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## How it Came to This – Learning from Sri Lanka's Civil Wars

*When development policies fail, the seeds of militancy are down. Escalating deadly conflict and terrorism provide evidence that these seeds have been fertilised and are beginning to flourish.*

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Chapter 1 posed four questions that bewildered residents of conflict-wracked nations often ask themselves:

- *How could we have come to this?*
- *What could we have done to prevent the conflict that has killed our family members and friends, devastated our lives, destroyed what was being so painstakingly developed?*
- *What can we learn and share from our experiences that may help others to avoid the path that we have trod?*
- *How can we share lessons from our experience most powerfully and effectively?*

This chapter and the one that follows provide answers.

### **The syndrome: why violent conflict and terrorism metastasised in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka began life as an independent nation peacefully, with democratic institutions in place, with only infrequent outbreaks of violent conflict in its history and with good economic prospects. It ended the millennium with more than 60,000 dead, a divided society, a devastated economy and one of the world's most effective militant movements contesting the government's sovereignty over a third of the island. Protracted deadly conflict became the norm, beginning in 1984. A succession of 'fever charts' picture the pattern and magnitude of this transformation. How can this best be explained? As we have seen, the Development – Deadly-Conflict System Model, described at length in chapter 5, points to five symptoms that characterise escalating conflict and terrorism.

To recapitulate, the symptoms are:

1. Deteriorating economic performance
2. An increasing number of development failures
3. Rising levels of relative deprivation manifested in heightened ethnic identities and groups mobilised around these identities
4. Declining effectiveness in the application of state-sanctioned violence
5. Growing strength of militant movements

Chapter 2 showed how a spectrum of theories attributed importance to these symptoms as proximate causes of violent conflict escalation. Chapter 5 showed how symptoms and violent conflict were linked through two reinforcing feedback loops, *conflict escalation from development failures* and *conflict escalation from state-sanctioned violence ineffectiveness*. How did these symptoms manifest themselves in Sri Lanka?

With the exception of development failures, narratives and graphs presented in chapters 6 through 19 describe the manifestations quite clearly. *Economic performance* exhibited relatively steady growth, with only minor downturns for 22 years following independence. After 1970, boom and bust cycles, inflation, periods of stagnation, and a weakening of the government's financial position became increasingly evident. These changes were coincident with, though not necessarily, direct causes of heightened violent conflict levels. Escalating violent conflict following the 1983 riots had an increasingly severe economic impact during the remaining years of J.R. Jayewardene's term, an impact that continued. By the end of 1988, economic activity was at a virtual standstill. Political leaders who had once hoped to transform Sri Lanka into an 'Asian Tiger' were preoccupied with maintaining some semblance of government authority and clinging to power.

Deprivation levels are hard to measure directly, but there is ample evidence that ambitious development programs were highly touted and then failed to deliver on their promises. As programs faltered, groups whose solidarity depended on the ethnic identities of members became more numerous and influential. Mainstream groups became more ethnically militant. This included not only the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, responsible for introducing ethnic politics into the political mainstream, but also the United National and Marxist parties, which had initially advocated multicultural, secularist political agendas.

J.R. Jayewardene, ostensibly a liberal democrat, was responsible for founding the pro-Sinhalese National Workers' Organisation (JSS) and for appointing an outspoken Sinhalese nationalist, Cyril Mathew, to head it. The Federal Party became the Tamil United Liberation Front and an advocate of 'self determination' for the 'Tamil nation.' By 1988, armed militant groups dominated Tamil politics, with Prabhakaran's Liberation Tigers in control of the agenda.

To document the declining effectiveness of state-sanctioned violence, one needs only examine fever charts that simultaneously display the 'disease' – levels of violent conflict intensity – and the 'cure' – levels of state-sanctioned violence. Occasionally, security force intervention and repressive measures brought violent conflict under control, but increased applications of state-sanctioned violence were more commonly coincident with conflict escalation. Often Sri Lanka's armed forces served as unwitting recruitment agents for the LTTE, the JVP and other militant groups by applying repressive tactics indiscriminately and responding to attacks with undisciplined broad-brush retaliations against mostly innocent civilians. In 1988 both violent conflict and state-sanctioned violence had reached their highest levels in the island's history.

The growing strength of militant movements is documented by data that shows the frequency of political conflict incidents, in different categories. Once again, the pattern is clear. Prior to 1970, incidents linked to militant movements played an inconsequential role in Sri Lanka's political scene (although militant labour unions were active). Beginning in 1970, they assumed increasing importance, first due to the JVP insurrection and then to the growing visibility of Tamil militants in the north and east. After 1983, conflict between militants and Sri Lanka's government became more and more all-encompassing. In the space of a decade, the number of violent conflict incidents increased at least twenty-fold and the overwhelming majority were militant.<sup>1</sup>

### **Development failures**

The most important symptom and the most difficult to precisely measure, development failures, has been left until last. Why do I characterise this symptom as 'most important?' It is because orchestrating successful development trajectories and taking quick corrective action when a trajectory shows signs of failure are the most cost effective ways for countries to escape the syndrome of protracted deadly conflict and terrorism.

Chapters 1 and 3 gave reasons why this is so. Most developing country residents, indeed, most residents of all countries, share common aspirations.

They want to feel good about their lives, the circumstances in which they live and future prospects for themselves and their children. They seek a humane and peaceable society, characterised by material sufficiency, personal security and psychic fulfilment. They seek leaders and political institutions that will respond satisfactorily to their concerns and grievances. Development policies seek to fulfil these aspirations with strategies and programs that will improve residents' circumstances and sense of well-being.

All too often, development policies fail. They fail because politically inflated rhetoric raises hopes and aspirations that cannot realistically be fulfilled. They fail because programs and strategies are grounded in political economic theories based more on ideology than fact. They fail because programs and strategies emphasise performance criteria that bear scant relationship to what people want and need. They fail because programs and strategies raise and then dash expectations by delivering short-term benefits that cannot be sustained. Development policies fail because political leaders fail to heed unmistakable feedback that things are going wrong and cling to power, using state-sanctioned violence, long after it is time to go. When development policies fail, the seeds of militancy are down. Escalating deadly conflict and terrorism provide evidence that these seeds have been fertilised and are beginning to flourish.

Development policy failures experienced in Sri Lanka illustrate this. They contributed to escalating deadly conflict between 1948 and 1988. They precipitated the symptoms described above. Listing and recapitulating these development failures provides a useful answer to the question 'how could we have come to this?'. How these failures might have been avoided is discussed in a concluding chapter.

The following are 10 development policy failures, which if avoided or corrected, could have prevented escalating deadly conflict and terrorism in Sri Lanka.

1. Unsustainable entitlement programs
2. Polarising political rhetoric and tactics
3. 'Winner take all' official language policies
4. Failure to devolve power – the 'outstation' mentality in implementing Sri Lanka's development strategies and programs
5. Half hearted reforms of secondary and higher education, coupled with discriminatory university admissions policies targeting Tamil youth
6. Perpetuation of government-controlled economic management schemes long after their economic inefficacy had been demonstrated

7. The over-ambitious and over-politicised economic reform policies of J.R. Jayewardene
8. Inadequate funding, Sinhalisation and politicisation of the security forces
9. Use of repressive measures to secure the United National Party's parliamentary majority for an additional term in 1982
10. The attempt to restore order in the north and east (especially in volatile Jaffna province) with military forces that were clearly incapable of achieving that goal.

Narratives describing each failed policy have been given in earlier chapters. A brief recapitulation here emphasises important points.

### **Unsustainable entitlement programs**

During Sri Lanka's first 22 years of independence, successive governments provided residents with a mix of entitlement programs that included subsidised food and transportation, free medical care, free education and a variety of agricultural subsidies and insurance programs. Residents came to take entitlements for granted and political leaders vied with one another to promise more. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's economy failed to diversify and its position *vis à vis* the international economy became increasingly vulnerable to external shocks. Leaders who called attention to this vulnerability and proposed remedial measures, most notably J.R. Jayewardene, were attacked by political opponents and then punished by voters. After 1970, when the international economic environment became more competitive and more volatile, neither United Front nor United National Party governments could avoid cutbacks. When out of power each party blamed the other.

The unsustainability of entitlement programs need not have become a political issue, since both parties faced the same problems, caused by structural weaknesses in Sri Lanka's economy. Paradoxically, the party in power was more disadvantaged by this problem. The absence of a democratic discourse emphasising sustainability as a national goal magnified the sense of deprivation that cutbacks in entitlements created.

### **Polarising political rhetoric and tactics**

Primordial violence, rooted in nationalist and ethnic identities, is latent in most societies. Whether or not it becomes manifest will be determined, in large degree, by the legitimacy of ethno-nationalist political rhetoric in mainstream political discourse. The example of World War II Nazi Germany taught

Europeans this lesson, and 'hate speech' is now widely condemned, despite resurgent right-wing nationalist movements in several countries. Some Asian nations, most notably Singapore, have recognised the potentially corrosive influence of ethno-nationalist political rhetoric and legislated against it.<sup>2</sup>

Post-1956 Sri Lanka provides an object lesson in the corrosiveness of such rhetoric and tactics that often accompany it. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's calls for 'Sinhala only' were intended to mobilise political support, but were also intended to serve an important development goal. In 1956, members of Sri Lanka's Sinhala-speaking majority community were second-class citizens in their own country. Public education was inferior or unavailable. Opportunities for public employment were limited. Thus Bandaranaike's appeals struck a responsive chord among individuals who previously felt they had little voice. Sinhalese-nationalist rhetoric became a staple of both mainstream parties, especially when they were out of power. Voices of extremist fringes, too, gained additional legitimacy.

Polarising rhetoric and tactics are corrosive because they invariably provoke counter-polarisation, leading to an escalating divisive cycle on both sides of an ethnic divide. When Bandaranaike began his political movement, he apparently gave little thought to the impact that his new discourse would have on Tamils and on the civility of Sri Lanka's political culture. But outcomes of the cycle his rhetoric and tactics initiated were the July 1983 riots, the Liberation Tigers' emergence as a dominant political force, and protracted civil war.

#### **'Winner take all' official language policies**

After years of civil war, Sri Lanka finally adopted policies that made Tamil an official language and established English as an official 'link' language. Had Sirimavo Bandaranaike's newly elected government adopted such policies in 1960, it might have helped prevent those years of civil war. Once elected, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's language policies had been more accommodationist than his 'Sinhala only' campaign rhetoric implied. The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, which he steered through Parliament in 1958, mandated the government to implement regulations providing for the 'reasonable use of Tamil.' In July 1960 general election campaigning, Sirimavo Bandaranaike pledged to implement official language policies in a manner that would respond sensitively to Tamil concerns.

Once elected, she reneged on these promises, implementing provisions requiring that Sinhala become the language of administration throughout the

island (including Tamil regions) on January 1, 1961. Like many Colombo-originated directives, this one was not fully implemented; however, many Tamil civil servants, including some with years of government service, were displaced from their jobs. Moreover, Mrs. Bandaranaike chose not to issue regulations providing for the reasonable use of Tamil at all, notwithstanding the law that required her to do so. They were issued only after Dudley Senanayake assumed office in 1965.

Even more pernicious, over the long run, were policies that required Sinhalese and Tamil students to be educated in their own medium (language). Essentially, Sinhalese students were discouraged from studying in Tamil or English, even if they wished to do so. Tamil students, too, were discouraged from studying in languages other than their own. Thus, increasingly, students who attended the same schools in multiethnic areas became less and less familiar with the culture of their schoolmates and less and less able to communicate with them easily.

Another consequence of Mrs. Bandaranaike's policies was the dismantling of excellent English language courses of instruction that existed in some urban areas, although not in rural areas. Increasingly, Sri Lankans who could afford it chose to educate their children in English-medium international schools or to hire private tutors. Thus English remained a 'sword' that divided the island along class lines. After 1977, when leaders attempted to link Sri Lanka more closely with the international economy, their revitalisation plans were impeded by a generation of indigenous language educated men and women who lacked necessary language skills to participate effectively. This, too, contributed to feelings of relative deprivation.

### **Centralisation of power in Colombo – the 'outstation' mentality in implementing Sri Lanka's development strategies and programs**

We have seen how a succession of attempts to devolve power either failed or were only implemented half-heartedly. Even under the United Front leaders, with their commitment to central planning, there were proposals that recognised the importance of granting local authorities some role in development programs. Narratives in several chapters emphasised that resistance to devolving power stemmed as much from the Colombo-centric attitudes of politicians and bureaucrats as from ideological commitments to a unitary state. Where devolution proposals were intended to cede autonomy to Tamil majority regions, these two points of view reinforced one another.

Denigration of 'outstation' regions is a common legacy of colonial regimes, which centralised authority in the capital city and structured a dependent economy to supply commodities and raw materials to the 'mother country.' Rural, peripheral areas were invariably short-changed when it came to economic development, educational opportunities, and government services. These patterns were perpetuated after independence. Sri Lanka implemented a number of rural development programs, but most bogged down in politics and bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> The accelerated Mahaweli Development Project specifically targeted rural areas but the opportunities it provided so blatantly favoured UNP supporters that it probably created as much discontent in rural areas as it remedied. Newly educated youth, seeking to enter the workforce in rural areas, invariably experienced the greatest frustrations. Bad economic times had a particularly severe impact on these young men and women, creating a climate where, in the south, the JVP became strong. In the northeast, discriminatory policies based on ethnicity added to volatile attitudes created by adverse economic circumstances and obviously second-class government services.

**Half hearted reforms of secondary and higher education, coupled with discriminatory university admissions policies, targeting Tamil youth.**

Since young men and women (especially young men) are the primary participants in militant movements, the success or failure of education programs in providing economic opportunities play key roles in determining whether or not militant movements grow strong. In Sri Lanka, the mismatch between economic needs and the education secondary schools and universities provided was an ongoing problem and remains a problem to this day.

Sri Lankans value education. Even in remote areas, travellers will see crowds of boys and girls and also young men and women, typically clad in white uniforms, walking to school each day. Between 1956 and 1966, S.W.R.D. and Sirimavo Bandaranaike's populist governments implemented policies that swelled primary, secondary and university enrolments ten-fold. Most of these new students were educated in Sinhala and in non-technical 'arts' subjects, which were the only curricula that rapidly expanding schools and universities could offer to their new clientele. New graduates, even those with coveted university degrees, learned that their studies did not guarantee employment in a competitive labour market where most good jobs required technical or professional training. This was disillusioning.

Successive governments recognised the problem and implemented some reforms, but failed to give the matter sufficient priority. Dudley Senanayake's government created technical training institutes and 'practical farms.' United Front leaders mandated radical secondary education reforms, and experimented with 'job-oriented curricula' at the university level. J.R. Jayewardene's government reversed these reforms, which had been gutted by budget cuts in any case. UNP leaders invested massively in university facilities, but short-changed primary and secondary education. Despite the bottlenecks created by an inadequately trained labour force and a restive youthful population that was disproportionately unemployed, no government made education a top budgetary or political priority. This made it easier for entrenched conservatives in the educational establishment to resist needed changes. Thus Sri Lanka's education policies became a textbook example of how to alienate the most volatile segment of the island's population.

The United Front government's tinkering with university admissions procedures may have been the most alienating of all. Readers will recall from chapter 11 that 'media-wise standardisation' adjusted the scores of Sinhalese applicants to make them more competitive with Tamils. 'District quotas' gave applicants from 'disadvantaged' (Kandyan Sinhalese and Muslim) districts preferential treatment. Since Tamils were disproportionately represented in universities, and especially in technical and professional fields, the reforms could be seen as allocating a scarce resource more fairly.<sup>4</sup> At the time United Front leaders were more concerned with placating potential JVP recruits than potential Tamil militants. But the policy came to symbolise racist government policies among a segment of the Tamil community that could provide militant groups not only with willing recruits but also effective leaders.

**Perpetuation of government controlled economic management schemes long after their economic inefficacy had been demonstrated**

As stated in chapter 12, I do not fault Sirimavo Bandaranaike's United Front for nationalising many basic industries and for creating regulatory incentives that favoured import substitution industrialisation. In 1970, the ideologically driven policies of Marxist coalition members were still accepted by many experts as a potentially viable economic development strategy for poor nations. A key goal of such policies – weighting social goals more equally with profitability – remains desirable, if difficult to attain.

United Front leaders' error was to cling tenaciously to their experiment long after it became obvious it was not working. It did not take long for the shortcomings of state managed industries to become apparent – use of political and ethnic criteria to hire senior managers, inappropriate use of capital-intensive technologies, regulatory regimes that mandated inefficient uses of scarce foreign exchange, and politically-mandated pricing policies that guaranteed unprofitability. Even policy makers who were blind to the causes of poor economic performance could not miss the evidence – stagnating economic output, low capacity utilisation, rising unemployment, government revenue shortfalls and scarcities of basic goods.

The failed policies had destabilising social consequences. Faced with budget shortfalls, leaders were forced to make cuts in social programs that had been the centrepiece of the United Front's campaign manifesto. The adverse impacts of cutbacks in education have already been described. Economies imposed on the security forces weakened morale and efficiency. Additional tasks, such as the control of 'domestic smuggling' stretched police and army resources to the breaking point. Program cutbacks made by a government with such strong Sinhalese leanings in an environment of scarcity were viewed as discriminatory by Tamils even when this may not have been the case.

It is by no means certain that Sirimavo Bandaranaike had the vision and power to orchestrate fundamental economic policy changes in mid-term. The unimaginative 1977 SLFP campaign manifesto suggests this was not the case. But overlong adherence to *dirigiste* policies widened ethnic divisions in Sri Lankan society and made the implementation of economic reform programs, when it did occur, more difficult.

### **The over ambitious and over politicised economic reform policies of J.R. Jayewardene**

Simultaneously faulting Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government for Marxist policies and J.R. Jayewardene's government for open economy reforms may seem inconsistent, but these contrasting policies were development failures for different reasons. The United Front's program was flawed in conception. The UNP's open economy programs were flawed in implementation. I label these programs too ambitious because J.R. Jayewardene's promise of rapid growth, combined with social justice, could not be fulfilled. Unfulfilled promises and unmet expectations are prime sources of relative deprivation. The programs were too political because UNP supporters were so blatantly targeted for pref-

erential treatment. This was particularly disheartening for opposition party supporters, as it became apparent that President Jayewardene's goal was to entrench the UNP in power for an extended period of *de facto* one party government.

Problems encountered by the Mahaweli Development Project, described in chapter 16, were typical of those encountered elsewhere. Managerial talent was stretched to the limit. Large numbers of expatriate workers were recruited, inflating costs and intensifying social tensions. Massive inflows of foreign aid, mostly loans, fuelled inflation and created opportunities for corruption. Pressures to produce quick results overwhelmed procedures that were set up to account for expenditures and maintain cost effectiveness. Priority was given to creating physical infrastructure. Little attention was given to compensating for the social dislocations that massive construction projects and settlement programs created.

As we have seen, inflation and the social consequences of inflation became a pervasive problem, especially when the economic downturn, beginning in 1981, started taking its toll. The gap between rich Sri Lankans and others widened. 'Middle class pauperisation' became a commonly discussed problem. Privations imposed on the poor were particularly severe because open economy reforms had gutted the subsidy programs and entitlements that once sustained them. Feelings of deprivation were heightened by the sudden downturn following three years of good times, by feelings that traditional values were being eroded and by ostentatious displays of luxuries that most could not afford. The widespread belief that many politicians were corrupt made things worse. This mix of disappointments and discontents, especially among urban dwelling youth, created a receptive audience for polarising rhetoric and a climate in which violent outbreaks were not only possible, but probable.

#### **Inadequate funding, Sinhalisation and politicisation of the security forces**

Why include the security forces in a discussion of *development* failures? First, personal physical security of individual country residents is an intrinsically important element of successful development. Second, countries must be relatively peaceful and stable for social and economic development agendas to succeed. Security forces are supposed to be guarantors of physical security, political stability and peace,

A country's police, army, air force and navy are political leaders' instruments of state-sanctioned violence, which may be used to maintain public or-

der, and for other purposes as well. Development practitioners rarely pay heed to the security forces, except to criticise, but this must change. When, as in Sri Lanka, security forces catalyse conflict escalation rather than intervening to restore order, development agendas suffer. Security force ineffectiveness thus clearly qualifies as a *development* failure.

Whether or not forces are effective depends both on their intrinsic capabilities and the missions they are assigned. Dudley Senanayake's modest forces, for example, maintained public order quite successfully during his 'middle path' regime. Two decades later, inaction and collusion by a larger, better-equipped force helped precipitate the devastating July 1983 riots. Sinhalisation, politicisation and under-funding became more serious problems because of increasingly heavy burdens that police and military personnel were asked to bear.

Inadequate funding had the most pervasive impact, especially on police officers in lower ranks. Why a succession of Sri Lankan leaders chose to pay these first-line security officers no more than a bare living wage and to skimp on basic logistical support would make an interesting topic for further investigation. Low pay eroded morale, and spawned corruption, though many officers continued to function with professionalism and integrity under difficult circumstances. Low morale and corruption poisoned police-community relations, which most experts view as a crucial ingredient of good policing. In times of crisis, police officers were less likely to put their lives on the line and ordinary residents were more likely to view them as oppressors than protectors. As demands on the police increased, deficiencies traceable to inadequate funding became more apparent.

Interjecting political considerations into police work, which became pervasive after 1970, further complicated police officers' lives and sapped their morale. Political considerations became key determinants of promotions and choice assignments. Those who offended powerful politicians would be banished to 'outstations' or to Jaffna as punishment. During election campaigns, police complicity in thuggish attacks on government opponents, either by 'standing aside' or even active intervention, became an all-too-common practice. The reluctance of police officers to intervene in July 1983 when it appeared that marauding gangs might have been unleashed by powerful UNP politicians is not difficult to understand.

Sinhalisation affected the military services as well as the police force. Its impact appears to have been greatest on the army. As we have seen, this proc-

ess began in 1961 when Mrs. Bandaranaike first replaced a Tamil regimental commander with a Sinhalese officer, her relative, before dispatching troops to Jaffna. Within few years both the army and police were almost entirely Sinhalese. The message this practice communicated to both Sinhalese and Tamil citizens was obvious. There is no evidence that potentially negative consequences of Sinhalese were fully debated.

These consequences were amply demonstrated when Sinhalese soldiers and police officers were the only forces available to enforce discriminatory policies, fight militants in Tamil majority regions, and protect Tamil citizens where they were a minority. As we have seen, many security force personnel seemed to view Tamil Sri Lankan citizens, in Colombo as well as the north and east, as 'the enemy.' In July 1983, when senior officers ordered soldiers to prevent Sinhalese mobs from butchering Tamil civilians and destroying their property, many refused and some actually joined the mobs. In July 1987, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi reviewed a military honour guard, after signing the Indo-Lanka Accord, one of its members, a Sinhalese, broke ranks and nearly killed him.

#### **Use of state-sanctioned violence to secure the United National Party's parliamentary majority for an additional term in 1982.**

UNP leaders had it right when, with J.R. Jayewardene's support, they drafted the 1978 constitution's electoral reforms. As chapter 15 noted, their proportional representation scheme was designed to sharpen the fidelity of feedback from democratic elections and prevent politically expedient constitutional amendments. Sri Lanka would be more stable, they reasoned, if its constitution was grounded in a broad national consensus and not captive to the pendulum swings of political fortune that general elections based on single member districts could sometimes produce (and had produced in 1970 and 1977).

After four years as Executive President, however, J.R. Jayewardene had become addicted to the pliant support of legislation and routine affirmation of constitutional amendments that a three-fourths UNP majority provided. More important, he was deeply committed to the vision of a transformed Sri Lanka that had been economically revitalised by open economy reforms and the accelerated Mahaweli Development Project. Opposing points of view were no longer regarded, if they ever had been, as communicating useful information about development failures and areas of national dissensus. Instead they were viewed as misguided or even pernicious impediments to policies that would

benefit all Sri Lankans, narrow the ethnic divide, and secure the President's legacy, if only they could be carried forward for a few more years without interruption.

This thinking spawned the December 1982 Referendum on which J.R. Jayewardene chose to gamble the legitimacy and future of his presidency. As chapter 18 reported, UNP leaders chose to go for a certain win, making maximum use of state-sanctioned violence and ignoring democratic niceties for the most part. The government won its inevitable referendum victory, but in fact the gamble failed and had little chance of succeeding.

This was because in 1982, Sri Lanka's stability was already threatened by three development failures that have been discussed above. Economic reform policies had weakened the government's financial position, made the economy more vulnerable to external shocks, corroded Sri Lanka's social fabric, widened the class divisions and heightened economic tensions. Security forces – weakened by inadequate funding, Sinhalisation, politicisation and humiliations by militants – were ill equipped to cope with outbreaks that might be precipitated in a volatile social climate. Foot dragging on devolution of power, the product of Colombo-centrism and ethnic polarisation, had, along with security force ineffectiveness, strengthened the influence of Tamil militants and weakened the influence of Tamil moderates.

J.R. Jayewardene abetted these destabilising trends with a transparently undemocratic strategy that undermined the legitimacy of his government and eroded respect for the law. A climate of disillusionment with governmental institutions contributed to the catastrophe that soon followed as well as its tragic dénouement. The referendum was designed to guarantee the President five more years of unfettered power to realise his vision, but that power soon became a poisoned chalice.

**The attempt to restore order in the northeast (especially in volatile Jaffna Province) with military forces that were clearly incapable of attaining that goal**

In 1977, as already noted, Sri Lanka's army was, essentially 100 per cent Sinhalese. Preponderantly, soldiers came from rural areas and had only basic education. Training was limited and there was almost no training in the complexities of counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. Transport was primitive. Modern weapons were scarce and those that were available were a hodgepodge of Soviet bloc and Western imports. Junior officers were inexperienced. Some

senior officers owed their rank to professional distinction, but many others had been promoted because of their political reliability. J.R. Jayewardene, like his predecessors, did not make military readiness a matter of high priority during his first term. I have already identified inattention to the capabilities of Sri Lanka's army as a development failure, while acknowledging that some development scholars might disagree.

The development failure highlighted in this section is different. Faced with a growing number of attacks by Tamil militants, President Jayewardene's goal – necessarily – was to restore order and respect for the rule of law in the northeast. Had he and his close advisors been fully informed about the capabilities of Sri Lanka's military forces, they would have known that using those forces to pacify the northeast was simply not a viable option. The unfolding scenario of conflict escalation from state-sanctioned violence ineffectiveness was all the more tragic because it was predictable and inevitable. Had UNP leaders correctly judged that force was not an option, given the capabilities of police and military contingents available to them, they would have been compelled to look more closely alternative options, however politically unpalatable, and to choose from among them.

The concluding chapter of *Paradise Poisoned* considers such options.