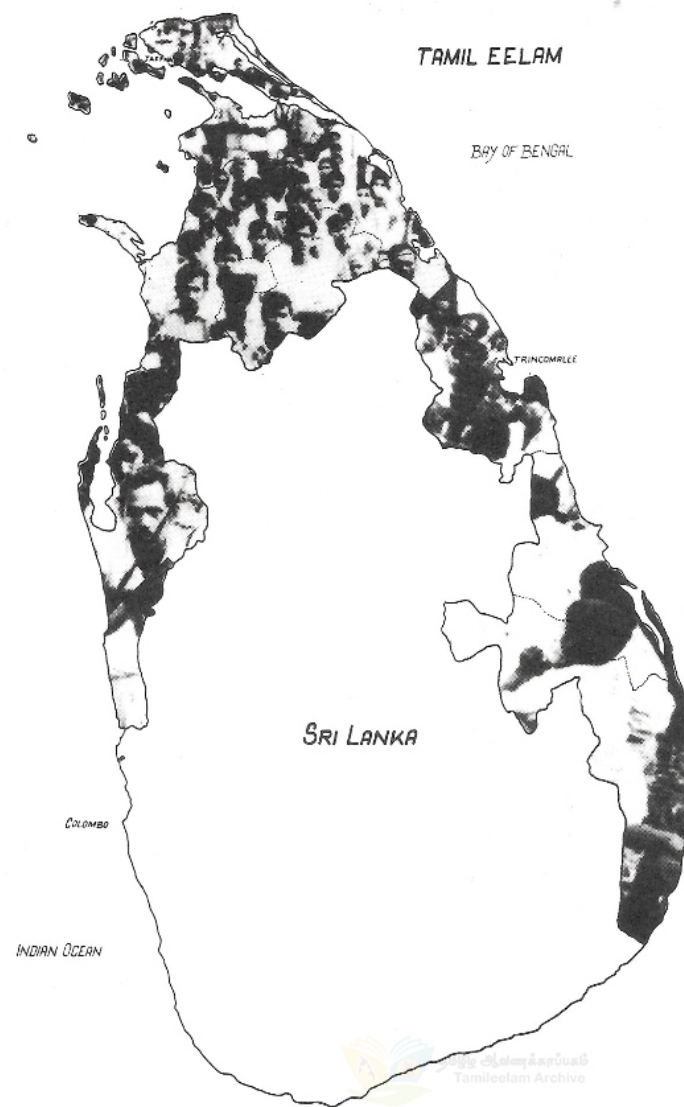


## **PORTRAIT OF A NATION**

A photographic record  
of the Tamil Eelam  
liberation struggle



# PORTRAIT OF A NATION

*N. Zerni*

In the contemporary conjuncture, national liberation struggles have assumed world historical significance. Though each liberation struggle has its own particular historical specificity and its unique condition, in essence each liberation struggle also articulates universal human aspirations for freedom from oppression and exploitation.

In this context, the Tamil Eelam liberation struggle — an oppressed nation fighting against the oppressor, the Sinhala ruling elite — constitutes an integral part of the international struggle of revolutionary forces against imperialism and neo-colonialism.

The island of Sri Lanka is often portrayed as a paradise which cherishes the Buddhist ideals of peace and Dharma, adheres to a political doctrine of socialist democracy and pursues the neutral path of non-alignment. But behind this political facade lies the fac-

tual reality, the reality of racial repression, of blatant violation of basic human rights, of police and military brutality, of attempted genocide.

The Sinhala ruling elite with the backing of Western imperialism have, since independence, been in charge of a totalitarian political system and have created an ideology of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism and fanaticism. It is a tragic paradox that despite indictment by world humanist movements for crimes against humanity, dictatorial regimes like Sri Lanka can claim to stand for democracy, peace and justice.

The object of this photo record is to expose the lies and hypocrisy and place before you the reality, the history of the immense suffering as well as the heroic struggles of the oppressed Tamil masses who, in facing slavery and slow death, have no choice but to fight for dignity and freedom.

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### **One island — two nations**

The island of Sri Lanka is the traditional homeland of two nations — Tamil and Sinhala, two distinct social formations with distinct cultures, languages and with their own unique historical past. The two nations had existed as separate national entities during pre-colonial and early colonial times until they were arbitrarily unified under one state structure by the British imperialists in the early nineteenth century.

### **Thrust of multi-dimensional oppression**

The Sinhala chauvinistic oppression was not simply an expression of racial prejudice, but a well calculated genocidal plan aimed at the gradual and systematic destruction of the essential foundations of a nation. The oppression therefore assumed a multi-dimensional thrust, attacking the national foundations on different structural levels of its existence, i.e., its language, culture, economy and territory. As

part of this genocidal programme formed, the state incited communal riots which led to the mass destruction of the lives and property of Tamils.

### **Tamil workers disenfranchised**

Significantly the first major onslaught was against the Tamil plantation workers — the classical proletariat of the island. One million workers were disenfranchised by the 1949 Citizenship Act. They were rendered stateless, condemned to become a dehumanised class devoid of any rights and dumped perpetually in their plantation ghettos to suffer degradation and despair.

### **Tamil peasants lose land — thrust on territorial identity**

The most vicious form of oppression calculated to destroy the national identity of the Tamils was the state-aided aggressive colonisation which

began soon after 'Independence' under which Sinhala people were forcibly settled in traditional Tamil lands. The Tamil peasants lost their land and were made a minority in their own homeland.

### **Assault on language, axe on employment and education**

The national oppression of the Sinhala racist regime soon penetrated into the sphere of language, education and employment. The 'Sinhala Only' Act in 1956, and subsequent republican constitutions of 1972 and 1978 effectively installed Sinhala as the official language and Buddhism as the state religion of the island and reduced the Tamil nation to a subservient role.

Imposition of an alien language and various discriminatory procedures in selection for institutions of higher education and employment meant that young Tamils had no future in their own homeland.





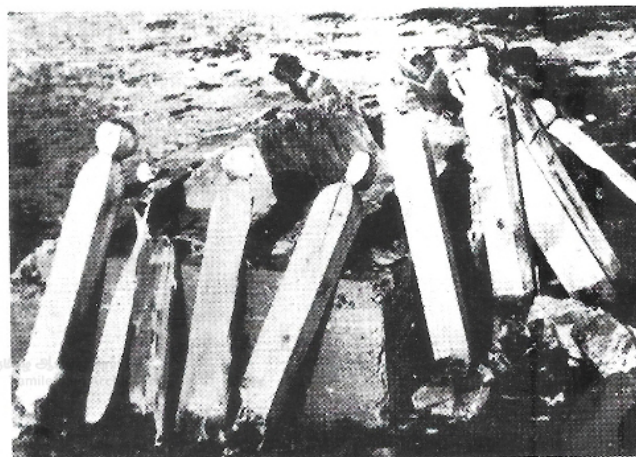
## Economic strangulation of the Tamil nation

National oppression showed its intensity in the economic strangulation of the Tamil nation. In the three decades after 'independence' while the Sinhala nation flourished with massive injections of capital the Tamil nation was alienated as an unwanted colony, isolated into the wilderness of economic deprivation.

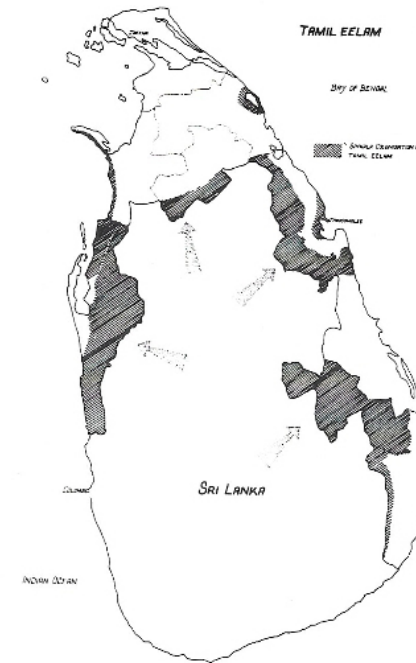
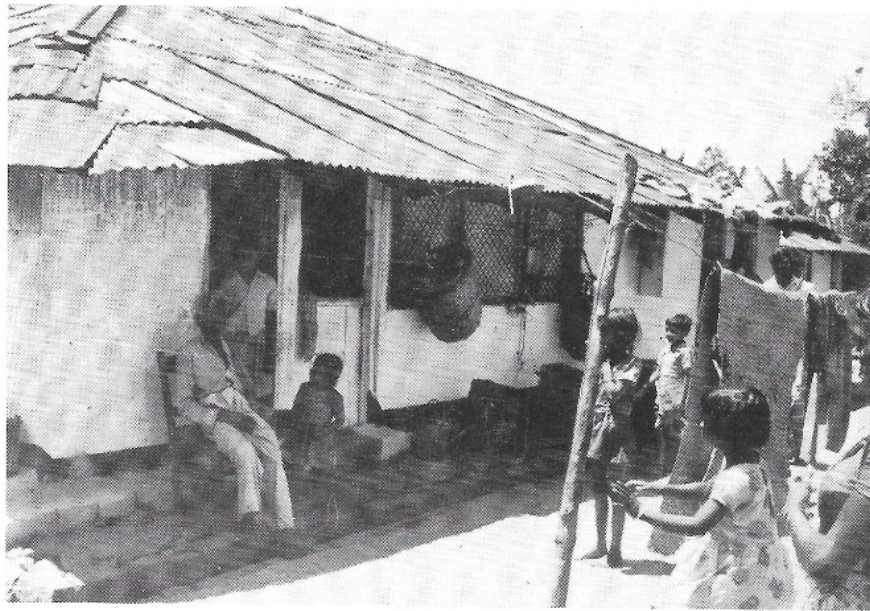
*This picture shows The Memorial with nine stones symbolising the lives lost; it is pulled down frequently by the army, but always erected by the people of Jaffna.*

On 10th January 1974 at an important cultural event, the Fourth International Conference of Tamil Research in Jaffna, the police launched their first major attack on the Tamil community. When nearly a hundred thousand Tamil people, spellbound by the eloquent speech of the great Tamil scholar from Southern India, Professor Naina Mohamed, the grim tragedy struck.

Hundreds of Sinhala policemen, armed to the teeth, launched a well-planned lightning attack on the spectators with tear-gas bombs, batons and rifle butts, which exploded into a gigantic commotion and stampede, resulting in the tragic loss of nine lives and hundreds – including women and children – sustaining severe injuries. This event cut a deep wound in the heart of the Tamil nation; it profoundly humiliated the national pride of the Tamil-speaking people.







*Traditional homeland of Tamils is being systematically colonised*

*Living conditions for plantation workers are among the worst in the world and after a life of continuous and extreme toil for a very low wage there are no rewards. Even in death, the plantation worker is denied dignity, being buried anywhere the management chooses, under the tea bushes.*

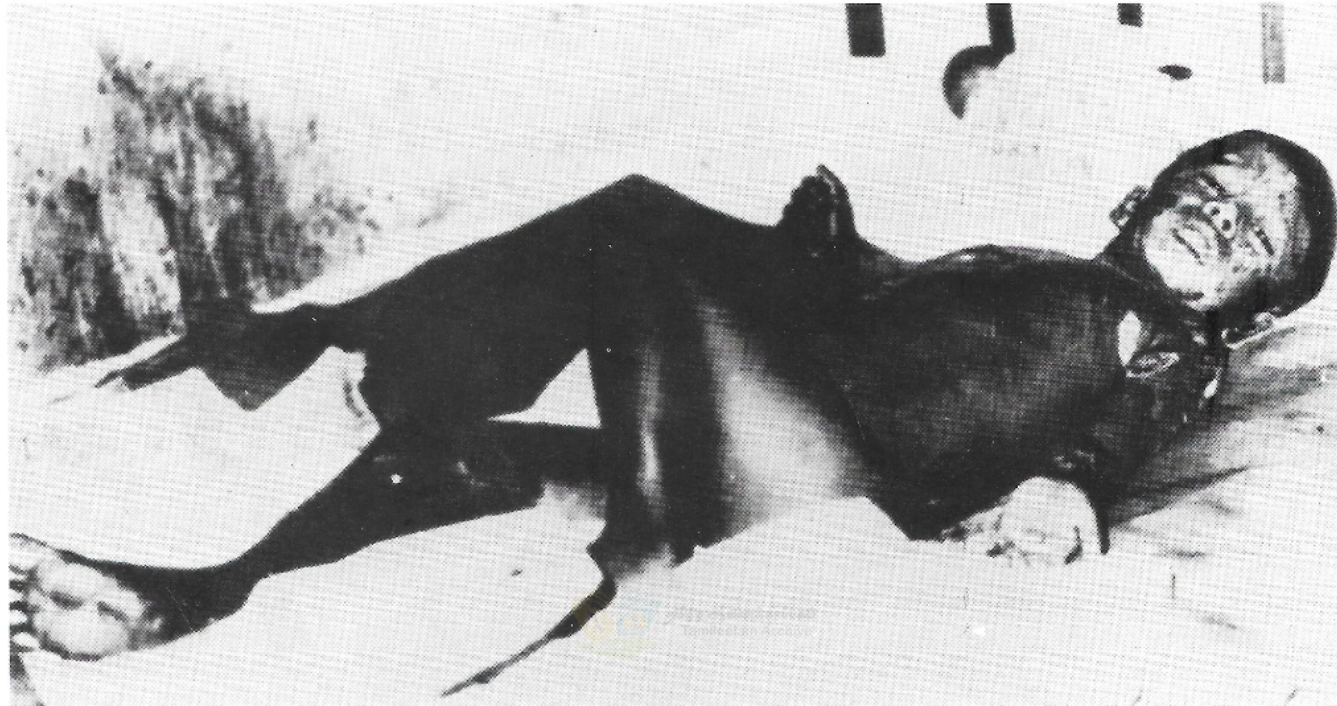


## Racial pogroms and attempted genocide

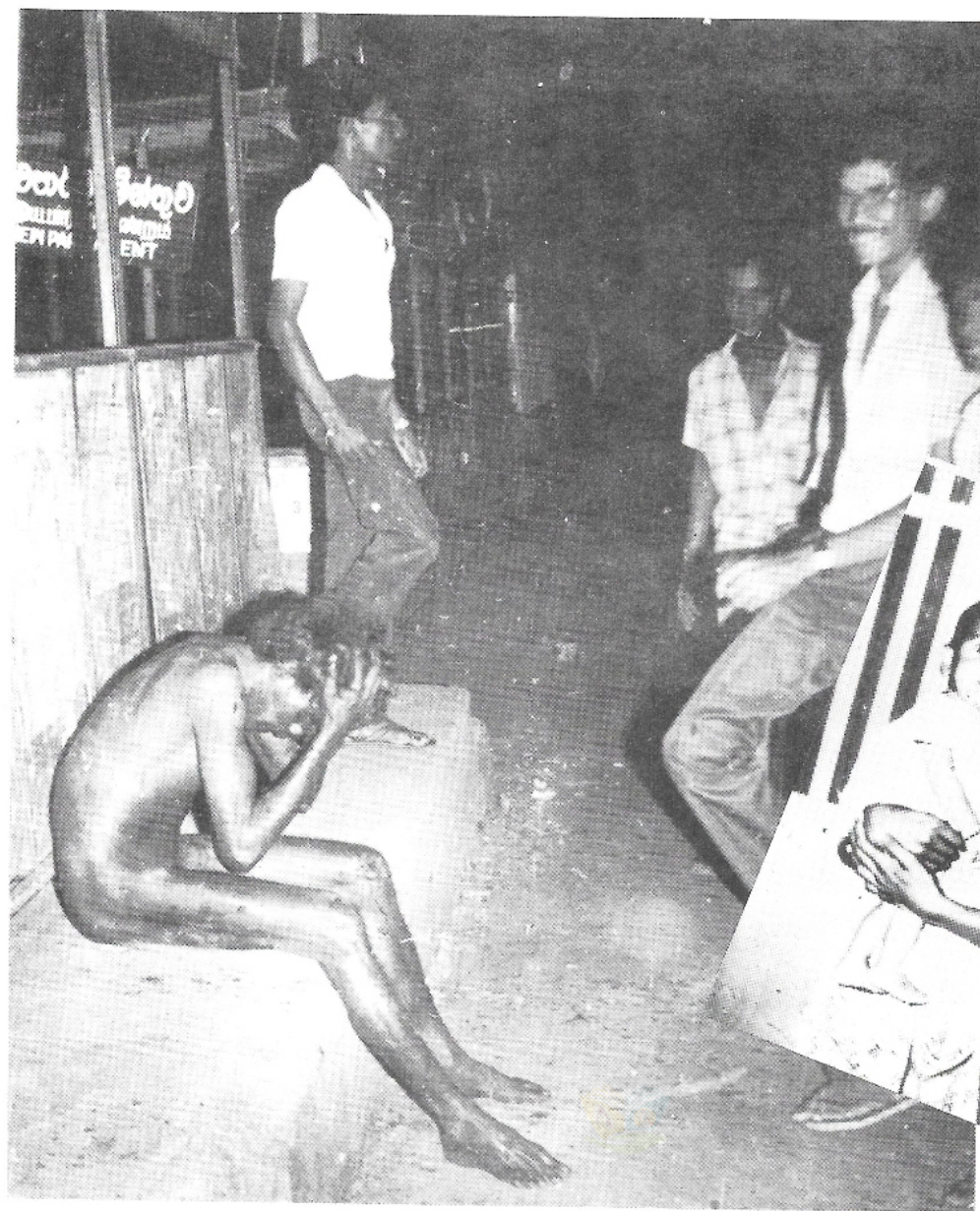
The savage and brutal oppression unleashed on the Tamil nation in pogroms of increasing violence, in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1981 and the attempted genocide in 1983, in which thousands of Tamils were killed, innocent people burnt alive and women and children raped and mutilated, should not be viewed as a spontaneous outburst of intercommunal hatred between two communities. All major conflagrations that erupted violently against the Tamil people were incited and mas-

terminded by the Sinhala ruling regimes as a part of a genocidal programme

The cumulative effect of multi-dimensional oppression threatened the very survival of the Tamils. It aggravated the national conflict and made co-existence between the two nations impossible. It has shattered all hopes of a peaceful negotiated resolution of the Tamil national question. It has heightened Tamil militancy and strengthened the demand for secession.











*Petrol bombs, guns, knives, any weapon one can think of, were used by the police, army and mobs against the unarmed Tamil population. Every phase of what was publicised as 'riots' meant a nation in agony. Homes, temples and every Tamil cultural symbol was attacked and destroyed. Even the children were not spared*

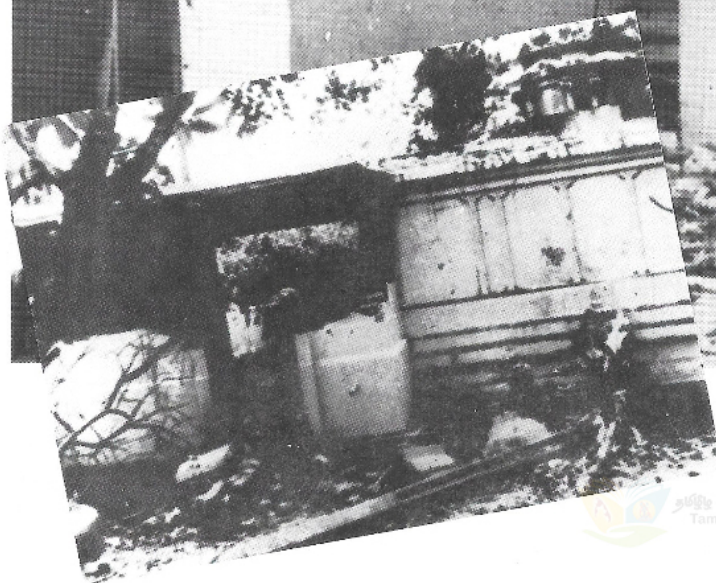














## State violence and Tamil non-violence

Faced with the oppressive measures of successive Sri Lankan governments, the Tamils, under bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leadership, organised mass non-violent agitational campaigns demanding a federal form of autonomy for the Tamil nation.

Alarmed by the success of the civil disobedience campaigns, the state oppressive

machinery unleashed military terrorism all over Tamil Eelam, suppressing the agitation with brutal violence.

Thus the violence of the oppressor silenced the non-violence of the oppressed; the armed might of Sinhala chauvinism crushed the 'ahimsa' of the Tamils.



*A civil disobedience campaign which was inaugurated on 20th February 1961 and lasted nearly three months brought hundreds of thousands of Tamil-speaking masses on to the streets to express their defiance of the oppressive state apparatus*



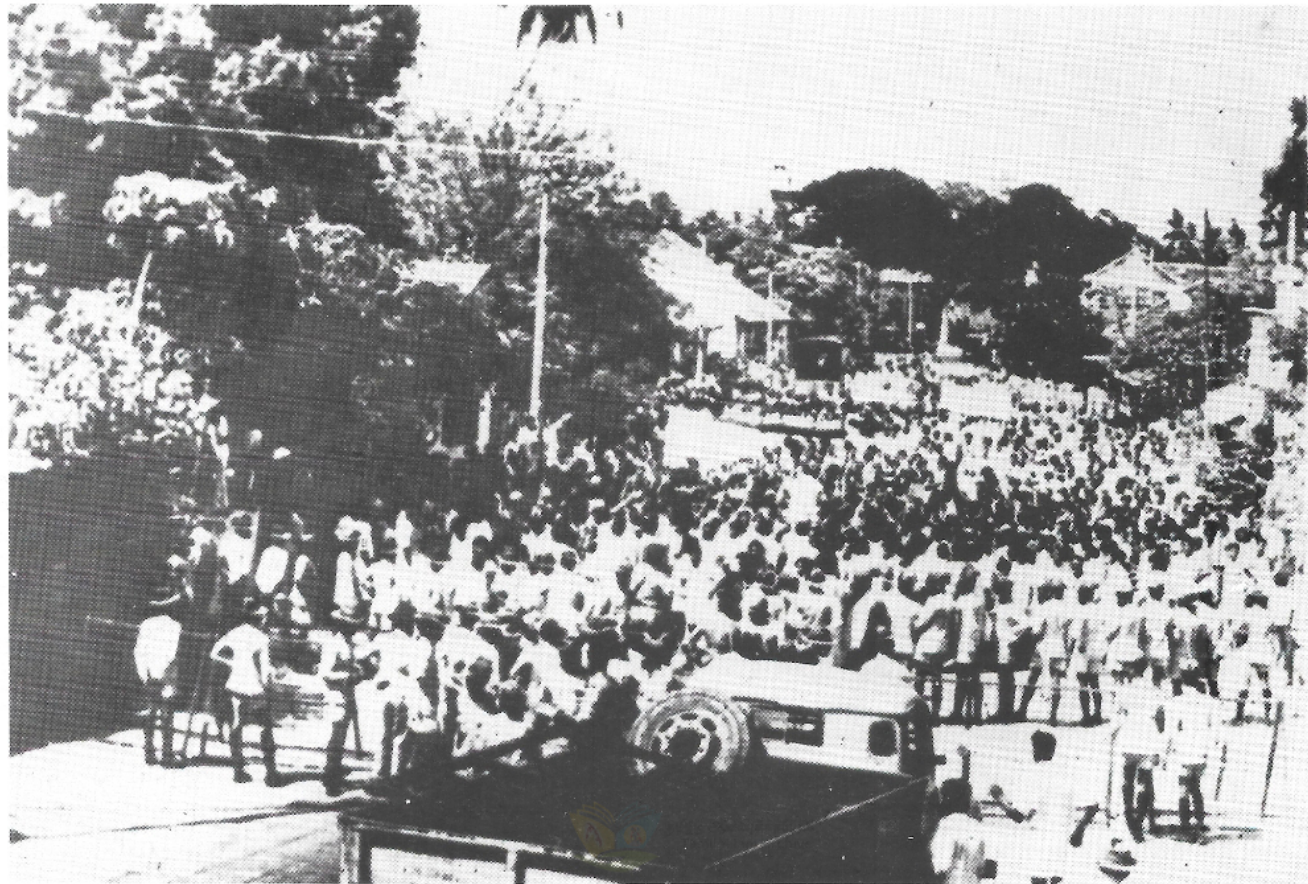
## On the path to secession

The arrogant determination of all major political parties to stifle the most crucial and urgent issues facing the Tamil nation made the Tamils realise the utter futility of pursuing

any form of political dialogue with Sinhala leaders. This objective factor led the Tamil nationalist parties to converge into a single movement (the Tamil United Liberation Front

— TULF) which resolved to fight for political independence on the basis of the nation's right to self-determination.

At the general elections of 1977, the Front demanded a



*Another disobedience campaign*



clear mandate from the people to launch a national struggle to establish sovereignty in the Tamil homeland. These elections took the character of a referendum and the Tamil-speaking people voted overwhelmingly in favour of secession. Thus a new historical era in Tamil politics began, ushering in a revolutionary struggle for national independence.

*Tamil nationalist parties converged into a single movement (the Tamil United Liberation Front) and resolved to fight for political independence, T.U.L.F. called an annual convention in May 1976 at Vaddukoddai where a historical resolution was unanimously adopted calling for complete political independence of the Tamil nation*



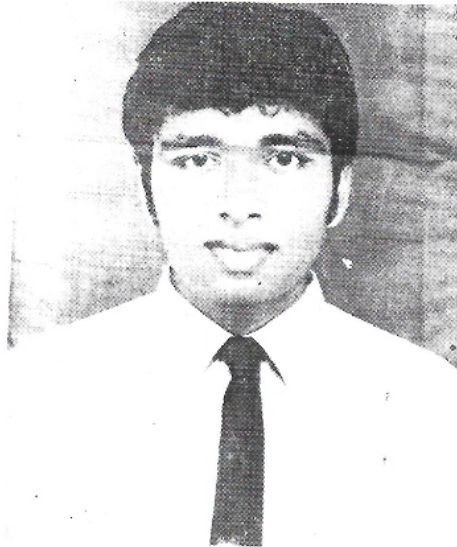


## Revolutionary youth and armed resistance

Caught up in a revolutionary situation generated by the contradictions of national oppression and constantly victimised by police brutality, Tamil youth were disillusioned with the political strategy of non-violence, which the bourgeois

nationalist leadership advocated. They rightly perceived that the only alternative left to the Tamils under conditions of mounting national oppression was none other than revolutionary armed struggle for the total independence of their

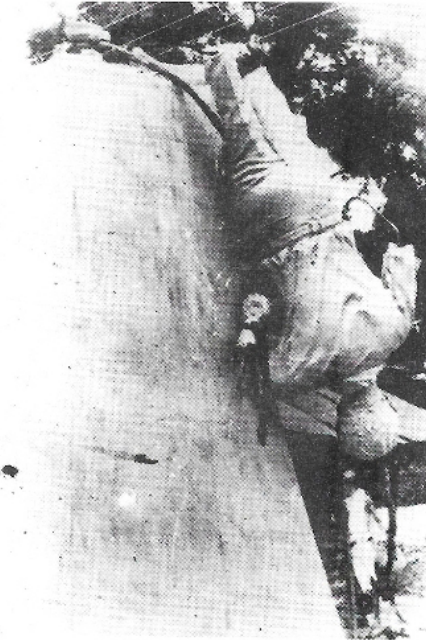
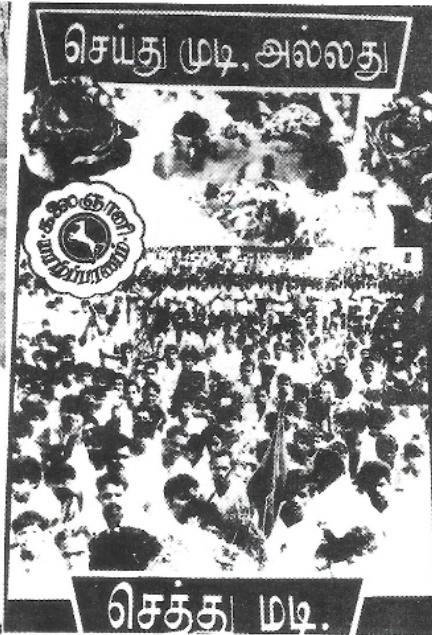
nation. Therefore, the radical Tamil youth, while making impassioned demands and pressurising the older generation of the TULF to advocate secession, resorted to revolutionary political violence to express their militant stand.



செங்கு முடி அல்லது  
- பொன்னுத்துரை சிவகுமாரன் -

பிறப்பு : 26-8-1950

மறைவு : 5-6-1974



*The Tamil Student Federation moulded the most militant political activists and created the conditions for the emergence of revolutionary political practice. The most outstanding freedom fighter who emerged from this tradition and became a martyr was the youth named SIVAKUMARAN (left).*

*The revolutionary violence by which SIVAKUMARAN kindled the flame of freedom became an inextinguishable fire that began to spread all over Tamil Eelam - his funeral procession (centre).*

*SIVAKUMARAN's statue is pulled down and broken by the armed forces (right)*



## The Tiger movement and the liberation struggle

The revolutionary ardour of the Tamil youth, which was manifested in the form of indiscriminate outbursts of political violence in the early seventies, began to seek concrete political expression in an organisational structure built on a revolutionary political theory and practice. Neither the Tamil United Liberation Front — TULF — nor the left movement, offered any concrete political avenue to the

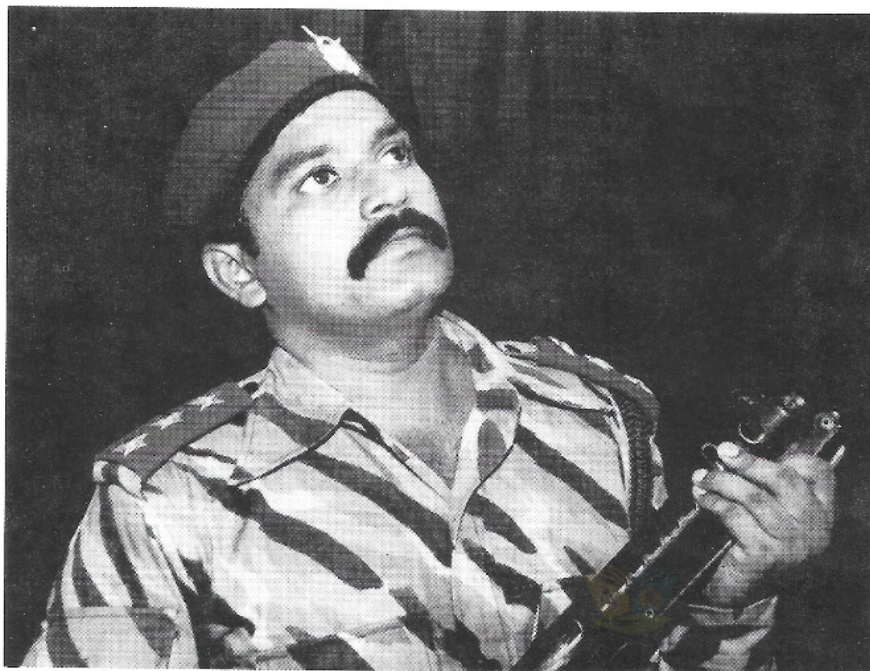
revolutionary potential of the rebellious youth.

Confronted with this political vacuum and caught up in a revolutionary situation created by the concrete conditions of intolerable national oppression, Tamil revolutionary youth sought desperately to advance the tasks of national liberation. In this specific political conjuncture the Tiger movement was born in 1972.

The movement was founded by its present leader and military commander, **Velupillai Prabakaran**. At the time of its inauguration, the movement called itself 'The Tamil New Tigers', but later on, on May 5th, 1976, the organisation renamed itself as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. From its inception, the Tiger movement took into its ranks the most resolute, the most dedicated and the most zealous young revolutionaries.

Structured as an urban guerrilla force, disciplined with an iron will to fight for the cause of national freedom, the Tigers emerged as the armed resistance movement of the oppressed Tamil masses.

As a revolutionary liberation movement, it provided a concrete organisational base for the insurrectionary spirit of the rebellious youth and soon established itself as the armed



*V. PRABAKARAN, leader and military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*

vanguard of the national struggle. The Tigers' commitment to armed struggle was undertaken after a careful and cautious appraisal of the objective conditions of the national struggle and with the fullest comprehension of the concrete situation in which the masses of people were presented with no alternative than to resort to revolutionary resistance to advance their national cause.

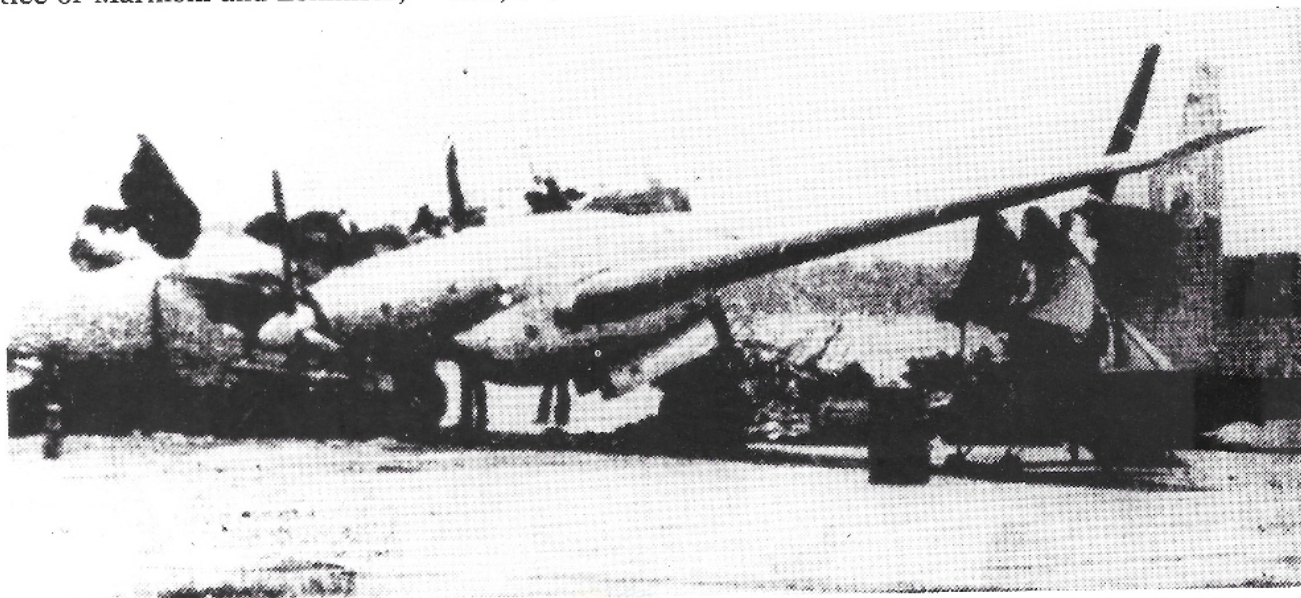
Ideologically bound to the revolutionary theory and practice of Marxism and Leninism,

the Tiger movement firmly believes that its commitment to armed struggle is not an alternative to the mass movement, but that revolutionary armed resistance must be sustained and supported by the mobilised masses. The power of the organised masses, Tigers believe, must be activated as a force of popular resistance.

Adopting Lenin's teaching that 'armed struggle must be enobled by the enlightening and organising influences of socialism', the movement has char-

tered its political programme integrating the national struggle with the class struggle, defining the ultimate objective as national liberation and socialist revolution.

In conclusion, we appeal to all progressive forces and revolutionary movements of the world to recognise our people's right to self-determination and to give unrelenting support and solidarity to the armed revolutionary struggle of the **LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM**.



*The only aircraft owned by the national airline, Air Ceylon, bombed and destroyed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on September 7, 1978, the day when the Sri Lankan regime introduced its new racist constitution*



# விடுதலைப்புலிகளும் தமிழீழசுதந்திரப் போராட்டமும்



*Tiger guerrillas*







**‘ The most important factor that we wish to state clearly and emphatically is that we are not a group of amateur armed adventurers roaming in the jungles with romantic political illusions, nor are we a band of terrorists or vandals who kill and destroy at random for anarchic reasons. We are neither murderers nor criminals or violent fanatics as your government often attempts to portray us. On the contrary, we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice. We represent the most powerful extra-parliamentary liberation movement in the Tamil nation. We represent the militant expression of the collective will of our people who are determined to fight for freedom, dignity and justice. We are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed. We are not in any way isolated and alienated from the popular masses but immersed and integrated with the popular will, with the collective soul of our nation . . . ’**

*AN OPEN LETTER OF PROTEST TO MR R. PREMADASA,  
THE PRIME MINISTER OF SRI LANKA  
L.T.T.E. PAMPHLET 1979*







**‘Even though a pawn in the hands of State terrorism, the atrocities and murders that you committed in Tamil Eelam have left permanent scars in the hearts of the Tamil people and will never be healed. Do not die labouring for the foul campaigns of the ruling class. Do not lose your integrity and your humanity, so that those who rule us may prosper. It is only when you take up arms on the side of the oppressed Sinhala workers and peasants, against the state of Sri Lanka, that we could speak the language of friendship. When and if you do that, you will understand the pulse of our own struggle . . .’**

*AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SINHALA SOLDIER  
L.T.T.E. PAMPHLET 1982*









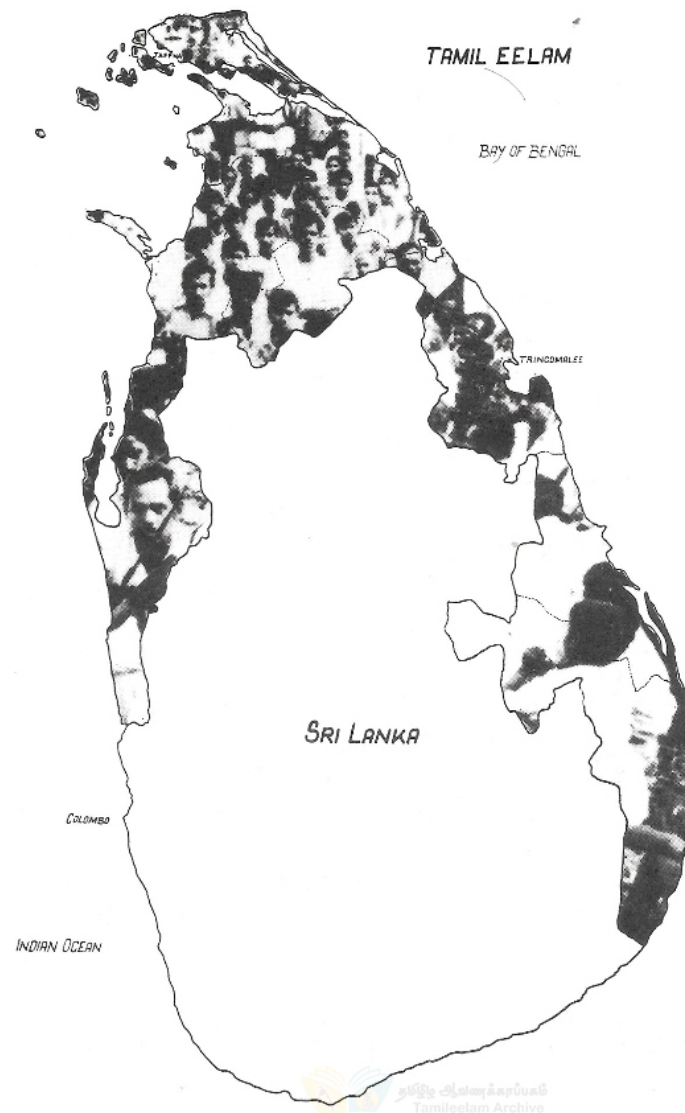




**‘ The imperialist penetration not only generated the mechanisms of the capitalist development but also shifted the national struggles to the peripheral social formations. In this context the nature of nationalism, the national struggle and the class relations in the national movements of the Third World countries must be viewed in relation to the transformations in the expanding capitalist economy, its global effects, its structural relations with developing peripheral capitalism . . . The so-called progressive national bourgeoisie has lost its revolutionary character to advance the national struggle as a democratic social force. The historical conjuncture of global capitalism has eliminated all progressive elements of the national bourgeoisie, its historical role in the national revolution has shifted to the revolutionary proletariat. Such structural transformation in the class elements has necessitated a revolutionary socialist strategy inter-relating the class struggle with national liberation struggle under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat, a strategy to advance the class struggle along with the national liberation struggle both against the indigenous bourgeoisie and international capitalism . . . ’**

*Reprinted from 'LIBERATION TIGERS AND  
TAMIL EELAM FREEDOM STRUGGLE', published August 1983*





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**'We the Liberation Tigers wish to express our support  
for and solidarity with all revolutionary liberation  
struggles of the oppressed masses of the world'**

