

## **EXPOSING A HIDDEN AGENDA**

Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali was appointed as the Minister of National Security after the Tamil riots of 1983. He was then resident at Polhengoda. I joined the Minister and his brother Dayantha for breakfast at their Plohengoda residence one day. While at breakfast the Minister related to me a very interesting story, which would prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Norwegians were even at that point of time surreptitiously helping the LTTE to settle Indian Tamil families in the strategic area of Weli Oya, in order to link the Northern Province to the Eastern Province with a continuous land mass inhabited by Tamils.

Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali informed me that one or two families of estate Tamils were off loaded at the Madu Road Railway Station each time the train made its journey to repatriate Indian Tamils from the upcountry to Mannar from where they were taken by ferry to India. The off loaded Indian Tamil families were smuggled to the Manik Farm in Cheddikulam and remained there for a week or two. If the Police failed to locate the missing families, they were next transported to Weli Oya, where many Tamil entrepreneurs had taken a massive stretch of land on lease, under the pretext of helping the government in its food production drive.

The Dollar, Kent, Ceylon Theater Farm etc owned by these Tamil entrepreneurs was on this massive stretch of land in this strategic area of Weli Oya that linked the Northern Province to the Eastern Province. The Indian Tamil families were settled in this strategic area to establish a continuous land mass inhabited by Tamils, between the Northern Province and the Eastern Province. The funding for this surreptitious effort I was told by the Minister was made available through Redd Barna and its chief executive officer was none other than Mr. Jon Westborg, who later became the ambassador for Norway in Sri Lanka.

The Minister Lalith Athulathmudali was subsequently responsible for getting these Special leases cancelled. The farms owned by these Tamil entrepreneurs were taken over by the state and handed over to the Prisons Department, for the purpose of running open prison camps. The Ministers intention were to ultimately alienate land to prisoners of good behavior in an effort not only to rehabilitate them, but also to utilize them as a buffer to prevent separatist terrorists from occupying this strategic area.

When the LTTE realized that their effort at gaining control of this strategic area, by settling Tamil families with the assistance of Norwegian funding through Redd Barna had been effectively neutralized by the Minister of National Security, with the establishment of open prison camps, they decided to attack these camps in Weli Oya and in doing so committed an unprecedented atrocity in the mass murder of over a hundred inmates, living in the open prison camps of Dollar and Kent farms in 1984. After this brutal attack by the LTTE, the then government was compelled to stabilize this area by bringing it under Army control. With the presence of the Army it was made possible for the government to develop this area under the Mahawali E System, with the establishment of many farmer settlements.

Since the establishment of these farmer settlements in Weli Oya, they have been subjected to many LTTE attacks from the jungles of Mullaitivu. However the Army has succeeded in repulsing these attacks and LTTE has failed in their effort to regain control of this strategic area though they were successful in occupying the village of Gajabapura in Weli Oya on or about 1997, with the fall of the Army forward defence line from Kanagarayankulam to Nedunkeni.

The only access route to this strategic area of Weli Oya from the predominantly Sinhala populated North Central Province is through Kebithigollewa and Padaviya in the Anuradhapura district. The direct attacks on Weli Oya having failed thus far it is possible that the LTTE is now trying a flanking attack on the Sinhala villages in the Kebithigollewa Divisional Secretariat Area, in an effort to drive away the people in these villages and thus to destabilize Weli Oya. The claymore mine explosion that killed 64 innocent Sinhala villagers on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2006 at Halmillawatiya and the subsequent claymore mine attack at Kalepuliyankulama that killed two home guards, may be a well planned effort to drive away the Sinhala villages situated along the only approach road to Weli Oya.

I made a visit to these threatened villages in the Kebithigollewa area with Mr.S.L.Gunasekera, Wing Commander Ranjith Ratnapala and Mr. Gamini Amarasekera recently and found that most of the Sinhala villages situated on the only approach to Weli Oya have been abandoned and that most of the families that were living in these villages have now shifted to camps for internally displaced that have been established near the Kebithigollewa town by INGOs such as UNHCR and ICRC.

The efforts made by the Divisional Secretary to resettle the abandoned villages are proving to be futile because not only food clothing and shelter, but also other gifts such as agricultural implements are being issued to inmates in these IDP camps. The people are informed by these INGOs that all these facilities and more will only be given to those who are resident in the IDP camps and not to those who resettle in their former villages.

It is a well known fact that the majority of the local staff in both the UNHCR and the ICRC is Tamil.. Therefore there is always the possibility that the LTTE is influencing the Tamil local staff in both these INGOs to expedite the exodus of Sinhalese families from the threatened villages into IDP camps.

If these IDP camps are allowed to continue it will firstly benefit the INGOs to collect funds abroad. Much of these funds will be utilized for administrative purposes wherein the staff working for these INGOs will utilize the donations received for accommodation in the best of hotels and for transport in the best of four wheel drive vehicles, while the internally displaced will receive a pittance of what is received as donations. Secondly as mentioned before the exodus of people from the Sinhala villages on the approach road to Weli Oya will destabilize the Weli Oya settlements that were established by the government with so much time effort and money.

The IDP camps if allowed to continue will contribute towards destroying the agricultural based village life in the Kebithigollewa area. Much of the agricultural lands owned by those who have left the villages have already been destroyed by wild elephants. These IDP families are being issued with dry rations over and above what they actually need. The storage space in the tents issued to the displaced families is limited. Therefore much of what they receive in excess is stolen by others and this has led to much disunity within the camps. The people who have shifted into these camps who were once hard working cultivators are now getting used to living off the dole and are becoming very lazy and lethargic.

During our visit we found that agricultural implements such as mammoties, pick axes and axes had been issued to inmates in the IDP camps. These are of little or no use to them as they have already abandoned their agricultural property. The men will we were told sell these items in town to shops at what ever price that is offered, as they are now doing with items that they receive over and above their need. The money thus received is invariably used to purchase liquor. Most men in IDP camps return to their family tents in the evenings drunk. When their wives protest at their drunkenness they beat up their wives. The family unity is thus shattered and an environment is naturally created where it is difficult to bring up children. The privacy that women enjoyed in their village homes are also not available in IDP camps and this brings many social problems in its wake.

Considering all the ill effects in continuing with IDP camps at Kebithigollewa it is suggested that the President instructs the Divisional Secretary to draw up a master plan to resettle the abandoned Sinhala villages in Kebithigollewa as soon as the forward defence line is completed. The INGOs who now work with the blessings of the Minister of Disaster Relief, who do not give any support whatsoever to the efforts made by the Divisional Secretary to resettle the abandoned villages, should be instructed to work according to this master plan drawn up by the Divisional Secretary.

All concerned citizen and volunteer organizations could help by contacting the Divisional Secretary, telephone number 0252298638 and assisting him to resettle the displaced families in their villages. They could also help by distributing whatever donations they wish to give through the Divisional Secretary to the families who opted to remain or have resettled in their villages despite the LTTE threat. They should refrain from helping families in IDP camps, which are being supported by INGOs with a hidden agenda.

The immediate requirement however is the construction of the forward defence line, before the onset of the rainy season. The Divisional secretary informed me that he in consultation with the Army has organized a *sramadana* on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2006, to expedite the construction work on the forward defence line. He needs to purchase implements such as axes, kathi, mammoties etc to the value of Rs.65000/=. These implements will be handed over to the Army after the *sramadana*, for the future maintenance of this forward defence line. Those interested in contributing for this project could contact Mr. Preethi Kolonnage of the Thawalama Development Foundation at his office telephone number 2481527. He has already commenced a collection account in this regard.

Dr. (Mrs.) Anula Wijesundara has also organized a very worthy project to show gratitude to the families who refused to fall pray to the strategy of LTTE terrorists by leaving the threatened villages in Kebithigollewa. She has intentions of donating a bicycle to each of these families through Success Colombo. Those interested in joining this project could contact her at her home telephone number 2810875.

The valuable Sinhala Buddhist culture in the villages of Kebithigollewa that was protected and preserved over the years by our ancestors is under severe threat, by the actions of INGOs now at work in IDP camps. Our culture, our values and our future generation is more important to us than the money that the INGOs are bringing into this country for what they call disaster relief work. If their activities in Kebithigollewa are well analyzed, it would be found that their work is disaster induction rather than disaster relief.

Lt Col. A.S.Amarasekera.  
14<sup>th</sup> August 1006.