

# University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)

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## A Tale of two Disasters and the Fickleness of Terror Politics

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### Summary of Concerns

In the aftermath of the Tsunami aid has poured into Sri Lanka from people and governments around the world. Sri Lanka's North and East witnessed a spontaneous outpouring of generosity that defied communal boundaries. A schoolmistress in Batticaloa-Amparai described the impact it created, "*At the bottom of their heart all Sri Lankans want to live in peace with one another. This is what the Tidal Wave taught us. What we saw is the people eager to help each other, forgetting all differences. Whatever community we belong to, there is something called Sri Lankan hospitality. The politicians should remember that when they get back to negotiations.*" It was a natural human response to a massive disaster that had no

political context. This help is desperately needed and gratefully welcomed. With relief and reconstruction efforts underway it is essential the process be open, transparent and accountable. We must not squander the good will of those who have so generously come to our assistance.

Both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have an unquestionable moral responsibility to ensure that disaster victims receive prompt and appropriate assistance and should dedicate resources and infrastructure to help them. This requires setting aside political differences, overcoming decades of neglect and bureaucratic dysfunction and allowing every available and potential source of support and assistance to contribute to the effort of rebuilding our communities. As important as anything else is the need to give hope to the people, rather than contribute to their trauma and despair.

Giving hope means a readiness to work with each other and being generous in acknowledging the good done by others. Testimonies given to us by witnesses in Batticaloa-Amparai, Trincomalee and Vadamaratchy tell the same story: personnel from the country's armed forces – the STF, Army and Navy – in the wake of the Tsunami, left their weapons and threw themselves into the dangerous waters to rescue civilians, in some instances losing their lives. In the aftermath, neighbouring Sinhalese and Muslim communities and the armed forces stretched themselves in caring for those affected, and are still doing so.

Much of these highly remarkable developments have gone unreported or pushed to the sidelines of the news concerning the North-East. A part of the answer is the incompetence of the state media, indifference of the Colombo media and LTTE propaganda networks having established a firm foothold, at least to confuse the international media. The LTTE, and the Tamil media controlled by it, largely ignored this non-partisan outpouring of humanity and from day-one started attacking the armed forces and, contrary to authentic reports from the ground, accused them of harassment, blocking rations, stopping a Russian medical team and burning a refugee camp among other violations. It accused the Government of discrimination in the distribution of relief and waxed loud that no one was helping the Tamils. By the time the foreign media came in large numbers, they lost sight of the one-sidedness of these claims and provocations, and started talking about deep hatreds and the ethnic conflict.

This in short was how the LTTE positioned itself to make political capital of a humanitarian crisis lacking political content and to position its agency, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation, to act as the sole body dispensing relief in areas it controls and throughout the North-East. The troubling political implications need not be spelt out. We are concerned that the international community may forfeit this opportunity for permanent peace, a political settlement and reconciliation, by allowing their misjudgments (which have amply been in evidence these last three years), the LTTE's ploys, and the Southern polity's incompetence and opportunism, dictate the agenda.

The LTTE established the TRO, which became increasingly visible in the early 1990s, as a mechanism to raise money for refugee relief and has long solicited donations from Sri Lanka's large expatriate Tamil community and is institutionally bound to the leadership of the LTTE. It has a history of discouraging independent initiatives both in Sri Lanka and abroad, and there have long been informed allegations that money the TRO collects for reconstruction has been diverted to other purposes, principally military. These allegations have been supported by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (*'CSIS warned Ottawa of terror*

*fronts...'*, *National Post*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2000), and by the LTTE's former Eastern strongman and leading insider, Karuna.

International donors and all concerned individuals seeking effective ways to assist survivors of this disaster should demand accountability and transparency from the TRO and all other partner agencies as a condition of cooperation. This should only be for purposes of urgent relief, avoiding measures that confer legitimacy on the LTTE's terror machine by the back door. They should at the same time encourage and support the development of social coping mechanisms that do not rely on the LTTE, including especially independent civil society organisations and initiatives, and should continue to press the LTTE to stop threatening others who are trying to do humanitarian work. The TRO's present demand that all major relief and reconstruction work should be entrusted to it and it alone is totally unacceptable, and has upset many donors who came to help and to work, leaving them with little alternative but to go back. We shall expand on these concerns in the sequel.

## **1. Introduction**

The tidal wave, which devastated the southern and eastern coasts of Sri Lanka and other Asian nations killing more than a hundred thousand people, will occupy the world's attention and the headlines for some weeks to come. Although it took some time to realise the scale of the tragedy, the world has awakened to the disaster and responded generously to the relief and reconstruction effort. The scope of the disaster is still difficult to digest: the loss of lives; the horrific stories of families torn apart and carried away by the Tsunami; the thousands of children orphaned by the wrath of the sea. The trauma of those directly affected is almost incomprehensible.

For Sri Lanka this unprecedented natural disaster comes in the train of decades of man-made disasters – communal strife and war. Among most Sri Lankans, this natural disaster has thrown up a spontaneous urge to reach out across man-made differences and help the needy and stricken. Even as the Government's response and capability was felt to be grossly inadequate, whether in the North-East or the South, the spontaneous help from men, women and children from all walks of life made all the difference.

These are the bright spots. War is at least temporarily in abeyance. But the fault lines that were prominent before the disaster still persist. Unless we come to terms with them, the present potential for peace and unity will be lost. The alternative Tamil web site *Thenee.com* reflected editorially:

*“Tsunami (the tidal wave) is an angel that came to teach lessons to all communities...It reduced us to a level where even the dead are indistinguishable as Tamil, Muslim, or Sinhalese. Nature taught us that in death we are all one. Even as international agencies are struggling to protect the victims [gunmen] shot dead a youth [from a rival faction] who went to Porativu [in Batticaloa] to look for his disaster-stricken family. Those trained in murder as their profession are incapable of any goodness or humanity...It takes no genius to breed hatred against our brothers. No ability or talent is required to exalt one's pride and ego, humiliate others and earn their hatred. Tsunami has taught us that learning to earn the love of others is the most precious lesson.”*

For the LTTE the natural disaster, which crippled its war machine, has been a bitter lesson that terror is a fickle asset. Before the disaster it manipulated the international community into

a programme of appeasement by threatening the discontinuation of the ceasefire. In the days following the disaster, the LTTE proclaimed a 'national emergency', implicitly thrusting itself as a state, and demanding international aid on its own terms.

The Tigers have done the Tamil cause the worst possible service in destroying its moral and democratic content and identifying it with terror. Today the victims under LTTE control along much of the seaboard from Vaharai to Pachchilapalai in the north need all the aid they can get to rebuild their lives.

Many Tamils all over the world and in the North-East wanted to share the agony of the tragedy not only with their own community but also with the larger community in Sri Lanka and others in the region. Those who are socially and politically conscious would like to be part of the humanitarian effort. But they feel powerless not only due to the scale of tragedy, but also because of the manipulation and control the LTTE continues to exert over any independent initiative. It is an extraordinary imposition on people in dire need. The LTTE at various levels attempts to shield survivors from human contact with outsiders for fear that it might pose a challenge to their narrow ideology. An example totally out of character with the victims' need, and the solemnity of the tragedy that bypasses human boundaries, is the LTTE warning by loudspeaker the people of Valvettithurai to disengage from the warm discussion they were having with Prime Minister Rajapakse on relief.

Further, the social havoc the LTTE wreaked by imposing itself as the 'sole representative' in every sphere of life extends to relief and rehabilitation work. The LTTE has insisted that its agency, the TRO, is the only force on the ground fit to receive aid and rehabilitate the victims. It may be true that the TRO has substantially more resources at its disposal than most local initiatives, but the TRO has a very poor record of accountability. The large sums of money it collected for 'refugees and relief' prior to 2002 were almost certainly laundered for military purposes as indicated by the deprivations it imposed on people on the ground, even short-changing them on government relief (see our reports for that period). We give below indications of its strong links to LTTE intelligence.

Still, the reality is that owing to the authoritarian control the LTTE exerts on the Tamil community, and its overt (very obvious to locals) control of even the government machinery in the North-East to service its ends, any humanitarian work inevitably must deal with the LTTE. Those who want to support their community independently of the TRO face various forms of pressure from slander campaigns to direct threats unleashed by the LTTE propaganda machinery, locally and internationally.

Many who have watched the long drawn-out conflict in Sri Lanka have expressed hope that the present tragedy will force an end to the political stalemate and bring peace. Indeed there is real potential for all three communities and the leaders to learn lessons from the disaster that could improve the prospects for a peaceful settlement.

Unfortunately, despite the confusion arising from the blame game, it is not clear to us that the tragedy has had any impact on the workings of the LTTE. Its dual efforts to inhibit all independent thought and action and maintain control of all material resources continue.

The clearest evidence of this is the line the LTTE is promoting in the vernacular press. Before the disaster the LTTE's propaganda machine was hard at work building up war hysteria. In its wake LTTE's statements have played on the desperation of survivors to

encourage communal hatred and ensure the LTTE's control over relief. Unless the LTTE changes its attitude, the victims of the recent tragedy who are among those in greatest need would suffer undue neglect.

In the current context, where effective relief and rehabilitation is so urgently necessary, the LTTE's attitudes present a substantial challenge to the international community and to local actors intent on reconstruction and peace. Though hidden by the regime of terror, the Tamil public, both locally and abroad, was groping for an alternative, even as the ordinary Sinhalese were far in advance of peacemakers, who largely were stuck in the mud of an outmoded ethnic conflict. The tidal wave precipitated changes in attitude that were already at work deep within people.

## **2. A Sea of Change: The Untold Story of the Tidal Wave**

To those whose memories of the armed forces are associated with the massacres and disappearances of 1990 and before, the tidal wave brought new revelations. The story was the same everywhere along the government-controlled seaboard along the East. It was spontaneous, un-coordinated and not part of conventional military training.

When disaster struck on 26<sup>th</sup> December, the Army had its camps along the Vadamaratchy coast, and itself suffered much loss. Yet many people testified to the courage and unselfishness shown by the Army in helping and rescuing people. A fisherman from Katkoyalam east of Pt. Pedro who was himself rescued by the Army, testified that the Army helped all those it could and was uniformly kind to everyone. As with many soldiers, this man had been hurt when thrown against barbed wire fencing along the coast by the force of the wave.

Along the seaboard of Trincomalee town and north of it, the Navy was the only body at hand to help the civilians (mainly Tamil and Muslim). Around 8<sup>th</sup> Mile Post (Kuchchaveli Road), in the wake of the turbulence the Navy asked the civilians to run inland to Agampodai Hill, and later in the afternoon brought food and water for them.

Kamaraj, a toddy tapper who shinnied up a coconut tree in Gopalapuram had a clear view of the mischief wrought by the tidal wave. He saw a navy man braving the flood and going in to clutch at two children. Then he saw another wave, which swept all three away. In Velloor, the corpse of a naval man clutching that of a child whom he tried to save was recovered, with his shoelace caught in a fence. These are actions, which, surely, cast a new ray of hope after decades of communal strife and should be the cornerstone of a new beginning.

Similar reports came from coastal areas close to Batticaloa Town, Kallady, Amirthakali and Navalady. Testimonies were of the Army going into the water, pulling out people and getting them to safety. Strangely, what the media largely ignored was not lost on Batticaloa people abroad. A Batticaloa man said that he received telephone calls from several of his friends in Australia and New Zealand, asking him to convey their gratitude to the Army Brigadier in Batticaloa for the good work done by his men.

In the Kalmunai and Thirukkivil areas of the Amparai District, people experienced 3 waves, and when the sea was seen to be wild, warnings were shouted and people ran. A number of old people succumbed. The STF in these areas has been commended for leaving their arms behind, going out into the water, pulling people out and getting them to safety. They worked

hard also at providing transport and basic relief, and the people are very grateful for it. Food came from neighbouring Muslims and Sinhalese.

Even more remarkable was the LTTE's behaviour. In all these areas where the LTTE had been unremarkable in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, started asserting itself subsequently, trying to take over the refugee camps and demanding that all relief material and work should be controlled by them. It launched a virulent campaign against the armed forces attacking them with blatant falsehoods.

The LTTE accused the Army through its media monopoly of burning a refugee camp in Kudathanai, Vadamaratchy, supplying bad rice to refugees and of obstructing relief. The Army cleared the road from Valvettithurai to Pt Pedro and made it usable to traffic. The LTTE claimed through its media that the Sea Tigers and the people had cleared the road.

Where the needs of the people who had suffered a grave tragedy were concerned, the LTTE's compulsions worked to the detriment of the people. At the refugee camp in Varani in the North, the LTTE turned down clean drinking water supplied by the Army. Everywhere people, especially foreigners, bringing relief were turned away, unless they were prepared to give everything to the LTTE.

Among the organisations that did relief work in Batticaloa in the immediate aftermath were EHED, World Vision, Oxfam, ZOA and UNICEF. On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2005, a rehabilitation meeting was held in Batticaloa, with the GA as chairman and various NGOs, foreign relief representatives anxious to help, religious leaders and the university vice chancellor in attendance. The meeting started with a discussion of division of labour – one organisation to supply tents, one in charge of sanitation and so on. The TRO suddenly ruled that in Manmunai Division (Batticaloa Town and environs), it alone would be in charge of relief work and the others should keep out. Similarly for Kiran and Vaharai. Though deeply upset no one dared to protest. One organisation, which brought relief for refugees in Batticaloa Central College, had to take it back when the LTTE-TRO demanded that everything be handed over to them. The donors instead distributed the materials to the needy in villages in the area. The victims were being victimised again.

Why was the LTTE behaving so? Again roughly the same answer came from residents all the way from Vadamaratchy to Komary and Pottuvil: The LTTE is afraid that the people had rejected the LTTE and turned to the Army (Navy, STF). It wanted to assert its power through taking over the refugee camps and establishing lines of patronage. The LTTE had been thrown off balance. It all started with the LTTE's visions of grandeur in creating intense war hysteria, until the very last day when the tidal wave struck.

### **3. 26<sup>th</sup> November – 25<sup>th</sup> December: War Fever**

The LTTE was actively fomenting war fever from about the time of the Leader's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday through a series of provocations apparently calculated to drive the Army over the edge. The fever reached its highest pitch on 25<sup>th</sup> December, the eve of the tidal wave. It was the kind of brinkmanship – all or nothing – that has repeatedly triggered war in the past.

On 19<sup>th</sup> November 2004, the LTTE killed two youths in Valvettithurai and engineered disturbances after blaming the killings on the Army. On 26<sup>th</sup> November, the Leader's birthday, the LTTE attacked with swords two soldiers who had gone out of the Nunavil army

camp and announced through its media that they had been attacked by ‘persons who followed them’. Continuing this vein of provocation, the LTTE’s Tamil language website *Nitharsanam*, a journal thought to have been established by the LTTE’s intelligence wing and aimed largely at an expatriate audience, reported on 19<sup>th</sup> December that ‘Military Intelligence’ persons were moving in the nearby Mirusuvil area in the night with swords and knives, scaring the civilians who were reminded of an army atrocity five years earlier. The LTTE peace secretariat was quoted saying that people intended to inform the SLMM. The matter was not heard of again.

The North-East had faced much flooding since November on account of the north-east monsoon. Far from providing relief to the people, an LTTE leaflet dated 15<sup>th</sup> December, issued in the name of ‘*Patriots’ Organisation*’ instead pledged military victory: ‘*We shall build dams in Jaffna before the floods come*’. Its import was that the Government had speedily rejected the Leader’s invitation to talks in his Heroes Day address, there is no hope for peace in the South that is preparing for war and the Army is hunting Tamil youth from Valvettithurai to Mannar. It declared: “*The Tigers too are ready for war. We invite you to bear arms and rout the Sinhalese forces. The Sinhalese forces are watching and longing for an opportunity to murder and torture the people living in invaded Tamil areas. In this situation the only places where young Tamil men and women can live with dignity are LTTE camps... Therefore take defensive measures before danger comes. Hear you men and women, swell the ranks of the Tamil army, join the Tigers and rout the Sinhalese forces*”.

There was also, according to reports from activists, heavy Sea Tiger activity along the Mullaitivu coast with secret preparations in fenced off zones. It is also notable that for some months increasing restrictions on fisher folk were being imposed by Sea Tigers. This was the root cause of the clash between the LTTE and Gurunagar fisher folk in Jaffna last August. A week before Christmas (18<sup>th</sup> Dec.) 12 fishermen were assaulted off Pallai by the Sea Tigers, of whom 3 were hospitalised in Jaffna (*Tamilnewsweb*).

The LTTE also launched an ambitious recruitment drive in several areas. To give this momentum, the LTTE coerced leading members of civil society to form committees to organise human chains and protests against the Government’s alleged war preparations and violations. A committee of five in Thenmaratchy included Chandrasekaran (retired principal), Arunthavapalan (vice principal of Drieberg College) and Balachandran (chairman, Chavakacheri, MPCS). A long list of Tiger killings, including that of prominent civil society activist Maclan Atputharaja in Chavakacheri, would amply explain why people could not refuse the LTTE.

Undercover of ‘legitimate political work’ permitted under the cease-fire, the LTTE had several times during the last three years forced school children onto the streets in provocative demonstrations against the Army. This time LTTE recruiters descended *en masse* to accost children in schools and streets. Their message to the children was: “*You are marked. When war begins soon, the Army will kill you. You are safe only in LTTE camps*”.

Police sources in Trincomalee quoted in the press reported that in 3 weeks since Great Heroes Day, the LTTE had taken away 400 children in the district for training in Sampur. Reports from other districts also ran into hundreds. People were being advised to sell all except their most precious items.

What made the significant difference this time was that the LTTE through force, murder, Norway’s appeasement diplomacy and the Government’s short-sightedness, had acquired a

complete monopoly of the propaganda space in the North-East. Through provocations against the Army, leaflets, demonstrations and replaying the disappearances caused by the Army in 1996, the LTTE frightened people into believing that war was imminent. There had been a gradual movement of people, especially relatives and caste sub-groups from which the LTTE had recruited significantly, into the Vanni.

The LTTE was also greatly irritated by the joint Indo-Lanka naval exercise and several of its 'analysts' dutifully attacked the exercise as an obstacle to peace. We list below in chronological order, some of the tokens of war fever featured in the Tamil media in late December.

24<sup>th</sup> December: Latest leaflet from the '*Patriot's Organisation*' (*Tamilnewsweb*): "*Come to harvest the land. The enemy has given us the opportunity. We can again capture the land. We also need a second force to protect the lands captured. Young men and maidens, come. Join us.*"

An *Uthayan* editorial called the Government of Sri Lanka's agenda for talks with the LTTE a smokescreen: "*The Tigers who have obtained a mandate as sole representatives of the Tamil people, will not agree to any agenda for peace talks contrary to that mandate.*" (Though *Uthayan* is supposedly an independent daily from Jaffna, note the similarity in tone and content to contemporary items from the LTTE media cited below.)

By this time the Cease-Fire Agreement under Norway's supervision was looking extremely bizarre. While the LTTE's actions, provocations, so-called political activity and intimidation were in blatant disregard of the CFA; it kept reiterating to the international community its commitment to a negotiated settlement. Norway and the SLMM had clearly marginalised themselves. As though leading to a climax, the following two ominous items appeared in succession in the LTTE's web site *Nitharsanam* on 25<sup>th</sup> December, both suggesting that a major event was pending:

*"The November (Karthikai) blossom is a month old. Chandrika must take appropriate steps within one year. The National Leader's words (his Great Heroes Day Speech annually after nightfall on his birthday, 26<sup>th</sup> November) are as rare as the November blossom. They are not words wandering away in the air or dissolving in the sea, but are seeds planted firmly on a hill. The Great Heroes Day speech is a unique experience in the region. It is awaited and listened to eagerly by devotees and enemies alike...It is the starting point of a gigantic deed".* [Quoted from *Eelantham* daily of 24<sup>th</sup> Dec.]

25<sup>th</sup> December (*Nitharsanam*): "*There has been no response to the National Leader's message delivered a month ago, based on the people's desires. The Southern political leadership has not responded to the National leader's words "We cannot be imprisoned in a political vacuum any more". We may thus conclude that there looms the prospect of a massive change in the political sphere.*"

The same day *TamilNet* quoted from the speech of Mr. Subesh, Vavuniya District president of the Consortium of Tamil Eelam students at a literary function: "*If war is thrust upon us, we have a duty to defend our people [!]*".

If the Tamil press was any indication, a resumption of war appeared almost certain. But what happened next was totally unforeseen. When the Tsunami struck, the number of lives lost in



such a short space of time was of the order of those killed in two and a half decades of ethnic conflict. The LTTE media men who poetically compared the Leader's words of exactly a month earlier with the November Blossom overlooked a simple fact of nature known to those close to the land. The November (Karthikai) Blossom though red and pretty has a poisonous root.

#### **4. Nature Strikes: The LTTE's response**

While the response to the disaster by the people, agencies and world leaders was spontaneous, the LTTE leadership failed to recognise the calamity as a shared human tragedy. On the day of the disaster (26<sup>th</sup> December) LTTE political leader Tamilchelvan appealed for international assistance and *TamilNet* quoted a source close to the LTTE as floating the idea of declaring a 'national emergency'. *TamilNet* itself was more sanguine in its expectations. In reporting the same day the TRO's call for help from expatriate Tamils, it took pains to describe the TRO as an independent rehabilitation organisation registered with the 'Government of Sri Lanka'.

Aid goes hand in hand with journalistic coverage. Anyone who has been to the Vanni knows that to leave the Kandy (A9) trunk road and visit an interior village involves annoying checks and bureaucratic procedures. Despite the CFA, the Vanni remained a closed militarised region.

Instead of flexibility in the interest of the victims the LTTE and its media published story after inflammatory story aimed at stirring up Tamil resentment against other communities and the Government. They claimed initially that the Tamils and in particular the Vanni victims were being ignored by the Government, the international community and the media, while only the TRO and the LTTE were helping the victims. The English language *TamilNet*, which is read by many non-Sri Lankans interested in events in the North and East was a bit subtler, while *Nitharsanam*, catering to a Tamil-reading audience of ideologically pure expatriates drifted further into fantasy.

On the day of the disaster itself *Nitharsanam* had already attacked UNICEF and UNHCR for not coming to the aid of victims in the North-East, and accused the Government of understating losses in this region. Later articles alleged that the southern media was being pressured not to report the extent of damage in the North-East; charged that an excess of aid was going to Galle and Matara, and claimed that Sinhalese gangs with the connivance of the police were forcibly redirecting vehicles carrying supplies to the North-East to the South. Playing to communal sympathies the website also stated that many Tamil corpses could not be recovered, while thousands of Sinhalese and Muslim corpses were being transported and buried in the jungle.

On 28<sup>th</sup> December, *Nitharsanam* went on the offensive against efforts by dissenting Tamils in the diaspora to identify alternatives to the TRO, publishing a letter purportedly from a Denmark resident Tamil accusing some local *fat cat* Tamils of blocking Danish government aid to the TRO. Pointing to the Sri Lankan Army supposedly blocking relief supplies to Tamils in the East, added, "*Even if the world is destroyed Sinhalese racism will never be destroyed.*"

It should be noted that *Nitharsanam's* principal use to the LTTE is in setting the party line for other Tamil media. Its stories, often light on facts and heavy on rhetoric, come out quickly,

and signal the editorial line to be followed by other media who share its brand of nationalism or simply wish to stay in the LTTE's good graces. Its stories employ a heavy chauvinist rhetoric that is common to many Diaspora Tamil journals and frequently twist the truth in reports of important incidents, attempting to sow doubt and division among critics. Unlike *Tamilnet*, *Nitharsanam* regularly targets dissenters, particularly in the expatriate community.

*Tamilnet's* line, though similar is delivered in English and generally steers clear of heavy-handed chauvinism and personal attacks. It dutifully reported the LTTE's messages as they were delivered through its spokesmen and surrogates. On 27<sup>th</sup> December TNA (LTTE) MP Joseph Pararajasingham said that at a 2 hour long meeting called by Prime Minister Rajapakse to discuss disaster relief, the North-East was discussed for only 5 minutes, and that too after he raised the matter. Therefore he said that they (TNA) have decided to ask the international community to send all aid directly to the North-East (i.e. TRO).

By 30<sup>th</sup> December *Nitharsanam* was implying that it was the Sri Lankan security forces and not the LTTE that had prevented foreign journalists from going to the Vanni and had redirected a 16-member team of Russian medical experts who tried to enter the Vanni to Trincomalee, citing security reasons. Were there any truth in these allegations, they would have become a major issue and the Government would have been taken to task. *TamilNet* generally kept away from these. Other sources and the Army said that it was the LTTE that turned back the Russian team.

We have observed for some time that the BBC (Tamil Service) has, while parading its objectivity (a reputation it has justly held for most of its 60years in existence) sometimes contributed to the LTTE's propaganda efforts. S. Nagarajah writing in *Asian Tribune* reviewed the coverage of Vaharai on 29<sup>th</sup> December by two Batticaloa-based correspondents Shanthi Selvadurai for the BBC Sinhalese Service and Uthayakumar for the Tamil Service.

Selvadurai reported the LTTE Vaharai leader Arivu's allegation that the Government was not providing immediate relief to the area and also the Government Agent's reply that he had been unable to send relief because of disrupted communications and transport. Uthayakumar reported only Arivu's allegations.

Selvadurai also highlighted Sinhalese residents and Buddhist monks from the neighbouring Polonnaruwa District going to the LTTE-controlled Vaharai area with lorry loads of food and urgent relief. (These Sinhalese had periodically been victims of LTTE attacks.) Uthayakumar only reported seeing some private citizens taking relief supplies. On the same day Weerasinghe reported for the Sinhalese Service that the monks and Sinhalese villagers were received warmly by the LTTE commander and cadres. Weerasinghe quoted the local LTTE political chief Jaya describing the action of the Buddhist monks and Sinhalese villagers as the triumph of humanity over pretty religious and racial squabbles. The Tamil Service blacked out this most newsworthy aspect of the proceedings.

The Government machinery is very bureaucratic, and is often slow to respond to major disasters. Further it is an undeniable fact that long years of Sinhalese chauvinist politics crippled the ability of minorities to advocate assistance on their own behalf. Still, in this case the Government insisted that it had routinely, as always, released money to the local Government Agents to purchase and transport the assessed needs from the nearest depots.

The Army in a statement of 30<sup>th</sup> December contradicted the LTTE's claims of no help from the Government, saying that during the last two days a total of 370 lorries laden with relief entered the LTTE-controlled Vanni from the North and South in accordance with requests made. The Army also confirmed that contrary to LTTE claims, the Russian medical specialists had been refused entry by the LTTE, and gave instances in Vavuniya and Trincomalee where it had to intervene when the LTTE tried to remove relief from private donors.

## **5. Delivery is subject to weather conditions and availability of transport.**

By 30<sup>th</sup> December, teams comprising the President or Prime Minister with other leading members of Government visited all affected areas in the North-East. The people, despite attempts by LTTE agitators to discredit the visit, undoubtedly welcomed the Prime Minister's team visiting Jaffna. At several places LTTE organised picketers sometimes posing as university students, ostensibly to protest the presence of the JVP's Wimal Weerawansa in the delegation. In Jaffna and much of the North-East the people were desperate and appreciative of the Army's, STF's and Navy's work in bringing relief to the victims, and there were even initial reports of LTTE cadres working alongside the Army in Jaffna.

Here we see that as in the past, the LTTE has permitted co-operation with state forces when it was necessary to secure assistance, just as it accepted government rations for its IDPs throughout the conflict, and help in facilitating travel and other logistical needs during the ceasefire. At the same time, the LTTE continues to very minutely monitor the people, ensuring that they do not look for alternative representation or engineers so-called "peoples protests." Its organised hooligans kill opponents they label "traitors," and feed the Tamil press with the relentless theme of untrustworthiness of the Sinhalese governments and its politicians.

But the reality of the situation is such that even the TNA MPs and mainstream Tamil press now and then need to come out with the truth. The Asian Tribune reported Trincomalee's TNA MP, Mr. Sampanthan being asked about the paucity of government help. Sampanthan was quoted responding spontaneously, "*Not only the Government, but even the Sinhalese people are rushing to help us*".

The Colombo-based *Thinakkural* (30. Dec) another Tamil paper that generally promotes the LTTE agenda reported a moving example of Sinhalese good neighbourliness. 50 lorries loaded with rice, sugar and cooked food arrived from Uhana, Amparai, Kandy, Mahiyangana and Polannaruwa with relief for the Tamil coastal villages north of Kalmunai. Owing to bridges and roads being damaged between Periyaniawanai and Onthachimadam, Periya kallar and Kottai Kallar among other areas were isolated. These Sinhalese carried relief on their heads and shoulders and walked distances such as 5 miles to succour victims not reached so far.

The *Daily News* featured a photograph of two women cadres in the East shaking hands with the President. But *Nitharsanam*, continued to play its game in a disgusting manner. An entry dated 30<sup>th</sup> December described the party of 'the Sinhalese people's political leader' Mahinda Rajapakse as having come to reap political capital in the Tamil people's sorrow. It claimed that the delegation including JVP's Weerawansa and EPDP members were chased and beaten by Tamil women bearing *ekel* brooms, who also threw human waste and rotten rice at them.

*Nitharshanam* also helpfully provided some pictures that showed some male ruffians holding *ekel* brooms.

The TULF leader Mr. Ananthasangari, in a statement, reviewed reports of the ministerial team that had visited Jaffna and testimonies of help the victims had received from the Army and appealed to the LTTE: “*This is not the time to revive enmities!*” However much the LTTE tried to discredit the Sinhalese people and their leaders (often attempting to forcibly take over relief brought by volunteers from the South), the ordinary people in the North-East were responding warmly to humanitarian initiatives from the South, and temporarily at least barriers were being broken. In areas relatively isolated from centres of ideological control, such as Vaharai, LTTE cadres were also responding. TNA MP Sampanthan in Trincomalee was moved, momentarily at least, to be his former self and cast away the disguise tailored in Killinochchi.

In the final reckoning, after being hysterically accused of neglecting the North-East, the Sinhalese leaders had, for a start, disregarded security risks and visited victims everywhere in the North-East they could reasonably be expected to go. The Tamils’ sole representatives, except for Tamilchelvan issuing statements from Killinochchi, were so scarce as not even to have broadcast a message. Perhaps the sharp change in their fortunes in a few hours from 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> December was too much to digest.

## **6. Hints of the Mullaitivu Scene**

Mullaitivu is on the eastern seaboard of the LTTE-controlled Vanni, which suffered heavy loss of life from the tidal wave in addition to heavy physical damage. Before the foreign press was allowed in following or just before Tamilchelvan’s meeting with donors and the media on 30<sup>th</sup> December, reports in the LTTE media spoke almost exclusively of civilian losses such as 2000 in Mullaitivu town, 1500 bodies in Puthukkudiyiruppu and 150 in an LTTE-run children’s home. The same media spoke of huge losses to the Sri Lankan armed forces.

After the foreign media and Southern civilians were allowed in, initial reports were highly complimentary of the LTTE’s efficiency in cleaning up operations. What was missing from these reports was even more significant – organised civil society participation in these operations. The people as it were must look to the LTTE to do everything for them. That was the image the LTTE was trying to promote and sell, but what was the social cost of this regime?

## **7. Traces of Sanity in Killinochi**

On 28<sup>th</sup> December, *Nitharsanam* announced the first move attributed to the reclusive LTTE leader. In a manner suggestive of hurt and neglect, the announcement said that in the absence of relief from other nations, the National Leader ordered Rs. 300 million (USD 3 million) from the Tamil Eelam Treasury for Tamil ‘*uravukal*’ (relationships) to be provided with food, clothing and medicines. Perhaps someone there thought this rather peevish and un-statesmanlike for someone with evidently more than a modest treasury. The next day (29<sup>th</sup>) a facsimile of a letter purportedly signed by the Leader offered his condolences to victims from all communities, while inviting international relief.

A statement on a more contrite note went out (29<sup>th</sup> Dec.) from Fr. Karunaratnam, chairman of the LTTE’s human rights organisation. He said: “*The Tamil motherland has suffered an*

*unprecedented disaster. Coastal villages have been levelled. People who bore the burden of war have been further devastated by turbulence of the sea.”* The statement while praising the generosity of Tamils living overseas, pointed out that only international agencies have the capacity for reconstruction. It appealed to the Government and international media to publicise the extent of damage.

The latter was a fair suggestion, again hinting at greater access to journalists and outsiders. The Government media has lacked the capacity to win over and give confidence to Tamil listeners. This is the legacy of years of abuse and neglect by government forces combined in recent years with LTTE terror that has inhibited quality Tamil reporting in the state media. For example, Tamil broadcasters in the state media rather than insist on their freedom to write their own bulletins so that they would be relevant to listeners in the North-East, play safe with everyone by reading out bland translations of Sinhalese or English bulletins. Creative people find it difficult to work with the government media, but alternative voices have little space in other Tamil media. As everyone is now aware, LTTE terror reaches the South, no less than the North and East.

The following day (30<sup>th</sup>) LTTE political leader Tamilchelvan had discussions with representatives of donors in Killinochi followed by a press conference on a more conciliatory note. He denied that the LTTE had earlier turned back vehicles bringing aid. While attempting to sound open as regards working with the Government and the International community, the undertone was that the Government and the international community are to work under the Liberation Tigers.

Asked, “*You said the Government and the international community were not helping you, how is the situation now?*”, Tamilchelvan replied: “*The TRO and other internal organisations were facing the problem. It was only after we publicised the problem through the media [as requested by Karunaratnam?] that the Government and the international organisations came rushing to commit themselves*”. Tamilchelvan added that some international organisations had started work the previous day. [*Nitharshanam*].

## **8. LTTE abroad: The TRO-Pottu Amman Nexus**

The Karuna split broke the LTTE’s totalitarian spell over Tamils abroad and more questions were being raised about its money collections and especially its relief and rehabilitation arm the TRO. Prior to 2002 at least, it is hard to find evidence that the millions collected for Tamil refugees and war victims at home reached those in need. And the experience of people on the ground was extortion, dire poverty, large-scale theft of government rations and funds directed to them, and compulsory unpaid labour and military service, with the threat of losing all government benefits due to them if they refused. These are conditions UTHR(J) documented in successive reports, most notably in Bulletins 19 – 23.

Many who rejected LTTE politics, but wanted to help, were left without any choice and were pressured to associate with the TRO. We can find many well-meaning individuals working with the TRO, but the fact remains that its primary function has been as a front organisation, first to raise money and later to liaise with international NGOs. For years the TRO was tasked with monitoring, coordinating and controlling NGO programmes at the behest of the LTTE. This included blocking specific initiatives, prohibiting access to areas or villages deemed off limits by the LTTE (for whatever reason), and limiting co-ordinated efforts between different NGOs. Many overseas volunteers came back disillusioned.

Its lack of transparency and history of strong-arm tactics abroad was also catching up with it. More and more Canadian Tamils were asking questions about where the money raised by the TRO was going. In the months leading up to 25<sup>th</sup> December, the TRO was facing a worrying decline of contributions. An important event was the Human Rights Watch report on the LTTE's use of child soldiers and the meetings by the HRW in London and Toronto where the issue was placed before Tamil expatriate audiences. Among other things an HRW representative raised questions about expatriate donations to LTTE front organisations, and warned of their potential misuse to support the LTTE's recruitment of child soldiers. This reference received prominent attention in the Canadian press. LTTE supporters in Canada reacted with anger and HRW received veiled threats against Tamils who associated with the organisation.

On 21<sup>st</sup> December, in an item titled '*Misfortune in moves to help Tamils amid misfortune*', *Nitharsanam* charged that some media stations in Canada were obstructing the TRO's appeal to Tamils overseas to contribute towards flood relief back home. It accused the other stations of placing barren policies before the people to divide (*kooru poda* as in cutting a fish) [and sell] them. The next day under the feature section *Vayatkarai Erambu*, *Nitharsanam* attacked personally one Sittha (unidentified), evidently targeting one or more Canadian Tamil broadcasters having different names asking, "*Will the Leader ever forgive those who seek to destroy the World Tamil Movement, which Tamils in Canada have chosen as their Representatives, its subsidiaries and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation? How ridiculous for them to imagine that the National Leader does not know the games they play to safeguard their livelihood?*"

The following day (23<sup>rd</sup>), the menace in the warning was stepped up in a piece attributed to the News Division of *Nitharsanam* titled '*Warning to those collecting money for corrupt purposes*', It said: "*Funds are being collected by individuals and groups, media organisations and Tamil traitors among them, using the people's sorrow as their pretext. They are being watched closely. All that you collect by the way of funds or gifts should be handed over to the needy through the TRO alone... [which must approve such initiatives]. Only the IBC (International Broadcasting Corporation) from London has approval to collect funds...*" This item appears to have been removed about 31<sup>st</sup> December.

Examine the language: "traitors" ... "They are being watched...." "The Leader will not forgive....", And to an unknown Canadian broadcaster: "His closest associates who went to the Vanni have told [LTTE intelligence] all about him." (*Vayatkarai Erambu*, 22 Dec.): What kind of relief charity is this TRO whose patrons use such intimidatory language, not against people who are stingy or heartless, but against those who want to help, but through other agencies? Where in the world does an agent of compassion, which appeals to the heart, threaten extreme violence to get its funds?

In fact the LTTE's move to reverse, if not arrest, the movement of funds away from the TRO was going on simultaneously in other parts of the world as well.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December, *Nitharsanam* attacked those who contribute relief to organisations other than the TRO in a piece in *Vayatkarai Erambu* titled '*The Cuckoo sings sweetly, cannot build a nest or hatch*'. It referred to the TRO's appeal for urgent flood relief and compared those who contribute to groups other than the TRO to thieves or cuckoos, which lay eggs in other birds' nests. The message in plain terms was that a person who even once lays a contribution in any 'nest' other than the TRO's is a traitor, and once a traitor would always be

regarded a traitor. The same piece hinted at the earlier Human Rights Watch meeting in Toronto as having left *'bitter feelings'* among people.

*Nitharsanam* of 23<sup>rd</sup> December targeted two individuals Mathy Kumarathurai and Neel in Denmark. The article featured a blown up picture of Neel and accused the two of being traitors working for the Sri Lankan and Indian governments and of issuing leaflets in the name of the LTTE calculated to embarrass them. One wonders why anyone else should do that when *Nitharsanam* is doing the job so effectively.

Nitharshanam's real problem with Mathy Kumarathurai appeared in another piece on 28<sup>th</sup> December after the tidal wave. It accused Kumarathurai of being in the central committee of Karuna's 'anti-national gang' and of telling Danish agencies to divert funds to the South claiming that the North-East suffered little damage. This and the next piece (letter from a Danish Tamil) made it clear that Kumarathurai's real crime was that he was against the Danish government aiding the victims through the TRO.

What *Nitharsanam* failed to say was that Kumarathurai, a well-known critic of the LTTE, is the younger brother of A. Thangathurai, the TULF MP for Trincomalee who was assassinated by the LTTE on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1997. Thangathurai had done more for the war-affected Tamils in Trincomalee District than anyone had in many years. These are people who owe their continuing misery to the Tigers. Kumarathurai is from Mutur that was directly affected by the tidal wave and many would object to aid to the victims being channelled through the TRO.

Once more *Nitharshanam* published a picture of Kumarathurai. It has been the practice of *Nitharsanam* for sometime to publish pictures of individuals being targeted by the LTTE for harassment or worse. *Nitharsanam* for example published photographs of persons who attended the HRW meeting in Toronto around the time that the organisation received phone calls threatening to expose the identities of local Tamils who had contacts with Human Rights Watch in a manner that would place them at risk. LTTE operatives routinely go to meetings and photograph persons, especially those who dissent and are outspoken, frequently with cameras attached to cell phones. In publishing the photographs in *Nitharsanam*, the message is, "Big Brother is watching you, Beware."

*Nitharsanam* of 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2005 warned "*Traitors in Canada collecting funds*". It pinpointed the cultural group *Thedakam* in Toronto, which did not function for sometime following constant LTTE intimidation and the burning of its library in the early 1990s. *Thedakam*'s organisers had begun to discuss restarting its activities following the revival of Tamil dissent in recent months. *Nitharsanam* warned, "*In wiping away tears of your people, do not let your money fall into the hands of traitors. Rather, our plea is that you expose them. Contact the TRO and make your contribution. We remind you that the responsibility of protecting the Administrative Structures of the Tamils rests with everyone of you.*"

## **Nitharsanam**

We thus see the nexus between LTTE-intelligence, the TRO and *Nitharsanam* (a media organisation which informs people that the Vanni bosses have been told all about them). LTTE intelligence is headed by Pottu-Amman – literally meaning Spot (Bullet Hole) on the Forehead Uncle – a job description. The indications are that the *Nitharsanam* operation is run from a Western European nation. This is terror in broad daylight. One wonders what kind of research the World Bank and UNICEF did before they threw in their lot with the TRO.

## 9. Behind the Apparent Somersault: Burning of the Refugee Camp

On 28<sup>th</sup> December, two days after the tidal wave, *Nithatsanam*'s tone changed briefly. It thanked all Canadian Tamil and other media collecting money to wipe away tears of relations (*uravukal*) in the motherland. It appeared that all fundraisers not supportive of the TRO who had been stridently attacked as traitors a few days ago, were now being thanked for their good work. We may take the change as the reflection of a hurried reassessment going on throughout the LTTE machine. Even before the tidal wave the LTTE's attempts to intimidate and eliminate alternative fundraisers was only making matters worse. After the tidal wave its position was even weaker. The alternative station, the Canadian Tamil Broadcasting Corporation (CTBC) had received a good response to its appeal, proving that many donors were consciously on the lookout for more credible alternatives to the TRO.

It was beginning to sink into the LTTE that the only political capital it relied on up until then – that of threatening war – had been rendered meaningless by the immediacy of the tsunami's destruction. At all levels it began making more accommodative noises – a common tragedy; no difference between Muslim, Sinhalese and Tamil victims; all help is welcome, and so on. While thanking fundraisers like CTBC who were earlier trashed as traitors, the LTTE also began applying pressure on them to hand over their collections to the TRO. On the ground, after complaining for days that no one was helping the Tamil victims, the TRO moved into refugee camps in government-controlled areas, and virtually took over the camps, insisting that all donations and relief should be through them alone. |

The CTBC director Kandiah Sivasothy, a former SLBC broadcaster, ran a programme on Canada's multi-cultural radio, which also admitted criticism of the LTTE. About 1995, some LTTE men from Valvettithurai visited his apartment, threatened him, and to make their point pulled out a weapon and fired a shot without hurting Sivasothy. Sivasothy was silent for sometime and about 2000 started the CTBC, taking a line critical of the LTTE after the Karuna split. CTBC came under concerted attack after it started collecting money for flood victims at home even before the tidal wave, and by about 30<sup>th</sup> December had collected about CD 280,000. The LTTE reportedly traced the contributors from the names and addresses read out on CTBC, several of whom received calls from the 'TRO' asking them to telephone the CTBC and tell it to give the money to the TRO. The CTBC reportedly gave CD100,000 to TRO.

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005, *TamilNet* gave a good hint of what this new accommodativeness was all about. It became clear that the old dirty politics was going strong. With the prospect of foreign aid coming in, Sea Tiger Commander Mangales was quoted highlighting the need for heavy machinery including bulldozers to clear the Vadamaratchy East coastal road for vehicular traffic. This was a strange priority when the BBC reported thousands of Mullaitivu residents so traumatised by losses of kin to be despairing of ever returning to their homes. For Vadamaratchy East residents, their economic links are mainly with the Jaffna peninsula and its markets. The Vadamaratchy East coastal road also links the Jaffna peninsula to the mainland. It is assessed by persons with local knowledge of being essentially a military road, suitable for combined land and sea movements, whose importance lay in the LTTE's plans to overrun the Jaffna peninsula in the event of starting a war.

Another item in *TamilNet* alleged some displaced persons in Vadamaratchy, Jaffna, protesting against bad rice given as relief, which it quoted an official (DS) saying was rice from a relief offering by the Army. Local sources told us that the incident took place in front of the DS's



office in Pt. Pedro, where some refugees piled up rice unfit for consumption. Throughout the entire protest there was no talk that the rice was given by the Army, until the allegation later appeared in the pro-LTTE media.

When people lived under LTTE control rotten rice was not uncommon because the LTTE took the new stocks and released what was going bad to the public. The LTTE when pulling out of Jaffna in 1995 set fire to stocks of rice it had stored in Navatkulli and Kachchai lest they be left for those who failed to follow them into the Vanni.

Early in the New Year, less than a week after the disaster, the LTTE showed strong signs of having decided that it would use force, when necessary, against disaster victims to ensure that the humanitarian space opened up would not bring the Tamils closer to the Government and the Sinhalese. The three versions below of the same incident, the first two respectively Tamil and English LTTE versions, are instructive:

In *Nitharsanam's* version of 2<sup>nd</sup> January, the Sri Lankan Army chased away 64 families of refugees from a refugee camp in Kudathanai, Vadamaratchy, and set fire to the camp. Two children it said were hospitalised. *TamilNet* was more ambivalent behind its sensational headline: 'Army burns refugee camp'. It reported that, 15 to 20 soldiers came to the American Mission School refugee camp 'allegedly to hand over food' and left when told that they were being helped by a Tamil organisation. 15 minutes later 200 'attackers' came to the camp and assaulted all males... The refugees are now in the Catholic Church, Kudathanai. The next morning TNA (LTTE) MP Sivajilingam charged the Army with burning the camp.

The report that appears (based on our research) to be closest to the truth came from *Tamilnewsweb* [an alternative web portal close to the EPRLF(V)], which reported that the Army had helped settle 70 families of 290 persons displaced by the disaster in the Kudathanai American Mission School and was feeding them. The LTTE repeatedly warned the refugees not to accept food from the Army, but with little effect. At 7.00 PM on New Year's day when the Army arrived with food, some agitators believed to be from the LTTE's *Venpura* (White Dove) organisation were waiting for them, and rejected the food and created a scene. After the Army left, agitators under the direction of the LTTE chased the refugees to the Catholic Church, and burnt the American Mission school about 1.00 AM. Next morning the LTTE brought TNA MPs Sivajilingam, Suresh Premachandran, and Sivanesan, with 'press' photographers, who gave the finishing touches.

According to local sources contacted by us, the Army had been feeding the refugees at the American Mission School in Nadu-Kudathanai, until the LTTE-TRO-*Venpura* moved in and told the refugees that they should not accept food from the Army, as it was not hygienically prepared. But a significant number of the refugees ignored them and kept taking the Army's food. The rest of the story is as in the *Tamilnewsweb* report. The LTTE chased the people and burnt the camp as a punishment to those who showed hints of wanting to be outside their control. The LTTE media shouted aloud that the Army burnt the camp. But their credibility is getting to be so low that even humble artisans confided in private that the Army in recent times would never do such a thing. Privately, people admit that the Army never interfered with the movement of refugees or harassed them.

Among other incidents in the same vein were reports that the LTTE hijacked three lorries of relief supplies brought by Sinhalese civilians to Tamils in Batticaloa along the Badulla-Chenkalady Road. One lorry reportedly escaped.

## **10 TRO -Cats Paw of LTTE Terror on the Ground**

The incidents above and concerted attempts to control funds abroad and relief at home show how the LTTE is attempting to make use of the catastrophe just as it did the devastation of war. On the ground the formal distinction between the LTTE and TRO disappears. In Jaffna, refugee camps were quickly set up with funds and resources released by the Government through its civil administration. The Army too was active in protecting lives and helping these camps. Then the LTTE moved in. And the ease with which it did so illustrates how much power it has consolidated during the ceasefire. LTTE cadres were placed in charge of the camps and whoever wanted to deal with the camps was told that the TRO was in charge.

Anyone wanting to help the refugees was directed to the nearest LTTE political office. NGOs receiving aid from foreign contacts and government officials had to go to the political office or risk being noted by LTTE intelligence for punishment or harassment. They know enough examples intimately to tell them what it could mean. Anyone making donations to a camp must give it to the TRO *poruppalar* (*warden*). Based on this degree of control over people who have lost nearly everything, the LTTE is able to use these wretched folk as mobs of agitators.

It is a measure of the abysmally low level of politics to which the LTTE has reduced a once well-educated community, that while the rest of the world is thinking about the plight of the victims the LTTE spends energy organising vulgar demonstrations against the JVP and the Prime Minister. The LTTE's own media, amidst this enormous tragedy, boasts of throwing 'human (lavatory) waste' at these gentlemen. The objective is to tighten its totalitarian grip on the victims: no one else must have anything to do with them except under our supervision.

The only force the LTTE could not control directly was the Sri Lankan Army. Hence the scenes like those at Kudathanai American Mission School. Another instance was the camp in the Varani. The refugees lacked clean drinking water. The Army brought drinking water in bowsers. The LTTE (TRO) made a scene and turned back the water. The people who were left without clean drinking water were angry, but were in no position to resist the tender mercies of the TRO.

As days go by dissatisfaction with the TRO in the government-controlled areas is becoming open at least to locals. Many of the affected see the TRO's role as dictated by fear that the people are grateful to the armed forces. The TRO's definition of affected persons as those who have lost their house or family member has left day-labourers now without work complaining of being denied relief. They have also complained of TRO's partiality in distributing the best to favourites. Refugees at Nelliady Central College complained that donations from NGOs, individuals and the Government are coming in plentifully, but the refugees are given only basic cereals (rice and dhal) and potatoes. They claim that large stocks of biscuits and tinned fish are stocked up in a room. Quantities of new clothes have been given, but the refugees received mostly used clothes while the new are stocked up. Stories from the LTTE-controlled area would take a long time to emerge.

Malpractice is by no means new in Sri Lanka, but it normally involves connivance between several interests, and seldom are they protected by pervasive terror. In the case of the LTTE, the practice is so well organised that the pattern will be the same everywhere. The question without an answer among the refugees is, who will bell the cat?

Sources in Batticaloa have sounded the alarm on moves by the LTTE-TRO to set up camps in the interior under its control, for refugees who are coastal folk. The move according to these sources is to transfer foreign relief and donations into its zone where there are absolutely no checks or accountability. The more sinister aspect would be the fate of refugee children, given continuing reports of child conscription.

We see clearly here the absence of any dividing line between the LTTE and TRO, which operates largely, if not entirely, as a social parasite, taking credit for resources brought in by others, destroying the initiative and good will of others, sapping the democratic will of the people, using them in the most shameful manner, and in the end leaving them worse off. All those who are now flocking to help the victims will get disgusted and leave, unable to lift the condition of the victims above mere existence.

## **11. Wrecking of Trincomalee: Incompatibility of Sole Representation with Peace**

The course of the disaster in Trincomalee clearly illustrates how amidst the weakness of the government administration and media, the Tigers found ample opportunity to blunt the spontaneous rapprochement between the different communities. In doing so the Tigers denied the Sri Lankan Navy the credit for humanitarian services and gallantry that was justly its due. When the journalists started making their appearance, the LTTE-TRO was able to project itself as the only group working for the Tamils and in several instances succeeded.

During the first three days the LTTE made itself scarce and relief efforts went fairly well. On the 26<sup>th</sup> it was the Navy that mainly provided food and water to survivors. Kuchchaveli was isolated because of a broken bridge, and there the LTTE reportedly provided the naval men with food and water. At this point things were spontaneous. There was no agenda at work. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the surviving youth with help from the Navy searched for bodies. Sinhalese came from Kantalai bringing food and drink. The survivors in Kuchchaveli who were cut off were fed and refreshed by Sinhalese from Gomarankadawela, who came by an old interior route. The government relief machinery – the GA, DSs and local *vidans* (head men) – was not functioning at this point. It was help from Sinhalese neighbours that filled the gap.

It was on the 28<sup>th</sup> that the LTTE recovered to get together an agenda worldwide. Locally, the LTTE cadres appeared and things started changing for the worse. TNA MP Sivajilingam put in an appearance by helicopter on the 28<sup>th</sup> morning and Sampanthan in the evening. Government relief started moving, and the LTTE asserted control. Wherever people were gathered in camps, LTTE-TRO sent two cadres to each place as *poruppalars*. The local youths who were involved in clearing operations largely withdrew once the LTTE arrived. The LTTE started taking lists.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> food and relief was brought from Kurunegala by a party headed by a Buddhist monk, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> by the Provincial Council of the North-Central Province. On the 29<sup>th</sup> those who had their homes intact started going back. 20 students from Kelaniya University and 20 women (Sinhalese) from a women's movement based in Kantalai came to help in clearing up. A medical team lead by a doctor too came from the South and visited homes individually.

From the time the LTTE arrived, rumours were spread, and actions instigated, to undermine the spontaneous rapprochement. When the LTTE tried to take control of relief distribution for

the Muslims at 8<sup>th</sup> Mile Post, there was friction. The Muslims refused to give a list of those affected to the LTTE, even though they had given one to another Tamil party attempting to engage in relief.

On the 28<sup>th</sup>, a van with relief came from Trincomalee led by two men in white *verti* on a motorcycle, who were evidently Tamil. They stopped at the 8<sup>th</sup> Mile Post mosque refugee camp and asked some youths if there were Tamils there. When the youths replied truthfully in the negative, the motorcyclists and van turned and went back. Muhunthan, an LTTE cadre, and an ex-LTTE man Ramesh who were there accused the Muslims of blocking relief for Tamils, and said the '*soni*' (slang for Muslims) must be beaten. The Navy came in to separate the two sides from the developing confrontation.

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, reportedly at the request of LTTE political leader Elilan, Mr. Sampanthan called a meeting of the GA (Government Agent), the government administration and NGOs to discuss relief measures. The GA did not attend. Shortly afterwards a rumour floated that the GA did not attend because he had hidden 150 lorry loads of supplies in Fort Fredrick and also that a shipload of Indian relief had been stashed away.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January EPDP men were distributing relief at Gopalapuram when an LTTE-instigated gang stoned them. The EPDP were forced to seek shelter in the Navy Camp. The Navy, which had allowed free movement until then, installed checkpoints. Things were by now becoming unpleasant.

The same day (1<sup>st</sup>), the Sinhalese youths from Kelaniya University, with local Tamils, were cleaning the local Tamil school, when the navy intruded and checked their identities. The Sinhalese youths became frightened that things were becoming dangerous and wanted to go back. (The LTTE started every war by massacring Sinhalese.) The Tamils tried to reassure them, but to no avail. The students went back. A navy man reportedly told a Sinhalese student, "*There is so much to do in the South, why are you helping these people?*" One observer put it, that by 1<sup>st</sup> January, the two *vethalams* (evil genies) of Sinhalese and Tamil chauvinism had climbed the *murunga* tree (got out of the bottle) once more.

The pattern of the LTTE-TRO trying to assume sole-control and the deterioration of human relations is the same in most places (e.g. Jaffna). The moment the LTTE steps in, local initiative ceases and people who were active move aside into isolation. The damage the LTTE has done by wanting to be sole representatives, sole-fighters, sole-administrators and in general, sole heroes and sole doers, is not readily evident to a casual observer. They see only the LTTE-TRO at work, and there is truth when they say no one is helping them.

The LTTE machine will often organise relief efforts to some extent in an efficient and orderly manner compared to the ponderous government bureaucracy. But behind this there lies a political ideology and years of experience in manipulation of local and international actors towards its vested interest, which gives little regard to the people's creative potential and their humanity. It can be sustained only by destroying local civil society almost completely.

The situation was markedly different in the South, where the Government's efforts were as ineffective. In Batapola near Galle for example, the Buddhist monk, Ven. Nanda, mobilised civil society groups and was able to care for nearly 2000 affected persons.

## **12. Strengthening the Humanitarian Space and Ending Conflict**

What emerges clearly is the enormous gap that exists between the interests of the LTTE and the interests of the people in the North-East. It is a pattern we have seen before. When a particular turn of events closes the divisions between the different communities and creates a spontaneous mood of rapprochement, the Leader and Pottu Amman keep their heads down and move their pawns until they totally wreck the benign drift. They would have looked askance particularly at some LTTE cadres in the East responding spontaneously to Sinhalese initiatives. We now see what they are doing, going to any vulgar level to harass, irritate and humiliate Sinhalese people, their leaders and the armed forces, hoping that they would all regret ever having wanted to help Tamils.

Many observers, who lived through the community's trauma for the last two decades, see a similarity with events that were set in motion when President Kumaratunge became Prime Minister in 1994. LTTE insiders quite casually spoke about why they wrecked the peace process and started war. They saw red when government negotiators touched down in Jaffna University and crowds broke the LTTE cordon to kiss the helicopter that brought them. Peace professionals wrote reams on why the process foundered. An LTTE insider and editor of one of its media publications simply told a friend: "*The people are being dazzled by the web of Chandrika's peace, and the direction of our struggle is being subverted*". He referred in particular to the 'helicopter incident'. That explains what the LTTE is doing after the tidal wave and why.

We have argued that there is no change in the LTTE's agenda. Even amidst this chaos and tragedy, there are reports of killing and child conscription by the LTTE, one relating to three girls rescued by the police while being taken to the LTTE-controlled area at Omathai. There is no doubt what will happen to many children in refugee camps where the LTTE has established control. While reports of a general nature on child conscription are in circulation, the following are specific instances that appeared on web sites:

**Thanabalasingam** (aged 13) and **Gunabalasingam Velkumar** (aged 13), respectively 7<sup>th</sup> standard at Kondavil Ramakrishna High School and 6<sup>th</sup> standard at Urumpirai Saiva Tamil School, both from Urumpirai South, Jaffna: abducted by the LTTE on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2005. SLMM informed (*EPDP News*).

**Kumarasamy Gokulan** (aged 19) and **Packiyarasa Dinesh** (aged 18) abducted from Mayilambaveli, Batticaloa, 3 Jan.05 (*EPDP News*).

LTTE cadres abducted four youths and a family man on 3 Jan.2005 from among the sea disaster victims sheltered at Uvarmalai Vivekananda College, Trincomalee (*EPDP News*).

Our sources gave the following report, which also touches on the TRO. **Ramasamy Yogachandramohan** (16) of Ward 5, Navatcholai, Kumburupiddy, was taken by the LTTE on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Three weeks later, in the wake of the disaster, he returned to the same area north of Trincomalee as a worker for the TRO.

The LTTE's principal intention with foreign aid is not the welfare of the people, but to rebuild its military machine and restore the status quo ante of 25<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

For now the Leader would encourage Sea Tiger Leader Soosai to go public with expressions of warm gratitude to the Sri Lankan government and donor nations with requests for dual-purpose equipment. Soosai too may see the best prospect for himself in rebuilding the Sea

Tigers quickly. One is reminded of a similar role played by the ill-fated former Deputy Leader Mahathaya during the Premadasa honeymoon in 1990.

The last three years of appeasement have been a travesty of what peace means. The main task now is to be alert against going down that same road again. The humanitarian space that was opened up for interaction and reconciliation must be preserved. This means placing conditions on the LTTE, including human rights monitoring and open access for humanitarian work. There should be no more desultory meandering with interim solutions. This opportunity must be grasped to challenge the Southern polity to come together on a permanent settlement. The stark choice today is between rehabilitating all the peoples of the North-East along with democracy, and rehabilitating Tiger terror. There is nothing in-between.

Given the plight of thousands of children orphaned and families shattered by this tragedy, it becomes incumbent on us to tap every potential source of humanity to give them hope and support. We cannot drag on in an uncertain political environment with temporary measures. It is criminal complacency that in the end makes us sadists in what we tolerate in the name of peace or war.

The orphans in *Senthalir Illam*, Mullaitivu, whose lives were abruptly ended, were being reared as sacrificial lambs by the LTTE. It was tolerated in the name of a grotesque *status quo* we were told was the road to peace. Is this the prospect we hold out to the thousands of children orphaned by the Tsunami?

Scores of Tamil professionals have flown into Sri Lanka at this critical time to offer relief to the victims. The world has responded generously. But all these would be wasted if we go back to the same political machinations, which condemned the vast majority in the country to an uncertain future. The same machinations helped a small elite to find greener pastures and thrive by feeding the hatreds and insecurity of those left behind.

Now is the hour of challenge for Tamils living abroad to demand an alternative that offers life and democracy. A little reflection on their own lives and the good fortune of their children should make it absolutely repellent for them to support a force, which offers only death and destruction to the coming generation in the Tamil community.

Will the leaders in the South persist in their old game of somersaults to undermine each other purely for power, and constantly betray the people? Will the lofty sentiments expressed in the immediate aftermath of the devastation turn again into empty slogans? Cynicism is so entrenched among the people that it would take concrete measures to convince them that the leaders really intend a benign change in Sri Lanka's direction.

The UN and other international agencies have a grave responsibility to ensure not only that the aid is distributed and reconstruction begins in earnest without any discrimination, but also to push for tangible steps towards reconciliation and movement towards a political solution. This cannot happen by superficial coordination alone, but by steps to create an environment for people to assert themselves, and through opportunities for their creative potential to bear fruit in the political and social arena.

The most critical question is whether the LTTE would release the children in its ranks and allow room for dissenting views.

