

Veerappan shadow over LTTE discussion

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 30. The handling of the Rajkumar kidnapping case and the LTTE links of some persons associated with his release overshadowed the calling-attention motion discussion in the Rajya Sabha today on the LTTE activities in the country.

The discussion, which generated heat with frequent skirmishes between the DMK on one side and the AIADMK and the TMC on the other, also saw the Congress and CPI(M) pitching in.

After Mr. Pranab Mukherjee of the Congress moved the notice, Mr. Peter Alphonse of the Tamil Maanila Congress said the problem of LTTE was like a time-bomb and warned the situation could go the Kashmir way if not attended to.

He charged that the Rajkumar kidnapping was masterminded and executed by Tamil Nadu Liberation Army and Tamil Nadu Retrieval Force; and the

State Government took no action even six days after the Kannada film star was released, to provide "safe passage" to the extremists. He also noted that the Tamil Nationalist Movement leader, Mr. P. Nedumaran, was now being projected and feted.

Mr. R. Margabandhu of the AIADMK demanded the dismissal of the Karunanidhi Government and sought the arrest of persons openly supporting the LTTE. They must be prosecuted for treason, he said. He referred to a political procession organised by the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, in support of Eelam which was also attended by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani. Like the TMC leader, he too sought to underline past association of Mr. Kolathur Mani and Dr. Bhanu who took part in the release of Mr. Rajkumar.

Mr. Cho Ramaswamy (nominated) mocked at the efforts of Tamil Nadu Government during the crisis by "sending

ambassadors to Veerappananchal state". He also ridiculed efforts to show the State Government was now preparing its police to nab the forest brigand much after the release. "Thank god they have not started recruiting people for it now."

When his turn came, the DMK leader Mr. S. Viduthalai Virumbi, put up a spirited defence and offered point-by-point rebuttal to all the charges. However, at times references to opposition and counter-charges on where their sympathies lay, led to immediate protests.

In fact, at one point Mr. Virumbi stuck to his guns forcing Mr. Alphonse to retreat after the Deputy Chairperson, Dr. Najma Heptullah, ruled against attempts of the latter to raise a point of order. However, she appealed to the members not to trade charges but discuss the issue which was serious and concerned the country.

THE HINDU

1 NOV 2000

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2000

A REALITY CHECK ON LTTE

THE NUANCES OF the latest political signals being sounded by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) merit close scrutiny. The LTTE appears to be wooing the international community at this stage by sending out some encouraging signals about its intentions. A reality check will however be required to assess whether the militant group is sincere in its professed interest in a peace alternative and is not engaging in double-speak. At stake is a fully negotiated settlement of the fundamental question about a rightful place for Sri Lanka's minority population of Tamils. Official Colombo and the international community, including India, rightly seem inclined to scrutinise closely the suggestion of some emerging under-currents in Sri Lanka. Now, a fresh 'offer' by the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, to consider non-conditional talks with Colombo should, of course, be read in the context of his parallel insistence on the imperative of a propitious climate for parleys. However, his 'offer' is an interesting new development on the Sri Lankan scene. The question is how promising will this be of a final settlement.

The latest flurry of diplomatic interlocution with the Sri Lankan Government by the U.K. and the U.S., besides a Norwegian envoy's preceding talks with the LTTE as well, appears to have alerted the larger international community to the possibility of new nuances. Three aspects of the LTTE's perceived thinking, however tentative or tactical these may be, deserve to be critically examined in the interest of Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity. First, any such exercise will necessarily be defined and circumscribed by the LTTE's 'claim' to be ready for a negotiated and peaceful resolution of its dispute with Colombo. The other major consideration pertains to the LTTE's 'signal' that it

may be willing to abjure pre-conditions for the talks *per se*. Yet, the most decisive element of any *de novo* analysis of the LTTE's present mood will hinge on the question whether Mr. Prabhakaran has indeed signalled at least a vague intention of considering a final settlement that will entail his giving up the demand for a "Tamil Eelam".

Mr. Prabhakaran's current 'offer' lends itself to an arguable interpretation that he has delineated preferences at two different levels. Certain pre-requisites have been spelt out by him for the amelioration of the difficult living conditions of the population in the Vanni and other areas of direct concern to him. Nonetheless, if interpreted with an eye to genuine peace, this need not necessarily block the commencement of parleys. The reason is that the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has said time and again that the welfare of the Tamils in the conflict-ravaged areas was already high on her agenda, consistent with the ground realities.

A logical poser is whether Mr. Prabhakaran will be prepared to bid farewell to arms and the idea of a separate state if his conditions regarding the plight of the war-affected people are realistically addressed. At the other end of the Sri Lankan political spectrum, the mainstream opposition United National Party can usefully ponder these discernible new nuances. The need for bipartisan support for the substance of the President's political package of devolution has not been greater than at present. There might perhaps be some scope for discussion on the nuances of the devolution proposals but there is no question that the mainstream parties need to coordinate closely with the President who has consistently been maintaining that the Tamils must be given a fair deal.

THE HINDU

1 DEC 2000

Chandrika may ask Blair to take action against LTTE in UK

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, November 30

DESPITE THE possibility of peace talks with the LTTE, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is expected to ask British Prime Minister Tony Blair to take stern action against the Tamil rebel group's activists and supporters in the UK under Britain's new anti-terrorist law when she meets him on December 4.

According to sources close to the Sri Lankan Government, the President will try and capitalise on the current situation in which the international community is not too pleased with the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military has the upper hand vis-a-vis the LTTE in Jaffna. A former presidential advisor said that easing the situation even to facilitate talks would only work to the advantage of the LTTE by enabling them to move freely and rebuild themselves.

Mrs Kumaratunga has already rejected the LTTE's demand for discussing economic and other peripheral issues ahead of discussing substantive political issues.

She is expected to explain the logic behind this to Mr Blair.

President Kumaratunga will bring to Mr Blair's notice reports in the British Press about the objectionable activities of the LTTE in UK. The Sunday Telegraph had a story about the LTTE's screening war films portraying its child soldiers and suicide bombers, to Tamil kids in state-run British schools to collect money for the war back home. The paper quotes Gary Streeter, the shadow spokesman for international development as saying: "This is another nail in the coffin in the so-called ethical foreign policy and we demand an immediate investigation."

Earlier, there were reports that the British Charity Commission (BCC) was probing several LTTE front outfits like Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), which had already been banned in Canada. The BCC raided TRO and froze its accounts. TRO had claimed that it was working close with UNHCR, CARE, OXFAM and Save the Children, and even with the Govt agencies in the war affected areas of Lanka. But these agencies denied any such involvement.

Truce for polio

LANKAN GOVERNMENT and Tamil Tigers have agreed to a temporary ceasefire to allow children in the war zones to be vaccinated against polio, military officials said on Thursday. They said the United Nations Children's Fund had asked both sides to observe "Days of Tranquillity" on Friday and Saturday. A similar truce was observed late last month, although each side accused the other of minor violations.

Reuters, Colombo

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 DEC 2000

...can help.

Respite in Colombo?

LTTE CHIEF Velupillai Pirabhakaran's offer of a cease-fire followed by talks with the Sri Lankan Government provides a faint sign of hope after a long time for resolving the 17-year-old ethnic tangle. The offer is a virtual reiteration of what the LTTE supremo is believed to have told Norwegian envoy Eric Solheim a few weeks ago. Understandably, the Sri Lankan Government has been guarded in its response. There may be genuine anxieties in Colombo that the LTTE will be able to secure some tactical advantages on the ground through the suspension of combat operations, especially in Jaffna. It is well known that the LTTE is not the most reliable of negotiators, having often used such breaks in the fighting to regroup. However, this is a kind of risk that every negotiating party has to be prepared for, especially when dealing with a militant organisation which has had some success on the battlefield.

At the same time, one cannot fail to notice that there has been a growing stridency in the rhetoric of many leading Sinhalese politicians, including those in the ruling party, after the recent parliamentary elections which is unlikely to help in creating the appropriate climate for a cessation of hostilities followed by talks. Since Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga had earlier been urging a return to the negotiating table, Pirabhakaran's gambit puts the Government in a bit of a dilemma. It has to weigh its every move with care. The subject is likely to come up when Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar visits New Delhi for talks. But having just ventured upon a cease-fire against the Kashmir militants, despite all the attendant risks, New Delhi's advice is bound to be on similar lines.

It would help, however, if the Sri Lankan Government were to rein in the hawkish elements in Colombo who have been upping the ante as if a military solution of the Tamil problem was the only way to deal with the situation. Apparently, they are driven by purely partisan and personal considerations aimed at embarrassing Mrs Kumaratunga. Such diatribes are likely to make it more difficult for the Government to mobilise majority Sinhalese opinion in favour of a package deal to meet the aspirations of the Tamils, as and when such an opportunity presents itself.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

1 DEC 2000

12/12 Talking to Tigers 11/10

Although the offer of "unconditional" talks made by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has not brought forth an explicit matching response from Colombo, it signifies a qualitative shift that cannot be ignored. Such a signal was being awaited not only in India and Sri Lanka but in the international community too, particularly in Washington and London, after Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim met LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran in Jaffna last month. Soon after the meeting, Mr Solheim had talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and other political leaders in Sri Lanka, and briefed Washington on the prospects for reviving the peace process. In the days preceding and following Mr Prabhakaran's 'Heroes Day' speech where the talks offer was made, there was a flurry of diplomatic activity in Colombo. Mr Solheim's visit was followed by those of British junior foreign minister Peter Hains and US assistant secretary of state Karl Inderfurth to both Sri Lanka and India. Meanwhile, Mr Solheim made a one-day trip to New Delhi — certainly not a coincidence with the LTTE offer of talks being expected. Mr Solheim's mission was, apparently, to prepare South Block for what was coming: the LTTE had already put out a message that it viewed "India as a friend". However, there has been no change in New Delhi's position that the Tamil-Sinhala conflict should be resolved within the framework of a united Sri Lanka which gave legitimate space to Tamil aspirations. However, while indicating his willingness for talks, Mr Prabhakaran has not budged from the LTTE's avowed goal of an independent Tamil state. In fact, he spoke of talks and "retaking Jaffna" in the same breath.

Five months ago, when this paper broke the news that the Tigers were willing to talk, the report was greeted with scepticism. Subsequent developments have shown that the LTTE, as much as the Kumaratunga government, are looking for ways to resume negotiations. The international players, who back New Delhi's stand, are now motivated to facilitate talks by putting pressure on both Colombo and the LTTE, since both parties are distrustful of each other's gameplan. While the government is wary of the LTTE chief, who has in the past seemed amenable to talks before launching an armed offensive, the Tigers want Colombo to end the "military occupation" of Jaffna prior to negotiations. There are subtle differences in the LTTE's present position from its past stance: earlier it was demanding cessation of military action, withdrawal of the armed forces and an end to the economic embargo in Tamil territory as a precondition for talks. Now Mr Prabhakaran has not mentioned these as 'conditions'. Instead, he has said that the government should create an atmosphere "conducive" for negotiations. In essence, the conditions remain and he has put the onus on Colombo to create a climate for dialogue. However, it is not easy for Ms Kumaratunga to grasp the nettle, given the fact that the LTTE has reneged on its commitment in the past. Moreover, the physical and emotional damage inflicted by the LTTE's assassination attempts, including on Ms Kumaratunga, are too recent to be put behind without more evidence of earnestness.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 DEC 2007

Lankan Govt wary of talks with LTTE

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, December 1

THE SRI Lankan Government is very cautious in its approach to the possible talks with the LTTE this time, having gone over similar ground in 1994-95 when an attempt was made to talk to the Tamil rebels group. As in 1994-95, the LTTE seems to be trying to consolidate and build itself up, making use of some economic issues to buy time for that purpose.

Sources in London say that the LTTE is telling the Tamil expatriates and refugees that its public stance about unconditional talks is not to be interpreted to mean that the goals of recapturing Jaffna and the establishment of an independent Eelam have been given up. The LTTE can achieve this if the expats continue to give money to buy arms to match the Sri Lankan armed forces' newly acquired firepower.

In his Great Warriors' Day message, Mr Pirabhakaran had said that he was prepared for peace talks "without pre-conditions" but he went on to say that he would "insist" that the economic embargoes and other restrictions be removed to create the atmosphere for meaningful talks. The same ploy was resorted to in 1994-95 also. In September 1994, he offered unconditional talks. But by March-April 1995, he had laid down certain "pre-requisites" like the removal of the Pooneryn Army Camp, the total lifting of the

embargo on fishing in the North East, allowing armed LTTE cadres to freely move about in the East, and the total lifting of all embargoes.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga viewed these demands as having "serious military repercussions". Nevertheless she decided to lift the embargo on fuel and the ban on fishing except near army camps. The embargo on other goods was already lifted. On the Pooneryn army camp, she pointed out that it had been already been shifted back by 600 metres as per a 1993 agreement.

But insisting on action and complaining that the lifting of embargoes had not been implemented fully, the LTTE set March 28, 1995, as the deadline and warned resumption of hostilities.

Due to the government's efforts, the deadline was extended to April 19, 1995. But on April 6, 1995, Pirabhakaran made it clear that the LTTE would discuss only the implementation of the economic assurances and not a political settlement, which, he said, could await the restoration of what he called "normalcy".

The talks resumed, but the LTTE said that the government had not conceded the key demands. The embargoes too had not been lifted fully and effectively, it charged. The six-month-old peace bid, effectively used by the LTTE to rest, train and rebuild, finally crashed on April 18, 1995, when it sank two Lankan gunboats.

'94-95 Experience

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 0 0 0

Will the tiger change its stripes?

119-16
27/12 S. Lanka

SO RARELY does the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, say anything, that his once-a-year Heroes' Day speeches are eagerly awaited, and, once delivered, become the subject of intense analysis. This year too, much hair will be split on the nuances of his utterances and this speech compared with those of previous years. Doubtless, bi-linguals will also compare the Tamil with the English versions put out by the LTTE's London office to see how much was lost in the translation.

But at the end of the day, one conclusion is inescapable. Despite the optimism generated by Mr. Prabhakaran's offer of "unconditional talks" this November 27, the speech is, at best, a bag of contradictory signals, containing no hard evidence of any shift in the LTTE's fundamental position that it stands for an independent Eelam.

Those who advocate talks with the LTTE said the Government in Colombo should grab Mr. Prabhakaran's offer. They pointed to the absence of a cry for Eelam in the speech, as well as to the fact that there was neither a demand for a ceasefire nor for a withdrawal of troops from the "homeland" as indication of a climb-down by the LTTE.

There is no denying that this year's Heroes' Day speech was not as aggressive as last year's, which came after a series of military victories. But Mr. Prabhakaran is clear that the offer of unconditional talks is dependent on the creation of an atmosphere of "goodwill" by the Government. Clarifying this, the LTTE leader said this would involve a "de-escalation" of the war, leading to a cessation of hostilities. In other words, a ceasefire, not immediately, but eventually. He also wants the Government to remove the economic blockades imposed in the Vanni, the LTTE-controlled northern mainland.

There is no direct demand for Eelam, but there is a lengthy reference to a "just solution" to Tamil aspirations based on the understanding that the Tamils were a "national formation" with a "national consciousness" with a "historical homeland" and a deep desire for guiding their own destiny through self-rule.

Shorn of the dressing, this sounds like a reformulated version of the Thimpu principles which have been rejected by Sri Lanka as concessions that could endanger its territorial integrity. Moreover, even the offer to talk seems grudging. "We have doubts as to whether Chandrika's



The Norwegian envoy, Mr. Eric Solheim, with the LTTE chief, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran... does peace have a chance?

Government will do justice to the Tamils on the basis of understanding the fundamentals of the Tamil question," Mr. Prabhakaran declared.

Then why, asked the daily, *Island*, does he want to talk at all? The answer to that is provided by Mr. Prabhakaran himself, in the bitter allusion to the "massive military assistance" to Sri Lanka by the international community that forced him to "delay the advance into Jaffna". Taken with the pledge that he would "liberate" Jaffna "whatever the challenges, regardless of the obstacles", the conclusion is inevitable that the offer to talk seems tactical, not out of a change of heart, but due to a change in the circumstances of the LTTE.

Moreover, it could not have escaped the LTTE that the international community is tightening the screws on it. The group faces a possible ban in the U.K. when that country's new anti-terrorism laws take effect next April. The British

junior Foreign Minister, Mr. Peter Hain, who was in Sri Lanka days before Mr. Prabhakaran made his speech, declined to predict if the LTTE would be on a list of organisations to ban from next year, but said it must give up its "brutal violence" and come forward for negotiations.

His call was reiterated by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Mr. Karl Inderfurth, who asked the LTTE to "abandon terrorism", and seek to achieve its political aims peacefully. The reaction to the speech by the international community has been guarded, Mr. Inderfurth, who was in Colombo then, said an initial reading showed "signs of hope" for the Norwegian-backed peace process in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Government has not reacted yet. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, with the memories of the 1995 failed peace talks fresh in her mind, has already made clear she does not intend to be rushed to the negotiating table naively.

Certainly, in the coming days, the pressure on the Government to respond to the LTTE offer will grow. However, as the *Daily News* cautioned: "The Government should leave no stone unturned to bring peace to Sri Lanka, but it would do well to read between Prabhakaran's lines. Peace moves should be initiated with the utmost discretion."

For, though it is quite certain the LTTE now wants to talk, it is far from clear what it wants to talk about and how it wants those talks to end.

Despite the offer for talks, Velupillai Prabhakaran's Heroes' Day speech is, at best, a bag of contradictions containing no hard evidence of any fundamental shift in the LTTE's position, reports NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN.

THE HINDU

- 3 DEC 2000

Ramadoss for lasting solution to Sri Lankan ethnic conflict

By Our Staff Reporter

TIRUCHI, DEC. 2. The international community and India, in particular, should exert pressure on the Sri Lankan government to initiate steps for a lasting and peaceful solution to the country's ethnic crisis, seizing the opportunity presented by the LTTE's offer to hold unconditional talks, the PMK leader, Dr. S. Ramadoss told presspersons here today.

The Chandrika government, however, should first put all its cards on the table so that the parties concerned know what the government had to offer, he said.

It would not be possible to find a political solution to the crisis unless a change of heart was brought about among the Sinhalese people and the Buddhist clergy, on conceding equal rights to the Tamils living in the country.

Referring to the frequent attacks on Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy, he said the Centre should instruct the defence forces to arrest the assailants and seize the boats to serve a stern warning to Sri Lanka, he said.

He also felt that it was the right time for the state and Central governments to take steps to retrieve Katchatheevu.

The PMK leader supported the Tamil Nationalist Movement leader, Mr. P. Nedumaran's demand for constituting a separate

commission of inquiry to probe the alleged atrocities committed by the Special Task Force during the operations against the sandalwood smuggler Vcerappan.

When asked about the demand for a white paper on the kidnap-release episode, he said the two governments had already come out with the details.

The state government could consider granting amnesty to the forest brigand if he sought it, he said in response to a query.

He accused the state government of failing to pay adequate attention towards "rendering justice" to the families, whose lands had been acquired for the Jayamkondam Lignite Power project.

The families have been demanding adequate compensation for the lands to be acquired from them and guaranteed employment for a member of each of the family. The compensation offered by the government was too meagre, he said.

He had already taken up the issue with the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi. Yet, the official machinery appeared to be more intent on "grabbing" the land from the local population rather than paying attention to their rightful demands. The government should have convened a meeting with all concerned to thrash out the issue, he said.

He charged the government

with attempting to create a false impression that the PMK was trying to stall the project.

The PMK wanted the project to come up at the earliest as it was essential for the economic development of the local population, a majority of whom were living below the poverty line. The PMK would take up the issue with the Prime Minister, he added.

Mr. Ramadoss also wanted the state government to enact a legislation providing for 25 per cent reservation for candidates from rural areas in employment opportunities. The government should also take stern action against senior police officials who fail to check the illicit arrack menace in their respective districts.

Some senior police officials were responsible for the free flow of illicit arrack in certain parts of the state, he alleged.

THE HINDU

• 3 DEC 2000

Norway plan for Lanka peace

AP & UNI

PIRABHAKARAN CONTROVERSY

COLOMBO, Dec. 3. — Norway which is mediating in the 17-year civil war between Tamil Tiger rebels and the government, has drafted a schedule to de-escalate the conflict as a first step in the peace process, *The Sunday Leader*, an independent English daily said today.

There is every possibility that the direct talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE will start within the next couple of weeks in London.

Sources said the Norwegians have the complete support of the UK, USA and India.

US assistant secretary, Mr Karl F Inderfurth who was in Sri Lanka last week said the beginning of talks was one step

COLOMBO, Dec. 3. — Sri Lanka's Attorney General, Mr KC Kamalasinghe has denied that an Indian team, which visited Lanka last month, had pressed for the extradition of LTTE chief V Pirabakaran, local daily *Sunday Leader* said today. Another Sri Lankan newspaper, *Sunday Times*, said Lankan officials had "reviewed" an earlier Indian request for Pirabakaran's extradition. Mr LK Advani told Parliament on 30 November that a team of officials from Multi-disciplinary Monitoring Agency, had visited Sri Lanka to meet Sri Lanka's Attorney General to press for the extradition. — PTI

towards the building of confidence. The USA would back the Norwegian initiative, he said.

Norwegian peace envoy Mr Erik Solheim, who made at least four visits to Sri Lanka this year, has drawn up a mutually reinforceable schedule to be implemented on a staggered

basis within a specific time, said the newspaper.

Quoting diplomatic sources, the article said Mr Solheim had formulated the document after consultations with both sides and would like to see it implemented on a "step-by-step reciprocal basis."

A definite date has not been fixed for the first stage of the conflict de-escalation schedule, it said.

Mr Solheim who met V Pirabakaran on 1 November said the rebel leader had not laid any preconditions.

Mr Solheim also had an extensive talks with the government officials including the President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The Norwegian schedule proposes that the government would remove existing restrictions on the movement of food, fuel, essential goods and medicines to northern rebel-held territory, the newspaper says.

From the LTTE it expects the release of all police and armed service personnel.

THE STATESMAN

4 DEC 2000

SCOTT MCDONALD reports how LTTE leader Pirabhakaran's

Lanka wants talks, emb

COLOMBO, DEC 12

SRI Lanka on Tuesday called for immediate talks with Tamil guerrillas fighting for a separate state but rejected rebel demands that the government lift an economic embargo first.

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told a news conference that the demand for the embargo on rebel-controlled areas to be lifted, made by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leader Velupillai Pirabhakaran last month, could be part of the talks but added it would not take place before any negotiations begin.

"Spending time on securing conditions of normalcy is by itself a waste of time. Enough time has been lost and rhetoric wasted. Now



Chandrika Kumaratunga

let's get on with it," Kadirgamar said. "The government states that political talks with the LTTE, aimed at resolving the conflict, can and should begin forthwith. This requires that the LTTE agree that the core issues

should comprise the agenda of negotiations," Kadirgamar said.

He said the core issues to be discussed were "the stoppage of war, the stoppage of all terrorist killings, the resolution of the Tamil people's problems through negotiated political settlement and a speedy resolution of the problems of those displaced by war".

Pirabhakaran had called for unconditional talks with the government, dropping previous demands for a truce and government troop withdrawal, but said the government had to first lift the economic blockade to create a proper atmosphere for any talks.

Kadirgamar said the economic problems in the North the East, where the rebels have been fighting for a separate Tamil state, were a result of the war and that the LTTE

253.00,249.45	ICICI Bank Crp	68.0
HDFC 555.5,567	163,159.7	Keel
556.00,501.55	163.15,160.05	30.1
HDFC Bank	Indle cem 47.2,46	29.7
224.8,228.25	46.70,45.95	Knoi
225.00,228.80	Indian Hotels	325.5
Hiro Honda	244.75,238.85	325.5
878.9,852.5	247.00,238.60	Koch
870.00,853.46	Indian Oil Crp	35.55
Himechel Futur	143.9,143.2	L.M.L
1525,1519.85	142.00,142.55	35.00
1518.00,1517.30	Indian Rayon	Larsa
Hind Lever Che	83.4,88.45	203.71
206,201.7	83.65,87.85	202.01
201.00,199.45	Indian Shaving	LJC Hc
Hindalco Inda	770,763.8	34.88
748,760.35	756.00,754.30	35.00
741.00,747.15	Indo Gulf Cor	MRF
Hindustan Leve	47.8,45.85	1288.81
93,189.25	46.90,45.65	1283.01
92.80,189.15	Infovys Techno	Madras
Jocheel Marlon	7498,7469.45	5102.51
27,532.25	7490.00,7453.50	5189.06
25.00,330.80	Ingersoll-Rand	Mahind
IPCL 143,147	183,178.45	164.3,15
43.95,147.40	178.60,175.35	163.00,1
IC 199.5,95.6	IPCL 72.45,70.45	McDowe
9.00,95.30	70.80,70.25	95.85,93
8.65,45.30	ITC 882,902.1	95.00,93
India 94,91.4	881.40,903.40	MTNL 18
95,90.30	ITC Bhadrachal	182.05,1
	67.9,66.9	Neetle In
20.25,153.05	Jyoti Structur	17.00,15
BI Bank 28.3,27.95	35,36.25	Mafattal F
1.45,27.80	33.80,34.90	4.5,4.85
Agro Inds		4.75,4.90
70,5.55		Maha Gia
B Inds 4.55,4.55	K G Denim 3.75,4.2	9.9,10.8
Capital Se 2.5,2.6	3.00,3.25	Maha Sco
CP Power 63.25,62.8	K S B Pumps 85.1,83	36.5,34.1
Swift 93,92.6	77.90,80.25	35.00,34.0
50,35.90	Kabra Extrusio	Maha Seer
Jia Cem Cap 12,12	30.2,31.5	26.5,26.1
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1.95,15.20	Kajaria Cera 51,50.15	Maharaja h
Jia Galvina		

INDIAN EXPRESS

13 DEC 2000

Confidence-building steps no substitute for talks: Kadirgamar

AD-1 By C. Raja Mohan 17/12

NEW DELHI, DEC. 16. Hinting at some flexibility in its approach to talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Sri Lanka today said it was prepared to consider unilateral steps to promote a peace process provided these measures were not seen as a substitute for immediate and substantive negotiations.

Addressing a press conference here, the visiting Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, reaffirmed his government's stated preference for an 'unconditional dialogue' with the LTTE to end the civil war in the island nation.

But Mr. Kadirgamar left the door ajar for some unilateral confidence-building measures by his government to create a conducive atmosphere for the talks. If these steps "can truly facilitate a dialogue, then yes, we can consider taking them," he said.

The proposed talks are stalled by the tension between Colombo's insistence on unconditional talks, and the LTTE leader Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran's demand late last month for actions from Colombo to 'de-escalate' the military situation and 'restore normalcy' in the Jaffna peninsula before the dialogue begins. Colombo says it is prepared to address the various concerns of the LTTE in the talks once they start. It argues that military de-escalation and a ceasefire can only follow from a serious, purposeful and time-bound dialogue to resolve the conflict.

Colombo's past discussions with the LTTE on a

'ceasefire' and 'restoring normalcy' in Jaffna were 'not encouraging', according to Mr. Kadirgamar. Instead of wasting time on preliminaries, he suggested, the two sides move quickly to 'come to grips with the core issues of the dispute'.

Mr. Kadirgamar said the perceptions of an economic blockade of Jaffna were 'off the mark'. He said Colombo would soon be issuing a document to clarify the situation on the ground. Conceding the deep distrust that divides Colombo and the LTTE, Mr. Kadirgamar said efforts must be made 'to overcome it'. While insisting that the prospects of a dialogue depend on the LTTE response, he believes that the long-awaited talks 'will take place'.

But the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister denied there was any specific end-of-the-year deadline for the negotiations to start. He also dismissed speculation about contacts between the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is on vacation in London and the LTTE leaders based there.

Mr. Kadirgamar briefed the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, yesterday on the latest developments in Sri Lanka and the prospects for peace talks being brokered by Norway.

He said neither New Delhi is seeking a role in ending the civil war in Sri Lanka, nor is Colombo asking for it. But Mr. Kadirgamar added, "India's views on the ultimate solution to the conflict are of paramount importance to us."

LTTE charge: Page 8

THE HINDU

17 DEC 2000

Government trying to scuttle peace process, alleges LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 16. The LTTE today accused Sri Lanka of attempting to scuttle the peace process and asked the international community to persuade it to agree to a de-escalation of the war and begin talks in a climate of "peace and goodwill."

In a statement issued two days before Sri Lanka will meet donor countries at the Development Forum in Paris, the LTTE expressed its "deep disappointment" at Sri Lanka's categorical rejection of its call for de-escalation of the war, and said talks could not take place in a climate of hostility.

Clearly aimed to embarrass Sri Lanka at the Paris meetings, the statement appeals to the international community to persuade Sri Lanka to "abandon its hard-line militaristic position and to seek the path of peace, rationality and fair play to find a negotiated political settlement to the Tamil national question."

The LTTE also said the government offer of talks stipulated conditions like a time-frame and discussions on a "pre-conceived permanent solution."

"These conditions are unacceptable to the LTTE. By refusing to de-escalate the war and by stip-

ulating conditions for talks, the Kumaratunga government is making a deliberate attempt to scuttle the peace process," it said.

A press release quoting the statement, reportedly released in Vanni today, was put out by the LTTE's London office and appeared on a Tamil website late tonight. It said the LTTE welcomed the "positive proposals" suggested by the government of Norway as confidence building measures to be mutually reciprocated by the two sides that would facilitate relaxation of the economic embargo and gradually de-escalate the conflict.

The LTTE was seriously considering the proposals but the initiative had to come from the government, it added.

According to the statement, the government had "deliberately distorted" its call for de-escalation as a pre-condition.

It said that the government had misinterpreted the call for the creation of conditions of normalcy as a demand for the withdrawal of troops from Jaffna.

"We did not demand the withdrawal of the armed forces. Our leader has explained that by normalcy he meant the restoration of normal civilian life in Tamil areas by removing the stringent eco-

conomic blockade imposed on the Tamil people. We want the government to take this step as a humanitarian gesture, as a measure of goodwill," it said.

12 soldiers killed

Sri Lanka's security forces claimed to have captured more territory in the northern Jaffna peninsula in an operation launched today, but resistance from the LTTE killed at least 12 soldiers and wounded over 30.

The Defence Ministry said troops supported by armour and artillery and the Sri Lanka Air Force advanced at first light towards Nunavil and Kaithady, west of Chavakachcheri, "taking the LTTE by surprise." An officer and 11 men were killed in the fight-back by the LTTE using artillery and mortar fire. However, there was no information on LTTE casualties.

The military, which has been attempting to wrest control of areas in the peninsula from the LTTE since June, kilometre by painful kilometre, has added 11 sq kms more to its tally after today's operation, the Government said. A small stretch of the highway connecting Chavakachcheri to Jaffna town was now said to be under Government control.

LTTE says no talks amid war, violence

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's Norwegian-backed peace process hit a fresh snag as the LTTE insisted on a ceasefire before entering talks and accused President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government for the deadlock.

The LTTE in a statement issued from their London office insisted on a process of "de-escalation" and said genuine peace talks could not be held under conditions of war, violence and hostility.

Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar had flatly rejected rebel demands for a ceasefire and said de-escalation of the conflict could be considered as negotiations progressed under an agreed time table.

The LTTE's latest statement accused the government of distorting its position on talks. "Though the government proclaims its readiness for unconditional talks, it reiterates its previous conditions of a limited time frame and a pre-conceived permanent solution to be worked out at the commencement of talks," the LTTE said.

For their part, they were not demanding the withdrawal of security forces from the Jaffna peninsula. "The Sri Lanka government has deliberately distorted our genuine plea for a peaceful environment for peace talks as a condition. Sri Lanka has misinterpreted our call for the creation of conditions of normalcy as a situation that

includes the withdrawal of armed forces from Jaffna. We did not demand the withdrawal of the armed forces."

LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran had on November 27 offered what he called unconditional talks but insisted on conditions of normalcy.

"We want the government to take this step as a humanitarian gesture, as a measure of goodwill. This should not be viewed as precondition for talks," the LTTE statement said. The statement came just as the Sri Lankan government was preparing for a crucial meeting of its international aid donors in Paris on Monday. The LTTE said it asked the international community to pressurise Sri Lanka to accept a truce to open peace talks.

Mr Kadirgamar had said in New Delhi on Saturday that Colombo was ready for immediate talks with Tigers, but added that these could not start before next year. Mr Kadirgamar also ruled out reduction in the scale of government offensives as a condition for peace talks.

The minister said Tigers were not to be trusted as they regrouped and rearmed during truces and then launched surprise offensives against Sri Lankan forces. Security forces had launched a fresh offensive against the LTTE in the Jaffna peninsula on Saturday. The military claimed killing 26 rebels for the loss of 12 of its own troopers.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 DEC 2002

No talks amid war, says LTTE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Dec. 17. — Sri Lanka's Norway-backed peace process hit a new roadblock as the LTTE insisted on a ceasefire before entering talks.

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519 18/12
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THE STATESMAN

18 DEC 2000

Dalai Lama, China talks resume after 2-year gap

Luke Harding and John Gittings
Dharamsala & Hong Kong, Dec 5

Negotiations between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama about the future of Tibet have resumed after a two-year gap following a secret visit to Beijing last month by the Dalai Lama's elder brother, it was claimed on Monday night.

Speaking after celebrations to mark his 50th anniversary as temporal leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama said yesterday that his brother, Gyalo Thondup, had held talks with the Chinese consular officials. Mr Thondup, a former Tibetan envoy, had earlier received "indications" that the Chinese wanted to see him.

Mr Thondup returned to

'Doors open'

CHINA ON Tuesday said its channels of communication with the Dalai Lama remained open but refused to make any concession for restarting negotiations to end the Tibet impasse. "I would like to reaffirm that there are channels for contact between China and the Dalai Lama. The channels are open," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue told reporters.

PTI, Beijing

Dharamsala, the north Indian home of Tibet's government in exile, bearing a message from the Chinese side, but last night, the Dalai Lama refused to disclose its

contents. "It is early days," he said.

He said, he had responded to Beijing's overture by suggesting that a Tibetan delegation visit China for further talks. There had not yet been a reply.

Beijing's formal position is that the door is still open to talks it broke off in 1993 if the Dalai Lama explicitly "renounces independence".

Informal talks briefly resumed after President Clinton met President Jiang Zemin in China in 1998, but were terminated soon afterwards.

The Chinese Government recently preferred to ignore the Dalai Lama, arguing that after his death Tibetan nationalism would disappear.

(Guardian News Service)

THE HINDUSTAN

6 DEC 2000

China denies Dalai contact

Beijing, Dec. 5 (Reuters): China declined comment today on reports that it had re-established contact with Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and restated Beijing's terms for future talks.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue sidestepped reporters' questions about remarks the Dalai Lama made at a news conference yesterday that his brother had visited Beijing in late October at the invitation of Chinese authorities.

She told reporters that China had "channels for contact and dialogue" with the Tibetan leader who has lived in exile in Dharamsala since 1959, but any talks were on condition he accepted longstanding Chinese principles.

The Dalai Lama must also acknowledge that Taiwan is part of China and that Beijing's Communist government is China's only legal government, she said.

China considers Taiwan to be part of its territory and harshly

criticised the Dalai Lama for visiting it in March 1997, accusing him of promoting separatism there. The Voice of America reported that the Dalai Lama told a news conference in Dharamsala that his brother, Gyalo Thundup, returned from his October visit with a message from China's communist leadership.

But the Dalai Lama would not reveal its contents, the US-funded international broadcasting service reported. The Dalai Lama said he responded to the message by requesting that the Chinese government allow him to send a fact-finding delegation into Tibet, VOA said, citing his remarks at the news conference.

Asked by reporters whether the renewed contact might represent a change in Beijing's attitude toward him, the Dalai Lama said it was too early to tell, according to the VOA report. The Dalai Lama also said he asked his brother to travel around Tibet during his visit to China.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 DEC 2000

Kanishka case: Witnesses threatened

■ Canadian police warn Sikh groups to stay away from witnesses who hold key to the conspiracy angle in bombing case

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
VANCOUVER, DEC 1

THE Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has warned radical Sikh groups in Pakistan and Canada to stay away from witnesses in the Air India bombing case or face the full wrath of the law.

The Air-India Boeing 747 'Kanishka', which took off from Canada on June 23, 1985, had exploded off the Irish coast in a terrorist act which was blamed on Punjab militants. All 329 people on board were killed.

The RCMP warning came in the wake of reports that a key witness was threatened with liquidation if he testified against the two accused — the city's millionaire Ripudaman Singh Malik and Kamloops priest Ajaib Singh Bagri — in the court.

In an interview to a local newspaper *Province*, the witness, who

preferred to remain anonymous, said he was lured to a secret place a few days back where three leaders of the extremist movement were waiting for him. They told him it was not a good idea to participate in "something that is so vital to interest of the Sikh cause". The witness claims his entire statement to the Canadian police appears to have been read by the militants. They knew what he had told the police, who he had implicated and the police detachment where he made his statement and the date.

According to him, the militants also told him that the Crown (prosecution) witnesses include a man who lives in New York, two former employees of the Khalsa School in Surrey County, a lower mainland businessman, a Sikh journalist and a villager in Punjab.

The militants later warned him that it was not a good idea to testify in courts. "You are one of us, you will be considered a traitor if you



The accused: Ripudaman Singh Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri

depose," he was told.

They also claimed to have seen a briefcase full of prosecution documents containing witness statements. The Crown's case consists of 132 large binders of evidence, including surveillance pictures taken by the Canadian police. This information is now in the hands of Sikh militants bent on intimidating the witnesses, it was claimed in the report.

The newspaper also said some

other witnesses named in the Crown's documents have received intimidating telephone calls from Sikh extremists in British Columbia, Pakistan and India. RCMP spokesperson Cati Galliford said they have taken all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of the witnesses. "Anyone found threatening or intimidating them would be obstructing the course of justice and would be prosecuted to the full extent of law," she added.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 2 DEC 2000

(A. J. S. W. M. M.)

HD-16

WEST ASIA / FIRST RAMZAN FRIDAY PRAYERS

GOVT.

Palestinian protests pass off peacefully

JERUSALEM, DEC. 1. Palestinians demonstrated in front of the Al Aqsa mosque in the old city of Jerusalem after the first Friday prayers of the Ramzan, but Israeli police positioned just outside the mosque compound did not intervene, as fears of another flare-up of violence eased.

Two months of Palestinian rioting began at the mosque compound after the hard-line Israeli politician, Mr. Ariel Sharon, visited on September 28 to emphasise Israel's claim to the site, which is also the location of the biblical Jewish temples.

Mr. Sharon and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Barak, have embarked on an election campaign, with prospects for a peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians the main issue.

Police said about 100,000 worshippers prayed at Al Aqsa after Israel eased restrictions, permitting all Muslims with Israeli identity cards — those with Israeli citizenship and Palestinians who live in Jerusalem — to enter. But witnesses said the crowd was much smaller. A Palestinian official said only 15,000 people attended.

After services, Palestinians marched in the plaza in front of the mosque, shouting slogans. Some threw rocks toward the police gathered just outside a gate leading to the compound, but the police did not respond. Muslim officials and Palestinian security officers kept the demonstrators away from the Israeli forces.

Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza were banned from



A Palestinian woman banned from entering Jerusalem is allowed to sit behind a line of Israeli soldiers, as hundreds of Palestinians are stopped from entering Jerusalem at an army checkpoint on the border with the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Friday. — AP

the mosque. About 300 Palestinians, shouting "We want to pray at Al Aqsa," pushed through an Israeli army checkpoint south of Jerusalem. Soldiers closed a nearby intersection with jev...

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Peace under siege: Lashkar militants kill 6 CRPF men

Truce and Pak 'restraint' are not linked, says India

The Times of India News Service

SRINAGAR: Six central reserve police force (CRPF) jawans were killed and several others wounded when two militants belonging to the *fidayeen* (death squad) of the Lashkar-e-Toiba attacked a CRPF camp at Ashajipora in Anantnag district on Tuesday morning.

The attack came close on the heels of the Monday evening incident in which Lashkar militants had stormed a CRPF camp, killed one jawan on the spot and injured seven others. One of the militants was killed by CRPF men during cross-fire. The militants also seized two AK-47 rifles.

Police sources said that dozens of CRPF personnel were taken hostage by the militants but were later rescued by a large contingent of the army and the BSF. The rescue operations came to an end on Tuesday evening with the killing of the two militants. Both were reportedly foreign militants.

On the diplomatic front, in New Delhi, in a carefully calibrated response to Pakistan's statement on 'maximum restraint' along the Line of Control (LoC) and the

ceasefire initiative in Kashmir, India on Tuesday emphasised that the two issues were not connected.

In keeping with India's general scepticism about Pakistan's motives, especially after the Kargil conflict, New Delhi is keen to wait and watch before waving the olive branch.

Yes, India was keen on the resumption of the stalled dialogue, but only when Islamabad showed a change of heart. "It is our hope that with the initiative for peace taken by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Pakistan will be persuaded to cease the promotion of cross-border terrorism so as to create an environment suitable for the resumption of a composite dialogue."

The spokesperson of the external affairs ministry acknowledged that the level of firing along the LoC as well as the infiltration into Kashmir had dropped. However, he attributed this to greater vigilance on India's part.

The Vajpayee government predictably rejected suggestions of tripartite talks on the Kashmir issue, sticking to its well-known position

that it was entirely up to the government and the people of Kashmir to sort out the mess in the state. "The government has always conveyed its readiness to hold talks with all parties and groups in Jammu and Kashmir, including the militants.

The government's desire in this regard is reiterated. The modalities of these talks will be decided by India. It is abundantly clear that there is no room for what is termed as tripartite talks," the external affairs ministry said in a statement.

Some of the Kashmiri militant groups had urged a three-way dialogue between India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir. Pakistan suggested that India could hold discussions with the Kashmiri groups and let the separatist outfits brief Islamabad.

New Delhi repeated what Mr Vajpayee said on Monday about extending the Ramzan ceasefire. "Upon conclusion of the month of Ramzan, the government will review the situation and then announce its further course of action," the statement read.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

6 DEC 2000

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Germany

USA, Russia seek Osama hand-over

PTI & AFP

UNHQ/WASHINGTON, Dec. 8. - The USA and Russia yesterday introduced a resolution in the Security Council for tough new sanctions against the Taliban.

The resolution, expected to come up for vote next week, demands that the Taliban shut down its terrorist training camps in 30 days and hand over Osama bin Laden immediately. It also calls for arms embargo and freezing of Taliban assets.

The Taliban have condemned the resolution, saying the sanctions would only hurt the common man and prolong the ongoing civil war which has killed and displaced hundreds of thousands. Pakistan too criticised the resolution, which it said would scuttle the UN-led peace process.

But Russia rejected Islamabad's contention

asserting that Taliban have never kept their promise and the resolution leaves ample scope for talks to continue.

Diplomats say it would be difficult to monitor the arms embargo

but it would bring Pakistan under fresh pressure as most of the weapons pass through that country. Besides, the Pakistani military actively supports the Taliban.

Justifying the sanctions, the US security advisor, Mr Sandy Berger, said: "We have sanctions against the Taliban particularly because they have provided safe haven for Osama, responsible for terrorist acts against the USA. There is a prosecution and indictment of Osama in the USA."



Osama bin Laden

"I believe there'll be a trial, and we would like to bring him to justice. He is clearly at the core of a network of groups that are threatening the USA states," Mr Berger said.

But he said USA would continue its role as peacemaker role whoever is the next President.

Last year, the Security Council had imposed limited sanctions, freezing foreign assets of Taliban and banning its airlines from flying outside the country. It had warned against new measures if the Taliban failed to comply with its demand to close terrorist training camps and hand over Osama.

But the Taliban refused to hand over the Saudi terrorist leader, saying there is no evi-

dence of his involvement. Besides, he is a guest, they said.

America and Russia joined hands in the stand against the Taliban after Yemeni investigators probing the USS Cole bombing said the suspects had contact with Osama.

Two suspects of the 12 October on the US navy destroyer, that killed 17 people and injured 39, had been in contact with members of Osama's East African organisation. One of the suspects, Jamal al-Badawi, allegedly admitted he was trained at Osama's camps in Afghanistan. He also said he had fought with Osama's forces in Bosnia.

Another suspect, Fhad al-Quoso, reportedly told the investigators that he received over \$5,000 from an Osama aide to finance the Cole bombing. Quoso was to record the attack on video for propaganda purposes, but missed his opportunity.

THE STATESMAN

9 DEC 2000

Hurriyat welcomes truce, offers to talk

Press Trust of India
Srinagar, December 17

THE HURRIYAT Conference, a conglomerate of 23 separatist outfits, today formally welcomed the Ramzan ceasefire announced by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and offered talks with the Centre at a stormy meeting of its executive followed by violent factional feud.

A Hurriyat Conference spokesman said after the meeting that the seven-member executive council, the highest decision-making forum of the organisation, discussed "the situation arising out of the unilateral ceasefire and unanimously reiterated its stand that the Hurriyat will take part in any meaningful and result-oriented political process aimed at resolving the Kashmir issue permanently."

A statement issued by the Hurriyat said: "It considers the announcement of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's unilateral Ramzan ceasefire as a positive change in the policy of Government of India".

"The Hurriyat leadership is of the

opinion that they be given a chance to initiate talks with militant leadership besides governments of India and Pakistan so that a process for meaningful and result-oriented dialogue for res-

Saudi Arabia meeting

LEADERS OF the pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islamia from on both sides of the LoC are to meet in Saudi Arabia in the next few days. Jamaat chief G.M Bhat is meet Pakistan-based Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Sallahuddin who, a report from Islamabad says, has already left for Saudi Arabia.

PTI, New Delhi

olution of Kashmir issue and restoration of peace in Kashmir is started," the statement said.

Stating that the "Hurriyat resolves to work unitedly and with discipline to reach its goal," the statement warned the forces "who want to create confusion and division in the ranks of the Hurriyat" saying these efforts "will fail".

HTC adds: Moments after the key

APHC meeting ended, clashes broke out between the "pro-Pakistan" and "pro-independence" factions. Six persons were injured and the police intervened to put an end to the chaos.

The trouble started after APHC chairman Abdul Ghani Bhat and senior leaders, Abdul Ghani Lone and Yasin Malik, emerged from the session in a single file. Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a pro-Pakistan leader, came out alone.

Soon after their leaders came out of the venue, Malik's supporters started raising pro-freedom slogans. The pro-Pakistan group, led by Geelani, countered these with cries of "Pakistan zindabad" and "Kashmir banega Pakistan".

The rival groups surged at each other and traded blows. The police stepped in and lathicharged the warring factions.

Bhat, however, dismissed the day's events as "not worth taking seriously". "Children do fight, don't they?" He said the meeting was a "cool, exchange-of-views" session. "I was in the chair."

PM on ceasefire: L K Advani on Sunday said A B Vajpayee will soon be making a statement in Parliament on extending the ceasefire even after Ramzan.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 DEC 2000

Hizb denies reports of Saudi meet

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, DEC. 18. The Hizb-ul-Mujahideen has denied reports in a section of the press that Kashmiri leaders from both sides of the border are to meet in the next few days in Saudi Arabia to chalk out a strategy in the light of recent initiatives by India and Pakistan.

The Hizb spokesman, Mr. Salim Hashmi, told *The Hindu* that there was no truth in the reports that the Hizb chief, Syed Salahuddin, has reached Saudi Arabia to take part in the meeting of Kashmir leaders.

"Syed Salahuddin is in Karachi at the moment. Even if he were to go to Saudi Arabia it would only be as part of his Haj trip. I have been wrongly quoted by some of the newspapers as saying that he has already left for Saudi Arabia," Mr. Hashmi complained.

The denial of the news by the Hizb has not deterred the Pakistani media from speculating on the nature and significance of the supposed meeting of the Kashmir leaders from both sides of the divide.

The Urdu daily *Jang* has reported that some important leaders from the Indian side of Kashmir have confirmed their participation in the meeting. The paper said apart from leaders from both sides of Kashmir, some other influential Kashmiri personalities might also take part.

Quoting sources, the paper said the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen was ready to respond positively to the ceasefire if India was prepared for tripartite talks on the Kashmir dispute.

The paper quoting diplomatic sources in Islamabad has said that Saudi Arabia could play an important role in making the ongoing efforts to resolve the Kashmir issue a success. It said Saudi Arabia could influence the militant organisations, particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami backed Hizb.

The paper has pointed out that the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, is also scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia and it could be significant in the context of efforts on Kashmir. Quoting sources, the paper has hinted at the

possibility of the Chief Executive of Pakistan, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, making a visit to Saudi Arabia on his way back from Jordan and Syria.

'Independent Kashmir' demanded

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) has urged Pakistan to concede to the Kashmiris the option of a unified independent Kashmir.

The Policy and Planning Committee of the JKLF at a meeting in Rawalpindi on December 16 adopted a resolution calling upon Pakistan to publicly accept and recognise right of Kashmiris to opt for "re-unification and complete independence" of the divided Jammu and Kashmir State, besides their accepted right to accede to India or to Pakistan.

Sharing the outcome of the meeting at a news conference here the JKLF Chairman, Mr. Amanullah Khan, said if Pakistan was not prepared to concede the right of Kashmiris for an independent state, then there would be no difference between India and Pakistan.

"One can only conclude that like India, Pakistan is also only interested in taking control of the Kashmir territory and is not bothered about the wishes of the people. If Pakistan does not agree to our demand, we would be forced to adopt any method to achieve our goal", he warned.

Mr. Khan said the meeting of the Policy and Planning Committee of the JKLF was held to take stock of the current political situation in the wake of the recent initiatives by India and Pakistan on Kashmir. He said that while the ceasefire initiative by India was appreciable, it was not sufficient to resolve the Kashmir conflict.

Mr. Khan said the Indian initiative was a well-calculated move and to reject it outrightly would be a blunder. "It should be welcomed conditionally while insisting that India should concede the right of Kashmiris to determine their own future".

THE HINDU

19 DEC 2000

LTTE move may force Colombo's hands

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 21. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's surprise announcement of a unilateral ceasefire may leave the Government with little choice but to reciprocate. Sri Lanka said last week that de-escalation of the conflict and the lifting of economic blockades on the LTTE-held areas would be considered only after peace talks began.

But the LTTE's latest move will bring considerable pressure on the Government to respond positively. "This is an answer by the LTTE to all the scepticism expressed about its intentions in offering to talk," said Mr. R. Sampanthan, secretary-general of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front. The LTTE's declaration strengthened its position that it was prepared to begin unconditional talks for a negotiated, political settlement.

To the extent that it is easier for the Government to reciprocate by taking steps to "normalise" life in the LTTE-controlled areas and begin de-escalation, rather than be seen as initiating these steps, the LTTE's latest move may present a way out of the deadlock that the Norwegian-backed peace process seemed to have hit last week. The LTTE said last week that talks could not take place while the shooting continued and the initiative to create a cordial atmosphere had to come from the Government — a condition the Government had already rejected.

"This is an opportunity for the Government to take steps for talks to take place in conditions of normalcy. It is a move that must inexorably lead to the commencement of peace talks," said Mr. Sampanthan.

The TULF vice-president and parliamentarian, Mr. V. Anandasangaree, said motives should not be attributed to the LTTE's announcement. "So many people's lives will be saved in this one month. This will be welcomed by both Tamil and Sinhalese people. We must take for granted that they are serious and the Government must respond positively," he said. The ceasefire announcement came amid reports from Jaffna peninsula that the Government troops were preparing for another offensive in the region. The Air Force bombers pounded targets in Kaithady, Navatkuli and Ariyalai sectors all day today, a practice followed by the military to soften the LTTE immediately prior to the launch of a ground operation. After the LTTE's declaration, it would be difficult for the military to go ahead with such a plan, if there is indeed one, even though the ceasefire begins only on Sunday.

The Opposition United National Party said earlier today that creating a cordial atmosphere was important for conflict resolution. The UNP parliamentarian, Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe, said at a news conference that his party was for a de-escalation after talks commenced.

He said the Government must heed the signals given to it by the donor community at the Paris Development Forum and take steps to improve its record on governance by establishing independent commissions for police, judiciary, elections and the public service.

Sri Lanka took a rap at the Forum earlier this week for not achieving the expected standards of "good governance."

THE HINDU

22 DEC 2000

Lanka rebels declare month-long ceasefire

■ Move a goodwill gesture for peace process, claims LTTE

REUTERS
COLOMBO, DECEMBER 21

TAMIL rebels fighting for a separate state in Sri Lanka declared a month-long ceasefire on Thursday, saying it was a goodwill gesture to push forward a peace process to end 17 years of ethnic war.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) announcement is the biggest breakthrough in efforts to end the war since 1995, when the rebels broke a truce with an attack on a navy base, and also comes after a dramatic increase in violence over the past 12 months.

The declaration comes almost two months after a peace initiative was kickstarted by a surprise meeting between a Norwegian envoy and LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

"If Sri Lanka responds positively by ceasing armed hostilities against our forces and takes steps to implement the Norwegian proposal of mutual confidence-build-

ing measures, the LTTE will be prepared to extend the period of peace to create cordial conditions and direct negotiations," a rebel statement said.

The statement said Prabhakaran had issued orders for a unilateral ceasefire from midnight on December 24 to midnight on January 24.

"We make this declaration of cessation of armed hostilities unilaterally hoping that the Sri Lanka government will reciprocate positively and instruct its armed forces to observe peace during the festive season of Christmas, New Year and Pongal (the Hindu Harvest Festival)," the LTTE said.

Meanwhile, there was no immediate reaction from the government, which has been forced on a diplomatic defensive since Prabhakaran called three weeks ago for unconditional talks and dropped previous demands for a truce and troop withdrawal first, both politically impossible for the government to meet.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga is in Europe where she attended a meeting of Sri Lanka's aid donors earlier this week.

"Our desire to cease armed hostilities should be viewed as a genuine expression of goodwill indicating our sincere desire for peace and negotiated political settlement," said the statement, which was faxed to Reuters from the LTTE's London offices.

The government over the past week has also said it wanted unconditional talks but has questioned the sincerity of the LTTE, pointing to recent rebel attacks.

Government forces have also launched two offensives since Prabhakaran met Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim.

Kumaratunga said earlier this week that Sri Lanka was ready to negotiate with the Tamil rebels, and was prepared to de-escalate the conflict, but added no troop withdrawals would take place until a negotiated settlement had been reached.

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 JAN 2001

Will the new year bring cheer?

S Lanka HV-21 24/12

FOR HISTORIANS, time is counted in decades, centuries, eras. When scholars study the history of Sri Lanka in the years to come, the events of the year 2000 may only form a small part of the larger picture. But for those living through it, this has been a momentous year, the tone for which was set by the narrow escape of the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, from a suicide assassin in December 1999. As Sri Lanka tottered at the brink of a stunning military defeat at the hands of the LTTE in May, few could have anticipated the events that followed.

It was entirely in keeping with the element of surprise that characterised all of 2000 that, as the year drew to a close, the LTTE declared a month-long unilateral ceasefire as a "gesture of goodwill".

As the Government launched an offensive in Jaffna peninsula hours after the announcement last Thursday evening, it seemed as if Sri Lanka was in no mood to reciprocate the LTTE's Christmas truce, even though there were still three days to go for the ceasefire to take effect.

That and the absence of any other immediate reaction from the government seemed to suggest that the meeting ground between the two sides was still proving elusive, despite efforts by the Norwegian government, the designated facilitator, to bring them together to the negotiating table.

But it could be equally true that in the postures that the Government and the LTTE adopt, they are performing to a well-written script with pre-determined responses and that even though it seems to observers that gaps continue to dog their respective positions, in fact, they may be rapidly moving towards the negotiating table.

"This (the LTTE's declaration of a ceasefire) is a step that has to inexorably lead to the commencement of peace talks," said Mr. R. Sampanthan, secretary-general of the Tamil United Liberation Front, which has for several years been pressing for talks between the two warring sides.

The Norwegian Foreign Minis-

There might well be peace talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE in the new year. But at the moment, says NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN, it is anybody's guess how the plot will unravel next.



A Sri Lankan woman whose soldier-husband went missing in action against the LTTE joins an anti-war protest in Colombo.

ter, Mr. Raymond Johansen, said recently that while his Government was pleased that both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE had expressed their willingness for dialogue, their "statements show there is a gap between the positions which may prevent the parties from moving into a process which may lead to direct talks in the near future".

In a statement earlier this month, he expressed the hope that the parties would seize the existing opportunities to bridge

any such gap and said his Government would "encourage them to take the necessary steps to enter into a process leading towards direct negotiations".

The ceasefire declaration could be one such step. At one level, it can be seen as an independent move by the LTTE to exert pressure on the Government to reciprocate and agree to talks in an atmosphere of peace, as Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran had wanted.

But at another, the truce presents an opportunity for the Gov-

ernment to take a similar step, to the extent that reciprocation is easier for it than to be seen as taking the initiative on this politically sensitive issue. It is now easier to respond positively to the LTTE without being seen as having caved in to its conditions.

Last week, the Sinhalese hardline National Movement Against Terrorism held a demonstration against the peace process in Colombo, burning an effigy of the LTTE leader along with those of the Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, and the British Junior Foreign Minister, Mr. Peter Hain.

The demonstrators marched to the army headquarters, where their representatives handed over a petition to the army chief, urging soldiers not to be taken in by the talk about peace talks, and to fight on.

But Sri Lanka may not be able to continue fighting the LTTE indefinitely, and the pressure is growing on it to talk. Mrs. Kumaratunga told a meeting of Sri Lanka's donor community in Paris last week that defence spending was now at the "intolerably high" level of six per cent of the country's GDP. In recent months, the Government has been forced to borrow at high levels to support its defence expenditure, which escalated in mid-2000. The allocation for defence in the interim budget for January to March 2001 is 20 per cent of the total expenditure.

How much the donor countries and organisations will pledge to Sri Lanka after the latest round of the Paris Development Forum could well depend on the progress of the Norwegian-backed peace process, along with

reforms to strengthen democratic institutions. Besides, as the army chief politely told the NMAT delegation that met him last week, the military was fully capable of finishing off the LTTE, but first they must help him find another 15,000 soldiers.

The pressures on the LTTE are well-known. Under the circumstances, there might well be peace talks between it and the Government in the new year. But at the moment, it is anybody's guess how the plot will unravel next.

THE HINDU

24 DEC 2000

Lankan govt. rejects LTTE's truce offer

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has rejected a unilateral ceasefire offered by Tamil Tiger guerrillas in a bid to kickstart a Norwegian-backed peace process.

The Sri Lankan government ended days of speculation by flatly rejecting a ceasefire as called by the LTTE to revive the peace process.

Prime minister Ratnasiri Wickremanakaye in a statement said military action against the LTTE will be kept up till they agree to honestly engage in peace negotiations with the government.

The Tigers had said that they expected the government to reciprocate their one-month unilateral ceasefire that goes into effect at Christmas eve as a goodwill gesture to help the Norwegian-backed peace process.

"The government believes that further gestures of goodwill are unnecessary, when the government has clearly indicated its wish to engage in talks with the ltte forthwith on the substantial issues involved, with a view to resolving

the ethnic question, ending the war and constructing a durable peace," the government statement said.

Shortly after the LTTE's truce offer on Thursday, the military mounted a major offensive against the tigers in the northern peninsula of Jaffna.

After two days of fighting an estimated 142 tigers and 25 government soldiers were killed, defence ministry spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said.

"We have recovered the bodies of 30 Tigers, but their radio communications have admitted losing 124 cadres," Mr Karunaratne said. "On our side, we lost 25 killed and 47 wounded," he said.

Mr Karunaratne said the military also captured alive seven Tiger rebels after Saturday's fighting in Jaffna peninsula.

Sri Lanka's rejection of the Tiger truce was also seen here as a snub to Britain's junior minister Peter Hain who had asked Colombo to accept the truce offered by the guerrillas. (FTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

9 DEC 1989

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2000

A MATTER OF 'TRUCE' AND TRUST

THE 'UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE' which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) announced, in a virtual public-relations blitzkrieg, has been rejected by the Sri Lankan Government with much political circumspection. The 'truce' is effective for a month from Christmas. There is nothing in the LTTE's media-spin to suggest that its "hope" of reciprocation by official Colombo was a coded conditionality. Viewed in this perspective, the LTTE seems to have taken upon itself the unusual onus of sustaining a 'truce' on its part for the stated purpose of facilitating new "initiatives" by Colombo for de-escalation of the prolonged "armed confrontation" between the two sides. In a purely technical sense relevant to their equally important 'psycho-war', it is now clear that the LTTE had not formally communicated its decision to the Sri Lankan authorities through Norway, which has been acting as an intermediary in their recent dealings with each other. Nonetheless, it was a good sign that Colombo indicated, in a preliminary comment, that its instinctive "caution" over the LTTE's declaration should not be construed as an impediment to an eventual "positive view" if that might be justifiable on serious second thoughts. The Government's "unhappy experiences" in dealing with a mercurial LTTE were said to have induced such caution and a sense of "inquiry" at this stage. Not surprisingly, a dominant political feeling among Sri Lanka's majority Sinhala population is that the LTTE's offer of 'truce' in its fighting with the armed forces would be really meaningful only if it is extended to the entire country. The transparent suggestion is that the LTTE must not also seek to strike "terror" in Colombo and elsewhere across the island-republic.

The LTTE's dramatic move, explicitly timed for the festive season of Christmas-New Year-Pongal, was in tune with the overall popular mood on the current South Asian scene, which

is marked by a sudden spurt in neighbourly feelings despite the actions of some determined anti-peace militants. With the LTTE affirming that it could go beyond its 'unilateral' announcement if the Government were to respond positively by "ceasing armed hostilities," the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, may still find that she will have to seize the moment of hope sooner than later for the high stakes of peace. There is of course no question mark over Ms. Kumaratunga's track record of vision-driven moves for a constitutional settlement of the basic question of a rightful place for the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka as an indivisible state. Yet the mainstream Opposition United National Party as also non-militant and formerly militant Tamil groups have not rallied behind her for a variety of reasons. While this still poses a delicate challenge to the President, she knows that dealing with the LTTE is a much more difficult matter of trust.

Brazenly disingenuous is the reported suggestion by a transparent LTTE-lobby that a specified military operation, which was launched well before the time set for the commencement of the 'unilateral ceasefire,' was clear proof of Ms. Kumaratunga's alleged attitude of pleasing donor-nations with insincere promises of a peace initiative. What she needs to grapple with in the present situation is how to redefine the offer that she expounded at a recent meeting held under the World Bank auspices in Paris. She said that while the "doors are always open for negotiations" Colombo would "not entertain any conditions imposed by the LTTE." This formulation, spelt out before the LTTE's 'unilateral' move, may require fine-tuning in the context of the militant organisation's promise to create conditions for "a stable ceasefire and direct negotiations" in the event of Colombo halting "armed hostilities" presumably without pulling its troops out of the conflict-zone. But confidence building is the first step.

THE HINDU

26 DEC 2000

Peace-mongering

It is a paradox of the Sri Lankan conflict that though both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Kumaratunga government ceaselessly talk of pursuing peace, the deadlock persists. Thus, we have a situation where the LTTE declares a unilateral ceasefire and the government asserts that the military operations would continue. Yet both, the government and the Tamil Tigers, insist that their respective positions are motivated by the concern to work for peace. Rejecting the LTTE's call to reciprocate the ceasefire, Colombo has held that no further goodwill gestures are necessary. The government believes that its desire to engage in talks with the LTTE on the substantive issues involved has been made clear beyond any doubt, and this having been done, it will continue with the military operations till the LTTE engaged in negotiations. The only stage at which the government would consider a ceasefire is after the talks are on track and some progress is achieved. Even while announcing the decision to continue military operations, the government reiterated its call to the LTTE "to engage honestly in this opportunity for peace". The LTTE's case is that peace initiatives can be promoted only when there are congenial conditions, specifically de-escalation of the armed confrontation. Significantly, the LTTE seems to be placing less emphasis on lifting of the embargo on Jaffna and withdrawal of the government forces. These were part of the demands articulated by the LTTE and its chief V Prabhakaran soon after the Norwegian peace broker, Erik Solheim, had conveyed their willingness for "unconditional talks".

If there appears to be a softening in the LTTE stance, where it has moved from implicit conditions to a unilateral ceasefire for a month "as a genuine expression of goodwill", clearly, President Chandrika Kumaratunga is not buying it. Her government's perception seems to be that evidence of earnestness must come in the form of actual negotiations and unless these proceed to a credible point, it would be unwise to walk into the Tiger's trap. The government is convinced that the LTTE's expressed desires for peace and negotiated political settlement are yet another ploy. In the past, the LTTE had made moves towards peace and then used the opportunity to regroup and re-arm itself for fresh offensives. Having been "betrayed" more than once, the government cannot afford to be hoodwinked again, especially now when the LTTE is on the defensive. The LTTE's peace posturing is attributed to its arms supplies and sources having diminished in recent months; and the fact that governments in Europe are threatening to crack down on the financial transactions of the LTTE's sympathisers. This would further disable the LTTE at a time when the Sri Lankan government has beefed up its arsenal. Hence, the government is unwilling to accept that the LTTE is any more serious about talks now than it has been in the past, but merely seeking a breather to re-equip itself for a new offensive at a later date. Regardless of the truth of these perceptions, political negotiations alone offer hope of an enduring solution and, therefore, both sides need to review their positions for breaking the impasse.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 DEC 2000

Lanka asks UN to recall diplomat

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

accidentally hit civilians.

COLOMBO, Dec. 27. — Sri Lanka has asked the United Nations to withdraw its top diplomat here, after accusing him of meddling in the island's internal affairs, a press report said today.

The government had stopped short of expelling Mr Peter Witham, a British National, but asked the UN to withdraw him, *The Daily Mirror* said quoting foreign ministry sources. No immediate reaction was given by either foreign ministry or the UN offices here in Colombo.

There had been tension between Mr Witham and the government over a UN statement in September 1999 which expressed concern over an air force bombing that killed Tamil civilians and a retaliatory massacre of Sinhalese villagers by Tamil rebels.

The Daily Mirror said that the government was also unhappy over Mr Witham's reported action to set up a refugee camp for minority Tamils. At the time of UN statement, Sri Lankan foreign minister Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar said the UN must "mind its own business."

The government initially maintained that it had bombed a Tiger base but later ordered an investigation acknowledging that it may have

LTTE breaks truce

LTTE guerrillas fired mortar bombs at Sri Lankan army positions, breaking their own unilateral ceasefire, adds PTI.

FLOODS

COLOMBO, Dec. 27. — At least 75,000 families were left homeless and five people killed in Sri Lanka following floods and a cyclone that swept through the island's northern and eastern regions, the social services ministry said today. The cyclone left a trail of destruction behind, the ministry officials said, adding that breakdown in communication was hampering relief operations. — PTI

The rebels attacked the Eluthumadduval army camp yesterday, killing two soldiers and injuring several others, defence ministry spokesman Mr Sanath Karunaratne said here.

Another soldier was killed and four others wounded in a bomb explosion at Kaitthady in Jaffna. Three rebels were also killed in two

separate encounters in the peninsula, he said. Mortar attack was a violation of the rebels' own truce, Mr Karunaratne said.

The rebel group had offered a unilateral truce from Christmas Eve. But the Lankan government rejected it until the Tigers entered Norway-backed peace talks.

In another statement on Christmas Day, the LTTE announced that they would unilaterally continue to honour a truce till 24 January.

"The LTTE will not embark on offensive armed operations during the festive season ending on the 24th January, 2001, but it reserves the right to armed "defence," the organisation said from their London office.

THE STATESMAN

28 DEC 2000

Whichever Government takes over in Colombo, India should help in healing Sri Lanka's wounds

No nation is an island

BY J.N. DIXIT

THE GENERAL and presidential elections in Sri Lanka were held in the first week of October. President Chandrika Kumaratunga faced the electorate in a national election for the first time since 1994. Much of her political idealism and commitment to bringing about a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict stands eroded because of the complex experience in governance and politics which she has gone through since the last six years.

Reports say that the voter turnout has been almost 75 per cent, the major political parties are running neck to neck, while a possible coalition Government of one of the formations in Colombo is not exactly ruled out.

India's foreign policy focus in the last seven months has been on relations with the US, China, Russia and Japan. But it is time to pay attention to our immediate neighbourhood (leaving aside Pakistan which continuously intrudes into our foreign policy radar screen).

The political developments in Sri Lanka subjected to the continuing complications of the ethnic conflict, should remain a matter of concern to India as the fall-out of events there impacts on India's stability, security and even territorial unity.

Elections in Sri Lanka, therefore, merit our attention. It is necessary to examine the military, political and economic situation which constitutes the backdrop of the elections. Militarily, it's a civil war situation. The Kumaratunga Government, however, has retrieved its military position after the major debacles which the Lankan forces suffered during summer this year when the LTTE captured the Elephant Pass and was poised to capture the entire Jaffna peninsula.

Sri Lanka was on the brink of territorial fragmentation earlier this year. But timely politico-military initiatives by the Government underpinned by military and defence assistance from a number of countries, particularly the US, Israel, Britain and Pakistan, stemmed the LTTE's run of successes. India also played a low-key but contributive role.

The present situation is that of a military standoff between the LTTE and the Lankan security forces, with the latter showing an incremental capacity to resist. Kumaratunga had to take some drastic decisions about changing the command structure of the forces which might not have made her popular with her military establishment. She showed courage to retrieve Sri Lanka from a situation when the Government was on the brink

of a military defeat.

Sri Lanka has succeeded in countering the LTTE's onslaught despite the crises which the armed forces have faced in terms of low morale, shortage of adequate equipment and the recurring phenomenon of desertions from the ranks. However, the forces have restored their credibility, despite these difficulties.

The political predicament of Sri Lanka is even more complex. The ethnic conflict remains the focus of party politics, the processes of governance and economic management. Kumaratunga's initial efforts to find a solution by direct negotiations with the LTTE failed. Her attempts to structure a constitutional package responsive to basic Tamil demands in consultation

with other Tamil groups who have been part of the mainstream democratic processes, have also not fully succeeded. The Tamil groups feel that the proposals put forward by Kumaratunga since 1995 are not satisfactory enough.

This view found expression when the proposals were referred to a select committee of Parliament which has representatives from the Sinhala majority and the Tamil Muslim minority. Complicating matters further was the reluctance of the main Opposition party, the United National Party, to move towards a rational national consensus on these proposals.

The situation was compounded by the security establishment and senior officers of the armed forces not being very enthusiastic about offering a compromise package to the Tamils, given the LTTE's continuing violence. The most disappointing predicament that Kumaratunga faced was that of the Buddhist clergy opposing any compromise responsive to the Tamil minority.

Despite all these difficulties, Kumaratunga managed to put together a set of constitutional proposals meeting the more substantive Tamil demands, except one, namely, the merger of the northern and eastern provinces — with this integrated province to be declared as a Tamil homeland. In some respects, the proposals put forward by her were an advance from what Jayewardene planned towards the end of his tenure before Premadasa

succeeded him and scuttled the process.

The proposals not only took note of Tamil demands but also the aspirations of the Sri Lankan Muslim community. The UNP and the Buddhist clergy prevented the proposals from being submitted to Parliament for a vote. This must have been a matter of disappointment to Kumaratunga who remains committed to a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict, despite the atmosphere of violence which she has faced and despite having been subjected to a close assassination attempt last December.

The economic situation in Sri Lanka remains stable despite the enormous resources it has to divert to its defence budget and the uncertainties affecting the northern and eastern provinces due to continuing violence. The central, western and southern provinces continue to maintain standards of economic performance in the spheres of tourism, agriculture, the plantations and manufacturing sector, like textiles. This is reflective of the patience and resilience of the people despite the violence which they have suffered since the last 17 years. It is in this context that the elections took place.

There are 42 political parties in the election fray, with 5,048 candidates. The main parties are: the People's Alliance led by Kumaratunga and the UNP led by Ranil Wickremasinghe. The Alliance has representatives of the Sri Lankan Muslim League also.

Leaving aside the LTTE, a number of Tamil groups were also fighting the elections. Significantly, the EPRLF was reportedly participating after a gap of time. Even more crucially, the Leftist Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is a major force in the elections.

Recent reports indicate that there has been a large-scale turnout of voters for both the legislative and presidential elections, reflective of the people's abiding commitment to democracy. There have been critical developments before the elections commenced. One of the most prominent Muslim leaders in the country, Ashraf, was killed in a helicopter crash while flying over the eastern province

of Batticaloa. His successor has escaped an assassination attempt. And the senior leadership of the moderate Tamil Party, the TULF, has been decimated over the last three years by assassinations carried out by the LTTE.

The Tamil parties are participating under repeated threats from the LTTE. This is an act of courage under extreme pressure. The campaign has been bitter and controversial, influenced by the ethnic divide, questioning the middle ground advocated by Kumaratunga. One also expects that there are segments in the senior leadership of the UNP which are inclined towards a compromise on the ethnic issue. But electoral politics prevents this view from getting an effective public expression.

It is a pity that the Buddhist clergy continues to play an obstructionist and Sinhalese ethno-centric role in influencing public opinion. The anticipation is that the Alliance led by Kumaratunga may not come back with the same number of seats in Parliament. She herself may get elected as the President, given her charisma and political background. But a piquant situation may arise if she wins the presidential election and the UNP returns with a sufficient number of seats which may result in the next Prime Minister of Sri Lanka belonging to the UNP. It will create a complicated and contradictory predicament.

Another influence impacting on political prospects in Sri Lanka originates in India. The LTTE still has extensive contacts in Tamil Nadu. A number of political groups — though they are not mainstream parties — have held rallies and meetings demanding the creation of Eelam and recognition by India of such a Tamil state. This phenomenon vitiates the political processes in Sri Lanka. It is difficult to counter given the democratic norms about political activities prevailing in India.

Whatever the results of the elections, the new Government of Sri Lanka would continue to face intractable complexities. These can only be overcome if a national consensus responsive to the aspirations of its Tamil citizens emerges. This is the only method by which the Tamil population can be liberated from the confrontationalist motivations of Tamil militant groups.

India should assist — whichever Government in Sri Lanka comes to power — this patch of accommodation and compromise with the Tamils. This assistance has to be diplomatic and political. There should be no direct mediation or involvement in the Sri Lankan political processes.



'Lanka's ruling party has won elections'

By RAHUL SHARMA

Colombo, Oct. 11: Lanka's ruling People Alliance has won a clear victory in parliamentary elections, capturing 109 of the 225 seats at stake, state radio said on Wednesday quoting an unspecified study of the results.

It said the main Opposition United National Party (UNP) won 90 seats, while the remaining were shared by the leftist People's Liberation Front, minority Tamil parties and other groups.

The figures announced by the government radio were different from official results released by the Elections Commissioner, which

showed the PA winning 78 and the UNP 64 of the 157 seats declared.

"The Elections Commissioner has not confirmed that (radio) result. They are still counting in some areas of Kandy. I can't comment until the official results are released," UNP leader Kamil Wickremesinghe said.

Analysts were predicting a hung parliament with President Chandrika Kumaratunga's PA emerging as the single largest party, but falling short of an absolute majority, which they said could lead to political horse trading after elections marred by murders, bombings and ballot rigging.

Tuesday's vote was a key test of

Kumaratunga's plan to end the country's 17-year ethnic war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in which more than 61,000 people have died.

In Sri Lanka's complex electoral system — a mix of direct voting and proportional representation — the number of polling divisions won does not translate into parliamentary seats. Seats are allocated according to the percentage of total votes polled by a party in larger electoral districts.

"The parties are going to be shopping around for possible political allies. Sri Lanka is probably heading for a minority government rather than a coalition, as smaller

parties may prefer to offer support on issues from outside," said Ketesh Loganathan of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, an independent think-tank.

He said both the UNP and the PA were likely to be more comfortable with minority parties as partners rather than the JVP due to its leftist inclination and past history. "God willing we will form the government and we are looking for coalition partners," said transport Minister A.H.M. Fowzie.

"We are waiting for the final results and have not contacted any potential coalition partners. But our leader has said we are willing to work with anybody," said

Karasena Kodirawaku, the UNP's spokesman. A nationwide curfew imposed following Tuesday's poll was lifted at dawn as counting began in some districts where it had been delayed by violence and other problems.

State media said around 75 per cent of some 12 million eligible voters cast their ballots in the general election. The stock market reacted badly to the latest results which signalled that neither the PA nor the UNP had a clear majority.

The key Colombo All Share Index closed 2.16 per cent, or 11.28 points, lower at 511.69 on across-the-board selling by retailers. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

71 2 OCT 2000

21 2 OCT 2000

101 2000

PM will find way to reduce oil prices: Naik

By Sushma Ramachandran

NEW DELHI, OCT. 11. The Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, has said that the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, would find a solution if the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, persisted with her demand for a roll-back in oil prices. "I feel the Prime Minister will find a solution; it is not a very big problem."

In an interview to *The Hindu*, Mr. Naik said, "I am not commenting intentionally because it is not my area." He felt that when the Prime Minister explained the situation to Ms. Banerjee, "the matter is over".

Ministry sources said a possible solution could be further reduction in customs and excise duties if Ms. Banerjee stuck to her demand. This would not affect the oil pool deficit but achieve the desired effect of reducing retail prices for consumers.

Details on Page 15

Sri Lanka headed for hung Parliament

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 11. With Sri Lanka heading for a hung Parliament, the People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party (UNP) were today making hectic efforts to rope in smaller parties to form the next government.

After scrapping the polls in 22 centres in the south and in the entire Killinochchi district in the north following complaints of large-scale rigging, the Election Commissioner, Mr. Dayananda Dissanayake, postponed the official declaration of the results till Thursday.

He said the final results would be announced in consultation with political parties at 11.30 a.m. on Thursday. "Please be patient," he told the nation, appearing on State-run television. A curfew was declared from 10 p.m. till 5 a.m. on Thursday as a precautionary measure.

Counting continued till late at night in the Kandy district where

the election was marred by allegations of widespread malpractice. Available results indicated the PA was leading in the seat count, but trends showed that neither side would be in position to cross the half-way mark in the 225-seat House for an absolute majority.

In the results declared till 9 p.m. on Wednesday, the PA coalition of the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, had obtained 88 seats while the UNP had 72 seats, a fair indicator that the final results may not be as close as predicted earlier. The JVP had eight seats. Even before the results began rolling in, both the PA and the UNP had begun negotiations with smaller parties, including the Tamil parties, in anticipation of forming the next government. From the reduced vote share of the PA and the UNP compared to the 1994 elections, it was evident that both had suffered an erosion of support.

Advantage JVP: Page 13

THE HINDU

12 OCT 2000

96.6 Dead end in Lanka 17/10

Peace demands that the two main parties hang together

THE close outcome of a singularly bloody election leaves Sri Lanka almost exactly where it was before. This does not augur well for the country. But for an increase in the vote share of small parties (including the radical Janata Vimukti Perumuna), the political status quo before the polls remains essentially unchanged. That does not encourage the hope of early restoration of peace on the island. Neither of the two main parties gets a clear majority and each has suffered a fall in its share of the vote. President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance has nosed ahead of its rival, Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party, and looks like being able to cobble together a majority from small parties and independents. Two parties which could line-up with the PA are the Eelam People's Democratic Party and the SLMC, both from the north-east. But a PA-led coalition is not as yet a sure thing. A period of uncertainty compounded by re-polling in some areas looms ahead during which a resurgence of violence cannot be ruled out.

The verdict, not dissimilar to the 1994 poll result, increases the prospect of contention and delay in pushing through key economic measures and paralysis on the question of autonomy for the Tamils. The silver lining to these dark clouds, if the PA is able to form the new government, is that Kumaratunga will get a prime minister she can work with. Under the Sri Lankan system, in which an executive president has overriding powers, political gridlock can develop very easily if the president and prime minister come from two different

parties and do not learn to "cohabit", a term the French use to describe power-sharing in government. Kumaratunga said quite plainly in the run-up to the elections that she would find it very difficult to work with Wickremesinghe if he became prime minister. Given the rivalries and vastly different political platforms that is understandable.

Whether or not working together turns out to be a constitutional necessity, it is certainly a political necessity whoever forms the government. The leaders of the island's two major parties need to narrow their differences. The starting point for resolving the autonomy issue and for dealing successfully with the LTTE is for the PA and UNP to find a common purpose. Otherwise, ethnic conflict which has gone on for 17 years looks like going on for many more. The election campaign showed the PA and UNP's approaches to the ethnic issue are poles apart. Wickremesinghe favours a ceasefire and negotiations with the LTTE while Kumaratunga wants to continue to prosecute the war in the north and to pass the Constitution bill which she was compelled, because of lack of support, to withdraw from the last Parliament. Without an understanding between the two parties, there cannot be forward movement in the months ahead. The fear of a dead-end is probably why some Sri Lankans are calling for a government of national unity. The country would have done better out of a more decisive electoral result. The hope now is that its politicians will find a way to make the verdict work for peace and stability.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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People's Alliance single largest party in Lanka

PTI & UNI

COLOMBO, Oct. 11. — Sri Lanka's ruling People's Alliance led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga today emerged as the single largest party in the parliamentary elections held yesterday, bagging 109 seats in the 225-member House, state radio announced here.

The Opposition United National Party, led by Mr Ranil Wickramasinghe, won 80 seats, while the ultra Left Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna and others won 10 and 16 seats respectively, the radio said.

Earlier, the two rivals looked

headed for a show-down as parliamentary election results indicated that no party was going to get a clear enough majority to form a government.

Since seats are decided on a proportional votes basis, parties have to wait till counting of all votes in the entire district is complete.

The Tamil United Liberation Front and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation had already done well in the north and east while the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna did well in the south. The ruling PA, it was thought, would have to depend on their support to form a government.

While the TULF had bagged seven seats, TELO bagged four and the JVP was expected to bag eight seats. The UNP too was aware that it could not afford to ignore the support of these parties if it meant to form a government.

The National Unity Alliance of Mr MHM Ashraff, former minister, had got four seats in eastern Ampara and the Eelam People's Democratic Party of Mr Douglas Devananda had secured four seats in Jaffna till early in the evening.

Observers were speculating whether a possible combination of the TULF, TELO and the JVP with the UNP could match

the PA which already had the support of the NUA and EPDP. Counting of votes in Kandy was then in progress. Both UNP and PA leaders then said they were trying to woo the smaller parties for their support to form a government.

The Marxist-oriented JVP or People's Liberation Front was being discussed as distant but significant third with a potential to be 'kingmaker' in case of a hung Parliament.

The Sinhala hardcore Sihala Ururnaya, whose candidates included a notorious hijacker and a naval rating who had tried to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi were routed out.

75 p.c. turnout in Sri Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 10. An estimated 75 per cent of Sri Lanka's 12 million voters turned out to elect the 11th Parliament today as politicians kept up the pre-poll acrimony with allegations of fraud and vote-rigging. In the Jaffna peninsula, about 60 per cent of the three lakh voters in the district, turned up, which immediately brought forth allegations from the TULF and the PLOTE that the EPDP had stuffed the ballot boxes.

Polling was poor in Jaffna town, where only 5,000 people out of an estimated 30,000 registered voters exercised their franchise.

Residents kept indoors as the army and the LTTE exchanged shells on the outskirts of the town from 7 a.m. till noon. They said over telephone that several shells fell close to the district's main administrative office.

In the central Kandy district, a senior Minister accused a Cabinet colleague of vote rigging, as both sought to corner the maximum number of preferential votes there. The Agriculture Minister, Mr. D. M. Jayarame, in an oblique criticism of the Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. Anuruddha Ratwate, told reporters that he was "concerned about the high degree of vote rigging".

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Mr. Rauff Hakeem, seeking election

from the same district, joined the chorus of charges against Mr. Ratwate and threatened to keep out of the People's Alliance coalition.



Sirimavo dies after casting vote

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 10. Ms. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first elected woman Prime Minister, died today shortly after voting in Sri Lanka's parliamentary election.

Ms. Bandaranaike, 84, died of heart attack around 10.30 a.m. when she was returning to the capital after casting her vote at Attanagalle, 36 km away, where her son, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, is a candidate of the United National Party.

"This is the worst violence we have seen. If they behave like this before the election, how will they behave if they win? We will have nothing to do with them after the election," he said.

The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, appeared to acknowledge that the elections in the district might not have been completely fair. In a statement, she said she would support the Elections Commissioner in "whatever action" he took on the "irregularities that are reported to have taken place in some polling stations in Kandy district". The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence, a private watchdog, urged the Elections Commissioner to scrap the polls in 11 electoral divisions across seven districts.

The death of the former Prime Minister, Ms. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, plunged her supporters into gloom. Voter enthusiasm was, however, not affected. The UNP's campaign managers said her death would not make any difference to the outcome, predicted as a down-to-the-wire finish between the two main parties.

PII reports:

Police said that six persons were killed in sporadic violence in different parts, including two in Kandy, where clashes took place between rival supporters of PA-

See also Page 14

THE HINDU

10 OCT 2000

The first woman PM

SIRIMAVO BANDARANAIKE, who died in Colombo on Tuesday, had been pictured as the shy wife of a political leader until she was persuaded to enter politics following her husband's assassination in 1959. But like other women politicians in post-colonial Asia, she soon demonstrated her leadership qualities and created a place for herself in contemporary South Asian history. Though her political career spanned almost four decades, it was the Sixties that can be described as the time when she was at her best. Having led the Sri Lanka Freedom Party to a big victory in 1960, she became the first woman Prime Minister in the world. As one of the leading lights of the non-aligned movement, she also played an important role in regional and third world forums. It was as a regional leader that she played a mediatory role in trying to mend fences between India and China in the wake of the 1962 conflict. ~~W-16~~

But despite such successes, her domestic balance sheet has not been an unmixing one. Many of the policies she pursued have since been overturned. It might have been a tribute to her diplomatic skills that she had the Sirimavo-Shastri agreement put in place. But much of the adverse impact of that agreement on the island's Indian Tamil population has been undone following the political struggle waged by these people. She followed an economic policy of controls and import curbs which resulted in much public hardship and led to her defeat in the 1977 elections. These policies have since been reversed.

It is an irony of history that someone who had set out to pursue socialist policies should have had to face the radical wrath of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. Thus, she came under attack from both the Left and the Right. But for 'Mrs B', as she was called, the unkindest cut was when President J.R. Jayewardene deprived her of her civic rights in 1977. For almost the whole of the past decade, she was confined to a wheel chair while holding nominal charge as Prime Minister since 1994. However, as someone who dismantled the last vestiges of a colonial connection by turning Sri Lanka into a republic in 1972, she will have an assured place in its history. ~~W-16~~

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 OCT 2000

Peaceful Lanka polls record 70 p.c. turnout

HTC/PTI
Colombo, October 10

ABOUT 70 per cent of the electorate had cast their votes by 3 pm today, even as the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) asked the Commissioner of Elections to annul the poll in eleven electorates given the violence, intimidation and rigging there.

An official source admitted that there was trouble in Kandy but maintained that the polling was peaceful in other parts of the island.

Two persons were killed last night in clashes between rival political parties in southern Kandy town, while LTTE rebels shelled government agents' office in northern Jaffna today as Sri Lanka began voting for the parliamentary elections.

Two persons were killed in overnight clashes between ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the opposition United National Party (UNP) in southern Kandy town, police said.

Barring sporadic incidents of clashes in southern Kandy and Matara areas, peaceful polling was reported from various parts of the country.

Polling, however, was reported to be brisk in the war-torn Jaffna peninsula despite sporadic artillery shelling by the LTTE.

Around 15 artillery shells landed around the Kutchchery, the office



A Buddhist hermit falls at the feet of a monk to mourn the death of former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, as voters wait to cast their ballot for general elections, in Colombo on Tuesday. Photo: AP

by persons trying to snatch ballot boxes or scare away voters. There were at least four murders. In Anuradhapura there was even a rape," Dr. Parakrama said. "The ruling Peoples' Alliance is the overwhelming offender," he added.

Kandy district is said to be the worst affected, with sources saying that the police had caught two bus loads of men owing allegiance to the Deputy Defence Minister, Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte. They were allegedly going to rig the polls.

The most affected areas were Puttalam and Anamaduwa in North Western Province; Anuradhapura and Kalawewa in North Central Province; Katana and Ja Ela in Gampaha district; Gampola, Nawalapitiya and Galagedera in Kandy district; Hauguranketa, Badulla, Malangala in Nowara Eliya district and Rambukkanna in Kegalle district.

There was no boycott of the elections in the terrorism ridden Jaffna North and East. But initially the polling was dull in Jaffna because the sky was overcast, and 15 shells had fallen on unpopulated areas near the Kacheri last night creating fear. In the troubled eastern district of Batticaloa, 46 per cent had

polled by 3 pm. Former MP Selvarajah said that polling was not so brisk because people had to come from the uncleared (i.e. LTTE-held) areas to the cleared areas to vote.

of the government agent in Jaffna town this morning, sources in Jaffna informed over phone.

However, Dr. Arjuna Parakrama

of the CMEV told *The Hindustan Times* that the election was peacefully unfair in 210 booths in 57 electorates immediately.

He said that the CMEV

had asked the Commissioner of Elections to annul the poll in 11 electorates immediately.

"There was firing in many places

Spectre of hung House looms as Lankans go to polls today

PK Balachandran
Colombo October 9

10/10
TWELVE MILLION Sri Lankans will choose 225 members of parliament on Tuesday amid gloomy forecasts of a hung Parliament, post-election horse trading and a possible clash between a Prime Minister belonging to the United National Party (UNP) and an Executive President belonging to the Peoples' Alliance (PA).

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has already said that it would be "very difficult" to work with UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe.

Mr. Wickramasinghe has warned that if Mrs. Kumaratunga was to flout the Constitution, she would meet the fate of Yugoslavia's Mlasovic.

With a hung parliament, government formation is expected to be very tricky with small parties like the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP), Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), the

Muslim dominated National Unity Alliance (NUA) and even the new Sinhala party, Sihala Urumaya, acquiring bargaining power and playing a critical role.

With over 1,000 incidents of election related violence, including 100 killed in LTTE bombings and 30 killed in inter-party fights, there is an undercurrent of fear. People are talking of curfews and are hoarding food.

The government, too is not taking any chances and has deployed 35,000 troops in addition to the police and paramilitary forces throughout the island.

According to the pre-poll surveys, the voters are divided on key issues and a sizeable section (18% to 45%) is undecided. The undecided vote could tilt the balance either way.

The latest survey by ORG-MARG-SMART found that 37.5% favoured the UNP and 36.5% preferred PA. The UNP scored better on economic issues, though on the issues of human rights, finding a solution to the ethnic question, fighting the war against the LTTE and media freedom, the PA scored

higher.

While the UNP hopes that the people will go by economic issues like cost of living, unemployment and lack of investment opportunities, the PA draws comfort from a Colombo University survey which shows that people consider the ethnic issue the most important one, and think that the PA has a better solution to it.

The PA is for a "fight to the finish" as far as the LTTE is concerned, but it is touting a draft devolution package to win over the ordinary Tamil.

The UNP does not have a devolution package, but is touting the idea of an immediate de-escalation of the war.

While the PA's aggressive stand appeals to the Sinhala south, the Tamil North and East is dismayed by it.

The anti-PA TULF may thus gain in the North and East. So will the UNP among other Tamils and also Muslims. The Muslims, being traders, are expected to vote UNP in most places, and the NUA in the East because the NUA is essentially East-based.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 OCT 2000

SRI LANKA POLLS / TRADITION OF HIGH TURNOUT

Preferential votes hold the key

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 9. Sri Lanka will vote on Tuesday to elect the 11th Parliament after a month-long election campaign which showed no discernible trend in favour of any political party.

Over 12 million people are eligible to vote in the election. With a tradition of high voter turnout about 70 per cent of the electorate are likely to exercise their franchise. Polling will be between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. and results are expected to start coming in by midnight.

In the contest are 5,477 candidates belonging to 29 political parties and 99 independent groups. The five districts of the Tamil dominated north-east account for nearly 1,000 candidates.

As many as 29 MPs in the 225-seat House will be selected without contest based on the percentage of votes nationally polled by each party. These are the National List MPs. The rest will be chosen through a system of proportional representation and preferential voting from each of the 22 electoral districts.

While the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratsasiri Wickremanayake, is contesting from the west coast district of Kalutara, the leader of the opposition United National Party, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, is seeking election from Colombo.

The Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Mr. G. L. Peiris, nominated through the National List to the last Parliament, is a contestant from Colombo this time. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party strongman, Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse, a vocal critic of Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, is seeking re-election from the southern-most district of Hambantota, where the UNP's Mr. Sajith Premadasa, son of the late president, R. Premadasa, has emerged as a powerful force.



Ballot boxes being brought under heavy security in Colombo on Monday. — Photo: Srivathsa Walpole

Two of the UNP's star candidates, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, estranged brother of the President, and Mr. Karu Jayasuriya, former Colombo Mayor, are contesting from Gampaha district, making the party formidable in a traditional SLFP stronghold.

A close contest is likely in Kandy district, with the PA holding as many as four senior Ministers, including the Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. Anuruddha Ratnayake, and Mr. South Anumugama, who left the UNP recently.

In neighbouring Nuwara Eliya, the Ceylon Workers Congress has to prove it is still a force to reckon with after the death of its founder, Saunmya-moorthy Thondaman, and the departure of several leading lights to the UNP.

Nearly 10,000 policemen will be deployed, with two posted at each of the 9,000 odd polling booths. Besides the 5,500 members of

police by a the Centre for Monitoring Election Processes, a private election watchdog, 154 international monitors have arrived, most of them at the Government's invitation.

Colleagues as rivals

On the eve of the elections, the focus is on the electoral system which has pitted candidates of the same party against one another.

Over the weekend, wide publicity was given to a rift between the People's Alliance secretary and Agriculture Minister, Mr. D. M. Jayaratne, and Ms. Kumaratunga, complaining that a Cabinet colleague was planning to rig the polls. Both Ministers are candidates in the 13-member Kandy district. Mr. Jayaratne fears he might poll fewer votes than his colleague, and *not either can make it to Parliament at all, or even if he does, lose his position as the leader of the district.*

At the heart of the problem is the electoral system, a mix of proportional representation and preferential voting. In each of the 22 electoral districts, voters must choose not just a party but also indicate their preference for three candidates from that party's list for that district.

The nomination list of each party must contain three more names than the number of seats from the district. Kandy can send up 13 members of Parliament, so each party nominates 16 candidates.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

OCT 9 1992

Chandrika rules out talks with LTTE

PK Balachandran
Colombo September 30

SRI LANKAN President Chandrika Kumaratunga has said that her government will not attempt to have any further peace talks with the LTTE. Addressing leading members of the Muslim community and professionals here on Friday, Kumaratunga said: "We are not trying (to talk) any more. We are fighting their terrorism to the end."

The President's declaration fits in well with Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake's announcement that the Army will take Elephant Pass by October 10, the date of polling in the Sri Lankan parliamentary elections.

As the Army moved in to take Chavakacheri and then went on to take Sarasalai (West) to

LTTE funds supply drop

IN A meeting with university teachers on Friday, President Chandrika Kumaratunga said that since she placed in Parliament a new Constitution to devolve power to the minority Tamils, funding of the LTTE by expatriate Tamils had dropped by 53 per cent. Quoting her, the state owned *Daily News* said that each one of the 700,000 expatriate Tamils had been giving \$6 a day on an average to the LTTE. These collections plus the income from human, drug and other kinds of trafficking had amounted to SL Rs 20 billion a year, she said.

HTC, Colombo

keep the supply route from the airfield in Palaly safe from the LTTE, the Tigers launched their

"Operation Unceasing Waves IV" in the south to push the Army further away from Elephant Pass.

The LTTE now claims that Kilali, strategically situated on the Jaffna lagoon on the Thenmarachchi side, and vital for the defence of Elephant Pass, has been captured.

The Army, however, is silent on this, only claiming that it has blunted the LTTE offensive further north on the Eluthumadduval-Nagarkoil axis straddling Thenmarachchi and Vadamarachchi.

Meanwhile, following the LTTE's appeal, about 6,000 people from Thenmarachchi tried to move to safer places in Vadamarachchi. But the Army stopped them. However, upon an appeal by the UNP candidate Maheswaran Jaffna commander Gen Anton Wijendra had agreed to allow the movement on Saturday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

• 1 OCT 2000

Hung Parliament likely in Sri Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 8. Sri Lanka appears to be gearing for a period of political uncertainty immediately after Tuesday's general elections with pundits and opinion polls alike predicting a neck-and-neck finish with neither of the two main parties getting a clear majority.

At a pre-election press conference today, the leader of the United National Party, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, said he was confident his party would obtain more than 113 seats in the next Parliament and form the next Government. "On October 11, you will have a new government and it will be a UNP government."

The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, also expressed confidence last week that her People's Alliance would win a clear majority.

An opinion poll conducted by ORG-SMART and published in today's *Sunday Times* put the opposition UNP ahead of the PA by just one per cent. The PA was ahead on issues such as the war against the LTTE, human rights and media freedom, while the UNP led on issues of economy.

Large floating vote

Campaign managers in both camps are hoping for a last minute surge from the large number of floating voters to give them the decisive edge. But smaller parties such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the Sinhala

Ummaya have emerged as strong contenders for the undecided vote, which according to the opinion poll may be as large as 18 per cent.

In this scenario, neither the PA nor the UNP is expected to make it past the halfway mark in the 225-seat House. Last time, the PA got 105 seats with 48.9 per cent of the vote while the UNP had 94 seats with 44.04 per cent of the vote share. The latter formed the Government by cobbling together the remaining numbers with smaller parties.

This time, the close finish will mean that both sides could lay claim to forming the next government. Or, as Mr. Dayan Jayatilleke, a writer on political affairs, put it, each side might indulge in a game of "strategic denial" to prevent the other forming the government.

But according to Mr. Jayatilleke, in a scenario where neither side wins a clear majority, the PA might still have an edge. The pull of the executive presidency would ensure that the smaller parties aligned themselves with the PA. The crucial role could well be played by the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP).

The resultant coalition is expected to be shaky. "The UNP will always be fielding in a position uncomfortably close to the batsman, and just beyond them will be the JVP and the SU," said Mr. Jayatilleke.

Plea for national govt.

For some others, the sharp polarisation between the two main groupings has created the belief that only a national government, in

which the leaders of these parties put behind their differences and work together, can resolve the country's problems. That yearning has grown with the prospect of a hung Parliament and was reflected in a comment in today's *Sunday Island*, which said: "... our leaders must be big enough to seize the opportunity of a truly national government if voters signal no clear preference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee."

The traditional hostility between the two groupings that makes a national government only a remote possibility has also raised fears of a constitutional deadlock in the alternate scenario of the UNP forming the next government.

Speaking to reporters last week, Ms. Kumaratunga said that as President, she held all the powers, and it was upto her to create a deadlock. She said she would find it "very difficult" to work with an opposition government. The PA hopes this by itself may be enough to swing the balance in its favour.

In interviews published today in the local media, Ms. Kumaratunga asked the people to give her a government with which she could work. "The people have given me a mandate to govern this country for seven more years... In order to carry on the programmes that we have started effectively, efficiently and honestly, I would need a government with which I can work. At the moment the only government I can work with is a PA government," she said.

THE HINDU

9 OCT 2000

Chandrika seeks mandate for war as campaigning ends

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 7. Campaigning in the bloody run-up to the October 10 parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka ended today after public meetings by all the major contesting parties. The final rallies of the big three in this election — the ruling People's Alliance (PA), the opposition United National Party (UNP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) — continued late into the evening.

While the JVP, acknowledged "third force", hopes to tap into voter disillusionment with the two main parties, the main plank of the UNP throughout the campaign has been the increase in the cost of living under the PA Government.

For its part, the PA, in the last few days, went on an all-out offensive against the UNP, accusing its leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, of having entered into a "memorandum of understanding" with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, said at a news conference on Friday that though the contest was between the PA, UNP and JVP, the LTTE had emerged as the "insidious fourth force" in the election.

"There is another force that is



participating in this campaign in a bizarre way and that is the LTTE," she told reporters. Ms. Kumaratunga hinted at the alleged link between the UNP and the LTTE by emphasising that the separatist group had singled out her party and its candidates for attacks in the run-up to the election.

Ms. Kumaratunga, whose PA rode to power in the 1994 general elections on a peace plank, is hoping that voters will hand her coalition a second term to wage

war against the LTTE. "We now believe there is no alternative that the LTTE leaves for the Government but that of concluding the war successfully," she said.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, has dismissed assertions by PA members that he had a "secret" agreement with the LTTE as election gimmicks to put off Sinhala voters from supporting him. "This force is not involved in what we know as elections, which is the very essence of democracy. It is obviously engaged in trying to sabotage the democratic process," she said.

In Jaffna, Government troops thwarted yet another attempt by the LTTE to break through defence lines in Nagarkovil, according to a Government statement.

Campaigning in the peninsula, which picked up in the last few days, is reported to have quietened down after a grenade attack on Thursday on a van carrying supporters of the Eelam People's Democratic Party at Kokkuvil. Three civilians were wounded in another grenade attack on a military ambulance in Jaffna town on the same day.

LTTE 'feigning' interest, TULF may dominate Tamil parties: Page 11

THE HINDU

8 OCT 2001

HD-14 2710

SLMC at the crossroads

By Nirupama Subramanian

KALMUNAI (AMPARA), OCT. 2. White flags and streamers, traditional Sri Lankan symbol of mourning, flutter from shops and houses. As this town grieves the untimely death last month of one of its favourite sons, M.H.M. Ashraff, the sense of loss is palpable.

Ashraff was the founder of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) which gave voice to this sizeable but insecure eastern Muslim population which fears Tamil domination.

Despite his recent efforts to give the party a national and secular look, calling it the National Unity Alliance (NUA) and co-opting politicians across religious boundaries, eastern Muslims still form the party's core.

Placed at the crossroads following Ashraff's death, the future of the SLMC, will be decided in the coming elections by its performance in this region, under a new leadership which, for the first time in its short existence, does not belong here.

The party has nominated Mrs. Ferial Ashraff, a political novice, to contest in place of her husband. She has also been appointed joint leader of the SLMC with Mr. Rauf Hakeem, articulate young lawyer and Deputy Chairman of Committees in the last Parliament who toiled in Ashraff's shadow. Both of them are from Kandy district in central Sri Lanka.

If their succession to the leadership faced opposition from aspirants in the east, Mr. Hakeem's first visit to the area after Ashraff's was definitely encouraging. Men hugged him, women kissed him and there were large turn-outs at even impromptu wayside meetings. "I have been absolutely unprepared for this reception. What we are seeing here is evidence that there is absolutely no dispute as far as my leadership is concerned," said a visibly moved Mr. Hakeem as he disembarked from his bullet-proof Mercedes to press the flesh outside a mosque in Ashraff's hometown Samanthurai.

After the initial paralysis following Ashraff's death, Mr. Hakeem's visit has set the NUA campaign in the district rolling again. But Mrs. Ashraff, restricted by Islam's four-month mourning period for widows, has not visited the region. Even her face does not appear on election posters. Very few here know what she looks like as she was not a regular visitor here even when her husband was alive. But NUA supporters said that would be no obstacle to her victory. It is not clear yet whether her joint leadership has been accepted, but at least in the elections, she is expected to romp home on sympathy alone.

"Everybody is very shocked by the sudden death of our leader. But it has united us even more than before," said Mr. Shah-ul-Hamid, an organiser for the party here.

In the Ampara electoral district, which has six seats in Parliament, the NUA is contesting

as a partner of Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA).

Besides the 48-year-old widow, there are two NUA candidates on the PA list. In 1994, the SLMC, contesting separately, had two seats, while the PA got one from the Sinhala areas of the district. Under the system of proportional representation, this time, the NUA hopes to benefit from the PA's vote base in Ampara district.

There are over 1.3 lakh Sinhala voters, besides 1.47 Muslims in the district. For its part, the United National Party (UNP), which had a strong position among the Muslims in the district before the SLMC came on the scene in 1989, sees a chance to regain lost ground in Ashraff's absence. But the election in the district could turn on how 60,000 Tamils there vote.

A party, the Tamil Mahasabhai, made up of members of two of the former Tamil militant groups - the EPDP and TELO - is also contesting in the district. In the last elections, the TULF polled 40 per cent of the Tamil votes, but this time, its nominations were rejected for technical errors.

The UNP believes that these votes could be

cast in its favour. "The position is in our favour, especially after the death of Ashraff, and with the rejection of the NUA's nominations," said Mr. M.M. Mohammed, a UNP candidate.

With the election proving a contest between the PA and the UNP, the NUA's performance in this district is crucial if it is to play any meaningful role in national politics. Last time, it helped the Government, and benefited

This time, Mr. Hakeem said they have to review its relationship with the NUA under one banner. Mr. Hakeem said Mrs. Kumaratunga did not give him the Cabinet portfolio held

But first, Mr. Hakeem has to see where the NUA is contesting in the first-time contest. He is up against the combined might of the PA and the

No one can yet predict what will play any lasting role in the party, but if Mr. Hakeem loses, it will be a question mark over the party as well as the future of the SLMC.

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THE HINDU

3 OCT 2000

Chandrika sorts out differences with ally

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Aug. 31. — The Sri Lankan ruling party led by the President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, today finally ironed out differences with its key ally, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, reaching an understanding to jointly contest polls.

Differences between Mrs Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the SLMC, led by Mr MHM Ashraff, over sharing of seats has been sorted out after a prolonged meeting between Mrs Kumaratunga and Mr Ashraff last night that continued till today, the SLFP general secretary and minister for sports, Mr SB Dissanayake, said.

In view of the new agreement between the two leaders, Mr Ashraff agreed to withdraw his resignation as minister for port development. Consequently, two other junior SLMC ministers, the deputy minister for media, posts and telecommunications, Mr MLAM Hisbullah, and the deputy minister of social services, Mr MLM Mohideen, have also decided to withdraw resignations, SLMC sources said.

Their resignations, forwarded last week following differences

between the two parties, were not accepted by Mrs Kumaratunga.

Under the new arrangement, the SLMC would contest alone in four districts — Colombo, Southern Kandy, Northern Jaffna and Vanni — under its new banner, the National Unity Alliance, and fight in other places, including its stronghold in eastern Amparai district, with People's Alliance.

SLMC, believed to be wielding significant influence among Muslims, held seven seats in the outgoing Parliament.

The firming up of the alliance would prevent the division of votes in several districts in favour of the opposition United National Party, contesting on its own in all Parliament seats.

Of the total 225 seats, election for 196 would be held on a complicated proportional representation system, while the rest 29 would be allocated to parties polling high averages.

The PA also got a boost yesterday with Supreme Court temporarily recognising the faction led by its ally, Mr Armugam Thondaman, as general secretary, Ceylon Workers Congress, to contest the 10 October general elections on its popular "roaster" symbol.

THE STATESMAN

2000

26 soldiers die as Army launches offensive in Jaffna

4/9 By Nirupama Subramanian HD-1

COLOMBO, SEPT. 3. At least 26 soldiers were killed and hundreds wounded when the Sri Lankan Army launched a fresh offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Jaffna peninsula early today.

"The operation was launched this morning and is continuing," said the military spokesman, Brigadier Sarath Karunaratne.

He said some 200 soldiers were wounded in the operation. Eyewitness reports from Jaffna said army casualties were being transported in trucks to Palaly air-base, from where they were being evacuated to hospitals in southern Sri Lanka. Late in the evening, residents speaking on the phone said they could hear the sounds of artillery.

This is the Army's first major offensive since the battles earlier this year in which it lost to the LTTE the strategic Elephant Pass garrison on the isthmus connecting the peninsula to the Sri Lankan mainland, as well as territory in southern Jaffna peninsula.

Heavy artillery and recently-acquired bombers of the Sri Lanka Air Force were backing ground troops in the operation, Brig. Karunaratne said. The oper-

ation was launched south of Puttur, on the road to Chavakachcheri, in an area near Madduvil.

The state radio Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation announced that the military had recaptured Puttur and Chavakachcheri towns from the LTTE, but army officials here were not able to confirm this.

The operation assumes significance in the light of the coming general elections. It is widely perceived that the LTTE may attempt a military push in Jaffna peninsula before the elections.

A military victory for the LTTE at this time could politically damage the Government, and the present offensive may be a pre-emptive step by the Army, which would keep the LTTE occupied and thereby prevent it from planning any fresh thrust that could embarrass the ruling People's Alliance.

In recent weeks, the Army has also been criticised for not being able to launch any major offensives in the peninsula even after acquiring heavy weapons at great cost to the country.

Responding to the criticism, the commander, Major-General Lionel Balagalle, told a press conference after taking charge last month that the Army was still short of manpower, and that there was no use recapturing territory if it could not be held.

Violent start to campaign

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, SEPT. 5. With the filing of nominations over, the campaign for Sri Lanka's October 10 general election took off today, but was marred by violence even before it began.

A supporter of the United National Party (UNP) was killed and five were wounded in a clash with supporters of a rival group in Amparai on Monday. In protest, shops and establishments in Akkaraipattu, where the killing occurred, remained closed.

At a press conference today, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, estranged brother of the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, held the Government responsible for the killing. "She must immediately disarm all those who have been issued with weapons by the Government to attack opposition supporters."

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence, a private agency, said it had received 32 complaints of poll-related violence since the dissolution of Parliament on August 18. "This does not portend well for the 40 days of campaigning ahead," it said in a statement.

In an incident which was an eye-opener on the intra-party rivalries that the system of preferential voting can engender, the Tourism Minister, Mr. H. B. Semasinghe, was attacked by supporters of a rival candidate from his own party in the north-central town of Anuradhapura.

The Minister had to be hospitalised. His bodyguards also suffered injuries.

Sri Lanka has a mixed system of proportional representation and preferential voting, in which the electorate must choose three candidates from the same party in order of preference.

In all, 29 parties and 99 independent groups filed nominations on the last date yesterday. A record number of 5,048 candidates are contesting for the 225-seat Parliament compared to 1,449 candidates who were in the fray in the 1994 general elections.

The fighting in Jaffna over the last two days and the consequent displacement of people have put a hold on campaigning in the peninsula for the moment.

Jail term for weekly editor

The editor of a weekly newspaper was today sentenced to two years simple imprisonment for carrying an defamatory article about the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, in September 1995.

The High Court passed the sentence on Mr. Lasantha Wickremetunge, editor of the anti-Kumaratunga *Sunday Leader*, but suspended it for five years.

"It was an expected verdict. When the complainant is the President, it is unlikely that the defendant will get a favourable verdict," Mr. Wickremetunge said.

The court held that certain references to Ms. Kumaratunga suggested that she was corrupt, and the article was therefore defamatory.

"We are planning to contest the verdict," said Mr. Wickremetunge. Two stages of appeal are now open to him, one in the appeals court, and if that fails, in the Supreme Court.

Earlier this year, the editor of the weekly *Sunday Times* was also awarded a suspended sentence for carrying a gossip item about Ms. Kumaratunga's personal life. The sentence is in appeal.

Ms. Kumaratunga promised more freedom of the press when she led the People's Alliance campaign in 1994. But her honeymoon with journalists of the so-called free media (to distinguish them from the Government-run newspapers) lasted barely a year after her election.

The Government filed a raft of cases against privately-owned newspapers including the *Leader* and *The Times*. Two cases, one against the editor of the *Island* and the other against the editor of a Sinhalese language newspaper, are still to be decided.

Earlier this year, the *Sunday Leader* was shut down by the Government for violation of censorship on war news in the wake of the LTTE military operation in Jaffna. *The Leader* contested the ban in court and on a technical ground, won the right to publish.

THE HINDU

5 SEP 2000

GOVT., LTTE BEGIN COUNTING THE DEAD

Fighting stops, stalemate persists in Jaffna

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, SEPT. 5. After the blood-letting in the Jaffna peninsula over two days in which over 300 combatants were killed and more than 1,000 wounded, the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today got down to the business of counting the dead and exchanging bodies through the International Committee of the Red Cross. The fighting ceased today.

The LTTE claimed over the clandestine radio, Voice of Tigers, that it had repulsed the army advance, killing over 100 soldiers. It said it was in possession of 50 bodies of soldiers and that its resistance to the government offensive had left over 600 troops wounded. The radio, monitored

in Vavuniya, gave out names of 20 LTTE cadres killed in the fighting, but did not specify the total number of casualties.

Govt. recaptures territory

The Government claimed that over 200 LTTE cadres were killed and over 300 wounded. The military put its own losses at 130 dead and more than 700 injured. It also claimed to have recaptured some territory in the offensive that it launched on Sunday and which provoked a fierce counter-attack from the LTTE on Monday.

"We are in occupation of Col-ombuthurai on the outskirts of Jaffna town. We have got where we wanted to be and we will be releasing a video-tape soon to show where we are," said a senior military official. A government re-

lease said its troops were in the process of "constructing defences and are consolidating in the newly captured areas".

It said the Army and the ICRC were working out the modalities of handing over the bodies of 37 LTTE fighters recovered by troops from the battlefield on Monday. The heavy casualties on both sides, the nature of the injuries and the mutilated condition of most of the bodies recovered from the battlefield were evidence of the devastation that the two sides can now inflict on each other with their heavy weapons.

The Army made extensive use of its newly acquired firepower, especially the Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs). The LTTE, for the first time, admitted facing "superior" firepower from the

ground and air, but seems to have put up a fierce resistance with its own heavy artillery. The rebels are known to be equipped with at least one MBRL.

Some residents of Jaffna town, speaking over the telephone, said they had never before heard such ear-shattering sounds in the last several years of living through the war as they did yesterday and the day before.

Changes in Army

Considering the number of casualties suffered by the military and its inability to overpower the LTTE despite its enhanced firepower, and the fact that the offensive ended without breaking the stalemate in the peninsula, was an indication that this was by no means a successful offensive. The operation, which resulted in a virtual bloodbath, is likely to reopen the debate on the recent controversial changes in the Army's top echelons.

Maj. Gen. Janaka Perera, who was sent as commander of the Jaffna peninsula at the height of the LTTE assault, was credited with halting the advance, but was pulled out last month and appointed Chief of the Army Staff. It is the number 2 slot, but it is an administrative job, and Gen. Perera has gone public with his displeasure.

The failed offensive may also provide ammunition to hardline Sinhala forces that disputed the appointment of Gen. Balagalle as the Army commander after his due date of retirement, over the claims of others.

HO-1
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27-12-2000
16 SEP 2000

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2000

10-12
7/9

A TACTICAL OFFENSIVE?

THE LATEST UPSURGE in the endemic fighting between the Sri Lankan military forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has broken a significant recent spell of low-intensity confrontation in a war known for its ferocity. The toll and other casualties on both sides in the new wave of hostilities, reported to have ceased for the moment at least, serve as yet another grim reminder about the intractable proportions that the war itself has acquired in recent years. During this period, both sides have also frequently demonstrated their ability to pull themselves from the brink on the battlefield (insofar as it is identifiable as such), although the two are not always evenly balanced in this regard. It bears repetition in this context that the failure of the two sides to force a decisive outcome on the ground has so far been matched by the absence of a creative political formula which they could bring themselves to regard as a win-win deal. It is against this background that the timing of the latest flareup, outwardly the result of a considered initiative by Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga's administration, can be regarded an important part of her overall political calculations.

Several unanswered posers characterise the sustained stalemate on the conspicuous war front, which can be distinguished in the Sri Lankan context from the LTTE's own chosen theatre of terrorism across the island. While the LTTE's agenda of terrorist deeds is not combat-action of the traditional military kind, it is in a larger sense related directly to the organisation's political aims in its war on the Sri Lankan state. This hair-line distinction is necessary, because official Colombo, despite being accused of state-terrorism against the minority Tamil community at different times, cannot legitimately plan to match or outdo the LTTE in counter-terrorism of the non-combat type. It is a sovereign right of the Sri Lankan Government, though, to seek and secure a military supremacy over the LTTE. A relevant question, therefore, is whether the primary focus

of Colombo's latest offensive against the LTTE is a test of the extent of 'superiority' that the former may have acquired over the latter in recent months. The specific context is the new political-military mood in Colombo following its acquisition of some sophisticated arsenal. The additional military hardware is known to have been ordered as a direct sequel to a severe scare that Colombo suffered in the war zone itself a few months ago at the height of the sweeping gains which the LTTE made. Now, this organisation is known for its resourcefulness in military tactics despite its parallel image as a disgracefully fascist, or more precisely Pol Potist, outfit. The current reports, based on the LTTE's media-feed, are that it has acknowledged the superior fire-power which Colombo displayed on this occasion. Should there be no tactical disinformation by the LTTE on this score, the question about Colombo's own tactics of putting its new military fire-power to a test will hold good.

However, and this aspect is equally important, Colombo's political version is that its latest operation against the LTTE is aimed at enhancing the level of security in Jaffna town. Towards this end, it is said, Colombuthurai on the outskirts of Jaffna has now been recaptured and 'occupied' by the security forces. The phraseology about the State's forces occupying an integral part of its own sovereign territory is quite unfortunate. But Ms. Kumaratunga's transparent objective in seeking to augment the level of general security in Jaffna at this time is to enable the constitutional authorities to assure the Tamils across the country that they will be protected if they participate in the parliamentary election scheduled for October 10. It is another debate, though, whether the panic that gripped the inhabitants of Jaffna during this latest military offensive is worth the price for both Colombo and the Tamils or whether it could actually be counter-productive.

THE HINDU

27 SEP 2000

Emergency declared in Sri Lanka

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
COLOMBO, SEPT 7

SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has declared a nation-wide state of emergency giving greater powers to security forces and the police ahead of Parliamentary polls, officials said Thursday.

She has issued a proclamation extending the state of emergency by a further month requiring the reconvening of the national Parliament which was dissolved on August 18, officials said. They said the Constitution allows Kumaratunga to reconvene a dissolved Assembly for the specific purpose of having emergency laws approved for a further period.

The President can impose emergency laws only for 10 days and thereafter must get Parliamentary approval to keep the Draconian laws going for one month. However, since Parliament was dissolved on August 18, she must issue a proclamation summoning the same Parliament which can function until the Parliamentary



Sri Lankan soldiers carrying out search operations in Jaffna just before campaigning started for the October 10 general election - Reuters

elections are concluded on October 10.

The emergency which was first imposed on May 18, 1983 gives wide powers to security forces and the police to arrest and detain suspects. The laws had been relaxed for brief periods and limited to certain areas of the country from time-to-time.

The emergency is primarily aimed at dealing with the sepa-

ratist Tamil Tiger rebels in the island's northeast but political parties have accused the government of using the laws to stifle opponents.

Meanwhile, in a scathing attack on journalists, Kumaratunga said the country needed reporters who could stand up to their bosses, while defending the prosecution of journalists under defamation laws, the state-run *Daily News* reported

Thursday. The newspaper quoted Kumaratunga as telling a group of journalists at her Temple Trees residence on Wednesday that she believed democracy could not be achieved without media freedom. "What we lack very much in this country today are media persons with a backbone who can stand up to what is right and wrong and not heed every order of their bosses whether they be in the state media or in the private media," she said.

She was quoted as saying Sri Lanka should take an example from India where she claimed media morality was high.

"It is high time that we took a lesson from the high standards of media morality in our neighbouring India."

Kumaratunga also defended prosecution of journalists under criminal defamation laws which have seen two newspaper editors handed suspended jail terms. "I can say that petitioning the courts was the only right I had and the only right I exercised as any woman in the country," Kumaratunga said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 SEP 2000

Bid to extend emergency

Chandrika recalls House

Colombo, Sept. 7 (Reuters): In a surprise move, Sri Lanka's President has recalled the country's dissolved parliament in order to approve a national state of emergency, officials said today.

They added that the parliament will then remain in session until the October 10 general elections. "The parliament will reconvene on September 14 to approve the emergency and continue in session until the elections," Priyane Wijesekera, deputy secretary general of parliament, told Reuters by phone.

The emergency regulations, which have been in force almost continually since 1983, give police and the military wide powers of arrest and detention and are mainly used against the Tamil Tiger rebels who are fighting for a separate state for minority Tamils.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga extended the emergency by proclamation on Monday, but the move would have to be approved by parliament within a month.

Wijesekera said the house would not function after approving the emergency but that lawmakers would continue to receive their salaries and other facilities, including vehicles, until the poll.

Kumaratunga dissolved parliament on August 18 after failing to secure a two thirds majority to pass a new constitution designed to end the country's protracted ethnic war.

Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels exchanged mortar and artillery fire on the northern Jaffna peninsula today as the air force attacked guerrilla positions for a second straight day.

"These exchanges in Jaffna are continuing and will continue at least until we have consolidated our positions," a senior military official told Reuters.

He said troops were securing territory captured in a brief offensive earlier this week which sparked the fiercest fighting on the peninsula since a LTTE offensive to re-capture the area appeared to run out of steam three months ago.

A government statement said today its aircraft had attacked rebel positions in the peninsula's Sarasalai area yesterday a day after air force officials said helicopters had strafed a guerrilla sea base in the northwestern Mannar district. It added that the navy had opened fire on a flotilla of boats belonging to the LTTE off the Mannar coast on the same day as the airforce attack.

The statement said LTTE had fired mortars yesterday at defences near the key town of Chavakachcheri and other areas in the peninsula. "Three soldiers were injured due to terrorist mortar fire during the day," the statement said. There has been no major confrontation on the ground since Monday when the LTTE launched two abortive counter attacks.

THE TELEGRAPH

28 SEP 2000

Another battle, against odds

HAD MS. CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGA acted on her political instinct way back in December 1999. Sri Lanka would have seen a parliamentary election within weeks of her victory in the presidential election, and the People's Alliance (PA) would probably have been re-elected with a comfortable majority in Parliament.

If a week is a long time in politics, 10 months are an eternity. In this period, the Kumaratunga Government was hit by an escalation of the war against the Tamil Tigers and political turmoil boiled over as a consequence of its move to introduce a new Constitution. With the renewed fighting pushing up the cost of living, the government's popularity when Parliament was dissolved last month, was arguably at its lowest since it came to power in 1994.

So much so, political analysts believed that Ms. Kumaratunga might extend the life of Parliament through a referendum, rather than hold an election at this stage.

But proving the doomsayers wrong, the President went by the book. Parliament was duly dissolved close to the end of its six-year term and general elections are to be held on October 10. In all, 29 political

ND-21 10/9
S. Kanke

Ms. Kumaratunga has called the parliamentary elections in time, in the face of low popularity of her PA Government, protests against the Constitution Bill and the war with the LTTE. NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN surveys the Sri Lankan poll scene.

parties and 99 independent groups have filed papers. A record number of 5,048 candidates are in the fray for the 225-seat Parliament compared to 1,449 candidates who contested the 1994 general elections. The four parties which have filed nominations in all districts are the PA, the United National Party (UNP), the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the recently-formed Sinhala hardline party, Sinhala Urumaya.

Though the PA has not released a manifesto or kicked off its campaign officially, it is evident from electioneering that at least as far as Ms. Kumaratunga is concerned, the alliance's broad plank is peace, same as it was in 1994.

While this lays the government open to the charge that it failed to deliver on a promise made at the last elections, Ms. Kumaratunga has at party conventions held the UNP responsible for the failure, accusing it of sabotaging her

efforts at finding a political solution to the conflict.

Though the President has made it clear that her resolve to change the Constitution to bring it more in tune with the aspirations of the minority communities remains as strong as before, other PA politicians are nervous of going to town, uncertain of the impact that the protests against the new Constitution Bill, spearheaded by Buddhist monks and Sinhala hardliners, have had on voters.

Indeed, the new Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, has declared that the Constitution would not be changed without first consulting the Buddhist Mahasangha on "every para and every line". It seems likely that PA politicians will take recourse to local loyalties and alliances in order to bring off the votes.

The UNP has meanwhile zeroed in on the increase in prices as an issue that will strike a chord with the voters.

Its manifesto, released last week, is a litany on the high cost of living under the Kumaratunga Government and contains the promise of a Rs. 2,000 pay hike to all government employees.

On the ethnic conflict, the party has pledged not to change the Constitution until a nationwide consensus is built on a solution, but has accepted that such a solution would have to be based on the devolution of power. The manifesto says the UNP will hold negotiations with the LTTE, political parties, members of the clergy and civil society to arrive at a solution.

The UNP has also said it would "reduce war activity according to proper plans and goals". But manifestos and promises may fall by the wayside if in the run-up to the elections, one group, which has not fielded any candidate but has been known to tilt the electoral balance from behind-the-scenes, plays its cards right once again.

The long shadow of the LTTE is as much evident in this poll as it has been in all Sri Lankan elections for more than a decade. In Batticaloa in the east, it has had an influence on the list of candidates. But it is now in the Jaffna peninsula that the LTTE has the most potential to influence the outcome of the elections.

Fully conscious of this, the Army last week decided to preempt Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, and launched an offensive in the Colombothurai area on the outskirts of Jaffna town to push back the LTTE's long-range field guns and secure the town for the elections.

But the offensive turned into a virtual bloodbath on both sides. Despite the army's enhanced fire-power, it could not end the stalemate to grab the military advantage in the peninsula. The failed offensive is ample demonstration of the long-range destruction that each side, armed with heavy weapons, can now inflict on the other.

A record number of 14 political parties and six independent groups are contesting in Jaffna, but whether they will be able to campaign is another matter. As it is, last week's offensive drove most of the contestants indoors. If another battle breaks out closer to the polling day, it may even become impossible to hold the election in the peninsula.

THE HINCE

10 SEP 2000

Sri Lankan minister killed in copter crash

P K Balachandran
Colombo, September 16

HC-10
THE MINISTER for Ports and founder leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) M H M Ashraff was killed in a helicopter crash at Aranayake in Kegalle district in Central Sri Lanka at about 10.15 am today, an official communique said.

The MI-17 chopper of the Sri Lankan Air Force, which had a two-man crew, was carrying the minister, his three body guards and eight of his party colleagues from Colombo to Amparai in the south east. It lost contact with the base while flying over Aranayake, 15 kms from Kandy at about 10-15 am. A search party sighted the wreckage and 14 bodies charred beyond recognition, were recovered. There were no survivors. The reason for the crash is not known, but the charred bodies suggest a fire.

Ashraff was a rising star in Sri Lankan politics trying to graduate from a Muslim communal leader to a national leader sworn to ethnic accommodation and harmony. Though he kept the SLMC, he had floated the National Unity

Alliance (NUA) and had made it contest the parliamentary elections

Tigers on prowl

THE NEXT time a Colombo motorist sees a beggar peering through his car window at a traffic light stop, he may be face to face with an LTTE suicide bomber, if police suspicions about the city's beggars are well founded. Following the discovery that the LTTE suicide bomber who wrought havoc here on Friday was disguised as a beggar, police on Friday arrested 58 beggars in the busy Fort-Pettah area alone.

SSP Gamini Wijesinghe said most of those held swore that they were only beggars, but the suspicion was that many LTTE spies could be roaming about as beggars. He said that 7 to 8 LTTE operatives might be in Colombo fixing targets and planning suicide attacks.

HTC, Colombo

this time in several multi-ethnic areas of Sri Lanka. The NUA was to be allied with the ruling Peoples'

Alliance (PA), but PA's General Secretary D M Jayaratne said on Friday that the NUA was not part of PA. This was partly a fall out of Ashraff's turf war with another Muslim minister and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leader, A I M Fowzie, who did not approve of Ashraff's trying to speak for Muslims outside his pocket borough of Amparai district in the eastern province. The SLFP is the main constituent of the PA.

resident Chandrika Kumaratunge had had a tough time trying to mediate between the two Muslim stalwarts.

Ashraff formed the SLMC in the late eighties because the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 had ignored the rights of the Muslims of the Tamil North East. He allied himself to the UNP when President Premadasa was in power and then switched on to Mrs Kumaratunga when she was a winning horse in 1994. He greatly helped the Muslims of the South East get jobs, but lacking the patience, verbal reticence, and tact of his mentor, the Indian Tamil leader S. Thondaman, he rubbed a lot of people, among all the communities, on the wrong side.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 SEP 20

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2000

OLD CRISIS, NEW CHALLENGES ^{Jaffna}

THE GENERAL ELECTION, scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka on October 10 under the gaze of international observers, is widely expected to underscore once again the island-republic's unwavering faith in the democratic process in the face of a persistent political-ethnic crisis. In a sense, the absence of a constitutional finality about the basic issues concerning the political space for the minority Tamils within a united Sri Lanka can be seen as a major distortion of the overall polity itself. Yet, Sri Lanka's track record of holding polls, despite diverse manifestations of the politics of assassination since its independence, is quite commendable. Not surprisingly, the violence that has so far marred the campaign for the October 10 polls will, if assessed on the touchstone of this contemporary history, induce a despairing sense of *deja vu* but not any alarmist conclusion that Sri Lanka is perhaps a failed state. For some time now, Sri Lanka has not figured prominently on the subcontinental centre stage despite being the current Chair of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). While this empirical reality is inherent in the fact that the U.S. and Japanese leaders did not include Colombo in their respective South Asia itineraries in recent months, there has been no serious suggestion from any quarter that Sri Lanka is irrelevant to the regional or wider issues of the 21st century.

The latest hand grenade attack on a convoy of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the other instances of poll-related violence, including yet another "suicide-bombing" in Colombo that might have been a plot against a Minister, deserve utmost condemnation. Unexceptionable indeed is the resultant call that an umbrella of heightened security be unfolded so as to ensure a smooth poll process. However, it is anybody's guess about the elasticity of Sri Lanka's resources in this regard. Obviously, an international policing for ensuring peace and tranquillity on Sri Lanka's

overall campaign trail is out of the question, this being an issue qualitatively different from the traditional poll monitoring by unarmed observers from outside that country. The poll-related problem in the Jaffna peninsula is compounded by the continuing fighting there between the Sri Lankan military forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). At the political level, the intensified campaign by the LTTE against the Sri Lankan state is a factor that the candidates and the poll organisers alike will have to contend with, deploying their wit and wisdom as armour. It is a sub-text that some anti-LTTE Tamil groups are militants in their own perceived "right" — an aspect that suits the Sri Lankan state in its war with the LTTE. The war itself is an issue in the current poll process. The new upsurge in the conflagration in the Jaffna peninsula, in particular the battle for Chavakachcheri, is perhaps a manifestation of a dual-purpose effort by Colombo to engage the LTTE on the battle field and to keep it away from the electoral arena where it could choose to play havoc.

As another sub-theme of Sri Lanka's overall dilemma of keeping its minorities happy, the strategic political space occupied by the country's Muslim population in the south-eastern sector has come into some prime reckoning. The death of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader, M. H. M. Ashraff, in a helicopter disaster is not being investigated at this stage as the possible handiwork of either the LTTE or any other saboteurs. That has helped turn the focus on the narrow issue of the SLMC's political equation with the country's President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, given the reports of an emerging estrangement between her and Ashraff on poll issues on the eve of his death. More significantly, the President may now need to nurse an "orphaned" section as a force that could in some ways bind the diverse Sri Lankan society. //

THE HINDU

22 SEP 2000

SRI LANKAN POLL

New And Interesting Dimensions

DESPITE all kinds of cynicism and pessimism often associated with the political scene in Sri Lanka, new and interesting dimensions are being added to its politics as the election scene is hotting up. Since its independence from British rule on 4 February 1948, Sri Lanka — known as Ceylon till 1972 — has conducted 10 nationwide elections to its Parliament. More important, the island has enjoyed the privilege of universal adult franchise since 1931.

During the days of the Donoughmore Constitution (1931-47), the legislature consisted of 61 members — 50 of them elected from various territorial constituencies of the island. The Solbury Constitution (1916) — which came into force immediately before independence — retained the principle of universal adult franchise, subsequently strengthening democracy in the country. Sri Lanka showed that a two-party political system can emerge and be retained in the Third World too.

The mainstream but Sinhala-centric political parties — the United National Party (established in 1946) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (established in 1951) — have been coming to power in the island since 1948 either independently or in coalition with small parties. This is not unnatural in view of the fact that the Sinhala Buddhists constitute 67.4 per cent of the population.

CHANGES

Interestingly, using the right to depose a government in an electoral exercise, Sri Lankan voters went on removing the government of the day between the third general election (1956) and the eighth general election (1977). Things changed after 1977. Through constitutional changes and other means — for instance, by holding a referendum in 1982 to extend the life of the existing Parliament by another 6 years — the UNP retained power between 1977 and 1994. The SLFP could regain power after a long gap of 17 years in 1994. The SLFP, since 1994, is heading what is known as the People's Alliance.

Using its strength of 83.73 per cent of seats in Parliament, the UNP formulated and promulgated the second Republican Constitution in the island — the first Republican Constitution was promulgated in 1972 — which created an "overmighty executive" in the form of the President. Noted Sri Lankan political analyst Aj Wilson describes it as "Gaullist" presidency. Provisions relating to the powers and functions of the President under the 1978 Constitution would convince even a casual observer that the Sri Lankan presidency is the strongest in the world. The PA had promised to remove this all-powerful executive presidency during its hustings in 1994. But not only has the status quo remained, but President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (1945) has not lagged behind in enjoying the powers and privileges created for this office by Junius Richard Jayewardene (1906-96) in his capacity as the leader of the UNP.

As the Sri Lankan voters are preparing for the one-day nationwide 10 October parliamentary polls, important

issues and doubts are surfacing. Like the August 1994 parliamentary polls, the question of a new constitution is bound to remain of utmost importance. The PA is bound to blame the UNP for thwarting its attempt to promulgate a new constitution giving more powers to minorities and the regions. The UNP, on its part, is blaming the PA for not moving honestly and transparently. By appointing a hardliner Sinhala politician and Minister for Public Administration and Plantation Industries, Ratnasiri Wickremnayake, as Prime



Minister on 10 August — the day the 10th Parliament was dissolved — President Kumaratunga has made many liberal Sinhalese and Tamils alike suspicious of her intentions.

Wickremnayake is supposed to have been maintaining very cordial relations with the hardliner Sinhala Buddhists who had opposed Chandrika's constitutional proposal and had threatened to do everything in their power to stop the bill. Significantly, 30,000-plus Buddhist monks are a powerful lot in the country's politics.

Immediately before the Parliament's dissolution on 10 August, Wickremnayake had met important monks and assured them that no constitutional change would be affected without their clear consent. Needless to state, this leaves much to be desired. The Buddhist monks had only recently gone to the extent of asking for India's help to defeat the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

ECONOMY

The UNP leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe (1949), who was Prime Minister during 1993-94, has been emphasising that the country's economy would be a very important issue during the campaigning. The UNP has been blaming the PA for ruining the country's economy. In August, the UNP organised several street protests against price hikes and currency devaluation that made imports costlier. In its election manifesto released on 2 September, the UNP has pledged to raise wages of government employees, increase old-age pensions, reduce unemployment and slash taxes.

Taking their cue from the UNP, and not hindered by any restrictions in the electoral code of conduct against the governing party granting sops to voters after the elections' announcement, the PA has begun to dole out jobs and money. On 5 September, President Kumaratunga declared a 10 per cent increase in all government salaries and pensions with effect from 1 October as an "interim" measure, pending the recommendation by a Salaries Commission. President Kumaratunga chose to announce this measure after a meeting with the government-

backed trade unions. In effect, government employees' salaries will go up by a minimum of Rs 1,000; pensioners will have a minimum hike of Rs 300 a month. On the other hand, there are reports that PA ministers had launched a recruitment drive offering jobs to thousands of Sri Lankans on the election eve.

In its election manifesto, the UNP promises to strengthen the Sri Lankan army. If voted to power in the 10 October polls, the UNP says, it will set up a war council consisting of retired army officers and experts to advise the government on the conduct of war against the LTTE. The UNP's focus on strengthening the army and improving war strategy is expected to win support of the Sinhalese, in general, and the Buddhist clergy, in particular, who stress that the rebels must be crushed militarily. At any rate, the Sinhalese Buddhists remain for both political spectrum's the main votebank to be allowed.

Not less significantly the UNP pledges to hold discussions with various political parties as well as the LTTE before changing the Constitution to give more powers to the regions. As the only party which is contesting all the parliamentary seats on its own, the UNP has suggested an interim council in the north and the east as a first step toward ending the war. It also said it would set up an independent authority to purchase arms.

VOTERS

Under the present dispensation, Sri Lanka has a unicameral Parliament comprising 225 members; 196 of these are elected by the voters of the island's total 22 districts under a very complicated proportional representation system; the remaining 29 seats are allotted to various parties on the basis of the votes polled by them in the 196 seats. Under a unique provision, the minimum age for voters as also for candidates in Sri Lankan elections is 18 years. In all, 29 political parties and 99 independent groups are in the fray this time.

Various election-eve permutations and combinations of political forces in the island substantiate the saying that politics is the art of the possible. Sri Lankan voters have not always exercised their franchise on predicted and expected lines. President Kumaratunga had a landslide victory in the presidential election of November 1994. But her PA was able to secure only a razor-thin majority in the August 1994 parliamentary polls. Fears about the LTTE's *modus operandi* on the election day or immediately before that are already lurking in the minds of many. Generally, the Sri Lankans participate in their elections overwhelmingly, but the polling percentage in Jaffna in 1994 was only 2.98.

Some analysts also visualise an unpleasant scenario where the parliamentary majority does not belong to the President's PA — giving rise to more and unexpected political tensions and circumstances. Some say that the LTTE would enjoy that unsettled situation, for it would give rise to more intra-Sinhala tensions and clashes to the advantage of the former. In other words, politics in Sri Lanka is more interesting and less certain. One hopes the electorate acts maturely, making peace and stability a possibility.

The author is Hon. Director, South Asian Studies Foundation, New Delhi.

HFI 2 Lull before the storm

With Sri Lankan elections slated for early next month, the LTTE will be making another round of serious attempts to capture Jaffna, writes ASHOK K. MEHTA

HAS JAFFNA gone off Delhi's radar screen? One should hope not, judging by the three-month long uneasy lull in Jaffna which was broken thrice this month by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) with disastrous consequences. The army's only success has been the recapture of the ghost town, Chavakacheri.

But the threat of another crisis in India's backyard is very much on the cards. With elections around the corner on October 10, trench warfare in Jaffna is likely to explode into a last ditch effort by both sides to claim the initiative in the decisive battle for the Tamil heartland.

While the Government has a limited objective to at least hold on to as much of Jaffna peninsula which it now controls, the LTTE are determined to capture Jaffna town, if not the entire peninsula. The limited but costly operations launched recently by the SLA have shown that the LTTE is firmly dug in around Jaffna and the army will need to think twice before trying anything more ambitious than gaining additional elbow room for the elections for the nine parliamentary seats in Jaffna district.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has hinted that in order to eliminate the threat to Jaffna, the key positions at Elephant Pass and Pooneryn have to be taken back from the LTTE. This is a tall order for the military — seriously depleted of morale and the will to fight despite the recent augmentation of firepower.

The LTTE, which has also suffered heavy casualties, requires additional cadres to break through the Jaffna defences and fulfil Prabhakaran's pledge of recapturing Jaffna before the end of the year. That timetable could get linked with the October elections.

Can the LTTE do it? They came so close to taking Jaffna in May that panic bells began ringing in Delhi and Colombo. But unusually for the LTTE, caution, bad strategy and over-confidence robbed them of their ultimate prize. There was also no resonance from the people of Jaffna. Instead of outflanking the withdrawing Elephant Pass garrison, the LTTE chose to place its main effort along the highway. Had they done what they are good at — bypassing the main defences — they would have taken Jaffna without a fight as there were no troops defending it at the time.

PLATFORM

Four months on, the ground situation in Jaffna has changed. But even now, with a retreat-prone SLA, a panic withdrawal can be triggered by the most innocuous of events like a rumour of desertions. If that happens, the LTTE will romp home.

Last time, their cadres wore their 'Jaffna-going regiment' sashes a bit too soon. Their task may have been made easier now by the baffling turnaround last month of senior commanders in Jaffna. Two highly respected and decorated Generals — Janaka Pereira and Sanath Fonseka — who were sent to save



Jaffna at the height of the crisis were suddenly but mysteriously recalled. This was bizarre and has led people in Colombo to say that the Government is not serious about fighting the war.

The threat to Jaffna is alive and the repeat of an SOS from Sri Lanka to India for an evacuation is not ruled out. In other words, if the SLA defences collapse, the LTTE flag will flutter from the Jaffna fort and the LTTE will give an ultimatum for surrender to the military garrisons at Kanakesanthurai and Palaly. The last time they offered a safe passage it was summarily rejected by the Government.

If one were to 'wargame' the outcome of the stand-off in Jaffna — 35,000 Government soldiers versus 3,500 LTTE guerrillas — there is no way one could credit LTTE with a victory given the military's overwhelming superiority in firepower on land, at sea and in the air. But

there is one intangible, a quirk in the case of SLA — the deep-rooted fear of the LTTE that can turn the tables.

What is necessary in Delhi is to try and avoid repetition of the May crisis, when the Vaikos and Subramanian Swamys were suggesting diametrically opposite courses of action. While Swamy wanted India to send one division of the army to Colombo and finish off Prabhakaran, Vaiko urged that the LTTE be provided military assistance so that not only could they take Jaffna but also achieve Eelam. Both are militarily absurd as they do not factor India's national interests and political constraints in the region — which is to keep the LTTE out of the Jaffna peninsula for the foreseeable future till it decides to join the democratic process in Sri Lanka.

It hardly needs stating that the consequences of Eelam in Jaffna would be horrendous in Tamil Nadu. The Tigers have proved they are the world's most formidable guerrilla force. But they lack political sense. One of the reasons they could not march into Jaffna in May this year is their failure to realise that they are losing support of the Tamils by the day.

The October 10 elections in Sri Lanka will be the bloodiest in its history. Already LTTE has threatened to assassinate top leaders, especially those campaigning in the Tamil areas. If Kumaratunga's Peoples Alliance is not returned to power with the mandate for a constitutional resolution of the ethnic conflict, the LTTE will never get politically marginalised to give the moderate Tamils a chance to savour autonomy, however imperfect it might be at present.

Sri Lanka's well wishers in India must hope that Kumaratunga is defeated neither militarily in Jaffna nor politically in Colombo. It is in the overall regional interest that she remains in power. As for the LTTE, while they are vital for peace in Sri Lanka, they are not necessary for starting the democratic process in the northeast.

But the million dollar question is: what will India do in case Sri Lanka again makes a request for evacuation? New Delhi has already said this can only be done with the consent of the LTTE. India has agreed to give humanitarian assistance. Isn't evacuation humanitarian assistance?

HD-14

Bill seeks to solve ethnic crisis

By Nirupama Subramanian 118

COLOMBO, JULY 31. Sri Lanka's Cabinet today approved a draft new Constitution Bill that seeks to resolve the country's protracted ethnic conflict and is to be tabled in Parliament on Thursday, a full five years after the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, first proposed constitutional reforms to address minority aspirations.

The proposed new Constitution, in which devolution of powers to Tamil and Muslim minorities forms the crucial centrepiece, is to be brought to Parliament as a Bill urgent in the national interest.

To ensure there will be no legal challenges to it, the Government is expected to send it to the Supreme Court for a final clearance before tabling it.

"The Cabinet met today and considered the new draft Constitution in full. After a lengthy discussion it unanimously approved the draft and decided to present it to Parliament on August 3, 2000," the Government announced in a statement.

It is expected that the Bill will be debated from August 8, when Parliament meets again. Voting must take place before August 24 when the term of this Parliament ends.

The UNP said last week that it would not support the new Constitution if it was brought in this session of Parliament, as rushing it through would hinder a wider consensus on it. It said the Government must first consult the Buddhist clergy and the Tamil Tigers on the proposed reforms.

The party chairman, Mr. Karu Jayasuriya, said the UNP was scheduled to have one more meeting with the President and a delegation of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) coalition on

Wednesday. "We are not being negative," he said. But he argued that besides building a consensus, the UNP's other concern was with the transitional provisions in the draft that allowed for the continuation of the executive presidency.

Without Opposition support, the only way in which the Government can obtain a two-thirds majority in the 225-member Parliament is by breaking the UNP. According to present calculations, the Government needs 10 votes more to make up the magic number of 150.

Tamil parties represented in Parliament said they would need to first read the text of the Bill to decide whether to support it.

A senior Minister told *The Hindu* that the Bill was a "fine-tuned" version of the Government proposals presented in Parliament in October 1997, incorporating most of the consensus reached recently between the PA and the United National Party (UNP).

The Bill is understood to have incorporated some modifications suggested by the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to the nature of the state to make the formulation more quasi-federal than that arrived at between the PA and the UNP last month.

Referendum on merger

On the issue of the unit of devolution, the Bill lays down that a referendum to decide the merger of northeast Sri Lanka will be held after 10 years, instead of five years agreed upon between the PA and the UNP.

On the issue of lands, all land except reserved forests will be the subject of the regional council.

"We have had several discussions with the President during which we pointed out various shortcomings in the so-called PA-UNP

consensus. We will have to wait and see if those concerns have been addressed in the legal text," said Mr. R. Sampanthan, secretary-general of the TULF. He said the TULF politburo would meet to take the final decision on support to the package after the Bill was made available to the party.

Meanwhile, the UNP issued a statement that ignored today's most important development and instead focussed on recent allegations in state-owned media that its leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, had forged secret links with the LTTE.

In a move calculated to raise dust on Ms. Kumaratunga as she prepares to take the new Constitution to Parliament, the statement insinuated that while running the "smear campaign" against Mr. Wickremesinghe, the Government had begun talks with the LTTE.

"I could have engaged in a smear campaign when the President met the theoretician of the LTTE, Dr. Anton Balasingham, in London and held talks with him. I never did that kind of politics ... the President has the right to talk to Dr. Balasingham because she has already started discussions with the LTTE," the statement quoted Mr. Wickremesinghe as telling a party meeting.

PTI reports:

Ms. Chandrika tonight denied allegations by the Opposition United National Party (UNP) leader, Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, that she had met the LTTE's spokesman, Mr. Anton Balsingham, during her last week's visit to London. State television quoted her as saying that she visited London last week only to undergo a medical check-up for her right eye which was injured in an LTTE suicide bomb attack last December.

THE HINDU

1 AUG 2000

Colombo ignores monks protest, sends statute Bill to SC

119-14
2/8

S. Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 1. As Sri Lanka's Buddhist clergy vowed once again not to allow the Constitution to be changed, the Government today moved swiftly to block legal challenges to the Constitution Reforms Bill and sent it to the Supreme Court seeking approval for its presentation in Parliament on Thursday as an "Urgent Bill".

The Supreme Court should give its opinion within 24 hours. Those who seek to challenge it must move the court within this period.

The Constitutional Reforms Bill, which provides for extensive devolution to the Tamil and Muslim minorities, was certified as urgent in the national interest by the Sri Lankan Cabinet on Monday.

Once the Cabinet deems a Bill urgent, the Supreme Court has to determine that it is not inconsistent with the Constitution. After it gets the approval of the highest court, the Bill cannot be legally challenged. With it also goes the requirement of gazetting the bill at least seven days in advance.

With the term of the present Parliament due to expire on August 24, the time available to the Kumaratunga Government to push the Bill through is limited.

After the Bill is tabled at a special session of Parliament on Thursday, it will be debated over three days next week before it is taken up for voting, official sources said.

While the Government pre-



Buddhist monks meeting in Colombo on Tuesday to denounce Government plans to change the Constitution. Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

pared for the tabling of the Bill, hundreds of Buddhist monks converged this afternoon in a suburb of the capital and urged the Sinhala people to rally behind them to stop the constitutional reforms.

The attempt to change the Constitution would lead to a separation of the north and east from the rest of the country, the monks

warned. Several Sinhala nationalist groups also participated in the demonstration.

The government countered the demonstration by organising a well-attended pro-reforms meeting of trade unions sympathetic to it. Meanwhile, after a long silence on the constitutional reforms, the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana (JVP), which spearheaded violent protests against

the 13th Amendment in 1987, today said it would mobilise supporters to demonstrate before Parliament on Thursday demanding the Bill not be tabled in the interests of the Sinhala people.

The United National Party (UNP), which will hold a meeting with the People's Alliance (PA) on Wednesday on the constitutional reforms, may not support the Bill.

THE HINDU

2 AUG 1988

Numbers game on as deadline nears

By Nirupama Subramanian

2/8

COLOMBO, AUG 1. Pocket calculators are out as politicians in Sri Lanka frantically add and subtract numbers to determine whether the ruling People's Alliance (PA) coalition has the numbers to push through Parliament the Constitutional Reforms Bill, on the fate of which rests the future course of the long-drawn-out ethnic conflict.

The Bill is to be presented at a special session on Thursday and may be taken up for debate next week. Voting could follow soon after.

The passage of the Bill requires the support of 150 of the 225 members. The PA alliance, to begin with, had 113 members. Later, two of its parliamentarians aligned themselves with the opposition United National Party (UNP). But recently, it wooed seven UNP members into its fold, so it can count 118 on its side.

So far, the Government was being supported from outside by Tamil parties, which between them account for 24 parliamentarians. The Constitutional Reforms Bill will directly impact on both Tamil people and politicians, and their support cannot be taken for granted.

Of the parties representing the northeast, only the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), with six members, has openly declared its support for the Bill.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which has five MPs, is yet to make up its mind. The secretary-general, Mr. R. Sampanthan, said a decision would be taken after the meeting of the executive committee. The two-member People's

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Liberation Organisation of Tamils (PLOT), has also not made known its stand. The one-member Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, will not support the reforms.

The eight parliamentarians of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) have declared that they will back the Bill, because it promises citizenship to 85,000 stateless Tamils of Indian origin.

According to pessimists, the Government has only 133 votes. This number does not account for those in the PA who know that they will be sidelined in the coming elections and hence may vote against the reforms. Considering all contingencies, the Government might need more than 23 votes to get a two-thirds majority.

Optimists, however, believe that the PLOT and the TULF will finally weigh in with the government, so the votes could go up to 140, leaving the PA 10 short of the required number. It is expected that a court ruling on a dispute within the EPDP might give the party three more MPs. That would add to the government numbers.

Though the President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, may only be short of a few MPs, it could still prove a gap too wide to bridge unless she has an ace up her sleeve, like engineering a split in the Opposition.

Tamil leaders who met Mrs. Kumaratunga yesterday and last week, said she appeared confident. "She seemed positively buoyant," said a Tamil politician.

If she is unable to gather 150 votes, the Bill may not come to the voting stage, predict both ruling and Opposition politicians.

THE HINDU

1 AUG 2000

Tribunal sends notice to LTTE

By Our Special Correspondent

S. Kumar
CHENNAI, AUG. 1. The Tribunal constituted under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967, to adjudicate the ban order against the LTTE, has sent a showcause notice to the rebels. *UO.A*

The Tigers' London office had received the notice and has reportedly sent it to a lawyer in Chennai, who will represent the organisation before the Tribunal.

The outfit was declared a banned organisation in India in 1992. The ban has been extended periodically every two years, with the latest notification being issued by the Union Home Ministry on May 11 this year. As per the statute, the ban order would have to be referred to the specially constituted Tribunal to adjudicate and review the order. Mr. Justice S.K. Mahajan of Delhi has been named for the Tribunal. *MS*

As per the procedure envisaged under the Act, the LTTE has been sent a notice seeking to send in its reply before August 28, as to why it should not be declared a banned outfit in India. The LTTE which received the notice, has sent a 'vakkalat' naming the advocate, Mr. N. Chandrasekaran, to appear before the Tribunal on its behalf. The advocate had represented the Tigers the last time around too.

The Tribunal would hear the Union Home Secretary and the Tamil Nadu Government, during two sittings one in Delhi and another in this State. The LTTE's counsel would be allowed to cross examine the officials. The adjudication would have to be completed within six months of the original notification.

THE HINDU

- 2 AUG 2000

Lanka to be federal in all but name ^{S. Lanka}

P K Balachandran
Colombo, August 3

THE CONSTITUTION Bill presented to the Sri Lankan Parliament by President Chandrika Kumaratunga today, envisages a basic structure which will be federal in all but name. The devolution of power promised by this Bill goes far beyond any given so far, including the 13th Amendment, which brought into being the Provincial Councils in 1988.

The Tamils, who have been the ones clamouring for devolution, will be getting an Interim Council for a period of five years. The council will not be

electd but nominated by the President from among the political parties of the Northeast for a five year period as it would not be possible for elections to be held here due to the war. Election would be held at the end of five years. Ten years down the line there would be a referendum in the multi-ethnic East to find out if the people there want the merger with the overwhelmingly Tamil North to continue. But if the referendum could

not be held at the end of the ten-year period, the merger of the North and East would cease.

The provinces, as such, would have their own judiciary, public service and police force. They could themselves negotiate for foreign investment and loans though within the national policy and with the sanction of the Centre. State land, except those coming under the Reserved or Central list, would vest with the provinces. Any dispute would be settled by a tribunal. There is a Central and Provincial list but no concurrent list to create confusion and conflict.

But the Constitution has enough safeguards against disintegration and secession and it thus

addresses the main concern of the Sinhala Buddhist majority, which is afraid that devolution may well be the first step towards secession of the Tamil areas. Secession is banned and the Centre can take over a provincial administration if there is a sign of rebellion. In an effort to satisfy the Sinhala Buddhists and the powerful clergy, the Constitution ensures the "foremost" place to Buddhism and promises to foster Buddha Sasana.

Chandrika offers talks with LTTE

PRESIDENT CHANDRIKA Kumaratunga said on Thursday that she would discuss the constitution with the LTTE, but vowed to continue the war if the rebel group rejected her proposals.

PTI, Colombo

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 AUG 2000

Sri Lankan statute Bill introduced 4/8

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 3. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, today presented the historic but controversial new Constitution Bill to Parliament, exhorting the Opposition to support it for the sake of peace in the island amidst noisy protests both inside the House and outside.

While the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana held a protest demonstration near Parliament, members of the Opposition United National Party burnt copies of the Bill inside the House, shouting slogans throughout Ms. Kumaratunga's speech that launched the debate on the Bill. The debate will continue on August 7, 8 and 9. Titled "The Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka", and described as "a Bill to repeal and replace the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka", it will put to vote on August 9.

Undaunted by the din created by the Opposition in the House, the President said the proposed Constitution would lay the foundation for a lasting peace in Sri Lanka by giving the Tamil and Muslim ethnic minorities their just rights for the first time in the country's history.

After the new Constitution was

adopted, she would send a copy to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and was prepared to discuss it with the rebels.

They were welcome to join the democratic process, but if they chose not to, then Sri Lanka was also prepared to wage war against them, Ms. Kumaratunga said.

"Five thousand armed militants have launched a brutal war which they say is for the liberation of the Tamil people. Sri Lankan Tamils exceed 1.2 million and these people do not want war.

They want their reasonable rights. The day the new Constitution is passed and comes into operation, Tamils and other minorities will decide to support the Government and Prabhakaran will be attacked by these people," she said.

Elaborate security

A blanket security cover protected Ms. Kumaratunga's presence in Parliament. Helicopters hovered overhead, anti-aircraft guns were positioned on the lawns and police boats patrolled the lake in the middle of which the imposing Japanese-style building stands. Only a pro-Government rally was allowed close to the complex, located in a suburb of the capital.

What the Bill says: Page 14

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A chance for peace

The tabling of the new Constitution Bill in Sri Lanka's Parliament represents the culmination of five years of efforts to find a just and consensual solution to the long-standing demands of the Tamils and of the smaller Muslim community.

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN reports. (S-Lanka)

THE HISTORY of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is a story of missed opportunities, of solutions that have been abandoned by successive Governments for narrow political gain, of self-seeking leaders who, in the process of cutting one another, led the country to an ever-growing spiral of violence and war.

Last Thursday, the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, demonstrated that she was determined to learn from history. Despite growing hostility from Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists led by the country's influential monks on one side, from the Opposition United National Party (UNP) on another, and with the menacing shadow of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) looming over the entire country, Mrs. Kumaratunga brought to Parliament a Bill to repeal the existing Constitution and replace it with one that seeks to address the aspirations of the minority Tamil and Muslim communities.

The Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka Bill seeks to grant greater autonomy to the two ethnic minorities within a quasi-federal set-up, changing the unitary and centralised character of present-day Sri Lanka. In one sense, the tabling of the Bill represented the culmination of five years of efforts to find a just and consensual solution to the long-standing demands of the Tamils, and of the smaller Muslim community, who have in the last decade, become a dominant force in Sri Lanka's politics.

But because the consensus, when it finally came, was in bits and pieces, the Bill represents only the first step on the long and tough road ahead for Mrs. Kumaratunga. From Monday to Wednesday, the Bill will be debated in Parliament, and on the final day of the debate, it will be put to vote. It can be passed only if two-thirds of the parliamentarians in the 225-member house support it. Had the UNP supported the Bill, this would have been a non-issue. But as the UNP has announced that it will not, Mrs. Kumaratunga will have to do some hard work to cobble together the magic number of 150 parliamentarians to vote for the reforms.

In this, the votes of the Tamil parties will prove to be crucial. While the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the



Anti-war banners on display in Colombo... will good sense prevail?

Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) have declared their support for the Bill, and the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) may also decide in favour of it, it is the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), with its non-militant, moderate character, whose backing is most important for the Government. At the moment, this group is still to make up its mind, torn between its fear of the LTTE which has dismissed the autonomy proposals as "ludicrous", and the recognition that this is the maximum offer that any Sinhala leader can make within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

Indeed, the fence-sitting is only proof that the proposals are not fundamentally flawed. If it were so, it would have been far easier to reject them. But if the TULF decides to back the Bill, the fear is it will once again be branded as "quislings" and "traitors" of the Tamil cause, labels which the party has been trying to live down for the last 15 years. The greater fear stems from memories of the 1998 killings of Sarojini Yogeswaran and Pon Sivapalan, who defied the LTTE to participate in the Jaffna municipal council, and those of other slain colleagues.

On the other hand, there is also the realisation that by not supporting the Bill, it would be letting down the Tamil

community which it claims to represent. The defeat of Mrs. Kumaratunga over the Bill would symbolise a defeat for all moderate Tamils who wish to live as Sri Lankans, because it is certain that no other Sinhala leader will offer anything more than what is contained in this Bill. In fact, if this is rejected, there may not be another offer.

That would only be in the interest of the LTTE. For this reason, unless Velupillai Prabhakaran undergoes a sudden and dramatic change of heart, there is a high probability of the group attempting to sabotage the exercise in the coming days. The campaign that will precede the coming general elections could prove to be one with the tightest-ever security witnessed yet in this country.

Without doubt, the Tamil politicians who will form the proposed interim council for the north-east, if the Bill is adopted as the new Constitution of Sri Lanka, would be exposing their lives to

grave risk. Even those who support the new Constitution share the view that the interim council may remain on paper, as the ground situation, which is favourable to the LTTE, may not allow its implementation. Before all that, if the Government manages to win the vote on Wednesday, the next step is a referendum where it would have to win a simple majority.

The President, in her speech to Parliament while tabling the Bill said she was confident of securing the people's mandate because it was on a ticket to change the Constitution that the people had elected her in the first place, and reiterated their faith in her party in consecutive elections since 1993. But first, all eyes on Parliament. The UNP has said it will pull out of the debate after a statement by the party leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, on Monday.

Meanwhile, in order to lure UNP members to vote in favour of the Bill, Mrs. Kumaratunga's Government has announced a change in the election system that will increase the number of MPs in Parliament, enabling the ruling coalition to guarantee UNP defectors that they will retain their seats. That is a juicy enough carrot. Will they rise to the bait? The next three days will tell.

THE HINDU

6 AUG 2000

A BILL OF INTENTIONS

A CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION has long been the favoured agenda of the courageous Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, for a resolution of her country's prolonged crisis of polity. Easy to blame indeed but difficult to reverse has been the tangled history of broken promises and ferocious backlash. Several salient pledges were not honoured by the leaders from the majority Sinhala community over time — a phenomenon that only outraged Sri Lanka's minority Tamils. A violent strategy of reprisal was first triggered by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the name of the victims of discrimination but it was later sustained in terroristic ways that would just not foster their considered collective interest. In many ways, the skewed Sri Lankan system, as it evolved through choice and chance, has so far represented a certain degree of majoritarian supremacy without much evidence of a sustainable sub-system of minority-friendly safeguards. Not surprisingly, therefore, Ms. Kumaratunga, presenting the latest Constitution Bill to the Parliament on August 3, sought to mollify the Sinhala-Buddhist majority by affirming that she, as one from the same spectrum, would simply not barter away its primacy while seeking to render justice to the minorities. Wanting to translate the "reasonable rights" of the Sri Lankan Tamils and others into enforceable statutory privileges, she expressed the hope, too, that the passage and implementation of this Bill would isolate the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Constitutional engineering is not a novel event in post-colonial Sri Lanka. In Ms. Kumaratunga's calculus, the latest Bill, the product of a broad 'bipartisan' consensus between the ruling People's Alliance and the opposition United National Party, is in this chequered context an embodiment of intentions of unprecedented goodwill towards the minorities. In one sense, the document reflects the invariably meticulous and often creative efforts of the now-slain Neelan Thiruchelvam and the indefatigable Sri Lankan Min-

ister, Prof. G. L. Peiris. Yet, in the end, as the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, and his supporters decided to cold shoulder Ms. Kumaratunga as she commended the Bill to Parliament, it became clear that competitive mistrust, a hallmark of the mainly-Sinhala politics of the mainstream parties, could not be wished away. The draft Bill had, at one stage, been substantially agreed to by the President and the Leader of the Opposition. In the event, though, their sharp clash over the proposed provisions for a transition from the existing near-Gaullist dispensation to a possible new constitutional order proved to be so divisive as to cast doubts on the fate of the Bill itself. It remains to be seen whether both sides could still muster accommodative statesmanship before the vote is taken.

It will be a pity if the qualitative work on this Bill is to be sacrificed at the altar of a political numbers game, especially so after a consensus had been announced before its introduction in Parliament. In spite of its current status as just an article of intentions, the Bill is noteworthy on five counts — the move to transform a unitary State into a matrix of the Centre and regions, the recognition of the need for a composite Sri Lankan identity, the plans for a measure of power devolution to the regions, the proposed experimental merger of the northern and eastern 'regions' of prime interest to the Sri Lankan Tamils as also an 'interim' council thereof, besides a formula to address the lingering statelessness of many Indian-origin inhabitants. While most of these subjects can still evoke some controversy, the target groups for Ms. Kumaratunga's last-ditch hard-sell include the Buddhist clergy, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna and of course the LTTE. While she is firm in wanting to deny the LTTE any virtual veto over this package, a thorough reality check must span such aspects as the Pol Potist group's apparent preference for war as a perpetual end-means proposition and the lull over Norway's 'facilitatory' diplomacy.

THE HINDU

7 AUG 2000

e to a major convulsion in society

ion making

Call given to monks to join 'fast unto death' agitation

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, August 7

A GRENADE attack against a prominent anti-devolution Buddhist monk and defectors from both the government and the opposition side marked the controversy over the making of a new quasi-federal constitution for Sri Lanka in the last two days.

On Sunday, a gang of three Sinhala men tried to set off a blast at a meeting of the Jathika Sangha Sabhawa (National Sangha Council) in Narahenpita, in south Colombo.

This Buddhist monk's organisation is headed by Ven. Sobitha Thera, an outspoken opponent of the new constitution, especially the devolution package offered to the Tamils in the island's North and East. An assailant's bid to chuck a grenade from the car park into the second floor room where the meeting was being held failed, and the device went off where he and two of his accomplices stood.

All three were injured and two cars were damaged. The police took them into custody and admitted them at the Colombo National Hospital.

Last week, Ven. Thera had organised a meeting in Maharagama, in the outskirts of Colombo, where a call was given to Buddhist monks to join a fast unto death agitation against the packages "in their thousands". The new constitution would be implemented only "over our dead bodies", the monks at the conference declared.

Afraid that the monks would carry out their resolve to go to every MP's house to dissuade them from voting for the Constitution bill on August 9, the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) has been keeping at least 30 of its MPs in five star hotels and a government guest house in the capital and a resort in Kalutara, south of here. On Monday morning, thirty MPs were brought to parliament by Air Force helicopters.

But still, one PA MP, Dixon Perera, defected to the opposition

United National Party (UNP) and Harindra Correa defected to the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA), both on Monday.

Some more defections are expected to take place in the next 48 hours. Minister for Fisheries Mahindra Rajapakse has already spoken against the devolution package.

Leader of the Opposition and UNP chief Ranil Wickremesinghe told parliament that UNP was opposing the bill because government had not incorporated what had been agreed to at the bipartisan talks in the past four months.

The government had agreed that there would be a referendum in the multi-ethnic east on the question of merger with the Tamil North in five years time.

But the bill said that the referendum would be held in ten years' time. Also the government had agreed that the Transitional Executive Presidency would have a time frame of less than six years, but the bill stated six years as the time frame, he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 AUG 2001

Govt. has gone back on its word, says Ranil

By Nirupama Subramanian
COLOMBO, Aug. 7. The Sri Lankan Parliament today began a politically explosive debate on a proposed new constitution aimed at ending the protracted ethnic conflict, with the Opposition UNP declaring that it would not support it and the Tamil parties describing it as an insufficient final solution but an adequate starting point.

A blanket of security protected the parliamentary complex as headline Sinhala groups which oppose the Bill raised the pitch of their protest.

Hundreds of Buddhist monks launched a hunger-strike here against the Bill and the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana(WP) staged a demonstration outside the Supreme Court against the Government's parallel move to change the electoral system.

The party also appealed to parliamentarians not to vote against the new constitution as it was a "secret conspiracy" to divide the country.

The leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, declared in Parliament that his party would not back the Bill, as the Government had incorporated provisions not agreed upon between his party and the ruling coalition during discussions, and



Anti-reformist Sri Lankan Buddhist monks pray for the country before beginning a fast unto death in Colombo on Monday.

— Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

also as the process of consensus-building had been "short-circuited" in haste to present the Bill to Parliament.

"Instead of creating a national consensus and evolving a political solution acceptable to all, this procedure will only create a national controversy," Mr. Wickremesinghe said.

The UNP's withdrawal of support implies that the Government must somehow work up the two-thirds parliamentary vote required for the passage of the Bill. The local media has been full of

reports of horse-trading between the UNP and the main People's Alliance partner, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party(SLFP), in the countdown to the vote scheduled for Wednesday.

The two parties were on deuce today, losing one member each to the other camp. The two sides triumphantly produced their respective trophies in parliament during the debate.

Mr. Wickremesinghe said not only had the Government gone back on its word to discuss the proposed constitution with the

expressed concern at its provisions on the merger of the north-east and on land.

The leader of PLOF, Mr. Dharmalingam Sithadthan, said the very idea of a referendum in the north-east to decide the merger was unacceptable. He said his party would be moving amendments to that and the chapter on state lands.

Control over land is an important issue for Tamils after attempts by previous Sri Lankan Governments to change the demographic patterns in the north-east through state-aided "colonisation" schemes.

The former militant group has not yet said whether it will support the Bill. Without committing himself, its leader said if the Bill was enacted, it could become a basis for negotiations with the LTTE, if and when the group decided to come for talks. And if the Bill failed to go through the House, the fact that it had been tabled had guaranteed that no other offer from a Sinhala leader could go below this one.

The UNP did not speak today. The party central committee went into a meeting this evening to decide whether or not to support the Bill. Three of its five MPs who represent Batticaloa are reported to be ranged against it.

LTTE, it had also set a record of being "the first democracy to keep its citizens in the dark in relation to the fundamental law of the country."

The UNP is also in disagreement with the Government over the transitional provisions that allow the continuation of the all-powerful executive presidency alongside the prime ministerial system contained in the new constitution. Mr. Wickremesinghe said it would be "ludicrous" for two contrary systems to exist in the same constitution.

The Opposition leader said his party would be supportive of the efforts to build a wider consensus on the basis of the agreement reached between the UNP and the Government on a number of issues in the proposed new constitution.

The UNP last week threatened to withdraw from the debate after the statement by its leader, but seemed to have changed its mind today and its MPs could be seen robustly raising points of order and noisily questioning Government speakers.

Tamil parties' reaction

Representatives of Tamil parties of the north-east who spoke today said the Bill was a good "starting point" and a "foundation" for a lasting solution, but

Sri Lankan Constitution

55-11-118
COLOMBO, July 31. — A new Constitution devolving more powers to the regions aimed at ending the ethnic conflict in the country will be presented in Sri Lankan Parliament on 3 August.

Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's Cabinet today unanimously approved the draft of the new Constitution after a marathon five-hour discussion.

Since it is a Constitution amendment, a two-third majority is needed for the Bill's passage. Thereafter, a referendum has to be held before adopting the new Constitution. — UNI

THE SRI LANKAN

- 8 AUG 200

Vote on Sri Lankan statute put off

By **Nirupama Subramanian**

COLOMBO, AUG. 8. The Sri Lankan Government's ambitious plan to introduce a new Constitution aimed at resolving the ethnic conflict suffered a setback today when it decided to adjourn the debate and put off the vote on the controversial Bill, an admission of its failure to muster the necessary two-thirds parliamentary support.

The Bill was to come up for a first-stage vote this evening, in which the Government had to get 150 of the 225 votes in the House to move to the committee stage and the final vote scheduled for tomorrow. At the end of today's proceedings, the Government moved a motion to adjourn the debate, effectively putting off the vote.

Putting up a brave face, senior members of the ruling People's Alliance coalition asserted that the Government had no intention of jettisoning the Bill, and said the option of bringing it to vote later in the session remained. Parliament has to be dissolved on August 24. "We have not abandoned the Bill, it is only the debate that has been adjourned. It could very well come up later in this session," Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, Leader of the House, told *The Hindu*.

With this, the fate of the Electoral Reforms Bill, approved by the Supreme Court for constitutional validity today, also hangs in the balance. In Parliament, Mr. Sarath Amunugama, a Cabinet Minister, was emphatic as he said: "We will present the Bills, we will present

the Bills." To do that, the Government has to first get the numbers. Cabinet Ministers had boasted last week that several UNP members were waiting to break ranks and vote in favour of the Bill. Even yesterday, the Government Minister, Mr. M. H. M. Ashraff, declared in Parliament that the Bill would be passed with a majority of 25 votes.

But the increasingly shrill protests from Sinhala hardliners backed by Buddhist monks seemed to have caused potential defectors to change their minds.

A few hundred Buddhist monks staged a sit-in on the road to Parliament this morning, and burnt copies of the Constitution. They traded slogans with some supporters of the Government, who were holding their own demonstration nearby, jeered at MPs on their way to the House, and held placards denouncing those who would vote for the Bill as traitors of Buddhism. "This new Constitution will divide the country. It will create ethnic ghettos," said Madulawave Sobitha Thero, a leading member of the Buddhist Maha Sangha, who was also in the forefront of opposition to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987.

Opposition to the Bill came from even within the Government. Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse, Minister for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and strongman of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party from the deep south with a loyal Sinhala-Buddhist following, had made known his disagreement with several aspects of the proposed Constitution, and urged the Government not to put it to vote.

THE HINDU

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 2000

A SQUANDERED OPPORTUNITY

IN FORCING THE withdrawal of Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga's constitutional initiative, Sri Lanka has squandered an opportunity it should have seized. The draft Constitution tabled in Parliament is on the whole a radical improvement on the existing Constitution marking a paradigm shift in Sri Lanka's constitutional evolution. Adopted in 1978, the existing Constitution concentrates power in the executive Presidency, rather than the Legislature; despite a measure of devolution introduced by the 13th Amendment, its strongly unitary (and, by implication, majoritarian) features were out of place in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country such as Sri Lanka. Apart from abolishing the executive Presidency, the new Constitution proposed by the Kumaratunga Government was underlined with features which considerably strengthened the devolution of power to the provinces. Given this, it is regrettable that the United National Party (UNP) — which, like other political parties, was closely associated with the formulation of the draft — declared it would not support the new Constitution. Given the political arithmetic in Sri Lanka's Parliament, it was virtually impossible to muster up the required two-thirds majority to pass the new Constitution. The UNP's change of heart left Ms. Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) Government few options but to declare it was deferring the vote on the Constitution Bill. Since the island's Parliament is scheduled to be dissolved later this month, deferment is but a thinly-veiled euphemism for withdrawal. The Bill of course could be re-introduced after the Parliamentary election which will be held within the next few months.

In recent weeks, the UNP had raised a number of objections against the Constitution Bill. Although there were some differences on substantive points, their main objection related to procedure — namely, the so-called unseemly

haste with which Ms. Kumaratunga's Government was pushing the Bill through. The UNP, and others of similar persuasion, have a point when they claim that two days is hardly enough time to debate something as complex and important as a piece of legislation to alter the Constitution. But in many ways, the arguments that the process was "too hasty" were flawed. The principal features of the present draft Constitution were introduced as early as 1995 and the UNP and other political formations were party to the various amendments made to successively revised drafts since then. As far as the substantive features go, the UNP may have a genuine grievance with respect to the transitory provisions, which permit Ms. Kumaratunga to remain President and assume all the powers of Prime Minister under the new Constitution until the end of 2005. There is also no denying the fact that some of the Tamil parties were apprehensive and entertained serious reservations about certain sections relating to the devolution of power. It would have been far more sensible and statesmanlike if those who opposed specific features of the draft had moved amendments during the Parliamentary debate rather than choose to reject the Bill in toto. It is no accident that the strongest opponents of the Bill were those at the very end of the political spectrum — the Sinhala Right (backed by hardline sections of the Buddhist clergy) and Tamil extremists (represented by the LTTE). It is these very forces which resist the idea that constitutional reform is an important part of finding a solution for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. All those who genuinely want this conflict resolved will hope that the Sri Lanka's next Parliament — whatever its political composition — will exercise its collective mind on the question of constitutional reform as soon as it is convened. The aborted Bill could be satisfactorily altered. It should not be allowed to die.

11 AUG 2000

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Lanka President drops Bandaranaike, makes Ratnasiri PM to appease Sinhala Buddhists

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, August 10

IN A shrewd move meant to retrieve the support of the dominant Sinhala Buddhist community in the forthcoming parliamentary elections, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today installed the veteran Sinhala Buddhist leader, Mr Ratnasiri Wickremnayake, as the Prime Minister. Mr Wickremnayake, who held the portfolio of Home and Public Administration in the Cabinet, replaces Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who has been dropped from the Cabinet.

Mrs Bandaranaike herself had the reputation of being a hardcore Sinhala Buddhist and was much respected for her contribution to the resurgence of the Sinhala Buddhism in the 1960s and 1970s, but she is very old and is confined to a wheelchair now. She had not been a functioning Prime Minister since she took office in 1994.

Mr Wickremnayake, on the other hand, is still a very active politician and has been functioning as the Leader of the House. He has been one of Mrs Bandaranaike's staunchest followers. Apart from the Minister of Ethnic Affairs, Mr Lakshman Jayakody, Mr Wickremnayake is the senior most active leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the dominant constituent of the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA).

"It's a shrewd move and a good choice. It'll boost the PA's campaign in the coming elections," said Mr Dayan



An AFP file photo of Sirimavo Bandaranaike

Jayatileka, political analyst and secretary of the Premadasa Centre. "Ms Kumaratunga needs to retrieve lost ground. The debacle suffered by the Constitution Bill in Parliament is akin to the fall of the Elephant Pass to the LTTE," said Mr Jayatileka.

"Loyalty has been the prime criterion and Mr

Wickremnayake is the most trusted and loyal of the top rung leaders in the SLFP. With a difficult election ahead of her, she needs a loyal second in command," noted Dr P. Saravanamuttu, Director, Centre for Policy Alternatives.

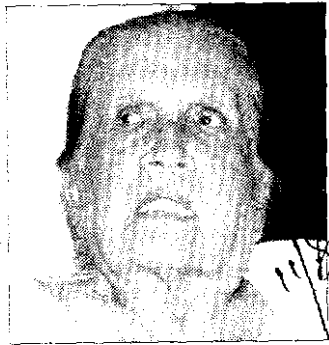
Indeed, the campaign is going to be tough for Ms Kumaratunga, with the Mahanayake or the High Priests of the Buddhist clergy, the United National Party (UNP), and the Sinhala Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage Party) all gunning for her.

Although she herself will be the prima donna and the biggest vote catcher, she needs a front of top-of-the-drawer Sinhala Buddhists and Mr Wickremnayake should fit the bill. With his help Ms Kumaratunga hopes to sell the new Constitution and the devolution package to the Sinhala Buddhists, who constitute more than 75 per cent of the electorate.

There is much talk about an imminent dissolution of Parliament, though there are others like Cabinet Minister Barty Weerakoon, who say that efforts will be made to restart the debate on the Constitution Bill and get the Bill passed before the mandatory dissolution on August 24.

He himself is moving an amendment on the Executive Presidency to create room for its abolition a year from now in order to get the UNP to support the Bill. But others like Mr Jayatileka feel Ms Kumaratunga may dissolve Parliament soon, and go to the people seeking a mandate to turn the next Parliament into a Constituent Assembly which can pass the bill with a simple majority.

Bandaranaike steps down as Lanka PM



Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Aug. 10. — Sri Lanka's octogenarian Prime Minister, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike today retired from office ahead of a proposed cabinet reshuffle by her daughter, President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Parliament was told that Mrs Bandaranaike, who turned 84 this April, will be replaced by minister for public administration and home affairs, Mr Ratnasiri Wickramanayake.

Mrs Bandaranaike, who became the world's first woman Prime Minister in 1960 following the assassination of her husband and Prime Minister, SWRD Bandaranaike, decided to retire after Mrs Kumaratunga announced a Cabinet revamp ahead of general elections in November.

Mr Wickramanayake has been picked to succeed her due to his proximity to right-wing Sinhalese Buddhist monks doggedly opposing the draft constitution Bill.

Commenting on Mrs Bandaranaike's decision, sources in the Sri Lanka Freedom Party said her retirement would create "a major vacuum".

THE STATESMAN

11 AUG 2000

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Mixed response to Chandrika's constituent assembly proposal

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, August 13

SRI LANKAN President Chandrika Kumaratunga's proposal to turn the forthcoming Parliament into a Constituent Assembly (CA) and get her Constitution Bill passed with a simple majority has received a mixed reaction from political parties and pundits, ranging from praise to predictions of doom.

"Let the people decide as elections are coming," commented



Pararajasingham, chairman of the United Liberation Front (TULF), said that the constitution she planned to enact was of no use to Tamils because it did not meet their basic requirements. If was really sincere, she could well turn the present parliament into a CA since she claimed that she had already won the peoples' mandate for a new constitution over several elections since 1993, the hawkish Tamil leader said.

"We do not think she is sincere. She has come out with this proposal only to appease the international community and the donor countries. She has promised to promulgate the new constitution in January, and interestingly enough, the donors are to meet in January,"

Opposing it, Joseph Pararajasingham, leader of the parliamentary group of the Tamil

Pararajasingham pointed out. Constitutional expert Rohan Edirisinghe described the move as an "extra constitutional" one because it was circumventing the present constitution which had laid two-thirds majority as an imperative." The new constitution will be challenged in court by the anti-devolution lobby," he predicted. Edirisinghe did not think that the 1972 precedent would apply because the then government had a two-thirds majority and the change over to a republican constitution was a key issue in the 1970 parliamentary elections.

The 1978 constitution was enacted under the provisions of the then existing (1972) constitution,

recalled Prof. K.M. De Silva, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy.

Political analyst Dayan Jayatilaka feared that Kumaratunga might be stepping on a political "minefield" if she went through with the plan. "She would have to bear in mind that the Supreme Court had allowed the current bill because the government assured that it would seek a two-thirds majority and sanction in a referendum. Then there is the possibility of the majority Sinhala-Buddhist lobby seeing it as a constitutional coup d'etat and agitating against it as successfully as they did on ethnic issues in the fifties and sixties," Jayatilaka said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 AUG 2000

The parliamentary poll and beyond

19-14 15/8
S. Lanka ✓

By Mukund Padmanabhan

A couple of days before the vote was scheduled on the new Constitution, one of the Government's legal advisers unveiled a strategy in the event the Bill failed to muster the required two-thirds majority. Mr. Jayampathi Wickramaratne told an independent television channel that if this were to happen, the ruling People's Alliance would contest the parliamentary election on a mandate that it be converted into a constituent assembly. Such a "constituent assembly" would then pass the Bill passed with a simple majority.

It was a startling plan, but his comments, although extremely revealing, were more or less lost in the political din. On the one hand, they betrayed the Government's lack of confidence in getting a two-thirds majority. On the other, they implied that the Government would go ahead with the Bill, never mind the consensus.

Mr. Wickramaratne's comments on television are now official strategy, with the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, saying pretty much what he did on Aug 12. It seemed to suggest that, irrespective of her loss of face over the Bill's withdrawal, she was prepared to set the agenda of the imminent parliamentary poll around her constitutional reform package.

The defences for such a strategy are twofold. First, a kind of consensus has already been achieved over the Bill and the reservations at the tail-end of the process were only a result of sheer political bloody-mindedness. Second, a victory in the parliamentary election would lend the ruling People's Alliance the popular legitimacy to adopt the new Constitution by a simple majority.

However, there are quite clearly both flaws and risks with this approach. To begin with, it

was only earlier this month when Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ruled that the new Constitution be adopted with a two-third majority and must be further ratified by a referendum. How does a parliamentary mandate alter this legal position?

And then quite obviously, parliamentary elections are determined by a variety of factors; a victory for the People's Alliance is not necessarily an affirmation of the constitutional reform just as a defeat is not proof of its rejection.

As things stand, the future of the constitutional reform package depends on the outcome of the election. The only certainty here is that neither side, given the proportional representation (PR) system introduced during the reign of former President J. R. Jayawardene, will receive a two-thirds majority. Ms. Kumaratunga's Electoral Reform Bill, which was based on a mix of the PR and the first-past-the-post systems, was specifically aimed at increasing the probability of bagging a two-thirds majority.

SRI LANKA'S CONSTITUTIONAL CONUNDRUM - IV

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it abrogates the consensual approach adopted since 1995 towards the whole process of constitutional reform. Such an approach may not have been followed when adopting either the 1972 or the 1978 Constitutions. But having put the draft up for discussion and debate, resorting to the stratagem of ramming it through with a simple majority would not only be legally suspect but also undermine the spirit with which Constitutions ought to be adopted.

Ms. Kumaratunga has already signalled that she is willing to risk a lot on her constitutional package and that she may try to set the agenda of the election over the UNP's betrayal over this. Few, even among her detractors, disagree that it was a bold initiative and one put forward at the cost of some political risk. Having suffered a loss over the Bill, the political stakes are going to be higher at the parliamentary election which many, such as Dr. P. Saravanamuttu, executive director of the CPA, fear may be even more violent and disorderly than before.

With this Bill having gone the way of the Constitutional one, the options before the PA Government - assuming it wins the election - has the choice between trying to muster a two-thirds majority or settling for a simple one. The former approach will require some modifications in the aborted draft Constitutional Bill but it may be the more prudent one for any Government to take.

Ms. Kumaratunga has reason to feel frustrated by the UNP's shifting positions on the Bill but the search for a difficult consensus is a more prudent approach than an easy but unjustifiable stratagem to push the Bill through. Referring to the closure of the political gap on the Bill, the UNP's moderate and articulate Mr. Milinda Moregoda urges that the aborted process is treated as an small interruption as not as a final breakdown. But how many people in his party and on the other side of the political divide are genuinely prepared to see it this way?

(Concluded)

THE HINDU

15 AUG 2000

15 AUG 2000

Chandrika dissolves Parliament, polls on Oct 10

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, August 18

PRESIDENT CHANDRIKA Kumaratunga today dissolved the Sri Lankan Parliament six days ahead of schedule, and fixed October 10 as the date for fresh elections, an official release said.

Most political observers were under the impression that the elections would be held in the first week of November, but Mrs Kumaratunga obviously did not want to give the Opposition parties, especially the United National Party (UNP), so much time.

Both the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the UNP have already begun their election campaigns. President Kumaratunga began by asking the old and ailing Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike to step down from the Prime Ministership and appointed in her place, Mr Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, a younger Sinhala Buddhist hardliner who could go round and sell the new devolution package for the Tamil minority among

the Sinhala Buddhist majority. There are already signs that the relations between the President and the Buddhist Maha Sangha are thawing. The Mahanayake of Mahawatte, who was very annoyed with Mrs Kumaratunga for trying to push the devolution package, received Mr Wickramanayake cordially.

Mrs Kumaratunga followed this up by appointing Mr S.B. Dissanayake, a young go getter, as the general secretary of her Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the main constituent of the ruling coalition.

Under Mr Dissanayake the party machine is expected to

work with vigour, sense of purpose and ruthlessly. The ruling party is also on a campaign to discredit the United National Party's top brass, particularly, the leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The state media is going to town with an affidavit filed by a former Senior Superintendent of Police Mr Douglas Peiris with the CID, which alleged that Mr Wickremesinghe and his cohorts were in cahoots with Dubai don Dawood Ibrahim and perhaps even with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to kill him so that the truth about the torture and killing of political detainees in the late eighties did not come out.



Mrs Kumaratunga would also tell the peace-loving and reasonable Sinhala and Tamils that while she tried her best to introduce devolution and bring about a political solution to the ethnic conflict, the UNP thwarted her attempts after promising support. The United National Party, on the other hand, is expected to cash in on Sinhala-Buddhist fears about devolution leading to secession of the Tamil North and East.

It believes that the Buddhist clergy and the rural masses are behind it on this issue. The UNP hopes to tell the Tamils that Mrs Kumaratunga is not serious about devolution because she did not consult the LTTE, a force without which there could be no peace or political settlement.

"Leaving out the committed voters, about 2.5 million undecided voters would play a critical role. It is difficult to say which way this vote will go," said Mr Kingsley Rodrigo, of the Peoples' Action for Free and Fair Elections.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 AUG 2000

Sri Lankan Parliament dissolved

By Nirupama Subramanian HD

COLOMBO, Aug. 18. The Sri Lankan Government today announced the dissolution of Parliament and said general elections would be held on October 10. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, passed the order for the dissolution of the 225-seat House from midnight on Friday, a Government statement said. Its six-year term was due to end next week.

The stage is set for a political battle between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party-led People's Alliance (PA) coalition, and the opposition United National Party (UNP) on the twin themes of peace and the cost of living.

The PA will set the pace on the first, telling voters that its efforts to bring about a political settlement through a devolution package to resolve the ethnic conflict were blocked by the UNP in Parliament. The Opposition will use the spiralling prices of essential commodities to accuse the Government of economic mismanagement.

With security restrictions on Ms. Kumaratunga's movements, the SLFP campaign would be led by the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, an

old soldier of the party, along with the new general secretary, Mr. S. B. Dissanayake.

The UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, is expected to lead his party's campaign.

"The PA will make its peace package the main election issue, the UNP will focus on cost of living but for the Tamils, it will be a solution to the war," said Mr. Dharmalingam Sithadthan, leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam.

Unlike in the Presidential election, which is a one-to-one contest, the SLFP and the UNP must concentrate on the majority Sinhala community. The campaign, thus, would witness the two parties vying with each other to prove who has the better Sinhala credentials. With the recently-formed hardline Sinhala group, the Sihala Urumaya, accorded official status, the SLFP and the UNP will be under greater pressure. The nominations process will begin on August 26 and continue till September 4, after which the campaign will officially begin.

A new Parliament, with 29 nominated members will convene on October .

THE HINDU

19 AUG 2000

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LTTE shadow over Sri Lankan elections

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, Aug. 19. Like every other election in Sri Lanka's recent history, the October 10 general elections too will be fought under the long shadow of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Without ever contesting, the LTTE has often used elections to further its agenda by trying to indirectly influence the outcome through a combination of military and political strategies as well as terror tactics.

In the 1994 elections, the LTTE, then in total control of the Jaffna peninsula and running a de facto Eelam, mocked at the whole process by ensuring that only 2.97 per cent of the nearly 600,000 electorate in the district, turned out on election day. Though Jaffna has since slipped out of its hands, the recent military victories in the peninsula will ensure that electioneering in the district is low-key.

Certain parts of the peninsula, which are back with the LTTE, will be no-go areas for the contesting political parties, and the large-scale displacement of civilians due to the fighting would turn the already outdated electoral registers upside down.

Analysts feel that the LTTE may aim to grab the peninsula ahead of the elections. Jaffna is now in a delicate stalemate between the LTTE and Government troops, but if the LTTE manages to break it, the Government could face severe embarrassment at the polls.

The month before the 1999 presidential elections saw a series of successful LTTE attacks on military positions in northern Sri Lanka. A former Army general described the tension of the days before the election as the security forces tried to stave off an attack on the Elephant Pass, which finally fell five months later.

The LTTE's military campaign more or less set the agenda for the presidential election, and Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, running for a second term, had to push her way out of a politically damaging situation by falling back on a hardline Sinhala position. That, in turn, was reflected in the dramatic fall in her popularity among Tamil voters.

Ms. Kumaratunga's diminished Tamil support base in 1999 also had a lot to do with a sustained campaign by the LTTE against her in the north-east, mainly in Batticaloa, where people were threat-

ened with dire consequences if they voted for her.

However, the main concern is with regard to life, and the decimated ranks of the country's political leadership will have to balance the desire to go all out to win with the desire to live.

The LTTE's plan to ensure that Ms. Kumaratunga would not return for a second term backfired when a suicide bomber sent to assassinate her on the eve of the 1999 presidential elections, narrowly missed. But others were less fortunate. In the 1994 presidential election, the LTTE had succeeded in assassinating the United National Party's candidate, Mr. Gammie Dissanayake, then Ms. Kumaratunga's main opponent.

Since the attempt on her life, Ms. Kumaratunga's public appearances have been kept to a minimum. In the 1994 parliamentary elections, her charisma pulled votes for the Sri Lanka Freedom Party-led People's Alliance (PA). But this time, hemmed in by security restrictions, the PA's star-campaigner will not play an active role in the campaign.

In that sense, the LTTE has already begun to play a role in this election.

THE HINDU

20 AUG 2000

Ranil confident of consensus

P. K. Balachandran
Colombo, August 20

LEADER OF the Opposition United National Party (UNP) Ranil Wickremesinghe has said that an "intelligent" leader can bring about an understanding between the apparently irreconcilable Tamil Tiger (LTTE) rebels and the Buddhist Maha Sangha and that he is confident of bringing about such an understanding if voted to power in the October 10 Sri Lankan Parliamentary elections.

"If you are an intelligent leader, you can do it. I think I can do it," he told the media here today. The LTTE wants much more autonomy than the Sri Lankan Government has offered, and the Maha Sangha considers what has been offered to be too much, making the people wonder if the UNP's demand that both be taken into confidence is only a clever means to scuttle efforts to solve the ethnic conflict.

3 Chetaks for Lankan Navy

INDIA IS in the process of supplying three Chetak helicopters to the Sri Lankan Navy's new air arm, *The Sunday Island* newspaper reported today.

The choppers are to be part of the facilities on board a Sukanya class Ocean Patrol Vessel (OPV), which India is now retrofitting for delivery to the Sri Lankan Navy.

"The Chetak carries a crew of two pilots, with room for up to five passengers. This capability will make it useful for other tasks such as casualty evaluation," the paper said.

HTC, Colombo

But Mr Wickremesinghe's contention is that a national consensus is both imperative and possible, if

sought intelligently.

On the ruling Peoples' Alliances' (PA's) decision to convert the next Parliament into a Constitutional Assembly (CA) and get its unilateral constitution passed with a simple majority, Mr Wickremesinghe said that it would be an "illegal" act because the present constitution had prescribed a way to change the constitution. Even the Supreme Court had ruled that a two-thirds majority was needed. The 1972 and 1978 Constitution were passed with more than two-thirds majority.

The UNP leader justified his party's decision to scuttle the government's constitutional proposals in Parliament by saying that the government had not given in on the question of limiting the term of the transitional Executive Presidency and had not stuck to its promise of discussing the draft with the Maha Sangha, the LTTE and the Tamil parties before tabling it in Parliament.

"We were not drafting a party constitution, but a national constitution," he pointed out.

Mr Wickremesinghe said that he was asking the voters to reject the ruling party because President Chandrika Kumaratunga had declared that the constitution should be torn to bits. Giving proof of the PA's violent tendency, he alleged that on Saturday, a Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) worker was killed in Colombo by men allegedly owing allegiance to Minister S. B. Dissanayake. "This is the election's first victim," the UNP chief noted.

On the allegation that as minister in the late 80s, he had ordered the torture and killing of political persons in the guise of tackling JVP insurgency, Mr Wickremesinghe said that the affidavit presented by SSP Douglas Peiris was doctored. Mr Peiris was specially brought from Madras to malign him and his party ahead of the elections, Mr Wickremesinghe charged.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 AUG 2000

MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 2000

119 12 ✓
FOR A MANDATE WITH A MESSAGE? Lanka

A LEGISLATIVE POLL is rarely a defining event under any system of executive presidency. However, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, quite an innovative President of Sri Lanka, whose Parliament has now been dissolved in the normal course for the purpose of a fresh general election, seems to be looking for a mandate with a message. She had already hinted, ahead of the announcement of dissolution on August 18, that expert legal advice had been obtained by her Government on the highly controversial option of transforming the prospective new Parliament into a 'constituent assembly' for the passage of an already-crafted basic statute. However, it was not without significance that she had also, by and large, kept the operative legal counsel to herself, except to the extent of her reported comment that a simple majority would suffice for the approval of a new constitution by a (hypothetical) parliament-turned-constituent-assembly. The inevitable impression, therefore, is that Ms. Kumaratunga appears intent on sending a strong political signal to the electorate in this regard without really going the whole hog at this moment at least. In her transparent calculus, the constitutional reform bill, which her administration was forced to shield from a feared fatal vote in the now-disbanded Parliament, can perhaps be given a new lease of life on the floor of a 'constituent assembly'. But, quite apart from her seemingly confident assumption that her People's Alliance will comfortably win the general election, scheduled for October 10, she knows that the legality and, more importantly, the political legitimacy of a short route to constitutional reform should be fool-proof. Now, this critical aspect is still highly contentious, whatever be the Himalayan hurdles which she, in her own reckoning, might have so far faced on this path.

By definition, any constitutional reform process in the contemporary Sri Lankan context is primarily a device to address, as satisfactorily as possible, an intractable political-ethnic crisis.

Given the tussle between the majoritarian Sinhala-supremacist tendencies and the reactionary passions with a devastating potency from a singular minority outfit, any new constitutional architecture must be acceptable to all sides. While the President is convinced that she has been able to evolve the necessary critical mass (in a positive sense of the term) for precisely such reforms, the opposition United National Party, mainly of Sinhala orientation, is still keeping itself and the Government guessing on this count. It is in this context that Ms. Kumaratunga will need to measure her steps as she begins to figure out how far the planned parliamentary poll could be converted into a referendum on the constitutional package on view. For obvious reasons of presidential security and the weighted importance of a parliamentary poll, she cannot also strain her political resolve beyond a point, given her assessment too that she had already received a mandate for a political solution of the fundamental question in several previous elections.

Disagreeing with those seen to be pressing for a decisive military solution to the phenomenal menace from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Ms. Kumaratunga has reportedly argued that a (presumptive) victory in the battlefield would still necessitate a political formula for addressing the primary issue concerning the rights of the Tamil population. Otherwise, in her view, "another (Mr.) Prabhakaran" could well emerge in such a scenario. A seeming platitude of this order is not without its political meaning, and it remains to be seen how the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, and his political soul-mates will respond to this aspect of the President's parliamentary calculations. The economic situation and the cost of living, in particular, can of course be a relatively obvious agenda for the Opposition, despite the latest emergence of a radical Sinhala outfit in the name and style of Sihala Urumaya. But the overall mood of the campaign may depend considerably on the tactics of the new Prime Minister, Mr. Ratanasiri Wickramanayke, too.

THE HINDU

21 AUG 2000

57-6

SRI LANKA

29/8 Politics Of Constitution-Making

By AG NOORANI

NO leader has striven as valiantly to do justice to the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka as President Chandrika Kumaratunga has ever since she was voted to power in 1994 as Prime Minister. She made two pledges. First, to dismantle President Julius Jayawardene's presidential system, embodied in his 1978 Constitution and replace it with one based on the parliamentary model. The other was to settle the Tamil issue by parleys with the LTTE and others.

Through no fault of hers, success has eluded her. The LTTE, encouraged by friends abroad, not excluding some in India, is in no mood to accept anything less than independence. But on the first, she has cynically backtracked. The President has received scant cooperation

get the new Constitution to be adopted by a bare majority.

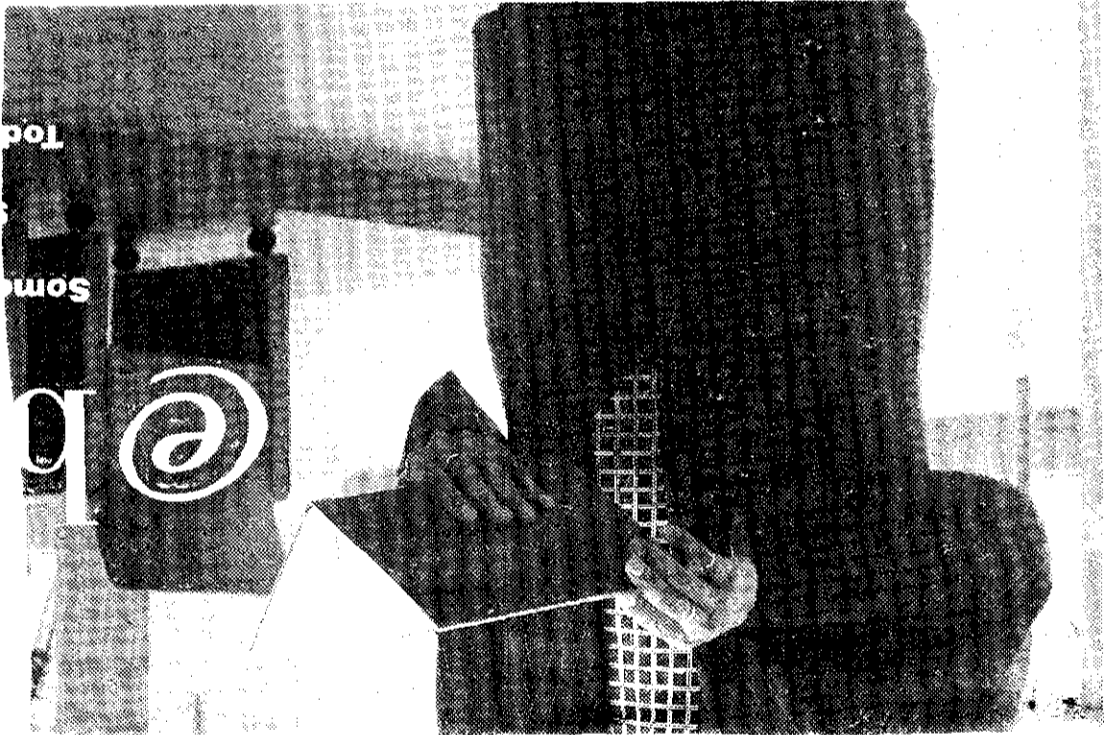
The suggestion is cynical and self-destructive. Bare majorities do not respect minorities. The Constituent Assembly would be an "extra-constitutional" body as the scholar, Rohan Edirisinghe, has pointed out. The Supreme Court is certain to strike it down as void. Constitutional amendments need a two-thirds vote and ratification in a referendum. This suggestion was made by the President herself in an inter-

the Constitution shall be deemed to have been elected by Parliament as the First President under this Constitution and shall, unless the President earlier vacates office ... hold office for a period of six years calculated from 22 December 1999".

Incongruity degenerates into gross absurdity in the next Clause: "(b) The first President shall, notwithstanding, the appointment of a Prime Minister under this Constitution, exercise, perform and discharge, the powers, duties and functions conferred or imposed on, or assigned to, the President by this Constitution as well as the powers, duties and functions conferred or imposed on or assigned to the Prime Minister under this Constitution, and the Prime Minister shall, so long



IBM commercial desktop prices are slashed again. With increased processing power and better features.



THE STATESMAN

2 AUG 2000

Non-issues to the fore

AFTER THE Sri Lankan Government's failure to mobilise support for the proposals to amend the Sri Lankan Constitution in Parliament before the House was dissolved, it would have appeared logical that the question of amendment would push everything else to the background during the run-up to the October 10 elections. What has been happening instead is that all the parties are trying to obfuscate the issue by raising a variety of secondary concerns. While President Chandrika Kumaratunga had taken a principled stand on the need to get the devolution package passed in an attempt to resolve the ethnic issue, she appears less certain about the extent to which the Opposition will be able to exploit the matter to turn the majority Sinhalese voters against her. The fact that the Buddhist clergy has been uncompromising in their opposition to the devolution proposals has not made her job any easier.

Even earlier, demonstrations of inflexibility by the Sinhalese parties, especially the Buddhist Mahasangha, has aborted any chance of a resolution of the ongoing conflict whenever such an opportunity presented itself. That is not to suggest that the main Opposition party, UNP, is on any surer ground. Its last-minute decision to back out of its commitment to support the constitutional amendment was indicative of its own fears while the parliamentary elections were round the corner. The result is that the level of debate in an election in which issues should have been clearly defined and lines clearly drawn has actually got mired in all kinds of non-issues.

Mrs Kumaratunga's attempts to rake up cases against her main political rival, Ranil Wickramasinghe, over acts allegedly committed by the UNP Government during its para-military campaign against the JVP rebels a decade earlier, is liable to be seen more as a step motivated by electoral considerations than as one inspired by a sense of justice. It is not surprising that her ploy has not earned her friends among the JVP either, who have accused the ruling party of involvement in the murder of one of its workers engaged in electoral work. All this promises an election in which the issues have not only been getting murkier but also have little to do with the grave threat posed by the LTTE facing the country.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 AUG 2000

UNP leader's defection a boost to Chandrika's party

P K Balachandran
Colombo August 30

PRESIDENT CHANDRIKA Kumaratunga's Peoples' Alliance (PA) got a further boost ahead of the Oct 10 parliamentary elections when a United National Party (UNP) leader and member of the dissolved parliament Sarath Kongahage resigned from it on Tuesday accusing the party leadership of being in cahoots with the LTTE.

"You have advocated a very lenient policy towards the fascist LTTE murderers, who killed President Premadasa, other leaders of the country and simple civilians. I could never approve of your actions in this regard.

It is clear to me that anti-LTTE attitudes apparent in my speeches in parliament during the past five years, you have viewed with disfavour, considering these statements as being against you and a certain section of the party." Mr

Kongahage said in his resignation letter addressed to UNP chief Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Mr Kongahage told The Hindustan Times that a section of the party, including Mr Wickremesinghe, had acted according to the dictates of the LTTE on Mrs Kumaratunga's devolution package.

The devolution package and the consensus seeking process initiated by President Kumaratunga had given the country the first real chance to find a solution to the ethnic question, Mr Kongahage said. The UNP had ditched her after agreeing to 95 per cent of the package, he pointed out.

The PA acquired further clout on Tuesday when Mrs Srimani Athulathmudali of the Lalith Front (a breakaway group of the UNP) re-hitched her party to the PA after a period of estrangement. A district court order barring the Suresh Premachandran faction of the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary

Liberation Front (EPRLF) from filing nominations till Sept 12, when the deadline for filing nominations had been set for Sept 4, is also going to help the PA because Mr Premachandran is anti-PA while his rival A Varatharajaperumal is pro-PA.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), a party of Indian Origin Tamils, has split into pro-PA and pro-UNP factions.

The dominant faction led by Mr Arumugam Thondaman would be supporting the PA in all regions except the Central provinces and Colombo.

The Catholic Bishops Conference (CBC), an influential body among the Catholics, has thrown its weight behind Mrs Kumaratunga on the question of devolution.

Its call for "sufficient devolution of political power to all the regions, while maintaining the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka," is right up Mrs Kumaratunga's street.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 AUG 2000

Sri Lanka: the devolution discourse — I

By Partha S. Ghosh

100.17 67

NOW THAT the crisis arising out of an impending fall of Jaffna to the LTTE has somewhat receded, the devolution debate in Sri Lanka has once again come under the limelight. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh's negotiations in Colombo on June 11 and 12 and Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections due between August and November have also contributed to this shift of focus. The Indo-Sri Lankan Joint Statement, besides mentioning India's commitment to "the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka", underlined the need for a lasting peace, keeping in view the "aspirations of all communities". It requires bare common sense to endorse the prescription, but the problem starts the moment one tries to administer the medicine.

To put the matter in perspective a short description of the discourse is imperative. In 1902, the British divided Sri Lanka into 13 provinces, each located in a coastal town. This arrangement, along with a separate administration for the 'Kandyan Provinces' (annexed in 1815), continued with minor modifications till 1833 when the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms introduced a unified administration for the entire island. According to these reforms, the country was divided into five provinces around the four most fortified coastal centres of Colombo, Galle, Jaffna and Batticaloa, and Kandy, capital of the Kandyan kingdom. Later, these provinces were re-demarcated and by 1889 altogether nine provinces came into being as we see today. This provincial arrangement was dictated purely by administrative and strategic considerations; no ethnic, geographical or demographic variable had any role to play. Also, except routine administration, no central authority was devolved to the provinces.

But ethnicity slowly crept into national politics. The Crewe-Mac Callum Reforms (1912-20) provided for three Sinhala elected seats and two Tamil elected seats in the State Council although their respective percentile ratio in the population was 66.1:12.8. Subsequently, when the Council was enlarged the numbers became 13 and 8, respectively. This lopsided representative pattern increasingly became a matter of contestation between the Sinhals and the Tamils, which became sharper with the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931

that introduced universal adult suffrage. Tamils feared that in the game of numbers they would be the losers. To compensate for this numerical disadvantage they demanded a 50:50 ratio between the Sinhalese and the minorities, the most dominant among them being the Sri Lanka Tamils.

When all this was happening in 1946 the idea of a federal structure for Sri Lanka was first floated by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, a man who 30 years later introduced the 'Sinhala only' policy and thereby sowed the seeds of the ethnic conflict. Considering the traditional differences amongst the Kandyan Sinhalese, the Low Country Sinhalese, and the Tamils, he advocated separate provinces for them with full au-

the bill been passed it would have been better for the future ethnic relationship. The Ceylon National Congress and the United National Party (UNP) which came into being were all for a composite Sri Lankan nationalism. In 1948 a majority of the Tamil Congress crossed over to the Government which greatly strengthened Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake's position.

Soon the Tamils, however, became suspicious when the UNP rode the bandwagon of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism so as not to lose its constituency, which the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) was trying to wrest. The latter won the 1956 election and as per its electoral promise introduced the 'Sinhala-only' policy, that is, Sinhala alone

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Bandaranaike had launched his Sinhala Maha Sabha (SMS) in 1937 with the purpose of uniting all the Sinhals. He had clarified that his idea was to eventually integrate all the communities and he was just starting with the Sinhals. But any student of political movement knows about the inherent danger in such strategies. Within a year, Tamil leader G.G. Ponnambalam vigorously pleaded with the Governor for 50:50 ratio in the State Council. Whether this kind of minority politics gives rise to majoritarian nationalism or vice versa is one of those chicken and egg puzzles that remains unanswered in all times and climes. Still, it may be argued that had

gation of the 'Sinhala-only' policy. Claiming that the Northern and Eastern Provinces were the traditional homeland of the Tamils the party warned against attempts to dislodge "us from our soil, grab our lands, render us destitute". This homeland is "the basis of our life as a community" in Sri Lanka and it is "the only guarantee of our security and safety". It was against this background that the D-C Pact was signed. The terms of the pact were on predictable lines. Significantly, however, both in respect of limit of devolution and Northern and Eastern Provinces as Tamil homeland there was a clear waivering down of the Tamil position. The pact only talked of District Councils, neither specifying their geographical limits nor mentioning about their possible amalgamation. Presumably the District Councils meant the then existing 22 administrative districts. In any case the D-C Pact too could not be implemented because of the opposition of the SLFP and other Sinhala parties. It is the tragedy of Sri Lanka that both the SLFP and the UNP while in power talk sense but once in the opposition turn Sinhala chauvinistic.

It is not necessary to recount all the developments that took place on the federal experimental front from 1965 to 1994 when Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga came out with her exceptionally bold federal package. It would suffice here just to underline that whether it was the 1972 Constitution, the 1978 Constitution, the Parthasarathi Plan (1983), the Thimpa Talks (1985), the 13th Amendment (1987), or the Mangala Morasinghe Select Committee Report (1991), the hiatus between the Sinhala position and the Tamil demand could not be bridged primarily because of two essentially inter-related factors. They were: (1) the geographical limits of the so called Tamil homeland, and (2) the exact powers to be devolved to the provinces. It may be noted that the provincial experiment undertaken since 1987 has failed even in the Sinhalese areas. The primary reason of failure is their economic dependence on the Centre as their own resources are extremely meagre. One must bear in mind that Sri Lanka is one-fifth of India's size. To comprehend its federal viability, therefore, one must imagine India divided into 450 States.

(The writer is Director, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.)

THE HINDU

6 JUL 2000

Sri Lanka: the devolution discourse — I

By Partha S. Ghosh

NOW THAT the crisis arising out of an impending fall of Jaffna to the LTTE has somewhat receded, the devolution debate in Sri Lanka has once again come under the limelight. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh's negotiations in Colombo on June 11 and 12 and Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections due between August and November have also contributed to this shift of focus. The Indo-Sri Lankan Joint Statement, besides mentioning India's commitment to "the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka", underlined the need for a lasting peace, keeping in view the "aspirations of all communities". It requires here common sense to endorse the prescription, but the problem starts the moment one tries to administer the medicine.

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thority. The bill passed it would have been better for the future ethnic relationship. The Ceylon National Congress and the United National Party (UNP) which came into being were all for a composite Sri Lankan nationalism. In 1948 a majority of the Tamil Congress crossed over to the Government which greatly strengthened Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake's position.

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(The writer is Director, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.)

Devolution package to be in place before July 12: Lanka

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 5

THE SRI Lankan Government plans to push its devolution package through the Parliament before its scheduled dissolution on July 12, ahead of elections next month. This will be done "with full support of the Tamil mainstream political parties," said Mr Lakshman Jayakody, special envoy to President Chandrika Kumaratunge.

He disclosed that the Norwegian facilitation of talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) had met with no headway till date. Norwegian special envoy, Mr Eric Solheim, admitted to both Governments that though his talks with the LTTE were at a "delicate stage", he could not foresee any chance of the underground organisation coming to the table in the near future.

"However, we are confident that the political process can yield success. The country is tired of war and everybody wants peace," Mr Jayakody, who is minister for Culture and Religious Affairs in the Kumaratunge cabinet, said. He however did not comment on the anti-foreign intervention (India) stand taken by the Buddhist clergy of the country.



Sri Lanka's Culture and Religious Minister Lakshman Jayakody meeting Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh. Photo: Prakash Singh

THE HINDU

Sri Lanka: the devolution discourse — II

By Partha S. Ghosh

AFTER WINNING the parliamentary and presidential elections held in 1994, the Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, announced her devolution package on August 3, 1995. She virtually conceded on every point to the fulfilment of the Tamil demands. Without mincing words she confessed that her primary task was to find a new approach predicated on unqualified acceptance of the fact that the Tamil people had genuine grievances for which solutions must be found. No Sinhalese leader had ever made such a categorical remark in favour of the Tamils. But as the days passed it increasingly became clear that she lacked political maturity. If politics is 'the art of the possible' she tried to achieve what was seemingly not possible, at least with the rhetoric she used. During her first tenure as President, in addition to the package mentioned above, she announced two more plans detailing the federal scheme. The first was released on January 16, 1996, and the second on October 14, 1997. The 1997 document was a draft Constitution for a parliamentary and federal Sri Lanka to replace the present one that provides for an executive presidency. A study of these documents reveals a systematic watering down of the promises in respect of the unit of devolution and the powers to be devolved to the provinces. It is not necessary to go into the nitty-gritty of these proposals. Important is to understand what exactly is bothering the Sinhalese and why the Tamils are not able to appreciate those concerns.

Without theorising about federalism and its attendant advantages two aspects need to be borne in mind — one, the state of Sinhala-Tamil relations, and, two, the level of militancy. Sinhala-Tamil relations have soured to such an extent that a political solution has become a cliché. There was a time when Tamils occupied large chunks of public service quite disproportionate to their number. In a democracy if the majority feels disadvantaged it claims positive discrimination of one kind or another. Sinhalese worked out their strategies through 'standardisation', 'district quota', etc. But having attained their independence without popular participation the Sri Lankans, both Sinhalese and Tamils, were not able to absorb this political churning. The re-

sult was the marginalisation of an once-proud Tamil community with little effort on the part of the Sinhalese to assuage their bruised sentiments. The failure of the B-C and D-C pacts were symptomatic of this shortsightedness.

Against this background, when Tamil militancy developed there was a general feeling in the community that probably this is the only language that the Sinhalese would understand and respond to. But, militant movements have their own dynamics and they end up with separatist demands. Once that happens, majoritar-

terms of area it is about 35 per cent of Sri Lanka's landmass and 40 per cent of the country's coastline with two brilliant natural harbours, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Given the level of ethnic suspicion if the Sinhalese assume it as a first step to Eelam one should not blame them. The core of the problem is, therefore, suspicion. It has been increasingly aggravated as both security forces and Tamil militants, most notably the LTTE, have indulged in all kinds of human rights violations making the society extremely violent. The IVP insurgency was not an acci-

The core of the problem is suspicion. It has been increasingly aggravated as both security forces and Tamil militants have indulged in all kinds of human rights violations.

dent. It was the product of certain social processes that may erupt again. It is, therefore, not a political solution alone but ethnic reconciliation also that is needed. Let Sinhalese and Tamils as communities stand up and confess why and how much they distrust one another. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission that South Africa has experimented with can have some relevance for Sri Lanka too though the latter cannot be accused of an apartheid-type situation.

As long as the Tamils ask for the merger of Northern and Eastern provinces the devolution debate will go round and round. But if the present ethnic composition of the Eastern Province is maintained it could serve as a microcosm of Sri Lankan plurality to be emulated by the entire nation. Otherwise this homeland question will have a domino effect. Next in the queue would be the Muslims followed by the plantation Tamils. Meritfully, the Sinhalese are small in number and are in the process of migrating to Australia. If the Sinhalese can agree to divide their habitat into seven provinces there is no reason for the Tamils to disagree to live in two provinces, one exclusively belonging to them (Northern Province) and the other partially (Eastern Province). From the Indian experience one may say that the size of a province does not necessarily do miracles,

for otherwise Bihar and Uttar Pradesh should have done better than Tamil Nadu or Kerala. Who knows that some day the Northern Province may become the trendsetter for Sri Lanka and Jaffna the Bangalore of the island.

All this talk about devolution of course has no meaning unless the role of the LTTE is discussed. Recently Mrs. Kumaratunga suggested the formation of a North-Eastern Regional Council as an interim measure before the issue of merger is thrashed out through a referendum. The pattern is typical of state response to the issue. In the said Council she does not agree to the inclusion of the LTTE. The UNP and some Tamil parties have argued in favour of the LTTE's inclusion for otherwise, they argue, the experiment would fail. The whole question to my mind is academic. It is possible for one to dream that some day the Northern and Eastern Provinces would merge permanently, but it is virtually impossible for one to dream that in that province the LTTE would rule as a political party with its leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, as the Chief Minister.

Prabhakaran has his dream of an Eelam — an independent, sovereign state, having a seat in the U.N., he himself shaking hands with foreign dignitaries on an equal footing, and most importantly, he being revered as the Father of Eelam. Would not the success of the devolution process with his nod reduce him to the level of a petty Chief Minister of a province one-fourth the breadth of India? It needs total metamorphosis of the man before anything like that happens. If at all the LTTE joins the Interim N.E Council it would be purely for tactical reasons to buy time. In any case, the presence of the Tigers in the council would reduce the other Tamil parties there into non-entities. Given these scenarios I see little hope in the present efforts to find a political solution through devolution. Let us wait for a few years for Prabhakaran to get older and hence mellowed to agree to a negotiated settlement. In the intervening period both Sinhalese and Tamils have time to search their conscience. Any political solution to an intense ethnic problem has inherent moral and human dimensions.

(Continued)

People's Alliance concludes talks with UNP

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 7. Sri Lanka's ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the opposition United National Party (UNP) today concluded talks on the proposed constitutional reforms with a historic agreement on a draft document that will now be presented to the Tamil political parties for their concurrence.

"The talks concluded on an extremely happy note. Both the President and the Leader of the Opposition feel it is a historic achievement and they feel they have laid the foundation for a new chapter," Mr. M.H.M. Ashraff, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), who was present at the talks as a coalition partner of the People's Alliance, said.

However, an outstanding issue that remains to be resolved between the two sides is about the transitional provisions to the new Constitution. The PA wants to retain the executive presidency while the UNP wants it to be scrapped immediately.

"The UNP has told us they will

get back to us on this issue," Mr. Ashraff said. The PA is keen on tabling the reforms before the term of this Parliament expires on August 24. The Government plans to seek a direction from the Supreme Court on whether a national referendum held on the new Constitution after the dissolution of the present Parliament will be legally binding after a new house is elected.

Before the two delegations met today, agreement had already been reached on the more controversial aspects of the proposed reforms, particularly those dealing with devolution of power to

the Tamil and Muslim minorities.

The PA and UNP have agreed to set up an interim council to administer north-eastern Sri Lanka for a maximum of five years after which a referendum will be held to decide whether the two provinces will merge or separate.

An agreement was also reached that Sri Lanka would be known as a republic comprising a Centre and regions, instead of the unitary State that it is now.

It is expected that the PA will table the new document before the end of this month seeking the support of two-thirds of Parliament for it.

'Historic feat'

COLOMBO JULY 7. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumartunga, speaking briefly over the national television tonight, said she had successfully completed a "historic feat" to achieve a broad consensus on formulation of a new draft Constitution which promises to grant autonomy to the Tamil dominated north and eastern province. "We have been able to start a new chapter and we have been able to work out an agreement," she said.

In his brief comments over the same television, the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe said the two of them discussed devolution of powers in order to avoid division of the country. — PTI

THE HINDU

119-13

Spotlight on UNP crisis

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By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 7. The defection of the senior parliamentarian, Mr. Ronnie de Mel, from the United National Party (UNP) to the ruling People's Alliance (PA) has once again turned the spotlight on the crisis within Sri Lanka's main Opposition party.

Mr. De Mel yesterday voted with the Government on a motion to extend the Emergency for another month. The cross-over had been expected for many months and it is being speculated that at least six or seven more UNP MPs may soon follow him.

While Mr. De Mel's departure by itself may not make a significant impact on the UNP because of his reputation as a habitual "pole-vaulter" — he has switched between the two parties three times so far —, political analysts say it points to a deeper malaise within the party.

"Such defections are normal just before an election, but the problem for the UNP is that it is becoming a one-way street. People are going away, but no one is coming in," said Mr. Sinha Ratnatunga, editor of the weekly, *Sunday Tim*.

"It boils do. Ranil Wick-

remsinghe's leadership. It's so weak and lacklustre, there is no magic in it," he said.

But the UNP has no alternative leadership either, with the LTTE having eliminated the party's heavyweights.

Mr. De Mel is the seventh parliamentarian to part ways with the UNP since last November. Five MPs decided to align themselves with the PA shortly before the Presidential polls last December. Talking to the local media, Mr. De Mel said the UNP was in "complete disarray". "The UNP is going down the slope to destruction," the 75-year-old parliamentarian told *The Island*.

Specifically, many UNP members say the party leadership mishandled the issue of ethnic conflict.

Its game of one-upmanship on the Government's devolution proposals might have gone down well with the party had it proved to be a vote-winner. That did not happen, with the UNP losing the local government, provincial government and presidential elections, all in a row.

Much to the dismay of its members, the leadership only seemed to be painting itself into a corner

with every move it made. First, it opposed the devolution package and called for talks with the LTTE, but got labeled as a fellow-traveller of the separatist group.

Then it agreed to sit in talks to reach agreement on the proposals when it seemed as if the party might split on the issue. It exposed the fact that the UNP was playing with limited options.

While there has been tremendous international pressure on the UNP to forge a bipartisan political solution to the conflict, there is also pressure from within the party not to go along with the Government ahead of the general election. "There is an expectation from the UNP in India and elsewhere, and if we back out of the process now, it will not go down well internationally. We are well and truly trapped," said a parliamentarian who participated in the constitutional reforms consultations.

It is being predicted that in its present shape, the UNP will find the going tough in the general election due before the first week of November, even though there is much discontent against the Government because of the recent price hikes of essentials.

THE HINDU

8 JUL 2000

Chandrika-Ranil devolution plan runs into Tamil wall

PTI & UNI

COLOMBO, July 8. — Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga and the Opposition United National Party leader, Mr Ranil Wickramasinghe, yesterday reached a broad agreement on self-rule and a new draft constitution that will give wider powers to the Tamils; but the plan ran into trouble today with a Tamil party rejecting it.

The Tamil United Liberation Front, while rejected the agreement, called it a "setback" to Tamil aspirations for greater political autonomy.

The LTTE has already rejected the devolution of power proposal.

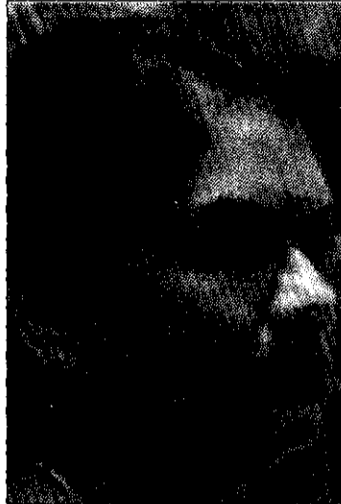
The President and the UNP leader, however, couldn't agree on the transitory provisions to shift from the presidential to parliamentary democracy.

The two leaders ended their nine-week-long talks last night with the broad agreement on powers to be devolved to regions but differed on the modalities to get it ratified by Parliament.

Later, Mrs Kumaratunga told the national television that the agreement was "a very historic occasion and I trust this will be

the forerunner to the peace in this country."

Mr Wickramasinghe said: "We in the UNP will do whatever possible to help bring peace to Sri Lanka within a



Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga

united country with more powers devolved to the regions."

The two leaders agreed on the unit of devolution to the Tamil-dominated north-eastern province, constitution of interim council to run it for five

years and the extent of powers to be devolved to administer it. They also agreed to set up independent commissions for election, police, public service and judiciary.

To attain legal status, the Constitution has to be ratified by the Parliament with two-thirds majority followed by an approval vote in a referendum.

UNP leaders argued the Constitution can't be ratified by the present Parliament as its term ends on 24 August.

Officials said the President would refer the approved draft to the Supreme Court and also moderate Tamil parties before submitting it to the Parliament.

On the transitory provisions, UNP sources said Mrs Kumaratunga proposed to retain the powers of presidency for the rest of her six-year term.

The UNP, however, wanted her to relinquish the presidency immediately after the next round of Parliament polls scheduled to be held in October this year.

The two leaders have agreed to meet at a later date to discuss the issue again.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

9 JUL 2000

The LTTE and devolution

By S. D. Muni

The LTTE sees any devolution package, no matter how responsive it is to the Tamil aspirations, as a negation of its main goal of Eelam.

THE LTTE's blunt refusal to either discuss the devolution package proposed by the Sri Lankan Government or participate in the interim Council for the northeast has not come as a surprise. The outfit made it clear months ago to Norwegian mediators that its priority over any negotiations with Colombo was military control of Jaffna. The LTTE's stance should help disabuse all those who pretend to believe that it can and must be involved in a peaceful process of resolving the ethnic conflict. Its ostensible condition for participating in any such process is that it must be based on the four Thimphu (1985) principles: (i) cultural distinctiveness of the Sri Lankan Tamils; (ii) recognition of the northeast region as their homeland; (iii) right to self-determination and (iv) a dominant role for the Tamils (read LTTE) in any inter-ethnic arrangement. Three of these principles were incorporated in the devolution package inherent in the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement.

The LTTE defied that agreement. These three principles are also generally covered in the present Sri Lankan proposals. The problem is only with the principle of self-determination. This right cannot be granted to a part of its territory by any state. Most of the post-colonial states would disintegrate if this principle was granted on the basis of ethnic nationalism. The LTTE is asking for this right only to eventually secure Eelam as a sovereign entity.

The LTTE sees any devolution package, no matter how responsive it is to the Tamil aspirations, as a negation of its main goal of Eelam. Its stakes in Eelam and the fight for it are too heavy to be given up. Any acceptance of a devolution package and its agreeing to work within a united Sri Lanka would mean the LTTE adapting itself to non-violent and democratic functioning. This is in conflict with its ideology, organisation, political experience and method of functioning. Besides, this threatens the huge economic empire built by the LTTE through regular remittances from the Tamil diaspora scattered all over the world, income from drug

clear political will behind it, and also had the political change in India and Sri Lanka not allowed the LTTE to manoeuvre Premadasa on its side against the IPKF. When the LTTE broke its tactical peace with President Premadasa in June 1990, Colombo had neither the moral authority nor the political will to resist.

Again during 1995-97, when the LTTE refused to come to the negotiating table and opened fire, it was driven out of Jaffna and pushed to the northeastern seaboard by the armed forces. The success of the LTTE's recent military campaign, "Unceasing waves", is credited more to the disarray and demoralisation in the armed forces. An important factor behind this demoralisation, besides complacency and mismanagement on the part of the Government, was the political rivalry and conflict between the ruling PA and the Opposition UNP. This did not allow the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga's devolution proposals of 1995 to succeed.

The UNP's influence in the security forces even encouraged desertions. The LTTE cleverly exploited the Sinhala parties' treachery to its advantage by going to the extent of leading open electoral support to the UNP in the Presidential race. By activating its constituencies of support in Jaffna, the LTTE has also successfully blunted any possible Indian support for Sri Lanka in its recent military campaign. Notwithstanding all this, once Colombo collected its political will, the fall of Jaffna which appeared imminent was averted.

It is therefore clear that the secret of the LTTE's military prowess lies more in its skill for political manoeuvre than its over-all strength and agility on the battlefield. A sound and sincere devolution can prove a powerful weapon in isolating the organisation. The reported consensus between the PA and the UNP on devolution and constitutional changes needs to be

firm up. The agreement between Mrs. Kumaratunga and the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, on the unit of devolution, even with a provision for referendum, and the character of the Sri Lankan state (comprising the Centre and the regions) generally meet the Tamil aspirations.

These two leaders must ignore extremist Sinhala views and grant land rights to the provincial councils. This will facilitate the efforts at securing the non-LTTE Tamil parties' acceptance of the broad parameters and substance of the devolution package, even if some of these parties such as the TULF cannot openly say so for fear of the LTTE.

India tried its best, during the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh's visit, to nudge the PA and the UNP towards each other on the Tamils issue. One hopes that a similar effort is already on in relation to the other Tamil groups. Within India also, New Delhi is making it clear to the two-LTTE Tamil parties that the only solution to the Sri Lankan problem lies in a sound, sincere and workable devolution package.

The Tigers would continue to vitiate the process of consensus building on devolution, by mobilising all possible pressures on the non-LTTE Tamil parties from within and outside Sri Lanka. For, once a consensus emerges, there will be no opportunity left for the LTTE to politically manoeuvre Sri Lankan internal divisions to its advantage. Nor will there be any rationale left for the outfit to carry on with its war for Eelam.

This will create ideal circumstances for international mediation efforts backed by Norway, the U.S. and India to bring pressure on the LTTE to lay down arms and join the national mainstream. The chances are that the LTTE will evolve tactical manoeuvres to defuse the international pressures and wriggle out of the uncomfortable situation in search of its desired Eelam. The only option left in that situation would be to meet the military challenge of the LTTE effectively, once and for all.

(The writer is Professor, South Asian Studies, JNU, New Delhi.)

Package by Aug., says Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 10. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, told European Union ambassadors and the head of the European Commission here today that she intended tabling the constitutional reforms package in Parliament early next month.

She also said that Sri Lanka was ready to talk to the LTTE anytime. "(She) stressed that in respect of the LTTE, the door remains open. The Government continues to be ready to offer for discussions to the LTTE the consensus that has evolved through consultations amongst all other parties," a statement from the Presidential Secretariat said.

Member-states of the E.U. are important to Sri Lanka as they account for a significant chunk of financial aid that it receives.

In the past, some members were critical of the Government's approach to the ethnic conflict, especially its pursuit of the war against the LTTE which has had consequences for these countries.

The recent agreement between the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the Opposition UNP formed an important part of the statement. Ms. Kumaratunga told the E.U. delegation that "on the basis of these consultations which had been preceded by discussions within the PA and thereafter with the Tamil parties, the Government intends to present its pro-

posals for constitutional reform to Parliament by the beginning of next month."

Another statement from the Government said the Media Minister, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, was in the Czech Republic on a three-day visit as Sri Lanka's special envoy.

He met the President, Mr. Vaclav Havel, and thanked him "for the understanding shown and support given by the Czech Republic in the recent past". Sri Lanka recently bought heavy weapons from that country.

THE HINDU

11 JUL 2000

Glorifying death

S. Lakshmi

HP-17
1677

One of the strategic successes of the LTTE is that it has managed to sell suicide to its cadres as something to aspire to. NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN on the fact and fiction which surround this issue.

IN SOCIOLOGICAL and legal discourse, suicide is alternatively a crime against society, the last resort or, if you like, the last revenge of the weak, the extreme manifestation of human inability to cope with life's ups and downs. One of the strategic successes of the LTTE is that it has managed to sell suicide to its cadres as something to aspire to, a life choice that brings the highest honour to self, family and the "Tamil nation".

Earlier this month, the LTTE observed its annual ritual marking the death anniversary of its first-ever suicide cadre. On July 5, 1987, "Captain" Miller of the LTTE drove an explosives-laden truck into an army camp at Nelliady in Jaffna peninsula and with that one act, laid the foundation for an entire cult of martyrdom built around suicide.

Since then, the LTTE has perfected the use of suicide as strategy, equipping its suicide cadres with RDX-lined belts or jackets that they wear on their bodies, and that explode at the tug of a detonator. The vital twist, stunning in its cynicism, is of course that valour flows not just from the act of taking one's own life, but simultaneously taking the life of one more person or several others, who may either be chosen or accidental targets, depending on the circumstances of that "supreme" nanosecond.

Suicide cadres of the LTTE, hand-picked by top leaders and known as Black Tigers, enjoy the highest status within the group. Stories abound of Black Tigers invited around by LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran for a grand last supper before they set out on a mission. The announcement by the LTTE this year that 188 Black Tigers had died so far in "land and sea attacks" had almost a note of triumph to it.

In essence, what the LTTE does through events such as



Young women have been especially susceptible to the LTTE's cult of violence.

Black Tigers' Day is celebrated suicide, goading — abetting would be the legal term — cadres to take their own lives, because suicide, as practised by it, is a potent weapon of war.

Mourning the Tamil moderate, Neelan Tiruchelvam, assassinated by a suicide bomber a year ago, the Adelaide-based Sri Lankan sociologist, Mr. Michael Roberts, wrote that while a political act of suicide, such as self-immolation — of which Tamil Nadu provides many instances — breaks the law, it is an act that does no physical harm to others. But the LTTE had taken political suicide to a new realm. "...it is an instrument of state, of terror, of cold-blooded killing," he wrote.

So why do LTTE cadres allow themselves to be goaded into taking their own lives in order to kill others? It has to be more

complex than just the romantic notion of a suicide bomber driven purely by a cause, which has been offered by Indian cinema recently in "The Terrorist" by Santosh Sivan, and in Mani Ratnam's "Dil Se".

Mr. Roberts speaks of the cult of filial piety and devotion to God among Tamils, apparent in Sangam literature, as one possible explanation for the acts of self-immolation in Tamil Nadu and suicide bombings by LTTE cadres in Sri Lanka.

"You cannot get converts to a group such as the Black Tigers unless there is already a cultural bedrock on which such total commitment can be based. The LTTE has used that," he told *The Hindu* over telephone from Australia. It helped that the LTTE's leadership was itself totally committed to its cause, he added.

Other explanations have been

offered. In a report published last week, the Jaffna University Teachers' for Human Rights said the militarisation of children frustrates their normal aspirations and makes "them part of an organisation where becoming a suicide bomber becomes the outlet for despair".

A disproportionately large number of suicide bombers are women. Does that mean women believe in causes more readily than men? In her forthcoming book, "Engaging Difference: Gender and Nationality in Sri Lanka", the Sri Lankan academic, Ms. Neloufer de Mel, like Mr. Roberts, places her argument in the context of cultural tradition, but with reference to gender.

"... the cult of martyrdom is so ingrained, and the concept of sacrifice already gendered in that it is within the normative, prescribed roles for women, the female suicide bomber's choice can be seen as already culturally predetermined," Ms. De Mel has argued.

A play, titled "Forbidden Area", staged recently in Colombo portrayed sexual frustration as the driving force behind women suicide bombers, provoking angry response from feminist critics. In contrast to the portrayals in Indian cinema, the play tried to show the female suicide bomber as not "good-looking" in the conventional sense of the word, infatuated by her supremacy, driven by the longing for physical contact with him.

One critic argued that this was a "trivialisation" that did not take into account "female agency". By choosing to become a terrorist, a woman coming from a traditional society feels liberated, empowered and able to influence events.

However, as Ms. De Mel has pointed out, the discovery after an attack in March this year in Colombo that the explosive-laden jackets of the suicide cadres were wired to go off automatically, has raised a whole new set of questions about the motivation of Black Tigers and how much control they have over their actions.

In the restricted space for public discourse in Sri Lankan society today, the ongoing debate on such a complex phenomenon, that is so little understood because of the absence of access and the overpowering propaganda, is like a breath of fresh air and will certainly help strip the LTTE's cult of suicide of a least some of the myths that surround it.

LTTE

16 JUL 2000

S. Subramanian
110-14

Devolution deal: too little for Tamils, too much for Sinhalese

177

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 16. A bleak future seems to be ahead for the People's Alliance (PA)-United National Party (UNP) agreement on devolution with the Tamils calling it a denial of their rights and Sinhalese extremists dubbing it a sellout to the minorities.

All the Tamil parties have rejected the agreement as too little, too late. The three main parties, the Tamil United Liberation Front, the Eelam People's Democratic Party and the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils that represent northeast Sri Lanka in Parliament, have said the draft document was "unacceptable" because it denies the merger of northeastern Sri Lanka and vests control of state land with the Centre.

According to them, it also fails to clearly specify that Sri Lanka is not a unitary state.

On top of that, seven other Tamil parties including the Ceylon Workers' Congress, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front issued a joint statement on Saturday describing the agreement as a "sinister design".

"The fact that this agreement, contrary to (our) basic stand that our homeland consisting of the northeast province is indivisible under any political settlement of the ethnic conflict, contains a proposal to hold a referendum in the eastern province to shatter the ter-

ritorial unity of our homeland and (ensures) that the Sri Lankan state would not shed its unitary character, makes it crystal clear that this agreement cannot in any way contribute to the resolution of the national question," the joint statement declared.

It pointed out that the provision enabling the Central Government to intervene in the regions through emergency powers was "totally contrary" to the concept of autonomy of regions. The parties demanded that the Government stop the war and initiate negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

On the other hand, Sinhalese extremists are baying against the PA and the UNP for giving away too much to the Tamil minority. Recalling the 'little now, more later' policy of the late Tamil leader, S.J. Chelvanayakam, the hardline outfit, Sihala Urumaya, asked in a statement: "If regional councils are now established, can anybody of sound mind and reasonable intelligence fail to realise that those regional councils will be the 'little now' and a separate state of Tamil Eelam the 'more later', and not very much later at that?"

The Sihala Urumaya general secretary, Mr. Nihal Karunaratne, slammed both the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, for not consulting the Buddhist clergy of the country on the agreed proposals.

"Why is it that the end result of the conspiracy between the PA and UNP to abdicate the powers of Parliament and divide this country is being communicated only to racist Tamil parties and not to any other party or segment of the populace including the Maha Sangha to which both these parties are ever ready to pay homage in front of cameras," Mr. Karunaratne wondered.

It was evident that "new-found partnership" between the President and the Leader of the Opposition was a plan to keep the draft document a secret and "foist" it as a *fait accompli* on the people, Mr. Karunaratne fumed.

Summing up the political noise that the agreement has created, the *Sunday Times* said different political players in the exercise had widely varying expectations from it.

"The hurried consultations that the President has had with the leaders of Tamil parties indicate that she is in a desperate hurry to show the Tamil constituency that she is making certain 'concessions' on their behalf. Ranil Wickremesinghe, on the other hand, lives in the hope that the combined forces of the Tamil parties and Sinhala interests spearheaded by the Maha Sangha will cancel each other out, bringing the whole political exercise concerning the package to a halt," the newspaper said in an editorial today.

THE HINDU

17 JUL 2000

Lanka polls in Nov under new Constitution

P K Balachandran
Colombo, July 17

11-14 187

ELECTIONS FOR the Sri Lankan Parliament would be held in the first week of November this year and under a new Constitution, President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga said here on Sunday.

Most political leaders consider this an impossible task given the shortage of time, but at least one political commentator, Dr P. Saravanamuttu, Director of Centre for Policy Alternatives, felt that the President could be posturing to get the opposition UNP and the Tamil parties to hurry up and come to a consensus, on the plea that time was running out.

Apparently under instruction from the Presidential Secretariat, the state owned "Daily News" carried a front page story today quoting the President as telling the country's top bureaucrats that the general elections would be held after passing the new Constitution.

Later, at a meeting of organisers of the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) from some parts of the

country, Mrs Kumaratunga said that the elections would be held in the first week of November.

She said that she would go in for elections only after strengthening the democratic institutions in the country and rectifying the grievances of the Tamil minority. These have been interpreted here to mean that the polls would be held under a new Constitution, now in the making.

Determined to give a good devolution package for the Tamil minority against all odds, Mrs Kumaratunga said: "There would be no country for anyone if only the Sinhalese were protected. Come what may, we are committed to the cause."

Mrs Kumaratunga had already announced that the present Parliament would be dissolved as scheduled on August 24. This means that the process of inter-party consultations on the draft Constitution, its legal vetting by draftsmen, its placing on the table of the House, the discussion on it, its securing a two-thirds majority in a vote, and the mandatory holding of a referen-

dum on it, will all have to be over and done with by August 24. "She can't go through the process in view of the shortage of time," said Mr Mavai Senathirajah, TULF MP.

Mr Douglas Devananda MP and Secretary General of EPDP, also felt that time was too short. Mr S. Thavarajah EPDP MP said that while the deadline could be met if there was a will to do so, the ground realities made it an uphill task.

He said that the discussions with the Tamil parties were not over yet. And once that was over, the amendments suggested by them would have to be discussed with the UNP.

Its denials notwithstanding, the UNP had forced the government to water down its proposals. And the Tamil parties had refused to accept these watered proposals, putting the government in a tight spot.

The EPDP has proposed a tripartite meeting between the government, UNP and the Tamil parties to thrash out differences. It is to meet the UNP for a preliminary discussion. It has not borne fruit yet.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 JUL 2000

A chance for peace

19/7 KR-11
WITH JUST about a month to go for the Sri Lankan Parliament's current term to be over on August 24, the Sri Lankan Government and the Opposition are racing against time to enact the necessary constitutional amendments that include a devolution package for the Tamils in the north-east. The devolution package itself, however, seems to have run into some rough weather. The Tamil Tigers' outright rejection of the proposals was only to be expected. It is the moderate Tamil groups' dismay with the final package that should concern the Sri Lankan Government. For it is these groups that have ultimately to sell this package to the Tamils as a final solution to the ethnic conflict.

While working out a consensus on the package of constitutional amendments, the opposition United National Party (UNP) appears to have pressed for modification of some features of the devolution package. The two key issues on which the dispensation as offered in the new draft now appears to have been whittled down pertain to the permanent merger of the northern and eastern provinces, and the devolution of the land rights to the provincial governments. These have been the core issues for the Tamils all through their interactions with the Sri Lankan Government, and it would be unrealistic to expect them to accept the modifications. And even if they did, it would only lend credence to the LTTE line that the Tamils have been taken for a ride yet again.

Having said that, it would be somewhat churlish on the part of the Tamils and other ethnic groups to raise the issue of the position of Buddhism in the country. Buddhism has enjoyed a certain primacy in Sri Lanka, but so far as the state is concerned, much of it in practice is of a nominal character. What is important is that the state does not discriminate on the basis of religion, and the freedom of religion is generally respected. However, the issue is so sensitive in the Sri Lankan context that it alone is capable of derailing the whole process of working out a durable solution to the ethnic tangle. The other ethnic groups should not, therefore, discover these new issues, nor should the opposition UNP act fussy and upset the devolution apple-cart in mid-course. All parties concerned should realise that this is a historic opportunity to put aside a rancorous past and turn a blood-stained page in Sri Lanka's history.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

The threat that hangs over S. Asia — I

By Prem Shankar Jha

AS THE weeks since the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's visit to South Asia have lengthened into months, New Delhi has become more and more puzzled over the behaviour of Pakistan's chief executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Pakistan's economy is at a near-standstill; the government's financial crisis is deepening day by day; its international debts are on hold but will not remain so forever; it is virtually isolated in the international community because of the October 1999 coup; it is under intense pressure to deescalate the jehad in Kashmir as a prelude to talks with India. It has been told by the major governments in no uncertain terms that the initiative must come from it and cannot come from India. Why then is Gen. Musharraf not budging?

One hypothesis is that he is not his own master and that real power lies with other shadowy generals in the armed forces GHQ. Another is that any softness towards India will undermine his position within the army and among the public just when he needs their support to deal with thorny issues like taxing the Bazanwas and imposing greater fiscal and administrative accountability on the administration. Both arguments will be plausible until one realises that they can just as easily be turned on their heads. If Gen. Musharraf is a puppet, it would make sense for the puppeteers to use him to take hard decisions before turning him into a sacrificial offering. By the same token, while Gen. Musharraf cannot be seen publicly bending before India's demand to halt cross-border terrorism, if he curbs the jihadis surreptitiously for a few weeks and gets it back to the conference table, he can claim a tactical victory over India and reinforce his position.

The explanation for his "stubbornness" that I brought back from a four-day visit to Islamabad — my second to Pakistan in nine years — is more complex. Gen. Musharraf's freedom of action is extremely limited, but not for the above reasons. It is constrained by nothing less than the way Pakistan's social and political identity has

crystallised during the past three decades. The process imposes its own undeniable logic on what the government can and cannot do. Anyone who does not respect that logic will invite the wrath of not just the army but of the entire country for, his (or her) actions will be seen as a direct threat to the national identity. Until we understand this, not just Gen. Musharraf's but any future Pakistani leader's actions will remain an enigma.

One of the beliefs Indians cherish is that

Gen. Musharraf's freedom of action is constrained by the way Pakistan's social and political identity has crystallised during the past three decades.

Pakistan's irrational fixation on Kashmir is a reflection of its own crisis of identity. We are not going to get very far in understanding Pakistan and its leaders if we do not shed it. The identity that Pakistan has all but completed forging is one that neither "looks east" i.e. towards India's multiethnic pluralism, nor "looks west" towards oil-rich Arabia's austere Islam. On the contrary, it has its own unique quality, one that has been jelling spontaneously ever since its people got over the secession of Bangladesh. This identity has five markers: dress, language, religion, education and demoralisation of India.

The choice of dress is highly personal. But that is precisely why it can be a powerful indicator of the emergence of a collective identity. From Peshawar to Lahore, to Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir, nearly every male, of almost any age, was wearing the ubiquitous shalwar and kameez. When I remarked on this to a Sindhi journalist, he said it was the same in Karachi. The shalwar and kameez even spread to rural areas. Farmers, who used to wear hitched-up dhotis (the universal dress of the working peasant in South Asia) while at work on the fields, now switched to the shalwar-kameez.

The shalwar-kameez has supplanted all

indigenous styles to which the country is heir: the kurta-pyjama, the sherwani, the angarkha and churidar of Lucknow, the pleated churidars of Rajasthan and their countless variants. Many of these are still worn at dinner parties or during marriages, but during the day and out on the streets the ubiquity of a single style is suffocating. Had this simply been a refusal to give up one's traditional dress, it would have been admirable. But the shalwar-kameez that Pakistan has adopted is of the

mullahs have street power but can never capture political power because Pakistanis will listen to them but do not want to be governed by them. Despite this in the past two decades there has been a steady convergence of national identity with not just Islam but Sunni Islam. This is apparent not only in the recent strengthening of the Islamic tenets of the state but in the growing pressure to declare various Muslim sects non-Muslims. Nor is this a post-Afghanistan phenomenon for, the first community to be expelled from Islam was the Ahmediya. Today there is growing pressure to do this to Shias as well.

What is happening in Pakistan today is a repeat of the relentless narrowing down of the definition of Sikhism which occurred a hundred years ago, as the community transformed itself from simply a branch of Hindus into a separate "people" (Qaum).

Over time, the fusion of religion with political identity is likely to strengthen because Pakistan has not spent much on modern education. Primary education has remained almost entirely in private hands. A small number of children go to expensive private schools. A substantial number join a skeleton government school system. The gap is being filled by madrasas of the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan and by thousands of Deeni-madaris attached to them. They teach nothing but the tenets of Islam as interpreted by their teachers.

The last element in the new identity is demoralisation of India. Having carved their country out of historic India because they emphatically did not wish to live under Hindu domination, the Pakistanis, it was only natural, would define their new identity in sharp contrast to what they left behind. But the true demoralisation of India began with the secession of Bangladesh. All Pakistanis are absolutely convinced that India, having failed to stop Partition, seized the first opportunity that arose to destroy the ideological base of their country. That is what has left them floundering till today.

The threat that hangs over S. Asia — II

By Prem Shankar Jha

THE DEMONISATION of India gained enormous momentum with the conflict in Kashmir. Every Pakistani believes without a moment's doubt the statistics of terror and oppression the government regularly publishes. As of a few days ago these were: killed 71,204; wounded 29,561; school children burnt alive 553; others burnt alive 674; raped (between ages 7 and 70) 7,613; sexually incapacitated through torture 6,726; sexually assaulted Muslim women 16,607 and so on. Few stop to ask themselves why, if India has unleashed terror on such an unprecedented scale, no more than 20,000 refugees have fled "Indian-held Kashmir" into "Azad Kashmir" in the past 10 years. In fact, the number in their refugee camps is only 15,852. Against this there were more than 60,000 Muslim Kashmiris in Jammu camps in 1994, they having fled the terror of militants in the Valley.

But disinformation has done its job. After 10 years of relentless exposure to such statistics, supplemented by daily footage from Kashmir broadcast by Pakistan TV, India has become the personification of evil — zullum — and the mere thought of fellow Muslims is sufficient to send many a young and impressionable Pakistani into a killing rage. No government in that country can now suddenly turn off the Kashmir tap because the knob is no longer in its hands.

Dress, language, education, religion and an enemy to hate — all ingredients of national identity are not just present but are blended into a mutually-reinforcing whole. That is what makes Pakistan's predicament truly difficult. For the identity that has emerged from the fusion is one which relentlessly and unalterably rejects westernisation and modernisation. As a result, the distance between what Pakistan is becoming and what it will need to be if it is to survive, let alone prosper, in the globalised, westernised world of the 21st century is growing steadily. A comparison with India will help to explain this.

In 1947 both countries enjoyed an equal variety and richness of dress. In both, time imposed a drab uniformity, especially in urban areas. But the resemblance ends there. In India people changed from their traditional to western clothes. It was the

shirt and trousers which became the badge of modern working India. However depressing aesthetically, it reflects an intrinsic openness to western ideas in Indian society. To the average Indian western dress is "modern." Wearing it lends one status in the village or the mohalla. In Pakistan, by contrast, the shirt and trousers are in retreat before the shalwar-kameez. Habitual wearers of western clothes can easily be identified. They belong in corporate offices, five star hotels and newspaper offices. They are likely to be managers, bureaucrats, doctors and lawyers and are seen far more in cosmopolitan Karachi than in traditional Lahore or Islamabad.

The emergence of the rejectionist identity is the greatest single source of anxiety to modern Pakistanis. For, it is... making the country progressively more vulnerable to sudden Talibanisation.

But these are islands in the sea of shalwar-kameez. Pakistan is thus going in a direction different from every other Asian country to the east of it.

Exactly the same contrast is to be found in language. In India too the ethnic languages are in gradual retreat. But the space left vacant is being occupied by English and not by Hindi. Even shopkeepers on holiday in Shimla or Kashmir talk to their children in loud voices in English to proclaim that they have "arrived." Road signs in English are the norm, at least on all national highways, and the moment an Indian shopkeeper or workshop owner begins to cater for people slightly better off than the local clientele, he not only puts up a signboard in English but chooses a cosmopolitan sounding "English" name for his enterprise, often made up of nothing more than the initials of the promoter or owner.

In India too the state schooling system has proved a hopeless failure. But in the past two decades, thousands of private schools have opened to fill the gap. These advertise themselves as "higher English" and "public" schools even when all they consist of are a couple of rooms and a lone teacher. The curriculum is strictly modern and they all aspire to recognition by the State boards of secondary education. All of

them teach English. In fact this is their main selling point as they try to wean students away from the defunct government schools. It is out of such humble institutions that the country is generating tens of thousands of young software programmers who have become the envy of other developing countries.

One does not need to dwell long on the role of religion in the formation of an Indian national identity. India had its Hinduism wave but, in contrast to Pakistan, religion simply does not define an Indian. Even the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has appealed for NGO status at the United Nations, claiming that it is completely

non-sectarian. Lastly, despite Pakistan's incessant intervention to stoke secession first in Punjab and then in Kashmir, Indians have not demonised Pakistan. The difference was starkly visible when the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, took a bus to Lahore. Indians greeted his initiative with euphoria; Pakistanis with wainess tinged with displeasure. If Indians demonise anything in Pakistan it is the dreaded Inter-Services Intelligence. But demonising an institution is very different from demonising an entire country.

The contrast between India and Pakistan is thus precisely the contrast that develops between siblings in a family. Born to the same roots, and in this case at the same time, siblings tend to develop non-competing identities. This happens spontaneously and unconsciously but its purpose is entirely rational: to prevent the disruption of the family. While India has embraced the West and has done its best to translate its ideals of pluralism, secularism and democracy into practice, Pakistan has embraced an identity which is taking it further and further away from all of these.

The emergence of this "rejectionist" identity is the greatest single source of anxiety to modern Pakistanis. For it is not only making the adaptation of the country

to the future more and more difficult but making it progressively more vulnerable to sudden Talibanisation. The danger arises from the hollowness that lies at the core of any identity based on rejection alone. One more ingredient is needed to make it complete, and that is a positive ideology. Once the Hegelian vision of progress through science and reason has been rejected, the only candidate anywhere in sight is Islamic fundamentalism.

The modern Pakistani establishment is desperate to avert this. To do this it needs to find that one element in the process of identity formation described above that it can reverse, in order to make the process benign. And every thinker in that country knows that is to end the Kashmir dispute. If only that is somehow done, the fuel rods which are feeding the rejectionist identity will get withdrawn. Sibling differentiation will slow down and go back to fulfilling its original purpose of minimising competition between the two countries. This is what every Pakistani leader from Ms. Benazir Bhutto to Gen. Pervez Musharraf has been trying to say over the past six years. It explains why in his blunt way Gen. Musharraf keeps insisting that there is no dispute other than Kashmir.

But for Pakistan the option of simply disengaging from Kashmir no longer exists. Any attempt to do so precipitately will turn the process of identity formation described above against the modern state overnight, and bring on Talibanisation in a rush.

During his meeting with Indian journalists in Islamabad, Gen. Musharraf pointed, however, to another way forward. Three times he repeated, "Any solution that is acceptable to the people of Kashmir will be acceptable to us." He qualified this with the remark that Pakistan would still need to be part of the final solution. But he has indicated clearly where he thinks he can breach the wall of rejectionism that Pakistan is immuring itself within. He has thus asked the people of Kashmir and the people and government of India for help. For the sake of avoiding Amageddon in the subcontinent, I hope that both will respond.

(Concluded)

THE HINDU
20 JUN 2002

Sri Lanka faces Tamil wrath on Constitution

AA-4
24/7

By RAHUL SHARMA

Colombo, July 23: President Chandrika Kumaratunga's ambitious draft Constitution, touted as the ultimate panacea to Sri Lanka's long ethnic war, seems doomed unless she can quickly pull together divergent public opinion.

The Tamils call the draft a denial of their political aspirations and the majority Sinhalese Buddhists say it's a sell out to minorities.

The constitutional reforms aim to devolve powers to the island's regions, including one administered by Tamils, in an effort to wean the minority away from Tamil Tiger rebels battling for a separate homeland in the north and east since 1983.

In the past month Ms Kumaratunga's government has partially succeeded in getting the main Opposition United National Party to agree to many of the draft's ticklish issues.

But there are still a few crucial pieces missing before the political jigsaw can be implemented.

First, there are the hardline Sinhala nationalist groups and the Buddhist monks who wield considerable influence in Sri Lanka, 70 per cent of whose people follow Buddhism.

With general elections due after August, the government cannot afford to have disgruntled monks on its hands. The monks say the new Constitution, which aims to turn Sri Lanka into a federal state, does not give a prime place to Buddhism.

And the government's efforts to convince them have yielded no results. (Reuters)

Statute talks heading for a deadlock

Colombo, July 23: Discussions on proposed constitutional reforms aimed at ending the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka are heading for a crisis amid protests from Buddhist monks and minority Tamils and the withdrawal of the leader of the Opposition, political sources said on Sunday.

Buddhist clergy informed the government of their opposition to the proposed reforms, which the ruling People's Alliance was planning to introduce in the Parliament on August 8.

The Buddhist monks' protest came less than 24 hours after two main Tamil parties reiterated that they could not accept the proposed reforms as they did not meet the needs of the minority Tamils.

The government is making a desperate attempt to push through the constitutional reforms before the parliamentary term ends late next month.

Ongoing talks between the ruling PA and the main Opposition United National Party suffered their biggest blow on Friday when the Opposition leader, Ranil Wickramasinghe, walked out.

Mr Wickramasinghe withdrew on the grounds that the state media were making an attempt to link him with the Tamil rebels. (DPA)

THE ASIAN AGE

24 JUL 2000

Sri Lanka editors want censorship removed

By CHRISTINE JAYASINGHE

Colombo, July 25: Sri Lankan editors have called for the removal of censorship ahead of the parliamentary election, campaigning for which is expected to get increasingly acrimonious.

At a meeting with editors, government censor Ariya Rubasinghe was bombarded with requests for the curbs on local media to be lifted, saying it was not in the national interest, the *Island* newspaper said on Tuesday.

The meeting between Mr Rubasinghe and the editors was called following a Supreme Court order on a petition filed by 10 newspaper chiefs challenging the censorship.

"The editors told Rubasinghe that with the President (Chandrika Kumaratunga) herself getting into the election campaign, censorship would be against the public interest," the *Island* reported.

Mr Rubasinghe replied that he thought censorship would be lifted when the election campaign gets officially under way, although he did not say when that would be. Elections to the 225-seat legislature are due to be held by early November.

The censorship came into force on July 1 and puts the burden of deciding what can be printed or broadcast on the editors themselves.

Despite being given a list of prohibited subjects, editors have complained that it is difficult for them to decide what should be kept out

of the daily newspapers and news bulletins.

Among the taboos on reportage are military operations, the conduct of security personnel, purchase of arms and anything that would adversely affect troop morale.

In a trenchant editorial, the *Island* pointed out that "terms such as national security and morale of the troops could be used to cover up shady deals in armaments and the like. The military conflict cannot be separated from the country's politics or economic affairs."

The *Island* also decried what it called the "apartheid aspect of this censorship where the foreign press is exempted."

Saying that censoring the local media was advantageous to the government, the editorial said with communications as advanced as it is today, "it reduced the censorship to the point of absurdity where national security is concerned."

The controversial muzzling of both the foreign and local media was first introduced in early May following several defeats suffered by troops at the hands of Tamil Tiger separatists in the north. However, the restraint was eased a few weeks later for the foreign media. In early June, the Supreme Court quashed the censor's order of sealing two newspapers for six months for having violated the censorship. The ruling effectively nullified the censorship.

(*India Abroad News Service*)

New clashes break out in Jaffna

Colombo, July 25: Sri Lanka troops and Tamil Tiger rebels exchanged artillery and mortar bomb fire in the northern Jaffna peninsula after launching attacks on each other's positions, a government statement said on Tuesday.

The statement said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels launched a mortar bomb attack on a forward defence line of the Army in the Sarasalai area of the peninsula late on Monday and troops retaliated with artillery fire.

"One soldier was killed and two others received minor injuries due to the terrorist mortar fire," the statement said.

It said troops mounted an attack on Sunday using rocket-propelled grenades and mortar bombs on LTTE lines in the Colombuthurai area, killing at least three rebels. Colombuthurai is to the east of Jaffna city, which lies some 400 km north of the capital Colombo. The Jaffna peninsula was the scene of fierce fighting until May as the LTTE tried to recapture their former stronghold. But fighting has eased since then and only sporadic clashes and exchanges of artillery and mortar bombs have been reported. (*Reuters*)

WAR IN LANKA

THE NEWS

26 JUL 2000

UNP distancing itself from reforms?

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 26. After reaching an agreement with the Sri Lankan Government on many of the key provisions in the proposed new Constitution, the Opposition United National Party (UNP) is now seeking to distance itself from the document.

The party spokesman, Dr. Karunasena Koditawakku, was today quoted by local media as saying that the party would not support the proposed Constitution in Parliament if the Government tried to rush it through.

The UNP support is vital for the mandatory two-thirds votes required to pass constitutional amendments in Parliament.

Fireworks are expected at a crucial meeting of the UNP working committee and parliamentary group scheduled tomorrow to discuss support for the new Constitution.

The UNP members are angry that the Government did not concede the party's demand for setting up an independent election commission before the next general election and instead was trying to push electoral reforms to change the present proportional representation system.

The party is also expected to reject support for a package that includes the continuation of the Executive Presidency. The modifications to the draft suggested by Tamil parties will also be discussed at tomorrow's meeting.

But besides all this, the UNP is also concerned about the rising voice of Sinhala nationalism against the package. Sri Lanka's two most important Buddhist priests, the heads of the Malwaite and Asgiriya chapters of the Siam Nikaya, have reportedly asked parliamentarians to vote against the proposed changes to the Constitution.

Dr. Koditawakku is reported to

have told a news conference that the Government and Opposition acting on their own could not adopt a new Constitution that did not enjoy wider approval.

"The other sections of the country should also agree to the Constitution. Now, even the Tamil parties have rejected the proposals. The Maha Sangha (Buddhist clergy) has rejected it," Dr. Koditawakku was quoted as saying by the daily newspaper *The Island*.

He said the process needed more time and could not be hurried through Parliament as the Government was trying to do.

Another UNP parliamentarian, Mr. John Amaratinga, was quoted by the newspaper as saying the country would head towards destruction if the Government rushed through with the reforms.

It is not yet clear if a meeting scheduled for tomorrow between the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the UNP will be held, with the Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, abroad.

THE HINDU

27 JUL 2000

Why Sri Lanka is not an Asian tiger

Amartha Sen has long gushed over Sri Lanka's achievements in attaining near-universal literacy and gender equality, reducing death and fertility rates dramatically, and reducing poverty by constructing deep social safety nets. Its socialist policies till 1977 made rapid growth impossible. But since 1977 Sri Lanka has taken the path of economic liberalisation, and today is the most open economy in South Asia. Why, then, has it failed to become an Asian tiger?

In the 1960s, Sri Lanka was in the same league as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. It has kept up in social indicators, but its per capita income today is just \$820, less than one-third of Malaysia's and one-thirtieth of Singapore's. It is far richer than India (\$440) but it always had a head start in per capita income even at Independence, a head start in liberalising, and low population growth. So why does GDP growth average less than 5 per cent annually?

The most obvious explanation is the civil war with the Tamil Tigers. But that affects only one-tenth of the population. Colombo is as little affected by militancy in Jaffna as New Delhi is by militancy in Kashmir. Indonesia suffered ethnic disruptions in Aceh, Timor, the Moluccas and Irian Jaya for decades. Yet it was able to grow at 8-10 per cent annually.

Many experts say the civil war has inhibited savings and foreign investment in Sri Lanka, thus reducing growth. But the latest World Bank report on the country projects national savings at 24.3 per cent of GDP and gross domestic investment at 32.5 per cent, implying a net for-

Sri Lanka proves that a failed society cannot be an economic success, says Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar



ful solution. Yet its immediate effect was to inflame virulent anti-Indian sentiment led by the JVP, a Sinhala Maoist group which had earlier attempted insurrection in 1971. Communists are nominally secular, but the JVP is virulently anti-Indian, and this combines the worst of Maoism and communism.

Many Sri Lankans worry as much about the JVP as the Tamil Tigers. The JVP uprising in 1987-89 was crushed by sheer muscle, iram-pling on human rights. The JVP now claims to have abandoned violence, but few believe it, and politicians in Colombo worry about renewed insurgency in the south sparked by youth unemployment. Maoist groups have withered in most countries after the fall of the Soviet Union and rise of Deng. But in Sri Lanka, the JVP controls all student unions, who have traditionally spearheaded civil strife.

The JVP aims at giving all university students secure government jobs, ignoring minor issues like productivity. To counter it, the government does not allow companies with more than 15 workers to sack any. Which is one good reason for foreign investors to avoid investing in manufacturing.

Youth unemployment is a problem

the world over, but nowhere else does it lead to a Maoist lock on students. The welfare state in Sri Lanka has ensured that people living below the World Bank's poverty line of one dollar consumption per day per head is only 6 per cent, against India's 44 per cent. Yet instead of creating a satisfied society it has created social dependence on government largesse as the solution to all problems, with no stress at all on productivity.

Fear of youth unemployment leads all governments to expand government jobs as a solution to unemployment and the JVP. So liberalisation remains a facade after two decades of supposed reform. Sri Lanka now has the biggest share of government employees in the world relative to population. It has 57 employees per thousand population, as against 45 in Malaysia, 37 in Singapore, 31 in Thailand and 21 in Indonesia. The civil war has created lakhs of jobs in defence. Some eminent Sri Lankan thinkers believe that the civil war represents a social and economic equilibrium. It provides enough jobs to absorb the educated unemployed; it redistributes income to jawans; it provides lots of money through corruption to the political and army brass; and it yields 4.5 per cent GDP growth, which is not tiggerish but yet acceptable in a country with little population growth.

The lesson for India is that you can be caught in a low-growth equilibrium through social failure even if you have high human development and economic openness. India needs a social contract that delivers. That is what makes an Asian tiger, not MNCs.

dominated business. This led to racial riots in Malaysia in the 1960s. Yet all three countries succeeded in forging a social contract that gave enough space to every community and yielded social harmony. This made tigerish economic growth possible.

Sri Lanka failed to forge a similar social contract. Despite its pretensions to liberal democracy, the Sinhala majority was unable to resolve tension with the Tamils. When a Sinhala leader like Solomon Bandaranaike attempted to sign a pact with Tamil leaders, he was assassinated. The Buddhist clergy abandoned Buddha's Middle Path for sectarian fanaticism. Eventually the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 made civil war inevitable.

Indira Gandhi actively aided the Tamil Tigers. But Rajiv Gandhi's IPKF intervention aimed at a peace-

Lanka formally asks Britain to ban LTTE

Colombo, July 28

SRI LANKA has formally asked Britain to ban the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), whose international headquarters are in London, the country's Foreign Ministry said today.

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar met Peter Hain, British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, yesterday and made a formal request to proscribe the LTTE under the new terrorism Bill of the United Kingdom, a Ministry statement said.

"The State Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs agreed to consider all matters pertaining to the request made by Foreign Minister Kadirgamar and to maintain a continuous dialogue with the Sri Lankan authorities," the statement said.

Sri Lanka has long urged the British Government to curtail the

LTTE's activities in that country, but it is the first time a formal diplomatic request has been made to ban it.

The Foreign Ministry statement said that the New Terrorism Law had put in place a comprehensive legal framework in the United Kingdom to effectively deal with activities of foreign terrorist groups on British soil.

The LTTE have been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983. More than 60,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

The LTTE was banned in India after it was accused of using a suicide bomber to assassinate former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during an election rally in 1991.

The United States in 1997 included the LTTE on its list of foreign terrorist organisations, making it difficult for the group to raise money there and for its members to get visas. (Reuters)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JUL 2000