

Information Bulletin No.10

Date of Release: 2nd March 1996

Trincomalee District in February 1996: Focusing on the Killiveddy Massacre

[Introduction:](#)

[Kumarapuram, Killiveddy : Background](#)

[Locations:](#)

[Kumarapuram:](#)

[The first Killiveddy massacre and displacement:](#)

[The situation just prior to the recent attack:](#)

[The massacre of 11th February 1996](#)

[The Morning After:](#)

[What was behind the incident?](#)

[A case of Government inaction:](#)

[Coverage in the press:](#)

[An Historical Note:](#)

Introduction:

We last covered Trincomalee District in June 1995 ([Report No.13](#)) just prior to the election of the new government. About a week after the resumption of war in April 1995, there was the major incident where the LTTE massacred more than 40 migrant Sinhalese fisher folk at Kallaru(Kallara) near the northern extremity of the district. The annual migration of these west coast fisher folk during the south-west monsoon is a long established tradition (see for instance Ceylon Census 1901). There was also an incident where the army went berserk in the resettled Muslim village of Pudavaikkaddu, just south of Kallaru and Thiriyai, killing five Muslim civilians. This followed an LTTE attack on the soldiers. Since then Trincomalee has been relatively quiet on the surface. The complacency was however shattered by the brutality and utter indiscipline displayed by the army at Killiveddy on 11th February 1996. The lesson to be drawn here is that it is dangerous to be complacent simply because violations by the forces are few and far between, and more especially when nothing was done about these violations. Most people are barely aware that these violations do take place.

On 23rd February the army going into a quarry in Kanniya, west of Trincomalee town, asked workmen whether they saw Tigers escaping that way. When the workmen replied in the negative, four of them were made to lie down. Two married men, Suppiah Rasendiram(31) and Arumugam Subramaniam(24), both of Technical Institute Refugee Camp, Uppuveli were shot dead and Velayutham Subramaniam was injured. Complaints about such incidents are duly recorded by the MP for Trincomalee and forwarded to the President and the Defence Ministry. Typically as we shall see, nothing happens. Shortly after the outbreak of war in April last year, two civilians were abducted in China Bay by men identified as being from the nearby air force camp. The DIG Police in Trincomalee promised to inquire into the matter and have the men released. To date nothing has happened. Following the shooting of a Muslim homeguard by the LTTE in Mutur during May 1995, Muslim hoodlums close to the armed forces killed three Tamils in reprisals. The Superintendent of Police promised to take action against the miscreants who were identified. Nothing happened. It also turns out that these hoodlums terrorised not just the Tamil population, but also the Muslim population that does not want trouble with the Tamils. On 10th August '95 at Senaiyoor, Kattaiparichchan, the army called out and shot dead Pathiniyar Subramaniam(55) and Visvalingam Thavarajah(43). An attempt to shoot the village headman was thwarted by women(the army has since withdrawn from Kattaiparichchan). A complaint was made to the authorities by the MP concerning this incident in the area under the Mutur Battalion. Nothing is known to have been done beyond an acknowledgement of the complaint. Such occasional incidents in a locality followed by long periods of calm is bound to inspire complacency. The key question that needs to be asked is why no action is taken? Why is no one held answerable? A closer look at the Killiveddy incident suggests that the rot goes to the very top. Punishing a few of those in the lower ranks, or more accurately getting them out of public view, does nothing to change matters.

Since the outbreak of war, as a measure to strengthen deployment in the North, the army has been withdrawn from some of the outlying areas. The army has been withdrawn from coastal areas north of Kuchchaveli. Consequently the civilians who were living in Thiriyai and Pudavaikkaddu have also abandoned their homes and come into army controlled areas closer to town such as Nilaveli and Jamaliya. In the south of the district the army has evacuated from Verugal, Ichchilampattai, Sampur and Kattaipparichchan. The LTTE now moves freely in the villages just east of, and south of Mutur town. These changes have no doubt made the army feel insecure. For Tamil villages in the area, life has been made extremely difficult. In a move apparently aimed at denying supplies to the LTTE, these villagers have to come into Mutur daily to get their supplies and carry back very restricted quantities of food and oil just enough for about a day. Typically there are long queues of people carrying firewood on bicycles, who file past check points into Mutur to sell their firewood and carry back supplies. In turn people from Mutur hardly venture out and depend on those coming in for supplies of firewood. The economy of those living in LTTE controlled areas is almost one of primitive subsistence. Selling firewood to the town residents is their main source of cash.

Until very recently women coming into town complained of being almost stripped at check points by women service personnel. Any provocation by the LTTE is usually replied with a volley of shells being fired into the LTTE controlled area. One could easily guess how people in the LTTE controlled areas feel about the government and the armed forces.

The Mutur sector is under the 22nd Brigade commanded by Brigadier Parami Kulatunge. The eastern division is under the battalion commanded by Colonel Uthayakumara based in Mutur, and the western division under Colonel Nihal Silva based in Somapura(Kallar). Colonel

Uthayakumara, when earlier based at Ichchilampattai had a reputation for being a very reasonable and considerate officer. Nihal Silva showed his ideological leanings when he was a major based in Muttur town. In September 1994 he used his position to usurp the power of the civil administration and personally supervise the settlement of Sinhalese encroachers on crown land in Muttur town designated for public buildings. It is notable that even the local Muslims who thought they had a powerful minister in M.H.M.Ashraff could make no impact on the matter. This is in keeping with the not-so-hidden agenda in Trincomalee District in which the central administrative machinery and the military have worked in tandem for decades.

A healthier aspect of developments in the district is a certain communal amity that has been coming about in recent times, which has remained unbroken despite the strain of current violent events. Community and religious leaders have often acted quickly to defuse tensions and prevent transient ill-feeling from getting out of control. In this representatives from all communities, including some members of the Buddhist clergy, have played a constructive role.

A recent event which led to some anxious expectations was the killing of Town Councillor Sumathiratne in mid February. The gentleman was a Sinhalese fishing merchant who appears to have been well regarded by the Tamils he employed. Most people, including the local Sinhalese, put his death down to either cross fire or mistaken identity during a skirmish between the LTTE and the army at Sambalthivu. No one is too sure.

Sumathiratne's story must be set against the darker political motivations at national level that have shaped developments in the area over the decades. But it is also a story of how enlightened self-interest could have little truck with communalism. Following the outbreak of war in June 1990, Tamil fisherfolk and fish-merchants were completely ruined. With the Ministry of Rehabilitation doing next to nothing for them, the gap was filled by Sinhalese entrepreneurs like Sumathiratne. They provided capital to the Tamil fisherfolk and bought their catch, deducting something regularly as repayment of capital. It was by all accounts good business. Surviving in such situations also requires tricky negotiations with all the forces in the area, and could be dangerous. Quite frequently changing social relations in the region defy old stereotypes. [\[Top\]](#)

Kumarapuram, Killiveddy : Background

Locations:

Killiveddy lies about the 57th mile post on the northbound Batticaloa-Trincomalee coast road after crossing Killiveddy Aru(River). The road then runs a further mile north and comes to Dehiwatte Junction. It then proceeds 1 1/2 miles ENE(east-north-east) with the bank of Allai tank to the right, past 59th mile post and comes to Palathadichchenai (60 1/2th mile post) after a left bend. Muttur is a further 7 1/2 miles NNW. A narrower road branches out from Somapura(formerly Kallar), off the Allai-Kantalai Road, and runs north along the Allai LB main channel past LB3 settlement. It then turns ENE through Dehiwatte colony and comes to Dehiwatte junction a further mile ENE, where it joins the Batticaloa-Muttur (Trincomalee) Road. Killiveddy River(or Kal Aru) itself branches off from Verugal River and flows into the Allai Tank just east of Killiveddy village. LB3 which lies two miles west of Killiveddy is also Tamil.(See map).

To get matters into focus, from Killiveddy village the Mutur Road runs a mile north to Dehiwatte Junction, almost opposite which is Parathipuram (58th milepost). The road then runs ENE to 59th milepost. An extension of the road in the opposite direction from Dehiwatte Junction(i.e. WSW) leads a mile on to the edge of Dehiwatte.

Killiveddy is a very old village, south of which lie the predominantly Sinhalese colony villages of the Allai scheme (late 50s). However Dehiwatte and Neelapola(formerly Neelapalai) which lie to the northwest of Killiveddy are both Sinhalese colonies. Neelapola lies at the northernmost tail end of the LB channel. The area is one where Tamils have considerable interaction with the Sinhalese, and both communities are bilingual. Relations have generally been good, with both communities attending functions in each others' villages. With severe restrictions placed on Tamil village shops, supposedly as a means of curtailing supplies reaching the LTTE, Tamils regularly shop for groceries and items like batteries in the Sinhalese and Muslim villages (eg. Thoppur). All these complicated arrangements for mutual survival and welfare have given the three communities a strong vested interest in continuing good relations. It is notable that the Sinhalese of the area have been very much against the security forces being harsh with the Tamils, nor has the LTTE attacked Sinhalese civilians in the area in any significant incident since the late 80s. [\[Top\]](#)

Kumarapuram:

Certainly by the late 60s, when the government installed an Air Force camp about the head-works of Morawewa or Mudalikkulam in the west of Trincomalee District, the issue of state sponsored colonisation of Sinhalese had come into the open. The State had shown its hand and the issue had gone beyond the plane of polite debate and of facts and figures. It is one of the main issues around which the nationalist youth coalesced. Among the counter-measures to 'secure the border areas' from further inroads by the state was to establish settlements of Tamils on vacant lands in these areas. In towns and villages, loose coalitions of activists worked in tandem to find new homes and occupations for Tamils displaced by acute starvation on the estates in the mid-70s and then by the communal violence of 1977 and 1981. From the onset of the civil war which followed the communal violence of July 1983, the State and its forces did a great deal that makes gory reading, not just to reverse such settlement efforts by Tamils, but also to destroy old Tamil villages.

The residents of Kumarapuram themselves have diverse origins. Several of them had come from the Hill Country. Some had first gone to Vavuniya during the 70s and had then come to Kumarapuram. Others had come from Batticaloa District. Some were landless folk from Killiveddy village itself. Kumarapuram is located about half a mile from Killiveddy, about half the distance to Dehiwatte Junction. The village was founded just after the communal violence of August 1981 by clearing jungle to the east of the road, between the road and Allai Tank. The land itself is not easy to cultivate. The people at Kumarapuram either cultivated vegetable plots on land outside the village or worked as labour for the rice field owners of Killiveddy. Unlike Killiveddy which produced a substantial educated middle-class, those of Kumarapuram were very poor.

As the civil war gained in intensity, the Tamils of the area became displaced, first in 1985 and again for a few months in 1990. Over this period a substantial number of persons from Killiveddy fled to Western countries as refugees. The number included Kumarathurai, who was among the key figures in founding Kumarapuram, after whom it is named. Kumarathurai, as a known activist, was detained by the army in January 1984 in a general tightening of

repression. He was tortured and released around mid-1986 when his village had for a time ceased to exist. He is now a refugee in Denmark. The fratricidal tendency within the Tamil militant movement also took its toll. The PLOTE had been the main movement established in the area from the early 80s before even the LTTE was known in those parts. After the LTTE's crackdown on the PLOTE in 1986, where recruitment is concerned, the people have almost completely kept aloof. [\[Top\]](#)

The first Killiveddy massacre and displacement:

During 1985 the Sri Lankan armed forces launched a general policy of terror and displacement against Tamil villages in Trincomalee District, the signs of which are all-too-visible to this day. The broken houses, the rusting frame of the Government Paddy Stores and the ruined hull of the milk collection centre are stark reminders of the former prosperity of the area against its present penury.

On the night of 30th May 1985, a police party from Serunuwara entered Killiveddy-Akkarai (South Bank) and took away 36 persons including women. They were massacred and burnt at Sambalpidy on the Allai-Kantalai Road.

On the same night itself the people of the area fled as refugees to places such as Pachchanoor & Thoppur, five miles away, and also to Trincomalee town and beyond. The following morning (31st) the army came into Killiveddy village along with police and homeguards and shot dead 8 mostly elderly persons, including the Hindu priest's wife and a girl who had remained.

Was there another immediate context to the incident? We do also know that several Sinhalese villages in the area, including Dehiwatte, were abandoned during that period. Dehiwatte was attacked at least once by TELO.

May 1985 was a period just before then Indian brokered ceasefire of June when things were very hot in the East. In the North there had been a number of massacres and counter-massacres of civilians (eg. Valvettithurai and Anuradhapura, both earlier in May 1985). On 9th February this year, the Deputy Minister for Defence presented in parliament a report titled 'Massacre of Civilians' accounting for about 2900 mostly Sinhalese civilians killed by 'armed terrorists' since November 1984. This listed attacks on Dehiwatte on 30.5.85 and 11.6.85 claiming respectively 5 and 13 Sinhalese civilian lives. There is of course no mention in the document of the Killiveddy massacre on the first date given.

The Killiveddy incident received worldwide publicity when Mr. A.Thangathurai, then ex-MP for Mutur and who is now MP for Trincomalee, spoke about it to the correspondent of the London Times in Trincomalee. Just afterwards Mr.Thangathurai, a native of Killiveddy, fled to Madras when the Minister for National Security ordered his arrest 'for spreading false rumours'!

The survivors from Killiveddy returned when the Indian Peace Keeping Force arrived in August 1987. The villagers fled again when the LTTE went to war with the Sri Lankan Forces in June 1990 and were brought back about the end of 1990.

The situation just prior to the recent attack:

The army had two main camps in the area at 59th mile post, and at Dehiwatte. A detachment from 59th Milepost under the command of a sergeant was posted at the Killiveddy ferry-point. This unit was regularly rotated. This meant that Dehiwatte Junction was fairly well covered from the three approach routes. There were also the strategic army camps at Neelapola to the northwest and Mallikaitivu to the north. The area around the junction is mostly open space, with Allai tank to the east. For an LTTE party attacking troops in the area, the most natural escape route is therefore towards Kankuveli and the Mahaveli River. This route is south of the army camp at Neelapola. The other escape route is westwards across the LB channel between the army camps at Dehiwatte and LB3. Trained professional soldiers would therefore have had a very good chance of cutting off the attackers as was no doubt intended by the military planners. Thus infiltration and escape should normally have been very risky affairs.

During the day the soldiers readily came into Kumarapuram and Killiveddy villages and mixed freely with the people, chatting and buying produce. The LTTE, sometimes, came by night or summoned individuals by messages for inquiries elsewhere. Both sides no doubt had their informers. People were regularly summoned for forced labour by the army. The soldiers were well-known in the villages, and given the current relatively disciplined behaviour of the troops, an atrocity such as the one described below, was totally out of character. [\[Top\]](#)

The massacre of 11th February 1996

About 5.00 p.m. Chokkalingam Stephen(51) from Kumarapuram with his wife and a daughter were watering their patch of chilies at Dehiwatte Junction when two soldiers from the Killiveddy detachment were bound thither from 59th Milepost. They addressed Stephen by name, exchanged pleasantries with him and went on. Just a little later firing noises were heard. Stephen's wife said that something unpleasant had happened. Stephen went with his wife and daughter to one among the few Tamil houses at the Junction that was predominantly a Muslim area.

Soldiers immediately ran from Killiveddy towards where the firing noises had been heard. They then started firing wildly and taking reprisals. Among the first victims were Kamaleswaran(13) and his employer Sivakolunthu Sinnathurai(about 60). The body of the latter was found the next morning with a leg severed.

The soldiers then went back towards Killiveddy, merged with others on the road and went into Kumarapuram village.

Anthony Joseph(10) had gone to Killiveddy for tuition. His mother Moses Vijaya had sent Tharmalethumi(15), daughter of Arumaithurai(59), a girl next door, to fetch her son. The latter was riding back to Parathipuram with Anthony on the bicycle bar when the alarm was given. The two of them got into a nearby shop along with others. Their gruesome fate will be described in the sequel.

As the soldiers came into Kumarapuram which was on the east side of the road, people heard wild firing and frenzied shouts of 'Demala kattiya maranuwa'('Death to the Tamils'). Thirupathy(45) ran eastwards, away from the road, with his 4 children, to the house of his sister Kamala(35). Then Kamala came running holding the hand of her son Eeswaran (18) when he received a shot on his hand. There were several people in Kamala's house with the doors and windows closed. Soldiers fired through the doors and windows, while Thirupathy crouched under a bed. Among those killed were Thirupathy's daughter Manjula(12) and

Kamala's daughter Sumathy(10). Two soldiers had entered the house through the front door and another from behind. A young farmer who survived said that he could identify the two soldiers who came through the front door. He had participated in forced labour at the Killiveddy army detachment the previous day where he had seen the two men. One of the soldiers came into the house with a knife. The other pulled him back and sprayed the place instead with his automatic.

Soldiers then went to the house of Thiagarasa Thuraiamma(65) further east. 14 people in the neighbourhood including children who had been playing near the house had sheltered there with the doors and windows closed. Those in the house included Thuraiamma's daughters Parameswari(30) who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, and Vallippillai(25) holding her child of 1 1/2 years. Soldiers forced the front door open and fired at the inmates through the door, as well as from a side through a closed window. 7 in the house were killed including Thuraiamma's two daughters above, another two adults and three children. Vallippillai's 1 1/2 old child survived. After the first round of firing ceased the children who survived had screamed. This had provoked the soldiers into a second round of firing. Thuraiamma said that soldiers later entered the house and looted about five sovereigns of jewellery that had been left with her for safe keeping. After more than a week the house still had the strong stench of death, such as was evident in Jaffna Hospital in the weeks following the incident of October 1987. There were bullet marks everywhere including holes in the roof.

Thangavelu Maruthai(57) saw the army coming towards her house. She called some of the children who were playing near the house and got them inside. She then stood at the door and pleaded with the soldiers not to shoot. The soldiers fired inside and badly injured her father Govindhan(72). The father died shortly. Also killed in that house was Stephen Padma(9), daughter of Maheswari(35). Maruthai's brother Govindhan Palanivel fled from the house. The soldiers chased him and fired at him, but he escaped with a minor injury. Maruthai could clearly identify the two soldiers who came to her house. One was a dark man with a cut on his face, known in the village as [Corporal] Kapila. The other was fair and stocky. On previous occasions Kapila had been to her house asking for water.

Soldiers went around in this manner to several houses in the area leaving behind death, injury and much physical destruction. In all 24 were killed including 7 children below the age of 12, the youngest being 3. The death toll would have been higher had not many of the villagers run into the fields around. While this was going on Stephen whom we had mentioned at the beginning, having left his wife and child at Dehiwatte Junction, became extremely worried about his other children. Of his 8 children 5 were at home. He cautiously moved towards the village. He witnessed soldiers coming into the area also from Dehiwatte and 59th Milepost army camps. In place of trying to chase after the Tigers who had killed the two soldiers, this had all the hall-marks of an operation against Kumarapuram. It was as though the soldiers from the other camps had come only to give cover to their comrades doing their work at Kumarapuram or to join in the destruction. The coming of soldiers from other camps was also witnessed by others. When Stephen got home the next morning after spending an anxious night in the surroundings, he found that his daughter Padma had been killed by bullets which struck her full in the face. His daughter Letchumi(18) was injured about the middle just above the leg.

Among the most gruesome of events took place in the twin grocery cum tea shop just across the road from Kumarapuram. This was where Tharmaletchumi and Anthony had taken shelter. Further behind the shop was an open space where children were playing a ball game.

Thambipillai Sittampalam(36), a labourer, when he heard firing noises near Dehiwatte Junction called the children and got everyone into the shop. Those in the shop included passers by and customers. From inside the closed shop they first heard the click of soldiers' boots as they ran from Killiveddy towards the location of the incident. A little later the soldiers opened fire into the tea boutique killing Suthakaran(12). The people in the tea boutique shifted to the grocery part. The soldiers then banged the grocery door and shouted for the Mudhalali(owner) asking for 'gini petty'(boxes of matches). The soldiers went to the back of the shop and asked everyone to come out. The shopkeeper went out with his wife and child and they were not harmed. The soldiers went into the grocery shop and opened fire closer to the ground level. Sittampalam who was under a table saw streaks of light and then the shop was covered in smoke.

Since the place was dark the soldiers found a mat, placed a dry palm leaf on it and set it on fire. A soldier raised his automatic to fire when in the dim light another noticed the fifteen year old girl Tharmaletchumi trying to creep away and hide behind the others, some of whom were injured. He stopped the first soldier who was about to fire. The soldiers then went out dragging Tharmaletchumi along and took her to the broken down former milk collection centre on the same side of the road about 30 yards towards Killiveddy.

While being forced out Tharmaletchumi pleaded that she was not from Kumarapuram, but was from Parathipuram. Her 10 year old charge Anthony too went out shouting Akka, Akka(Sister Sister), trying to cling to her. The soldiers shot Anthony in the middle and left him for dead. Tharmaletchumi was gang raped on the grass patch which must have been once the verandah of the building. The following morning she was discovered shot dead. Her face had marks of the bestial passion of her tormentors. She must have passed out by the time the men had finished with her. More than a week later the place where the deed was done was marked by a patch of dry blood that had caked in the sun. Anthony spent the night in the open, injured and frightened. Only the next morning did he find himself able to ask others who came out to restore him to his mother Vijaya. [\[Top\]](#)

The Morning After:

Most villagers were too terrified and exhausted to move out of their homes. Many of them had spent a crowded night with dead bodies among them. Some who had managed to get out of the area had telephoned people in Trincomalee. The MP for Trincomalee who had been in Colombo came to know about the incident early in the morning. Killiveddy was his own village. The army did not allow people into or out of the area until about 9.30 a.m. when it came to be known that the brigadier of the twenty second group, which had its head quarters in Trincomalee, and DIG Police/Trincomalee were coming to the area. At about 11.00 a.m. the army came with buses and asked for the injured to be loaded inside, to be conveyed to Mutur and Trincomalee. Stephen who had lost a child and two of whose children were injured felt very angry when he found that the soldiers were from the same area. He asked angrily, "Were you shooting elephants or were you shooting people?". The soldiers replied, "Two of our boys were killed, so we too went killing". The people refused to take the injured into the buses until the ICRC which had arrived gave them an assurance of their safety.

The 28 injured were taken to hospitals in Mutur and Trincomalee. Autopsies for the dead were performed in Mutur. The villagers said that the dead unborn child was taken out of its dead mother Parameswary. Many of the 28 injured had cut injuries and said that the soldiers

had assaulted them with axes. Among the children subject to axe injury, often on their face, were 2 children of Nadarajah Kanapathipillai, Niroshan(6) and Thamesan(3).[\[Top\]](#)

What was behind the incident?

The area in question came under the battalion commanded by Colonel Nihal Silva. The rampage at Kumarapuram had started at about 5.30 p.m. and went on for about two hours. From the events witnessed it was clear that the neighbouring camps had been alerted and had come to the area. It would be extraordinary if Colonel Silva had not been notified immediately. Why no attempt was made to bring the soldiers under control is a question that needs to be answered. It is also significant that the troops did not attack Killiveddy village itself or even the houses at Dehiwatte Junction, but had instead targeted Kumarapuram whose people were the poorest and the most vulnerable in the area. Was it sheer incompetence or was it deliberate? Whether these matters are going to be answered by an official inquiry is in question, given the record of cover ups.

Following the attack on a similar village , Mylanthanai, in the Batticaloa District in 1992, where about 35 civilians were killed, this has been the first attack on Tamil civilians of a comparable scale. Spontaneity does not seem to explain this breach of relative discipline after more than 3 years. There have been incidents in the Eastern Province where more than 30 soldiers were killed in recent times and where the army conducted itself towards civilians with commendable discipline. Many local observers are clear that this incident could not have taken place without instigation from a higher level. We have reliable testimony from several sources who are certainly not anti-government, that an officer of considerable seniority had instigated the reprisals. The words he is said to have used were to the effect, "Turn the place into powder"("kudu karanda").

These sources also said that this officer was in the 59th Milepost army camp when the shooting of the soldiers took place. He with a party of men tried to proceed towards Dehiwatte Junction. They were prevented by firing from the LTTE. Likewise a group that had tried to come from Dehiwatte too was prevented. Both parties went to Dehiwatte Junction only after the LTTE had made their escape. A CTB bus was stopped, made to pick up the bodies of the soldiers killed and transport them to Dehiwatte army camp. The senior officer then went to Dehiwatte army camp. The fact that soldiers at Killiveddy immediately proceeded to the scene is also an indication that they did not expect the escaping the LTTE men to come that way.

We also assert here that the Sinhalese in the area have been very much upset by the incident and were full of sympathy for the people of Kumarapuram. Buddhist monks in Trincomalee who were contacted had also expressed their grief. It is also noteworthy that among those who visited Kumarapuram and consoled the people was a Buddhist monk from the area. [\[Top\]](#)

A case of Government inaction:

We have remarked earlier that complacency about what appeared to be occasional and untypical violations, together with inaction on complaints about such, lies the groundwork for a tragedy such as that which transpired at Kumarapuram. The Government and the Defence Ministry had been given several indications that something was terribly wrong in the area coming under the battalion commanded by Colonel Nihal Silva. On 18/2/'95 the MP for Trincomalee complained by letter to the President about the draconian manner in which the

people of Kanguveli were harassed by Lieutenant de Silva who was in charge of Neelapola army camp. The complaint mentioned the humiliation and assault of people, the use of forced labour to dig trenches and the regular abuse of people, including women, in foul language. A reply was received from Chandrananda de Silva, Secretary, Ministry of Defence, dated 9/5/'95. The reply denied all charges made against Lieutenant de Silva. He was instead credited with being a good social worker who organised shramadana (voluntary community service) for the improvement of local agriculture. It was clear that there was no process of inquiry in which the people and their representatives were involved. The reply to all practical purposes was drafted by the likes of Colonel Nihal Silva.

What was happening was that complaints to the political authorities were routinely passed on to the defence ministry, which then asked the army to investigate complaints about itself. This was a parody of natural justice. It was because of more than 10 years of blundering by an expanding military establishment that there were calls to appoint, after many years, a civilian administrator as defence secretary. The change however has not evinced greater sensitivity to the interests of civilians than one has seen from retired generals.

On 6th March 1995 Sellappa Perinparajah of Kanguveli sent an appeal to President Kumaratunge saying that he was in hiding from Lieutenant de Silva who sought to take his life. This was backed by the MP's letter to the Deputy Minister for Defence. Perinparajah had indicated that one of his sons had been shot dead by the army during the 80s and another had joined a militant group. Perinparajah was among the few in the area who dared to complain about the army's behaviour to persons who would be able to pursue the matter. As it turned out nothing was done. About early June 1995 another Perinparajah passing through paddy fields near Neelapola army camp was abducted. His body was discovered near an irrigation channel opposite Kanguveli, towards the Sivan Temple. Evidently it was realised that the wrong Perinparajah had been killed. About 12.00 noon on 24th June, S. Perinparajah was seen near the Mallikaithivu army camp and was not seen alive thereafter. His body was found the following day at Chakkaravattai, half a mile from Mallikaithivu along the Menkamam Road. The tragedy was communicated by the MP to the authorities in Colombo.

On 26th June the MP lodged a complaint regarding Kidnapillai Prabakaran and Chitravel Indran of Manalchenai, Mallikaithivu, who had been badly injured as the result of being assaulted by the army. The army also prevented them from being conveyed out of the area for medical treatment. All these are instances of serious misdemeanours that had been communicated by responsible persons to the authorities and where no restraint had been imposed on the conduct of military officers and personnel. The message effectively given to them was that all violations would be overlooked. It is a state of affairs where the repressive power of the army increases in proportion to its ineffectiveness.

What transpired after the massacre at Kumarapuram lacks a sense of gravity on the part of the authorities giving thus the impression of a cover up. The military top brass were aware that something serious had happened. Yet, until about 11.00 a.m. the next day no attempt was made to bring relief to the injured. Colonel Nihal Silva continued to remain in charge of the area while a military team which included his immediate superior, who too was answerable, was inquiring into the matter. The only action taken was evidently to shuffle the men between two neighbouring camps - according to some sources in the area, 59th Milepost to Palatthadichenai and vice versa. The people were then supposed to identify the culprits while

the wolf remained in charge of the sheep pen. This was superfluous once it was clear that the army was involved.

It was then up to the officers in charge to reveal why this had happened, why they could not stop the rampage though it went on for two hours, what orders they gave, who disobeyed, why there was no immediate relief brought to the injured and so on. The tragedy had been in the making owing to neglect, indifference or complicity from the very top. Would the demand of the people not to have a repetition of such behaviour be addressed by merely punishing a few louts for momentarily indulging in some of their base passions? Should not there be a commission of inquiry to fully go into the institutional aspects of such tragedies?

As we release this report, we were given to understand that the Government has instituted action on the basis of the committee's findings. We also understood that the action may go further than what we have been accustomed to in the past. If so the case for a full public inquiry by a commission is further strengthened. We also understand that two soldiers have been remanded over the killing at the quarry in Kanniya. [\[Top\]](#)

Coverage in the press:

Towards the end of October 1995, the LTTE massacred civilians in a number of villages towards the East when a sizeable contingent of the foreign press was here to cover the military operation in Jaffna. The LTTE was readily blamed for the massacres and foreign pressmen going to the Ministry of Information and Tourism for their accreditation were canvassed by officials to visit scenes of LTTE atrocities. We believe that foreign coverage of these atrocities was necessary to restrain the LTTE. But why this partiality as opposed to when Tamil civilians are massacred? During those massacres by the LTTE some reports brought out how LTTE cadre on the mission to massacre had gone among Sinhalese villagers they knew well and even raped women whom they had moved among on friendly terms. This was done by armed men in Kumarapuram as well. Should these not be treated as part of the common brutalisation and degradation the whole country has been going through, rather than place ethnic labels on individual events?

The reluctance to face up to tragedies that befall Tamil civilians is evident in the way some correspondents covered the massacre. Even on the 16th of February one major English daily gave headline prominence to security officials in Colombo claiming that there was no evidence of army involvement in the massacre. More than a week later the area had not been visited by any representatives of the local mainline or the foreign press.

An Historical Note:

The agricultural region which forms the hinterland of Mutur was referred to as the Province of Cottiar by colonial writers. It had a close connection with Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee and is known to have been very prosperous for much of the millennium until about the 18th century AD. Since the colonial era beginning in the 16th century, the people of the region had the misfortune of having their fate decided very much by external events and decisions taken elsewhere. From the onset of the European colonial era, shipping from rival European powers called regularly in the Bay of Cottiar for anchorage and resupply. The region was then ruled by a Wanniar referred to by Baldaeus as the "King of Cottiarum", with the King of Kandy as suzerain. Tenant in his book on Ceylon quotes the Dutch writer Valentyn who wrote that in 1675 there were constantly from 80 to 100 ships, bringing clothes

and other wares from the Coromandel coast of South India, to be bartered for arecanuts, palmyra sugar and timber. The country surrounding the port of Mutur was then said to have been 'full of villages; rich in arable and pasture lands; producing large quantities of rice for exportation, and importing merchandise annually to the value of 1,00,000 pagodas'. But within a century the country had fallen to ruin, mainly owing to conflict resulting from power struggles involving rival European powers who also formed alliances with local interests.

The state of the region is described in considerable detail by the Dutch resident administrator at Trincomalee, J.F. Van Senden, in the diary of his visit in June 1786 with a view to revitalising agricultural production. The population then was a shadow of what it had been in times of prosperity. What he saw were people who had lost much of their traditional skill and often living close to subsistence level. It was also Van Senden who made the first record of the Kanguveli Tamil inscription dealing with a large field dedicated to Koneswaram Temple. He was struck by the contrast between the prosperity signified by the inscription and what he then saw in the village. It was Van Senden who first contemplated colonising the area. He was thinking of importing Chinese and Javanese labour and then advised against it. He observed that the local inhabitants who had suffered from years of misrule and anarchy were also feeling insecure, and were easily provoked to rebellion. He also cited the assassination of his predecessor, Schorer. Van Senden recognised that it would not serve the economic interest of the colonial power to introduce changes while the people still felt insecure.

During the British era the first major irrigation works involving the Allai Tank were completed in 1928 and there was a gradual revival of the prosperity of the region. The first major colonisation effort was however undertaken after Independence in the late fifties as part of the Allai Scheme. Most of the new settlers came from Feeder Districts in the South chosen by the government. Tamil representatives had constantly complained that giving preference to settlers from outside the province was contrary to the Land Settlement Ordinance. Once a majoritarian-nationalist ideological motivation took precedence in such schemes, economics and the wellbeing of the people took second place. This motivation was reflected in the case of Neelapalai which was first meant for people of the area. During about early 1958 C.P. de Silva who was then the Minister concerned, brought rough elements from colonisation schemes around Polonnaruwa and settled them overnight at 'Neelapola'. RB1 was earlier given to Tamils and Muslims who were displaced by the 1958 communal violence. The land was later given to Sinhalese.

However many of the local inhabitants benefitted from the scheme and the area regained much of its former prosperity. Social relations between farmers from different communities remained fairly good. But the eruption of State instigated communal violence in the South during July 1983 had its repercussions in the region. We have already described the depopulation and destruction wrought mainly in the Tamil areas and the primitive conditions to which the Tamil people have once more become subject. Whatever else had changed over the last 200 years, if Van Senden were to come again he would readily recognize the people whom he had then described as being sullen and rebellious.

The current situation resulted because the ideological orientation of the State did not allow it to deal with the Tamil problem in a rational manner. When youths are rounded up in Trincomalee today those from Mutur are more suspect of having insurgent leanings, and security forces personnel often speak of Mutur as being the home of the LTTE. If there is any truth in this, it reflects the ineptness of the State. To start with the LTTE hardly had any base in the region. The militant loyalties of the population were mainly PLOTE and TELO in that

order. When the LTTE struck against the other groups in 1986, the population in that area would normally have become hostile to the LTTE. This is again reflected in the present aloofness of many villages. But on the other hand, the government forces had already subjected most of the villages to violence and displacement. Owing to this situation the people had no alternative but in some sense to develop sympathy for the LTTE, which is the only group that is fighting the State now.

As we had pointed out, the people of all communities are tired of the war and have shown a determination to resist the resurgence of communal violence among themselves. This provides an opportunity for peace provided the political initiative is advanced with sensitivity. But firstly the armed forces need to be subject to strict control and the people need to see that there is a determination by the State to respect human rights and be accountable.