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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As is generally the case, the spontaneous resistance to this recruitment drive came from the humbler and unsophisticated sections whose minds had not been muddled by an excess of
LTTE recruiters harassing some of his neighbours. He was assaulted in return and left with a bruised eye. Yet, he remained defiant and unconcerned about being marked. This was the spirit on which the Tamil militancy in the East was founded, that was then hijacked and debased by the LTTE.

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

Factors Behind the Recruitment Drive

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

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

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

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

   The recruiters then reassured him that he need not fear confronting the Army. They would, they explained, concentrate artillery fire at the Army from a safe distance, and they would then move in and establish a base as the Army withdrew. They would then shell again, establish another base and so on. After 15 minutes of unsuccessful
On 10th September, after training in a group of 80 at Viswamadu, he was enrolled in the elite Charles Anthony Brigade. On 1st October, he deserted and went home for the umpteenth time. He was again brought back, beaten and punished. He was repeatedly beaten by several leaders. He was taken to Jaffna for a battle in mid-January 2001 and was captured in Jaffna by the Army.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moreover, the signs are that the LTTE leadership is at present worrying about a hostile force, or forces, having penetrated the Vanni and directly or otherwise giving opportunity for counter-opinions to be aired. This also entails the leaders having anxieties about running their institution with young persons, many of whom repeatedly run away and are caught and brought back.
There are thus many reasons why the LTTE leadership would prefer to place greater reliance on Eastern cadre for battles in the North – the main battlefield. For Eastern LTTE members stationed in the North, desertion is not a prospect open to them. They are cut off from their villages and relatives, and the new localities are strange to them. This was evident in the tragedy of May 1986 when the LTTE launched its putsch against the fraternal group TELO in Jaffna. Most of the TELO victims massacred were young Easterners. We may surmise that the current recruitment drive in the East is mainly in preparation for projected battles in the North.

**The LTTE’s Strategic Opportunity and the Cost**

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

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

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

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

The foundation for the tolerance of the LTTE’s impositions was of course laid by the pillage and mass-murder inflicted on the Eastern Tamils by the Sri Lankan Forces, particularly during the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. The people’s experience of the LTTE’s machinations have been more than counter-balanced by this historical legacy that is continually being reinforced.
polity will continue to obstruct any justice to the Tamils. The PA government too is far from facing up to this historical legacy, and has indeed played at suppressing it.

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

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

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

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

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

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