

INDO-LANKA RELATIONS - THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA

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In the historic decade of the 1970's Sri Lanka witnessed the emergence of violence both in the South (1971 insurrection) and in the North (beginning with the assassination of the Jaffna Mayor on July 27th 1975).

The Southern violence was militarily quelled and the militant leaders and their cadres were imprisoned. Unlike Southern militancy the northern militancy gathered wide public support and co-operation from the Tamil speaking people as their demand for equal opportunity in the spheres of education and employment was always at abeyance. In particular those who were victimised or witnessed the racial riots of 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977 and 1981 and in 1983 saw Samuel David's concept of Eelam (a creation in 1961) as the only alternative to the so called discrimination of the Tamils by the Sinhalese¹.

Unfortunately to quell northern militancy which had transformed itself into ethnic terrorism, the decision makers and the policy makers ill advised the Government of Sri Lanka only to resort to a military option. A second major error was the absence of cordial relations between Madras and Colombo, and the tension over "US interests in Trincomalee" weakened the political and diplomatic dialogue between Delhi and Colombo. In addition

¹ It is well known that for 150 years the colonial masters, the British favoured the minority Tamils as part of their divide and rule policy. Following independence, when equal education and employment opportunities were being created, the Tamils began to feel that they were being discriminated by the majority community.

the Central Government interests in Tamil Nadu which determined the political future of two Indian leaders catalysed the development of 36 ethnic militant organisations². Post-Operation Liberation, an effort to capture the northern city and coast line on May 26th 1987 witnessed Indian airforce planes violating Sri-Lankan airspace and a crisis period in Indo-Lanka relations. Jayewardene-Gandhi agreement of July 29th 1987, an Accord proposed by India was acceptable with minor amendments and served as an alternative to an escalating conflict between Sri Lanka and India. India had ceased to be a mediator and had become a participant in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis.

There are connections and aprallels between northern and southern militancy. In 1978 the Southern militants were pardoned and they were given an opportunity to enter the mainstream of Sri Lankan politics. Similarly with the signing of the Accord, the northern militants were given an amnesty. Both groups have today taken up for arms.

The question "Can a northern group of armed youth, misled by "Leaders" of their choice, and not necessarily of the masses ever enter and survive in the mainstream of a democratic politics? If and when the Indian peace makers return to India will the masses cut off their support to the Sinhala militant groups? If the Government sincerely impliment the Accord, will the militant groups continue to enjoy the support of the minority Tamils?

² Recent studies indicates that the Research and the Analysis Wing (RAW) of the Indian Ministry of Defence and External Affairs too have supported the weapon training of some of the prominent Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups.

This paper will discuss some aspects of northern and southern militancy, the changing attitude, trends and thinking patterns of the masses, and a possible solution to the crisis that is facing Sri Lanka today.