

BLACK JULY



Tamils board ships in Colombo to flee the massacres

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Furthermore, in keeping with his avowed Sinhala supremacy mandate, he announced the Sixth amendment to the constitution, which declared even politically advocating a separate Tamil state illegal. Those who supported separatism would not be allowed to sit in parliament, practice a profession or even to hold a passport. In effect the government itself outlawed any discussions with the Tamil political leaders, many of whom fled the island.

The UK's Guardian in its editorial of 1st August 1983 referred to the Sri Lankan President as someone who has "increasingly come to resemble a dictatorial and racist third World autocrat".

President Jayawardene called an end to the violence on the sixth day. By then, an estimated 3,000 Tamils had died, and the Tamil population of the island was in shock. Over 200,000 Tamils (including 35,000 Indian Tamils) were displaced. 18,000 Tamil homes and 5000 businesses were destroyed, with economic losses totalling \$300 million.

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Icon of 1983

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Amarasinghe whipped the camera up, snapping a frame before tossing it into an open bag being held open by his friend. They then fled. In the bag was a captured moment of Sri Lanka's violent history. It is doubtful they were even aware of its potency.

The photograph is made available by well-known Australia-based academic Michael Roberts, who acquired it from Amarasinghe.

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national Commission of Jurists observed: "the evidence points clearly to the conclusion that the violence of the Sinhala rioters on the Tamils amounted to acts of genocide."

George Immerwahr, a United Nations civil servant and a US citizen who had worked in Sri Lanka in the late 1950s wrote to Professor Wilson, the author of "The Break-up of Sri Lanka" that "... the most shattering report came from a friend who was a civil servant; he told me that he had helped plan the riots at the orders of his superiors. When I heard him say this, I was so shocked I told him I simply couldn't believe him, but he insisted he was telling the truth, and in fact he justified the Government's decision to stage the riots. When I heard this, I telephoned an official in our own State Department, and while he declined to discuss the matter, I got the impression that he already knew from our embassy in Colombo what I was telling him."

The Sri Lankan government of the time rejected demands for a proper judicial investigation by international organisations, including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. Subsequent governments have also done so.



Colombo's Sinhalese on the battered streets after the riots. All the Tamils had fled the south.

Slaughter in the cells

Over fifty Tamil detainees in Welikade prison were massacred by Sinhala inmates and jailors.

The Guardian (UK)

(5th August 1983) It is the massacres in the Welikade gail which are attracting the most attention. There is a particular interest in circumstances in which two alleged guerrilla leaders were killed.

The two men, Sellarasa "Kuttimani" Yogachandiran, leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TE-LO) and a political writer, and Ganesanathan Jeganathan had been sentenced to death last year for the murder of a policeman.

In speeches from the dock, the two men had announced that they would donate their eyes in the hope that they would be grafted on to Tamils who would see the birth of Eelam, the independent state they were fighting for.

Reports from Batticaloa gaol, where the survivors of the Welikada massacre are now being kept, say that the two men were forced to kneel and their eyes gouged out with iron bars before they were killed.

One version has it that Kuttimani's tongue was cut out by an attacker who drank the blood and cried: "I have drunk the blood of a Tiger."

The two men were among the 35 Tamils killed in the Welikada gaol on July 25. Another 17 were killed in the gaol two days later and the Guardian has obtained a first hand account of part of the fighting in this incident, including

the circumstances in which Sri Lanka's Gandhian leader, Dr. Rajasunderam, died.

Dr. Rajasunderam was one of nine men, including two Catholic priests and a Methodist minister, who were moved out of their cells immediately after the July 25

'Kuttimani, an MP, was forced to kneel by his assailants and ordered to pray to them. When he refused, he was taunted about his last wish... He had willed that his eyes be donated to someone so that at least that person would see an independent Tamil Eelam. His assailants then gouged his eyes... He was then stabbed to death and his testicles were wrenched from his body.'

- Hindu 10 August 1983

killings-to make way for survivors moved into their cells on security grounds-into a padlocked hall, upstairs in the same block.

The nine, convinced that further attacks were coming, made repeated representations to the prison authorities on July 26 for better security. Assurances were given that they would be protected, but nothing was done.

At 2:30 pm in July 27, hearing

screaming and whistling outside, one of the priests looked out of a high window and saw prisoners breaking in from a neighboring compound, wielding axes, iron bars, pieces of firewood, and sticks. There was no sign of the prison guards.

The mob, which was later found to have killed 16 prisoners in the downstairs cells, ran up to the hall and began breaking the padlock. Dr. Rajasunderam then went to the door and cried out: "Why are you trying to kill us? What have we done to you?"

At that moment, the door burst open and Dr. Rajasunderam was hit on the side of the neck by a length of iron. Blood was seen to spurt several feet.

"At that juncture, we thought we should defend ourselves," one of the prisoners related. "We broke the two tables in the hall and took the legs to defend ourselves."

"We kept them at bay. They threw bricks at us. We threw them back. Pieces of firewood and an iron bar were thrown at us. We used them to defend ourselves. It went on for about half an hour. They shouted: 'You are the priests, we must kill you.'"

The killing was eventually ended by the army, who moved in with teargas. An inquest has been opened into the Welikada massacres, but the above details did not emerge. Prison warders claim that keys to the cells were stolen from them.

Lawyers for the prisoners who have accused the warders of having participated, claim that they were not given the opportunity to bring evidence despite representation to the Government.