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THE SUN GOD's CHILDREN & THE BIG LIE

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Introduction

Elephant Pass fell to the LTTE on 21st April 2000 and there followed a month of grave anxiety when the fall of the entire Jaffna peninsula seemed imminent. President Kumaratunge placed the country on a war-footing, external help was sought and a new military commander was placed in charge of the North. Troop morale which was at a low ebb revived sufficiently to inflict two significant defeats on the LTTE at Kilaly and Sarasalai, halting the LTTE advance for the present, restoring some stability by 21st May. However, the short term picture is grim.

Not only foreign missions and international agencies based here, but even the Government, and activist groups who represent this country to the outside world, do not appear to have come to terms with what happened in April, the nature of the LTTE, its moves and its

motivating aims. The main cause of the crisis are however the wounds the Government inflicted on itself from the time of its brazen misconduct during the NWPC elections in January 1999. Coupled to the military setback in November 1999, the Government was getting tangled up in desultory polemics whose adverse effect on the security forces was evident in the early months of this year. However by the month of February (2000) the UNP had agreed to support the Government's constitutional reform proposals and Norway had been brought in formally as a facilitator. On the surface the prospects for a negotiated settlement were looking bright. But there was a key reality which nearly all the actors had lost sight of.

The January-February issue of 'Liberation Tigers' published in the Vanni asked in its lead item, 'What is Next? War or Peace!' It went on to answer the question: "The Sinhalese Government has totally rejected our demands for third party mediation and for the Thimpu Principles as the basis for negotiations. Therefore the Sri Lankan Government cannot be expected to co-operate with Norway's efforts. It would be therefore foolish to expect the Chandrika government to open the door of peace and conduct itself with fairness and justice"

The same page had a picture of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran pointing at Jaffna on a map of Tamil Eelam with his left forefinger. Beneath it was the verse, "*Where Sooriya Thevan (Sun God) points with his finger, thither the sun rays will hasten, to enfold Thamir Eelam in the brightness of his glory!*"

On page 5 of the same journal was a large map of the area surrounding Elephant Pass army camp, describing the LTTE's advances in December 1999. From the attention paid to the east coast and the arrows shown in some detail pointing to the Army's new defences, there was a clear indication that they would isolate Elephant Pass by cutting off the A9 trunk road from the north. The people in Jaffna had guessed it. The Army had been unprepared in the past, but this time something seemed to have snapped within. The LTTE leader had been saying for some time that he would take Jaffna by the year 2000.

The people in Jaffna, the Vanni and the East, as well as the Sinhalese people, badly wanted peace. The Army too was weary. Yet, the war seemed destined to go on, beyond the control of the majority who want peace. Having gone through many years of destruction, it was the dream of the people in the North-East that a democratic political solution will be in place which would eventually remove any armed presence.

There was a far greater tragedy that lay unseen and was carefully suppressed. The sunrays that do the Sun God's bidding are today mainly children, often 14 or 15 years old, and increasingly girls. In specific cases we have ascertained that LTTE cadre who died during the period of the Elephant Pass battle were aged 15.

One was a girl who had joined two years earlier aged 13. Two girls had joined a year earlier aged 14. What is the plight of a society which is subject to such demands? How do the parents take it? Do they spontaneously support the LTTE?

There is a big lie that has been sold to the world. The myth that these people wholly support the LTTE is seldom questioned. That the Tamil people in the North-East support the LTTE has been given credence by leading NGOs in the South, creating unwarranted optimism that the problem is going to be solved by the Government talking to the LTTE with help from

Norway. So abysmal is the level of discourse that the absurdity of talking about ‘support’ when the freedom to discuss options is brutally suppressed, is ignored.

Even more grave is the refusal to see the tragedy and humiliation faced by the people - all fellow citizens of this small country. To impose on them convenient beliefs about their disposition - often flattering to vocal members of the Tamil elite not affected by the war - amounts to arrogance that is also cruel.

A hint of what it is like in the Vanni came from the testimony of people who had a taste of it. “It is true”, they said, “there are human rights violations under the Government of Sri Lanka. But here, there is not a shadow of human rights!” This is no more evident than in the manner in which children are recruited for military service.

The plight of those living under the LTTE is the main subject of this bulletin. We will also touch on Government’s failures to check violations by the security forces which helps the LTTE and its lobby to get away with it.[\[Top\]](#)

1.The Government: A Record of Callousness

We had pointed out in earlier reports that the Government’s inability to effectively stop violations in the form of missing persons, torture of prisoners and indiscriminate killings of civilians, gives credibility to the LTTE propaganda, particularly among those outside the North. This results from the Government’s own indiscipline and incompetence. It has left behind a trail of uninvestigated crimes that constantly reawaken doubts of the worst kind. On 12th April, Traditional New Year’s eve, a Tamil musical show in Trincomalee was disrupted by a grenade explosion which killed several members of the audience. A few days later the Police ruled out the LTTE as being the cause of the explosion. This also indicated that they had received some information. But we understand that the case has been closed.

We have been told by well-placed civilian sources that elements in the security forces had been responsible for this communally motivated attack in what the Government has declared the ‘City of Peace’. This view is also shared by well-informed Sinhalese residents committed to a plural Trincomalee. They felt that by covering up this incident the Government was opening the way to communal disharmony. They wanted the culprits punished. On Vesak Day, 17th May, there was tension in Trincomalee as Sinhalese residents anticipated a reprisal attack. Initially the news of the bomb explosion in Batticaloa on that day was thought to be such a reprisal.

Under the prevailing press censorship the Government claimed that the 17 victims killed were victims of an LTTE outrage on a day sacred to the Buddhists and was intended to provoke a backlash. Except for the Tamil papers, the Press in this small country did not question this version. About 4.30 PM a bicycle had been found parked by a row of shops on Trincomalee Road near the office of DIG/Police. The Buddhist temple was a small distance inside on a by-road. The shop-keepers had suspected a bomb inside a box on the bicycle and informed the Police. The Police had been careless about it and had apparently meddled with the box. A loud explosion was heard and about 3 policemen were killed. Some shops were damaged.

Police sergeant Perinpam Uthayanan, a respected figure and treasurer of the St.Michael’s College OBA, was on the road keeping people away. He was speaking to Fr.Chandra who had accompanied a group of children from Aythiyamalai, who came to see the Vesak celebration.

The children were in a van. About 10 minutes later a group of the Special Forces came from Brigade HQ on their motorbikes and fired many rounds indiscriminately.

Despite Fr.Chandra's appeal, they fired at the van killing 9 children and injuring several others. They also killed Sergeant Uthayanan who was in police uniform and was well-known. Some persons were dragged out of shops and killed. The outrage was covered up.

At Batticaloa Hospital the MSF recovered several bullets from dead and injured victims. However the JMO certified that the victims had died of a bomb explosion. The Police and the Magistrate did not go beyond this, although the van carrying the children even as shown in the TV news evinced neat lines of regularly spaced holes as one would expect from an automatic weapon rather than a from a bomb. The first step of pulling up the Brigadier Zacky and asking him to identify the men who committed the massacre was evidently not taken. It was said in Colombo that the President had delayed the broadcast of the news (the government version) to prevent a backlash against the Tamils.

Responsible persons in Batticaloa do believe that the massacre was planned in advance. In earlier months there had been mine attacks by the LTTE on vehicles carrying troops within Batticaloa town limits. But the soldiers had generally behaved themselves. They associate the Vesak incident with a mood of impunity resulting from putting the country on a war-footing, where some group in the Army decided that the next time there was an incident they would act in this fashion. It must be noted that there was a gap of 10 minutes and the Police on the spot were calm and did not do any firing. We may also mention that throughout the crisis involving the fall of Elephant Pass, the behaviour of troops in Jaffna towards the civilians was commendable.

Even so late in the day when the cost of justice faltering in incidents such as those above is well understood, the Government persists in cover-ups. More damagingly, the responsibility for covering up goes right up to the President when no action is taken on requests for an independent inquiry by Tamil parliamentarians. Where does it leave the credibility of devolution?

We may say that after more than 4 years, the Government's attitude towards civilian casualties in the North-East has not changed. In July 1995 the covering up of the bombing of civilians near the Navaly Church went right up to the President. In November 1995 a good GA in Jaffna was sacked for giving the accurate figure of 104 civilians killed by aerial bombing during the month of October 1995 when asked by agencies based in Colombo.

During the post - Elephant Pass crisis this year, under a declaration of 'war-footing', the official Media Information Centre whenever referring to civilian deaths in Jaffna, blamed them all on the LTTE, although it is clear that a significant number died from aerial bombing and shelling by government forces. Sometimes the Government pointed the finger at itself through its own incompetence.

On 20th May shells fell on the old people's home at Kaithady killing 15 elders and wounding 24. The 6.00 PM SLBC Tamil radio news of 21st May did not mention the incident, but talked about the Army taking special measures in Jaffna to protect charitable institutions such as orphanages etc and charged that the LTTE was using civilians as shields. The 8.45 PM English SLBC news which followed, reported the incident and blamed it on the LTTE. It is only an impartial inquiry that could decide the truth.

Using censorship to handle civilian deaths in this cavalier manner does little to enhance the people's trust in the Government. The Government's failures are part of the devastating success of the LTTE. We have mentioned three in a continuing succession of incidents (see AI releases). The Government that constantly talks about the LTTE's use of children at the UN, must ponder the future of those children who survived the massacre by the Special Forces, and of their friends.[\[Top\]](#)

2. For the Sun God's Alter

After the LTTE engineered the forced exodus from Jaffna in October 1995, there were many children from Jaffna idling in the Vanni. The areas where the 2,00,000 displaced from Jaffna settled in considerable numbers include Mallavi and Puthukkudiyiruppu. Those settled in Killinochchi were once more displaced in late 1996. From October 1995, the LTTE recruited intensively from this displaced population, until most of them progressively left the Vanni.

In April last year (our Bulletin No. 20), on the Leader's orders intense propaganda activity and compulsory self-defence training in schools and villages had commenced. A variety of pressures were applied to ensure co-operation, including the withholding of government rations. A certificate was issued at the end of the training lasting 3 months. People were then checked on the roads, and those (both men and women) who could not show the certificate were turned back. Life was so made difficult. Exit visas were also refused to those who did not train.

A new intensification of militarisation and child recruitment commenced on 5th May 2000 with the 'Elephant Pass Victory Festival'. The LTTE has developed a system of punishments forcing people and school children to attend festivals and protest demonstrations. The slogan for the occasion was '*The Leader Who Rules The World*'.

The following figures drawn from a school in the area of Mallavi, attended mainly by Vanni natives, gives an idea of the recruitment of children (most of them 14 and 15 years) from this category: Before the April 1999 commencement of compulsory training - 4 joined; From April 1999 to early 2000 - 15 joined; 5th May 2000 to late June (7 weeks) - 24 joined. This gives us an idea of the unprecedentedly severe methods of recruitment being used at present which we will describe in the sequel.

We may also give a fairly informative idea of the life-span of the young recruits. Of the 15 who joined between April 1999 and early 2000, the bodies of six were brought to their school for display before being laid to rest. This ceremony is intended to give the dead an aura of heroism and to make the others guilty about not joining. But we reliably understand that a total of 9 out of the 15 who joined had died in a little over an year.

The feelings of the parents of children so killed are expressed guardedly and vanish into the sultry air. The mother of a girl recruit who joined when she was 14 and was killed aged 15, was brought to school. After seeing the remains of the girl, she told a neighbour, "*I lost my daughter when she was 14 and now they have taken my son who is of the same age.*" The son had joined after his elder sister was killed. A clear sense of outrage was couched in her expression of sorrow. It is a common reaction when an LTTE cadre is killed for a younger sibling to join.

In another village a man facing hard times, who once had means and was well-to-do, was seen standing, looking bent and miserable. He told another who inquired, “*My daughter (about 15) has gone.*” The lady asked him, “*But were you not in great form, being very busy and active, at the Elephant Pass victory festival?*” The man looked even more miserable and blurted out, “*But they forced me!*” We will come to that later.

Girls have been in a large majority in the current round of recruitment in schools. 20 girls were recruited recently from a school and were taken to a girls’ camp. They were ordered to surrender their school uniforms and were given exercise slacks. The school uniforms were burnt in their presence. After a day, five of the girls aged 14 to 15 told the camp authorities that they wanted to go home. These girls were then isolated, taken to a room, stripped, mercilessly assaulted and pushed onto the ground. They were then trampled upon. This punitive violence was administered by senior girls.

The girls were then locked up. Three of them escaped when they had the chance. The remaining two were too frightened to escape. The escapees made it home after walking more than 24 hours in the jungle. The father of one of the girls feared that the LTTE would come looking for his daughter. He got hold of a jaw of a large shark – a long object with sharp teeth on it – and was determined that should the LTTE come for his daughter, he would fight them and face death at their hands. He continues to keep her at home. This is one instance of the desperation which tens of thousands of parents feel, but may not resort to such an extreme. We have it on good authority that if the term voluntary recruitment has any meaning when applied to children, only 5% go willingly.

During the one and a half months following 5th May, about 5% of the school children targetted have been recruited. Another source of recruitment comes from orphans and destitutes brought up by the LTTE in their ‘Chencholai’ (Red-Blossomed Garden) homes for children. Here brainwashing and adulation of the Leader begins from the time they are in (Our [Report No. 13](#)). We have no estimate of the number, but children as young as 10 and 11 can be seen walking about in LTTE uniform.

The Red-Blossomed Garden homes are often referred to as orphanages, but its inmates come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are close relatives or siblings of dead LTTE cadre whose families had fallen on difficult times. A particular group of recruits tells us something about the motivation behind these homes and the social conditions that provide inmates. Following the engineered Jaffna exodus of 1995, a number of displaced parents in the Vanni got their children to beg. Many of these children were taken off the streets by the LTTE, put into vans and were deposited in the Red-Blossomed Garden.

In the homes they are graded into categories and used accordingly. Some would study and get into universities. Some do military-related work from a very early age. The incident below illustrates the position of children in the RBG.

A mother rendered destitute after displacement from Jaffna in 1995, gave charge of her young son to the RBG. Late in 1998 a sealed coffin that was said to contain the remains of her 13 year old son was brought to the mother in Puthukkudiyiruppu. She screamed and wanted to break open the coffin, but was prevented by LTTE guards. The child had been taken to an area of fighting as a helper, and was killed in a shell blast.

Unlike in the earlier phases of fighting where small arms played a dominant role, most of the young being killed on the LTTE side (eg. Elephant Pass) are now brought home in sealed coffins as they had been mangled by shelling. A large number - more than 1000 - were hospitalised with grievous injuries.

A question that strikes one immediately is, how do parents allow their own children to be taken almost by force from school without any organised protest?

3. The Regime of Terror

The extent of repression should not surprise someone with a historical perspective. It had begun by the time the St.John's College principal Anandarajah was killed in June 1985 and was firmly in place by mid-1986. Why such a thorough campaign to exterminate dissent by killing for example members of the some of the smaller left-oriented groups who refused to co-operate with both the governments of India and Sri Lanka, whom the LTTE would still dare not call traitors? It was to make the people accept any degree of repression they thought fit to impose, according to need. In Vanni today we are seeing its horrendous limits.

One token of this repression is the behaviour of parents when they hear that LTTE recruiters had come to their children's school. Earlier (mid-90s) in Jaffna the parents would rush to the school and surround it and the teachers and the principal would often help the parents to safeguard their children. This pattern continued into the Vanni in 1996. But in Vanni today the situation is different.

Parents today do not rush to the school in an organised manner when the recruiters arrive. At one time the teachers and the principal used to insist on being present when the recruiters addressed the children. Today as soon as the recruiters arrive the teachers walk out of the class and there is no adult to witness the pressures being employed. Whatever civil society there was in the Vanni has been destroyed and the people have been reduced to zombies. One means used to accomplish this is direct terror. What is more damagingly effective is indirect terror. A government official is, say, given an order by the LTTE. At first it may be innocuous enough. He agrees knowing at the back of his mind that the consequences of refusal may be unpleasant. These orders progressively increase in their degree of unreasonableness and the official goes all the way until he is thoroughly caught.

When someone is more difficult, there is direct intervention. A government official was for some time firm with the Tigers about doing his job. Once he was taken away by the Tigers and given a warning. No one knows what transpired. What people saw subsequently was a broken man. When the LTTE addresses senior educationists, a casual warning is sometimes issued: "You know what happens to those who do not co-operate!"

Teachers who try to protect the children from recruiters are marked. One day a local LTTE leader may meet him alone and tell him, "We have reports that you are not co-operating with our recruitment drive." Once when recruiters arrived in school, four young girls approached a teacher and asked her, "Miss, may we go home?" The teacher replied, "Now that they have come, it is not nice for me to let you go. You listen to them. If you are firm in your mind, they cannot do anything to you." Later an angry recruiter approached the teacher and said, "I hear you told some of the students not to join our movement!"

Other direct and more extreme forms of terror exist which are for ordinary people too unpleasant to contemplate. The people have seen dozens of bodies of persons executed and dumped on the roadsides. In the sizeable village of Puthukkudiyiruppu alone, people have seen about a hundred of such bodies during 1998. The victim with eyes and mouth tied and hands tied behind the back is brought to a public place and the people are summoned. The charges are then read out by a cadre while the victim remains speechless. While the charges are read, the spectators are also told, "We are watching many more persons, traders, farmers etc, who are doing similar things and we will act against them soon." (Some traders stopped trading out of fear.) A pistol is then raised and a bullet fired into the forehead. The victim drops lifeless. If the victim twitches, a second bullet is fired. The crowd goes away horrified and skeptical.

Since 1999 these public executions have been very much reduced. The reason attributed for it is concern being voiced by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International. We understand that now the LTTE has reverted back to secret executions as in the early 90s. By the same token we have confirmation that a large number of detainees are being held in bunkers, in chains. Testimony comes from civilian as well as LTTE detainees.

A detainee in North-Vanni was later given some freedom of movement within the premises. He had seen detainees in chains, dishevelled and with faces covered, walking falteringly, led by guards. This was a revelation to the detainee about the kind of cruelty involved. He is also aware that nearby there were also Sri Lankan Army prisoners who were quite free to play games such as foot-ball.

LTTE cadre who wish to leave before completing 7 years are chained and kept in a bunker for 6 months, even if they have completed most of the period, had worked hard, and got injured fighting for the LTTE. They are then given a period of manual labour before being released. This has been another source of information through which we have been able to confirm that a large number of civilians are kept chained in underground bunkers.

This shows a continuity with practices we had reported in some detail in the early 90s (our reports [5](#), [6](#), [8](#), [9](#) & [10](#), and [Bulletin No.5](#)). The cumulative end-result is given eloquent testimony by some remarkable happenings. In the past the LTTE allowed senior officials of the Sri Lankan Government enough leeway to keep their self-respect. This has changed drastically. Among those who under compulsion undergo military training now to serve in the LTTE's Border Force are government officials having designations of Government Agent, Assistant Government Agent, Director of Education and Assistant Commissioner of Co-operatives. All these officials sign and pass on instructions dictated by LTTE co-ordinators, such as Illankumaran for education. Orders to close government offices at 3.00 PM on training days have been passed down by departmental heads. Letters summoning employees to LTTE meetings refer in coded form to an 'urgent discussion'. What freedom can an individual have in this environment?

The absolute control of the government machinery as we shall see enabled the LTTE to put into effect a far-reaching system of repression. Firstly we deal with its implication for schools. [\[Top\]](#)

4. How Universal Conscription Works

On 5th May, after the Elephant Pass attack, the LTTE in effect told the schools that they need not teach. Three days a week all school children from year 10 (grade 9) upwards (that is the 14/15 age group and above) were required to take military training.

This is different from the former self-defence training, but there was continuity. Last year school children were marched with poles. But December last year saw a parade of schoolgirls in Mallavi. Though not in uniform, guns had been substituted for poles, so that they were unawares becoming soldiers. Now escape has been made nigh impossible. Within one month the school children had been put through dismantling and reassembling guns and grenades. They were then divided into two sides and mock battles were held.

The means used to ensure full attendance is that those who do not train can neither attend school nor tutorials. School authorities have been asked to enforce this, causing them deep heart-burn and misgivings. However children gradually stopped coming anyway. The reason was not far to seek. The children train from 7.00 to 8.00 AM, go back home, bathe and get to school at 9.00 AM. After that there are no lessons, instead, propaganda full five days of the week – 3 days by the LTTE propaganda wing and on the other two days by teachers from other schools. When the LTTE arrive, those in the smaller classes try to slip away home. On the streets too there are booths of the Political Wing at short intervals to stop young and inveigle them in.

When the LTTE come for classes, the pattern is that there are guards posted outside the school and about three cadre waiting with motorbikes. The recruiters pick out children individually and apply psychological pressure on them to join. Often the child would try to buy time by saying that she would come after, say, a temple festival a few days away. In a particular case the child did not go for a month after the promised date. The recruiter watched her and in a propaganda class asked another girl in class, *“This girl promised to come at a given time. We waited 5 days, 10 days and now it is a month. Tell me, can this girl be forgiven or not?”* The girl questioned answered that it was unforgivable and felt miserable thereafter. The first girl feeling helpless was in tears.

As soon as a child is made to say yes, he or she is immediately placed on a waiting motorbike and deposited at a camp. Many of the new recruits were found crying when they were taken away. Seeing the children being taken away crying, some villagers would purposely ask the LTTE the reason for it. Normally they would get the reply, *“They were tears of joy”*, or that *“They were tears of parting (from friends)”*. Owing to this the parents took their children from schools and sent them to tutorials. At present the LTTE is not objecting to this provided the children attended the military training sessions. They attend military training and then the tutorials in the hope that they could continue with their studies. But here things are by no means certain.

The A Level examinations are due in August and the students are preparing at tutorials. But the LTTE continues to give mixed signals about whether it would permit the holding of A Levels. It will decide after judging what it could get away with. We understand that there are plans to subvert attempts by the students to continue with their studies, while going for training solely to ward off the LTTE.

We reliably understand that those undergoing training are to be issued with identification plates to wear around their neck and would be initially required to do 10 days of military service a month in border areas. Ultimately it would dash their hopes of a future for

themselves as normal people, and would make them part of an organisation where becoming a suicide bomber becomes the outlet for their despair. The LTTE has already taken 50 A Level first year students each from some of the bigger central schools to do 10 days on the border.

Programmes to get children in are now a regular feature. A 'Students' Inspirational Week' was begun on 6th June. An LTTE speaker told the school, "*I too once thought studies are important and put my heart and soul into it. I later realised that liberation is far more important, so here I am*". He added that studies are now not necessary until Eelam is obtained. The same things were said in all the schools

In most schools now children attending grade 10 and above are a small fraction of the number. They are frequently students who are medically certified for ailments such as wheezing and rheumatism. The 56 year old right in this country of compulsory free education for all, has been turned into a pretext for conscription. [\[Top\]](#)

5. Current LTTE Policy Towards Child Recruitment

Child recruitment from the age of ten upwards (then nearly all males) was practised by the LTTE openly in the early 90s. With the government administration in the North coming under its control and its social and psychological mechanisms for recruitment becoming more effective, there was a shift towards combat effectiveness and generally the preferred age became 15 or 16, while not spurning much younger recruits. During mid-1998 the UN special envoy, **Mr. Olara Otunnu**, who was dealing with the subject of child soldiers, visited Sri Lanka. The LTTE pledged to him that they would not recruit those below 17 and not use those below 18 in combat.

But the LTTE had placed itself in a position where it could not negotiate for a political settlement, and its whole thrust was towards militarily establishing a separate state. It began the first of its conventional thrusts by taking Killinochchi in October 1998 and with it started a massive recruitment campaign. The pressure applied on children grew in intensity. Any token attempt to keep the agreement with **Otunnu** was forgotten.

A further conventional attack in early November 1999 caused the Army to lose large tracts of territory in what the LTTE leader called the first phase of 'Unceasing Waves'. On National Heroes Day, 27th November 1999, the leader declared the coming year to be the Year of Battles that would see the establishment of his separate state. He had given priority to retaking the Jaffna peninsula. In December he made important strategic gains on the east coast of the Jaffna peninsula, but failed. The Government remained unbelievably complacent. In April 2000 he came very close to success, but failed beyond capturing more territory. This was a serious setback for his plans.

The whole exercise from December had cost the LTTE about 1,500 dead and many more injured. This was in an organisation whose total strength was generally placed at 7,000, but placed higher by local observers. The LTTE's problem was not arms and money, of which its global reach provided more than enough. It needed considerably more recruits to make another attempt at taking Jaffna. This comes out clearly in its propaganda meetings.

Currently these meetings held for the public, schoolteachers and government officials are being addressed by big guns. They include Balakumar and Para who were EROS leaders, Tamil Chelvan who heads the LTTE Political Wing, Vithuran and Puthuvai Rathinathurai, a

former communist and poet laureate. Their constant message is that they can take Jaffna in a few days or even a few hours (Puthuvai), but they need 2000 more people. Balakumar and Para have been taken off their normal duties and specially assigned to recruitment. **Even mature people listening to these recruitment speeches said that they get so emotionally carried away that they develop goose-pimples. Later, it is like coming out of a trance.**

Reflected in ground reality, it means that any consideration for age of recruitment is not observed. All that matters is whether the boy or girl can carry a gun. Although compulsory training begins at grade 9, those who are bigger made from the lower classes are also picked out and asked to join those doing military training. A recruiter going over a class would often pick out someone and say something like, "You would do fine to man the cannon." When a child is taken, only appeals from the parents are tokenly entertained. An uncle, aunt or any other relative is rudely chased away. In one incident the father and the mother of a child had barged into an LTTE camp. They were beaten and chased away for trespass. This also reflects a desperation about wanting to take Jaffna. [\[Top\]](#)

6. Why Take Jaffna?

Jaffna has prestige value as having been the intellectual centre of the Tamils and also the fountainhead of Tamil nationalism. After being under the control of the LTTE, Jaffna folk had also shown considerable reservations about the LTTE to its embarrassment. However the LTTE's immediate need to take Jaffna is mundane - i.e. flesh and muscle.

Although the East has been the main traditional source of recruitment, forming the bulk of the casualties, this dropped temporarily from 1992 when the Army took control of most parts of the East. In the Pooneryn attack in 1993, Jaffna recruits dominated the casualties. After the Army took Jaffna in 1995, schools functioned normally and recruitment by the LTTE in Jaffna dropped to almost zero. This was resented by the other cadre, especially from the East, who again began dominating casualty lists of the LTTE's very costly conventional campaigns from 1998. Moreover, recruitment in the Vanni and the LTTE-controlled East with a total population base of about 300,000, was being pushed to the limit and can be increased only by cannibalising any remaining social structures as is being done in the Vanni now. However the capture of Jaffna would not end the LTTE leader's task.

But taking Jaffna would increase the LTTE's population base by 500,000. The Leader would then have to use in Jaffna the harsh methods of recruitment he has used elsewhere as a sop to satisfy the long-suffering people in the Vanni and especially Batticaloa. He would moreover need these Jaffna recruits to launch the final thrust to liberate South Tamil Eelam – the East. This would be very difficult because of the long border with the populous South. It is something for which he has been preparing from the time he attacked Mullaitivu and captured long-range cannon in 1996 and has not deviated from it and he cannot.

Now that taking Jaffna has proved more difficult, he has to go for broke in the Vanni, break every sense of community, all human values and all fundamental loyalties to make everyone who can physically carry a gun a fighter. It is the gamble of a desperate man who is throwing in everything. Should he succeed, it would be the end of civilised life in Sri Lanka. The country will not be able to absorb the consequences.

The reasons why the LTTE went all out in support of the UNP presidential candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe in December 1999 are far deeper than the rhetoric about Chandrika

Kumaratunge having betrayed the Tamils. As president he was pledged to give in effect the LTTE the North-East administration on an interim basis. There is no need to expand on the consequences. It is a matter of deep regret that some prominent NGOs in Colombo and some supposedly anti-racist intellectuals were either backing the UNP or were saying that it is what the Tamil people and those in Jaffna wanted - hence the need to utterly discredit the Jaffna poll.

Of course those in Jaffna knew that a UNP victory or a return of the LTTE would have apocalyptic consequences. This was evident from last December when the LTTE made some incursions near Elephant Pass. From Iyakkachchi 67 families were transported to the Vanni. They were then visited by international NGOs, but they did not utter a word of complaint. We do know for a fact that they did not want to move, but several of them were assaulted and the families were transported forcibly. It is a pity that when highly organised international institutions approach the ordinary people, the truth which all the locals know, fails to surface.

This phenomenon was in evidence again in April and May. We have received several reports that thousands of people in the Thenmaratchy caught up in areas where there was fighting between the LTTE and the Army fled behind Army lines. Often on their way they were assaulted by LTTE cadre. An estimated 2000 people, including injured civilians, were made to get into trailers and after a drive were taken across a narrow stretch of the sea near Pooneryn to the LTTE controlled Vanni. There can be no doubt as to what nearly 100% of these people wanted. In early 1996 they had already defied the LTTE's orders to move to the Vanni. Quite apart from what they thought of the Army, there was a preferred option – an option where their children could attend school without being importuned by recruiters.

The LTTE itself is very clear that their reasons for taking Jaffna have nothing to do with the people there wanting to be liberated from the Army. Some LTTE spokesmen display their hostility and paranoia concerning people in Jaffna quite openly at public meetings in the Vanni. One asked, *“Whenever our cadre go to a place in Jaffna, they are immediately surrounded by the Army. How do you think that happens?”*

Frequently when a group of corpses of dead cadre are brought from Jaffna, the press and radio announcements would say that they died in action. But at the local funerals, the people would be told, *“They were betrayed!”*

Other speakers have tried to express it more humorously. They said in an oft repeated story: *“Once our cadre went to the house of a retired principal in Jaffna, and knocked on the door. Opening the door and recognising our boys, he invited them inside. A sumptuous meal with pittu and several curries was on the table. He invited them to partake of it. The LTTE men declined, went away and stayed at a distance. A little later they saw a party of the Sri Lankan Army, led by the brigadier, going into the principal's house. It was then they realised that they had stumbled into a dinner prepared for the Army.”*

Puthuvai Rathinathurai said in another story: *“During the operation to capture Elephant Pass, our cadre moved into Vadamaratchy East near Nagar Kovil. An angry young woman came at them shouting, “I was going to marry the army captain tomorrow and now you have come and spoil everything”. From the audience someone asked, “Did they shoot her?” Rathinathurai assured them that she was spared.*

A senior leader related a story about a woman from Jaffna who had been injured during the fighting between the Army and the LTTE during May. The LTTE is said to have transported her and admitted her to Mallavi hospital in the Vanni. When she regained consciousness some days later, she asked where she was. When Mallavi was mentioned, she exclaimed, *“How on earth am I to get a pass to get back to Jaffna?”*

The LTTE is very strict in issuing passes to people who want to leave the Vanni, especially to children and others eligible to be called up for military service. What the senior leader evidently tried to convey was the unbecoming nature of people worrying about getting passes to quit the Vanni at a time when the liberation struggle had reached a crucial stage. It was when the audience taking a different meaning laughed heartily, that the leader realised he had goofed.

We have verified in general and in particular cases that families in Jaffna caught up in the fighting (eg. Mattuvil) were forcibly dispatched to the Vanni, and are settled in out-of-the-way places such as in the Mullaitivu District. Subsequently their homes were looted as happened during the Jaffna exodus in Valikamam. Several of their houses were also destroyed or damaged by Kfir bombers and shells. In many cases people sent to the Vanni want to get to their relatives or are seeking proper medical care, as in the case of the elderly, but are finding passes difficult. Several of the injured taken to the Vanni were later admitted to Vavuniya Hospital.

In the Vanni itself after every displacement, the people become desperately poor and the LTTE richer. The LTTE has acquired a giant cattle-herd.

In 1990 the LTTE had ordered the EROS to close down and formally become part of the LTTE. Balakumar, now a key LTTE propagandist, agreed abjectly, angering many EROS members who then left. Balakumar did not have the nerve for the kind of risks taken by Prabhakaran and thought it very foolish when Prabhakaran attacked the Indian Army in 1987. One aspect of his nature is that when under training in India in the mid-80s, he used to be seen crying, longing to be with his father and mother. He was then in his mid-30s.

It is now his job to take even very young children from their parents and send them to almost certain death. However, unlike Prabhakaran, he knows that controlling Jaffna would be an unpleasant task. When questioned he could sometimes be disarmingly frank. After saying that they would somehow take Jaffna, he threw up his hands and confessed, *“After that we don’t know what we are going to do!”*

Such anxieties do not bother Prabhakaran. The past record suggests that if he needs to kill thousands of people in Jaffna to bring Jaffna down to the level of servility now obtaining in the Vanni, he would not hesitate to do it. He made up his mind a long time ago that he would not balk at going to the lowest depths to achieve his Eelam.

Some military and political analysts viewed the prospective fall of Jaffna last May as a military setback. Several peace activists, liberals and the UNP leader saw giving the LTTE control over Jaffna as a confidence-building measure. What callous indifference parading as wisdom! How well-founded are their theories about peace?[\[Top\]](#)

7. How Serious is the LTTE About Peace?

We have answered this question before and history and the contents of LTTE journals speak for themselves. At a recent meeting a senior LTTE leader was asked about Norwegian mediation. He replied that the Norwegians, like beneficent gods, came here with sincere intentions of bringing peace, and added that the Norwegians had begun to go rotten after they started going to New Delhi and consulting India. He later said that they are aiming high at Tamil Eelam and whatever they have to do on the way there is a small matter.

Someone pointed out that the Leader himself had said publicly that they are ready for peace talks. The senior leader replied that such pronouncements are '*maya jala vitthai*' (hocus pocus, or trickery). An old man then asked, "*Do you mean to say that our Thalaivar (Leader) is a liar?*" The senior leader looked disturbed and waffled.

A total and universally destructive war has thus become a substitute for the inability to talk peace. To this end we mentioned that the control of the population is accomplished in part through the control of basic services that are provided by the government machinery. [\[Top\]](#)

8. Control of the Government Machinery

One aspect of it is the doctoring of records and the illegal transfer of resources. For example the monies allocated by provincial ministries for public works are fully spent regardless of whether or not the work is done. This is relatively of minor significance. But when orders from the LTTE are rubber stamped down the line, so that the LTTE can decide who will get government rations that are an entitlement and who will not, here we have something with far-reaching consequences. Village headmen are also used to extract supposedly voluntary payments for the many LTTE funds as a condition for collecting their government rations.

Even more serious is that of pilfering rations to keep people on the brink of starvation, thus making them vulnerable to being roped in for military service. Government rations do get late at times when there is fighting, but they eventually arrive. It is only in Madhu refugee camp that people get their full rations. But outside they may receive about half. If say rations failed to come during a month, the next month they may receive a month's rations when two months' rations have been made available. If the full government rations are passed on, the recipients may not get balanced food, but they will not starve.

When it comes to promotions or recommendations for promotions, orders are given to heads by LTTE co-ordinators. Thus sycophancy gets priority over merit, seniority and eligibility, in some ways replicating the system in the South. In particular cases those who are good at recommending themselves to the LTTE are equally good at recommending themselves to the Government.

In the educational field, one way of going up the ranks of government service from an LTTE controlled area is to be very co-operative in abetting LTTE activities, including child recruitment [\[Top\]](#)

9. Teachers & Recruitment

Once intense recruitment began on 5th May, the teachers were summoned and ordered to take propaganda sessions twice a week in a school other than their own. On the other three days LTTE teams went to the schools, and for special meetings, several schools came together. The

teachers were asked to speak on 'current affairs' To this end teachers were given classes on orders passed through the government educational authorities about once in 20 days. About once a month the teachers were expected to organise the students and put up inspirational dramas to aid recruitment.

The syllabus, as it were, of the propaganda sessions was an inversion of traditional history – the Duttugemunu-Elara episode for example – taught in Sri Lankan schools, and its authors were people like Balakumar. According to this, some alien nations, starting with the Portuguese, had sundered the Tamil nation by continuously having an army camp at Elephant Pass for 560 years. By demolishing it the LTTE had achieved a victory unprecedented in the annals of mankind.

Another topic in current affairs which they are supposed to teach is the sea-landing in April of 1400 cadre north of Elephant Pass on the east coast of the peninsula. This was said to be even more remarkable than some of the military feats during the Second World War. Most teachers in the Vanni are unhappy with being forced to do propaganda and do the bare minimum. When LTTE men come snooping around while a session is going on, a teacher unenthusiastically doing the minimum may raise his voice and say, *“In the whole history of the world there has not been a leader so great as our Leader!”*

The authority of the teachers is also continuously undermined. As mentioned earlier, when LTTE recruitment teams arrive, teachers simply quit the class. When students seek permission from the teacher to go out of the school or to fetch some water, the LTTE would tell them, *“Your teacher is a nobody here. If we ask your teachers to go, they go, if we ask them to come, they come, if we ask them to stand on their head, they stand on their head.”*

Most teachers feel miserable and utterly humiliated. Instead of discharging their traditional responsibility of teaching, guiding and protecting their children, they are forced to connive at tricking them into going to their death. For the most part they are forced to while away their time and collect their salary. There is also a strong feeling of guilt, where many feel that the right thing to do is to resign their job and farm.

To a question at a meeting, how long the military training of students would go on (the earlier self-defence training was of limited duration), an LTTE functionary replied, **“Once all the students join our organisation, there will be no need for further training.”** The intention is clear.

What is happening in schools is part of a larger process where the whole community is forced to connive at the sacrifice of children. [\[Top\]](#)

10. The Art of 100% Support

About four videos are made in the Vanni every month showing large numbers of people holding placards, protesting against the Government on some issue or showing their support for the Tigers. But in reality the people are forced to come for these or suffer some disability. Unless the demonstration is particularly to do with schools, the students are asked to change and come in civilian clothes. Once the people come, they are given the slogans written on placards in English and Tamil to be carried. When occasion demands, they are also given pictures of the Leader. A cassock here and there gives the occasion added authenticity.

The videos taken are dispatched to the West as part of fund raising efforts. Subjects of protest include the Government's failure to dispatch rice rations, medicines, school books, school uniforms, its alleged attempt to starve the people and so on. The truth is that there may be delays according to the ground situation, but the goods do arrive. There have been occasions when a protest was organised, the goods arrived routinely and the LTTE claimed credit. Normally the government departments know when the goods are on the way.

When a demonstration is announced, people try to make excuses - some urgent business in the field, a sick cow and so on. Here the government machinery is part of the means of enforcing compliance, ensuring that at least two from every family attend. The village headman to whom the people have to go for rations, identity cards and so on, has been given the task of enforcing attendance. **This has led to ironies such as family being denied food rations for failing to attend a protest demonstration accusing the Government of starving people by not sending rations.**

We earlier encountered a man who was very active in the Elephant Pass victory festival and was later miserable when his young daughter joined the LTTE. He said that his role at the festival was forced on him. Elaborating, he added that since he had been a man of influence, the headman had asked him to bring a given number of people to the festival. He pointed out that should he have declined, the headman can harass him in so many ways, including delaying signing various documents such as applications for identity cards. Even if it was not the whole truth, it shows how the system works. The headman is ordered to bring a certain number of people and he passes it down.

Normally departmental heads and school principals are given quotas of persons to present at an occasion. Some are indifferent while others try to bring double their quota. These village headmen or principals make it a point to impress on the LTTE that they have done more than their due. The LTTE would announce who did more and who has been slack, so applying pressure on the latter.

It is a system where people are asked to put away their humanity and intelligence and behave as morons. Those who apply for passes to make a trip out of the Vanni are treated as criminals. As they are questioned in the pass office, intelligence men snoop around occasionally popping a question. At the end of the experience most people feel a loss of personality.

A further elaboration is the queuing at the exit point from the Vanni at Pandivirichchan. The people are forced to queue in a narrow channel bounded on either side by bladed wire taken from the Army's abandoned defence lines.

After years of this, it is not hard to imagine why people have stopped surrounding schools *en masse* when recruiters go there to take their children. The system has gone further in its attempts to militarise the whole society. [\[Top\]](#)

11. The Border Force

All civilians from the ages of 16 to 45 are required to undergo similar military training as in schools, for the Border Force. Indirectly it has made total minions even of high ranking officers paid by the Government. Those above that age are drawn into the Village Force. The

function of the latter is to do jobs like the repairing of roads for which the Government (eg. Provincial Council) has allocated money. The LTTE pockets the money.

The Border Force is at present posted in frontier areas either in a defensive capacity or in ordnance work. Since April this year 30 to 50 Border Force personnel are said to have been killed - mostly in Jaffna. They were no more than civilians carrying a gun under duress. Their families were totally unprepared for their deaths.

In the Mulangavil area in the Killinochchi District, a middle aged man was taken north for border duty. When the wife received news that the man had been killed, she and her four children took poison and committed suicide. Another man in the same area was similarly taken north and his wife had no news of him for many days. When the man returned home, he found that his wife and children had ended their life.

For the families of the Border Force dead who lived on, life was not going to be easy. Even earlier they had lived in poverty. They were entitled to a compensation of Rs 25,000. This is what the Government pays widows of victims killed by the security forces, and at current prices this sum would soon be exhausted. A particular phenomenon that has accompanied Border Force training is the use of sequestered grenades in murder. There are said to have been six such incidents. In two of the cases at Oddisuddan and Mulliavalai, the LTTE has administered capital punishment.

In the Vanni too a significant number of civilians have died or lost their limbs through bombing and shelling by the security forces. A group of very articulate persons who live in the Vanni and know what is going on are the Christian clergy, particularly from the Roman Catholic Church. Many of them would say little. But the others would play down the extent of the LTTE's repression, would deny that coercion is used to recruit children, and would make a case that what the LTTE does is justified by the callousness of the Government. 21 civilians were killed when Air Force bombs fell in Puthukkudiyiruppu market last September. (The Government first tried to deny it, but no inquiry has been held.) They would also cite suffering caused by restrictions on goods placed by the Government, and the starving of civilians to enhance their case.

We merely observe that the people living in the Vanni have a fairly sober assessment of the Government and its limitations. But they have grave reservations about the track along which the LTTE has been goading them and know that the world offers them far kinder options than the blood sacrifice of their children and the destruction of their humanity.

They are also grieved by the manner in which they have been systematically misrepresented by those who speak on their behalf, and in doing so condemn them to their present state. Unfortunately, the Church is very guilty in this respect.[\[Top\]](#)

12. The Church: Between Nationalism & Fascism

From the point of its global reach the LTTE realised the importance of the churches when it became a state-in-the making. But bishops of the powerful Roman Catholic Church have generally tried to keep a distance. Bishop Rayappu Joseph of Mannar sometimes slips by treading areas he should have avoided. During mid-June, Ananthi of the BBC Tamil Service asked him a leading question about where the civilians in Jaffna caught up in the presently

LTTE controlled area would go if given a choice. The Bishop immediately replied that they would come to the Vanni.

Because of confusion in standing up for values and a lack of courage in the Church hierarchy, through a handful of priests the LTTE has been able to push the Church to support its propaganda. There was in recent months a remarkable occasion in Killinochchi. The LTTE invited a large number of priests and nuns for a meal. It turned out to be a perfect western meal where several courses were served, with the best chinaware and cutlery in use. At the end of the meal Tamil Chelvan read out a message from the Leader.

The message was that the Church has an important role to play in obtaining legitimacy for their cause internationally. There was also an earnest plea for their co-operation. The propaganda role of the Church is important both locally as well as among the Tamil expatriate community. Fr.P2 is the Mankulam correspondent of the Tamil service of the Philippines-based Radio Veritas. Although owned by the Roman Catholic Church, it is notorious for pro-LTTE propaganda.

The north of the Vanni comes under the Bishop of Jaffna and during the middle of last year the Vanni Divine Service Council, consisting of clergy and lay was in conference for 7 days. The president of the Council was **Fr.P1**, **Fr.P2** its secretary and **Fr. P3** its co-ordinator. On the last day **P1** brought up an item not on the agenda. He wanted the Council to discuss, “*What is the role of the Church and its contribution in today’s situation?*”

There was an attempt to steer the discussion towards open support for the LTTE. The majority of the clergy and other delegates were dumbfounded. However they strongly objected and the attempt to pass a pro-LTTE resolution failed.

It was rather resolved that the Government and the LTTE should talk and bring about peace. But the next day the LTTE daily *Eelanatham* announced that the Council had resolved to support fully all the wartime measures of the LTTE. The same claim had also been quickly given to the BBC Tamil Service and was broadcast. Although many priests protested privately and the church authorities too later took the three officiating priests to task, no correction was ever made.

We said in our last bulletin that the Church believed that the shells which killed 38 refugees in Madhu in November 1999 had been fired by the LTTE. We now have confirmation that this is widely shared by church officials in Madhu and technically the Army could hardly have fired those shells. We also learn that shortly after the incident, Bishop Joseph Rayappu gave Karikalan, a senior LTTE figure, a dressing down. It was **Fr.P1** who had told the BBC Tamil Service that the Army had fired the shells.

The Church has however been silent, allowing the people to believe that the Army fired the shells. Two months later the **HUDEC** of the Roman Catholic Church in Jaffna organised a memorial service for the victims at Madhu. However, the prayers and speeches, mostly by laymen, referred to the victims as having been killed by ‘*alien forces*’. That claim went uncorrected.

Fr.P2 also chairs the NGO consortium for Killinochchi District that deals with international NGOs. The Church has contributed significantly to the Big Lie. [\[Top\]](#)

13. On the Threshold of Tragedy

The LTTE is fated to persist its attempt to take Jaffna as part of its long-term military plans. It will be very bitterly fought and, on the LTTE's part, it is going to be a massacre of innocents, often taken away in tears from their school. It is a tragedy in the making under our very noses, and those who should be alerting the world to apply every available means of pressure on the LTTE to stop this crime against children and against the community as a whole, do not seem to be aware of the enormity of it. The confusion of the West is also reflected in the presumption of 'neutrality'. Does one need to seek an artificial balance by supposing that children in the Vanni are joining the LTTE because of Sri Lankan Air Force bombing?

Many observers tend to avoid seeing the underlying trends and look at issues very superficially.

Are they equal to the well-camouflaged deception all around them, and the controlled information that is channelled to them by a very sophisticated organisation?

It is also important to recognise the effect of scores of millions of dollars pouring into LTTE coffers from the West during this year alone. Children have to be found to carry the weapons bought from this money.

When challenged, LTTE fund raisers in the West claim that these millions are being collected for refugees in the Vanni. Has this ever been challenged? Is there anything in the Vanni to justify this claim? Has one dollar been spent paying compensation to the widow of a Border Force victim? **The first step in halting the tragedy that threatens to engulf thousands of children is to come to terms with what is really going on in the Vanni.**

A number of groups in the South who supported justice for Tamils in the past are today guilty of creating confusion about the interests of the Tamil people. They have made it seem natural that the Tamil people want to live under the LTTE, and that its attempt to take Jaffna is in keeping with the wishes of the Tamil people. It is as though the Tamil people in the North-East have an obsession for destroying their children. The LTTE taking Jaffna would have been an act of brigandage and that is how it would have been seen in Jaffna. It would have been very wrong to misrepresent a triumph of barbarism as a triumph of nationalism.

The Government too has failed to ask itself the many questions that fall of Elephant Pass and the succeeding events should have raised. The events have been looked at largely from a military stand-point. The civilian perspective has been lost sight of. After the Army took Jaffna in 1996, these civilians lived under guarantees and promises made by the Government. Thousands of these civilians were last May caught up amidst Air Force bombing, and shelling by both sides, when the Army's positions had to be protected. Why this situation was allowed to arise needs to be answered. It is more than about the destruction of dozens of lives and many homes. There are also political questions of confidence and morale. The Army Commander has tried to place the onus on the Jaffna civilians by suggesting that they should co-operate with the Army, of which the LTTE thinks they are doing too much. That is not where the problem lies. The LTTE gave the Army all the information they needed in the 'Liberation Tigers' of Jan-Feb 2000!

This is not going to be the last time and military structures are in need of drastic repair, both to improve professionalism, give confidence to the men and to uphold human rights -

particularly in the areas of torture and accountability after incidents, such as that in Batticaloa on Vesak Day. Can this be accomplished by a Deputy Defence Minister whose main recent preoccupation has been towards salvaging his personal reputation?

There is also a painful dilemma facing the Tamil intellectuals, the Church in the North-East and the Tamil parties who with ill-disguised fear have abdicated any role in finding a political solution to the LTTE. The LTTE which has been culling the abler and effective members in their ranks, is goading them in a particular direction. This direction is the 'EROS Way'. It is a dead end without honour. After launching out on a liberation struggle, EROS leaders Balakumar and Para are now catching children for the LTTE. They would privately admit to close friends that they have to go on because they are trapped.

There is survival politics. Being politically astute they know that the political vacuum of the LTTE would lead the Tamil people towards tragedy. In a frank moment Balakumar would throw up his hands and say, "*We will get Eelam, but then we don't know what to do.*" As Minister of Justice in the Vanni, Para's main job is to raise money through astronomical fines, such as by levying impossible fines on widows who buy Sri Lankan arrack at a highly inflated price from the LTTE, and sell it for a small profit. Where children in the Vanni are concerned, most of the articulate members of the Tamil community have been playing the EROS game.

At an age when we are talking about global governance, are systems so weak, ineffective and blind, that nothing can be done to halt the tragedy to which the children in the Vanni are being destined?]