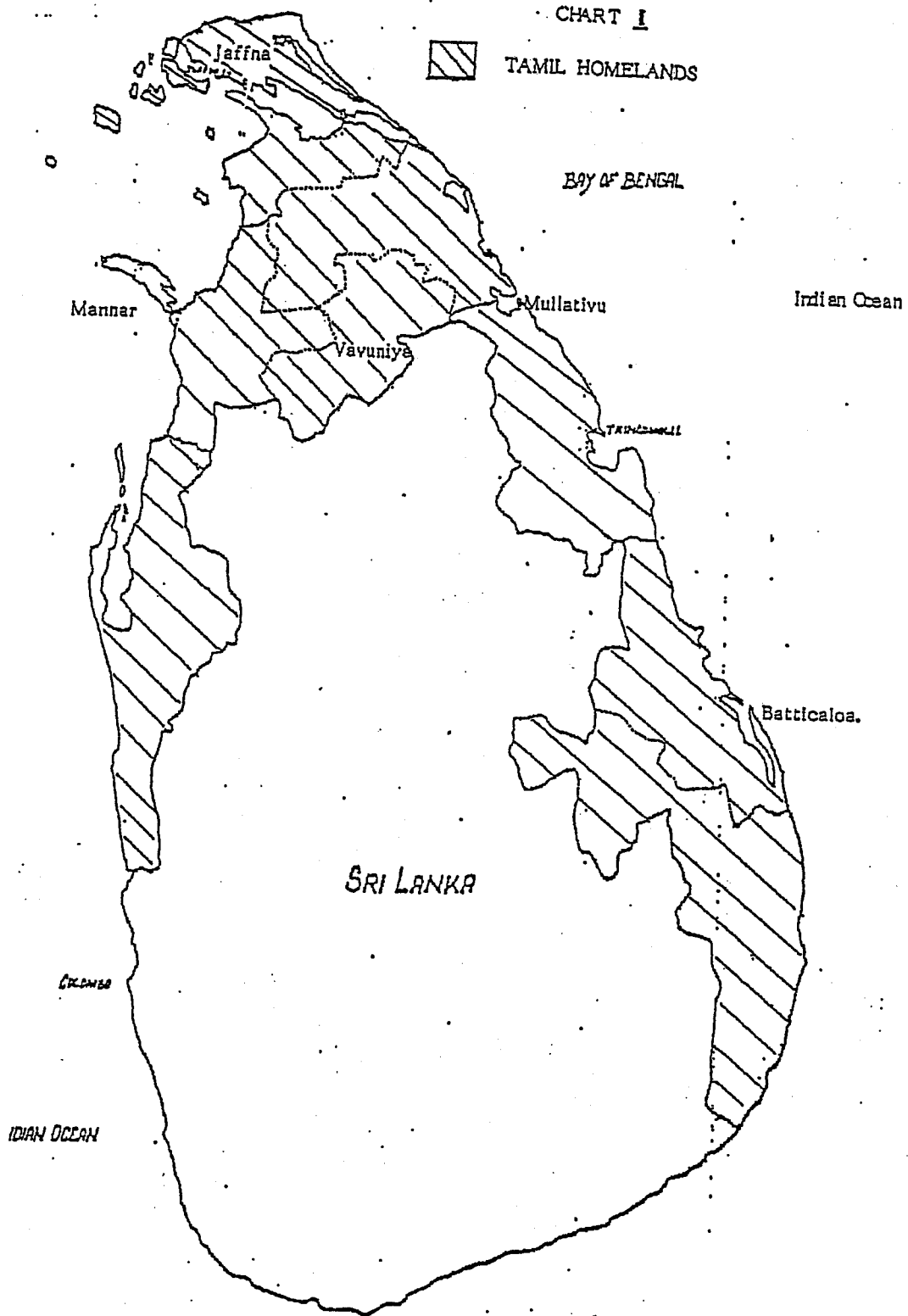
Sri Lanka is situated just north of the equator, leaving it with a tropical hot and wet climate. Sri Lanka is famous for its precious stones such as sapphires and rubies, and fertile soil. This fertile soil joined with a tropical climate allows Sri Lanka to prosper in agriculture. Sri Lanka produces tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber, and coconuts for export apart from rice and other vegetation for its own use.

B. MAP OF SRI LANKA

MAP 3
SRI LANKA
PROVINCES



C. TAMIL EELAM
TAMILI'S HOMELAND



II. HISTORY OF TAMILS

A. ANCIENT HISTORY

Sri Lanka's beauty and richness has not only offered prosperity but it has also invited many invaders. Sri Lanka was invaded by many countries, therefore, it has been known by many names and it has had many different capital cities. To the people in India, it was known as "Lanka", Greeks and Romans called this island "Taprobane", the Arabs knew it as "Serendib", and during British ruling it was known as "Ceylon". Sri Lanka was settled in pre-history 'by the ancestors of today's Tamil community and Sinhalese community, each of which has had periods of ascendancy through history. Sri Lanka experienced colonization and foreign control by European powers since 1597, first with the Portuguese and later with the Dutch and British. Conflict between the Tamil minority and Sinhalese majority dates back to at least 200 B.C.

B. MODERN HISTORY

In 1931, under British rule, Sri Lankan adults were given the right to vote and in 1946 they were granted independence and a constitution very like the British constitution. In 1948 the Sinhalese majority gained control of the Sri Lankan government in elections and the modern oppression of Tamils began.

Once the Sinhalese gained power, they made many changes that disregarded the wishes and needs of the Tamils as citizens in Sri Lanka. In 1958 Sinhala was introduced as the official language of Sri Lanka and Tamil and English languages were reduced in importance in education, Many Tamils opposed this official language policy and an outbreak of rioting lasted two days. Soon after the riots, Tamils achieved the right to conduct education in their mother tongue, especially in the northern part of Sri Lanka.

Many changes were made in favour of the Sinhalese people which led to the present situation in Sri Lanka. The dream of having a separate state for the Tamil people began when many new government policies and projects were created to increase the Sinhalese majority in population, government and business.

During the government-funded colonization period, many housing projects were introduced in Tamil regions, on Tamil land, which gave free housing to Sinhalese moving into the region for agriculture. The goal of these projects was to make Sinhalese a majority in every region. Pressure from these housing projects, and internal colonization pushed many Tamils towards the northern part of Sri Lanka where Tamils retained a majority. Many former Tamil regions were renamed in Sinhalese, including Mullativu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Vavuniya.

Secondly, the Sinhalese government combined Tamil districts with surrounding Sinhalese districts, especially during elections, to ensure Sinhalese Majority. Additionally, many "Indian Tamils", workers imported from India to work on the plantations, who were considered Sri Lankan citizens under the British rule lost their status and their right to vote. Tamils had no chance to succeed politically and to represent their concerns and problems in parliament.

Thirdly, education and employment policies of the government favoured Sinhala language over Tamil even in Tamil majority areas. University selection criteria unfairly favoured the Sinhalese. The result was very few Tamil students were selected for university 'even when they were equally or more qualified than their Sinhalese peers. This led to much unrest amongst Tamil youth.

Sinhala language also became a requirement for any government job, even in Tamil areas. Due to this policy, many Tamils were forced to resign from their jobs. The police and military of Sri Lanka were also dominated by the Sinhalese.

During this period of oppression, many Tamils were killed in rioting and massacres. Property damage and looting of Tamil stores was also common, and many Tamils fled to Britain and other foreign countries for safety. This oppression has flared into massacres and riots every few years including major conflicts in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981, and 1983. Most of these massacres involved Sinhalese inflicting harm on Tamils, except in the 1980s when the Tamil militants started to fight back for the rights of their nation.

C. TAMIL MILITANT MOVEMENT

Tamil militants did not appear overnight. Tamil groups attempted to gain equality through peace movements and political action. Most of the Tamil political leaders fighting for the rights of Tamils were jailed, tortured and killed in prison. The strength and the determination of the Tamil militants to have a separate state became visible in 1983 when they fought face-to-face with Sinhalese military.

In 1983 many Tamils were killed and many started fleeing the country. In 1987 the Indian 'peace movement' policy boarded Indian armies in Sri Lanka to fight the Tamil militants to preserve the peace. Many Tamils thought this movement would help to save their lives and create a Tamil nation. Instead, the Indian army worked with the Sri Lankan government to destroy Tamil militants. A majority of Tamils are in favour of Tamil militants, especially the Tigers. Many innocent Tamils have been killed in the conflict, including women and children. Many Tamils accuse the Sinhalese government of regarding all Tamils as the enemy. The Sinhalese government labels the militants as separate and as dangerous to the Tamil people, to gain sympathetic support and arms from foreign countries. In recent years, Tamils are in outright war with the Sinhalese government for a separate state. Current fighting in Sri Lanka is described in recent Canadian newspaper articles in the appendix. Tamil community members feel that the full atrocities of the fighting in Jaffna, the largest Tamil city, are not being reported, and that news sources are biased in favour of the Sri Lankan government. The latest offensive of the Sri Lankan government this year is considered the most destructive in the ten year conflict.

D. TAMIL RELATIONS WITH INDIA

The fact that the Indian government knows more about the Sri Lankan Tamil situation than any other country and still supports the Sinhalese government, is a great disappointment to Tamils world-wide. The Indian government shows concern towards "Indian

Tamils," living near tea plantation, who are perceived and treated as a separate race. The "Indian Tamil" immigrants from India Tamilnadu during British ruling were not assimilated into the nation of "Sri Lankan" Tamils. This tension between Indian government and Tamils has built hatred towards the Indian government. Rajiv Gandhi, son of Indira Gandhi, was the Prime Minister of India in 1987 who created the 'peace movement' policy which killed many Tamils. These armed forces raped, wounded, and killed many women and children during their stay in Sri Lanka. Many in India blame Rajiv Gandhi's murder on Tamil militants, which has further strained relations.

E. TAMIL RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Invasions by Portuguese, Dutch and British did not leave any permanent scar in their relationships with Tamils. Many Tamils sought refuge in Britain during their difficult times and many have settled there in the 1970s and 1980s.

III. DIVISIONS IN TAMIL COMMUNITY

Many believe Tamils are one nation and are inseparable, but there are divisions in the community. In recent years Tamils are visibly united because they are fighting together against the Sinhalese to have their own state. This war has put them together as one, but structural divisions have existed and still are embedded in the psyche of many Tamils. There are many forms of division within Tamil community. Religion, Caste, region, economy, and politics are separating barriers.

A. GROUP DIFFERENCE

First of all, there are two different groups of Tamils, as identified earlier. There are the "Sri Lankan Tamils" and "Indian Tamils." Though they are Tamil-speaking Hindus and physically indistinguishable, their dialect identifies them as separate. Many Sri Lankan Tamils do not inter-marry with "Indian Tamils". The "Indian Tamils" are a minority within the Tamil community.

B. RELIGION

Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country. First, there is Buddhism followed by the Sinhalese. Within Tamils, there are followers of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Hinduism is practised by the majority of Tamils including "Indian Tamils." Christianity is a religion introduced- during the invasions by Portuguese, Dutch, and British. More than a million Tamils are now followers of Christianity. The Muslim religion is practised by Arab descendants who are now Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan. Even though, Tamils practice different religions, there is no history of religious persecution within the Tamil community.

C. CASTE

Added to this religious difference is the well known caste system. The root of this system lies in India and it is not as severely practised among Tamils as it is in India. Caste system is strictly followed by Hindus who believe it to be part of their religion, and most other Tamils follow caste to some extent. Many Tamils willingly converted to Christianity to escape their inferiority within the caste system. The caste system was a structural way of organizing people into groups according to their occupation. Priest families are at the top of the hierarchy followed by landowner/farmers. The lowest of the hierarchy are fishers and labour workers. Even though one is born into a caste, a few are able to overcome their inferiority by prospering in education and economics which gives them an importance in society. Nevertheless, one can never convert caste.

The formation of Tamil militants united Tamils to create their own state and the emphasis on caste practice has been abandoned. Though caste is not practised visibly, it is still a major divider when considering marriages. If people inter-marry, they are likely to be unaccepted by both caste groups. It is evident that younger generations are questioning and opposing this caste division and are inter-marrying. In Canada, older generations are facing adjustment difficulties but are still aware and practising the

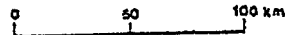
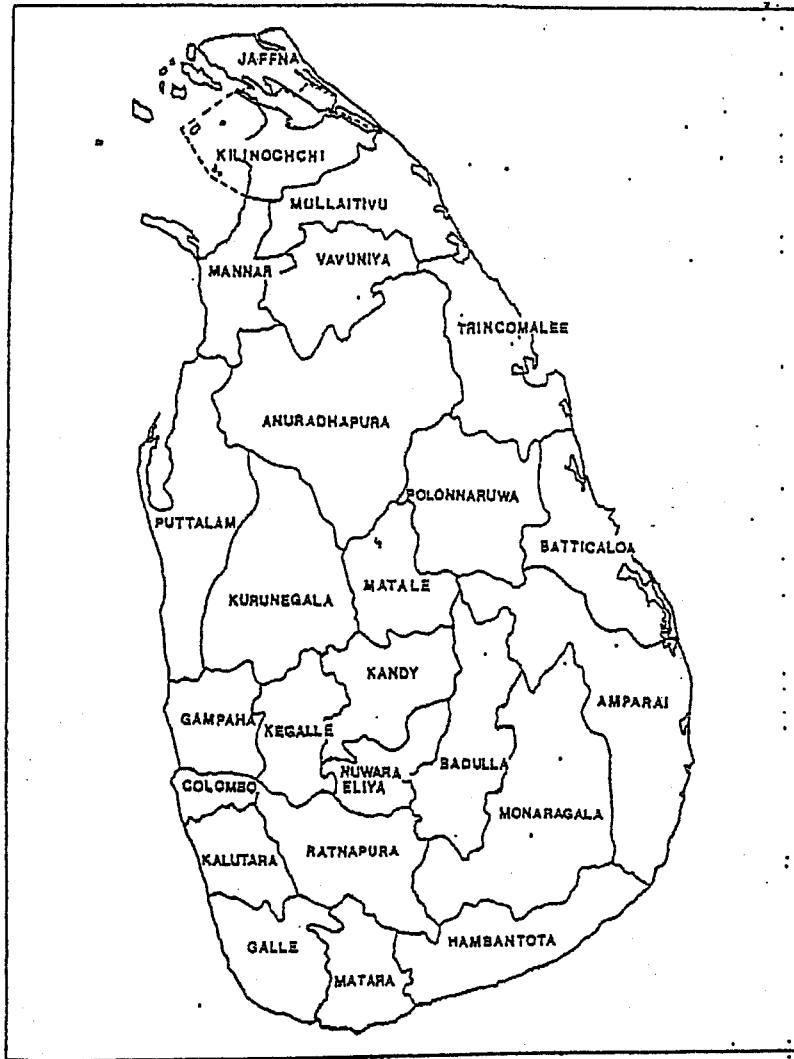
caste system. It is advisable to all service providers to be cautious in talking about caste for it is still a very sensitive topic.

D. REGION

Sri Lankan Tamils were once divided regionally. Regional division has many connotations. To some extent, regional division also involved caste and class division. People tend to live in concentrated areas with their own caste, therefore, regional division also indicates caste division.' The same pattern is relevant in class division, especially urban/rural division. A majority of Tamils live in rural areas. One other indicator that identifies people from different regions is their dialect. Each region tends to have its own way of talking but this indicator is unnoticeable unless encountered often. The younger generations in Canada are incapable of identifying this regional dialect. Regional division is not practical now in Sri Lanka because no one has a place of their own. They wander according to violent situations. Tamils in Canada, as their populations increase, are beginning to divide themselves according to Sri Lankan regional differences. The majority of Tamils in Metro are from Jaffna Region, which also has many sub-regions.

REGIONAL MAP OF SRI LANKA

MAP 4
SRI LANKA
DISTRICTS



S

F. FINANCE

Generations of Tamil who studied in the British system are likely to have knowledge of the English language which normally leads to better employment and wealth. Caste, as indicated earlier, is structured based on occupation and wealth, therefore, those in the higher caste are likely to be wealthier than those in the lower caste. But both of these are less applicable to the financial problems faced now by Tamils in Sri Lanka.

In recent years, income depends on the help of people in foreign countries. If at least one member of the extended family has sought refuge in countries like Canada or America, then the family back home is likely to be better off than those who have no help from abroad.

G. POLITICS

Politics within the Tamil community has become wholly centred on the conflict with the Sri Lankan government in recent years, and 'does not have political parties as known in Canada. At the beginning, there existed many different groups of Tamil militants. Though they had similar goals, they did not work together to achieve a Tamil state. Most famous of all militant groups is the 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam', which is supported by the majority of Tamils, even in Canada. Other militant groups include People's Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam, Eelam people's revolutionary Liberation Front, and Tamil Eelam Liberation Army. At this stage of the conflict, some groups no longer operate, some have combined, but others are still divided. At least one group of Tamil militants have been known to aid the Sri Lankan government and would be considered war criminals by other Tamils.

IV. IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN CANADA

A. INFLUX OF REFUGEES

There were very few Tamil immigrants in Canada prior to the past 10 years and there was no concentration of settlement. Most of these immigrants were well-educated professionals. The flood of refugees began after the massacre in July 1983. Tamils started fleeing Sri Lanka seeking refuge all over the world. For many Tamils, Canada is their final, settling destination. Though they are more familiar with countries in Europe after the colonization, they learned that permanent status and family reunification is virtually impossible in these countries. Though Tamils are living world wide, they all wish to be in Canada due to the hospitality and favourable immigration laws. Canada not only accepts refugees but it gives them permanent residence and the opportunity for family reunification. Almost 70% of the refugees now live in Metro Toronto because of accommodation, jobs, and the use of the English language. Many prefer to study in English as opposed to French because it can be used world-wide.'

B. CONDITIONS OF THEIR FLIGHT

Though Canada welcomes refugees, it is very difficult and life-threatening for a refugee to attempt to flee Sri Lanka. Many travel illegally through hostile countries and in an unsafe manner. The condition of their flight is terrifying and risky. Many Tamils have died in the process of illegal border crossing. In July 1995, twelve young men died when crossing the Russian border. They were sealed in an oil truck at a border check point and all suffocated to death. Another incident involved refugees who were clothed improperly in winter when they were taking an illegal route. The long hours of walking in the cold weather lead to their death. It is evident that many of those who are fleeing Sri Lanka are unsure of how they will travel, how long it will take, and what they will face.

C. TAMIL POPULATION IN CANADA & ONTARIO

The latest estimate of Tamils in Canada today according to most of the Tamil community workers is 120,000. Official census data is only available from 1991 and is not considered complete or accurate in counting the Tamil community. Generally, census data suggests that 81% of Tamils in Canada are in Ontario.

CENSUS CANADA 1991 - HOME LANGUAGE: TAMIL

TAMILS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
CANADA	16,240	10,575	26,825
ONTARIO	13,245	8,380	21,620

CANADA	0-14 yrs	15-24 yrs	25-59 yrs	60+ yrs	TOTAL
MALES	2,160	2,290	8,970	540	13,960
FEMALES	1,910	1,310	3,955	585	9,130
TOTAL	4,070	3,600	12,925	1,125	23,090

LANDING STATISTICS 1992 - 1995 APRIL

Country of Last Permanent Residence by Province:
Sri Lanka 1992 - 1995 April

	QUEBEC & EASTERN CANADA	ONTARIO	WESTERN CANADA	TOTAL
1992	1,650	10,576	229	12,635
1993	1,380	7,466	215	9,061
1994	789	5,306	201	6,296
1995	208	3,137	81	3,426
TOTAL	4,072	26,485	726	31,418

V. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF TAMILS IN THE CITY OF YORK
 A. IN METRO TORONTO AND CITY OF YORK

According to census data, City of York had 875 Tamils in 1991 with another 4,440 Tamils living in North York. Many of these North York Tamils lived near the City of York borders, according to North York Board of Education statistics and Tamil community workers at North York Community House. Based on the documented increase in the Tamil community seen in the York Board of Education statistics, we can estimate the Tamil population of the City of York in 1995 to be 2,000 people.

TAMIL POPULATION	CITY OF YORK
1991 ACTUAL CENSUS	875
1995 PROJECTED	2,000

CENSUS CANADA 1991 - HOME LANGUAGE: TAMIL

	TORONTO	SCARBOROUGH	NORTH YORK	YORK
TAMILS	27530	10960	4440	875

B. TAMIL STUDENTS IN THE CITY OF YORK

According to 1995 York Board of Education statistics, Tamil-speaking students are now 1.2% of the overall school population and 1.7% of the Secondary school population. For comparison, other non-English-speaking communities in the student population are the Spanish-speaking community (7.4%), the Vietnamese-speaking community (4.7%), the Italian-speaking community (3.6%), and the Somali-speaking community (2.6%).

Tamil-speaking students are the tenth largest community in the York Board of Education, and Tamil-speaking students are the fourth fastest growing community. Since 1993, the Tamil student community has increased by 129%. Separate statistics on Tamil students are not available from 1992 or earlier because the population was then so small it was included in "Other Asian."

Year	Elementary School	Secondary School & Adult Day School	Total Tamil	% of all students
1993	30	58	88	0.5
1994	67	107	174	1.0
1995	77	125	202	1.2

C. AREAS OF CONCENTRATION OF TAMIL RESIDENTS

1. IN THE CITY OF YORK

Jane & Lawrence
Weston & Lawrence
Weston & Church

Keele & Eglinton
Dufferin & Eglinton

The best indicator of areas of concentration of the Tamil community in York and nearby sections of North York are school board statistics and the experience of local community workers.

Using elementary school statistics, we find that Tamil children are predominantly in Weston, with 55% in Weston area schools. Another 22% are in the Dufferin/Oakwood family of elementary schools. This gives an indicator of where young families live.

Using secondary school statistics, we find that Tamil youth predominantly attend school in Weston (52%) and the Keele/Eglinton area (35%). Although youth tend to travel farther for school, we can assume that Tamil families may concentrate in these areas.

Community workers and business leaders in York have specifically identified numerous high rise buildings on Weston Road and Jane Street with high concentrations of Tamil families.

2. IN NORTH YORK/CLOSE TO CITY OF YORK

Lawrence & Bathurst
Lawrence & Dufferin
Lawrence & Caledonia
Jane & Sheppard

Finch & Weston
Keele & Wilson
Keele & Lawrence

Clearly, the population of Tamils in North York is much larger than in the City of York. There is evidence that many Tamils in North York live close to the City of York boundaries. Given the

highly mobile nature of newcomer communities, it is important to look at concentrations of Tamils in North York that may access services and businesses in the City of York or may move their residences from one municipality to another.

Using North York secondary school 'statistics, we can see that 471 Tamil youth go to school in the Dufferin corridor (Dufferin & Lawrence), 154 youth go to school in the Bathurst corridor (Bathurst & Lawrence), and 80 youth go to school in the Keele corridor (Keele & Wilson). An additional 256 Tamil youth attend North York secondary schools convenient to Weston on either Weston Road or Jane Street. Tamil-speaking community workers in North York have also identified two concentrations of the Tamil community in low-rent high rise buildings at Keele & Lawrence and Caledonia & Lawrence.

VI. DIFFICULTIES THAT TAMIL REFUGEES ENCOUNTER

A. CULTURAL SHOCK

Tamils in Canada are experiencing difficulties in their lives because of all of the adjustments to Western culture. For many Tamils, arrival in Canada, means protection and prosperity but it also means change and insecurity in their lifestyle. Younger generations find it easier to accommodate to western ways of living but many parents and grandparents are experiencing difficulties in almost everything they face. Many refugees leave their country with little preparation for their new country and face difficulties in language, culture, food and way of life. For many Tamil women, clothing in winter is a big problem. Many women have never worn pants in their lives and avoid going out in winter. Many who go out to work and to get other basic needs are normally under-dressed in winter which may lead to health problems.

Many refugees are not even aware of the multicultural composition of Canada. Many coming to Canada have never seen a white, oriental, or black person in their lives. This is less of a shock to those who are sponsored to Canada since they are prepared by their families.

B. CULTURAL CONFLICTS

The way of life of the younger generation of Tamils in Canada is different from that of their parents and grandparents. Younger generations are learning and trying to assimilate with western culture which is different from their traditional background and beliefs. Tamil culture and beliefs are often in conflict with what is taught and followed by Westerners. For example children are expected to marry the person chosen for them by their parents and not allowed to date or move-out until marriage. In Canada, youth and children are given more freedom, opportunities, and choices, therefore, they tend to favour and follow this 'open' culture. Parents are trying hard to understand and accept the change in lifestyle but they are not willing to give-up their culture and beliefs. This friction in the family have caused many youth to run-away from their homes.

Tamil youth in Canada are facing a situation where they are unsure of their own identity. They don't see themselves as a "Sri Lankan" but they are not being fully accepted as "Canadian" by Canadian society. Many youth fall in 'a situation where they are creating their own culture which a mixture of both the Tamil and the Canadian culture.

C. ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS

Adjusting to this new lifestyle is a challenge to every newcomer from Sri Lanka. Prior to the past two decades, life in Sri Lanka was traditionally slow, steady, and peaceful. Most had their own land and homes, and only needed to work for their food. Tamil adults find western lifestyle very stressful and demanding. Difficulty with language and job opportunities create additional barriers and demands. It is especially difficult to start with nothing or worse, deeply in debt to relatives when arriving. Racism in Canada also contributes to under-employment and depression in the middle-aged and elders. Youth on the other hand, tend to react angrily if they experience overt or systemic racism. One example raised recently by Tamil youth in interviews is recent

hiring of Tamils by the police force in Scarborough. There is anger that their people are only being used in clerical positions rather than investigating crimes within the Tamil community.

D. FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Grandparent, parents, youth, and children are having difficulty communicating with one another because of the long separations caused by their flights from Sri Lanka. Young fathers in Canada were often the first person to flee from their homeland to seek a safe land for the family. It takes at least three years for the father to settle, receive permanent residence and sponsor the family, during which time they have little contact. When the family reunite, father and children do not know each other very well and the mother becomes a mediator for them. Although the fathers and children want to spend time together, many fathers continue to work one or two work shifts to support the family and have very little time to build the broken bond with their children. Even later, when children are quite grown, are families reunited with absent grandparents.

E. CHILDREN

Many Tamil children do not have proper daycare services to facilitate English language development and to give them an opportunity to play with their age group from diverse cultural backgrounds. The expense of daycare and waiting list for subsidy constrains parents to using home daycare with friends or grandparents. Many working Tamils tend to sponsor their parents to take care of their children, resulting in exhausted grandparents taking care of grandchildren, cooking and keeping the house. Since a large number of grandparents have language difficulties they are unable to help develop the English language for the children. Many Tamil children regardless of whether they were born in Canada, tend to use very few English words until after attending some form of school.

F. YOUTH

A major issue for Tamil youth are the large number of teenagers living without parents in Canada. Most are sent to Canada by parents for safety, but lack caring, supportive guardians. Extended family and friends are generally burdened with these youth in their homes which leads to overcrowding, conflict, financial hardship and very painful family relationships. Although proper concern for the physical safety and education of the youth are provided, the emotional and supportive, needs of the youth are often not met. Many Tamil service providers believe that these youth are not disciplined well, or provided with guidance. This is considered a main cause of youth gangs in the community.

Overcrowding and poor family relationships lead many youth to form supportive groups of their own. Unfortunately, these groups sometimes lead to conflicts, gang fights and violent crimes. Five years ago the few Tamils who were involved in criminal activities were young adults in their 20s and 30s. Recent trends shows the range to be in the high school population, among the ages of 16 - 19 years. To date, most gang violence is directed within the community between rival gangs. There is a great need to establish more healthy, recreational ways for youth to relate, compete and socialize.

One explanation for this violent behaviour is thought to be the exposure to violence from their life in Sri Lanka. Some believe that Tamil youngsters have been traumatized by war, and taught that 'Violence is the only way to justice.' Another explanation is the lack of opportunity for employment and education. The Canadian school system is not supportive of youth from Sri Lanka who have been wanderers within their country and out of school for many years 'due to civil war. These youth are disadvantaged and need programs to bridge the educational gap.

Many youth are also frustrated and discouraged to see educated people from Sri Lanka come to Canada and work as security guards or dish washers in restaurants. This is a disincentive to continue and to excel in school. Many youth are experiencing stress

in school and pressures at home to excel in education, leading to frustrations. Many youth and children as they become capable of communicating in English, face greater responsibilities at home. Many parents use their children as interpreters and translators which creates pressures on youth and insecure feelings in their parents. Many parents are used to being in control, now, their lifestyle tends to revolve around the children. As a parents dependency increases, their power to discipline children decreases and youths become the decision-makers at home.

A third explanation of gang activity is the recognizable regional division among the Tamil community in Metro. Canada now has immigrants from all over Sri Lanka and there are enough members from each region of Sri Lanka to have small communities based on region or caste. Most of the violence with weapons among the Tamil gangs in the past, involved conflict based on Sri Lankan regional division. There were two well-known regional communities in Canada two years ago, the "Valveddy" group and "Udduppiddy" group with affiliated gangs that were constantly in conflict. This rivalry is not as strong now due to mediation within the community and new approaches to resolving disputes.

G. WOMEN

Large numbers of Tamil women, compared to men, have language difficulties. They are used to a stay-at-home lifestyle and when they come to Canada their whole lifestyle changes. In Sri Lanka, they do their household chores and enjoy the rest of the day with friends and family, all around their community. In Canada, they are restrained to their apartment most of the time unless they are employed or in school. Many women are forced to work to support the financial needs of their family unless they live on welfare. When women start working outside their home, they are faced with a double work load at home. They are still expected by husbands, parents, and children to do the house work and they get very little leisure time to rest and enjoy with the family.

Many have little or no recognized Canadian skills and they end

up working in factories, under poor working conditions, for minimum wage. Many times these women are exploited in the work force because they are unfamiliar with labour laws and do not know their rights. In some cases they may know their rights but have difficulty accessing assistance or need a translator. Since this process is time consuming and stressful many live knowing they are being exploited and do little about it. Since their whole lifestyle changes with added work and responsibilities, it leads to physical health problems, family conflicts and psychological problems such as stress and depression.

H. MEN

Majority of Tamil men in Canada have language difficulties which becomes a barrier for normal functioning in Canadian society. Due to this fact, many are incapable of finding a job and a majority of those who are working tend to get lower positions for minimum or near-minimum wage. When they have a family to support, and expenses increase, they sometimes hold two jobs. Working day and night leaves very little time for their family. Males living with their traditional roles and values have difficulties adjusting to the new role and freedom of women. They still expect them to do all of their "women's" work. When women start to expect more from the men, different from traditional practice, it normally leads to family conflicts.

Tamil men were raised to be dominant and protective, and physically disciplining their wives and children is accepted by the majority. When women challenge their expected roles, physical abuse increases. Some men are becoming heavy alcohol users. They tend to use alcohol which adds to the severity of physical abuse. Alcohol use is freer in Canada than Sri Lanka and is increasing for all age groups.

I. SENIORS

Seniors are sponsored to Canada by their children and are normally expected to baby-sit, cook, and keep the house, while

their children are out working. Seniors in Sri Lanka were well respected and mobile. They were not expected to do too many household chores, which was normally done by daughters or daughter-in-laws. In Canada, seniors are very isolated and spend most of their time alone or with young, grandchildren. They get very little chance to go out and socialize because they don't know how to travel alone and their children are too tired, after a long shift at work, to take them out. Even if centres for seniors are available, household responsibilities and travelling difficulties will be significant barriers.

J. FAMILY AND FAMILY-RELATED PROBLEMS

Wife and child abuse is common among Tamil families. Traditionally, it has been accepted and the community finds it difficult to change. Community service providers identify many reasons for increasing family violence. Change in gender roles contributes to physical abuse. When men expect their wives and children to follow their rules and wishes, and when they refuse physical abuse increases. Since youth and children spend most of their time in school with their peers, they learn and follow more westernized values. A communication gap between parents and children, results and, any difference in opinion leads to physical abuse. Many children tend to have a greater bond with the mother who becomes the mediator between husband and children. When the mother is more supportive of the youth, it will often lead to wife abuse.

Several Tamil service providers also identified marital separation as an increasing problem. Most Tamils will not divorce because of strong cultural prohibitions, but separation is now common.

VII. HEALTH ISSUES FOR THE TAMIL COMMUNITY

A. MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

1. POST-TRAUMATIC SYNDROME

Recent Tamil refugees tend to experience many changes in lifestyle that affects their mental health. Though many are happy to escape the life-threatening situation in Sri Lanka, many suffer from post-traumatic syndrome due to their tremendous emotional experiences in the war. According to psychiatrist Dr. Sooriabalan, post-traumatic syndrome is widely experienced by many Tamil newcomers from Sri Lanka. Many tend to have nightmares about their past experiences and have panic attacks when they encounter people and situations that remind them of their past. Many Tamils in Canada are experiencing post-traumatic syndrome when they encounter anyone in any form of uniform, or if they see a helicopter in the sky. In Sri Lanka, helicopters are used for bombing Tamil homes. According to Dr. Sooriabalan, a Tamil man recently hid in his washroom for a whole day when he saw a helicopter.

2. DEPRESSION

Many Tamils are not aware of depression as a medically treatable state and are not clear about its symptoms. Many young mothers tend to get depressed after giving birth. Many of them in Sri Lanka would have received extended family support and been cared for by family and friends. In Canada, they lack that support when depressed. Tamil women are also often stressed or depressed due to the double shift in the home and other difficulties. Men also get depressed for many reasons, including communication problems with wife. and children and unemployment or underemployment.

3. OTHER MENTAL ILLNESS

The Tamil community 'is not very tolerant of mental illness generally, because they are not aware of its forms and its symptoms. The Hindu religion believes in the existence of ghosts and evil power, therefore, illnesses is often interpreted based on religion beliefs. Tamils believe that an evil power has entered a person who is behaving strangely.

Some Tamils still believe if a person has epilepsy or strokes, it is due to their evil deeds in their past life or because they have done something against the wishes of the Gods. Many Tamils are educated enough to understand the scientific explanation of these illnesses but there are still a few who believe in witchcraft and other spiritual explanations for psychological illnesses.

B. PHYSICAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The most immediate health issue for the Tamil community is heart attack and stroke. Heart problems are almost eleven percent higher in the South Asian community than in other communities in Canada, with fifty-three percent of the South Asian community experiencing heart problems compared to forty-two percent for other communities. There are many causes given for this increase in heart problems. In Canada, Tamils eat much more meat and sweets than traditionally since these foods are less expensive here. Also, Tamils, with the exception of children and youth, tend to do very little exercise here. Thus, the combination of an unbalanced diet and exercising habits, results in an increase in their cholesterol levels, they gain weight, and other health problems follow.

High blood pressure, low birth-weight babies and thyroid problems are also issues identified by health care providers.

C. TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICE

Many Tamils try home medications made with herbs and spices before seeking medical help. Medical services are used only when they are in the later stage of their illness. Regular check-ups are rarely practised. During pregnancy women are restricted from eating certain foods. Fruit such as papaya is believed to harm the fetus and may even lead to natural abortion. After the birth of the infant, women are expected to rest and do no heavy lifting or exercise. They are given special curry, made of herbs and spices that is believed to help heal internal pains.

Some illnesses are associated with religion and it is believed that medical treatment should not be sought. Chicken pox for example is associated with a Hindu goddess. It is believed that if she is angry with you she will cause this illness and only religious rituals should be performed to promote natural healing.

VIII. SERVICE NEEDS OF THE TAMIL COMMUNITY

A. LANGUAGE

The majority of the Tamil population would benefit from language classes in near-by areas. Beginners prefer to have instructors who can speak both Tamil and English, but as they advance they prefer to have instructors from other communities. They believe this will relieve them from feeling shy about making mistakes and provides opportunity to socialize and begin communication in English. It is also evident that one-to-one tutoring help with difficulties and a small class will improve learning. It is necessary to arrange classes for mothers with young children where childcare is available. Since many women are still doing all their household chores without help, it is best to avoid having classes during the afternoons. The community can provide more input on schedules before starting a class in a local neighbourhood.

B. EMPLOYMENT

Many Tamils face difficulties in getting employment. Language becomes a barrier and most of them end up with labourer jobs. Many have skills and qualifications that are not marketable or recognized in Canada. Many are unemployed or under-employed. Many professionals from Sri Lanka work in factories and restaurants because they have no other incomes while acquiring Canadian degrees. Financial aid is needed, especially for sponsored family members to provide an opportunity to improve or modify their skills to Canadian expectations.

Information about employment and training programs currently offered must be made more available. Written information in Tamil

is especially needed because many people having language difficulties are unaware of existing opportunities. Many Tamils are looking for specific employment skills training with practical placements and some form of wage subsidy. These programs need to be promoted to the Tamil community. Many Tamils try very hard to achieve employment on their own but find little opportunity. Failure in seeking employment leads to low self-esteem and low self-confidences.

C. EDUCATION

General education is very important for all **age groups**. A first priority should be obtaining recognition for existing degrees and qualifications from Sri Lanka. This will prevent much unnecessary re-education. Many adults would also benefit from short-term orientation education to function smoothly in Canadian Society. They not only need to learn English, but they need education in all aspects of life: education about their rights, Canadian laws, health issues, and employment.

Tamil parents and children are coming from a competitive, authoritarian school system. They are coming from schools with high expectations regarding discipline and manners, and where physical punishment is common. They are not familiar with the Canadian school system and are confused by the philosophy, attitudes and the role of the parent. Tamil parents generally avoid their children's schools or else end up in conflict with teachers and principals. Tamil culture does not recognize 'learning disabilities', and they greatly fear special education programs that label their children as 'dumb'. Some parents are also requesting aid in organizing Tamil Heritage Classes where they are not being offered by the Board of Education.

D. LEGAL NEEDS

As with all newcomers, Tamils need legal help and information when they first arrive in Canada. They need help in claiming refugee status. They need help in organizing their story and

following up on court orders. They need education about immigration laws and explanations of possible outcomes on their case and appeal procedures. Once a landed immigrant status is given, they may need help in sponsorship and family reunification. Increasing stress in family life leads to violence and awareness about family law is very necessary. It is very important to educate in this area, especially about wife and child abuse laws. Traditionally many Tamilmalees are used to physically disciplining, they need to know that it is not accepted. Apart from these issues, the Tamil community needs to be aware of their rights and benefits, especially in labour law. They need explanations on union laws and compensation rights. Many are fearful of losing their job so they become very submissive and are exploited. Many Tamils are also being taken advantage of by the long-distance telephone companies. They need to know about consumer laws and how they can handle harassment. Many Tamils are also living in rental accommodation for the first time in their lives. They need knowledge on tenant rights and discrimination in housing.

IX. CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY GATHERINGS

Most of the Tamils gather and have social and cultural events on the weekends and some weeknights. Most of the events take place after 6:00 p.m. with some exceptions. Events such as community picnics will be for the whole day. Any seminars, workshops or classes arranged by community agencies should be after 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and before 6:00 p.m. on weekends. Activities for mothers and the unemployed can be arranged during the weekdays.

It should also be noted that religious festivals and fasting dates are important in many Hindu's lives. It is better to avoid these dates when scheduling meetings and workshops. These dates are not applicable to all Tamils, but a majority of Tamils in Metro Toronto are Hindus and these dates are important to many religious Hindu Tamils.

Tamil calendar is fourteen days behind from the Roman calendar. The Roman calendar is followed by all Tamils in daily

life, except in fixing dates for special occasions such as weddings. The Tamil calendar is basically used for all festival and fasting dates. The chart below is based on the Roman Calendar.

Pongal - Celebration with a feast (sweet rice)	January 14	Not subject to change
Sivaratri - Over-night vigil for Siva	February 17	Subject to 1-2 days change
Tamil New Year - Celebration	April 13-14	Not subject to change
Chitra Pournami - Fasting for certain family members	May 3	Falls in the first week - New Moon
Adiamavasai - Fasting for certain family members	July 15 or 16 -	First New moon or around August 14 - Subject to change
Navarathri - Fasting for ten days for students	From Sept 12 -22	Not subject to change
Diwaldi - Day of prayer, festival of light	Oct 12	Not subject to change

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 8. | Flemington Neighbourhood Services
Amala Ambalavarnar
10 Gateway Blvd, Ste 104
North York, Ontario
M3C 3A1 | Tel. (416) 424-2900
Fax (416) 424-3455 |
| 9. | Law Office
Kumar S. Sriskanda
3850 Finch Ave. E, Ste 410
Scarborough, Ontario
M1T 3T6 | Tel. (416) 321-9739
Fax (416) 321-9651 |
| 10. | Scarborough Hospital
Dr. Sooriabalan
3030 Lawrence Ave. E. Suite # 410
Scarborough, Ontario
M1P 2T7 | Tel. (416) 431-3557
Fax (416) 431-3701 |
| 11. | St. Michael Hospital
Department of Family Medicine
Dr. Devanesen
30 Bond Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 1W8 | Tel. (416) 867-7461
Fax (416) 867-7498 |
| 12. | Barrister & Solicitor, Notary Public
Nathan Sritharan
2190 Warden Ave. Suite 208
Scarborough, Ontario
M1T 1V6 | Tel. (416) 499-2760
Fax (416) 499-3977 |

B. MEDIA

The following newspapers and radio and television programmes from across Metro Toronto can be helpful in promoting events or programs.

NEWSPAPERS

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|---|
| * | Mansaty newspaper | Tel. (416) 321-0989
Fax (416) 321-5472 |
| * | Eela Nadu newspaper | Tel. (416) 588-5112
Fax (416) 588-1094 |
| * | Suriyan newspaper | Tel. (416) 283-8946
Fax (416) 283-8946 |
| * | Pothikai newspaper | Tel. (416) 284-6730
Fax (416) 425-5813 |

- * St. Anthony's Church
1041 Bloor St. W.
Toronto, Ontario
M6H 1M4
Tel. (416) 536-3333
- * Sivan Kovil
205 Champagne Dr. Unit 1
Downsview, Ontario
M3J 2C6
Tel. (416) 398-7448

E. OTHERS STRATEGIES

Flyers on the street and door-to-door contacts in buildings and neighbourhoods with large Tamil populations can be a useful outreach strategy. Neighbourhoods with higher concentrations of Tamil residents have been identified as:

Jane & Lawrence
Weston & Lawrence
Weston & Church

Keele & Eglinton
Dufferin & Eglinton

XI. APPENDICES: RESEARCH NOTES

A. INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES & BUSINESSES SERVING TAMIL

July 7, 1995	Sumathy Christy South Asian Social Services Organization
July 12, 1995	Jaya Surendren North York Community House
July 13, 1995	Jody Rajalingam Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre
July 14, 1995	Shyamala Shanmuganathan Chellam Sivasithambaram South Asian Women's Centre
July 19, 1995	Siva S. Nathan Senior Tamil Centre
July 20, 1995	Sivajini Jegatheeswaran Wellesley Hospital St. James Town Health Centre
July 24, 1995	Prithiviraj Devarajah Tamil Youth Association
July 26, 1995	Nagarajan Ramalingam Family Service Association
July 27, 1995	Amala Ambalawarner Flemington Neighbourhood Services
July 28, 1995	Douglas Disseverasinghe Rogers Road Welfare Office
July 31, 1995	Kumar S. Sriskanda Lawyer
August 1, 1995	Dr. Devanesen St. Michael Hospital
August 8, 1995	Mr. Kanagasapabathy North York Board of Education
August 10, 1995	Nathan Sriharan Barrister & Solicitor, Notary Public
August 16, 1995	Dr. Sooriabalan, Psychiatrist Scarborough Hospital

B. TAMIL EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

- July 27, 1995 SEMINAR ON HEART PROBLEMS
 Dr. Devanesen and Dr. Nithiya Ramani
 Wellesley Hospital
- July 29, 1995 WORKSHOP ON DEPRESSION
 Dr. Sooriabalan
 Wellesley Hospital

C. DOOR-TO-DOOR SURVEY

- July 27, 1995 Door-to-Door Interviews
 1577 Lawrence Ave. West
 In cooperation with North York Community House

D. REFERENCES

Cheran, R. South Asian Bulletin. "Cultural Politics of Tamil Nationalism." 1992, 12, 1. p. 42-56.

Karthigesu, Sivathamby. Bulletin of Peace Proposals.
 "The Sri Lankan Tamil Question: Socio-Economic and Ideological Issues." 1987, 18, 4. p. 623-635.

Kendall, P.R.W. City of Toronto Department of Public Health.
 "The Sri Lankan Tamil Community in Toronto." 1989.

Nasir, Islam. Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism.
 "Ethnic Differentiation, Relative Deprivation and Public Policies in Sri Lanka." 1990, 17, 1-2. p. 15-30.

Sankaran, Krishna. Studies in Conflict and Terrorism.
 "India and Sri Lanka: A Fatal Convergence." 1992, 15, 4,
 Oct-Dec. p. 267-281.

Toronto Star

October 21, 1995

Canadian Tamil leader arrested as terror threat

By JACK LAKEY
STAFF REPORTER

The arrest of one of Canada's top Tamil leaders on allegations of terrorism has shocked members of the community in Metro.

Manickavasagam Suresh was taken into custody Wednesday after Canada's immigration minister, Sergio Marchi, and the federal solicitor-general signed a national security certificate for his arrest.

Suresh, 39, who lives in Toronto's east end, is described by members of Metro's Tamil community as a leader who has organized demonstrations against the violence in Sri Lanka.

Marugesapillai Duraiswamy, president of the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada, described Suresh as one of the important personalities in the world Tamil movement.

"He has a lot of confidence and respect of the Tamil community in Canada," Duraiswamy said.

Suresh is being detained under a special section of the Immigration Act that allows the immigration minister and Canada's solicitor-general to sign a certificate ordering a person to be taken into custody.

Documents served on Suresh at the time of his arrest identified him as a person who has or may engage in acts of espionage or subversion against a democratic government, institution or process.

Immigration spokesperson Kevin Sack said he couldn't indicate what charges had been brought against Suresh, but said he'll face an in-camera hearing before a federal court judge within a week.

Sack said Suresh would have normally appeared at an immigration hearing shortly after his arrest, but there's no need for a hearing until a judge of the federal court rules on the reasonableness of the national security certificate.

"The security certificate provides for a person to be detained for the entire process," he said.

Immigration intelligence sources said the arrest was made following a lengthy investigation after authorities received information Suresh could pose a security risk in Canada.

Duraiswamy said it's nonsense to suggest Suresh was involved in any terrorist activity.

"He's been charged on false information," he said. "That's my belief. That's what majority of the Tamils believe. I can vouch and say he had never been involved in any terrorist activities, that's a for sure."

Duraiswamy also thinks it's wrong that Suresh should face a secret hearing.

"I'm almost sure this is a result of someone trying to implicate him in something," he said.

Max Berger, an immigration lawyer who represents many Tamils, said it wouldn't surprise him if someone from the other side had made allegations against Suresh.

Berger said the arrest was made as local Tamils were preparing to travel to New York to stage a peaceful protest against Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga during celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.

Toronto Star

November 01, 1995

100,000 flee during army drive on Tamils

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (Reuters) — More than 100,000 civilians have fled the rebel Tamil Tiger stronghold of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka as the army presses what could be a decisive advance to recapture the rebel-dominated peninsula.

The city seemed almost deserted yesterday as civilians and guerrilla fighters fled ahead of advancing troops to nearby Chavakachcheri, aid workers on the Indian Ocean island said.

The mass exodus, which began Monday after troops overran the town of Neerveli, on the approach to Jaffna city, marked a turning point in the army's campaign to recapture the peninsula, where the rebels run a virtual mini-state, army sources said.

"If this goes on much longer Jaffna will be a ghost town," a senior Western relief worker said.

The aid worker, quoting colleagues in Jaffna, said the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, reported earlier to be overflowing with rebel wounded, had been cleared of those who could walk, that the safety zone around the hospital was almost empty.

But Lawrence Thilakar, the rebel Paris-based spokesperson, denied the rebel Tamil Tiger were pulling out of Jaffna as the city, but were encouraging civilians to flee because of air and artillery strikes, food shortages and heavy rain.

A senior army officer said rebel forces collapsed Monday after troops captured Neerveli, 10 kilometres northeast of Jaffna's city centre.

Three army divisions of more than 21,000 men backed by tanks, artillery and air cover have been pushing south on two axes of advance from their base and were within 6 kilometres of Jaffna's city centre.

Relief workers earlier said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, fighting for a homeland in the north and east, had panicked and were fleeing en masse from Jaffna city as the armed forces approached.

Toronto Star

November 03, 1995

Sri Lankan army expects big fight to seize Tamil rebel stronghold

COLOMBO (AP) — Sri Lankan government troops shelled the last major Tamil rebel outpost yesterday, just a few kilometres from the separatists' stronghold, the military said.

Soldiers encountered fierce fighting on the road to Kopai, 3 kilometres from Jaffna, headquarters for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which has fought 12 years for an independent homeland on the Indian Ocean island.

"We believe there will be a major battle for Kopai before we can enter Jaffna," said Maj. Tilak Dunuwille, a

military spokesperson.

About 520,000 of the Jaffna Peninsula's 800,000 people were reported to have fled their homes in advance of government offensive.

The region's chief official appealed yesterday to President Chandrika Kumaratunga to stop shelling civilian areas.

International relief agencies have warned of a possible disaster.

Ponnampalam has appealed for food, chlorine to purify drinking water and tents for the refugees.

November 09, 1995

Moderate Tamil groups urging immediate ceasefire in Sri Lanka

Mass exodus of refugees from rebel-held north 'uncontrollable'

Reuters News Agency

COLOMBO — Moderate Tamil groups called for an immediate ceasefire in Sri Lanka's separatist war yesterday and said the exodus of refugees from the rebel-held north was out of control and could be, compared only to Bosnia.

"The loss of life has been unprecedentedly heavy among the civilians, not to mention the high toll among the militants as well as security personnel," the groups said in a statement, stressing that fighting was reaching a climax in the north.

"The exodus is uncontrollable," the statement said. "The fleeing of nearly half a million people is an index of the terror that has gripped them. The refugee problem is unmanageable. People are facing starvation."

It said there was an acute shortage of milk for infants and no antibiotics of medicine. "The situation can only be compared to that of Bosnia," it said.

Residents fleeing the north said in the central town of Vavuniya there was a line a 1% kilometres long outside the hospital at Chavakacheri, a refugee destination south of Jaffna lagged with people suffering sores, diarrhoea and fever.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are fighting for a homeland in the north and east in a war that began in 1983.

Government troops are now massed in the northern Jaffna peninsula for an expected assault on Jaffna town.

The military said yesterday that troops were continuing to "consolidate in newly captured areas" outside Jaffna town, believed to have been laced with mines by fleeing rebels.

"The exodus is uncontrollable. The fleeing of nearly half a million people is an index of the terror that has gripped them."

The group of nine Tamil unions and parties also called for the immediate commencement of a political process for a negotiated settlement.

"It is our considered view that bombing and shelling of areas of high civilian concentration will drive the people away from their homes," it said.

The LTTE accused the armed forces on Tuesday of bombing civilian areas at Kopai, Chunnakam and Changanai, all equidistant from Jaffna town. The military has many times denied bombing civilians but says there are bound to be some civilian casualties in conventional warfare.

The groups' statement said the LTTE had "declared openly" that they would consider a federal constitution as an alternative to "Eelam," their would-be homeland.

But analysts said the LTTE refused invitations to discuss a wide-ranging devolution "peace package," offering federalism in all but name, and broke a 100-day ceasefire with the government in April.

The Tamil statement was drawn up by parties including the Tamil United Liberation Front, which has five seats in the 225-seat parliament, and the once-militant People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam, which has three seats.

Also signing the statement were the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization, virtually wiped out by the LTTE in 1986, and the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students, founded in 1975 and the first outside group to be trained by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Absent from the list was the fiercely anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party, whose leader, Douglas Devananda, was the target of an LTTE assassination attempt in October.

Mr. Devananda, known for the two Browning pistols he wears tucked into a khaki belt, is currently ill in the United States.

Toronto Star
November 15, 1995

Main Tamil base captured by troops

COLOMBO (Reuter) — Sri Lankan forces have captured the main political headquarters of Tamil Tiger rebels on the outskirts of their stronghold of Jaffna, civilians and the army said yesterday.

Tamil residents from Jaffna arriving in the government-held town of Vavuniya said the army had seized the Kondavil-based headquarters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, about 5 kilometres north of Jaffna.

The International Committee of the Red Cross pulled out of Jaffna, saying the northern bastion was about to become a major battleground between guerrillas and advancing government troops.

"(The Red Cross) has temporarily shifted its local office from Jaffna to (the northernmost port of) Point Pedro," its statement said, adding the agency's convoy of about 30 vehicles and 220 people reached its destination safely.

The predominantly Hindu Tigers have waged war for 12 years against the mainly Buddhist Sinhalese government to establish a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east. Some 50,000 people have died in the carnage.

A military statement said two government divisions encountered many anti-personnel mines and rebel resistance in the latest fighting.

The advance of the 51st Division on the eastern flank was slowed by minefields while the 52nd Division, on the western flank, captured a large rebel training camp in Urumpirai, suburb about 5 kilometres northeast of Jaffna, it said.

"The training camp comprises an elaborate network of roads and a well-laid out building complex, lecture hall with underground bunkers and well-prepared training areas," the army said.

"Terrorists engaged advancing troops with mortar (and army) artillery retaliation, neutralizing most of these mortar positions."

Troops also recovered small arms, rocket launchers and other equipment left behind by the rebels, it said. Travellers from Jaffna said the military yesterday captured the suburb of Thinnaveli, 1.6 kilometres from the centre of Jaffna. Jaffna residents said important Tiger leaders had fled the northern peninsula and moved to the jungles of Killinochchi on the mainland to evade an army dragnet.

A Tamil rebel leader vows:

No surrender

ARASADITHUVU, Sri Lanka — Deep behind rebel lines, far from the constant thumping of government artillery and tanks, it's quiet enough to think of victory.

Sri Lanka's army is hitting Tamil Tiger guerrillas hard in the country's northern Jaffna peninsula, inflicting heavy losses and driving them further into the bush.

A mass exodus of refugees is fleeing in front of them and the Tigers say army shelling is kil-

ling civilians trying to escape. As the army closes in on Jaffna, Sri Lankans are looking to the east for the next round in an escalating civil war.

The Tiger rebels control vast stretches of countryside here and their hit-and-run attacks against soldiers, police, and even villagers, are warning signs that the worst may be yet to come.

Sivanagnanam Karikalan, the Tigers' leader, in eastern Sri Lanka and the guerrilla force's deputy commander, insists the rebels are holding their own against a powerful onslaught and won't surrender.

"The government doesn't want to admit it, but they are finding it very hard to get into Jaffna because we are fighting very hard," Karikalan said at his headquarters here yesterday.

"But even the capture of Jaffna does not mean the end of the feud."

No matter how hard they're pounded, the Tigers will keep trying to carve out a homeland called Eelam, Karikalan said through an interpreter.

The military had better halt its offensive soon or "We will have permanently closed the door to peace," he added.

"If the government has any idea about by weakening us, we are going to come to a roundtable and talk to them, then they are completely wrong," Karikalan said.

"We have started this war because we wanted a permanent peace. The people want that, so we also want it."

Government troops continued their slow advance on Jaffna yesterday. They're still about a kilometre outside the city and are meeting stiff resistance from the rebels almost every step of the way.

Hoping for all the help they can, authorities have boosted the reward for the capture of the Tigers' chief commander, Velupillai Prabhakaran, to

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers still dream of victory

'If the government has any idea that by weakening us, we are going to come to a roundtable and talk to them, then they are completely wrong.'

— SIVANAGNANAM KARIKALAN
TIGERS' DEPUTY COMMANDER

Karikalan is second-in-command to Prabhakaran, a leader who has built a personality cult so spellbinding that he has cadres so devoted they'll turn themselves into human bombs if ordered to.

Men and women serve in the suicide bombing unit, whose victims include several Sri Lankan military and political leaders as well as former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Each one of Prabhakaran's fighters wear long, glass vials of cyanide around their necks and are under orders to kill themselves if that's the only way to escape from capture.

With his easy smile, and owlish, black-rimmed glasses, Karikalan hardly looks like the ruthless terrorist depicted in government news releases.

His desk in a small, spartan office is covered by a white tablecloth decorated with lace roses.

On one side of his desk, there are a few bottles of typewriter correction fluid, a stapler, and a short-wave radio. The holster that carries his 9 mm

pistol and cartridges, and a mini flashlight is laid out on the other side.

The government blames Karikalan's forces for recent massacres in northeastern villages, such as an attack on the night of Nov. 3, when four children had their throats cut and a fourth was beheaded.

Karikalan admits that his guerrillas attack villages, but he insists they only kill in those armed by the government.

"In cases where a man has a gun and is an obstruction to us, we must kill him," the rebel commander said.

But murdering children is the work of government forces, simply for propaganda to make the Tigers look bad, he added.

Palithamby Chandran, who served five years in the rebel army before deserting on Oct. 30, says the Tigers often strike villages to get revenge for the deaths of Tamil civilians.

The order is usually to kill two Sinhalese for every Tamil who dies by the government's hands, according to Chandran, now a prisoner in a government jail in Batticaloa.

When new recruits go out on operations, unit commanders watch to see who are the best candidates for future massacres, Chandran claimed during an interview in front of prison end at my officers.

"There are some people who, even when they see a child, they don't give a damn," he said. "They cut him into pieces. But there are some members who ignore the child and go for the target."

"They monitor exactly how you react to a situation. If you are an unmerciful killer, you are chosen for that task. Others are not touched."

The government launched its current offensive against the Tigers a month ago after the rebels turned down a offer of strong regional powers for the north and east and started shooting again.

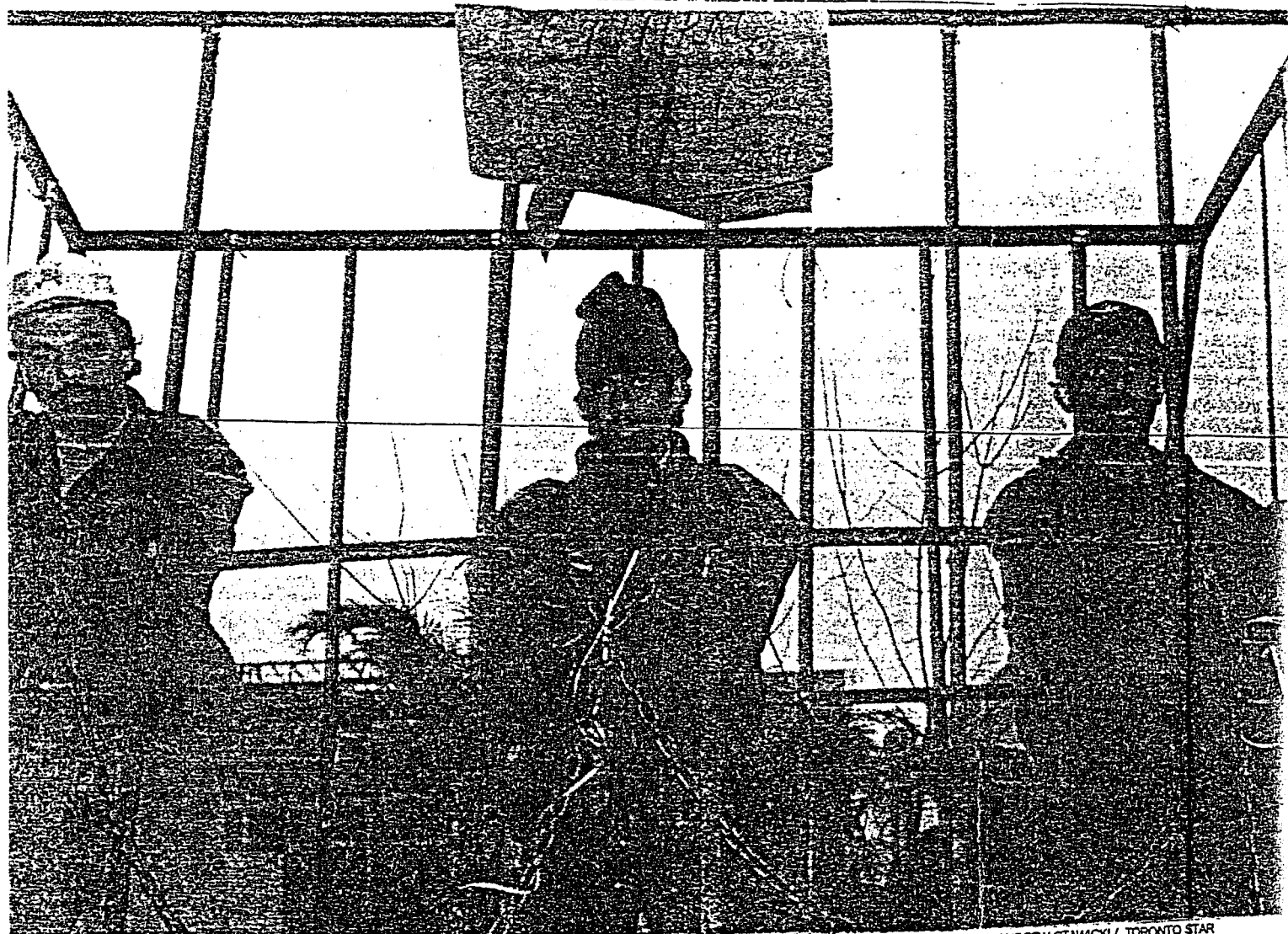
Foreign governments, such as Canada's, are pressuring both sides to have another go at negotiations because neither side in the civil war seems able to win a total victory.

The army has thrown more than 20,000 troops into the assault on Jaffna and that's forced the military to lower its guard in the east, where Karikalan's guerrillas have the upper hand.

Outside the regional capital, Batticaloa, the front-line is as thin as the city's boundary and the two-lane roads that link it to the rest of Sri Lanka.

The vast green countryside of rice paddies and jungle stretching off into the horizon is all Tiger country. Government military commanders admit privately that the Tamil Tigers control 90 per cent of northeastern Sri Lanka, almost half the territory they want as their own country.

It's the same area where just last year, Resident Chandrika Kumaratunga won her biggest election landslides, with as much as 94 per cent of the vote in some districts.



ANDREW STAMICKI / TORONTO STAR

ALL FOR FREEDOM: A float carrying three men in chains and behind bars depicts of Tamils in yesterday's protest march, the suffering

Metro Tamils protest 'genocide'

BY HAROLD LEVY
STAFF REPORTER

Thousands of Canadian Tamils paraded on University Ave. to Queen's Park yesterday morning to protest the plight of fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The rally included a float holding a jail cell containing three shackled Tamils and posters demanding aid, shelter and an end to the killing.

It was organized by the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils "to draw the attention of our Canadian government and our fellow Canadian people to the murderous offenses by the Sri Lankan government against the Tamil people."

The demonstration was held ried posters saying "No food, no medicine, no shelter," "Send us their attack on Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the country's northern Jaffna peninsula, where Tamils are trying to carve out a homeland called Eelam.

Many of the estimated 120,000 Tamils in Canada are believed to have come from the Jaffna area.

Conference organizers say 500,000 people have been forced out of their homes in the area and the Sri Lankan government is preventing food and medicine sent by the United Nations and other relief agencies from being delivered to those who need it.

Marchers in the parade carried posters saying "No food, no medicine, no shelter," "Send us their attack on Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the country's northern Jaffna peninsula, where Tamils are trying to carve out a homeland called Eelam.

Besides the float with the jail cell, another held a large replica of a bombed out schoolhouse.

The rally, which conferrers estimate drew about 16,000 people, began with the singing of "O Canada," and a two-minute silence for the Tamils dead.

A number of speakers repeated the message that nations throughout the world should support Tamil claims for their homeland, provide relief for refugees, pressure the Sri Lankan

government to allow the entry of foreign aid and to embrace a just peace.

Liberal MPP Tony Ruprecht received a loud ovation with his call to "Stop the killing." Many constituents in his Parkdale riding came from Sri Lanka.

Ruprecht urged Ottawa to tell the Sri Lankan government "to do just one thing -- to immediately stop (the fighting) and go to the bargaining table."

"The Tamil people simply want justice and fairness..." Ruprecht said. "Let the Tamil people determine their own future and structure their own destiny."

Another speaker, Vasantha Raja of London, formerly head of the Sinhalese Section of the Star: "If the French people in

Quebec had undergone 2 minutes, a fraction of what the Tamil people had suffered under the Sinhalese government, the Canadian federation would have broken up a long time ago."

Toronto Star Sri Lanka
November 19, 1995

Fear engulfs Sri Lanka as death squads roam



PAUL WATSON / TORONTO STAR

RECRUITED AT 11: This Tamil Tiger, carrying assault rifle and vial of cyanide to swallow if captured, is 16. He was photographed near Batticaloa.

BY PAUL WATSON
ASIAN BUREAU

BATTICALOA, Sri Lanka — The names of the disappeared are written out in blue ink in an accountant's ledger, along with a few sentences about the last days they were seen alive.

There are 25 names in all. But they're not the only ones who have gone missing.

In times like these, few who know what's going on have the courage to walk up the dark rear stairwell of the local Catholic church's library and ask the peace committee for help.

The Sri Lankan army is on the verge of seizing the northern city of Jaffna, capital of the independent homeland the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are fighting to create.

Guerrillas firing from two boats shot down a transport plane delivering barbed wire to the troops near Jaffna yesterday, killing at least two crew members.

They died in hospital after being rescued at sea, while a third man survived. Three others are still missing.

As the latest round in a 12-year civil war escalates, the middle ground is falling to hold.

Extremists are growing bolder by the day, stirring up old hatreds between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils.

Sunanda Deshapriya, a prominent Sinhalese journalist whose campaigning for a negotiated peace has drawn death threats for years, was badly beaten by a mob near Colombo

in an interview.

Deshapriya accuses state-controlled newspapers and broadcasters of inciting trouble with propaganda that portrays anyone who wants the army's offensive stopped as a Tamil rebel sympathizer.

That's playing right into the guerrillas' hands because they would love to see anti-Tamil riots that would drain the security forces even more, he argued.

"The government has let loose forces that will first turn against us and then turn against the peace forces within the government," said Deshapriya, editor of the newspaper Yukthiya.

People in Batticaloa are so afraid to speak out against what's happening that even the local priests, who get their strength right from God, will

Say something bad about the Tigers above a whisper to trusted friend and the risks narrow down to one.

"It's very simple," a local leader of the peace committee said. "I would be killed."

One of the disappeared recorded in his ledger is Sangalingam Chandran, a 30-year-old Tamil man who went missing Nov. 2.

The evidence points to a gang believed to be working with military intelligence, according to human-rights workers who have investigated his disappearance.

The thugs are the last survivors of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam militants who tried to take on the Tiger rebels and were systematically wiped out.

As Tiger assassins decimated their ranks, the rival militants turned to the Sri Lankan army for protection and then developed into a small death squad known as the Moha Group.

A suspected member, who identified himself as Ramesh, demanded Chandran's identification card at one of many checkpoints in Batticaloa on Nov. 8. The missing man's sister reported.

Neither dead nor alive, Tamil just disappeared

"I feel more fear than in any time in my life, really," he said only talk about it privately, with hushed voices.

The death squads are on the move again in this east-coast city and no matter which side of the civil war people are on, they know that having an opinion is enough to get them killed.

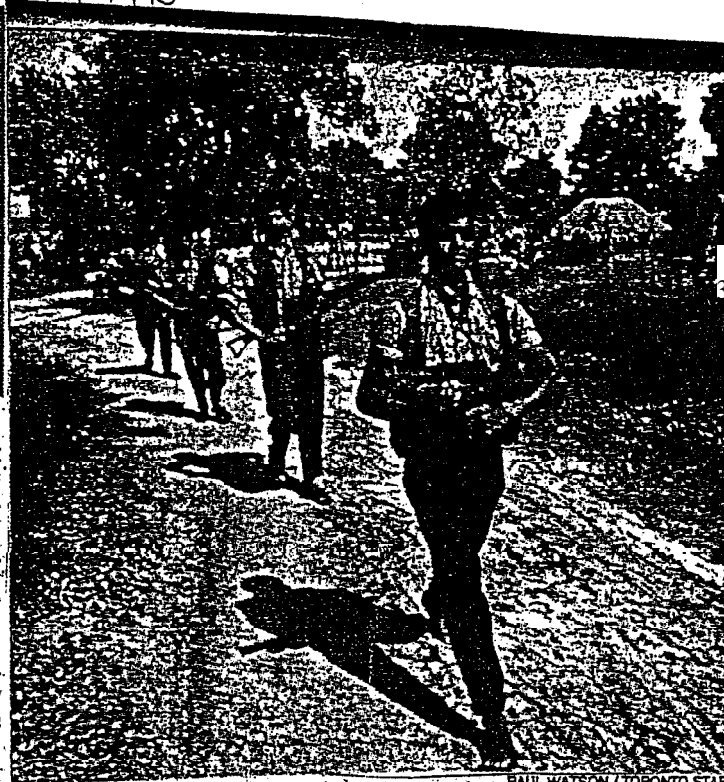
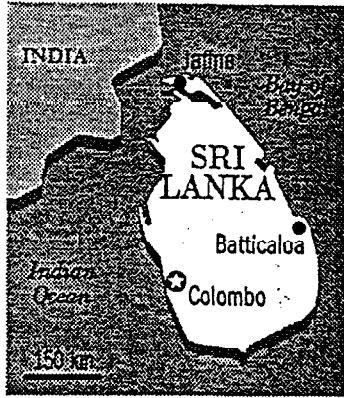
Criticize the government or its military and you're automatically a stooge of the rebel Tamil Tigers. You're harassed, arrested, or simply made to disappear, according to local and foreign human-rights workers.

Chandran told her the next day he was ordered to go to military intelligence camp to pick up his ID card. The army told human-rights investigators that he was never there.

"They say he went off to join the Tigers," one Catholic church worker said. "That's the usual statement."

On Nov. 8, soldiers at the military intelligence camp insisted

Toronto Star
November 19, 1995



PAUL WATSON / TORONTO STAR

Chandran never showed up, but admitted they did have his ID card, according to the human-rights activist.

The following day, men in civilian clothes called at Chandran's house.

"They threatened the sister, the mother — everybody — and said they must produce identity cards at the camp or else the whole family would be taken into custody," the church worker said.

But Chandran's relatives kept demanding answers and the army changed its story again, insisting it did not have his ID card after all. Finally, a colonel agreed to meet with activists.

"Fortunately, he is a gentleman," one said. "He accepted that the card had been taken. He has given a severe warning that this type of activity should not take place."

Yet still, no one knows what really happened to Chandran. He's neither dead, nor alive. Just disappeared.

The same people who believe the army killed him also tell of Tamil Tiger supporters who use extortion and kidnapping to raise money for the war effort.

Four years ago, an elderly Batticaloa man conspicuous for being a good farmer had to give the Tigers the equivalent of \$17,000 when they threatened to murder him, the human-rights activist said.

"The people of Batticaloa are thoroughly scared because they are very angry with the Tigers," he added. "And the Tigers are angry with the people because they are not supporting them."

In a mainly Tamil region where President Chandrika Kumaratunga's peace platform won its strongest support in last year's elections, the army is winning more enemies by the day.

ON PROWL: Tamil Tiger rebels pass in single file on a road near Batticaloa, a city where peace activists die or disappear in Sri Lanka's bloody civil war.

Until last Tuesday, the regional military commander was known as a hearts-and-mind man, a specialist in charming the local people over to the government's side.

Brig. Siri Pieris now gives the orders in Batticaloa. He used to head the special forces, elite commandos whose strength is close combat, not gentle persuasion.

Many are reading his transfer as yet another sign that the military is preparing for an new offensive in the region to squeeze the Tigers even harder.

The Tigers are trying to rebuild their strength with conscripts that include children.

An eight-man unit guarding a road inside Tiger territory this week was commanded by a 16-year-old boy who said he joined the rebels when he was 11.

Senior commanders here admit their forces hold no more than a narrow strip of land along the coast and the city of Batticaloa, which the Tigers have taken before.

For months, soldiers have done little more in the area than mount foot patrols and watch nervously from sandbagged machine-gun nests, wondering where the rebels will strike next.

On Monday, four soldiers died when their vehicle ran over a land mine just outside of town.

The next day, five bus passengers were killed when they ran into a firefight between soldiers and guerrillas near Batticaloa.

That night, the thud of artillery guns echoed from the city's outskirts when troops fought off a guerrilla mortar attack, considered a regular test of the city's defences.

Even without an all-out war like the one raging outside Jaffna, the fighting near Batticaloa has killed 429 soldiers in the seven months since the Tigers' rejected the peace plan and resumed the war.

That's more than 20 times the army's body count for the same period last year, the senior officer said.

There are fresh graves in Tiger country, too. One new cemetery is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and sits in front of a building destroyed in some battle gone by.

Garlands are draped over each tombstone and, in the front row, 30 of the dead rebels are buried beneath neat piles of gravel. They all died on the same day in August.

The bloodshed is only hardening the resolve on both sides to win a war the experts say cannot be won.

Frustrated, the government and the rebels are seeing new enemies wherever they look.

Last weekend, police raided a Catholic retreat in the city of Kandy and hauled off six Jesuit priests, all of them Tamils.

They were detained for 24 hours, interrogated about their feelings toward the Tiger guerrillas, then released without charge.

Two other priests were arrested on their way to Jaffna earlier this month when they were stopped at a roadblock and soldiers found coils of copper wire and a large cache of money hidden in their car.

Deshapriya was on his way to a meeting of more than 80 non-governmental organizations

from Sri Lanka and abroad when he was attacked Tuesday in the town of Bentota.

The state-run and Sinhalese news media had denounced the forum as a Tamil Tiger front for several days and a mob of some 50 people was out in front of the Bentota Beach Hotel to stop it.

Deshapriya says someone recognized him and started shouting, "Kotil Kotil" — the Sinhala word for tiger.

Several dragged him from his car and pummeled him, demanding to know if he was a Tamil.

"I didn't want to say I was not a Tamil," he said. "It's kind of an insult. Why should I say that? I'm a citizen. What would I have said if one of my friends were there? He's a Tamil and I'm not?"

While the crowd continued beating Deshapriya and got

an army truck pulled up. He begged the soldiers to save him and they just watched, the journalist said.

Deshapriya finally managed to crawl up on to the back of their truck, beside two coffins.

The soldiers told him to run, so he did, and made it to a taxi that took him to the police station where he lodged a complaint.

They haven't arrested a single person.

THE CANADIAN CONNECTION

Sri Lanka moves to crush Tamil rebels at home and abroad

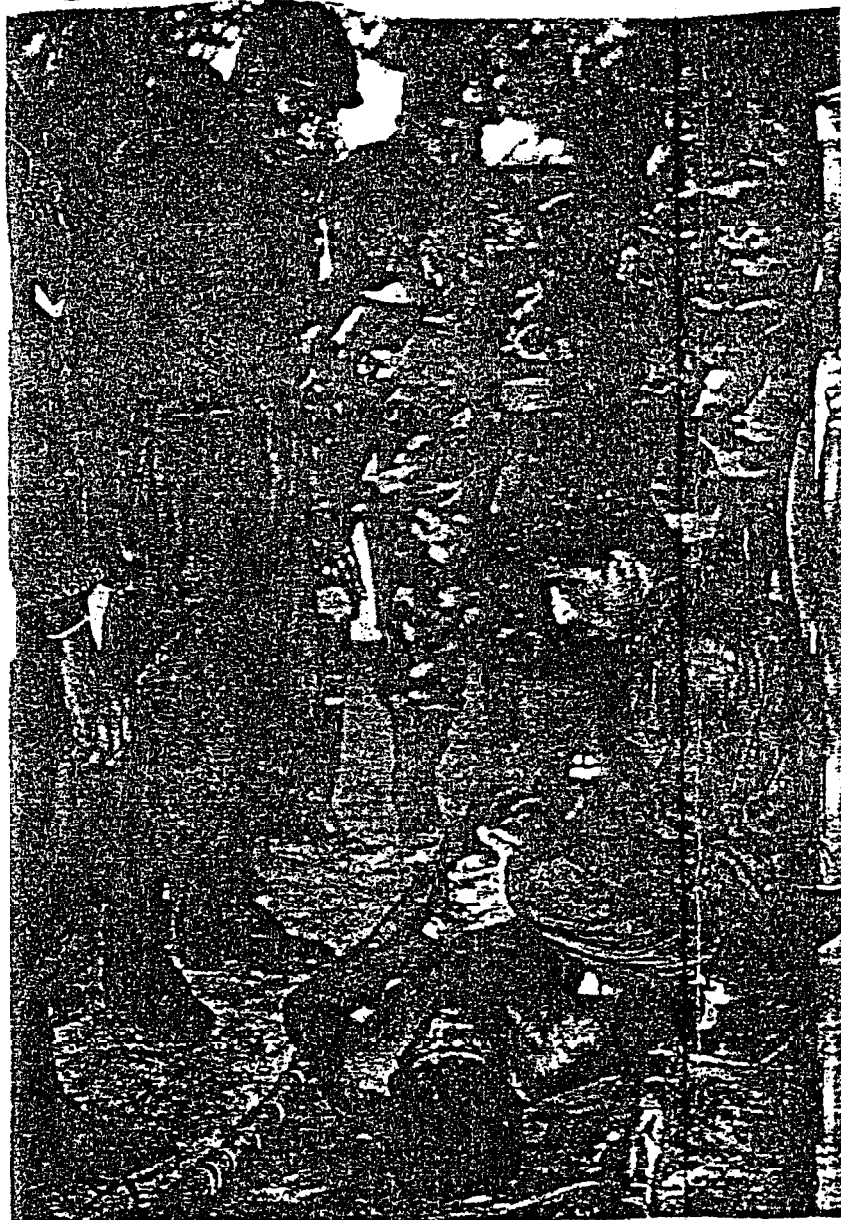
BY NOMI MORRIS

The names of the villains do not appear on international war crimes lists. There is no shuttle diplomacy organized from Washington. Instead, the 131 Sinhalese villagers that Tamil rebels massacred in recent weeks—like the scores of Muslims at prayer they hacked to death with machetes in 1990—are victims of an ugly, far-off war, hugely ignored by the world community. Nonetheless, the conflict between the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the sometimes equally brutal Sri Lankan army has killed some 50,000 people since 1933 and forced more than 500,000 Tamils into exile. Within that diaspora, the largest group, about 125,000, have made their way to Canada and find them&es still caught up in the bloody struggle for a Tamil state.

As the Sri Lankan government wages its biggest-ever assault on the Tiger-controlled Jaffna peninsula, it is bent on crushing not only the guerrillas, but also their international support base. We will be fighting this war to a conclusion," said President Chandrika Kumaratunga of the army offensive that began on Oct. 17 and has already taken the lives of more than 1,400 Tigers and 300 soldiers. By last week, as government troops advanced on Jaffna City, the refugee total from the current fighting had risen to 400,000, and relief workers warned of a dire humanitarian crisis. Tens of thousands of people had fled to towns east of Jaffna, while 100,000 Tamils crossed a lagoon to reach the mainland and camped out in schools and temples. The Red Cross shifted operations from Jaffna City to the harbor town of Point Pedro.

The army proceeded cautiously, clearing land mines and booby traps. Military officials had expressed fears that the Tigers were clearing civilians from Jaffna City in order to use chemical weapons, a strategy that would not surpass the horror threshold of a group whose members recently chopped off heads of Sinhalese villagers and shot a mother and her six-week-old baby. Last week, two rebel suicide bombers killed 20 civilians and injured 40 in an attack near military headquarters in Colombo.

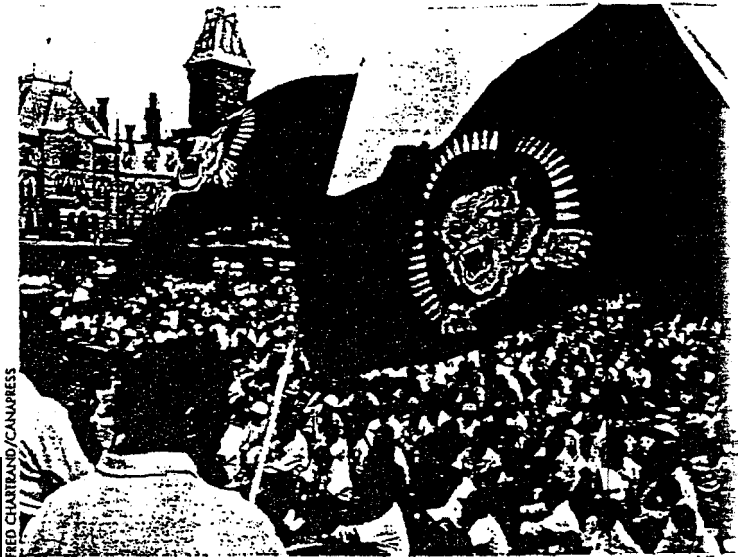
Such excesses have helped shift the moral balance for countries like Canada which previously showed a fair degree of sympathy for the Tamil independence drive as well as intolerance for the strong-arm response of past Sri Lankan governments. Now, the more moderate Kumaratunga regime, elected last year, has stepped up pressure on foreign governments—in particular Canada—to take a harder line against expatriate Tamils who are major financial contributors to the Liberation Tigers. "Canada has been a hotbed of the Tigers. That is where the biggest contribution comes from," says G. B. Kotakadeniya, a police spokesman in Colombo. Adds Konrad Sigurdson, Canada's high commissioner in Sri Lanka: "As far as a list of countries is con-



Wounded government soldier near Jaffna: shifting balance

cerned, Canada is the worst culprit with regard to funding." Last month immigration authorities in Toronto arrested Tiger fundraiser Manickavasagam Suresh, 40, in connection with alleged terrorist activity. It was the first time the National Security Certificate—an anti-terror measure that requires the immigration minister's signature—has been used to detain a Tamil refugee claimant in Canada. This represents a shift in Canadian policy," says David Jeyaraj, editor of a Canadian Tamil weekly paper. "Ottawa is now siding with the Sri Lankan government." Within days of the Suresh arrest, another alleged Canadian link to the war surfaced: police in Colombo reported

Maclean's
November 27, 1995



Tamils demonstrate in Ottawa: support for a homeland

finding an airmail envelope with a Toronto address on the body of a suicide bomber who set fire to oil depots in Colombo during the first days of the current battle. The family living at the Canadian address has denied any involvement. "This is part of the government's current campaign to discredit the [Tigers]," said a former Tiger leader now living in Canada, who declined to be named. "Someone on a suicide mission doesn't cam, names and addresses with them"

Nehru Guna, a spokesman for the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils, says Colombo became concerned about the clout of the Canadian community after a pro-Tiger demonstration in Toronto last June attracted 20,000 people. Most Tamils in Canada have been recognized by Ottawa as refugees, considered victims of more than a decade of Sri Lankan army repression in the north, which included torture of activists and the bombing of civilians. Coming from that violent environment, many feel they have no choice but to back the Tigers as the only available agents of resistance. "Politics is brought to the youngsters of Sri Lanka," says Guna, 31, a former student leader who arrived in Canada five years ago. Your education is taken away from you, your employment is taken away from you, your future is a question mark. You are brought to the point where you have to act for yourself."

The origins of the conflict go back to 1947 when the British withdrew from their former colony of Ceylon, ending a regime that had granted relatively equal weight to ethnic monarchies, including the mostly Hindu Tamils. Suddenly, that group found itself reduced to minority status—Tamils now make up 32 million of the 18 million population and subject to increasingly harsh assimilationist policies in language, education and employment of the majority Sinhalese, who are mainly Buddhist. By the time anti-Tamil riots broke out in Colombo in 1983, killing 400, the Tigers had become a guerrilla force fighting to break off the northern and eastern coastal areas into a homeland they would call Tamil Eelam.

A particular sore point has been the resettlement of Sinhalese peasants to the Tam-dominated fertile eastern region of Sri Lanka. Long-simmering communal hatred in these areas—which also includes a substantial Muslim minority—forms the backdrop to the gruesome reports of at least five Tiger massacres of Sinhalese villagers there in recent weeks.

The barbarity only adds to the Tigers' image as extremists who will stop at nothing to achieve an independent state in one-third of what is now Sri Lanka. In April, they broke an internationally monitored ceasefire and abruptly pulled out of peace talks set in motion by Kumaratunga after her election. In August, the president unveiled plans for constitutional reform that would grant more powers to Sri Lanka's eight regions, including greater autonomy for the Tamils. The Tigers rejection of those reforms has further squandered the patience of several Western governments—as well as many in their own community. "I'm not really sure why we're still fighting. The package gives them pretty well everything they want," says one dissenting Tamil in Toronto. Moderates within the Canadian community are generally afraid to speak out by name, lest they be targeted by Tiger supporters. Last year, Toronto's Tamil Resource Centre was fire-bombed after officials accused both sides of violating human rights.

Now, with the rainy season at hand, Kumaratunga is under pressure from hardline Buddhist clergy to smash the rebels before putting through her constitutional changes. But the taking of Jaffna City, though a major blow to the Tigers, will not end the war since they have already moved men and materiel to the east and south. There they will be able to regroup, as they have in the past. India was forced to increase troop levels to 50,000 to withstand guerrilla raids when New Delhi tried to enforce a peace accord between 1987 and 1990. A year after the pullout, the Tigers were implicated in the assassination of Indian Rime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The guerrillas have since run their own mini-government in Jaffna—complete with police, courts and tax-collection agencies.

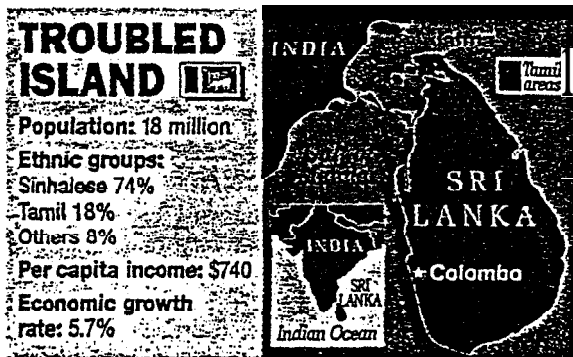
That is why Colombo's current offensive includes asking foreign governments like Canada's to help choke the Tigers' lifeline. "If you are fuelling this conflict by allowing the people in your country to contribute, then you are partly responsible for the conflict," argues Nanda Godage of the Sri Lankan foreign ministry. Godage says British intelligence agencies have revealed that Tamils in Britain collect and send \$510,000 a month to the Tigers. Says Godage: "We have no figures, but it would be much, much more from Canada"

Nehru Guna flatly denies allegations that Tamils in Canada are bankrolling the Tigers. We simply don't have the means," says Guna. "Tamils in Canada are a young immigrant community, not yet established at a high enough level in the Canadian mainstream to contribute much." He says Tamil social agencies raised up to \$100,000 last year for much-needed relief efforts. But the bulk of money from Canada goes directly to family members or organizations, he says. Even acknowledging that some may be seized by the Tigers for arms purchases, he asserts the figures do not add up. Says Guna:

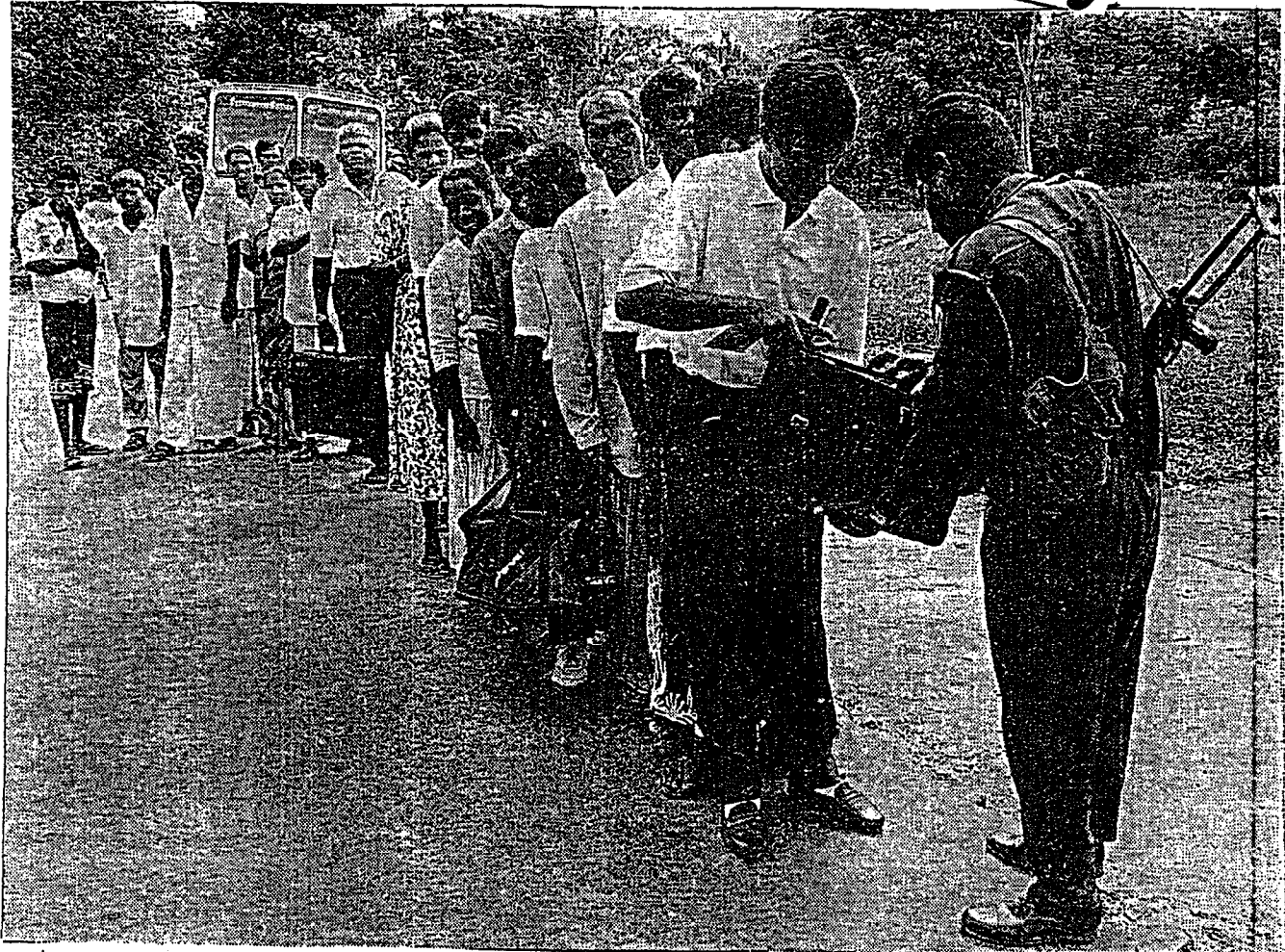
"In the north alone it takes a budget of \$14 million a month to look after the basic needs of the people." Sri Lankan officials admit they cannot know how much money may be diverted to the guerrillas from humanitarian donations. Last week, though, authorities announced that all relief for the refugees must be channelled through state agencies.

With 35,000 soldiers outside Jaffna City, Tamils feel themselves, as one exile in Toronto described it "between the devil and the deep blue sea." On one side is the full force of the military, on the other the merciless Tigers. Some analysts say the savagery displayed in recent village massacres is an attempt to foment riots and divert army power to the south—but that hardly excuses the conduct. Yet the dream of Tamil Eelam is a powerful one for a people who have long felt victimized. Watching a tragedy unfold in their homeland, many Tamils in Canada cannot help but feel part of the fray.

With DEXTER CRUEZ In Colombo



Truth is another Sri Lankan casualty



PAUL WATSON / TORONTO STAR

ROAD CHECK: Sri Lankans' civil rights have gone by the board as the government war with Tamil guerrillas grinds on. Here a soldier inspects travellers' belongings.

Government goes to
any lengths to keep
world in the dark
about civil war

BY PAUL WATSON
ASIAN BUREAU

KALPITIYA, Sri Lanka

THE BISHOP of Mannar is a kind, welcoming man who knows the suffering of his people, which might be why the generals are so determined to keep journalists away from his door.

There's no end to what Sri Lanka's military will do to stop the world from knowing what's really going on here.

It's a lesson in what happens to a fragile democracy when war breaks out — the generals feel their power and civil rights are the first to die.

Lying to journalists is just par for the course. Bishop Rayappu Joseph invited a reporter to visit him last week in government-controlled territory on the northwest island of Mannar, but the military stood in the way.

In the war against the Tamil Tiger guerrillas, the Catholic church is often seen as one of the enemy, a fifth column that supports the separatists.

"They are only afraid you will come to know what is happening all over," Joseph said after the reporter reached him on a neighbor's line. His own phone is out of order.

"If they are doing the correct thing, why should they be afraid?" the bishop asked.

"It's a pathetic situation. People are moving in the thousands, just moving on the road with no hope on their faces. It's the first time there's been a whole mass exodus from Jaffna town. But the (military) operation is going on, whatever happens. Thousands of people have got killed."

The Sri Lankan government, elected last year in a euphoric celebration of democracy, is now harassing clergy, activists and politicians who criticize the massive offensive in the north.

Several Catholic priests have been

Newspaper and Magazine Articles Sri Lanka

battling the government offensive in who prefers to communicate with journalists by fax the north.

Just being a Tamil is enough to risk arrest.

In the eastern port of Trincomalee, residents say police move through the city at night accompanied by informants wearing black hoods. If the snitches nod in someone's direction, he's taken in for interrogation and can be locked up for months without charge under emergency regulations.

Sri Lanka's commanders have divided the country into two simple categories: so-called cleared areas; which it controls, and uncleared areas, where the Tamil rebels are still in command.

Joseph's diocese on Mannar has the distinction of being in a cleared zone. On an average day, 125 people take the eight-hour boat ride there.

So it ought to be easy to call on the bishop — except that the Sri Lankan navy decides who gets on the only boat to Mannar. Journalists are not welcome aboard.

When a reporter suggested that a call to defence command would quickly clear up the misunderstanding, a naval officer said the base doesn't have a phone link with headquarters in Colombo.

Even the officer had to laugh at the silliness of that lie.

Still, the reporter had to use the only other phone in town, at a grocery store.

It took two days of haggling with colonels, captains and brigadiers who all began by saying that Mannar is a cleared area and then insisted, with equal certainty, that it isn't.

The request for permission to visit; the bishop went all the way to the desk of Sri Lanka's defence secretary, Chandrananda de Silva.

Any inquiries through his assistant, R. J. de Silva, were met with the Sri Lankan military's common response to impertinent questions — he simply hung up the phone. He did it time after time, once adding a stream of invective for emphasis.

It was only after President Chandrika Kumaratunga's press secretary, Victor Fernando, intervened that anyone felt any obligation to explain why reporters are barred from a cleared area.

Fernando relayed the prohibition order from Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe, the military's spokesperson,

nalists by fax

"It is not a ban," Fernando insisted. "Bather, they won't permit it because of the situation. Once the situation has come to normal, and it is safe, they will allow journalists to go."

If it's dangerous in Mannar, no one has told the bishop.

"There is no security problem here," Joseph said. "There are over 3,500 security forces. It's a small island. This is a cleared area."

There were those nagging words again: a cleared area.

A small part of Mannar Island is in fact uncleared, a strip along the north coast where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam still have bases.

That's the real reason Sri Lanka's high command wants to keep journalists away. They might actually speak with rebels close to the real war, maybe even report their side of the story.

Joseph was across the bay on the mainland two weeks ago and went to the Jaffna area where government troops are driving out Tamil Tigers in heavy fighting.

The government says it has captured 75 per cent of Jaffna town Tiger rebels continued to put up fierce resistance yesterday and have vowed to tight on once Jaffna falls.

Government forces are obviously trying not to kill civilians, but some of their shells and bombs are missing and hitting innocent people, the bishop said, flatly contradicting military statements.

"Compared to earlier operations, it is a little better," he said during the telephone call.

Up to 300,000 civilians are still caught in the war zone on the Jaffna peninsula, he said, and at least 4,000 refugees cross in boats each night through a navy free-fire zone to reach the mainland.

"They are all afraid," Joseph said. "They don't know what's going to happen next."

"People die here and there in the shelling, but I'm not exactly sure of the numbers."

Each day in the news media, the government assures everyone the refugees are being well cared for. The truth is they're only getting one meal a day and most don't have proper clothing, shelter or medical supplies, the bishop said.

Toronto Star
November 20, 1995

Sri Lankan troops take Jaffna: Army

COLOMBO (AP) — Sri Lankan troops advanced the last few hundred metres to Jaffna yesterday, the main objective of their bloody four-week campaign against Tamil rebels.

Resistance was fierce, as thousands of troops pushed forward in armored columns and under air support on the city that long served as the separatists' headquarters, said Brig. Sarath Munasinghe, the government military spokesperson.

The military denied a claim by state-owned radio that troops had entered the city.

At least 80 rebels and 17 soldiers were killed in what the army hoped would be the final battle for Jaffna.

Some 1,800 people have been killed and 6,200 soldiers and rebels wounded since the offensive began Oct. 17.