

'Prabhakaran keen on settlement'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, NOV. 2. The Norwegian special envoy, Mr Erik Solheim, who met Mr Velupillai Prabhakaran on Wednesday, expressed confidence that the LTTE leader was 'interested' in and 'serious' about a negotiated political settlement to the country's ethnic conflict but cautioned that the road ahead would be uncertain and difficult.

At a news conference after his return from the LTTE- controlled mainland in northern Sri Lanka, Mr. Solheim described the meeting as a "positive step in itself" because it was Mr. Prabhakaran's first contact with a foreign delegation in several years.

The meeting was held at Malla- vi in the Vanni, at the initiative of the LTTE leader with the concurrence of the Sri Lankan Government.

"The talks were serious, frank, open and we consider them very useful. We consider Mr. Prabhakaran as serious and dedicated (to a negotiated settlement)," Mr Solheim said, but declined to reveal any of the substance of the discussions.

The Norwegian delegation will



meet the President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, to brief her about the visit. It will inform the Indian Government about the meeting through its envoys in Sri Lanka and Norway, Mr Solheim said.

The envoy, who has been in the forefront of the Norwegian initiative for a dialogue between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, said the next step was up to the two sides but cautioned against expectations of "quick-fix" solutions to a conflict that was deep-rooted.

He said it was impossible to predict when peace talks between the two sides would take place. "It could be in some weeks, it could be in many years," he commented.

A press release from the London headquarters of the LTTE about the talks, the first its leader has had with a third party since the Indian involvement in 1987, said Mr. Prabhakaran had laid down a "de-escalation of the armed conflict and restoration of

normalcy in the Tamil homeland" as the "essential pre-requisites" for peace negotiations with the Sri Lankan government.

"By de-escalation, Mr Prabhakaran meant the cessation of armed hostilities, the removal of military aggression and occupation, the withdrawal of economic embargo and the creation of conditions of normalcy in the Tamil homeland. The LTTE leader insisted that the Sri Lanka Government should take the initiative of relaxing the conditions of war if they wanted genuine peace," it stated.

However, Mr Solheim said that as far as the three- member Norwegian delegation understood the LTTE leader, he had not set any pre-conditions. "He did not set any pre-conditions. But we discussed how the initial phases could come about and what measures could be taken by the different parties to build such a trust that peace talks are possible," the envoy said.

Accompanying the LTTE leader were its political representative, Mr Tamilchelvan, and Mr Sankar, described in the group's press release as a 'senior cadre'

THE HINDU

3 NOV 2000

Norwegian envoy meets Prabhakaran

By Arupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, NOV. 1. The Norwegian Special Envoy to Sri Lanka, Mr. Eric Solheim, today met the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, in the northern Vanni mainland, the separatists' clandestine radio, Voice of Tigers, said. The radio, monitored in Vavuniya in northern Sri Lanka, said Mr. Solheim was accompanied by the Norwegian Ambassador, Mr. Jon Westborg.

It said Mr. Prabhakaran explained to the Norwegian delegates that his struggle was justified because of the "atrocities" against the Tamil people and the attempts at "ethnic cleansing" by the Kumaratunga Government.

The "scope for peace efforts" was also discussed at the meeting and Mr. Solheim expressed "satisfaction" at getting to know the state of affairs in the Vanni firsthand. The LTTE political represen-

tative, Mr. Tamichelvan, was present at the meeting that took place at an undisclosed location.

Mr. Solheim also met representatives from a "citizens' committee" and visited camps for the displaced and other war-affected areas in the Vanni, the radio said.

Norway is trying to facilitate a dialogue between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, said earlier this month that the LTTE had "played the fool" with the Norwegians by faking interest in talks. Hopes of talks with the separatist group were "remote," she said at a press conference a few days before the recent parliamentary elections.

The Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, who visited Norway immediately after the elections, also said that the Norwegian initiative had reached an impasse as the LTTE had not shown any interest in a dialogue.

Contest is proof of internal democracy in party: Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE NOV. 1. The AICC President, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, said here today that the fact that Mr. Jitendra Prasad was contesting against her was a proof of the existence of internal democracy in the organisation.

Her view was later corroborated by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh.

Ms. Sonia Gandhi was talking to presspersons at Bangalore Airport during a stopover in her journey to Lakshadweep where she has convened a two-day conclave of Congress chief ministers and leaders.

Ms. Sonia Gandhi said in reply to a question that she was undeterred by Mr. Prasad's decision to enter the election fray. Though Mr. Prasad had raised issues such as the existence of a coterie around her and neglect of the

party workers, Ms. Sonia Gandhi did not see anything particular in his decision to contest against her.

'No threat'

Earlier, Mr. Digvijay Singh said Mr. Prasad would not pose any threat to Ms. Sonia Gandhi. He had raised non-issues in the election. Mr. Prasad had forgotten the manner in which he became the AICC vice-president when the late Sitaram Kesri was the president. He declined to comment on the incidents at the AICC headquarters on October 29.

Prasada campaign: Page 13

Ms. Sonia Gandhi declined to answer a question on the choice of Mr. Ajit Jogi as the Chief Minister of Chattisgarh. She expressed her satisfaction over the performance of the Congress-ruled States and said that it was better than that of the BJP-ruled States. It was to ensure transparency and inner-party democracy that the Congress had appointed a Central Election Authority and State-level election authorities.

Ms. Sonia Gandhi was received at the airport by the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, the KPCC(U) President, Mr. V.S. Koujalgi, several Ministers, the former Chief Minister, Mr. Veerappa Moily, Mr. Jaffer Sharief, MP and others. She later left for Lakshadweep in a Madhya Pradesh State aircraft ac-

'Racism will only make LTTE stronger'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, NOV. 1. As the central hills of Sri Lanka began to return to normality, the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, warned that the country ran the risk of suffering international isolation once again if there was a "relapse" of Sinhala-Tamil communalism.

In an address to the nation last night over radio and television, Mrs. Kumaratunga appealed for restraint by all ethnic groups, reminding the majority community that Sinhala racism would only make the LTTE stronger.

"Those who spread narrow racist ideals are the very people who become traitors to the Sinhala people of our country. It is Sinhala racism that becomes the greatest strength of the Tamil racism of Prabhakaran. The best foundation for Prabhakaran's terrorism is the thuggery against the Tamil people," she said.

Mrs. Kumaratunga pointed out that the LTTE grew on the support of the international community after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 but her Government changed that. "...it has come to the point that the international community is in the process of rejecting the LTTE. If there is a relapse of Sinhala-Tamil communalism, all our efforts to usher in peace will be in vain."

The President's address came after a massacre of LTTE prisoners at a government facility for their rehabilitation near the hill town of Bandarawela last week, and later rioting in the adjoining Tamil-dominated areas.

UNP leader in custody

The Government has said the incidents were instigated by "certain groups" acting in collusion with the LTTE.



Members of the left-wing Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna protesting on Wednesday against the massacre at the Bindunuwewa rehabilitation camp for LTTE cadres in Central Sri Lanka recently. At least 20 inmates were killed by a mob.— Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

An MP of the United National Party (UNP), Mr. P. Chandrasekharan, who is also the leader of the Up-Country People's Front (UCPF), a trade-union-cum-political party representing tea estate workers, continued in police custody for the third day today.

He was detained for questioning following the riots, which broke out first at a UCPF meeting

held to protest the Bindunuwewa massacre.

Appealing for his early release, his wife told journalists today that the meeting had not been organised with any ulterior motive, but was held only to express sorrow at the killings of 27 prisoners at the camp.

There was no curfew in the area today, but work on the estates continued to be hit as many la-

bourers stayed indoors, some to protest against the detention of Mr. Chandrasekhar and others out of fear.

In her address, Mrs. Kumaratunga said her Government had not forgotten the Tamil community, and reiterated her promise to bring in a political solution to solve the ethnic conflict through a new Constitution.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2000

HD-12
MOVING A NEW 'PEACE' PAWN?
6/11

THE DIPLOMATIC CYNICISM about the occasional moves by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for 'peace' and a 'negotiated settlement' of the basic ethnic-political crisis in Sri Lanka has been high in recent years. Not surprisingly, the larger international community, including India for the obvious reason of a certain geopolitical empathy with Colombo's concerns, may require some clairvoyance of the political kind to decipher the real nature and scope of the latest meeting between the LTTE's chief, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, and Mr. Erik Solheim, an emissary designated by Norway for a patently ambitious external facilitation of a fresh 'peace process' in Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, it is a welcome development that a meeting has indeed taken place, albeit in an area under the palpable control of the LTTE in the northern Vanni sector. While official Colombo has not conveyed any message to Mr. Prabhakaran through the Norwegian diplomat, it is evident that these talks could not have taken place without the Sri Lankan Government's knowledge. There is also nothing in the public domain at this stage to suggest that Sri Lanka is dismissive of the Norwegian interlocutor's confabulations with Mr. Prabhakaran as an exercise in freelance diplomacy. Nor is there any hint that the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, is inclined to give up the option of credible parleys between the Government and the LTTE with suitable safeguards.

Of much political significance is the fact that the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry has now issued a statement which, while being unrelated to the intercession by Norway, lends an additional new context to Mr. Solheim's disclosure of a perceived new 'peace' gambit by Mr. Prabhakaran. It might be that Colombo wants to keep the LTTE guessing on Ms. Kum-

aratunga's likely response to its 'peace' overture. With the LTTE's official status as persona non grata in India and the U.S. remaining unchanged, Colombo's current suggestion to the U.K. that it proscribe the LTTE can lend itself to an interpretation that the Sri Lankan Government may not wish to place all its diplomatic eggs in Norway's basket for an evaluation by the separatist-guerilla outfit. S. Lanka

The latest cameo of a 'peace' dialogue between Mr. Solheim and Mr. Prabhakaran has raised more questions than proposals for a settlement. If the LTTE, and not Norway, had taken the initiative for this new turn of events, an inexorable query is whether the group is once again biding for a 'peace' breather. But inherent in the LTTE's media-spin on the Vanni summit of sorts with a peace-broker is Mr. Prabhakaran's game plan of trying to snuff out or soften Colombo's military hold over the Tamil 'homeland' through 'diplomacy' if that is attainable. If, however, Norway had taken the lead for this foray into 'peace', an obvious poser is whether Oslo, somewhat versed in the intricacies of the West Asian standoff between two ancient adversaries, has yet to master all the nuances of the Sri Lankan crisis. The question flows from the discrepancy between Mr. Solheim's reported perception that the fresh 'peace' move by the LTTE is unconditional in scope and the organisation's differential view. It is generally difficult to divorce actual diplomacy from its public facet in the Sri Lankan setting, given the intensity of varied popular emotions on all sides of the spectrum on the prime issue of a fair deal to the minority Tamil community. This is an aspect that Norway may usefully bear in mind as it seeks to measure its steps and keep India informed, although the latter surely does not command a veto over Sri Lanka's affairs.

THE HINDU

6 NOV 2000

Hopes of early

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, Nov. 3. Hopes of early peace talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE arose following the landmark Solheim-Prabhakaran meeting earlier this week, but analysts said the ball was now in the court of the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"The onus is now on the Sri Lankan Government to demonstrate that it is prepared to go the extra mile for peace," said a diplomat based here.

So far, the Government reaction has been to distance itself from the meeting. In a statement published in the state-run *Daily News* today, the Government said the meeting was not at its request, nor had it sent any message to the LTTE through the Norwegians.

A Foreign Ministry communiqué said Sri Lanka had once again pressed the U.K. to proscribe the LTTE under its new anti-terrorism legislation.

The Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, met his U.K. counterpart, Mr. Peter Hain, and the Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, in London earlier this week and urged "that the LTTE be proscribed and its front organisations be placed under close scrutiny".

Fastidious about keeping the Indian Government informed at every step, the three-member Norwegian delegation that visited the Vanni met the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr. Gopal Krishna Gandhi, last night to apprise him of the meeting.

Norway's special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, was the first outsider to meet the LTTE leader in several years. He told journalists that Mr. Prabhakaran was "sincere" about finding a negotiated settlement, and had laid no pre-conditions for such negotiations.

But following the failure of peace talks with the LTTE in April 1995, the Sri Lankan Government has been extremely sceptical of any overtures from the separatist group.

But this time, the Government may find it tough to spurn the hand that the LTTE leader has held out through the Norwegians, especially as Norway is the Government's own chosen facilitator.

"The international community is watching the Sri Lankan Government and expects that it will act with responsibility," said the diplomat, who declined to be identified.

The National Peace Council, which advocates talks with the

peace talks in Sri Lanka

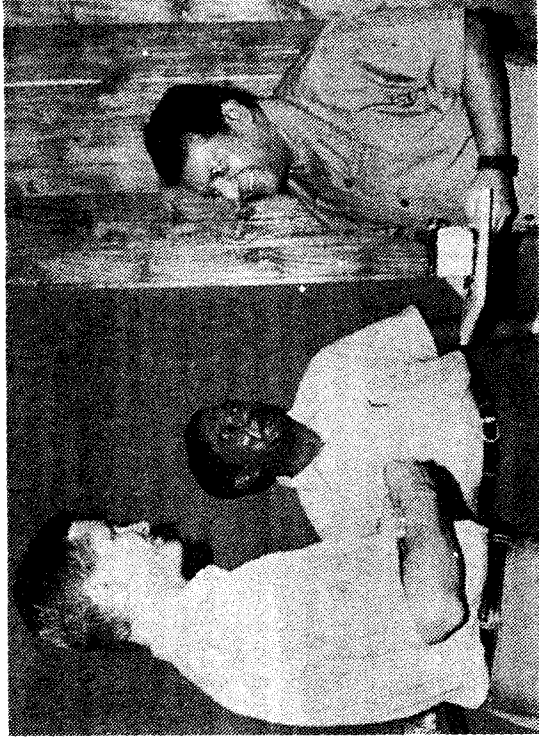
any more offensives. Another reason could be the real deterioration in the living conditions in the Vanni. The LTTE may be apprehensive that if it got any worse, it could lead to a rapid erosion of its popularity among the Tamil people and that talking with the Government might arrest further deterioration.

In all the anticipation generated by the meeting, the sour note is the apparent discrepancy between the Norwegian insistence that the LTTE leader posed no pre-conditions for talks, and a statement from the group's London headquarters laying down the "necessary pre-requisite" for dialogue.

The LTTE statement clearly mentioned the conditions, namely the cessation of armed hostilities, the removal of military "aggression and occupation", the withdrawal of the economic embargo and the creation of "conditions of normality" in the Northeast.

PTI reports:

The Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, tonight apprised Mrs. Kumaratunga and the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. G.K. Gandhi, of his talks with the LTTE chief.



The Norwegian emissary, Mr. Erik Solheim (left), with the Tamil rebel leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran (right), in the northern Vanni district on October 31. — Reuters

LTTE, said in a statement today that the meeting between the Norwegian envoy and Mr. Prabhakaran had "revived hopes for a negotiated peace".

The secretary-general of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Mr. R. Sampanthan, welcomed the meeting as a "positive development" to which the Government, having given its consent to a point where it cannot launch

to it, "cannot and will not respond negatively". The United National Party (UNP) deputy leader, Mr. Karu Jayasuriya, has said his party would support any moves for peace.

Analysts see the LTTE's readiness for peace talks as a sign that it may now be militarily weakened

Doors open if LTTE is sincere: Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, Nov. 9. The Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, today said the Government would not be "fooled" again by the LTTE, and was waiting to ascertain the conditions laid down by it before responding to its recent offer of peace talks made through the Norwegian Government.

Till then, it would continue to deal militarily with terrorism and strive for a political solution for Tamil aspirations.

An "interim administrative council" would be established in the north-east as an "urgent measure" to revitalise the civil administration in the region, she announced.

Spelling out the Government's response to the Solheim-Prabhakaran meeting in her address to the 11th Parliament this morning, Mrs. Kumaratunga said the Norwegian Government had informed her that there were certain conditions to be met for discussions to take place.

"However, there is no decision yet on what these conditions are...once the Government of Nor-

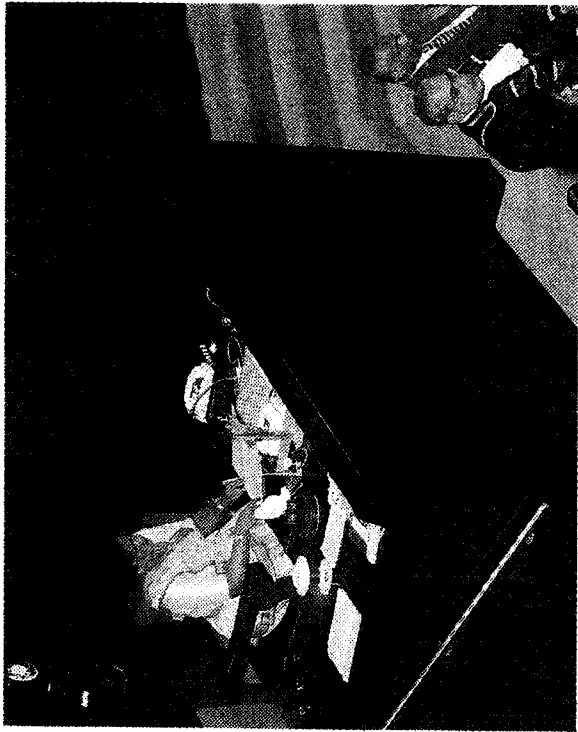
way informs us what these conditions are, we expect to come to a final decision having discussed the matter with all parties concerned," she said, during a 75-minute speech that also dealt with other issues, including the economy.

At the end of the proceedings, Mrs. Kumaratunga hugged her long-estranged brother, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, the Speaker of the new House.

Members of the Opposition United National Party (UNP) attended the session wearing black arm bands to protest against the large number of Cabinet and Deputy Ministers in the new Government.

Outside, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) held a protest demonstration demanding the reduction in the number of Ministers.

Mrs. Kumaratunga reiterated to the MPs that the Government had "not closed the door" on the LTTE. Her only condition for talks with the group, as spelt out today, seemed to be that there had to be an agreement with the LTTE that discussions must be on "clear and definite political issues" and not on matters such as the lifting



The Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and her brother, the Speaker, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, at the ceremonial opening of the second Parliament on Thursday. — Photo: Srijantha Walpola

of embargoes on rebel-held areas, prior to taking any decisions with which the group had "defied tracked previous negotiations."

Mrs. Kumaratunga also made it clear that her Government would not be rushed into peace talks. "... as they have fooled different gov-

ernments through a period of 15 years," she stated.

Challenging the LTTE to come forward with a democratic alternative to power-sharing within a united Sri Lanka, Mrs. Kumaratunga avoided repeating her previous election assertions that she would move quickly to implement the new Constitution Bill, but at the same time hinted it was not a closed chapter.

Instead, she restricted herself to pointing out that in a democracy, it was not possible "to expect hundred percent unanimity" on any issue.

"Therefore, it is my view that to wait till the consensus or agreement that all sections is obtained is not the correct path to proceed on," she said, but expressed openness to discussions on the Bill.

Mrs. Kumaratunga's announcement of an interim council for the north-east would have gladdened the hearts of the government coalition partner, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), which hopes to be placed in charge of the body.

Her speech did not spell out any details about the council, or how soon it would be set up.

Unrest among Indian Tamils could benefit LTTE

40-1A
6/11
By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, NOV. 5. The recent riots in the central hills of Sri Lanka have focussed attention on an aspect of the island's ethnic conflict that is fast developing, but remains the most ignored.

The clashes were apparently in retaliation to the Bindunuwewa open prison massacre in which 27 Tamil detainees were killed. Purely technically, there should have been no reaction to the massacre from the Tamils of central Sri Lanka. The prisoners at the camp were either LTTE cadres who had surrendered to the security forces, or those who had been picked up on suspicion of helping the LTTE.

The central hills are inhabited by Indian Tamils, a distinct ethnic category from the Tamils of north-east Sri Lanka. The two groups are linked by little other than language, and definitely not by the same cause. While the north-east Tamils see themselves as a separate nation, Indian Tamils, or up-country Tamils, merely want to be accepted as Sri Lankans.

In this light, the riots seemed like an attempt by certain "elements" to drag the Indian Tamils into the ethnic conflict in which it has no apparent interest.

The Government's response was to detain the leader of the Up-Country People's Front (UCPF), Mr. P. Chandrasekharan, who is also a parliamentarian of the United National Party, for his suspected role in instigating the riots. Assuming for a moment that it was really the UCPF leader who instigated the riot, his existence today as a successful leader with a sizeable following among the tea estate workers, powerful enough to paralyse the region for three whole days, points to a deeper malaise within the Indian Tamil community that both its traditional leadership and successive Governments have failed to address. It will certainly not go away by the continued detention of Mr. Chandrasekhar. In fact, that might only aggravate it.

Mr. Chandrasekhar represents the newer, more radical generations of tea estate workers, who believe near-militant political aggression is the only way the rest of Sri Lanka will learn

to respect them. This section of Indian Tamils has grown up seething with resentment at the third-rate treatment the community has received from the Sri Lankan State since independence. Despite being the backbone of the island's economy, the Indian Tamils continue to remain the most deprived community in Sri Lanka.

Thousands of them are denied the rights and privileges of Sri Lankan citizens, wages in the tea estate sector are among the lowest anywhere in the country, housing is pitiful, health care and education are sub-standard. Sri Lanka has the highest social indicators for South Asia, but Indian Tamils have the poorest social indicators within Sri Lanka.

Younger generations desperate to escape the tea estates discover their qualifications cannot get them jobs outside the plantations. To make matters worse, when they venture out of the estates, they are harassed by the security forces who have not learnt to make

NEWS ANALYSIS

the subtle distinction between the Tamils of the north-east and the Tamils of the estates. In fact, one of the victims of the Bindunuwewa camp was a youngster from Nuwara Eliya, who was arrested for not carrying his ID card. It was after his funeral that riots erupted in the region.

Successive Governments have glossed over the frustrations of this section of Sri Lanka's population, content instead to cut political deals with its leaders for the limited purpose of elections. In turn, the leaders, mainly trade union bosses, perhaps apprehensive that the social and economic advancement of the tea estate workers might eventually lead to a depletion of their flock, have been securing for the community far less than what their political clout should entitle them to.

The growing frustrations of the Indian Tamils hold enormous significance for the LTTE, which has long eyed the younger generations

of this community as potential recruits to militancy. Not only would that enable it to spread its tentacles into the region, unrest in the hills would also disrupt the Sri Lankan economy, reducing the Government's capacity for war.

As long as the authoritarian and charismatic Sauvmiyamoorthy Thondaman, the leader of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, the oldest trade union-cum-political party, was alive, he managed to keep the discontent on the tea estates under control. But he never had a vision for the Indian Tamils other than as a captive work force on the tea estates. It was this myopia that gave rise to Mr. Chandrasekhar, who broke away from the CWC in the late 80s and quickly established himself among those who saw him as a leader who could finally instill self-respect and confidence in the estate youth.

The death of Thondaman in October 1999 released further fissiparous tendencies in the CWC. In the recent parliament elections, five of the seven MPs from Nuwara Eliya were Indian Tamils, but three of them were elected on the PA ticket, and two on the UNP ticket. Indian Tamils did not make it in any other district.

It was exactly a year after Thondaman's death almost to the day that the riots erupted, the most serious incidents of communal violence in the tea estate in a long while, showing up the inadequacy of his grandson and political heir, Mr. Arumugam Thondaman.

Not gifted with his grandfather's charisma, the statements by the leader of the largest trade union-cum-political party during the clashes inspired little confidence, and instead made clear that he was using the opportunity to grind a political axe against Mr. Chandrasekhar and the more recent CWC dissidents.

For the Government, the events in the hills should be an eye-opener that continued neglect of the region could turn it into a powder keg that will ignite at the smallest spark. That can only be to the benefit of the LTTE, which was awaiting an opportunity to make common cause with the estate Tamils of Sri Lanka.

THE HINDU

6 NOV 2000

Peace talks: Lanka seeks details from Norway

AGENCE FRANCE PRESS
COLOMBO, NOV. 12

Sri Lanka is seeking clarification from Norway over conflicting claims that separatist Tamil rebels were unconditionally willing to start peace talks, state media reported today. The government-run Sunday Observer said President Chandrika Kumaratunga's administration wanted further details from Oslo before working out the ground rules for negotiations with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"Further talks will be held with Norway to clarify some issues before the modalities for peace talks are worked out," the Observer quoted agricultural minister D. M. Jayaratne as saying. He said that several cabinet ministers had welcomed the idea of direct talks be-

tween Kumaratunga and LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, as it could pave way for peace.

The minister said the government was also planning to press ahead with a constitutional reform plan aimed at politically ending the conflict. The latest remarks came amid conflicting reports that the Tamil rebels were insisting on a ceasefire before opening dialogue with the government.

On November 1, Norway's peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Eric Solheim, had a rare meeting with Prabhakaran and a day later raised peace hopes when he announced that the LTTE were serious about opening negotiations without preconditions. Colombo, however, maintains that the Tigers had imposed conditions and the administration was in the process of trying to clarify this with Solheim.

Norway's Solheim was cautious not to offer a time table for bringing the warring sides to talks. "It could be in weeks, or it could be in years," Solheim told reporters here 10 days ago. "Nobody can expect a quick fix or an immediate solution." "We believe that the LTTE are serious and interested in solving the problem through negotiations, but we know that it is going to be difficult."

Contrary to a statement issued by the Tamil Tigers setting a "necessary pre-requisite" to open dialogue, Solheim insisted that Prabhakaran had not placed any preconditions. "He did not set any preconditions," Solheim said. "But we discussed a variety of possibilities to initiate a peace process. He did not issue preconditions."

The LTTE in a statement issued from London said that de-

escalation was a necessary pre-requisite for talks. "By de-escalation, Prabhakaran meant the cessation of armed hostilities, removal of military aggression and occupation, withdrawal of the economic embargo and creation of conditions of normalcy in the Tamil homeland," the LTTE said.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickrematunge has vowed to militarily crush the Tigers, despite the ongoing peace efforts. He has taken a hawkish stance in resolving the drawn out conflict and dismissed peace talks with Tamil Tigers who are fighting for an independent homeland in the island's northeast. "As far as we are concerned, the LTTE has to be finished," he told reporters here earlier last month.

Sri Lanka's Army Chief, Lionel Balagalle, has said that any future talks should be held without a ceasefire until a full agreement is signed. "If they agree for talks, we should not stop fighting until they come forward to reach an agreement," he told members of the Foreign Correspondents' Association on Saturday.

He said proposed peace talks with LTTE under Norwegian facilitation could begin without cessation of hostilities. Chances of peace talks between the government and the rebels brightened after Solheim's meeting with Prabhakaran in the rebel-held North. Solheim later said that Prabhakaran agreed to unconditional peace talks.

Balagalle said Prabhakaran agreed to peace talks in the past whenever he was weak and later used the negotiations to recover from losses.

INDIAN EXPRESS

13 NOV 2000

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2000

FOR PEACE AND POWER-SHARING

THE POLITICAL NUANCES of the latest intercession by Norway as the facilitator of a dialogue between official Colombo and the separatist-militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been spelt out by Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, President of the island-republic, in her address to the new Parliament. Contrary to earlier reports on the pronouncements by the Norwegian emissary, Mr. Erik Solheim, it appears that the LTTE has laid down conditions for parleys with the Government in the present circumstances. However, there is no immediate sign of any forward movement from ground-zero, with the President taking the line that "once the Government of Norway, through their facilitation, informs us (the Sri Lankan authorities) what these conditions are, we expect to come to the final decision" about the feasibility or otherwise of a dialogue with the LTTE. The presidential rider is that "military action" against "terrorism" would, in the meantime, be pursued with undiminished vigour. Consistent with this policy, she will consider it her "duty not to close any doors" on the LTTE with a view to enabling it to come up with a "positive response" to the proposal of a "democratic alternative" that she outlined in her constitutional reforms some time ago. This "alternative" is a formula that the Sinhala majority and the Tamils as the main minority share power "within a single united country".

It is not without significance that Ms. Kumaratunga is willing to evaluate the LTTE's conditions for renewed talks with it, should these ifs and buts be conveyed through Norway. There is no indication in her statement whether the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, has indeed expressed a wish to elevate the 'peace process' to the level of direct

talks with the President herself in a decisive round. However, it is clear that she has little faith in talks with the LTTE evidently because she perceives its move as a ploy to strengthen its position on the ground.

Irrespective of the blame-game regarding the responsibility for the plight of Sri Lanka's Tamils, the success of the Government's new measure to have a ministry to tone up the quality of life in the Tamil areas will depend on the political drive and imagination of Mr. Douglas Devananda, who has been entrusted with this ministry for having joined the democratic mainstream despite his political origins as a Tamil militant.

The crux of Ms. Kumaratunga's firm signal to the LTTE now is that it should suggest for discussions "definite political issues" about the future of the Tamils within Sri Lanka as an indivisible state. The message is obvious that it is left to the "good offices", or more precisely the diplomatic ingenuity, of Norway to ascertain, if it has not already done so, the LTTE's agenda as also conditions for parleys. While it is premature to visualise whether Norway will turn into a mediator from being a facilitator, the model that Ms. Kumaratunga has in mind is a suitable replication of the "democratic alternative" that is seen by her to have gradually weaned the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), an extremist Sinhala outfit, away from the path of armed insurrection. Now, Norway's status as a player with no direct or indirect vested interest in the stability of Sri Lanka is not in doubt. This certainly enhances Oslo's stature as an interlocutor, but the complexities that need to be sorted out in Sri Lanka require diplomatic transparency and a thorough grasp of the interplay of emotions among the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhala majority.

THE HINDU

13 NOV 2000

PA ally sets deadline for new Constitution

By Nirupama Subramanian

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15/10
COLOMBO, OCT. 14. A crucial ally of Sri Lanka's new Government has threatened to withdraw from the coalition if its 100-day deadline for the implementation of a new Constitution was not met.

The National Unity Alliance (NUA), earlier known as the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, has four independent seats in the current Parliament.

Its leader, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, said at a news conference today that in exchange for the party's support, without which the People's Alliance (PA) could not have formed the Government, he had set the 100-day deadline for the implementation of constitutional reforms proposed by the Government in its first term.

To meet the NUA deadline, the Government would need to seek the support of the Opposition, as it does not by itself have the required two-thirds strength in Parliament to make changes to the Constitution. The PA's attempt to do this two months before the election ended in failure.

Mr. Hakeem said it might be no less difficult for the Government to rope in the Opposition United National Party (UNP) this time, but indicated other avenues were available to the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to bring in the new Constitution.

He foresaw no legal problems in converting the Parliament into a Constituent Assembly in which only a simple majority was required to make constitutional changes.

"We will not hesitate to withdraw support if our

condition is not met," Mr. Hakeem said.

The NUA would use its "leverage" in the new dispensation to change the political culture of the country, and would be a "fiercely independent" member of the coalition Government, he said.

The party had been in talks with the UNP to persuade it to join a national Government.

"But the UNP was desirous of forming a Government of its own. I did not have confidence that the various disparate elements of a UNP coalition could have lasted, so I offered my support to the PA," Mr. Hakeem said.

In return for its support, the NUA has been promised two Cabinet portfolios, and "two or three" junior Ministries. It may also see its numbers increase in Parliament through nominations.

Expressing confidence in Mrs. Kumaratunga's approach to resolving the ethnic issue, Mr. Hakeem hailed the proposed new Constitution as "courageous", but said the hardline utterances of the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, on the Constitution and the LTTE pointed to a "sorry state of affairs" within the PA.

"There needs to be a door open to talks with the LTTE," he said, but added that he had not broached this subject with Mrs. Kumaratunga. She said before elections that the time had passed when talks could be held with the LTTE, and that her Government would prosecute an all-out war against the separatist group.

Mr. Hakeem said that Tamil parties also needed to be consulted on this issue.

THE HINDU

15 OCT 2000

Chandrika short of majority with 107 seats

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
COLOMBO, OCT 12

PRESIDENT Chandrika Kumaratunga's party on Thursday emerged as the largest in the Sri Lankan parliament, but fell short of a majority leaving a small Muslim party holding the balance of power.

The People's Alliance won 107 seats in Tuesday's parliamentary polls while the main Opposition United National Party (UNP) bagged 89 seats, the Election Commission announced.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which contested on its own in several districts but fielded some candidates under the People's Alliance (PA) symbol, won a total of 10 seats. But four of its seats were won under the SLMC symbol, while six others had stood on a joint ticket with the PA and were counted among the



Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga touches the body of her mother, former prime minister Sirima Bandaranaike, on Thursday as elder sister Sunethra (R) and estranged brother Anura (C) pay their respects — AFP

PA's total of 107 seats. The result thrust the small Muslim party into the role of kingmaker, as without its support Kumaratunga could find it difficult to form a government in the 225-seat national Assembly.

The Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, also emerged as a significant force after it won 10 seats in the polls.

Another 15 seats went to smaller nationalist parties and minority Tamil groups.

Kumaratunga's party was left just six seats short of the required 113 MPs needed to form a government on its own and the horse-trading looked set to begin.

But the PA claimed victory and PA leader S B Disanayake said he was confi-

dent of forming a minority government with the help of a regional Tamil party, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), which won four seats in the Jaffna peninsula.

So far however, the minor SLMC has refused to commit itself to a fresh alliance with Kumaratunga's party after alleging that there was widespread ballot-rigging during Tuesday's vote. "We have been approached by both (ruling party and the main Opposition United National Party) sides and we have told them the same thing," SLMC joint leader Rauf Hakeem said.

Political observers say the cryptic statement meant the SLMC would cut a deal with the side that made them the best offer. A spokesman for the Opposition UNP also appeared confident of forming the next government with the help of regional parties.

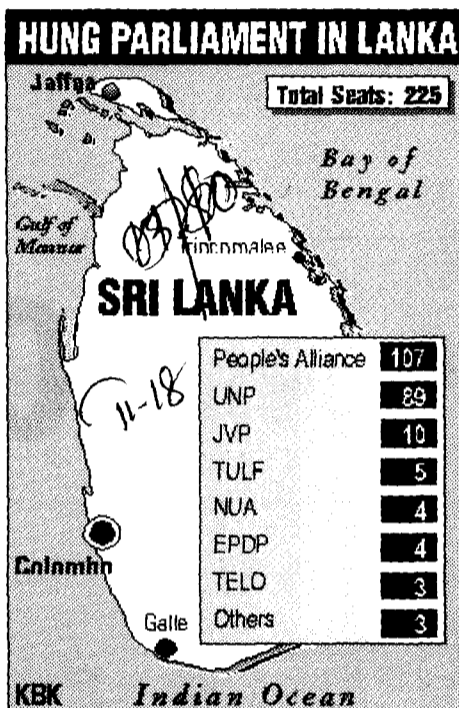
New govt. takes charge in Lanka

By Charu Lata Joshi
The Times of India News Service

COLOMBO: Prominent Peoples' Alliance leader Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, was sworn in as Sri Lanka's Prime Minister for the second term on Friday, soon after President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party claimed its bid to form the government.

Amid the flash of camera bulbs and international television crew, Wickremanayake took the oath of office before President Kumaratunga. In an election that was marred by allegations of large-scale rigging, the death of former prime minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the annulment of polling in 22 electoral stations, the ruling People's Alliance managed to obtain the highest number of seats polled to a single party. Along with two smaller partners, the moderate Tamil party, Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the National Unity Alliance (NUA), President Kumaratunga's party has managed to obtain 116 seats in the 225-member Parliament.

The EPDP and NUA have contributed four and five members each to the alliance.



The announcement to swear in Wickeremanayake came amidst widespread speculation of the event being postponed on account of Bandaranaike's funeral and the

fact that there is state mourning. However, announcements of cabinet portfolios has been postponed to Saturday, following Bandaranaike's funeral.

The peace process and revitalising the economy remain two main agendas before the new government which has already been charged with poor fiscal policies since its first re-election in 1994. In what could be interpreted as a cue for future actions, Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar leaves for Norway on Saturday. Norway has been playing the role of a facilitator between the LTTE and the government for the past few years.

Ms Kumaratunga told the state-owned television that she decided to invite

Peoples' Alliance to form the new government as it had won enough number of seats along with two of its allies to claim majority in the elections.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 OCT 2000

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2000

BEYOND A GAME OF NUMBERS

SRI LANKA'S ELECTORATE may not have conveyed a dramatic message of any kind in the latest parliamentary poll in a polity that is dominated *ipso facto* by an executive presidency rather than the legislature *per se*. Moreover, neither the governing People's Alliance (PA) nor the main Opposition outfit, the United National Party (UNP), has won a comprehensive victory. However, the constitutional dynamics of the persistent political-ethnic crisis in the island-republic dictates that the people's new representatives look beyond a mundane numbers game, important as that might be in parliamentary politics, and take a qualitative view of the results. In one sense, the complexity of the Sri Lankan electoral system, which laces the traditional practices of a simple ballot count with a significant dose of the principle of proportional representation, does not always make for easy arithmetical weightages about the political vibrance of parties and personalities. From a different but related angle, therefore, a simple test of governance in Sri Lanka at this stage is whether or not the President and parliament can work in reasonable harmony. Given the political and numerical logic of the latest electoral tally, the PA as the outfit with the largest number of seats is probably in a position to piece together a mosaic of majority support in a new 225-member House. In trying to do so, the PA will need to look for firm and consistent support from a party rooted in the politics of the minority Tamils and one or more 'fringe' groups. The UNP may find it more formidable to cross the absolute majority mark of 113.

The poll outcome cannot obviously be satisfying to either the PA leader and the country's President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, or the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe. However, it is in the overall interests of Sri Lanka that the emergence of a hung parliament at this critical juncture is not misconstrued either as a vote of popular disaffection with the entire class of present-day politicians or as a mandate

for keeping in abeyance the process of reforming the existing constitutional order in a manner that could enhance the political space for the Tamil population without depriving the majority Sinhala community of its legitimate rights. While the Opposition may feel tempted to contend that there is no sign of a clear green signal for Ms. Kumaratunga's recent constitutional initiative, it will indeed be a political travesty to interpret the new parliamentary configuration as a reflection of the people's desire to flash a cautionary amber signal on this front. Ms. Kumaratunga has already displayed commendable non-chauvinistic vision and courage in pleading consistently for a pluralist society founded on a polity of equitable rights for the minorities and the ethnic majority. Scope there may still be for a further examination of the President's package, which faced rough weather in the previous parliament. But it is of cardinal importance that there is no demand that the book be closed on the proposed constitutional reforms.

The attitude of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a quintessential party of parliamentary ethos, will be watched with great attention (not by the separatist-militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam alone). It is surely a matter of the TULF's parliamentary prerogatives to cast its lot with either the UNP or the PA. Yet, the TULF seems to be skating on thin ice by insisting on a formula of constitutional reforms acceptable to the LTTE when the latter itself has not revealed any credible new intention of considering a negotiated settlement. There is a fine line of political distinction between Ms. Kumaratunga's latest reported preference for a military solution of the problem posed by the LTTE and her willingness to consider creative constitutional means of ensuring a fair deal for the minorities. The good showing by the radical Janata Vimukti Peramuna in the poll arena can also be another reason for a new sense of urgency.

UNP

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Fractured Island 16/10

The hung verdict delivered by the electorate in Sri Lanka will inevitably impact on the island's fractured polity and complicate further efforts to restore peace. The issue of ending the 17-year-old Tamil-Sinhala conflict that has wrecked the country's economy, claimed over 63,000 lives and uprooted a million people goes well beyond the question of whether the ruling People's Alliance (PA) is able to cobble a majority in the new house. Even if President Chandrika Kumaratunga's PA, which has won 107 seats, manages to reach the magic figure of 113 in the 225-member house, as a result of this election Colombo faces new obstacles in its attempts to end the civil war and tame the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The majority would be slim and far from enough to push through the devolution proposals as a basis for peace negotiations. Although the opposition United National Party's vote share has also fallen with that of the PA, its bargaining power and potential to dictate the terms of the peace process are enhanced by the victory of smaller parties. For it is the smaller parties which have made impressive gains at the expense of both the UNP and PA. The ultra-left Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), which led the 1971 uprising and made a second violent bid to seize power in 1987-89, has won 10 seats. This southern, Sinhalese force with its new found king-making potential will be as much a critical player as the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) which has staged a remarkable comeback in the Jaffna peninsula by winning five seats. Both the JVP and TULF are opposed to Ms Kumaratunga's peace plan, though for entirely different reasons.

Even as Ms Kumaratunga begins negotiations to bring the smaller parties into her seven-party alliance by promising a broader coalition government, the UNP with 89 seats would seek to bolster the ranks of the opposition. UNP's Ranil Wickremesinghe, who favours negotiations with the LTTE to end the military conflict in the island's north, could make common cause with the TULF. The TULF, despite being a victim of the murderous politics of the LTTE, wants the military offensive to stop and work towards a solution acceptable to the LTTE. The TULF is ready to back the UNP if it comes forth with an undertaking to talk to the LTTE. If the votes won by the TULF in the face of opposition from another Tamil group, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), are any indication, there is growing support for the TULF's position of talks with the LTTE. The EPDP, a rebel group which is now part of the ruling alliance, has lost much ground in recent years; it could secure only four seats against the nine it had won in the 1994 elections. In contrast to these signals from the north favouring negotiations with the LTTE, the JVP's electoral haul suggests a hardening of attitudes among the Sinhalese. The party has opposed the power-sharing proposals mooted by Ms Kumaratunga. Should she seek the support of the JVP, Ms Kumaratunga may well be forced to continue the military offensive against the Tamil separatists. On the other hand, devolution and peace depend on winning over the Tamil parties. This dilemma is unlikely to be resolved by the numbers' game.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
THE FRIEND OF INDIA — Founded 1818

Printed from Calcutta, New Delhi and Siliguri

17 OCTOBER 2000

Vol. CXXXIV 245

KUMARATUNGA WINS

4-6 Fresh complications ahead 17/10

IF preliminary results are confirmed, the People's Alliance, with 109 seats, should have no difficulty in forming the next government in Sri Lanka. Even though its allies, the National Unity Alliance and the EPDP, have less than the sixteen seats they won last time, any one of them joining a PA government would give it the single-seat majority it held in the last House. Significantly, President Kumaratunga's Tamil opponents have done better this time, with the TULF winning seven and the TELO four, to the obvious detriment of the pro-government EPDP. This indicates a certain erosion of support in the Tamil North and the East due to the abrupt withdrawal of the constitutional reform bill in August this year, even though the Tamil parties benefiting from it were not exactly enthusiastic supporters of devolution. The UNP has ostensibly come down to 90, from 94, while the JVP makes its mark in Parliament again with 10 seats. The UNP fought the elections on its own and none of the parties outside the PA ambit have memories of it nice enough to want to join hands.

Has this been a fruitful exercise for President Kumaratunga? If the idea was to get an overwhelming mandate for the devolution package, which would give Tamils in the North and the East their provincial councils with substantial autonomy, no. But, if the idea was to minimise the risk of alienating the Sinhala Buddhist majority too much and lose the thin advantage in Parliament altogether, then yes. The draft constitution bill was withdrawn in August in the face of stiff and potentially violent, opposition from the Buddhist clergy, immediately after which Kumaratunga appointed Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, said to be a Sinhala hardliner, as prime minister. Wickramanayake met the powerful monks of the Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters and said that each and every clause and provision of the draft would have to be approved by them. This certainly lost Kumaratunga more Tamil votes, but possibly rescued her government.

Wickramanayake's appointment complicates matters a great deal as far as the devolution scheme is concerned. In August, Kumaratunga said she would convert the newly elected Parliament into a constituent assembly, get the draft passed by a simple majority and then put it before the people for a referendum. This can be done. The UNP has done similar things in the past, using its brute majority to bring in the executive presidency in 1978, and holding a referendum in 1982 to extend the life of the parliament by six years. Now, Wickramanayake says that the old draft is dead and a new draft will have to be prepared, probably in accordance with the wishes of the clergy. That may take time. You can't have a constituent assembly that waits patiently for the document to show up. Besides which, the old draft was prepared after extensive consultation with the Tamil parties who, understandably, might not like the ideas the monks have on the subject. It's one or the other.

CREDIT POLICY

After RBI's calm, now some trouble

THE credit policy was dull. RBI Governor Bimal Jalan read out the second instalment of the biannual credit policy with a backdrop covered by gloomy sketches of foundering business confidence, lower growth projections, some sectoral ... in capital goods, and interest rate

THE STATESMAN

17 OCT 2000

Challenge of a fractured mandate

S. Lanka
H.D.P.C

15/10

IN SRI Lanka's blood-stained history, elections have been little more than punctuations, marking perhaps a change in Government, but never altering the big picture of a conflict-ridden island where politics and ethnic animosities live off each other.

After the elections of 1994, there was a belief for the first time that this would change, that in Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga there was a leader who had the will to resolve the conflict. Unfortunately, she did not have the requisite strength in Parliament to bring about the changes that might have made peace possible.

If it was difficult then, it may prove tougher now. The just-concluded general elections for Sri Lanka's 11th Parliament threw up no clear winners or losers, with voters denying both the People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party (UNP) an outright victory.

The PA coalition of Ms. Kumaratunga emerged as the single largest party securing 107 seats, which while being two more than what it managed in 1994 was still six short of the half-way mark in the 225-seat House. Not surprisingly, the PA after hectic parleys has been able to form the Government

with a helping hand from the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the National Unity Alliance (NUA), alter-ego of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC).

The UNP won 89 seats which was woefully short of the needed numbers. It conceded defeat but not before exploring the chances of forming the Government. In the end, the centrifugal forces emanating from the all-powerful office of the President played a vital role in pulling the smaller parties in the direction of the PA. However, with a Tamil party from the north-east for the first time joining the ruling coalition that also includes the hardline Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, which won three seats under the PA banner, the coalition may prove shaky.

The UNP leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, predicted a short life for the new Government. "I do not see it lasting six or even five years," he said. Nonetheless, the PA will seek to firm up its alliances in a week's time for the real test of strength when the new Parliament meets on October 18 to elect a Speaker.

But beyond the euphoria of being back in power, the immediate task facing Ms. Kumaratunga is how best to use the ambiguous mandate to resolve the ethnic conflict that is slowly bleeding the country. No fresh ideas emerged during the election campaign. As Ms. Kumaratunga said before the



The shadow of the gun lingers in Sri Lanka.

tackling the problems facing the country.

If anything, it appears that Ms. Kumaratunga will find it more difficult to implement her plans through this Parliament than the last. "The new Government will try and bring back the new Constitution Bill. But given the composition of the PA, with all the new elements it, they will have to reopen negotiations within the PA first," said Mr. Jayadeva Uyangoda, who teaches political science at Colombo University.

Besides the presence of the MEP in the new Government, the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, has repeatedly asserted that the proposed new Constitution would have to be rewritten in consultation with the Buddhist Mahasangha.

The UNP foresees that the stage may not come when the party will have to either support or oppose the Constitution Bill in the new Parliament. "The new government can reintroduce the Bill, but I don't think they will be able to pass it. The PA will split on the issue," Mr. Wickremesinghe said.

The Government will also have to contend with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna,

The immediate task facing Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga is how best to use the ambiguous mandate to resolve Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, says

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN.

election, she is likely to revert to the constitutional reforms process. She has also made it clear that there will be no letup in the war against the LTTE.

Cautioning the new Government, Mr. Jehan Perera, media director of the National Peace Council, said the nature of the mandate should be reflected in a consensual approach to the resolution of the conflict. "Those who form the Government should realise that they cannot go in for unilateral action, and that they do not have a mandate for bulldozing through," he said. Describing the election as "flawed" due to the violence that took place on polling day, he said, there would be, in any case, a question mark on every action of the next Government. All the more reason for it to consult all shades of opinion in

which made impressive gains this time, winning 10 seats compared to just one in the last election. The Sihala Urumaya has also gained a parliamentary presence with one seat.

The resurgence of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which won three seats in Jaffna and two in Batticaloa held a lesson for the LTTE that considers itself to be the sole representative of the Tamil people, as well as the Government, which has sought to sideline it in recent months.

The fractured mandate might give the two main parties pause to re-think their roles in 21st century Sri Lanka. The PA's vote share in this election was 45.10 per cent, down from the nearly 49 per cent it polled the last time. The erosion in the vote-base was not confined to the party in Government. The UNP's share dropped from 44 per cent in 1994 to just over 40 per cent this time. Mr. Wickremesinghe said their proportion of the vote-share might have been more had it not been for the violence and intimidation witnessed in the central province and other areas on voting day.

Mr. Uyangoda predicted that in the present set-up, conditions for the two parties to work together would be created only if there was a "extreme" national crisis, such as hyper-inflation or the LTTE getting the upper hand in the war. But for now, the country seems set for more of the same.

Chandrika has put off naming a new Cabinet

18/10 • AA-9
Colombo, Oct. 17: Sri Lanka's President has delayed naming a new Cabinet as she negotiates with smaller parties demanding a greater role in her tenuous coalition.

"The Cabinet will be sworn-in on Saturday the 21st," A.H.M. Fowzie, the outgoing transport minister, said on Tuesday. The swearing-in ceremony had originally been expected to take place on Wednesday, when the new Parliament will meet for the first time to choose a speaker and other officials.

Neither President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance nor the main Opposition United National Party won a working majority in last week's election which was marred by violence and ballot tampering. Ms Kumaratunga cobbled together a coalition to give the People's Alliance a slim majority, but Mr Fowzie said the coalition partners were still negotiating over Cabinet portfolios.

"The small parties are making big demands," he said in an apparent reference to the Eelam People's Democratic Party — a former Tamil rebel group — and the largely Muslim National Unity Alliance. The EPDP has five seats and NUA 10, including six on the PA ticket, making them indispensable. (Reuters)

'Norway is welcome as a mediator'

Oslo, Oct. 17: Sri Lanka's foreign minister today said that Norway was welcome to continue its peace-making effort in the nation's civil war, less than two weeks after his country declared that role over. "We want Norway to remain engaged in the process," Sri Lanka foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said at a news conference in Oslo. "At the moment there is not much of a process."

Norway has negotiated in some of the world's worst conflicts and revealed in December that it was attempting quiet diplomacy between the Sri Lanka government and the island's main rebel group, LTTE. However, fighting has flared and the Sri Lankan government said on October 5 that it was dropping a Norwegian peace initiative aimed at ending the country's civil war, which has killed more than 61,000 people, and left 1.2 million homeless since 1983. Norwegian foreign minister Thorbjørn Jagland said he was glad to hear that the Norwegian effort was still welcome. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

18 OCT 2000

The Telegraph

WEDNESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2000 VOL. XIX NO. 102

ELUSIVE PEACE

The possibility of peace returning to Sri Lanka is only marginally linked to electoral politics. The verdict of the 11th parliamentary elections may have made it even more difficult for President Chandrika Kumaratunga to launch an imaginative peace initiative. Consider first the fractured electoral result. While President Kumaratunga's People's Alliance won the largest number of seats, these were six short of a majority. It could form the government only with the support of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, a moderate Tamil formation, and the largely Muslim National Unity Alliance. Both of these small parties will now wield influence out of proportion to their real strength. Indeed, within days of the formation of the government, the National Unity Alliance said that it wanted President Kumaratunga to begin peace talks immediately with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. However, what was more revealing was the strident note adopted by the leader of the Alliance, Mr Rauf Hakeem. He declared at a press conference, "We will not hesitate to pull out support within 100 days."

The ultra-left Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna has won an unprecedented 10 seats, and its presence too will make it difficult for the People's Alliance to develop a consensus on any substantive issue. To add to the government's woes is the widespread impression that the elections were far from being fair. Even the election commissioner, Dayananda Dissanayake, has admitted that given the violence, intimidation and allegations of vote rigging, the elections could be interpreted as not being free and fair. There may be some merit, therefore, in the warning issued by the main opposition leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe, of the United National Party, that the new government would be short-lived.

The elections were widely viewed as a referendum on President Kumaratunga's plans to end the 17-year civil war, in which more than 61,000 people have died. The president's proposed plan had two central elements. The first was to give more autonomy to the Tamil majority regions of the north and east of the island state. The second was to abolish the presidency, instituted in 1978. She wants a revival of a Westminster-style government with executive powers held by a prime minister. The electoral verdict suggests that there is only limited support for such a plan. Indeed, the vote share of the People's Alliance has fallen from 49 per cent during the last election to just over 45 per cent this time. In addition, President Kumaratunga has to contend with two extra-parliamentary forces, which can wreck any peace initiative. On the one hand, there are the forces of Sinhalese nationalism, led by hardline Buddhist monks. They argue that devolution would end the nation's unitary structure and erode the rights of the majority, who constitute 74 per cent of the population. On the other hand, is the LTTE, which is unwilling to accept anything short of a separate Tamil state. The LTTE continues to be a deadly fighting force. While the LTTE's goal of an independent "Eelam" may not be realized, it is clear that the Sri Lankan army too will find it very difficult to defeat the rebels militarily. Norway has been playing the role of a peace broker between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government for eight months, but there has been no real breakthrough so far. It is clear, therefore, that peace in Sri Lanka will continue to remain elusive. Neither parliamentary nor extra parliamentary politics seems to be ready for a process that will inevitably involve making concessions and compromises by all the parties concerned.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 OCT 2000

NEW SRI LANKAN CABINET SWORN IN Suicide-bomber strikes

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 19. Two persons were killed in a LTTE suicide-bombing that rocked the Sri Lankan capital as the country's new Cabinet was being sworn in today.

A police officer, besides the suicide-bomber, died. Twentytwo people, including two policemen and three United States nationals, were injured when the suicide bomber detonated himself in front of the Town Hall.

The three U.S. nationals were all women, working in Sri Lanka.

The injured policemen were in a mobile patrol, part of the high-security blanket that was thrown over the city for the swearing-in ceremony of the Cabinet this morning.

The bombing took place at 10.10 a.m., minutes before the Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, began swearing in the jumbo Cabinet of the People's Alliance-led coalition Government at the official residence of the President 5 km away.

46-member Cabinet

Mrs. Kumaratunga retained the portfolios of Defence, and Finance and Planning in the 46-member Cabinet. The Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, has been placed in charge of sensitive portfolio of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs. Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar retains the Foreign Ministry. The National Unity Alliance (NUA), the PA's assertive coalition partner, was given two berths, with one of its leaders, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, getting the



Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar(left) taking oath as Foreign Minister in the presence of the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga (right), in Colombo on Thursday. — Reuters

sought-after portfolio of Trade and Commerce, besides Shipping Development and Muslim Religious Affairs.

The other leader of the party, Mrs. Ferial Ashraff, who was appointed Minister of Development and Reconstruction of the East and Rural Housing, is to be sworn in later as she is still in mourning the death of her husband and NUA founder, M.H.M. Ashraff.

The PA's other coalition partner, the Eelam People's Democratic Party, was given one berth. Its leader, Mr. Douglas Devananda, has been appointed Minister of the prestigious Development, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the North, as well as Tamil Affairs, North and East.

The appointment is certain to bring about a howl of protest from other Tamil parties in and outside Parliament.

LTTE downs copter

In another development, an attack helicopter of the Sri Lanka Air Force was shot down by the LTTE in Jaffna peninsula this afternoon.

The Mi-24 helicopter went down in Government-controlled territory while assisting soldiers to ward off an LTTE attack on defence lines at Nagarkovil, the military spokesman, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne, told *The Hindu*.

"Initial reports said the crew were injured and rescued, but there is no confirmation," he said.

THE HINDU

20 OCT 2000

30 rebels killed in Lanka

S Lanka
51-70

2/9

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLOMBO, April 1. — Government soldiers killed at least 30 rebels in fresh fighting near a strategic causeway linking the Sri Lankan mainland with the northern Jaffna peninsula, the defence ministry said today.

The guerrillas tried to attack army artillery positions in Iyakachchi, near the Elephant Pass causeway, but were repulsed by the soldiers. A large number of rebels were killed in the confrontation and troops later found the bodies of 21 guerrillas in the area.

The ministry also said Air Force jets and artillery pounded a rebel armored vehicle in the Nagar Kovil area, also in the Jaffna peninsula. It said seven rebels were killed in the same area during skirmishes. Another two were shot dead elsewhere in the north.

The guerrillas launched a fresh offensive last weekend to recapture Jaffna, 300 kilometers north of Colombo, which they lost to the military in 1996. If the rebels succeed in overrunning the Elephant Pass, they would cut off the Jaffna peninsula from the rest of the country and recapture Jaffna, their former capital.

According to the LTTE, more than 700 government troops were killed and wounded since the attack was launched. The rebels admit to only 60 casualties.

The military, however, said it killed 150 Tiger rebels and wounded more than 350 guerrillas since Sunday. It put its losses at 85 soldiers killed and another 613 wounded.

More than 61,000 people have

been killed since the war began in 1983 in this small island nation.

The LTTE is fighting for an independent homeland for the Tamil minority in the north and east of the country. It accuses the majority Sinhalese community of discriminating against the Tamils in education and jobs.

Crash probe: A special committee has begun investigation into Thursday's defence plane crash amid speculation that the aircraft had been shot down, adds PTI. All 40 people on board had been killed, including 36 Army personnel.

The three-member committee, appointed by the Air Force, began the probe even as media reports said a pilot engineer had "found a part of the wreckage with six bullet holes". "This has given room to speculation that it was shot down by the LTTE," said The Weekend Express.

The Ukrainian-built AN-26 was carrying wounded troops from Palaly in northern Sri Lanka when it crashed south of Anuradhapura in north-centre. Thirty six Servicemen and four crew members were killed.

Two minutes before the crash, the pilot had contacted the Anuradhapura radio control room and said the right side engine had developed some trouble.

Thursday's crash was the second involving an Antonov class aircraft in a week. On 24 March, a private cargo carrier from Bangkok, crashed north of the Bandaranaike international airport here in Colombo. Poor visibility, caused by inclement weather, has been cited as reason for that crash.

Govt-LTTE talks will be delayed

P K Balachandran
Colombo, April 1

TALKS BETWEEN the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are unlikely to begin soon because both sides are trying to secure advantageous positions ahead of the meeting to get the best bargain, political sources say.

"It's going to be a long haul," a senior Lankan diplomat told The Hindustan Times today. If the LTTE wants to capture Jaffna before beginning negotiations, the Government does not want to begin talks while the military situation is fluid or is not exactly in its

favour after the debacle in the Wannu in November last.

But the Norwegian government is going ahead with its task of being the facilitator in right earnest.

On Thursday it systematised its involvement by appointing Mr Eric Solheim, leader of the Socialist Left Party with a long standing involvement in his country's peace efforts in Sri Lanka, as Special Advisor on the talks. A Norwegian Foreign Ministry statement said that Mr. Solheim would be working on the problem for six months beginning on April 1.

The immediate reason for the nil progress in the current "talks about

talks" is the illness of the LTTE's negotiator, Dr Anton Balasingham. He had a kidney transplant in Oslo and is yet to recover fully. The more substantial reason, however, is the need for time to recapture Jaffna. The LTTE dreads the prospect of giving up the idea of securing Jaffna as a result of international pressure during talks.

To get Jaffna quickly, the LTTE has been hammering Sri Lankan army positions in Vadamarachi. The idea is to secure the coastal road linking Mullaitivu district, which they hold, to Point Pedro in the army-held north.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 2 APR 2000

Uneasy calm in Jaffna

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 31. An uneasy calm has fallen over the Jaffna peninsula, as the big guns on both sides continue to remain silent.

On Wednesday the Sri Lankan Government reported only minor skirmishes between its troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. A Government press release said the LTTE launched an attack with rocket-propelled grenades on Army lines in Chemmani outside the Jaffna municipal area, but that Government troops "retaliated effectively", forcing them to withdraw. The Government said its soldiers had killed seven LTTE cadres in two separate confrontations at Colombuthurai and Chavakachcheri areas.

Other confrontations, far from the battlefields of Jaffna, indicated the kind of pressure the security forces are under in the area claimed as a Tamil homeland.

At the southern end of the island, the Special Task Force, an elite police force, claimed to have killed 18 LTTE cadres, among them 11 women fighters, who launched an attack on one of its

camps in the south-eastern province of Amparai.

In Trincomalee, LTTE cadres broke into a government food shop early this morning and made away with almost all the dry rations stocked inside. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, seems to be making a determined effort to keep political attention focussed on the Government's proposed constitutional reforms which include devolution to the north-east.

Earlier this week, as part of the ongoing process to reach a consensus on the proposals, Ms. Kumaratunga met representatives of the United National Party (UNP) and separately, representatives of three Tamil parliamentary parties, and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC).

The three Tamil parties that attended the meeting were the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils (PLOT) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) which represents Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka.

New envoy: Page 13

1 JUN 2000

Talks soon on Delhi role: Lanka

571 2/6
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, June 1. — Sri Lanka will begin talking to India "very soon" on the possibility of involving New Delhi in negotiations with the Tiger rebels, a Lankan minister has said.

It's been some time since Mr Jaswant Singh made his "unofficial" offer to play peace broker, but New Delhi and Colombo have not yet had the chance to discuss details of the role India could play, Sri Lankan foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, told PTI today.

"We do not know what India has in mind. That is why I say that we have not explored with each other in real detail.

"We would like to know in due course what India has in mind. That can only be done by discussions between two friends. The dialogue will start soon, very soon," Mr Kadirgamar said.

The external affairs minister had said on TV last month: "India has never been a dishonest broker. And as to playing any role in the situation, that is a process that can only be engaged in when all sides in the situation ask for it."

New Delhi has also said it is willing to discuss with Colombo a devolution package for the Jaffna peninsula that will go "well beyond" the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka accord that spoke about the merger of the

island's northern and eastern provinces.

Mr Kadirgamar wondered who would enforce the settlement — provided one is arrived at — with the LTTE.

"The question to be settled is ... in the event of an agreement reached under the auspices of and support of India, or active participation of India, what about enforcement of the settlement later in the event of breach?"

The Tigers' "track record", Mr Kadirgamar said, "is not very good. In respect of the settlement, this (enforcement) is very big question. How far India wishes to go and the position India (would) like to be in. The extent of the Indian involvement should be decided by India itself, the parameters and the implications".

Indo-Lanka talks must also cover the role of Norway, which was currently acting as facilitator for dialogue, the minister said. "All that must be carefully discussed. These are matters we cannot discuss through newspapers."

'Down but not out': The Lankan defence minister, Gen. Anuradha Ratwatte, who returned here yesterday after 12 days in Jaffna, has said there was "mental depression" in some soldiers. But "I was able to boost their morale ... (and they are) determined to win back the ground they have lost."

THE STATESMAN

Talks with India on Jaffna soon, says Lanka Minister

AGENCIES
COLOMBO, JUNE 1

SRI Lanka will start talks with India "very soon" to explore the possibility of involving New Delhi in any negotiations with LTTE to find an amicable solution to the ethnic conflict in Jaffna peninsula.

In a wide-ranging interview to PTI here today, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said though it was some time since External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh made the offer to negotiate between the government and the LTTE, New Delhi and Colombo have not yet explored the details of the extent to which India could get involved.

"We do not know what India has in mind. That is why I say that we have not explored with each other in real detail. We would like to know in due course, what India has in mind. That can only be done by discussions between two friends. The dialogue will start soon, very soon," he said.

Singh in an interview to a TV network last month had said that "India has never been a dishonest broker. And as to playing any role in the situation, that is a process

that can only be engaged when all sides to the situation asked for it."

New Delhi has also said that it was willing to discuss a revised devolution package with Colombo for the Jaffna peninsula that will go "well beyond" the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka accord that spoke about merger of northern and eastern provinces.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan government has said that a series of military setbacks against the LTTE coupled with the 'acquisition of high degree' of firepower by the rebels have caused mental depression among soldiers forcing them slip into withdrawal syndrome.

Gen Anurudha Ratwatte, who returned to Colombo yesterday after a 12-day stay in the war-torn Jaffna, told a state-run television channel last night that the army was in dire straits in the peninsula.

He, however, exuded confidence that the Lankan troops were determined to win back the ground they had lost.

"When I arrived in Jaffna on May 18 unannounced, I had to jump out of the helicopter in the dead of the night because the

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 2 JUN 2001

ND-13

Ceasefire if talks follow: Kadirgamar

S. Lanka

COLOMBO, JUNE 4. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, has said the Government is willing to declare a ceasefire in the ongoing fighting with the LTTE in northern Jaffna, provided it is linked to immediate commencement of peace talks.

"The LTTE wants a ceasefire linked to withdrawal of troops which is not agreeable to the Government but a ceasefire linked to commencement of (peace) talks is a possibility," Mr. Kadirgamar told PTI here.

The Government is not willing to consider a ceasefire without proper linkages as it has had bad experiences with the LTTE in the past. "They regroup and start (fighting) again. We are wary of ceasefire," he said, adding "if the talks begin, the Government is willing to discuss anything except 'Eelam'."

He said the Government is even ready to discuss the 'Thimpu principles' being advocated by the LTTE as the basis for talks. The 'Thimpu principles,' enunciated by a number of moderate Tamil parties at the Bhutanese capital during their talks with the Sri Lankan Government under the auspices of India in 1986, included the grant of right of self-determination to the Tamils in the island nation. Referring to the peace efforts by Norway, which has been accepted as a facilitator both by the Government and LTTE, he said, "at the moment it is quite clear that Norway can not help to bring the two parties to the table be-

cause the rebels are not showing much interest."

About the ground situation in Jaffna, he said, "there is definite evidence of Army's resistance stiffening. The Army is holding positions and has gained some modest ground here and there." About evacuation of troops from the peninsula, the Minister said "a wise answer to that is we can not rule out anything...We are reasonably confident that it need not come to that."

Israeli combat craft

Meanwhile, after inducting fresh troops to stem the tide of military losses in northern Jaffna, the Sri Lankan Government has said it will reinforce its navy with more Israel-made missile-fitted combat craft along with equipping the Army with new ground weapons from Europe.

"Israel has agreed to supply the new combat craft, whose missiles have a range of 36 km," the State-run newspaper *The Daily News* reported today.

Another report in *The Island* quoting top military sources said the Army has acquired two powerful weapon-systems from an East European country to "sharply increase" the troop's capability to launch counter operations. The newspaper, however, did not identify the two weapons. But informed sources here have been speculating that the Army has

been acquiring artillery as well as truck-mounted, multi-barrel rocket launchers.

14 LTTE men killed

At least 14 Liberation tigers were killed in northern Jaffna, while terrorists abducted two civilians and forcibly took away three fishing boats in eastern Batticaloa during the past 24 hours. The Sri Lanka's Defence Ministry today said its troops have put Tamil tigers on the defensive in the northern Jaffna peninsula after killing at least 200 guerrillas and knocking out some of their heavy artillery.

"This explains the calm on the part of the terrorists. They may be trying to regroup, but it looks like we have given them a good beating," the Defence Ministry spokesperson, Brig. Palitha Fernando told presspersons.

Judges plea to Chandrika

In a separate development, eleven judges of Sri Lanka's Supreme Court have written to the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga asking her to name the judge, whom she has alleged to have accepted bribe from an LTTE supporter. The Judges' letter was a follow up to the alleged remarks by Ms. Chandrika during a meeting with the Opposition United National Party leaders that the Judges appointed during the UNP regime were corrupt and one Judge even took a bribe from an LTTE supporter in a fundamental rights case. — PTI, UNI

5 JUN 2007

No offer of CM's post to Pirabhakaran: Chandrika

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

SR-5/6
COLOMBO, June 4. — President Chandrika Kumaratunga has denied local and foreign media reports which said she had offered LTTE leader, V Pirabhakaran the chief ministership of the northern province.

The information director, Ariya Rubasinghe said in a statement that the President's comments were "misquoted and taken out of context." What Mrs Kumaratunga had actually stated was that she had made the offering to Pirabhakaran during her 1995 peace negotiations on the condition that he gave up terrorism and joined the democratic process.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar has said the government is willing to declare ceasefire with the LTTE in northern Jaffna provided it agrees to immediate commencement of peace talks.

The government is not willing to consider a cease-fire without proper linkages as it has had bad experiences with the LTTE in the past. "They regroup and start (fighting) again. We are

S. Lanka
wary of cease-fire," Mr Kadirgamar added.

The minister said if talks begin, the government is willing to discuss anything except "Eelam", a separate state demanded by the LTTE. Even discussions on "Thimpu principles", advocated by LTTE as the basis for talks, were on the government's agenda.

The issues included in the principles could be discussed "but we have to see how they fit into the constitution," Mr Kadirgamar added.

Referring to the peace efforts by Norway, he said "at the moment it is quite clear that Norway cannot help to bring the two parties to the table because the rebels are not showing much interest."

A senior Sri Lankan minister has, however, said India, as an Asian country, is better suited to be a facilitator than a west-

JUDGES APPEAL

COLOMBO, June 4. — Eleven judges of Sri Lanka's Supreme Court have written to the President, requesting her to name the judge who, she has alleged, has accepted bribe from an LTTE supporter. The judges' letter followed the alleged remarks by Mrs Kumaratunga, during a meeting with Opposition United National Party leaders, that the judges appointed during the UNP regime were corrupt. — PTI

ern country in holding talks with the LTTE. "I have reservations about Norway because there is evidence that Oslo sympathises with the LTTE," said Mr M a h i n d r a Rajapaskse in an interview with the Sunday Times.

About the ground situation in Jaffna,

Mr Kadirgamar remarked that "the army is holding positions and has gained some modest ground here and there." The lull in fighting for the past few days could be because LTTE might be reformulating its strategy or is suffering from cadre shortages.

14 rebels killed: The Lankan army today claimed to have killed 14 LTTE rebels in close encounters in northern Jaffna yesterday. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan air force jets pounded suspected Tamil rebel targets near the Jaffna peninsula as civilians who fled the regional

capital trickled back to their homes. The air strikes came as junior defence minister, Mr Anuruddha Ratwatte said another 4,000 soldiers were being sent to resist rebel attempts to re-capture the peninsula.

Lanka navy: The Sri Lankan navy will soon get naval combat craft from Israel which has the capacity to bombard targets from off-shore in order to fight LTTE's sea tigers.

These boats have the missile capacity with a maximum range of 36 km and could be launched from different platforms.

The strengthening of the navy follows a decision by military planners and the government to neutralise the LTTE's naval bases.

Rights petition: The Sri Lankan SC would hear a Fundamental Rights petition on Tuesday, challenging the press censorship and subsequent ban on the *Sunday Leader* newspaper and its sister Sinhala publication under the public security ordinance.

The newspapers have been accused by the government of being pro-opposition.

THE STATESMAN

3 JUN 2000

JUN 2000

Chandrika rules out 'talks' with LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 4. In an indication that Sri Lanka is fast regaining its military confidence, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has said there was now no possibility of holding "unconditional" talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

"At the moment, there is no question of any of that. For six years we have tried to talk to them and for six years they have lied (that) they are going to talk, and up to date, they have refused. Now there is no question of talking unless certain conditions are fulfilled, so we can't even think of it," she has said in an interview to the BBC which is to go on air on Monday.

Without giving details, she also indicated that there was "a clear operational plan" to recapture areas of the Jaffna peninsula that the Army had lost to the LTTE, but said she would not venture to mention a time-frame for the operation.

Separately, the President also strongly refuted press reports which quoted her as telling an Indian TV channel that she was ready to offer the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, the position of

Chief Minister of Sri Lanka's northern province "The President's comments made at this interview have been misquoted and taken out of context. What the President in fact, had stated in this interview, was that she had offered the LTTE leader during her 1995 peace negotiations the Chief Ministership of the northern province, on condition that he gave up terrorism and joined the democratic process," a statement from the Information Department said.

In the last presidential election, Ms. Kumaratunga had accused her opponent, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, who had made a similar statement, of conspiring to "hand over" the north-east to the LTTE.

In clarifying her statement and putting it in the context of the failed 1995 peace process, the President is obviously saying the offer no longer stands and also pre-empting any protest by the Opposition that she was planning exactly what she had accused them of. The statement said the President had made this "conditional offer with good intention and sincerity but unfortunately, the LTTE has proved to the entire globe that it was not interested in democratic processes or mainstream politics".

Kadlrgamar's condition: Page 13

THE HINDU

5 JUN 2000

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'Sri Lankan Tamils not for separate state'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 5. The suggestion by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr M Karunanidhi, that Sri Lanka follow the Czechoslovakian model and split into two separate countries evoked a sharp reaction from the island today. "The partitioning of Sri Lanka will be the beginning of balkanisation of India," warned the Media Minister and Government spokesman, Mr Mangala Samaraweera. "If Mr Karunanidhi knows the wishes of the Tamils, he should know that most of them do not want a separate state."

Moderate Tamil politicians welcomed Mr Karunanidhi's remark, but indicated that they would prefer a political settlement. As separation is not a possibility, we would ask him to put pressure through the Central Government on the Sri Lankan Government and Opposition to agree to the 1997 devolution proposals, and to offer these proposals to the LTTE and request them to study it," said Mr. V. Anandasangaree of the Tamil United Liberation Front.

Mr. Dharmalingam Sithadthan, MP and leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils (PLOT), said while such statements would certainly put the Sri Lankan Government under pressure to give maximum concessions to the Tamils, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister also had "an obligation to put pressure on the LTTE" to accept a political settlement.

Crucial meeting today

Sri Lanka's ruling People's Alliance (PA) coalition and the opposition United National Party (UNP) are expected to cross swords over the most contentious issues in the draft constitutional reforms at a meeting tomorrow. The President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, has set a June 15 deadline for finishing consultations with the UNP on the reforms, of which devolution to the Tamil minority forms the centre-piece. Consultations with the UNP and Tamil political parties on the political package were going on even while the Government was locked in a battle with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in

the Jaffna peninsula. When representatives of the PA and the UNP meet again tomorrow, they are expected to discuss the issue of control over land, the unit of devolution in the Tamil-dominated northeast and the structure of the Sri Lankan state, the three stickiest issues in the package proposed by the Government.

At the last meeting, the UNP told the Government that control over land use should vest with the Centre, and the region could use it for "specific purposes". Outraged, the Tamil parties have urged the Government to retain its proposal of handing over control of land use to the region.

On the issue of unit of devolution, the Government has proposed that referendums be held in the northeast to decide whether it should be one or two units, and whether there should be a southeastern Muslim-majority unit.

However, the UNP has made it known that it is totally opposed to the concept of a Muslim-majority south-eastern council, and broadly favours status quo in which the northeast is temporarily a single unit, with the proviso of a referendum within a specified time. While the Tamil parties would have no objection to the UNP position on this, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), whose brain-child the south-eastern council is, is expected to oppose the UNP tooth and nail.

On the structure of the state, the Government favours a quasi-federal state, while the UNP stand is not clear. Mrs Kumaratunga has said whether or not the PA and the UNP are able to reach a consensus on the proposals by June 15, she would present the package to Parliament after finishing consultations with the Tamil parliamentary parties.

In a BBC interview, she also said she would hold the general election due this year before November, the legal time limit for doing so after the tenure of the present parliament expires in August.

While the battle for Jaffna has not yet been won by the security forces, the Government seems more politically confident now than it was in recent weeks.

THE HINDU

- 6 JUN 2000

LTTE'S MENACE

An Impossible Negotiator

By AG NOORANI

51-8
6/6
RESPONDING to clamour, President Chandrika Kumaratunga has offered to parley with the LTTE supremo, V Prabhakaran. She knows, even if others more generous with advice than aid do not, that neither on the immediate crisis nor on the main problem do talks offer much hope in the present situation.

In his Martyrs' Day message last November, Prabhakaran boasted that his "current military successes" in the Vanni "have surprised and astounded the world" and the LTTE had acquired "the military capability to liberate our homeland". Capture of the Elephant Pass in April could not have discouraged him. "Objective conditions conducive for peace talks" mean a situation in which he can negotiate from strength and dictate terms. He demands "a situation of normalcy free from military aggression, occupation (sic) and economic strangulation of the Tamil Nation". In 1995, when he was in occupation of Jaffna, he wanted Colombo to let him consolidate his rule and permit its extension to the east as well.

Jaffna was taken over by the Sri Lanka army in December 1995. The Colombo Journal *Island* reported (30 April) that "the LTTE has taken a decision not to conduct any serious negotiations ... until it captures Jaffna". Recent talk of evacuation of the SLA's 25,000 men from Jaffna must have been music to its ears. It will pitch its demands higher in the parleys and a Sinhala backlash will render a settlement impossible.

Prabhakaran is as starkly realistic as Khrushchev was when he said at Leipzig on 7 March 1959: "History teaches us that conferences reflect in their decisions an established balance of forces resulting from victory or capitulation in war or similar circumstances."

THREE FACTORS

There is no such thing as settling any conflict by purely "political means". Even labour strikes or corporate wars are resolved only when the sanctions each side commands help to establish a balance that makes accord possible. As Hans J Morgenthau wrote in his classic *Politics Among Nations*: "The means at the disposal of diplomacy are three; persuasion, compromise, and threat of force. No diplomacy relying only upon the threat of force can claim to be both intelligent and peaceful. No diplomacy that would stake everything on persuasion and compromise deserves to be called intelligent." A diplomat must simultaneously "use persuasion, hold out the advantages of a compromise, and impress the other side with the military strength of his country. The art of diplomacy consists in putting the right emphasis at any particular moment on each of these three means at his disposal".

Only a congruence of three factors will bring the LTTE to its senses — total international isolation; alienation from Sri Lanka's Tamils; and resounding military defeat. The isolation has increased, but is not complete. Some residual links have survived in places more than one. Terrorists thrive when ill treatment at the hands of the state makes a people look upon them as their saviours. "No Tamil expects anything after a total annihilation of the LTTE," GG Ponnambalam Jr of the Ceylon Tamil Congress remarked in 1993. Would Colombo have conceded what it has but for the LTTE, they ask? A repres-

sive situation buttressed by force provokes countervailing force to revise the status quo. President Kumaratunga has sought sincerely to conciliate the Tamils even at the risk of alienating some Sinhalas. But, there are areas in which she could move fast to clinch a deal with the non-LTTE Tamils, with the opposition UNP's support.

As the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M Karunanidhi, courageously said on 15 May, Prabhakaran is no champion of the Tamils. He is a fascist who has eliminated by murder any Tamil who he perceives as an alternative. Neelan Tiruchelvam had to be done away with last July because his outstanding qualities made him the one Tamil leader who could have bridged the gulf between Tamil



aspirations and Sinhala fears. The march of gore from the EPRLF's Sabaratnam's killing in 1986 is revolting — K Pathmanabha also of EPRLF, two TULF leaders in 1985, and another two, including its leader A Amirthalingam, in 1990, two former benefactors — Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and President R Premadasa in 1993, Foreign Minister Ranjan Wijeratna, Navy Chief Admiral Clancy Fernando, former Minister Lalith Athulathmudali, Gamini Dissanayake, the UNP's presidential candidate, who was killed along with 55 others, including two former Cabinet Ministers, and the general secretary of the UNP. The LTTE is not a liberation movement that uses terror as a weapon, but essentially a terrorist unit. Prabhakaran is South Asia's Pol Pot. The attempt on the life of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, only last December during her election campaign, just after the LTTE's military victories in November, was a bid to bring the state to its knees.

LITTLE HELP

This is what a hapless but great country has been up against with little help from the democratic world. India's role in the recent crisis merits separate discussion. The cynicism of some is saddening. Before the Jain Commission on 11 September 1995, the Home Minister SB Chavan's letter to the then CM Ms Jayalalitha, dated 22 May 1993, was quoted. He suggested parleys with the LTTE.

In 1998 a brilliant brochure was published in Chennai entitled "Jain Report — Buried Facts". It reproduced this nugget from the Report: "According to an unconfirmed report, the LTTE plans to eliminate M Karunanidhi, leader of DMK, in order to make way for V Gopalaswamy, who is reported to be more radical in his approach and support to the LTTE. The above information is being shared with you for action as deemed appropriate to review and suitably augment the security arrangements with Mr M Karunanidhi". Source? "A Secret/Crash message no 23/VS-193(141)-3 dated 28 September 1993 from IB (Anil Choudhry, Joint Director, VIP Security) to the IG

(Intelligence), Tamil Nadu." (V Gopalaswamy is now known as Vaiko). Prabhakaran had no illusions even when he lived in Chennai in the mid-eighties "Right now, I am small, I need India's help to grow" he told Anita Pratap. But, "eventually, I will have to battle India."

Mrs Kumaratunga came to power first as PM on 16 August 1994 on the plank of conciliation. She was elected executive President in November that year. The first round of talks with the LTTE was held at Jaffna on 13-14 October 1994. What followed is very relevant today. The government pressed for talks on the political problem, the LTTE insisted on a cease fire and measures that would ease its control of Jaffna, especially removal of the army camp at Pooneryn. The second round was held on 3 January 1995. Two days later the President signed with Prabhakaran a Declaration on the Cessation of Hostilities, terminable by either party at 72 hours' notice. The third round on 17 January was no more successful.

The President wrote to Prabhakaran on 20 February proposing a French diplomat, Francois Michel, as an "intermediary", but not mediator. He turned down the proposal (25 February). She sought "a dialogue on the elements of a political solution"; he, "a permanent, durable cease fire" to consolidate his hold on Jaffna. At the fourth and last round, on 10 April,

Colombo offered ameliorative measures preliminary to political talks. The LTTE had unilaterally set a deadline, 19 April 1995, as extended. It gave notice of termination on 18 April. Within hours of its receipt, it launched hostilities. Its statement on 19 April demanded explicitly "movement of our cadres with weapons in the East". On 23 April the LTTE accused Colombo of "trying to woo the Tamil people over the heads of a liberation movement fighting for their rights".

STICKING POINT

The President first put forth proposals on devolution of power to the Regions on 3 August 1995; and next on 16 January 1996. Finally, on 24 October 1997, the Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, GL Peiris tabled in Parliament the Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform containing a new draft Constitution. Under it, a Region of Sri Lanka will have greater protection from the Centre than States in India enjoy. Colombo needs no lessons on devolution of power from New Delhi.

There was one snag. The Indo-Sri Lanka accord of 29 July 1987 provided for a provisional merger of the northern and eastern provinces, subject to a referendum in the east. Chapter XV of the 1997 draft reverses the process. Merger will follow a referendum in the Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts of the eastern province. If they agree to the merger, the Amparai district of the province would decide, by referendum, whether to become a Region or part of the Uva Region. Its Muslim majority areas of Kalmunai, Sammanthurai, and Pottuvil would form the South-Eastern Region, in the event of the N-E merger (Article 127).

This is a sticking point. The UNP has yet to formulate its proposals in any detail. It is imperative that the government forge a consensus with, both, the UNP and the non-LTTE Tamil parties on a firm basis and enact the accord into law. Only thus can the Tamils be weaned away from the LTTE. Norway is best qualified to perform its facilitatory role in this situation.

The author is a lawyer and commentator on current affairs.

Lanka polls will be held on schedule, says Chandrika

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has said the general election in the country will be held as scheduled in October.

Speaking to *Sandeshiya*, a Sinhala programme, the president said she was hopeful of overcoming all obstacles, both constitutionally and democratically, before the general election. The term of present Parliament expires in August this year and a new election is to be held in

October. The president has also indicated early lifting of censorship as she thought it was not possible to hold the election in the midst of censorship. Media reports quoting government sources said a new draft constitution will be presented to Parliament in mid-July for discussion.

The talks between the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and opposition United National Party (UNP) on constitutional reforms which started

in March this year was to be concluded on May 29, but was extended till June 15. Official sources said immediately after the UNP talks are concluded, the government hoped to start talks with all Tamil political parties to discuss the reforms and the consensus reached between the PA and the UNP on the reforms. A crucial round of talks between the PA and the UNP on constitutional reforms is scheduled for Monday. (Agencies)

Sri Lanka eases curbs on foreign

media ^{H0-13}
By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 5. Sri Lanka has "eased" censorship restrictions on foreign media, the Government announced today.

Foreign journalists are no longer required to get their reports screened by the Government-appointed Competent Authority. However, the censorship regulations imposed on May 3 remain in force and continue to be implemented for the Sri Lankan media.

The Media Minister, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, said the censorship on local media would also be lifted soon, "certainly before the general election."

The President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, told the BBC that she expected the general election to be held by November, after the tenure of the present Parliament ended in August.

Naval craft destroyed

The week-long lull in fighting between Government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Jaffna gave way today to a fierce sea battle off Vadamarachchi in which two Israeli-built Dvora Fast Attack Craft (FAC) of the Sri Lankan navy were destroyed.

A military spokesman said 23 sailors were missing, while 11 had been rescued.

He denied reports that one of the two boats was sunk when a Sri Lankan Air Force bomber, which had gone in to provide air support to the Navy, fired at it.

He said a FAC was attacked initially, and the second came under fire from LTTE when it went to rescue the first.

The FAC were escorting a troops-carrier between Jaffna and Trincomalee when they were attacked by a Sea Tiger unit off Nagarkovil on the north-eastern coast of Jaffna peninsula. The troops carrier escaped the attack. However, this setback for the navy is not expected to significantly alter the stalemate on the ground in Jaffna peninsula.

The Government-owned weekly *Sunday Observer* had reported on Sunday that the Sri Lanka navy was to be equipped with more Israeli naval combat craft, equipped with missiles and artillery, to enable them to take on Sea Tiger bases along the coast.

The navy is also planning to equip all its combat craft with advanced weapons systems that would help in the accurate identification of targets.

It is expected that the induction of these gunboats would put a squeeze on the LTTE's sea operations, including the smuggling of arms.

6 JUN 93

Chandrika, Opposition hold talks

HD-17 By Nirupama Subramanian 7/6

COLOMBO, JUNE 6. The ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the opposition United National Party (UNP) met today to thrash out crucial issues of the government's draft constitutional reforms.

The meeting, chaired by the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga at Temple Trees, her official home, began this evening and continued late into the night. Details of the meeting were not immediately available.

The two sides were expected to take up the thorny issues of the unit of devolution, the structure of the Sri Lankan state, and control over land use at the meeting.

Mrs. Kumaratunga has set June 15 as the deadline for arriving at an agreement with the UNP on these issues, and has said she will go ahead with moves to implement the devolution package, whether or not such a consensus is reached by that date.

In a message to the nation on the eve of War Heroes day, Mrs. Kumaratunga reiterated that the

"cherished dream of peace" could only be achieved through a political solution "of giving space to every citizen of this country to live in dignity and harmony."

She said the government and other political parties were reaching a consensus and "forging ahead" with a new constitution that would guarantee rights for all citizens.

Mrs. Kumaratunga appealed to the country to "come forward and assist the families of those brave soldiers who are dead or maimed and those who are at the front."

"On behalf of the nation, let me on this occasion extend our deep gratitude to those families who have given their children, husbands, fathers, brothers and sisters to the defence forces, in order to defend the unity and integrity of our motherland," she said.

The country will observe a two-minute silence at 9.30 am tomorrow on the occasion of War Heroes day.

11-10-00

67 JUN 7 1996

'HUMAN BOMB STRIKES ON WAR HEROES DAY'

Sri Lankan Minister among 22 killed

HP-1
8/16

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 7. Sri Lanka's Industries Development Minister, Mr. C. V. Gooneratne, was killed by a suicide bomber of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam 15 km south of the capital today. At least 21 others, including the Deputy Mayor of the area, Mr. Anura Silva, and Mr. Gooneratne's police bodyguard, died in the attack shortly before 2 p.m.

Over 50 persons, including the Minister's wife, Mrs. Shyama Gooneratne, were injured. Her condition was described as "critical. Four persons were taken into custody in connection with the incident. The attack did not come as a total surprise. With the battle in the Jaffna peninsula in a stalemate over the last two weeks, it was expected that the LTTE might open a new front elsewhere, the capital not excluded.

It is one of the strategic advantages of the LTTE that Sri Lanka's security apparatus was unable to predict the exact shape or form

such a strike would take.

Today was War Heroes Day and Mr. Gooneratne (64) was participating in a large procession to raise funds for soldiers and their families through the suburb of Ratmalana, his constituency, when the male "human bomb" struck. He died on the spot.

A staunch supporter of the policies of the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Minister was a popular politician and a senior member of the Cabinet as well as the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Immediately after the incident, gangs attacked a few houses in the area, which has a significant Tamil population. Till late in the evening, the atmosphere in the suburb and its surroundings was described as "tense".

Additional police and a unit of the elite Special Task Force (STF) were deployed to maintain peace. In a statement, the Government appealed for calm. It said the LTTE's aim was to provoke ethnic unrest and create confusion just

as the security forces were taking steps to defeat it militarily in the north. The bomb attack occurred a few hours after the country, led by the President, observed a two-minute silence in remembrance of soldiers killed in the long war against the LTTE.

The procession in which Mr. Gooneratne participated this morning was organised by a state-owned radio and TV station. "I was walking close to the Minister. Suddenly, there was a huge fireball and an explosion. The next instant, there were bodies strewn all over," said Mr. D. B. Chandrasena, who was in the procession.

India condemns killing

Our New Delhi Special Correspondent reports:

India today strongly condemned the assassination of the Sri Lankan Industry Minister. Describing the killing as an expression of terrorism, the Foreign Office spokesman said such acts had no place in a democratic society.



The scene where a suicide bomber blew himself up during a War Heroes Day procession in Colombo on Wednesday. — Reuters (More photos on Page 14)

E 8 JUN 2000

Another blow to peace process

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 7. The Tamil Tiger suicide attack that killed the Industries Minister, Clement V. Gooneratne, today is yet another blow to prospects of peace in Sri Lanka.

"Like all such attacks, one the one hand, it reinforces the hands of the Sinhala right, of the hawks, who are demanding that the Government pursue a military solution to the problem. On the other hand, it also increases the feeling of despondency and helplessness," said Mr. Ketheesh Loganathan of the Centre for Policy Alternatives here.

Though a political lightweight, Mr. Gooneratne was a popular figure both in his constituency and outside.

"The peace process had already suffered a setback with the LTTE's attack in Jaffna peninsula. The killing of a popular leader can only add to it by further hardening the Sinhala position," said Mr. Dharmalingam Sithadthan, member of Parliament and leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils (PLOT).

Evidence of the hardening came almost immediately after the killing, when a few Tamil houses in the area were attacked. The situation around Ratmalana, where Mr. Gooneratne was killed, was being described as 'tense' till late in the night. A curfew was declared in the area and additional police were deployed to maintain law and order.

In the pursuit of its stated goal of an independent Eelam, it had been the LTTE's strategy to create conditions in southern Sri Lanka that would lead to a violent backlash against the Tamil community living outside the north-east, or at least to their constant harassment by the security forces. The reasoning behind this was that it would create such an unbridgeable divide between the minority Tamils and the majority Sinhalese, and also between the Tamils and the Government, that separation would become inevitable.

With the LTTE advance into Jaffna peninsula stalled, at least for the time being, it was anticipated that the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, would fall back on this strategy as he has done on so many occasions in the past.

"But if the Government guards against such a backlash, there is still a good chance for a negotiated political settlement," said Mr. Loganathan.

It was also expected that the LTTE would in some manner attempt to disrupt the War Heroes Day which was observed all over southern Sri Lanka today. The celebration was intended to boost the morale of soldiers locked in a grim battle with the LTTE in the north.

Mr. Gooneratne was not a particular target of the LTTE, but by hitting at the celebrations and killing a key figure who was participating in it, the group may have gained a symbolic victory

over the government's war effort.

"I see this as primarily a response to the War Heroes Day. It only shows that both sides are trying to resolve this militarily and their responses to one another are military responses," said Dr. Jehan Perera, director of the National Peace Council.

He said the incident would make it more difficult for the Government to present "a non-military alternative" to the Sinhalese majority. But, he cautioned, the Government should not be 'led' by the LTTE's actions. "A military response from the Government serves the LTTE fine, because the LTTE is a military organisation, but the initiative lies with the Government to bring a political solution."

Amnesty condemns killing

Amnesty International, the London-based human rights watchdog, said it had written to the LTTE's London office condemning the killing and appealing for an immediate halt to attacks on civilians.

"While the parade may have been in honour of the security forces, that does not mean that those participating in it can be considered to be combatants. The large majority of those killed were civilians and their killing was in violation of international humanitarian law", the organisation said in its letter addressed to Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's representative in London.

THE HINDU

8 JUN 2002

Suicide bomber kills Sri Lankan Minister

AFP & HTC
Colombo, June 7

HTM 8/6
TAMIL TIGER rebels assassinated Sri Lankan Industry Minister C.V. Gooneratne, 65, and killed 21 others, in a devastating suicide bombing this afternoon that marred the country's first War Heroes Day.

A man detonated explosives strapped to his body after embracing Industry Minister C.V. Gooneratne, 65, at a parade organised to collect contributions for thousands of government troops fighting Tiger rebels in the island's north.

Police said the attacker was a "Black Tiger," a suicide bomber of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and that four men were taken in for questioning shortly after the bombing.

Suicide bombings are the trademark of the Tamil Tigers who have been increasing their pressure on government forces in the northern peninsula of Jaffna in the past two months.

A Buddhist monk, Rev. Vijitha, said he saw a man approach along a side road and then walk onto the main road where he embraced Gooneratne, then assassinated him in front of some 5,000 people.

Doctors said Gooneratne's wife was among at least 30 people seriously wounded in the daring attack in the minister's home constituency of Ratmalana, 15 km south of Colombo.

Earlier in the day, Gooneratne had attended a meeting with President Chandrika Kumaratunga who led the nationwide War Heroes Day celebrations to honour government troopers battling the LTTE.

The attack came a few hours after Sri Lanka

observed a two-minute silence in honour of the fallen soldiers, and as the military fended off skirmishes in the north against rebel Tamil Tigers.

Police said the authorities immediately ordered ministers to stay away from any further public gatherings Wednesday amid fears of further suicide bombings.

"It is a precautionary measure," a police source said. "Ministers have been asked to stay away from large crowds, especially today."

There has been a string of suicide bombings in the capital since December. President Kumaratunga narrowly escaped assassination on December 18, but lost her right eye.

The timing of the assassination is seen as being significant here. It took place on Ranaviru Day, when the army was being honoured. Such attacks on civilians, political and economic targets take place also when the LTTE is not doing too well at the war front. Their thrust into Jaffna had been blunted and now there is an uneasy stalemate.

Unprecedented security was also in place at Kumaratunga's office overlooking the Indian Ocean. Navy gunboats were deployed to check any sea-borne attack by the rebels.

Within the tightly-guarded building, Kumaratunga called for peace and unity as the nation came to a halt at 9:28 a.m. (local time) to commemorate the sacrifices made by the military.

She stressed the government wanted to end the 28-year conflict, which escalated into civil war in 1995, but added "the Tigers have shown that they don't want peace."

New Delhi has condemned the killings and extended its sympathy to the families of the dead and injured

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 JUN 2000

Sri Lankan Govt accuses LTTE of forcibly enlisting civilians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, JUNE 7

THE Sri Lankan Government on Tuesday accused the LTTE of preventing large number of civilians from crossing over to army-held areas in the embattled northern Jaffna peninsula in order to conscript the general populace.

An official statement said here that though a large number of civilians have expressed their desire to move into army-controlled areas from the rebel-held villages, the LTTE has refused to allow them to cross over. This was despite the army making arrangements for the civilians to cross over with help of International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it said, adding "however, the LTTE is instead forcing these civilians to move into Vanni, which is under its control".

Also a large number of civilians, including women and children, who

were picked by the rebels from Ariyalai and Kaithady in the peninsula were subsequently conscripted and later taken to Vanni during the one-day unilateral ceasefire announced by the LTTE on May 27, the statement said.

But the ceasefire failed to hold as the army declined to honour it saying that it was not consulted by LTTE or UNHCR, though the UN body has said that it did inform the Defence Ministry the night before ceasefire was announced. The UNHCR later said about 150 people moved over to LTTE-held areas while over 400 shifted to army held areas.

Meanwhile, fighting in Jaffna appeared to have subsided, with no clash between the LTTE and troops reported since Monday, even as the Sri Lankan Government on Tuesday said the rebels had lost 14 personnel, including three women cadres, in Monday's mid-sea battle with navy off the Jaffna coast. The Special Media Information Centre

(SMIC), which compiles reports of fighting from north east, said no incidents of encounters were reported from anywhere in Jaffna. The state radio said 14 LTTE rebels, including three women cadres and a self-styled 'Lt Colonel', were killed in mid-sea fighting off Jaffna on Monday.

The LTTE admitted losing 13 'Sea Tigers' in the battle in which 21 naval personnel were killed and two fast-moving gunboats sunk.

The clandestine LTTE radio, 'Voice of Tigers' in its news broadcast added that the rebels sunk two naval craft and damaged two more. Army sources said while one naval boat was sunk after receiving artillery hit from LTTE boats, another sank after being accidentally hit in aerial bombardment by air force planes.

The bombardment aimed at LTTE boats turned counterproductive as the pilots missed their targets and accidentally zeroed in on naval craft, the sources said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 8 JUN 2002

40-12
FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2000

AN ANNIHILATIONIST STRATEGY

PERSISTING WITH ITS annihilationist policy, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has consumed the life of another Sinhala politician in C. V. Gooneratne — the Minister for Industrial Development. Hardly six months after an abortive attempt on the life of the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, at an election rally in Colombo, the Tamil Tigers have struck with deadly force again now that the battle for Jaffna has reached a stalemate. The assassination carries the signature of the LTTE through the suicide bomber. It was not without significance that it had chosen to explode another human bomb as the Government observed War Heroes Day for the first time since the war with the separatists began in the 1980s. The Minister, who was on a march in his Ratmalana constituency to raise funds for the soldiers, was killed along with over 20 others in the explosion. These are crowded suburbs of Colombo, very near some of the Tamil-dominated areas such as Dehiwala and Wellawatte. The genial Gooneratne may not have been a target himself, but was only a symbolic addition to the ever-increasing list of the LTTE's gruesome and brutal assassinations of Sinhala and Tamil leaders.

This strike in Colombo sends out three clear signals: The LTTE is not interested in peace or negotiations for a political settlement; it may be an attempt to take the heat off Jaffna, where the Government troops have succeeded in halting the LTTE's march towards the town; and above all, the Tamil Tigers may be hoping to trigger a backlash against the Tamils in the capital so that they can document it as another pogrom or genocide by the Chandrika regime. Ms. Kumaratunga must keep the security forces on full alert to prevent any such attack on the Tamils. The time has come for the Sri Lankan Tamils to grasp the essence of the LTTE's strat-

egy. It is one thing to say that but for the LTTE's stiff resistance, the Sinhala-only agenda could have gained ground in the early 1980s. But there is a stage in any struggle when a group claiming to be the 'sole representative' of an ethnic minority takes into account the suffering of that community — in the Jaffna peninsula, in other parts of the island and in countries far and near. If the LTTE cannot see the writing on the wall and open serious negotiations with Colombo to end the unwinnable war and seek a power-sharing, political solution, it cannot be regarded as a sincere interlocutor for the Tamil community.

When she began talks with the major opposition United National Party (UNP) earlier this year, Ms. Kumaratunga set herself a mid-June deadline to achieve a bipartisan consensus on the devolution package and constitutional reforms. She should pursue this seriously and make a determined bid to evolve a compromise package that can then be adopted by Parliament. The UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickeremasinghe, who has not been averse to dallying with the LTTE for some time, must acknowledge that the Tamil Tigers cannot be trusted. The LTTE must have realised by now that taking Jaffna may have no more than symbolic value. The international community has set its face against a separate state or the Eelam demand. If the two main Sinhala parties are able to forge a consensus on devolution, the LTTE would have to give peace a chance. This it can do without giving up its hold on the peninsula, by freezing positions, agreeing to a ceasefire and beginning direct talks with the Government. It may be the last chance for the LTTE to jettison its terrorist moorings and to join the political mainstream. Can the LTTE gather the courage to give up the gun and seek real legitimacy as a representative of the Tamils through the democratic process?

THE HINDU

9 JUN 2000

S. Ranjitha

LTTE asks for ceasefire

11/6

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 10. The LTTE has urged a temporary ceasefire in Jaffna to enable evacuation of civilians after fighting erupted on Friday in the Thenmarachchi division breaking a lull.

The LTTE, claiming to have pushed back the military in Sarasalai after inflicting "heavy casualties", accused the Government of "bombarding" civilian areas in Thenmarachchi. It claimed that aerial and artillery bombardment had killed six civilians and injured "scores" in Maduvil.

A Government statement said two women were killed by LTTE fire at Puttur and Meesalai, and one officer and 24 soldiers had died in Friday's fighting, while 49 soldiers were wounded. The Government also said troops had destroyed an LTTE "strong point" near Sarasalai.

In a statement from its London headquarters, the LTTE said it had asked the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help to arrange for a temporary ceasefire; there was no word from the Government on such a possibility. It was also not clear whether the ICRC and the UNHCR had communicated the LTTE request to the Government.

The organisations do not want to mediate without assessing the situation, but neither has been granted access to the affected ar-



The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, paying homage to the slain minister, C.V. Gunarathne, in Colombo.

— Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

eas. The ICRC spokesperson, Mr. Harsha Gunawardene, said they had been in discussion with both sides over the last two weeks on the issue of access.

The LTTE statement said though "a large section of the civilian population has moved to safe areas in Valigamam, Vadamarachchi and Vanni, thousands are still caught in the crossfire. The forces are pounding the possible routes of evacuation to prevent civilian movement."

Funeral amid security

The funeral of the slain Minister for Industrial Development,

C.V. Gooneratne, and his wife took place here this afternoon.

The President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, went to Parliament, where Gooneratne's body lay in state, in the morning to pay her last respects.

There was tight security in and around the complex as the President, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, the Speaker, Mr. K.B. Ratnayake, Parliamentarians and the diplomatic corps paid homage.

'Communication gap' with south India: Page 11

11 JUN 2000

Lanka welcomes Jaswant with scepticism, surprise

By Charu Lata Joshi

The Times of India News Service

COLOMBO: The two-day visit to Sri Lanka by Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh, beginning on Sunday, has been greeted with a mixture of scepticism and surprise by political leaders here.

"Why has he suddenly decided to come here? We are very suspicious about this because of the manner in which India has been changing its stance. I don't think it is for the good of the country. The fewer visits we have from these countries, the better it is for us," an indignant Tilak Karunaratne—leader of the extremist Sinhalese outfit Singhala Urumuya, which has been opposing talks with the LTTE—said.

Within the ruling People's Alliance government, the two most vociferous opponents of negotiations—minister for public administration and home affairs Ratnasiri Wickeremanayake and minister for agriculture and land D.M. Jayaratna—are equally bewildered at the Indian foreign minister's visit. "I know nothing about this so-called visit. How can I comment?" questioned Mr Wickeremanayake. "I think our foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, did extend an invitation when he went to New Delhi. But we haven't been officially informed about Mr Singh's visit, so we don't know what the purpose is," added Mr Jayaratna.

While an official comment from Sri Lanka's media information unit was unavailable, reliable

sources at the presidential secretariat said that the foreign minister's visit was a direct fall-out of the three-hour meeting that Indian high commissioner Shiv Shankar Menon had with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Mr Kadirgamar earlier this week.

Officials in the Indian high commission in Colombo, however, confirmed that Mr Singh would meet Ms Kumaratunga and ministers from the ruling alliance, apart from leader of opposition Ranil Wickeremasinghe and Tamil leaders on Monday.

Within the Tamil parties, which share a consensus on Indian mediation and involvement, there is a measure of surprise. "Why is he making this sudden visit? Is it because of Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi's statement and to show that there is no confusion in the Indian government's stand?" asked PLOTE leader D. Siddharthan. "In any case, this is merely a diplomatic exercise," he said. The Tamil parties are more or less united on what they are going to tell Mr Singh. "We'll tell him that you have a moral responsibility and the power to do something to resolve the situation," said S. Thavarajah of EPDP.

Mr Siddharthan added, "The Indians are the only ones who can be guarantors to the peace process. We are going to tell them very clearly that you are the only ones who can twist the arms of both the government and the LTTE."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11 JUN 2000

Faint echo of the Tigers' roar?

JUST A few years ago, the LTTE was a dirty word in Tamil Nadu politics. And — believe it or not — there was a period when the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, used to flare up at the very mention of the militant organisation. That was when no one, not even politicians on the fringe, wanted to be associated in any manner with the LTTE. Today, of course, Mr. Vaiko is the most prominent of the growing number of Indian politicians voicing support for the Tigers. What changed between then and now? Time, yes. But little else.

Although there is no shift in the public perception of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation since Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, pro-LTTE groups have used the intervening years to create their own space in mainstream politics.

Their efforts were aided by several factors: incidents of firing at Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy, political exploitation of "Tamil sentiments", the leverage of power held at the Centre by Tamil chauvinist parties such as the MDMK

Lankan Navy firing on Tamil Nadu fishermen in terms of a conflict between the "Sinhalese Navy" and "Tamil fishermen". Almost inevitably, anti-Sri Lankan sentiments in Tamil Nadu found widespread expression everytime the Sri Lankan Navy fired at Tamil Nadu fishermen. And, expectedly, pro-LTTE groups projected the issue as an extension of the ethnic crisis in the island.

But despite all this, the fishermen see the problem differently. Even those who deny any involvement in smuggling activities admit to straying into Sri Lankan waters. As Susai, a fisherman in Rameshwaram says: "The fish won't come to us; we have to go in search of the fish."

Most of them recognise that the Sri Lankan Navy, apprehensive of LTTE attempts to ram into its vessels, is only too likely to resort to indiscriminate firing. "That is a risk we have to take." There is hardly any evidence of pro-LTTE or anti-Sinhala sentiments among fishermen, though some of them do "business" with Sri Lankan Tamils. The linking of the worries of the fishermen to the ethnic

conflict is then essentially the handiwork of politicians who believe there is mileage to be had from taking a pro-Eelam stand in the coastal south of Tamil Nadu.

Often, even the mainstream parties in the State are confused about the political purchase of the rather intangible "Tamil brotherhood" that supposedly unites Indian Tamils with Sri Lankan Tamils. They sense an affinity for Sri Lankan Tamils in south Tamil Nadu, though there is no evidence of support for Eelam and much less for the LTTE. Actually, this "affinity" too is mostly a byproduct of the business network built by the LTTE much earlier. "They are so different from us; we have no real grasp of their problems and therefore no real sympathy," says Banqo, another fisherman from the same area.

Even for the two major Dravidian parties, the DMK and the AIADMK, there is a constant tension between being anti-LTTE and pro-Eelam. With high stakes in the electoral system, they are striving for a golden mean between anti-terrorism and pro-

separatism. At different stages, the two parties have supported the LTTE, but the Rajiv assassination was decidedly a turning point that hardened their attitude to the Tigers.

But the same is not the case with parties such as the MDMK and the PMK. True, the MDMK distanced itself from the LTTE in the years immediately after the Rajiv assassination, but this, as Mr. Vaiko himself concedes now, was part of a strategy. "They never lost touch with me, and I never lost touch with them," he says. When the MDMK broke away from the DMK, it took a greater chunk of the youth in the party. A pro-militancy line appealed to those who left the DMK to join the MDMK. The "no-to-LTTE" stance was intended to shake away the "pro-terrorism" tag which alienated large sections of the voters from his nascent party. Now, after having established the MDMK as a key and acceptable political player in the State through electoral alliances, Mr. Vaiko is once again true to his political constituency.

As for the PMK, it took up the "self-determination for Tamils" slogan after having consolidated its caste constituency. The slogan did not help in any expansion of base, but neither did it damage the established caste base. However, unlike in the case of the MDMK, there was no "push-from-below" to encourage the leadership to take a pro-LTTE line. The party founder, Dr. S. Ramadoss, has made visits to countries with huge populations of Tamil expatriates who are flush with funds. Indeed, some of the conferences and activities of the PMK on the Sri Lankan issue are organised with the specific purpose of selling a particular LTTE line. Thus, in February 1997, the party organised a conference on the Sri Lankan issue, but the invitees did not include any of the major parties from Tamil Nadu. Instead, those on the guest list were the BJP, and its pro-LTTE allies, the Samata Party and the Shiv Sena. Even as far back as 1997, the PMK was directing its energy towards cultivating the BJP and its allies for the sake of the LTTE.

Actually, the alliance of the PMK and the MDMK with the BJP, though first achieved indirectly through the AIADMK, was not accidental. Mr. Vaiko says as much: "With my years of political experience, I knew that through the alliance with the BJP, I could be of help to the Eelam Tamils."

As an ally of the AIADMK, the PMK presented a memorandum to the BJP-led Government in 1998 on the Sri Lankan issue appealing to the hindutva sentiments of the BJP. This, among other things, betrayed the attempts of the PMK to use its influence at the Centre to serve the ends of the LTTE.

Although there is no shift in the public perception of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation since Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, pro-Tiger groups in Tamil Nadu have used the intervening years to create their own space in mainstream politics, writes
SURESH NAMBATH.

and the PMK, and, most importantly, the trickling-in of refugees.

Though initiated by the smaller parties, Tamil nationalism was aided by the major parties. In a phase of competitive Tamil chauvinism, these parties thought it politically expedient to portray the problem of the Sri

THE HINDU

11 JUN 2000

Incendiary influx

The refugee issue is politically volatile for Tamil Nadu... Indian authorities anticipate difficulties only if the war is prolonged.

DON'T LET them come in, but help them once they are in. This is the obvious, but unstated Indian policy on Sri Lankan refugees. The refugee issue is politically volatile for Tamil Nadu. An increase in the influx of refugees could unsettle the "no-interference" approach of the Centre, and increase the stakes of all State political parties in the Sri Lankan crisis. At the same time, the political costs will be high if an impression gains ground that Indian authorities are unwilling to help refugees.

But as of now, the situation is nowhere near worrisome. Thanks to the precautionary measures and the tightening of coastal security, the number of refugees so far this year (a little more than 1,000) is only half the number of those who landed on Indian shores during the same period last year.

The Mandapam camp, with about 3,900 refugees, can accommodate another 3,000. Refugees are only trickling in, and they are not coming from the war zones, but from areas under Sri Lankan military occupation. The on-going war does not appear to have brought in any fresh influx.

Indian authorities have identified more than a score of Sri Lankan agents who help in ferrying refugees to India and alerted their counterparts in the island. But, there is no information of action having been taken at the other end. In a recent instance, an Indian fishing boat was also reportedly involved in bringing in refugees. But so far, there is no evidence of any organised racket of ferrying refugees from the Indian side.

Most of the refugees are skilled

and have a sound financial background. Many have relatives in India waiting for them. Some of them use Tamil Nadu as a transit camp before they seek to go to countries such as Canada and Switzerland.

There are middlemen in Tiruchi and Chennai who do the paperwork for the refugees to go abroad. One of the first things that refugees do on landing in India is make ISD calls to Sri Lanka and countries in the West where they have relatives. Refugees already in India actually encourage those in Sri Lanka to come over.

According to Mr. Nirmalanathan, a refugee who landed at the Mandapam camp on May 28, the Sri Lankan Army personnel indulge in indiscriminate firing and shelling. "There is no escape for civilians." The LTTE too is ruthless in its ways. There is forcible recruitment. 'No' to recruitment is met with 'Why not?' Those who continue to hesitate to join up are asked if they are on the 'other side' or with 'another group'. A 'yes' could prove fatal.

But almost all refugees have a standard one-liner to the question if and when they would like to return to Sri Lanka: "The day the war ends."

In handling refugees, the Tamil Nadu police have the additional task of screening them to prevent entry of militants. Besides, there have to be routine checks to curb smuggling of motorcycle engines, diesel, medicine and clothes. Recently, two refugees were arrested while they were trying to smuggle out motorcycles. However, the Ramanathapuram Superintendent of Police, Mr. S. N. Seshasai, says smuggling has been stopped almost completely. Actually, the smuggling comes down during war-time as fishermen "lose contact" with the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Indian authorities anticipate difficulties only if the war is prolonged and the Sri Lankan forces make significant gains. More restrictions are now likely to be placed on the refugees in the changing situation. — S. N.

The clemency petitions of the Rajiv assassins naturally found favour with respected groups of human rights activists, but for the pro-LTTE outfits the campaign against the death penalty was just another means to push the Tiger agenda.

While leaders of both the MDMK and the PMK do not expect the Sri Lankan issue to dominate any election in Tamil Nadu, the situation would be very different if there is a continual flow of Sri Lankan refugees

into the State. In a volatile scenario, they are hopeful of leading public opinion the LTTE way.

Thus, although the LTTE does not find direct backing from the major Dravidian parties, it is obtaining greater support from those smaller parties which have emerged as significant players. The four-letter acronym is yet to gain social acceptance, but those who now use it are not speaking in hushed tones.

27 JUN 2000

SRI LANKA-I

Roots Of India's Policy

SI-8
18/6

By AG NOORANI

THE Government of India had an excellent opportunity to break from the disastrous policy which the Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi regimes pursued towards Sri Lanka as it grappled with the ethnic question. Minus the mother and son's imperial gloss, the government has followed the same policy of old based on the great power complex and obsession with southern comfort. In the course of just one month, May 2000, a fine opportunity has been squandered. As before, a conflict is misperceived between friendship with Sri Lanka and the interests of the Tamils there. In truth, it is friendship, not pressure tactics, that will fortify India's intercession on their behalf.

RELATIONS

Only a few days before the crisis erupted, the MEA's Annual Report 1999-2000 was published. It said: "India's relations with Sri Lanka continued to be cordial and friendly. India expressed its consistent support for a peaceful settlement of the ethnic conflict within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. India views the ethnic issue as an internal matter of Sri Lanka and best be (sic) resolved by Sri Lankans themselves." This formulation was repeated in a statement on 21 April.

The fall of Elephant Pass to the LTTE in late April and Sri Lanka's request for military assistance to fight them back altered the situation. India has been very coy about mentioning that request and its refusal. But President Chandrika Kumaratunga revealed both in a very candid interview to Nirupama Subramanian on 23 May. She had asked India "for some urgent military assistance which India had said they cannot give". That was the issue; not the strawman of despatch of Indian troops whom New Delhi repeatedly set up and knocked down with great gusto. Sri Lanka did not ask for the troops. It asked for "military assistance". Evacuation of 30,000 of its troops caught in Jaffna was a separate and secondary issue, depending on the situation there. Sri Lanka was battling for its survival as one country.

Soon after Sri Lanka's foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar's meeting with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on 3 May, the Cabinet Com-

mittee on Security met and endorsed the basic policy. The minister for external affairs, Jaswant Singh's definitive statement in Parliament on 4 May revealed its broad contours. India was committed to "a negotiated peaceful resolu-



tion of the conflict". The LTTE is banned in India. In 1995 India had demanded its supremo V Pirabhakaran's extradition to India. "We are not supplying any ammunition to Sri Lanka," he declared. "Should an occasion arise," he hinted, "humanitarian assistance" will be rendered. It was a euphemism for help in the evacuation of Sri Lanka's troops in Jaffna. "The option of any kind of military intervention in Northern Sri Lanka is not an option that we are contemplating of (sic)," the minister said.

He made a remark, pregnant with meaning, whose significance was not then appreciated. It foreshadowed the line followed thereafter. Jaswant Singh acknowledged that Sri Lanka had requested Norway "to intercede on their behalf to act as a kind of a facilitator for dialogue" with the LTTE. Both, Sri Lanka and Norway "did India the courtesy of consulting us before they undertook what step". Which makes it highly objectionable for India's foreign minister to belittle for no reason its very usefulness even before the process has really gone underway. Mark the sweep of his words: "It is my appreciation that the Norwegian initiative of any kind of facilitation perhaps is not a workable solution under the present circumstances."

PROGRESS

Jaswant Singh was not expressing his disappointment at the lack of progress. He was questioning fundamentally the very worth of "any kind of facilitation" by Norway. This was presumptuous as well as crassly irresponsible. Its worth was entirely for Sri Lanka to judge. The implication was plain. He resented being left out and was trying to muscle in. The reaction to this statement was little short of a rebuff. It was one

thing to withhold assistance; another to undermine a process which India was not invited to join.

The very day the minister spoke (4 May), "sources in the Government" asserted that "there is no room for military or political intervention by other powers in the Sri Lankan conflict". It reflected the government's "judgment that India is in a position to facilitate a dialogue between the two warring sides in Sri Lanka".

Jaswant Singh could not conceal his purpose any longer. On 7 May he said in a TV interview, "I do not think India has ever been a dishonest broker. And as to playing any role in the situation, that is a process that can be only engaged in when all sides to the situation (sic) asked for it." Specifically, "Playing the role of a negotiator can come only when the Sri Lankan government requires, determines and decides that there is such a role to be played."

ROLE

Clearly, contrary to its stand in the MEA's report ("internal matter") the government of India had not taken a major policy decision to project for itself a role in the conflict, ousting Norway from the ring. Its refusal to help the government of Sri Lanka militarily becomes understandable. That would have robbed the aspiring mediator of credibility in the LTTE's eyes. Significantly, the proposal was addressed to Colombo. The LTTE's approval was taken for granted. President Kumaratunga said in her interview, "India can do many things. What it could do is strengthen the hands of our chosen facilitator, Norway, and try to persuade the LTTE to come for talks." Asked whether India had "that kind of influence over the LTTE", she smiled meaningfully and replied: "That's an obvious question. I think India has, could have a lot of influence over the LTTE, if they so wish."

Jaswant Singh had not thought the matter through. The implications of such a role by India, had Sri Lanka acquiesced in it, would have been disastrous. India would have accepted the LTTE as the sole spokesman for the Tamils, thus betraying moderates like the TULF who have trusted it all these years. The LTTE would have received a tremendous boost, enabling it to receive greater help from abroad and to consolidate its fascist set-up in areas under its control. Its record alone renders its word unworthy of credence.

(To be concluded)

The author is a lawyer and commentator on current affairs.

Consensus in Lanka on command for North, East

14/6 5/1
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, June 13. — President Chandrika Kumaratunga and leader of Sri Lanka's main Opposition United National Party, Mr Ranil Wickeramasinghe, today agreed to set up an interim administration in the island's Tamil-dominated northern and eastern provinces.

The meeting came a day after Mr Jaswant Singh urged Lankan leaders to speed up the process of formulating a new constitution granting equal rights to Tamils.

Mrs Kumaratunga and Mr Wickeramasinghe met as part of an ongoing exercise to finalise a draft constitution to grant regional autonomy to Tamil provinces. The leaders reached a broad understanding on setting up an interim council to administer the provinces, official sources said here today. They said the arrangement could provide an opportunity to the LTTE to play a dominant role in any future political settlement to end the ethnic conflict.

Mr Singh, who wound up his two-day visit yesterday, had reiterated India's commitment to the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka.

Mrs Kumaratunga and Mr Wickeramasinghe met last week to discuss devolution of power to the regional councils, but no agreement was reached. Setting aside differences, the two leaders today discussed the unit of devolution.

The 1997 draft constitution finalised by the Kumaratunga administration had proposed bifurcation of the north-eastern province by de-linking a Muslim-dominated district from the east.

The UNP, however, said it supported a united north-eastern province as merged in 1987.

■ More reports on page 8

THE STATESMAN

14 JUN 2000

'Sri Lankan reforms package by June-end'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 16. The much-awaited package of Constitutional reforms that envisages devolution to the Tamil and Muslim minorities of Sri Lanka could be up before Parliament within weeks, the State-owned *Daily News* indicated today.

The newspaper reported that the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, had taken a "firm decision" not to allow discussions on the reforms to extend beyond June 30.

Mrs. Kumaratunga is under pressure from the minorities to present the package of devolution and other Constitutional reforms to Parliament before it is dissolved this August.

On the other hand, the package, with its radical proposals for devolution, could pose problems for her and the People's Alliance (PA) during the general elections which have to be called before November.

It was not immediately clear whether Mrs. Kumaratunga proposed to hold discussions with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as she had promised in February, before presenting the package to Parliament.

Daily News said the package would be put to Parliament soon after the deadline, whether or not a consensus with the UNP was reached on all the contentious issues.

HD-1 17/6
"It is the opinion of the President that the longer the delay in arriving at a consensus (on the package), the greater are the opportunities for the acts of crime perpetrated by Prabhakaran. Accordingly, the President has decided very firmly that discussions will not be extended beyond June 30th under any circumstances whatsoever," it declared.

Earlier this week, there was a breakthrough in Government-
Opposition talks when the two sides resolved their differences over the unit of devolution and agreed to set up one interim council to rule over the north-east, with a referendum later to decide the issue of merger of the two provinces. The proposal, which has yet to be formalised, is awaiting the approval of the Tamil parties.

The main outstanding issues now between the PA and the UNP are control over land use, and the nature of the Sri Lankan State.

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17 JUN 2000

LTTE to be kept out of interim council

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 18. The Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, today ruled out the participation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a proposed interim council to administer the embattled north-east of the island.

A Government statement said an agreement had been reached with the Opposition United National Party (UNP) in talks last week that the merger of the northern and eastern provinces would be decided through a referendum.

"Until such time the referendum is held, it was discussed that an interim council would be established to administer the currently merged north-east province. The President, on behalf of the Government, has specifically stated that only those representatives of registered Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala democratic political parties representing the north-east should participate in the proposed interim council".

According to the statement, the LTTE could join the interim administration if it entered the democratic mainstream and gave up violence. It pointed out the existence of a gazette notification to set up an interim council since



PAINTING PEACE: Members of an organisation for peace draw a butterfly on a road in Colombo where a bomb exploded on Saturday. — AP

November last year. Earlier this week, Mrs. Kumaratunga was reported to have set a deadline of June 30 for reaching a consensus

on all other issues with the UNP, so that the political package could be presented to Parliament before its dissolution in August. Today's

statement leaves no doubt that the Government wants to present the package to Parliament without consulting the LTTE.

It is expected that this week, the Government would take discuss the proposed council with non-LTTE Tamil parties, four of which are represented in Parliament.

The proposed referendum is a concession to the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) which has articulated the community's fears of living in a Tamil majority north-eastern province.

Last week, amid reports of the proposed council and referendum, the LTTE circulated a leaflet addressed to Muslims living in Batticaloa and Amparai districts asking them to be vigilant against "Sinhala chauvinist forces" trying to create divisions between the two communities.

The appeal began with an address to "all Muslim brothers and sisters" and said: "Regardless of the (incidents of the past), Tamil Eelam belongs to the Muslim and Tamil people.

"We urge your cooperation in working towards strengthening the Tamil Muslim relationship and also urge you to be vigilant in identifying the insidious designs of the Sinhala Government to bring about disharmony between the Tamil and Muslim people."

See also Page 13

THE HINDU

19 JUN 2000

Eelam belongs to Muslims too: LTTE

'A political masterstroke' India no longer safe refuge

COLOMBO: In a significant political move the LTTE departed from their policy towards Muslims to say the "Tamil Eelam belongs to the Muslims and Tamil people" and has sought co-operation of the community to "strengthen Tamil-Muslim relationship".

Political analysts consider the LTTE move as very significant coming as it does at a time when the government and the opposition are parleying on how and when a referendum should be held in the Tamil-populated north and the Muslim-dominated east on the merger of the two.

The LTTE has also warned Muslims to be vigilant against "a campaign of divisions" between them and the Tamil people in the east.

"Tamil Eelam belongs to the Muslims and Tamil people", the LTTE said in a leaflet in Tamil with the address 'Dear Muslim brothers/sisters' distributed widely in the Eastern Batticaloa and Ampara districts.

It was not immediately clear what prompted the rebels to issue the appeal to win over the Muslims.

Sinhala chauvinist forces, however, have been warning Muslims of an imminent war in the eastern province and that they are facing a danger from the Tigers who are looking to force them out of the east.

The rebels have forced tens of thousands of Muslims out of their homes in the northern Jaffna peninsula in the past, forcing them to relocate to the east. Tamil rebels have also attacked Muslim villages.

By Charu Lata Joshi
The Times of India News Service

COLOMBO: A majority of the Tamils fleeing Jaffna and now put up at a transit refugee camp in Trincomalee do not find India an option to seek refuge. The northerners escaping the fighting which has intensified during the past few months are no longer heading for the southern coasts of India as they once did. "If we go to India, we can always be pushed back," says 30-year-old Kulenderi, who is on her way back from Colombo to Jaffna, after leaving her children in the capital.

Fifty-two-year-old Jagdishwari, too, has left her three teenage children with a relative in Colombo. "We don't know what the Indian government's policy is. We don't know when we will be sent back to the scene of fighting, there is no security there," she argues.

Apart from a feeling of insecurity at the treatment they would receive from the Indian government, there is sound, practical logic behind their decision. "If I go to the Middle-East or Europe, I can earn better money and send it home," says 28-year-old Mahendra, a resident of Karavur in Jaffna, who recently lost some two lakh Sri Lankan rupees to an agent in a failed attempt to get to Germany.

Some like Jyaneshwari have already started receiving money from her son in Italy. "The postal system is erratic but whatever we get from there is a help because we don't have any money left," she says.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 JUN 2000

LTTE kept out of talks on devolution plan

President Chandrika wants Parliament to ratify the proposal before involving rebel groups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, JUNE 18

THE Sri Lankan President has decided not to refer the draft of the new constitution to the LTTE until it is ratified by Parliament, as she reached a broad agreement with the opposition on the unit of devolution to demarcate the contentious north and eastern province.

While the official media here today focussed on a broad agree-

ment reached between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe on the unit of devolution, *The Sunday Times* newspaper said the President decided not to submit the draft constitution to the rebels before she tabled it in Parliament for ratification. *The Sunday Times* said both the government and the opposition reached an understanding to set up an interim administration in the north and east for a limited period of three years after which a

referendum would be held in eastern areas to ascertain whether people preferred to stay with the north or as a separate province. Unlike the north, Sri Lanka's east has a mixture of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese population.

While the government would continue with the present temporary merger of the north and east as a basis for the unit of devolution to start with, a referendum would be conducted in eastern areas like Trincomalee and Batticaloa to find

whether people wanted to stay put with the north. "Until this, an interim council would be established to administer the currently merged north and eastern province," the state-owned *Sunday Observer* said.

But did not mention what would happen to the fate of a southeastern provincial council to be set up after being carved out from Muslim-dominated district of Ampara in the east.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, a senior partner in Chan-

drika's coalition has been demanding the formation of such a province to protect the interests of the Muslims. The decision on formation of the interim council and unit devolution follows last week's visit of External Affairs Minister

Jaswant Singh, who had strongly advised the Lankan Government and the UNP here to speed up the process of formation of new constitution giving proper legal guarantees to autonomy and equal rights for minority Tamils.

Mixed reactions to LTTE's exclusion from Council

SRI LANKA's main opposition United National Party (UNP) and the moderate Tamil parties today expressed reservations over government decision not to include LTTE in the proposed interim council for the northern and eastern provinces unless the rebel outfit gave up violence and joined the democratic mainstream. *UNP*

Expressing surprise at yesterday's announcement by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, UNP secretary Gamini Athukorale said here that his party wanted all the concerned political parties of the north and east to be included in the interim council.

He was not aware of the reasons for barring the rebel group from the proposed council, UNP leader said adding his party's stand had been conveyed to Chandrika last week.

Vice-president of the TULF Ananda Sangari said his party would not take part in the proposed council unless the government made the rebel group a party to its formation. **PTI, Colombo**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JUN 2001

20 JUN 2001

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2000

89-12
21/6
AN INTERIM SOLUTION ✓
S. Hanumanth

THE MOVE TO set up an interim council to administer the northeastern region of Sri Lanka must be seen in the context of the evolving bipartisan consensus between the two main Sinhala parties. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has now set a June-end deadline for wrapping up the package of devolution proposals and constitutional reforms with the main Opposition United National Party (UNP). The interim council will be a temporary vehicle to implement the devolution package in the north and east. Reservations have been expressed by the UNP, the TULF and a number of other Tamil groups about the feasibility of an interim administration that excludes the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Their view is that an interim council without the LTTE will serve no purpose and keeping the Tigers out may mean closing the door on the peace process. Ms. Kumaratunga has not shut the door on the LTTE, but has now clearly put the onus on the Tamil Tigers to give up terrorism and demonstrate their commitment to a peaceful negotiated solution. The Sri Lankan President is working in very limited political space. There is a stalemate in the theatre of war and neither side wants to give up its positions. The Norwegian initiative to revive the peace process has not made much headway and there are no indications yet from the intransigent LTTE that it is ready for a ceasefire that could lead to substantive negotiations. In the absence of such a commitment, the Government obviously thought it better not to hold up the devolution package. The LTTE has repeatedly reneged on its commitments to engage in substantive negotiations after the 1987 agreement, under which it could have secured a dominant position in an interim administration. Again, it broke off talks with the Chandrika Government after launching a peace process with all fanfare in Jaffna in 1994. There is no sign of its return to negotiations with Colombo.

Under these circumstances, what are the options? True, there is need to take stock of the ground realities, as the LTTE controls most of the north and east. But how can anybody force the Tamil Tigers to return to talks and abandon the path of terrorism? Yet, the way ahead for the Sri Lankan Government seems to be to build on its offer of devolving power to the Tamil minority-dominated north and east. There are so many intricate details to be sorted out and these issues can only be addressed in detailed discussions with the Opposition parties and the Tamil political groups. Unless the Norwegian initiative achieves a breakthrough, it will be difficult to see the LTTE returning to the negotiating table. But the question is: should the first set of concrete devolution proposals become a victim of the unending, unwinnable war? If the LTTE is really committed to the welfare of the Tamil people and wants them to live in peace and prosperity, why should it not give peace a chance? Without the LTTE and possibly the TULF, it is quite likely that fringe groups like the EPDP and the PLOTE, along with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, will dominate the interim council. The President's critics suggest that the sudden speed with which she is pursuing the consensus on the package is linked to the upcoming parliamentary elections. That might be the case, but that should not detract from a dispassionate evaluation of the merit of the package of proposals. If the President evolves a Sinhala consensus on a set of proposals to solve the ethnic problem, the responsibility will shift to the Tamil parties, including the LTTE, to build on them and get the best possible deal. If a consensus is reached without the LTTE, it will stand exposed and will be seen to be blocking the devolution of powers to the minorities. But it is still too early to conclude that the mainstream political parties — Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim — along with the all-powerful Buddhist clergy — can unitedly endorse the final set of proposals.

THE HINDU

21 JUN 2000

'Sri Lankan Muslims not for Eelam'

10-13

21/6

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 20. The Muslims of Sri Lanka are not for the separation of the country, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and parliamentarian, Mr. M. H. M. Ashraff, said today.

"The Muslims of Sri Lanka do not subscribe to the theory of Tamil Eelam," he told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Ashraff, a powerful partner in the Kumaratunga Government, was responding to reports of a leaflet, purportedly from the LTTE, telling the Muslim community in eastern Sri Lanka that Eelam belonged to both the Muslims and Tamils.

He said shared political power should be the basis for any solution in north-eastern Sri Lanka. And power must be shared not just between the Centre and the region, but between the Centre and different ethnic communities of the region.

The SLMC has been pushing the case for carving out a south-eastern council out of three Muslim-majority electorates in Amparai district. The district now falls in what is claimed as "homeland" by all Tamil parties.

"We have been persuading the Tamil political parties to understand and accept our position," Mr. Ashraff, who is also the Minister for Ports, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, said.

The Minister, who commands a sizeable following in eastern Sri Lanka, said the LTTE had behaved in a "very brutal way" with the Muslims of the north and east.

"Our understanding is that the LTTE had a strategy to make the

north-east a mono-ethnic region. Even now that threat is hanging on our heads," he said, referring to the killings of Muslims in Batticaloa and the purge of Muslims from Jaffna in the early 90s.

Mr. Ashraff, however, disagreed with the decision to exclude the LTTE from a proposed interim council to administer the north-east. "If they want to join, they must be allowed. By saying that the LTTE should not be part of the solution, we are not leaving any doors open for a peaceful solution."

The People's Alliance and the United National Party had agreed, in principle, to set up an interim council in the north-east, but details like its powers, and provisions for the Muslims and Sinhala minority in the area had yet to be worked out.

Mr. Ashraff, who took part in last week's discussions as a member of the PA, said he had agreed to an interim council, provided a referendum was guaranteed, at the end of a given time-frame, to decide whether the north and the east should be two separate provinces or merged into one. The SLMC position is that in case people vote to merge the two provinces, a south-eastern council should be formed.

If after the specified time-frame, conditions do not permit a referendum, a south-eastern council should be set up automatically. "As far as we are concerned, this interim council should not become a permanent arrangement," Mr. Ashraff said.

21 JUN 2001

Any qualitative shift in India's Sri Lanka policy will be illogical

An island in context

J.N. DIXIT

Sri Lanka is in crisis again. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in a major military offensive, has expelled the Sri Lankan army from the Elephant Pass and Iyakachchi, the main points in land approaches from the rest of Sri Lanka to Jaffna peninsula. Before analysing the implications of this crisis, it would be pertinent to see the background in which Sri Lanka's territorial unity stands threatened again, perhaps more seriously than ever before.

First, the "Sinhala only" policy and the Buddhist religion being given the supreme position in the Sri Lankan constitution in 1958 initiated a process of systematic and drastic discrimination against the Tamil population of Sri Lanka, which constitutes nearly 15 per cent of the country's population.

Second, from Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 to the late Eighties, a number of agreements were signed between Sinhalese leaders and the Sri Lankan government and the leaders of the Sri Lankan Tamils to ensure justice and equality for the Tamils. Each and every one of these agreements was scuttled and betrayed despite the solemn assurances given to the Tamils.

Third, the attempts at genuine mediation made by India between 1983 and 1990 were sabotaged primarily by members of the Sri Lankan government. This included its hobnobbing with the LTTE while requesting the Indian troops to contain them. All the negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE between 1990 and 1999 remain cosmetic efforts without a purposive move forward.

The Sri Lankan government was expected to negotiate with the LTTE representatives somewhere in Europe through Norwegian mediation. An amount of background information and historical memory should however have made all concerned anticipate a significant military initiative from the LTTE before the negotiations commenced.

First of all, instead of agreeing to commence the dialogue immediately, both the Chandrika Kumaratunga government and the LTTE stipulated parallel preconditions. The Sri Lankan government demanded a complete cessation of the LTTE's operations, whereas the LTTE demanded the cessation of the Sri Lankan military offensive and the withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces south of the Elephant Pass. Given the political and military orientations of both sides, it was obvious that these demands would not be met.

The military objective now of the LTTE is to consolidate its domination of the Jaffna peninsula and the political objective to enter the negotiations sponsored by the Norwegians from a position of strength and credibility based on territorial control of the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. While the LTTE is incrementally dominating the peninsula, it is also effective in questioning the government's jurisdiction in Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amperei.

The development since the second

fortnight of April was a culmination of the critical predicament faced by the Sri Lankan government. Kumaratunga was subjected to a suicide bomb attack in December 1999. The LTTE's military pressure in Jaffna increased between January and March when Kumaratunga ordered her three service chiefs to locate themselves in Jaffna to personally command the operations against the LTTE.

But this initiative did not serve the purpose of boosting the morale and de-

term. Kumaratunga has undertaken consultations with the opposition parties, and more importantly, with the Buddhist monks about the stances to be adopted by the government in the negotiations being launched by Norway. These consultations have not been encouraging. The main opposition party, the United Nationalist Party, is critical of the fact that the Kumaratunga government did not have any detailed discussions with the opposition parties be-



Given the LTTE's violent posture, the Norwegian initiative will go into a limbo in the short term

fore formally accepting the Norwegian initiative.

The two main Buddhist religious leaders of Sri Lanka, the Mahanayakas of the Asgariya and Malwatte orders of monks, indicated to Kumaratunga that they have reservations about the Norwegian initiative in the context of developments over the last one year. While the LTTE has indicated a willingness to participate in negotiations through Norwegian mediation, their objective remains to see that all their fundamental demands are fully met by the Sri Lankan government. If negotiations do not achieve this purpose, the LTTE may dissociate itself from the process. More so now when they seem to have the upper hand.

Apart from the critical military situation that the Sri Lankan government faces, its ramification in terms of the internal politics of Sri Lanka creates additional problems for the stability of the country. The Sri Lankan armed forces

have been under continuous military pressure for the last five years, which they have not been able to cope with despite some interim military successes. There are reports of desertions and low morale, in contrast with the LTTE cadre's commitment and battle-hardened determination regarding their cause. They seem to have grown in strength and organizational capacities, specially from 1993-94 onwards.

A critical dimension affecting India in this whole situation is the fact that despite being an organization banned by the government of India, the LTTE retains its extensive political and logistical connections in Tamil Nadu and along the coast, including the ports of Rameswaram and Vedaranyam. The most recent media reports indicate that areas in Tamil Nadu still serve as bases for supplies and logistical support to the LTTE.

The LTTE's political links with some political parties and groups in Tamil Nadu remain strong, indicating that segments of the public in Tamil Nadu remain supportive of the LTTE. The access and support which the LTTE enjoys in Tamil Nadu could not have been achieved unless sections administration and security forces connived at the LTTE's continuing covert activities in Tamil Nadu.

An example of such general support is the confusion created by a statement of the chief minister of Tamil Nadu on his 77th birth anniversary, that, given the intractability of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, a solution could be for the Sri Lankan government to agree to the separation of the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka into another state as Czechoslovakia bifurcated itself peacefully allowing Slovakia to become a separate state. Though attempts have been made to project this view as a personal view and party view of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and not of the Tamil Nadu government and the government of India, it nevertheless indicates a deep undercurrent in Tamil politics which has critical implications for India's Sri Lanka policies.

India has to cope with three problems in its Sri Lankan policy at this stage. First, to deal with the LTTE connections with Tamil Nadu which affects the security of that state. Second, there is a continuous trickle of refugees from Sri Lanka to India. And the third, to respond to Sri Lankan concern about the first factor and sustain stability in Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

Despite suggestions from some quarters, it is obvious that India should not get involved in any direct military efforts in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the LTTE's military successes leading to the dismemberment of Sri Lanka, has serious political implications not only for Sri Lanka but also for India. Given our past experience with Sri Lanka, it would be both impracticable and illogical for us to venture into any qualitative shift in our present Sri Lankan policy. However, we can certainly suggest that Sri Lanka seriously considers responding to Tamil aspirations short of accepting the division of the country, if that is possible.

The author is former foreign secretary of India

The devolution dilemma

By V. Jayanth

JUST AS much as the extent, the unit of devolution remains a major hurdle in Sri Lanka's search for a political solution to its ethnic crisis.

There are bound to be reservations on both sides of the ethnic divide about the devolution package as well as the unit of devolution. The Sinhalese will feel that the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, plans to give away more than what is due to the provinces or the proposed regional council. And no matter how good the package is, the Sri Lankan Tamils will ask for more.

Any possible solution to this problem lies in finding a middle ground, a compromise that will make devolution really meaningful so that the Tamils can jettison the idea of secession. Unless they are convinced that there is enough in the political package, even the moderate Tamil parties will remain reluctant to openly endorse any offer. That will leave very little chance for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to accept anything short of 'Eelam'.

In the evolving consensus between the two main Sinhala parties — the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the Opposition United National Party (UNP) — there seems to be a very cautious approach to the sensitive issue of unit of devolution. They have agreed on the need for an interim council, but are holding back on the administrative unit. There is still talk of two provinces — north and east — but a combined regional council to administer the area. This is nothing more than semantics. It is virtually a continuation of the existing arrangement with one Council of Ministers, one Chief Minister and a single Governor for the combined north and east.

But there is room for a referendum to decide on the possible merger of the north and the east or, if the people so decide, to delink them. This was so even in the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1987, which paved the way for the 13th Amendment and the creation of the provincial councils.

Successive Governments in Colombo have stuck to the separate entities of northern and eastern provinces, though there is only a single Northeast Provincial Council and one Governor for the region. Till its dissolution when the Indian Peace-Keep-

ing Force (IPKF) left Sri Lanka, there was but one provincial Government with Mr. Varadaraja Perumal as Chief Minister.

So diplomatic sources see no difference in the latest proposals emanating from the PA-UNP consultations. But they can be fulfilled only when the moderate Tamil parties and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) accept them. The only change now lies in the nomenclature — a regional council.

In the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of July 29, 1987, the following provisions dealt with the unit of devolution: Clause 1.4 read: "Also recognising that the northern and

endium". That referendum was never held. The Chandrika proposals, released in August 1995, made some minor changes, but stuck to the existing arrangement. It provided for a regional council for every province to be identified by a new schedule to the Constitution. It said: "One of the regions would be constituted by redemarcating the existing boundaries of the present northeast province in full consultation with a view to reconciling Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim interests".

What is more, land was one of the subjects to be devolved and state land within any region will be vested in the regional

There are bound to be reservations on both sides of the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka about the devolution package... Any possible solution lies in finding a compromise that will make devolution really meaningful to the Tamils.

councils. Priority in future land settlement schemes will be given to persons first of the district and then of the region.

Perhaps, had the LTTE taken the 1995 peace process seriously, the President would have gone much farther than the proposals in her package. Unfortunately, the Tigers abandoned the peace talks and resumed the war in April 1995 with the attack on the Trincomalee harbour.

Five years later and the military advances and setbacks during that period, the debate is raging — should the Government talk again with the LTTE and will that serve any purpose? Can there be a solution to the Tamil question without the LTTE?

Simultaneously, the Muslim factor has also emerged. Thanks to the LTTE's policy of 'ethnic cleansing', the Tamil-speaking Muslims in the north were targeted and given 24 hours to pack up and leave the province. The Muslims in the east have also been targeted periodically.

As a result, the eastern Muslims feel more insecure now and may not be ready to do business with the LTTE. The emergence of the SLMC and its leader, Mr. M. H. M. Ashraff, filled a vacuum and provided a

rallying point for the community. With his astute bargaining power and political skills, Mr. Ashraff negotiated with both the UNP and the PA, before finally jumping on the Chandrika bandwagon to become a coalition partner.

Under these circumstances, it will be very difficult for both the Sinhala parties to deny the SLMC and the Muslims their say in the resolution of the ethnic conflict. Had the LTTE and the Tamil parties forged a common front with the Muslim Congress, they could have emerged as a major power bloc with almost one-fourth of the island's votes. The LTTE drove the Muslims into the arms of the Sinhala politicians, but is now trying to win them over.

Parliamentary elections are due in August and must be held before October/November. So, it is bargaining time again for Mr. Ashraff. During the December 1999 presidential election, the UNP leader, Mr. Hanil Wickremesinghe, clinched an understanding with the Tamils — his critics said it was even with the LTTE. So the SLMC will be keeping its options open till the last minute to ensure a substantial representation for itself in the next Parliament. Neither the PA nor the UNP will be willing to sacrifice Muslim interests and votes to strike a deal with the Tamil parties.

Both the UNP and the PA have decided to firm up the preliminary understanding on an interim council for the northeast in a week's time, after consulting the Tamil parties. The SLMC has given its initial acceptance subject to the condition that there would be a referendum and hence the possibility of delinking the two provinces if need arises.

It remains to be seen whether even the moderate Tamil groups will accept this regional council concept with the referendum on demerger thrown in. And if they reject it, the whole formula will collapse. The President is willing to give the LTTE a dominant status in the interim council, if it gives up violence and agrees to enter the political mainstream.

Tamil sources are not too optimistic right now. They are convinced that Ms. Kumaratunga is only ready for the elections and the interim council concept cannot succeed unless the LTTE is also involved.

✓ LTTE to be ✓
allowed draft ✓
statute preview ✓

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ^{SR} 28/6

COLOMBO, June 22. — Chances of the start of a new peace process involving the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have brightened with Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga deciding to refer the draft of the new constitution to the Tigers before submitting it to Parliament for ratification.

The draft is being finalised by the President in consultation with the Opposition.

The decision to refer the draft, containing broad autonomy proposals to the Tamil-dominated north and eastern provinces, follows an accord last night between Mrs Kumaratunga and the United National Party leader, Mr Ranil Wickramasinghe, on devolution of power to the administered land.

The minister for agriculture and general secretary of the ruling Peoples' Alliance, Mr DM Jayaratne, said last night that the government would present the draft to the LTTE after it was finalised by the government and the UNP.

THE STATESMAN

23 JUN 2000

OFFERING AN OLIVE BRANCH: LTTE MAY BE GIVEN A CHANCE IN ADMINISTRATION

Lanka govt, Oppn agree on interim council

Colombo
23 JUNE

IN A major breakthrough in the ongoing talks to formulate a new constitution, the Sri Lankan government and Opposition United National Party (UNP) have decided to constitute an interim council to administer the Tamil-dominated north and eastern provinces for five years and permit the LTTE to take part in it, provided it stopped the war.

Official sources here said President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her arch rival and UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe during their meeting on Thursday night decided on the constitution of the interim council for five years at a stretch.

This meant that the status of the temporary merger of the north and eastern provinces, effected in 1987, will continue for another five years till the government held a referendum in the east to ascertain whether the province, with a mixed

population of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese opts to stay along with the north or preferred a bifurcation.

The two provinces were temporarily merged as a consequence of the Indo-Lanka accord in 1987, signed by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and late President J.R. Jayawardene.

In addition to this agreement, the President, who had earlier expressed reservations about the LTTE taking part in the administration has reportedly clarified to the UNP that the rebel group will be permitted to take part in it only if it stopped its ongoing war against the government.



Chandrika: Giving an inch

The island newspaper quoting "authoritative sources" of the ruling People's Alliance stated that Chandrika made it clear the "the LTTE must stop the war otherwise how can they participate in the council while waging a war." Both the government and the UNP, however, ruled out

monopoly status for the LTTE. They wanted all the political parties from the Tamil provinces to be represented, UNP sources said.

The two sides have agreed to submit the LTTE draft constitution for talks after it was finalised.

Both Chandrika and Ranil were continuing their discus-

sions since last month to formulate the new constitution, which incorporated a broad autonomy package to devolve powers to the proposed council for the Tamil-dominated areas. The discussions were scheduled to concluded by June 28.

The agreement on the interim council followed similar agreements between the two on vexatious issues like powers to be devolved to administer land and the unit of devolution for the north-eastern areas.

The two sides were currently discussing the powers to be granted to administer and law and order.

With this the two leaders, who have never seen eye to eye to evolve a political solution to end the conflict, set aside their differences following pressure from India and the international community to quickly work out a consensus draft constitution which could be presented to Parliament by middle of the next month.

— PTI

The Economic Times

The Economic Times

24 JUN 2007

Sri Lanka clarifies stand on LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 23. Sri Lanka today clarified that the LTTE could participate in a proposed interim council, to administer the embattled north-east, only if it entered the democratic mainstream and gave up violence. *SI- H9-1*

The Government, in a statement, said its "stance on the LTTE remains the same." It added that there was "no truth" in reports that the Government had changed its mind over the inclusion of LTTE in the interim council. The clarification does not mention if the particular proposal, or indeed any of the proposals in the devolution package, will be forwarded to the LTTE, as stated by a Minister earlier this week.

There has been a spate of reports on the interim council and the LTTE, emanating from frequent meetings over the last two weeks, between the People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party (UNP) for consultations on Constitutional reforms.

However, with the process of give and take set to continue till at least June 30, the deadline fixed by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, for wrapping up discussions, there is no final document yet arising out of the consultations.

Devolution condemned: Page 13

THE HINDU

24 JUN 2000

24/6 Right wing group against devolution S. Lanka 19-12

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 23. It could have been a social gathering in one of the wealthier suburbs of the capital: genteel old women in pearls and pretty saris, a young mother-to-be, a former Governor of Sri Lanka's Central Bank, a sprinkling of retired army officers, a whiff of expensive perfume in the air.

But this was no tea party. It was a public rally held here earlier this week of the Sihala Urumaya, a newly-formed political group against devolution and believes that the minority Tamil community in Sri Lanka has no grievances. And these were its core members. The right-wing group, seeking recognition as a political party, is convinced that all that is needed is a firm military hand to crush "terrorism in the north-east", after which there will no more be a Tamil problem.

The leader of Sihala Urumaya, Mr. S L Gunasekara, broke away from the UNP Government in 1987 as he did not agree with its participation in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord.

Going by the size of the rally, it seemed as if there are a number of people ready to lend ear to the Sihala Urumaya. As the afternoon progressed, the gathering grew to include professionals, office-workers and university students. A large contingent of Buddhist monks had already taken up position in the open-air auditorium.

Speaker after speaker talked on

how the two main parties in Sri Lanka — the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which heads the People's Alliance coalition, and the UNP — had betrayed the Sinhala community.

The Sihala Urumaya was formed in April this year, a few days after the military debacle at Elephant Pass. The leaders of the Sihala Urumaya believe they can win over sections of the Sinhalese majority that are unhappy with the present political establishment for various reasons.

Rejecting the tag of Sinhala chauvinism, Mr. Karunaratne said the Sihala Urumaya was against the harassment of Tamils and other minorities, and would not oppose equal rights to individuals of all communities.

The group has vociferously condemned the devolution package and has demanded that even the provincial council system must be abolished, and the Centre strengthened. The party believes that in the coming elections, it can hive off 15 per cent of the vote from the two main parties put together. Right now a grouping of urban middle and upper-middle classes, the party is trying to expand its base in rural areas with the help of Buddhist monks.

For electoral inspiration, it looks to the Bharatiya Janata Party in India. "Like them, we are prepared to sit in the opposition for many years till we build our strength," said Mr. Karunaratne.

Norwegian envoy to meet Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 27. The Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, on his arrival here, met the Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Mr. G.L. Peiris, and the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, this morning. He is also scheduled to meet the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, during his three-day visit.

Details of his meetings today remained unavailable. Sources said Mr. Solheim was apprising himself of the latest political developments in Sri Lanka. He is scheduled to leave for New Delhi from here on Thursday where he is expected to hold discussions with Foreign Ministry officials.

After the hand grenade attack on its premises, the U.K.-Norwegian agency "Save the Children" issued a statement, saying it had no part in the mediation efforts between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, and that it was engaged purely in humanitarian activity.

Last week was commemorated by "Save the Children" to highlight the impact of the protracted conflict on children all over Sri Lanka.

There had been opposition to Norway's role in the Sri Lankan conflict from hardline Sinhala groups, which are of the view that the Scandinavian country is on the side of the LTTE.

Mr. Solheim is leading the Norwegian effort to facilitate a dialogue between the Government and the LTTE. The facilitation efforts suffered a setback with the LTTE's military onslaught on the Jaffna peninsula, but analysts believe with the battle in the north stalemated, there may be a window for talks between the two sides.

Mrs. Kumaratunga recently asserted that the LTTE could participate in a proposed interim council for north-east Sri Lanka, if they gave up violence and came into the democratic mainstream.

In negotiations that have been going on for most of June, the ruling PA and the UNP are said to be on the verge of a path-breaking consensus over the Government's devolution proposals.

One of the agreements between the two sides is on the interim council for the north-east. It has been reported that the Government may forward the proposals to the LTTE.

THE HINDU

28 JUN 2000

Norway envoy in India after Colombo visit

Colombo, June 29: Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim on Thursday flew to New Delhi following three days in Sri Lanka where he held talks to try to push forward Oslo's peace initiative in the war-torn nation.

Mr Solheim's visit to Sri Lanka came as a deadline loomed for the government and the main Opposition United National Party to complete discussions on a peace package.

Diplomats, who played down Mr Solheim's visit, said he had come to get a first hand view of the situation in the country.

He met senior ministers, the UNP and Tamil political parties while in Colombo, but he is believed to have brought no ground breaking proposals from the Tamil Tiger rebels, with whom he is in regular contact.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have said in the past that it was important Sri Lanka's two main Sinhala parties are in agreement over any political solution that was offered to ensure that neither of them rejected the solution at a later date.

"He had various rounds of consultations with all key sections. It was all part of the regular exchange," a Western diplomat told Reuters.

Diplomats said Mr Solheim would meet senior Indian officials in New Delhi and brief them on his latest visit to Colombo.

India and the United States have backed the Norwegian peace initiative.

Norway has offered to host talks between the government and the LTTE, but Mr Solheim, who heads Oslo's peace initiative, has said in

the past that peace was still far off.

Tamil politicians said they had informed Mr Solheim of their views on the on-going efforts to end the 17-year ethnic conflict through political means. They didn't give details.

Mr Solheim last visited Sri Lanka in May when the fighting between the military and the LTTE was at its peak in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

The Tamil Tigers have been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east since 1983.

The fighting has eased and the ruling People's Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the UNP are completing discussions for a consensus over a plan to devolve additional powers to the region to try to end the war.

The government proposes an interim council to administer the country's north and east, but has ruled out the LTTE's participation saying the rebels should first give up arms and join the political mainstream.

Ms Kumaratunga has said she plans to complete talks with the UNP by Friday. Politicians said the government and the UNP had reached agreement on a large number of ticklish issues and discussions would continue until the last minute.

However, it is still not clear what Ms Kumaratunga's next move would be. General elections are due after August, but speculation is rife the government might want to extend the life of the Parliament by holding a referendum and weaning away UNP lawmakers to get the required two-third majority to win the vote in the house. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

30 JUN 2000

7/2/70 A 'centre and regions' in Sri Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 29. The ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the Opposition United National Party (UNP), who will meet for a last round of negotiations tomorrow, have agreed on the crucial issue of the nature of the state.

A press release from the Presidential Secretariat late tonight said in discussions on Wednesday, it was agreed that the Sri Lankan Republic under the new Constitution would consist of a centre and regions, and that the legislative and executive powers of the Republic would be distributed between the two.

Thus the new formulation is a compromise between maintaining the territorial integrity of the Republic and devolving powers to the regions. This is different from the present formulation under which Sri Lanka is a unitary state.

THE HINDU

JUN 29 1970

Lanka Buddhist clergy angry over exclusion from dialogue

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, June 29

S. Lanka HC 15 20

THE MAHA Sangha, the highest body of the Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka, has bitterly complained about being kept out of the on-going discussions between the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the opposition United National Party (UNP) on a new constitution to grant a high degree of devolution to the Tamil areas of the country.

The PA-UNP parleys are to end on June 30. Reportedly, the two sides have arrived at a great measure of agreement on key issues including devolution, a tentative five-year merger of the Tamil northern and eastern provinces and the setting up of an interim council. The agreed draft is to be presented to parliament on July 16 or 21, according to Dr. Piyasena Dissanayake, secretary general of the National Joint Committee of Sinhala Organisation (NJC).

They complain that the government has discussed the constitutional question with the Tamil and Muslim parties, but it has not consulted the avowedly Sinhala parties, or Sinhala Buddhist organisations. "The constitution is being made without consulting the majority community. All nationalistic and patriotic forces must, therefore, endeavour to eliminate the proposed constitution," Ven. Maddehe Pagnaseeha, the Mahanayake or chief prelate of the Amrapura chapter of the Maha Sangha told reporters here on Wednesday.

The creation of the North Eastern Tamil province was tantamount to giving territory to the LTTE ter-

rorists, he said. "The North and East would be merged over our dead bodies," declared Dr. Dissanayake.

Ven. Maduluwawe Sobitha Thero, the most outspoken Buddhist lobbyist, said that the constitution was being amended at the instance of the Tamil and Muslim parties and the Norwegians touting the LTTE line, while keeping the majority of Sri Lankans, who were Sinhala Buddhists, completely out of reckoning.

Such a constitution would have no legitimacy, he declared. Ven. Ittapana Dhammalankara Thero, secretary of the National Sinhala Commission, said that the resolutions passed by the organisations of the majority community and sent to government were not even acknowledged. "Supporting the new constitution would be the worst betrayal in our history," he said.

Former Supreme Court judge, Justice S.W. Walpita, said that the present parliament, which was at the tail end of its term with dissolution just two months away, had no right to amend the constitution. "It lacks the mandate for it. Also, amending it now would be tantamount to ignoring the views of one million citizens who have become eligible to vote and who will be voting in the coming elections," he said.

Meanwhile, according to a UNI report, two members of Tamil Eelam Peoples Organisation (TELO) were shot dead by the Pistol gang of the LTTE in Eastern Batticaloa while government troops killed 11 separatist Tamil guerillas in different clashes in northern Jaffna yesterday. A government spokesman said two TELO members were killed by the LTTE Pistol group in the general area between Kallady and Kathankudy near Sivananda college yesterday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 JUN 2000

Historical hindsight and the LTTE's latest offensive

An elephant's memory

REPORTS from Sri Lanka should be a matter of concern not only to Colombo but to New Delhi also. The LTTE, in a major counter-offensive against the Sri Lankan government, reportedly ousted between 20,000 and 25,000 Sri Lankan troops from Elephant Pass and Iyakachchi in the Jaffna Peninsula. Reports said that nearly 14,000 government troops have been pulled out of the Elephant Pass and re-located north of the pass and troops have also moved out to southern defences in the region. Government forces are being deployed in defensive positions to safeguard Jaffna town as most of the peninsula is again under the LTTE's control, with the Tigers on the offensive in the Soranpathe, Settikadu and Massar areas. The LTTE has captured huge amounts of arms, ammunition and transport vehicles of the Sri Lankan forces.

According to conventional wisdom, these developments can be considered anticlimactic since Sri Lankan government and LTTE representatives were expected to commence negotiations in Europe through Norwegian mediation.

A measure of background information and historical memory should, however, have made all concerned anticipate a significant military initiative from the LTTE before negotiations commenced. Instead of agreeing to commence the dialogue immediately, both the Kumaratunga government and the LTTE had stipulated parallel pre-conditions. The government demanded complete cessation of LTTE operations, whereas the LTTE demanded cessation of the Sri Lankan military offensive and withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces south of the Elephant Pass. Given the political and military orientations of both sides, it was obvious that these demands would not be met. There might have been some tactical lull in fighting engineered by the LTTE in preparation for the massive assault which resulted in the capture of

the Elephant Pass, displacement of the Sri Lankan army north and south of the pass and bottling up of government forces in Jaffna town.

The LTTE's military objective now is to consolidate its domination of the Jaffna Peninsula and its political aim is to enter the negotiations from a position of strengthened credibility based on territorial control of Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. While the LTTE is incrementally dominating the peninsula, it is also effective in questioning the government's jurisdiction in Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amperai.

The developments in the second fortnight of April were a culmination of the critical predicament faced by the Sri Lankan

going in for the Norwegian-sponsored negotiations in a militarily and politically assertive mood while the Sri Lankan government would either be on the defensive or would be in the process of launching a military onslaught (that is, if negotiations can take place at all in such a situation). Kumaratunga has undertaken consultations with opposition parties and, more importantly, with the

Buddhists about the stance to be adopted by the government in the negotiations. These have not been encouraging. The main opposition party, the UNP, is critical of the fact that the government did not have any detailed discussions with the opposition before formally accepting the Norwe-



J.N. Dixit

The LTTE's aim is to consolidate its domination of the Jaffna Peninsula and enter negotiations with Colombo from a position of strengthened credibility

government. President Chandrika Kumaratunga was subjected to a suicide bomb attack in December 1999. The LTTE's military pressure in Jaffna increased between January and March and Kumaratunga ordered her three service chiefs to locate themselves in Jaffna to personally command operations. But this did not serve the purpose of boosting the morale and determination of the Lankan forces. The fall of Elephant Pass and Iyakachchi means that the LTTE is now in control of the main land route from the rest of Sri Lanka to the Jaffna Peninsula. Parallel to this, the LTTE's capacity to disrupt land and sea communications as well as the administration in the eastern provinces remains unchallenged.

The emerging situation in Sri Lanka, therefore, is that of the LTTE

gian initiative. The two main Buddhist religious leaders indicated to Kumaratunga that they have reservations about the Norwegian initiative in the context of developments over the last year.

While the LTTE has indicated a willingness to participate in negotiations through Norwegian mediation, their objective remains to see that all their fundamental demands are fully met by the Sri Lankan government. If talks do not achieve this purpose, the LTTE may dissociate itself from the process. More so now when they seem to have the upper hand. It must be noted that preparatory consultations on the Norwegian initiative were interrupted, with Kumaratunga going abroad for medical treatment.

Apart from the critical military situation that the Sri Lankan government

faces, its ramification in terms of internal politics creates additional problems for the stability of the country. Future prospects, therefore, have to be assessed not only in the above context, but also in terms of the overall politico-military situation. The Lankan forces have been under continuous military pressure for the last five years, which they have not been able to cope with despite some interim successes. There are reports of desertions and low morale, in contrast to the LTTE cadres' commitment and battle-hardened determination. It is interesting to note that the LTTE has acquired weapons capable of shooting down aircraft. They are also becoming incrementally effective in operations at sea. Despite being a secessionist organisation, they do not seem to be short of finances or arms.

A critical dimension affecting India in this whole situation is the fact that despite being an organisation banned by the Government of India, the LTTE retains its extensive political and logistical connections in Tamil Nadu and along the coasts, including the ports of Rameshwaram and Vedaranyam. Recent reports indicate that areas in Tamil Nadu still serve as bases for supplies and logistical support to the LTTE.

India has to cope with three problems in its Sri Lankan policy at this stage. First, to deal with the LTTE connections in Tamil Nadu which affect the state's security. Second, there is the continuous trickle of refugees from Sri Lanka. And third, to respond to Sri Lankan concerns about the first factor and sustain stability in Indo-Sri Lankan relations. Despite suggestions from some quarters, it is obvious that India should not get involved in any direct mediation efforts in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless the LTTE's military success in threatening the dismemberment of Sri Lanka also has serious political implications for India. We can certainly suggest that Sri Lanka seriously consider responding to Tamil aspirations short of accepting division of the country, if that is possible.

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 MAY 2000

Sri Lanka fails to catch the tiger by its tail

BY ARRANGEMENT WITH THE ECONOMIST

Colombo: Was it all a colossal waste of lives and money? In December 1995, the Sri Lankan army took control of the town of Jaffna from the Tamil Tigers and re-established the writ of the government. Civilian life was restored, more or less. Local elections were held. The army understandably claimed a famous victory. In Colombo, the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga had hopes that the long civil war might at last be coming to an end, and that the Tigers would accept a settlement short of their demand for a separate state for the Tamils in the north-east of the country. Some four years later, on April 22, those hopes were in tatters.

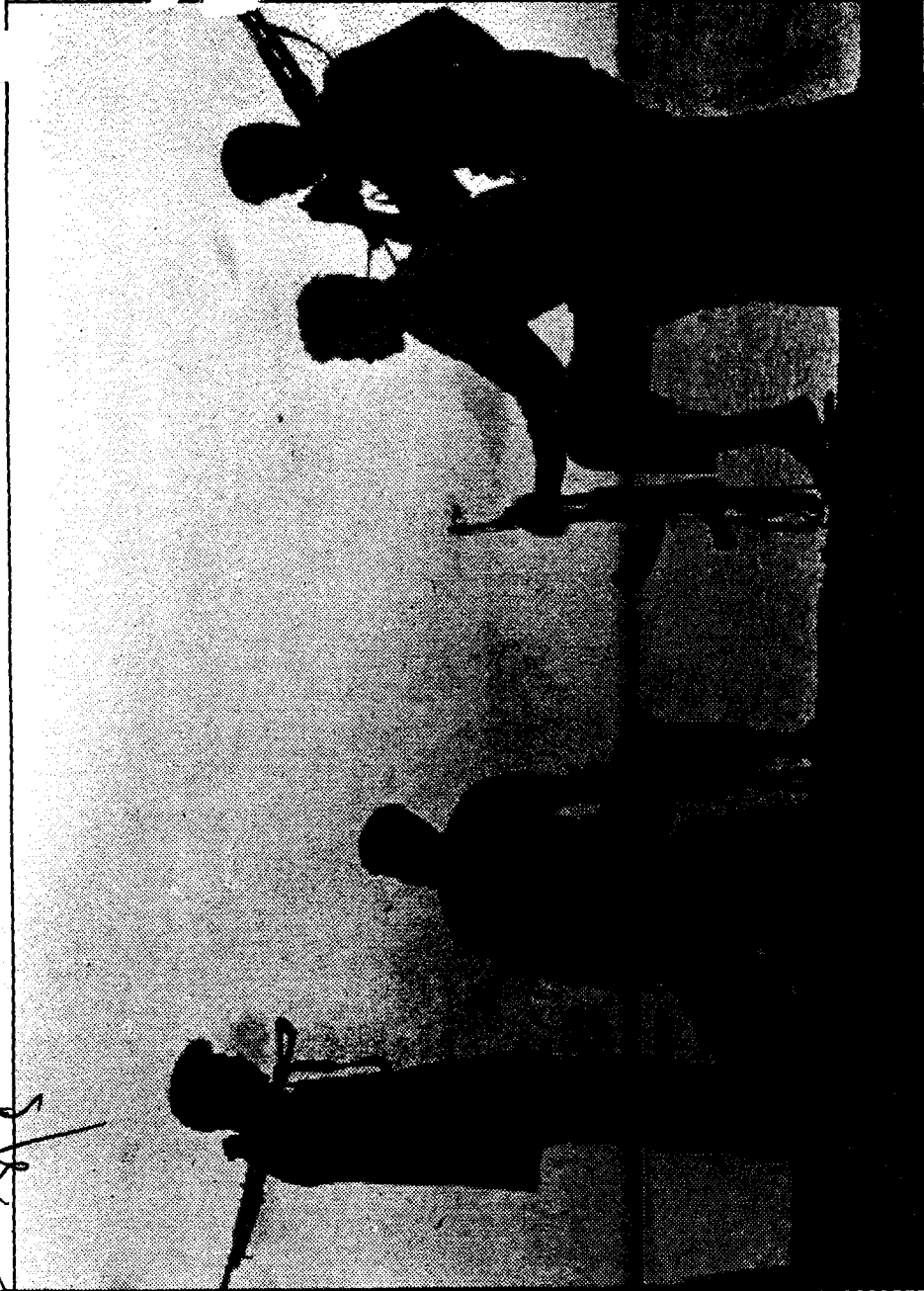
The Tigers took control that day of the army base at Elephant Pass army camp, the gateway to the Jaffna peninsula. They are now poised to retake the peninsula and its main town. Their morale is high and their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has conducted their battles with great skill. When the Tigers lost Jaffna in 1995, Mr Prabhakaran moved his fighters into the jungles to the south of the peninsula. From there they sought to cut all the land routes north. All the time they had their sights on the giant government base at Elephant Pass, manned by two divisions of the Sri Lankan army. Lieutenant-General Srital Weerasooriya told journalists last week in Colombo that the Tigers had not overrun the Elephant Pass base. The army had made "a tactical withdrawal." But the army had had to take into account the possibility of the camp being surrounded by the Tigers, he said. He conceded under questioning that the Tigers had a formidable range of weapons, including long-

range mortars. The army does not have long-range mortars, a fact that perhaps helped to concentrate the minds of the defenders of the base when they decided to abandon it.

Whatever the general says, the fall of the base is probably the single biggest military loss suffered by the army since the civil war began 18 years ago. Yet army intelligence knew as far back as mid-December that the Tigers were determined to take the base, and presumably passed on this information to the army's high command. Over the past four months the Tigers have been able to place their weapons within range of the base, apparently without hindrance. What was the top brass doing?

The Tigers launched their offensive against the Elephant Pass camp when there was virtually no government in Sri Lanka. Mrs Kumaratunga, who is defence minister and commander-in-chief, as well as President, left the island in the first week of April to seek medical treatment for an undisclosed ailment and did not return until April 27. The Prime Minister, her mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike, suffered a stroke several years ago and remains confined to a wheelchair. Eight government ministers are abroad.

The leader of the Opposition, Ranil Wickremesinghe, said last week that Mrs Kumaratunga "and some corrupt and inefficient military officials" must take responsibility for the Elephant Pass debacle. No doubt, but his words are hardly likely to raise the morale of the foot-soldiers of the Sri Lankan army holed up in the Jaffna peninsula. A parliamentary general election has to be held by August. There is little doubt



Tamil rebels are poised 15 miles from Jaffna, preparing for a final offensive (AP)

The Tigers took control that day (April 22) of the army base at Elephant Pass army camp, the gateway to the Jaffna peninsula. They are now poised to retake the peninsula and its main town. Their morale is high and their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has conducted their battles with great skill

Tigers closing in on Jaffna

By V.S. Sambandan

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COLOMBO, MAY 2. A key Army base in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula has come under threat from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), following its advances towards Kilali, 24 km from Jaffna town.

In addition, the presence of the Tigers on the southeastern Jaffna coast also raises the possibility of a further advance towards the northern port town of Point Pedro, which could bring the northern Palaly airbase under threat.

With telecommunications to northern Jaffna remaining severed since mid-April, there is no information about the condition of an estimated five lakh civilians on the peninsula.

Indian airlift?

The twin threats also raise questions regarding the evacuation of an estimated 35,000 Sri Lankan troops who are deployed on the peninsula. There was no immediate confirmation over reports that India's assistance had been sought for an airlift, though military officials said it was among the contingencies explored.

"There are no immediate threats to Palaly," a military source said, adding that the decision to seek India's assistance would have to be taken at the governmental level. Government sources said they were unable to confirm reports that India's assistance was sought.

After the overrunning of the Elephant Pass military complex on April 22, the Tigers had claimed control over Soranpattu and Pallai on the Jaffna-Kandy A-9 Highway two days ago before advancing towards Kilali, on the southern coast of the Jaffna lagoon. The threat to the Kilali base, which includes a naval detachment, is significant in that the base defends Jaffna's southern coast from movements of the rebels from the mainland into Jaffna.

Also, the presence and possible consolidation of

the Tigers at the Nagar Kovil theatre, on the southeastern side, opens up the option of a strike towards the northern port town of Point Pedro.

There has been no comment from the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry on today's fighting.

Chandrika meets Ranil

The drastic military reversals have resulted in a meeting between the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Opposition Leader and former Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, in Colombo today. During the one-hour meeting, the Opposition Leader was briefed about the "critical" situation on the military front, officials said, adding that no discussions were held on the possibilities of an external involvement.

Tipnis' goodwill mission

By C. Raja Mohan

NEW DELHI, MAY 2. The Chief of the Indian Air Force, Air Chief Marshal A. Y. Tipnis, is going to Sri Lanka later this week on a goodwill mission.

The visit comes amid a dramatic offensive by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the Jaffna peninsula. Sources in the Government here today, however, denied the Air Chief's visit has anything to do with the current military situation in that country. Sources also say the visit was planned much earlier and was originally scheduled to take place in April.

Meanwhile, the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr. Shiv Shankar Menon, is here for consultations with the top political leadership. Reports from Colombo have indicated that Sri Lanka is very keen on Indian military assistance in stemming the tide of the LTTE offensive against Jaffna. Although there was some concern in the Government that the visit could be misinterpreted in the current context of the military situation in Sri Lanka, New Delhi has decided to go ahead with the goodwill mission.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

3 MAY 2000

Chandrika vows to defend Jaffna

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 3. In an all-out effort to defeat the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan Cabinet, headed by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, met today and decided to suspend all non-essential development work for the next three months, the state media said tonight.

The Cabinet decision comes in the wake of the Tigers having advanced into the northern Jaffna peninsula following a string of victories over crucial military camps since the fall of Elephant Pass on April 22. The Cabinet has decided to concentrate all the energies of the nation on defeating the Tigers, the state media said.

With the battle over Jaffna entering a critical stage, Ms. Kumaratunga vowed to "defend Jaffna", sought "assistance" from "friendly countries" and pledged to continue with efforts at peace talks with the Tigers through a Norwegian initiative.

Ms. Kumaratunga told ruling party MPs that a withdrawal from the peninsula, where an estimated 25,000 Sri Lankan troopers are battling against rebel advances, was ruled out. Confronted with a string of defeats since the Elephant Pass debacle, the current thinking is to counter the rebel



Sri Lankan soldiers wounded in battles in the northern Jaffna peninsula, recuperating in an army hospital in Colombo on Wednesday. — Reuters

advances by enhancing the firepower of the security forces.

However, no details were provided on the strategies under consideration to counter the LTTE's artillery strength.

The much-called for induction of foreign troops to ward off the LTTE's advances has also been skirted for the moment, with Ms. Kumaratunga telling ruling party Parliamentarians that it was not necessary to deploy foreign

troops, a senior presidential aide said. The President said the Government would do its best to safeguard the peninsula. No mention was made of the countries from which assistance was sought, nor was there an elaboration of the nature of assistance, a senior Parliamentarian said.

The Sri Lankan Parliament is to debate on the Elephant Pass debacle on May 9, following pressure from the Opposition United

National Party (UNP). While the UNP had demanded a special sitting of the House, a decision was taken to advance the date for the monthly debate on the extension of the island-wide emergency to May 9, when Parliament is scheduled to be convened.

The President's address to the MPs is seen by political observers as one of putting up a brave face in the context of military reverses.

More reports on Page 13

THE HINDU

4 MAY 2000

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2000

SRI LANKA'S HOUR OF RECKONING

THE BATTLE FOR Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka has reached a decisive stage. Colombo has pressed the panic button and sent feelers to India for assistance. The situation in the Jaffna peninsula is so serious and the implications so ominous for Sri Lanka that it would inevitably explore all options. Sounding out India is apparently its first option. India is making a gesture by sending the Air Force Chief, Air Marshal Tipnis, on a 'goodwill visit' to Colombo very soon. India must make it abundantly clear that its sympathies and total moral support are with the Sri Lankan Government's efforts to keep the island's unity intact and that it would give absolutely no quarter to efforts such as the LTTE's to destroy that integrity. There need be no ambiguity in saying that the disintegration or dismemberment of Sri Lanka is not in the interests of both countries. Unfortunately, in its anxiety to establish firm control in Jaffna, the capital of the so-called Tamil homeland, the military strategy of the Sri Lankan Government did not take the East sufficiently into account. And now, it has lost Elephant Pass. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are hardly 40 km from Jaffna. If the Palaly air base is damaged or lost, there is a serious crisis on hand. Even the evacuation of the troops will become a problem.

Unfortunately, things have gone very much according to the LTTE's gameplan. Before the Norwegian initiative to push for peace in the island could fructify, the Tamil Tigers clearly wanted to secure a military victory and talk from a position of strength. Till the Sri Lankan forces hold Palaly and Jaffna, the battle is not over and it cannot be a cakewalk for the LTTE — that is, if the army can really get its act together and function like a professional force. If the LTTE decides to damage or take the Palaly air base and Point Pedro too, that can signal the end. It is now for the Sri Lankan Government, the LTTE and Nor-

way to decide if they want to give peace a chance and negotiate a political settlement. But the question arises, what will the LTTE seek through a dialogue? They may even demand major concessions in the East. It appears to be a no-win situation. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has to face up to the realities on hand. Despite the military setback in the north and the spectre of a parliamentary election round the corner, she still has the devolution package on offer. But that too requires a bipartisan consensus between the two major Sinhala parties. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe, must put the country first and demonstrate his statesmanship by forging such a consensus to present the people of Sri Lanka a real, viable solution through genuine devolution of powers.

The options before Colombo seem to be limited. If it does not elicit a positive response from India on the Jaffna crisis, it is quite likely that Sri Lanka may approach Pakistan or China for help. Ms. Kumaratunga may even think of approaching SAARC, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, for assistance, if the situation worsens and evacuation of troops becomes a necessity. India must be ready to respond to the emerging crisis on its southern coast, including the possibility of an inflow of refugees from the Jaffna peninsula. There is no question of India getting involved militarily or directly in the process. Yet, it must provide all the moral support it can for the Chandrika Government and the peace process. The Kumaratunga administration and its demonstrated commitment to an enlightened process of constitutional reform and devolution of powers, is Sri Lanka's best hope in the current context. Acknowledging this, the Vajpayee Government must reassure Ms. Kumaratunga of its commitment to support a united Sri Lanka.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

4 MAY 2000

THE LTTE IS BACK

The response is naive and irresponsible

IT is panic in Sri Lanka and everybody is screaming once again for Indian help, even the Buddhist monks who hooted the Indian Peace Keeping Force out of the country in 1987. In a disastrous comeback, the LTTE first took the Lankan army base at Elephant Pass, effectively cutting Jaffna off from the rest of the country, and then the base at Pallai, along with loads of ammunition and military vehicles. The rebels are now poised to launch a direct offensive on Jaffna itself, everybody is giving them a good chance to take it. The reason for this stunning military setback may be progressive demoralisation — the army had already ceded large areas along the Vavuniya highway that it had painstakingly captured in the course of Operation Jayasikuru over the last three years. This was apparently compounded by a qualitative and quantitative deterioration in military supplies and by failures of leadership. President Chandrika Kumaratunga had ordered the top brass to set up headquarters at Jaffna and oversee the defence of the peninsula on the spot, but these dramatic reverses confirm what many have always suspected: that the Sri Lankan Army does not seem to be an effective fighting force. Frantic efforts are made to purchase arms and call up reserves, but the rebuilding, according to experts, will take six to nine months, by which time it may already be too late.

This, of course, puts paid to the idea of a negotiated settlement for the time being. In case Jaffna falls, the Sri Lankans would be going empty-handed to the table. They can't offer the LTTE autonomy in the North if they are already flying their own flag there. In retrospect it now looks as if the whole idea of negotiations came up at the wrong time, when the army had lost Kilinochchi and Mankulam and Jayasikuru had run out of steam. The Tigers have once again demonstrated their capacity to catch the government off guard while it is looking the other way, towards peace, and its army is lulled into complacency by this prospect. President Kumaratunga may also be paying the price for taking off some of the military heat on the ground: there is no reason why the effort to re-establish the road link with the mainland should have flagged and them come disastrously apart. The number of desertions should have attracted more serious notice, so also the loss and degradation of equipment. The Tigers, on the other hand, have apparently had no problem replenishing their hardware and their centres of funding abroad remain intact. They succeeded in getting Canadian Tamils to block a conference in Toronto on the peace initiative hosted by the Sri Lankan High Commission.

The upshot is that Kumaratunga's strategy of reducing the Tigers militarily and encouraging alternative Tamil voices more willing to collaborate with the government on a constitutional solution has come apart. The LTTE once again forces itself on everyone as the only spokesman for Sri Lanka's Tamils and, once in Jaffna, it can shake off the terrorist tag and relaunch itself, both in Sri Lanka and abroad, as a state waiting for recognition.

The Opposition UNP party must bear its share of the blame. At no time have they recognised that it is a national struggle for which a united and national solution is desperately needed. They have repulsed Chandrika's sincere efforts to evolve a consensus for petty political advantage or more correctly, merely to avoid conceding the credit to the President, a reason as naive as it is irresponsible. The threat is one and indivisible — it is to the integrity of Sri Lanka as a nation. It can be faced only if all concerned stop behaving as though they are going to a party.

THE STATESMAN

4 MAY

4 MAY 2000

Sri Lanka resumes ties with Israel

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY. 4. Sri Lanka today decided to resume diplomatic relations with Israel with "immediate effect".

Sri Lanka had severed its ties three decades ago following the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, but maintained an Israeli interest section in the U.S. embassy between 1985 and 1990. The section was closed in the early Nineties during the Premadasa regime when the then Government held talks with the LTTE. Plans to resume ties with Israel have been on since 1995.

The decision to resume ties with Israel is seen as an immediate need for gaining military hardware as well as the expertise of the Jewish State in counter-insurgency operations.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the modalities would be mutually discussed and decided upon by the two Governments.

Sri Lankan ties with Israel during the past two decades have

moved in tandem with the escalation of militancy in the island. Security forces deploy Israeli-built Dvora gunboats and Kfir aircraft in the battles against the LTTE. Reports say that Government security forces and the LTTE had received Israeli training. Israeli expertise was used in the past for planning resettlement schemes in the dry-regions under the Mahaweli plans.

Political observers feel that the move would have to be viewed in the backdrop of the changed international situation.

Public Security Ordinance

As a measure to contain possible Sinhala-Tamil backlashes in the south, the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has reimposed the Public Security Ordinance, which vests wide-ranging powers with the Government to arrest and detain suspects and ban strikes, public protests and demonstrations in the interest of national security.

Under the Ordinance, officers of the armed forces and the police

are empowered to arrest suspects without warrant. It provides the death penalty or rigorous imprisonment for a maximum of 20 years for those who conspire to overthrow the Government.

Anyone who "by words, whether spoken or written or by signs or visible representations... brings or attempts to bring the President or the Government into hatred or contempt" could be punished with imprisonment between three months and 20 years.

Possession of maps, subversive literature or collection of arms are among the other offences.

Meanwhile, the Media Minister, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, brought foreign correspondents based in the island under the purview of press censorship. Briefing foreign media, he said the measure was part of the Ordinance and said an office would be operational at the office of the Director of Information here for the purpose.

More reports on Pages 13, 15

THE HINDU

5 MAY 2000

Colombo re-establishes diplomatic ties with Tel-Aviv

Press gagged in Lanka war effort

PTI & UNI

COLOMBO, May 4. — Embattled President Chandrika Kumaratunga put her country on a war footing today, assuming sweeping powers that severely curtailed citizens rights and press freedoms on the island.

Colombo also re-established diplomatic contact with Tel-Aviv, a move flowing possibly from New Delhi's refusal to lend its forces to halt the Tamil Tigers' advance on Jaffna.

The Sri Lankan foreign ministry declared that the 20-year freeze in relations with Israel was off, and that diplomatic ties stood re-established with immediate effect.

Colombo has long-term defence ties with Tel-Aviv. Its army uses Israeli-made specialised defence equipment like KFIR bombers and naval gunboats.

The government's move has set off speculation that Israeli assistance is being sought in the war against the Tigers. Sources in the Lankan army said Israeli specialists with vast experience in tackling the PLO and other West Asian terrorists can extend valuable strategic and operational help.

Mrs Kumaratunga had yesterday told a meeting of ruling party MPs that she had asked

975 S. Lanka
"friendly countries" for military help, but had declined to name them.

Official media today reported Mrs Kumaratunga has promulgated an ordinance under the country's public security Act, banning strikes and demonstrations on the island.

She has arrogated the power

to act "responsibly".

The government had imposed press censorship in 1998 for a few months. Late last year, it re-imposed censorship on the local media, but exempted foreign media.

Today, the government appointed Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, director, information, as the "competent authority to take such measures and give directions as he may consider necessary for preventing or restricting publication of matters which would be prejudicial to the interests of the national security".

Transmission of matters relating to operations of security forces, including news reports, will have to be first cleared by the "competent authority".

The public ordinance announcement follows yesterday's Cabinet decision to put the country on a war footing by suspending all non-essential development activities for three months.

A ban on demonstrations that may harm the country's war efforts is in force since last year. Sri Lanka is already under Emergency rule that empowers the armed forces and police to raid and search any home and detain suspects without formal warrants.

■ More reports on page 5

NO ARMS SALE: PM

NEW DELHI, May 4. — The Prime Minister emerged from a meeting with Tamil Nadu allies late this evening to announce there was "no question of either sending or selling arms to Sri Lanka. Both are ruled out".

On offering humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka, Mr Vajpayee said there was "perfect understanding" among NDA constituents. He will meet Mr M Karunanidhi tomorrow. — PTI

to confiscate property without citing reason, and banned publication of newspapers and leaflets.

Press censorship applies to the foreign media as well. The media minister, Mr Mangala Samaraweera, told foreign media personnel based in Colombo that Sri Lanka expected them

THE STATESMAN

5 MAY 2000

Colombo denies it is withdrawing troops

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 5. Buoyed by having resisted the artillery fire by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the past three days, Sri Lanka today "strongly refuted" having contemplated a withdrawal of troops from the embattled northern peninsula, where the Tigers are reportedly pressing ahead towards Jaffna town.

"All troops are determined to push back the terrorists," a Government statement on the security situation said adding that the troops had "effectively repulsed all attempts" by the LTTE in the general area of Kilali, which could turn out to be the last Army line preventing a LTTE overrun of the peninsula.

As the Army and the LTTE continued fighting in two sectors, the state-run *Daily News* said "the Government has strongly refuted speculation that there would be a troops withdrawal from the Jaffna peninsula".

A day after it imposed censorship on news, the Government said 458 LTTE militants, including

116 leaders were killed between April 27 and May 4. However, no details were given on the course of the battle.

While restrictions have been in place for the past two years on independent access for journalists to the conflict-zones, telecommunications to Jaffna have remained severed since the last week of April.

The LTTE has not made any new claims over the last three days regarding the ongoing "Oyatha Alaigal-III" offensive in the Kilali and the Nagar Kovil theatres of the Jaffna peninsula. Fighting has been reported from the Kilali and the Pallai-Kodigamam sectors, both of which are vital defence lines protecting over five lakh civilians from the ongoing battle. The changed nature of warfare with the two sides engaging each other with long-range artillery, has serious implications for the civilian population. Besides, the rebels' use of multi-barrel rocket launchers looms as a major threat to army positions.

Jaffna town, recaptured from the LTTE by the Army in 1995, is home to about five lakh civilians.

6 MAY 2000

No withdrawal of troops from Jaffna: Lanka

P. K. Betachandran
Colombo, May 5

THE SRI Lankan Government has strongly refuted speculation that its troops will be withdrawn from the Jaffna Peninsula in the face of the threat from the LTTE, the state-owned *Daily News* said here today. The report said that troops were, in fact, fighting relentlessly at the re-located forward defence lines in Thenmarachchi, the narrow causeway linking Elephant Pass with Jaffna.

The current pause in the LTTE's bid to push towards Jaffna coupled with the favourable response from the international community to the Sri Lankan Government's request for military and logistic help, has given a boost to the Government's morale. "Latest reports indicate that India, Pakistan and Russia have taken special cognizance of the situation in Sri Lanka. The Government of India yesterday announced that it was urgently considering Sri Lanka's request for assistance," *Daily News* said.

"Given the international

response, we can finish off the whole thing in three months time," said a top government source. Evacuation was certainly not on the cards, though in a contingency in which the lives of the troops in Jaffna were at stake, evacuation could be resorted to on

humanitarian grounds, he added. Meanwhile, as part of placing the country on a "war-footing", the Government imposed a ban on strikes and other disruptive activities and also widened the scope of media censorship through the Public Security Ordinance.

Foreign media has been brought under censorship. As regards domestic media, not just war-related news, but all news would now come under censorship.

There is wide support for the Government's handling of the current crisis, especially, the decision

to re-establish diplomatic ties with Israel, a country which could supply arms and provide expertise on counter-insurgency warfare. "This is a ray of hope in a dark cloud," said an activist of the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT). Israel has already been

supplying arms to Sri Lanka, selling Dvora Fast Attack Craft to the navy and Kfir jet fighter bombers and UAVs to the Air Force. "The toughness showed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga in her speech and action has lifted the spirits of the people," said analyst Dayan Jayatilaka.

Norwegian facilitators are still hopeful

M.K. Tikku
New Delhi, May 5

DESPITE THE dismal news emanating from Jaffna, the Norwegian facilitators have not given up trying. They are hopeful of an eventual reconciliation and a peaceful settlement to the war in Sri Lanka.

"We find that both parties are interested in a peaceful solution," Mr Erik Solheim, Special Advisor to Foreign Minister Torbjorn Gajeland on Sri Lanka, said in a telephonic interview from Oslo. He, however, said that right now the situation in Jaffna was "a very

difficult one" and called for utmost care and attention in handling it.

Mr Solheim declined to comment on the ground situation in Jaffna or the

Lankan government's latest resolve to fight it out, saying that as facilitators they would not like to say anything about particular policy decisions. "But we will continue our efforts no matter what happens on the ground," he added.

Last month, Mr Solheim, who heads the Socialist Party in the

Norwegian Parliament, was taken off his parliamentary duties for six months and exclusively assigned to handle the Sri Lankan peace facilitation task on behalf of the Foreign Minister.

Exclusive
A couple of weeks ago, he had visited New Delhi and, among others, had a meeting with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, who was undergoing medical treatment here.

Norwegian sources, however, indicate that they have been in touch with "all parties" to the Sri

Lankan imbroglio, and the Indian government has been kept fully informed about the developments.

These sources also point out that bringing about a peaceful resolution of the ethnic war in Sri Lanka was going to be a long haul and could take even years.

Such had been Oslo's experience in brokering peace deals between the government and Gauthemalan guerrillas or between Israel and Palestine, and the progress often was disappointingly slow — but perseverance was what had eventually paid off. The Lankan situation was not any easier.

for urgent assistance with mixed feelings. "India has needlessly slammed the door. It has been a major foreign policy gaffe," commented Mr Jayatilaka. He wondered if it indicated a growing softness towards the LTTE and if so, whether or not India had considered the consequences of being soft on the LTTE for its own national interests.

"India has abrogated the Indo-Lanka Accord in both letter and spirit. It has let us down badly," said former Ambassador Kalyananda Godage, who had been advocating the leasing out of Trincomalee to India for the sake of friendship.

Mixed feelings on India's response: The Sri Lankan political spectrum has reacted to India's tepid response to Sri Lankan pleas

for urgent assistance with mixed feelings. "India has needlessly slammed the door. It has been a

major foreign policy gaffe," commented Mr Jayatilaka. He wondered if it indicated a growing softness towards the LTTE and if so, whether or not India had considered the consequences of being soft on the LTTE for its own national interests.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 7 2000

U.S. will consider request for humanitarian help

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MAY 5. The Clinton administration is saying that it has received no request from Sri Lanka for any assistance from the United States, but that a request would certainly be considered for humanitarian assistance. At the State Department on Thursday, the spokesman was asked about the situation on the ground, Colombo's inability to get any military assistance from India and its recognition of the state of Israel.

"We would certainly consider a request for humanitarian assistance. We have provided them in the past with certain military equipment as well, under careful review of human rights considerations. We have provided some

military training in the past under our programmes, following the same criteria. But in this situation, we've not been asked to provide any assistance in response to the current fighting", the spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher, said.

By not commenting on Colombo's inability to get any military assistance from India, the Clinton administration does not wish to comment, at least publicly, on the linkages between establishing diplomatic ties with Israel and getting defence hardware from there.

"That's a question you're going to have to ask them (meaning Sri Lanka) or Israel. That's not the kind of stuff I'm going to do. We have encouraged the step of having cooperation with Israel. We've

encouraged relations with Israel for some time. So it's a good thing that they've done that", Mr. Boucher said.

The State Department was also asked to comment on the "draconian measures" imposed by Colombo including censorship of the local and foreign media in response to the war with the LTTE. The spokesman said the U.S. was aware of the intensification of the fighting and that it had all along supported a peaceful process and one "based on the Sri Lankan Government's proposals for constitutional reform and devolution of power".

The U.S. has the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in its list of terrorist organisations.

Troops regroup to defend Jaffna

S. Lanka
5/5

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLOMBO, May 5. — Thousands of Sri Lankan troops regrouped at a defence line to protect Jaffna on Friday, a day after the government imposed censorship on foreign media and gave wide powers to the armed forces to help fight the Tamil Tiger rebels.

The government's Information Department said the military successfully repulsed several rebel attempts to breach the defence line.

"Troops supported by artillery and mortar fire effectively repulsed all terrorist attempts compelling them to withdraw southwards," Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, director of information, said in a statement.

Mr Rubasinghe is also the government's chief censor.

Mr Rubasinghe said two soldiers were killed and one wounded in the latest fighting. He listed rebel deaths at 458 killed since the rebel offensive to take the Elephant Pass causeway began on 27

April. He neither gave a breakup, nor said how many of the 458 died in the latest clashes.

"Troops at present are in a stronger position consequent to the pullout from Elephant Pass and are poised to launch attacks on the temporary defenses occupied by the terrorists," he said.

The government labels the LTTE as terrorists, accusing them of attempts to divide the country.

Earlier, a senior military official said the morale of the military, seriously undermined after recent rebel successes, has improved since the government's hardline stand against the rebels' advance toward their former capital of Jaffna. The official spoke on condition that he not be identified by name.

The rebels did not post any new information on the group's Internet web site Friday, but the Voice of Tiger radio, monitored in Vavuniya, said that the battle continued. It did not give details.

The military official said that

the string of setbacks, in which the Sri Lankan troops lost several key bases, had come to a stop.

Soldiers' morale was also boosted by the government's statement that it was satisfied with the response it has gotten from requests for help from friendly countries. The government has not released any details of its requests.

But yesterday Sri Lanka renewed diplomatic ties with Israel after a 30-year lapse. Tel Aviv welcomed the resumption of diplomatic ties with Colombo and said a delegation of Sri Lankan officials would travel to Israel to discuss renewed relations. Sri Lanka is hoping to get weapons from Israel to replenish it with armaments lost in the recent battles with the rebels.

A Russian delegation has arrived in Sri Lanka, state-run radio said today. The report did not give a reason for the Russian presence, but Sri Lanka has in the past bought arms and aircraft from the former Soviet Union.

THE STATESMAN

6 MAY 2000

Lull in LTTE advances enthuses Lankan govt.

By Seema Guha

COLOMBO: The news trickling in from the 'war front' on Saturday is good for President Chandrika Kumaratunga. There have been no further reverses for the Sri Lankan army. And the government is now exuding a quiet confidence after pushing the panic button earlier in the week and calling for help, not just from India but the world at large.

Despite exchanges of gunfire in the Jaffna peninsula, there has been a lull in the fighting over the last two days. Both sides seem to be preparing for the big battle. Can the military stop the Tiger assault on the Palaly air force base? That is the big question.

Ironically, several analysts here say India's decision not to intervene militarily in Sri Lanka may be the best thing that happened.

for Sri Lanka if Jaffna is recaptured by the LTTE? Will it mean the ultimate division of the island?

The answer is not easy. At one level, according to diplomats based in Colombo, it will mean nothing. "After all, Jaffna has been under Sri Lankan army control only from 1995; the army was confined to the Fort for most of the '80s," one diplomat said. However if Tiger supremo Prabhakaran succeeds in driving out the army and then making a bid for an Independent northern province, it would be the first step towards an independent homeland for the Tamils.

This is one reason why Ms Kumaratunga needs the international community's support, especially of India. Over the years, the Tigers have lost much support because of their brutal terrorist tactics. As U.S. President Bill

PM confers with oppn. leaders over Sri Lanka

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Amidst the emerging consensus against India's direct armed intervention in the aggravated ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee is to discuss the situation across the Palk Straits with the opposition leaders on Monday.

Mr Vajpayee has already held talks with some leaders of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) constituents from Tamil Nadu on the issue. Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi had apprised the PM of the views and sentiments in his state on the question of India's involvement during their meeting here on Friday.

Reinforcing the view on non-interference in Sri Lanka affairs, home minister L.K. Advani on Saturday discounted the possibility of India getting mired in the full-scale war between the Lankan forces and the LTTE militants.

India, Mr Advani said in Nagpur, "will not repeat the mistakes of the past" in acceding to the Lankan request for intervention in the eastern part of the island nation.

"It is a civil war and an internal matter of Sri Lanka, and there is no question of India interfering in it," Mr Advani said, according a news agency report. Recalling the "disastrous consequences" of sending the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to fight the LTTE in the last decade, the home minister said, "We will certainly not go the IPKF way; we must learn from the past."

Mr Advani pointed out there was complete unanimity on this issue among the leaders both in the south and at the Centre. He, however, said there was scope for sending humanitarian aid to the battle-scarred island nation.

Lankan air force mounts air attacks

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan air force retaliated against Tamil Tiger artillery and mortar attacks in northern Sri Lanka with intense air strikes, the government said on Saturday.

Air force planes launched the attack on Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) troops on the northern and southern flanks of the Elephant Pass army garrison that fell to the rebels on April 22, the government said.

In a statement the government said the LTTE had wounded four soldiers with artillery and mortars on the defences of Nagarkovil and North of the town of Pallai which the rebels took last week.

"Although there was no intense fighting, terrorists were reportedly concentrating in areas north of Elephant Pass," the government statement said. (AFP)

"The army now knows there is no option but to fight. There is no question of rescue or reinforcement from outside the country. The soldiers will have to face the consequences if they don't," a defence analyst in Colombo said. The President, as the commander-in-chief of the Lankan defence forces, has already said her troops will not surrender and will fight to the last man.

"The chances of Palaly being defended are now 60 per cent, though there's always the 40 per cent chance the Tigers will smash through the army defence lines," the analyst said.

Taking a worst case scenario, what would be the repercussions

Clinton had pointed out in Pakistan, the cause cannot justify the means. Whatever the pressures from its allies, the BJP-led Vajpayee government cannot support the LTTE. New Delhi's campaign against terrorism would lose all meaning if it does so. Ms Kumaratunga can rest easy on that score.

Her main challenge if Jaffna falls will be the political fallout, and how well she can manage to control the damage. The UNP will seize the opportunity to damage her politically. Apart from losing face, the fall of Jaffna, if it does happen, will have little effect.

(Colombo is calm on the surface—see timesofindia.com homepage)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 MAY 2000

Lanka amends controversial war status law

Colombo, May 6 (AP): The government amended a controversial law that was brought in as part of measures to fight Tamil Tiger rebels, a state run newspaper said today, as the military continued to claim victories in the battle for Jaffna.

The Public Security Ordinance dealing with detentions and arrests was amended, the state-run *Daily News* said.

The law was imposed on Wednesday after the country was put on war status, giving sweeping powers to the armed forces and administration.

The government can detain anyone for up to one year and must inform the relatives within one day, the paper said. The earlier version of the law left it to the discretion to the authorities.

Authorities can also seize aircraft, ships and property without giving any reason, ban publication of newspapers and leaflets, and prohibit demonstrations and strikes that may harm the country's war efforts.

The military, meanwhile, continued on the "offensive" against the rebels, said military spokesman Brig. Palitha Fernando. "The rebels seem to have run out of steam," Fernando said.

He said the air force continued its bombing missions and took on rebel targets. He refused to give details of the outcome of the missions. Director of government information Ariya Rubasinghe, who is also the chief censor said that there were no clashes yesterday between the troops and rebels.

He said that four soldiers were wounded when the guerrillas fired artillery and mortars at military defences near Jaffna.

"Although there was no intense fighting, terrorists (the rebels) were reportedly concentrating in areas north of Elephant Pass," Rubasinghe said in a statement.

The rebels overran the Elephant Pass two weeks ago and then advanced towards Jaffna, seizing Pallai town and adjoining areas.

Earlier, military officials said the morale of the military has improved since the government's hardline stand against the rebel advance toward their former capital. Government troops are holding on to a new defence line, which is about 25 km southeast of Jaffna city.

The rebels did not post any new information on the group's Internet web site today.

THE TELEGRAPH

7 MAY 2002

Lanka govt amends security ordinance

58-12
7/5
S Lanka

ASSOCIATED PRESS
& UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, May 6. — The government has amended a controversial law that was enforced as part of the steps to fight the LTTE, a state run newspaper said today, as the army continued to claim victories in the battle for Jaffna.

The Public Security Ordinance dealing with detentions and arrests has been amended, the *Daily News* reported. The law had been imposed on Wednesday after the country was put on war footing, giving sweeping powers to the army forces and administration.

The government can detain anyone for up to a year and must inform the relatives within one day, the paper said. The earlier version of the law left it to the discretion to the authorities.

Authorities are also entitled to seize aircraft, ships and property without stating any reason, ban publication of newspapers and leaflets, and prohibit demonstrations, strikes that may harm the country's war efforts.

Meanwhile, the army continued the "offensive" against the rebels, military spokesman, Brig Palitha Fernando, said, "the rebels seem to have run out of steam."

The LTTE launched artillery and mortar attacks on security force defences in Nagarkovil and near Pallai even as a rebel military wing leader was killed by troops.

"Para" — a LTTE leader operating in Tennamarachchi —

was killed during a search operation by troops in Meesalai.

Troops observed rebel movements in Tanankillappu and Ariyali, keeping them engaged with the help of long-range weapons. Troops continued to carry out fighting patrol well ahead of the forward defended localities.

The air force continued its bombing missions and took on rebel targets, he said, but refused to divulge details of the mission's outcome.

But the director of government information and the chief censor, Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, said there were no clashes between the troops and rebels today.

Four soldiers were injured when the guerrillas fired artillery and mortars at military defences near Jaffna, he said.

"There was no intense fighting but the rebels were reportedly concentrating in areas north of Elephant Pass," Mr Rubasinghe said.

The rebels overran the Elephant Pass two weeks ago and advanced towards Jaffna, seizing Pallai and nearby areas.

Earlier, military officials said the army's morale has improved since the government's hardline stand against the rebel advance towards their former capital. Troops are holding on to a new defence line, about 25 km south-east of Jaffna.

A delegation of Sri Lankan officials are expected to travel to Israel to discuss the renewed diplomatic ties. A Russian team has also arrived in Sri Lanka.

THE STATESMAN

67 MAY 2000

President says talks possible only if LTTE chief attends negotiations

Lanka seeks foreign help again

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
COLOMBO, MAY 16

SRI Lanka said on Tuesday it was seeking foreign assistance to end the country's drawn out Tamil separatist war, as Tiger rebels escalated attacks aimed at retaking their former stronghold of Jaffna.

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said the Colombo government was prepared to receive external help, including possible help from India, to open a dialogue with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Kadirgamar, who returned here last week after medical treatment in India, said that India had "not completely washed its hands of Sri Lanka" and that the government was aware of New Delhi's offer to help. He said India's two year extension of its ban on the LTTE at the weekend was not a "fatal impediment" to possible efforts by New Delhi to bring the Tigers to the negotiating table.

"We know that India has said it is willing to offer mediation if asked," the Minister said, adding however that neither side had for-

mally approached each other on the subject. At the same time, the minister said Norway, which is already trying to broker peace between the Colombo government and the LTTE, was keeping New Delhi informed of all developments. Sri Lanka maintains that India has a legitimate interest in a settlement to the island's dragging conflict which has claimed nearly 60,000 lives in the past two decades.

Earlier, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga now outright rejected any cease-fire agreement with the LTTE. But, she said, her government was ready for talks with the militant group provided LTTE supremo V. Prabhakaran was brought to the negotiating table.

The President was speaking to representatives of 27 registered political parties whom she had called to explain the current military situation in the war-torn Jaffna yesterday. "As a responsible government, we consider it our responsibility to apprise you of the situation in the north after the April 20 battle in Jaffna peninsula intensified."

Obviously referring to the cease-fire offer made by the LTTE early last week, Kumaratunga said the government would never agree to withdraw the armed forces from the North. "Every attempt made by our government to arrive at a peaceful solution was thwarted by the LTTE. When we genuinely tried to restore the rights of the Tamil people, the LTTE opposed it. If it (LTTE) is prepared to negotiate peace we are ready, but we

will never give in to proposals like withdrawing our forces from the North and the East."

Kadirgamar said he did not expect quick results from the Norwegian peace initiative which was announced by President Chandrika Kumaratunga in December. However, so far there has been no direct face-to-face talks between Colombo and the Tamil Tigers who are fighting for an independent homeland for the island's 2.5 million Tamil minority. The Minister said there could be other countries joining in the peace effort but at the same time he cautioned against too many becoming

involved for productive reasons. "There are about 16 or 20 countries which have offered to help," Kadirgamar said. "If there are too many and everyone wants to add their two cents worth, then it will not be useful." Kadirgamar said India had "ruled in" humanitarian assistance in the context of the fighting in the island's Jaffna peninsula.

Five days ago, Kadirgamar's junior, Lakshman Kiriella, told parliament that Sri Lanka's sovereignty was threatened by the ongoing heavy fighting and the country was ready to accept foreign help to end the prolonged separatist war. "If any country is willing to mediate to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table, we welcome it," Kiriella told parliament. He said the government had seen reported remarks from Indian politicians offering help to bring about a settlement, but added there had been no formal approach. "We can't respond to what appears in newspapers," Kiriella told the 225-member Assembly during a debate called by the main Opposition United National Party which was pressing for a reaction to New Delhi's offer.

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 MAY 2000

Lanka rejects LTTE offer of safe passage for govt. troops

Chandrika determined to save Jaffna and key Palaly air base *Govt., oppn. agree that army will not be sent to Lanka*

By Laurinda Keys

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Tamil Tiger rebels offered a temporary cease-fire on Monday to allow the evacuation of 40,000 Sri Lankan government troops from the northern city of Jaffna but officials said it would be rejected.

The safe passage offer amounted to a call for the surrender of the city of 500,000 "to prevent the further escalation of violence and a bloodbath." It was faxed to news agencies in Colombo and New Delhi from the London office of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The cease-fire offer will not be accepted because of the evacuation condition, a senior government official said in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo. He said President Chandrika Kumaratunga favours peace talks, but will not accept any conditions or compromise the sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

Officials said a formal statement would be issued later.

The government has indicated it is prepared to fight to hold on to the city and the nearby Palaly air base, the crucial supply link for troops defending Jaffna.

The offer of a truce came as the Sri Lankan air force bombed rebel artillery positions at Elephant Pass, the land bridge that the rebels captured last month between the Jaffna Peninsula and the mainland.

Military officials said the army was inducting weaponry newly acquired on the international arms market to strengthen the new military defence line, 25 kilometres South-east of Jaffna, in the hope of stopping a relentless advance by the rebels toward the city.

Jaffna, considered the centre of Tamil culture and history, was under the rebels' control from 1990-95. It was then the capital of a virtual Tamil state, which had its own police, judiciary and border controls. During that time, however, the government never lost control of the Palaly airport.

Reports of the truce offer were delayed in Sri Lanka by military censorship that has been imposed on the local and foreign media.

The Tigers' press release said the LTTE "is prepared to declare a temporary cease-fire suspending all armed hostilities against the Sri Lankan armed forces to facilitate the beleaguered government troops to be evacuated safely from the Jaffna Peninsula." (AP)

NEW DELHI: The government and the opposition on Monday consensually decided on four aspects of India's policy on the Sri Lankan crisis: that the Indian army would not intervene and efforts should be made for a peaceful settlement; that the unity, integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka should be maintained; that the welfare of the Tamils and their demand for Eelam should be kept in mind; and that all minority interests should be protected.

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee told the opposition there was no question of India backing the demand for Eelam, according to parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan. The PM made this clear in response to Tamil Maanila Congress MP Jayanthi Natarajan's suggestion that India should support such a demand.

Earlier, external affairs minister Jaswant Singh, briefing the parliamentary leaders on the latest situation in Sri Lanka, said India was in close touch with Norway, which was the go-between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. India was also in touch with the United States and other Western powers. He added that so far no one had sought Indian intervention and that Delhi would not act on its own.

The opposition parties said they were willing to back the government on the Sri Lankan issue, but said they wanted to be briefed at greater length on what precisely had passed between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments on the crisis in the island state. Congress spokesperson Margaret Alva said that the government had not briefed them on what Sri Lanka had asked for.

Ms Alva added that in the absence of Sonia Gandhi, who has taken ill, Pranab Mukherjee and Manmohan Singh stressed at the meeting that India should proceed with the utmost caution, and ensure that it was not dragged into any confrontation, and that whatever solution emerged should be within the parameters of the Sri Lankan constitution. They also added that the government should brief them again if there were further developments or the government made any fresh commitments to Sri Lanka.

Opposition leaders also demanded that since only parliamentary wing leaders had been invited for Monday's meeting, the party leaders should be called for the next discussion on the subject.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 9 MAY 2000

Colombo rejects LTTE's offer

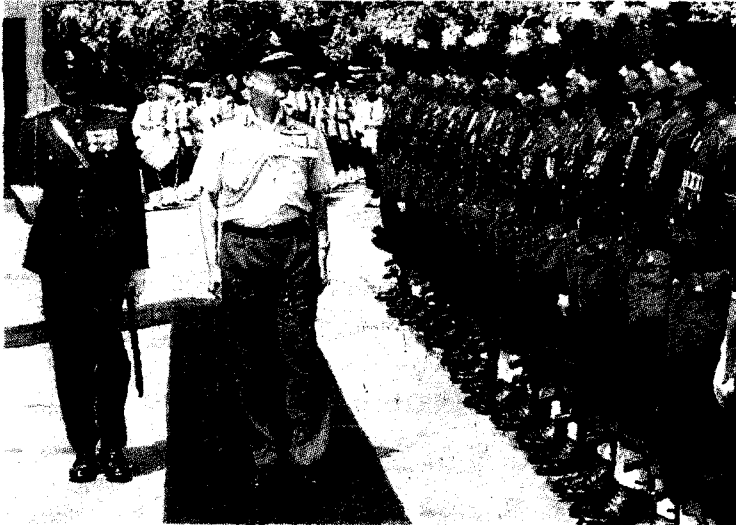
By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 8. Breaking a week of silence, the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today offered a temporary truce to the Sri Lankan Government to facilitate the "safe evacuation" of its troops from northern Jaffna.

The offer was promptly rejected by the Government, which said there was no question of a pull-out. Coming as it did at a time when there is considerable international attention on the military situation in the island's northern region, the LTTE offer was described by a source in the Government as one of "psychological operations" and that "there is no question of an Army pull-out from the northern Peninsula".

The offer, observers say, would place the Government under pressure from the southern majority as it promised a safe passage to an estimated 25,000 troops from the embattled peninsula. According to the offer, a positive response would "create cordial conditions for a permanent ceasefire, peace talks and a negotiated settlement". The Tigers also said the Government would have to bear responsibility for "heavy military casualties" if the offer was rejected.

In its reaction, the Opposition United National Party said the Government could have made a "counter-offer" rather than reject the call altogether. The UNP, which has been calling for cessation of hostilities and the commencement of a deescalation process, felt the offer could have



The Indian Air Force chief, Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis, inspecting a guard of honour at the Sri Lankan Army headquarters, during his official visit to the country on Monday.

Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

been met with a suitable proposal for deescalation. Political observers, who have been calling for a cessation of hostilities, feel the offer would have been more productive, if it was made by a third party "facilitator or mediator".

UNP hails Indian stand

With the necessity of an external player being felt increasing in political circles, the UNP also welcomed the Indian position on the conflict and the reported statement of the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, that India was willing to negotiate a settlement, if invited by both parties. The Indian position was welcomed "in the present crisis when

a military solution is not possible", the Opposition leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, told reporters. He called upon the Government to respond to the Indian invitation. The party felt the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord could remain the "starting point" for New Delhi's involvement.

Tipnis meets Chandrika

Meanwhile, India's Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal A. Y. Tipnis, today called on the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and "discussed mutual interests". Air Chief Marshal Tipnis, on a six-day goodwill mission, is scheduled to visit the country's airbases.

THE HINDU

4 MAY 1988

Lanka rejects LTTE truce offer

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLOMBO, May 8. — The Sri Lankan government today rejected an LTTE offer of ceasefire to allow the evacuation of 40,000 Lankan soldiers from Jaffna.

Officials said the offer was rejected as it was conditional and accepting it would send the wrong signal that the government was willing to pull out its troops from Jaffna city.

"President Chandrika Kumaratunga favours peace talks, but will not accept any condition, or compromise the sovereignty of Sri Lanka," said a senior government official. A formal rejection would be issued later, confirmed another official.

In a nationwide television address, the President iterated her determination to win the war and attacked the LTTE for not responding to her peace moves. Describing the present crisis as a "temporary and serious setback", she, however, did not refer to the ceasefire offer. "We decided that we would put the country on war status ... and win the war as soon as possible."

The country was put on war status on Wednesday while invoking the Public Security Ordinance. Under the new law, authorities can seize aircraft, ships and property without giving any reason, ban publication of newspapers and leaflets, and prohibit demonstrations and strikes that may "harm" the country's war efforts.

The safe passage offer was a goodwill gesture meant to "prevent further escalation of violence and a bloodbath", said a

NAVY ON ALERT

CHENNAI, May 8. — The Indian Navy and Coast Guard have intensified vigil in the Palk Strait, fearing a refugee influx from Jaffna. A high-alert has been sounded at all coastal checkpoints in the south and patrolling has been intensified along the coastal villages.

"We are definitely in a state of preparedness, but we have found no suspicious movement. There has been no significant refugee influx apart from the usual trickle, nor has there been any militant movement," a senior naval official said.

However, Navy and Air chiefs of southern sector have been camping in Rameswaram to oversee the operations in the coastal area in case of an emergency. — SNS

■ Operation Tasha vigil 'heightened': page 6

faxed message reaching news agencies in Colombo and New Delhi from LTTE's London office.

Reports of the truce offer were delayed in Sri Lanka by the military censorship imposed on the local and foreign media. The Tigers' Press release said the LTTE "is prepared to declare a temporary ceasefire suspending all armed hostilities against the Sri Lankan armed forces to facilitate the beleaguered government troops to be evacuated safely from the Jaffna Peninsula".

Government officials had indicated that the offer was unlikely

to be accepted as the government was prepared to fight to hold on to the Jaffna city and the nearby Palai air base, which is the crucial supply link for troops defending Jaffna.

The truce offer and the President's speech come against the backdrop of renewed government offensive in the strategic Elephant Pass area that the Tigers captured last month. The air force bombed the area and targeted rebel artillery positions while the army inducted newly-acquired weapons to prevent the fall of northern Jaffna.

Meanwhile, India's Air Chief Marshal AY Tipnis met his Sri Lankan counterpart today. Officials said the visit was not linked to the Tamil separatist war but certain issues affecting the two neighbours might come up for discussion. He was accorded a guard of honor at the high-security air force headquarters in Colombo and is also slated to meet President Kumaratunga.

Stocks tumble

Sri Lanka's stock index tumbled 3.7 per cent today, the steepest decline in 19 months, as growing concern over the war triggered heavy selling. By the end of trading, the benchmark All Share Index was lower by 16.2 points to 430.6. The decline is the sharpest percentage drop in a single day's trading since 1 September, 1998, when the index declined by 4 per cent during the Asian financial crisis. The market has been weak throughout most of 1999 due to low liquidity and domestic politics.

S. Lanka
110-1

Colombo to go ahead with war

110-5

By V.S.Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 9. With resumption of fighting looming large over northern Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Parliament was today told that the security forces would "not be defeated" by the LTTE and Jaffna would be defended at all cost.

Reports from the battlefield indicate an imminent resumption of fighting, with the Government stating that the troops had repulsed LTTE attacks at Pallai, over which the Tigers claimed control on April 30.

Now contained a few km south of Kilali, the Tigers are likely to launch attacks, possibly multi-pronged, to get to the crucial base, especially after the LTTE offer of a temporary ceasefire was rejected yesterday.

Another possibility is an eastern advance from Nagar Kovil, which would take the Tigers to the northern port town of Point Pedro.

"We will fight to the last man," the Deputy Defence Minister, Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte, told Parliament, which deliberated on the situation after the Elephant Pass military debacle of April 21.

"In a war situation, there may be temporary setbacks. That does not mean that the war is lost altogether. We will not be defeated.

We are determined to recoup all our resources in order to achieve success at the end," he said.

The Minister's statement in Parliament, which advanced its monthly debate on the extension of nation-wide emergency, was reflected in reports from the battlefield, which said LTTE attacks this morning were "repulsed twice" in general area Pallai.

On the developments in the warfront, the Government in a statement said, "During the early hours of the morning today, terrorists in large numbers launched two consecutive attacks on the troops manning defences north of Pallai. Terrorists used small arms, machine guns, RPGs and mortars during the assault."

Troops "fought back valiantly repulsing both assaults" compelling the LTTE to withdraw southwards with their casualties, the daily situation report said.

While the first attack lasted 30 minutes, the second was "repulsed within 15 minutes."

On the eastern flank, the LTTE's mortar presence was felt yesterday. While "troops sniped and killed" one rebel south of Nagar Kovil, two soldiers were injured "due to terrorist mortar fire," the statement said.

THE HINDU

10 MAY 2000

Norway still on Lanka peace broker duty

AUNOHY A MOJUMDAR
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 9. — Norway is still in close touch with the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government in its role as facilitator for a dialogue. *S Lanka*

Speaking to **The Statesman** from Oslo, the spokesman of the Norwegian foreign ministry said Norway was still committed to bring the two warring parties together. He said the government was extremely concerned and had urged the two parties to "show restraint" and respect international humanitarian norms.

(The Lankan Parliament today extended the Emergency for another month. The government also announced that it had no intention to withdraw troops from the Jaffna Peninsula, adds UNI from Colombo.)

On whether Norway was reviewing its decision to act as a facilitator in view of the current situation, he said his government was "determined to continue the peace process as long as the parties want us to do it", adding that "there is no indication that they wouldn't".

He said: "We realise it will be a difficult process to establish contact to promote the peace process" and added there had been no discussions with India.

Norway's determination to continue to be a part of the peace process suggests that there will be no early move on India's offer to mediate. Sources hinted India would not want to move into a process spearheaded by another country.

Norway's task of facilitation has continued with only a brief interruption during the change in its government, with the current government deciding to continue utilising the expertise of Mr Erik Solheim, an acknowledged expert on South

■ See LANKA: page 8

THE STATESMAN

10 MAY 2000

Tiger, tiger, burning bright

More than the military costs incurred in the ongoing conflict, it is the political fallout that Chandrika Kumaratunga may find hard to cope with, writes M.K. TIKKU

IT IS for the second time in a decade that Sri Lankan forces are losing their hold over Jaffna after having gained initial control at the end of considerable battle-line sacrifices. In 1990, the Sri Lankan troops had even reached the Dutch Fort in Jaffna town, raised the national flag on its ramparts, and then — heeding military advice on the unmaintainability of that position — voluntarily pulled back to the base at Palaly airport.

This time, the story is somewhat different. The litany of suffering, however, is the same. About two years ago, Sri Lankan troops had managed to gain control of Jaffna and push the LTTE out of the peninsula. Though the costs of this operation had been substantial in terms of men and materials, it seemed to occasion a sense of national euphoria that made it appear worth the price.

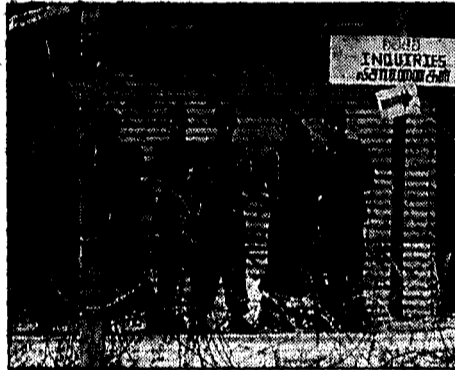
In fact, the opposition United National Party had been criticising the government for having positioned most of its troops in the north, allowing the LTTE to have a free run of the east. But even such high troop concentration in the north did not seem to stop the Tigers from launching attacks on Sri Lankan camps in the Vanni region. That is when the bad news started coming in. Even so, the rout of the Sri Lankan troops at Elephant Pass was so dramatic that it took almost everybody by surprise. They seemed to have made versatile use of the guerrilla capacity for tactical flexibility while the Sri Lankan troops remained pinned down to fixed positions and options.

This debacle has also paved the way for the Tigers regaining control of their "home territory" of Jaffna. Even assuming that the Sri Lankans manage to retain their foothold at Palaly, it would still leave most of the peninsula, including Jaffna town, in the hands of the LTTE. It is possible to argue that Colombo need not lose too much sleep over this development since the Tigers had in any case held Jaffna for most of the period since the early Eighties. Locally, the LTTE's writ

SRI LANKA

ran, and they were collecting taxes even while they had been battling the IPKF. What makes it worse in the ongoing conflict is the damage they have caused to the morale of the troops. It is to such an extent that the Tigers may now feel free to extend the area under their effective control further down across the east.

Whether the Jaffna operations will now concern itself with facilitating a tactical withdrawal or will result in Colombo pushing in more arms and men to hold whatever is pos-



sible in the north remains to be seen. The answer might partly depend on the kind of military support the government manages to obtain from Israel and elsewhere. From the military point of view, the first choice of withdrawal would be the saner course. Politically, however, the latter option of obtaining outside help appears to be more attractive.

More than the military costs, it is the political fallout that President Chandrika Kumaratunga may find hard to cope with. For the past six years, she has been rather lucky in having to deal with an opposition party that was in disarray. Now, the opposition has got a ready handle to criticise the

government. It is likely to count the costs of the war and what it has "achieved". Past criticism of the ruling elite in Colombo that the government was using the jobless rural youth from the south as "cannon fodder" in a war that did not mean much to it is bound to be resurrected with a vengeance. The sense of national dismay about the outcome of the war could itself be used as a political platform.

All that, in any case, is indicative of the tough times ahead. But coming in an election year makes it worse. But one does not suggest that the opposition would have had any better solutions to offer. In fact, it has been part of the continuing tragedy in Sri Lanka that whenever there has been an opportunity for resolving the ethnic tangle, the more extremist elements — including the Buddhist clergy — have raised the bogey of ultra-nationalism, thereby derailing the whole process.

It may be hard to imagine that barely a few weeks ago, when reports that the Norwegians were to work for a possible rapprochement between the government and the LTTE, the clergy led a protest march to the Norwegian embassy in Colombo. A few months earlier, as the government's proposals for a devolution package — which by itself would appear inadequate from the Tamils' point of view — came up for discussion, the clergy again occupied the centre-stage, condemning the move as a sell-out to the Tamils.

Whichever way Ms Kumaratunga proposes to lead the war effort and whatever its outcome, hope must finally lie in creating a national consensus on how to resolve the ethnic tangle in a fair and equitable fashion. That is something that has been eluding Sri Lankan politicians all through the war years. Such an amicable resolution is unlikely in the stifling conditions imposed under the draconian Public Security Act invoked by the Sri Lankan President in the wake of the debacle in the north. To that extent, she has started on a false note.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 MAY 2000

11/11 The Tiger's Smile 10/5

Chandrika Kumaratunga has rightly rejected the LTTE's offer of a ceasefire to enable the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan troops trapped in the Jaffna peninsula as the first step towards a possible negotiated settlement of the Tamil question. If the offer of the Liberation Tigers — estimated to number about 5,000 — showed contempt for the superior strength of the 40,000 Sri Lankan troops, Ms Kumaratunga has been no less scornful in dismissing the calculated overture. In her response she did not even refer to the LTTE's offer of talks, but vowed that the armed forces would continue to fight and "not allow half a million people to fall into the fascist LTTE's hands". Several reasons prevent Colombo from acknowledging, let alone accepting, the LTTE offer. There is the longstanding offer of Ms Kumaratunga for a negotiated resolution of the Tamil problem. Before launching the current offensive against the LTTE, she had pointblank raised the question of whether they wanted to talk peace or face a military conflict; the LTTE had opted for war on every occasion when talks were proposed. The LTTE's record shows that it is not serious when it speaks about negotiations and its pronouncements in this regard cannot be relied upon. All this inevitably raises the suspicion that the current offer is a tactical move to get the Sri Lankan armed forces out and capture Jaffna without being challenged militarily. To allow a rebel force to capture territory after a voluntary army withdrawal is unthinkable for any legitimate constitutional authority; as such, Ms Kumaratunga's resolve is unexceptionable.

However, to reject the LTTE's tactical manoeuvre, timing and preconditions for negotiations is different from altogether repudiating a non-military solution to the conflict. The LTTE should be made to realise that while the process for peace talks has to begin in earnest, it cannot be allowed the advantage of preconditions. This can be done by stepping up international pressure for talks. New Delhi has shown that it is willing to mediate if its participation is acceptable to both sides, and Norway, at the behest of the US, is available as a facilitator. Other countries, such as France and Britain, hitherto reluctant to lend their weight, can also be expected to pitch in to expedite negotiations. New Delhi — which is a critical player for obvious reasons — must shed its presumptions of any exclusive prerogative in the matter and act in concert with the Norwegian initiative which is backed by the US. India's four-point policy on the Sri Lankan crisis — no army intervention but efforts for a peaceful settlement; safeguarding Sri Lankan unity, integrity and sovereignty; keeping in mind the welfare of Tamils and Eelam; and protection of minority interests — recognises the Tamils' right to autonomy and should be the guiding principle for all those involved in resolving the conflict. Restraint and not jingoism will help the political parties in Tamil Nadu serve the cause of the Tamils and their objective of an autonomous province.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 MAY 2000

Heavy LTTE attack on troops in Jaffna

Colombo, May 10

TAMIL GUERRILLAS today launched heavy attacks on government troops at places closer to embattled Jaffna town to dislodge Army defences.

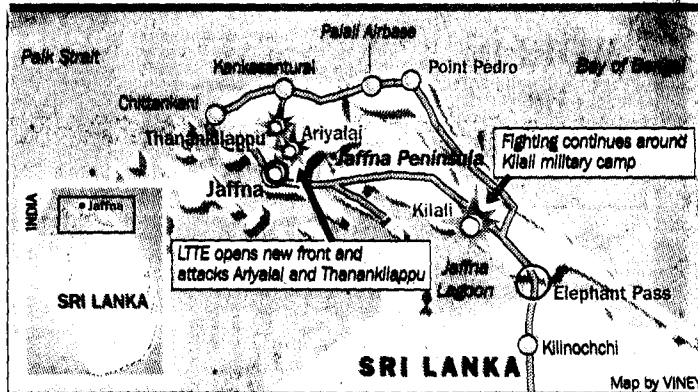
LTTE launched pre-dawn simultaneous major attacks on Ariyalai and Thanankilappu located on the banks of a lagoon close to Jaffna, a government Press release said, adding troops held on to Thanankilappu repulsing all attacks by the guerrillas.

The rebels, however, managed to breach Army defences in "few places".

Casualties, if any, were not immediately known.

Ariyalai is located over five km north of Jaffna town while Thanankilappu is situated about seven km north of Ariyalai. Army has rushed more reinforcements to the two areas to repulse LTTE attacks, it said.

"Terrorists continued to fire heavy volumes of artillery and mortars. Troops fought back effec-



tively repulsing a number of human waves of the attackers. Although there were large number of casualties among the attackers, LTTE human waves continued to assault without any respect for the lives of junior LTTE cadre," the release said.

While troops managed to repulse LTTE attacks at Thanankilappu, LTTE guerrillas managed to breach a "few gaps" in the Army defences at Ariyalai. "At present intense fighting is continuing in

Ariyalai sector," it said.

Ground troops were effectively supported by artillery and air attacks by Sri Lankan Air Force fighters. Reinforcements have already been deployed in Ariyalai and Thanankilappu sectors to push back the terrorists, said the release.

According to ground troops, terrorists suffered very heavy casualties while troops too suffered casualties due to intense fighting," the release said. (PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAY 2000

Norwegian mediator arrives today

Udayan Nambodiri
New Delhi, May 10

NORWEGIAN MEDIATOR
Eric Solheim is scheduled to meet on Thursday External Affairs Ministry officials and brief them on the outcome of his dialogue with the Sri Lankan Government in Colombo. Mr Solheim, an MP, has been mediating between the Lanka Government and the LTTE since March.

But going by External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh's recent statement in Parliament that such a mediation would not be a "workable solution", nothing much is expected from the visit. The Minister told BJP parliamentarians on Tuesday that the Norwegians had agreed to keep India and the United States informed of the developments in

Sri Lanka. India continues to stick to its stand that direct mediation by New Delhi was possible only if both Colombo and the LTTE agreed.

Mr Solheim will be accompanied by the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka. He is expected to enrich the Indian perspective of the ongoing crisis with his third party opinion. He is learnt to have been contacted by the LTTE's diplomatic operatives and told of the organisation's latest position. Exactly a week after announcement of the Government's decision to offer "humanitarian assistance" to the strife-affected population of Jaffna peninsula, India's involvement, even if indirect, is set to begin with Mr Solheim's visit.

New Delhi has already established contact with the Norwegians in the past few days and told them

that Indian favoured devolution of more powers to the Tamil-majority North. It is proceeding with its present Sri Lanka foray on the assumption that mediation will result in the Chandrika Government announcing some kind of a half-way house to total autonomy to the Tigers, before a more durable peace settlement is achieved.

Though New Delhi and Colombo have been in touch through the week, Mr Solheim is believed to be in a better position to judge the overall position. India too relies on this channel for a dialogue with the LTTE should the need arise.

New Delhi, which has ruled out a repeat of 1987 — when it got involved militarily even though its first overtures were humanitarian — has no intention of departing from a hands-off approach.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 MAY 2000

Battles on Jaffna doorstep

By V.S.Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 10. Pitched battles are on at the doorstep of Jaffna today, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) breaching the Sri Lankan defences close to the northern town. Curfew was imposed in the town, home to about five lakh civilians.

About 149 soldiers have been wounded in action up to this afternoon. Resuming "Operation Ceaseless Waves III," (Oyatha Alaigal), the Tigers have breached

gaps at the Ariyalai defence lines, taking the offensive close to the northern town. Reverting to human wave tactics, the Tigers have sent confusing signals to military observers. They have breached a gap of "less than 1 km" in the three-km Navatkuli-Ariyalai sector.

The Government, in a statement, said "troops continue to use maximum fire power against the terrorists and are being supported effectively by the attacks."

Information received from Jaffna indicate that there has been a movement of civilians to the town from the suburbs. "It is a close call now," military observers said, expressing apprehensions of a fierce attack into the town.

With access to the roads leading to Jaffna, several advances are possible for the Tigers after today's attacks. If they were to move north it would take them towards Palaly, bringing the air base under threat. An eastern move would take them to Chavakachcheri, while to the west lies Jaffna town

and to the northeast, Point Pedro.

While the Tigers claimed to have taken control of sections of the Navatkuli bridge, sources in the Government refuted the claim and said while there were "gaps in the Navatkuli-Ariyalai sector, the bridge is still with us."

Ranging from "very serious fighting" in the morning to a few "skirmishes" towards evening, much of the course of the fighting would depend on the ability of the Tigers to advance their field guns further into the Peninsula from their earlier positions. As of now, there appear to be no indications of such a move.

Much of the unfolding scenario in the next few hours would depend on the manpower situation and the movement of artillery by the rebels.

"It is a serious setback," the military observers said and the Government, in its daily situation report, conceded that the defence lines at Ariyalai had been breached in a "major attack" by the Tigers on the troops manning the defences at Ariyalai and Tanankillappu.

The Tigers, in a statement, announced resumption of fighting, "following the Government's rejection of the ceasefire proposal" along three fronts, and said "fierce fighting is continuing in Ariyalai, Tanankillappu and Navatkuli."

UNP calls for debate

At Parliament, the Opposition United National Party (UNP) pressed for a debate on Government of India's offer of its willingness to negotiate in the crisis, if invited by the Government and the LTTE.

China against outside intervention, Uncertain future stares refugees: Page 13

Arms arriving for Sri Lanka

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, MAY 10. Despite their military gains, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) may now encounter tougher resistance from the Sri Lankan troops who are now getting fresh arms supplies from abroad, highly-placed sources in the Government said.

Sources here pointed out that the arrival of arms and ammunition for the Sri Lankan soldiers, which has already begun, is likely to make a material difference to their combat strength in the coming days. Key players who are involved in the transfer of arms are Pakistan, Israel, South Africa and North Korea.

Meanwhile, the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard are planning a limited exercise near the coast. This exercise, in which a detachment of the naval aircraft is also likely to be involved, is expected to send a "graduated message" of "operational readiness" to the LTTE. Conversely, these manoeuvres are meant to boost the morale of the Sri Lankan

forces. Such show of strength in conflict zones are "routine" and have a psychological rather than a military aim, the sources said. The Indian maritime forces are also involved in screening the refugees who are arriving in boats from Sri Lanka mostly in the Mandapam—Tuticorin zone.

The preparedness of the Island's troops may also improve as they are now getting larger access to commercially available surveillance data to pin-point the LTTE strongholds in the Jaffna peninsula and monitor their advance. Sri Lanka is especially keen to observe the shifting Tiger artillery deployments. Colombo wants to ensure that the LTTE's artillery, which include the highly-effective multi-barrel rockets, is kept out of the range of the Palaly air base, the key to the maintenance of the over 20,000 troops positioned in Jaffna. Colombo is also making efforts to ensure that traffic is not disrupted in the key ports involved in maintaining supplies for the troops.

The chief of the Air Staff, Air

Chief Marshal A.Y Tipnis, accompanied by a "technical officer" of the rank of an Air Vice-Marshal is touring some of the key commands of the Sri Lankan air force. According to sources, he visited the flying training wing at the Anuradhapura airbase in the North on Tuesday as well as the Southern command of the air force at Diyafhlawa.

Diplomatic sources here said that Sri Lanka could do with technical assistance to improve the serviceability of its planes which include the Israeli-built Kfir fighter jets as well as a handful of unmanned aerial vehicles for surveillance.

The assessment of the changing scenario here is that Sri Lanka is acquiring enough military capability to prevent the Tigers from overrunning the entire peninsula, unless the troops, despite their improved weaponry, suffer inexplicable reverses.

The sources said though the fighting has currently peaked, its drop to more "acceptable levels" in the coming weeks is not ruled out.

THE HINDU

11 MAY 2000

China against outside intervention in Sri Lanka

BEIJING, MAY 10. China has expressed concern over the developments in Sri Lanka and said it was against any outside intervention in the strife-torn island nation, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said here today.

S. Lanka 40-13
Expressing concern over the fighting in Jaffna, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Ms. Zhang Qiyue, said China was of the view that Sri Lankans should handle the situation themselves.

11/5
"We are very much concerned about the situation in Sri Lanka and are confident that the Government and people of the country have the capacity to handle their own questions properly," Ms. Zhang told PTI.

She, however, did not comment when asked whether Sri Lanka had requested military and other assistance from China.

Diplomatic sources meanwhile said that Beijing was closely keeping a watch on India's response to the situation.

The State-run Chinese media also gave prominent coverage to India's decision not to send troops to the strife-torn island. — PTI

THE HINDU

MAY 11 1982

S. Rana

Fierce fighting for Jaffna

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 11. Intense fighting continued on Jaffna's doorstep for the second day today between Sri Lankan security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), threatening to spill over into the key northern Jaffna town, home to over five lakh civilians.

The Ariyalai and Tanankilappu, sectors, where fighting broke out on Wednesday, saw heavy fighting since the afternoon. According to the Government, troops continued to repulse the LTTE attempts to advance further from

the stretch where it breached army positions yesterday. The Sri Lankan Air Force engaged many LTTE positions and destroyed a rebel bunker-line at Ariyalai.

A total of 33 soldiers and 96 LTTE cadre were killed in the latest offensive, the Government said, adding that at Tanankilappu 17 LTTE men were killed yesterday, while at Ariyalai, "over 50 terrorist bodies" were found by the Government troopers.

While indications are that the LTTE could attempt an encircling from the positions under attack in a multi-pronged attack through

Tanankilappu and Kerativu, the Government said the troops continued to offer stiff resistance, displaying a firm determination to destroy the terrorists.

The LTTE presence in the Jaffna suburbs is a cause for concern over the conflict spilling into the populated northern town, which the LTTE vowed to take back after a three-stage army offensive in 1995 brought Jaffna under Government control.

With the likelihood of the battles being taken into civilian pockets, the ICRC expressed concern over the humanitarian con-

sequences of the upsurge in the fighting.

The fluid situation also triggered, what the Government termed, "rumours by LTTE agents that the Palaly airbase is under attack".

Live telecasts banned

Meanwhile, the Government today further strengthened its censorship, by banning live telecast and broadcast of news.

'No change in Indian policy'

NEW DELHI, MAY 11. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today ruled out any change in India's policy in the event of fall of Jaffna to the LTTE.

"If Jaffna falls it will not be the first time (such a development would take place)," Mr. Vajpayee said in an informal chat with newsmen here.

He agreed that the situation was grave but made it clear that any Indian initiative for mediation had to be with the consent of the parties concerned.

The Prime Minister confirmed reports of movement of arms to Sri Lanka but did not specify the source country. Asked if the weapons were coming from Pakistan or Israel, he said there were various sources.

Mr. Vajpayee ruled out India recognising Tamil Eelam if Jaffna fell into the hands of the LTTE.

Asked about the issue of rollback in subsidies which led to adjournment of both Houses this morning, Mr. Vajpayee, in a lighter vein, said it was the press which had kept alive the rollback rhythm. — PTI, UNI

No mediation offer: Page 13

Israeli jets for Sri Lanka

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, MAY 11. While the LTTE continues its "all-out" offensive on Jaffna, Sri Lanka has acquired new fighter jets from Israel and is awaiting a shipload of arms from Pakistan, highly placed Government sources here said.

Sources pointed out that seven Israeli Kfir fighter jets had already arrived in Sri Lanka. Besides, Israel has also landed 24 containers of arms and equipment in Colombo.

The presence of Israeli Kfirs is meant to build the depleted stocks of the Sri Lankan Air Force. With the Sri Lankan Army losing ground, its Air Force which already has a handful of Kfirs is under pressure to deliver. The Air Force, analysts say, has to target the LTTE artillery which otherwise can impose enormous pressure on its ground troops in the Jaffna peninsula.

Analysts, however, point out that Colombo must retain the strategic Palaly air base in the country's north-east to make its air strikes effective. Strategically, holding Palaly, which is also close to the key port of Kankasanturai, by Sri Lankan forces is more important than Jaffna town. Palaly, unlike Jaffna, has less forest cover and is not favourable for guerrilla warfare by the LTTE.

Sources pointed out that a Pakistani ship with arms on board is on its way. The consignment includes, 122 mm. Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers along with a load of 1600 rockets. Besides, Pakistan has already flown in ammunition supplies to Colombo. It has declined to fly its planes directly to Palaly. The Pakistani consignment, analysts say, could strengthen the Army's ability to counter the LTTE edge in field artillery.

Sri Lanka has also contacted the Czech Republic for delivery of tanks. Colombo plans to airlift them from Prague, to facilitate its early induction.

While military equipment has now begun pouring in, its full impact could be felt only over time. The induction of weaponry, according to analysts, is not enough for success in combat. Sri Lankan soldiers will have to be trained on the new weaponry which is unfamiliar to them. Moreover, infusion of fresh arms should be accompanied by a perceptible rise in troop morale in order to retard the LTTE strike. Aware of this eventuality, the LTTE has speeded up its offensive.

Meanwhile, the screening of refugees arriving in the Mandapam-Tuticorin areas suggests that the migrants are mostly from Central Sri Lanka rather than the Jaffna area.

THE HINDU

12 MAY 2000

Jaffna battle claims 131

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SR-1 MS
COLOMBO, May 11. — Sri Lankan fighter jets strafed LTTE positions today as fierce fighting broke out near embattled Jaffna town, leaving 131 people dead, though government troops retained their hold on the nearby and strategic Navatkuli road bridge in the face of heavy guerrilla attacks.

Israeli-built Kfir fighters were pounding LTTE bunkers at Ariyali, Thanankilappu and Pooneryn since daybreak, destroying some of the positions completely, a government statement said. It admitted heavy fighting on several fronts in the peninsula.

Many attempts by the Tigers to approach the bridge had been resisted by the troops, but small groups of Tigers still held on to a stretch of the main highway just one km northwest of the bridge, the statement said. The Tigers said they would continue their assault on Jaffna.

Norwegian initiative: India remained cool today to the Norwegian initiative on Sri Lanka after talks with the special envoy from Oslo, Mr Eric Solheim, but stressed that any solution to

the problem would require India's support, SNS adds from New Delhi.

With no evidence that the government was changing its views on the futility of the Norwegian initiative, Mr Solheim, who met Indian officials and called on the Union External Affairs Minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, said, "there are no ways that the problem in Sri Lanka can be solved without India playing a positive role." India was positive about Norway's role, he claimed. But there was no tangible sign of any joint initiative evolving from today's discussions, with the MEA spokesman calling the Norwegian initiative an "entirely Norwegian effort".

The Prime Minister too ruled out any change in India's policy in the event of the fall of Jaffna to the LTTE, report agencies. "If Jaffna falls to the LTTE it will not be the first time," he was reported having told reporters in Parliament.

Lankan offer: If India so wants, its navy can use the Sri Lankan port of Trincomalee, but the immediate naval response has been "Thank you, but no thank you", SNS adds. The Lankan offer was made sometime ago, but it would be of marginal use at present, naval officials said.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 12

Lankan air force strafes LTTE positions, 108 die

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan air force planes strafed LTTE positions as ferocious fighting broke out at areas close to embattled Jaffna town which left 108 people dead even as government troops were still maintaining their hold on a strategic bridge despite heavy attacks by the guerrillas.

Israeli-built Kfir fighter jets were bombarding LTTE bunkers at Ariyalai, Thanankilappu and Pooneryn since early Thursday morning, a government statement said. Some of the positions were completely destroyed, it said.

Admitting heavy fighting on several fronts in the Jaffna peninsula, the statement said troops continued to hold on to the road bridge at Navatkuli near Jaffna town.

Many attempts by the terrorists to advance towards the bridge have been repulsed by the troops. However, small

groups of terrorists continued to occupy a small stretch of the main highway just one km northwest of Navatkuli bridge," it said.

Tamil rebels on Thursday said they would continue their assault on Jaffna. But the government statement said troops also attacked batches of rebels who attempted to remove the bodies of their colleagues strewn on the battleground.

So far, 75 Tamil rebels were killed in the fighting since Wednesday, the statement said, adding, "due to confrontation at Ariyalai, two officers and 31 soldiers have been killed in action." On Wednesday night army said 149 troops were injured.

"Although the terrorists are making desperate attempts to advance further, troops are determined and so far all such attempts have been repulsed," it added.

The government release said while the rebels managed to breach the defence lines at Ariyalai about five km from Jaffna town, troops managed to repulse all attempts by rebels to break army defences at Thanankilappu, another point north of Jaffna

where the rebels attacked simultaneously.

Ariyalai and Thanankilappu were located on the banks of a narrow lagoon with shallow waters. The rebel forces attacked both the places in the early hours on Wednesday. The attacks took place as army reinforced defences at Kilaly, located further north of Ariyalai and Thanankilappu.

Troops also repulsed several attempts of the rebels to enter through the lagoon at Thanankilappu. Some guerrillas even attempted to swim through the lagoon to reach the army defences.

Troops and rebels clashed in the eastern province of Ampai where two armed militants have been killed, it said.

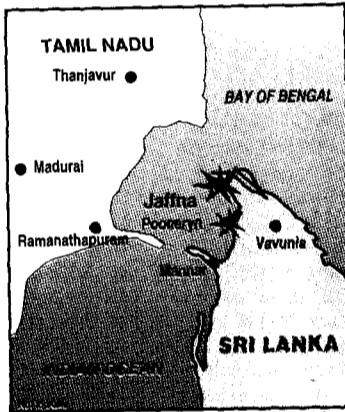
Meanwhile, in New Delhi, diplomatic efforts to end ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka were intensified with the arrival of the

Norwegian principal negotiator in Delhi on Thursday.

Mr Erik Solheim, who will hold extensive talks with the Indian government officials on latest security situation in the island nation, said his government would assist Sri Lanka in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. He said the purpose of his visit is to brief the Indian government about the latest security scenario in the war-torn nation and Norwegian efforts to bring about peace there.

External affairs minister Jaswant Singh expressed his government's willingness to mediate between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil rebels for ending the 17-year-old conflict if both parties approach it. He had also stated that Norwegian efforts had not resulted into a workable solution.

It is also reported that India was in touch with various governments, including the United States, on evolving security situation in the island nation. India had always maintained that it supports resolution of the ethnic conflict within the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. (Agencies)



TOI Graphic: Prakash Sarap

Tigers close in on Jaffna, set to swoop down

LONDON: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels appear set to recapture their former stronghold of Jaffna, lost five years ago, after overwhelming government troops in a lightning advance.

The government failed to deny a rebel statement, issued in London late on Thursday, that rebel forces were only one km from the administrative centre of the city, hub of the battle-scarred Jaffna peninsula. Nor was there any immediate prospect of negotiations to ease the conflict or the plight of civilians caught up in it.

Refugees said food and power were short in the town and that both rebel and government forces were ordering away or evacuating civilians to get them clear of the fighting.

The international committee of the Red Cross voiced concern about the humanitarian consequences and urged both sides to protect the 500,000 civilians on the Jaffna peninsula.

But there was little first-hand information from the city itself as the government, which has already imposed strict censorship and banned journalists from travelling to the war zone, prohibited all live radio and television broadcasts.

The statement from the London office of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said the rebels had made "spectacular military gains", advancing close to the

city centre and overrunning two major military bases around Chavakachcheri, east of the town.

The onslaught raised the spectre of an exodus of civilians by boat to India, which already have some 100,000 refugees.

Recent arrivals in Tamil Nadu said conditions in the town were grim. "Conditions there are bad and some reports say quite pitiable," an Indian intelligence official said in Rameswaram, a town close to refugee camps holding Tamil civilians.

Selvaraj Sabarathinam, a fisherman who fled with his family from Thalaiady in the region, said the rebels were ordering away or evacuating civilians to their jungle strongholds.

"The government troops are also taking civilians with them as they retreat towards Jaffna to discourage the boys (LTTE) from shelling at them as they flee," he said.

The LTTE, which has been fighting since 1983 for a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east, said its political wing had urged civilians living in Jaffna town to seek safer areas.

The battle is being fought amid efforts by a Norwegian peace envoy to draw India into peace initiatives.

But lawmaker Erik Solheim emerged from meetings with officials in New Delhi with a downbeat message. (Agencies)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

13 MAY 2000

LTTE supply route destroyed

1365 By V.S.Sambandan HD

COLOMBO, MAY. 12. The Sri Lankan security forces today claimed that they have destroyed a "main supply route" and "the main communication tower" of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) near Pooneryn

With fighting between the security forces and the Tigers raging for the third day, the Government said the Sangupiddy Jetty, "the main supply route" and the "main communication tower" of the rebels at Pooneryn were destroyed in a "joint operation."

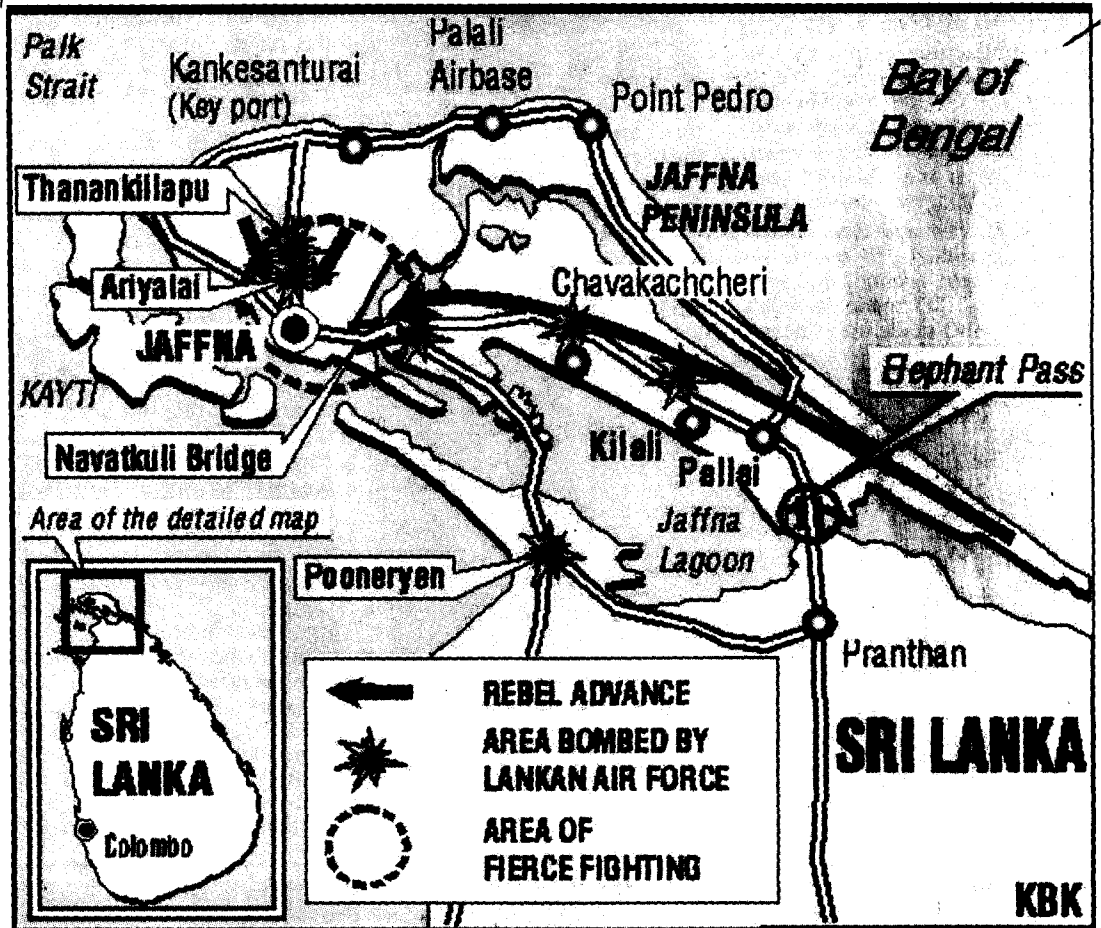
Military manoeuvres by the Tigers and readjustment of defence lines by the security forces saw the army defence lines move at Ariyalai and Colombuthurai, in the southeastern municipal limits of Jaffna.

The number of soldiers killed in the present conflict rose to 42 and that of the Tigers to 167.

The Government said after a five-hour battle last afternoon which saw "heavy volume of mortar fire" by the LTTE at Ariyalai, "its troops had to readjust their defences temporarily towards Colombuthurai east." Fighting was reported simultaneously from the Ariyalai and Tanankillappu sectors- both east of Jaffna.

The battle manoeuvres keep the options open for the Tigers to move in several directions, while maintaining a threat of a takeover of the town, populated by an estimated five lakh civilians. The impact of the fighting in the vicinity of the town is not known, as conflicting reports on internal civilian movement reached here.

The Tigers launched an attack in the Tanankillappu sector at around 2.00 p.m. The Government troops, "supported by aircraft, MI-24 helicopter gunships and artillery, fought back causing heavy casualties among terror-



ist." The present situation is a pointer to intense battles in the days ahead. Prior to the latest fighting, the Tigers had advanced towards Kilali after overrunning the Iyakachchi- Elephant Pass gateway garrison by the end of last month.

The rebels have another route along the southeastern arm of the Peninsula with a presence at Nagar Kovil, from which a further advance would take them to Point Pedro. Further advances along these sectors would bring the

northern Palaly airbase within the rebel artillery range.

With its presence in three sectors of the Peninsula, the Tigers could choose between moving in to Jaffna, or revert to either the Kilali or Nagar Kovil sectors. In addition to Jaffna town, the Palaly airbase is seen as a vital target by the rebels.

LTTE ready for 'final assault'

PTI reports from London: The LTTE claimed to have cap-

tured strategic areas on the outskirts of Jaffna and said it was poised for the "final assault on the heart of the capital."

"Strategically important city outskirts of Ariyalai, Manianthotam, Colombuthurai, sections of Passaiyur, Nedunkulam and Puliyankulam have already fallen to the Tigers, making the city centre vulnerable to the LTTE assault," a release from the rebels' international secretariat here said.

LTTE ban extension on the cards: Page 13

218 10000

13 MAY 2000

LTTE ban extension on the cards

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, MAY. 12. The Government is all set to renew the ban on Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which expires on May 14. Sources in the Government indicated that the formal notification extending the ban for another two years would be issued by the Union Home Ministry on May 14.

Though the extension of the ban under Section 5 of the Unlawful and Activities (Prevention) Act is only a formality, it assumes importance in the wake of developments in Sri Lanka. Sources pointed out the Government had already agreed in principle to extend the ban but the formal notification would be issued on the date when the ban already in force expires.

The indication comes amid inputs received here that the LTTE was concerned over exercises conducted by the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard along the Eastern sea board. The LTTE was said to be worried over the pressure the exercises would exert on it if the Sri Lankan Navy also increased its presence along the Northern Sri Lankan coast.

Reports with the intelligence agencies suggest that while the LTTE was expecting that

the Indian Government would lift the ban, it nevertheless has welcomed the Indian proposal for mediation in case both the sides agreed to it.

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, called on the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, here this evening. It is learnt that the two discussed the Sri Lankan situation in the meeting that lasted for about an hour.

While the PMK has demanded lifting of the ban and described the LTTE activities in Sri Lanka as "liberation struggle", the BJP rejected it saying there was no question of lifting the ban on LTTE.

At the all-party meet here on Tuesday, the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, categorically stated that India was not for a separate Eelam, and that it favoured a solution to the crisis in the island country "within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity." Some of the National Democratic Alliance constituents had spoken in different voices but the Government had reiterated it was against military intervention and also wanted protection for the island's minorities, especially the Tamils.

In a meeting with the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, last month, the Janata Party

president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, had pointed out that recently Canada had followed the U.S. in banning the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. While demanding extension of the ban, Dr. Swamy had told the Home Minister of the growing ISI-narcotic trade connection of the organisation.

Refugee influx

An official spokesman of the Home Ministry stated there has not been any significant influx of refugees from Sri Lanka. In April, 198 refugees reached Tamil Nadu and by May 9 nearly 114 arrived. While 463 refugees arrived in 1998, the figure went up to 769 last year.

Most of the Sri Lankan refugees arrived in Rameshwaram from where they were taken to the transit camp in Mandapam after verification. He said that relief was provided though India is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention of 1951 and Protocol of 1967 dealing with the status of refugees. At present, there are about 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees accommodated in 129 camps in Tamil Nadu and one camp in Orissa. The Government, the spokesman said, aimed at repatriation of all the refugees with the assistance of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

THE HINDU

19 MAY 2000

Grim battle on, Colombo denies reports of exodus

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 13. Barring attempts by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to breach Sri Lankan defence lines near Jaffna town, it was a day of relative low-intensity warfare in the island's northern peninsula, as the latest rebel offensive to retake Jaffna entered the fourth day.

The Government, in its situation report said, "troops repulsed the attack" by the LTTE at Colombuthurai, in coastal Jaffna, in which three soldiers were killed and 38 injured.

Conservative estimates put the total human loss during the last four days of fighting at the 200-mark — the number of Sri Lankan soldiers killed rose to 45 and that of the Tigers, according to the Government, to 167.

Meanwhile, there are reports of an exodus from Jaffna, which the Government has denied, saying: "Despite fighting between security forces and terrorists in Ariyalai area, life in Jaffna goes on as usual. Residents are not showing any sign of panic and continue their day-to-day activities."

Telecommunication links to the Jaffna peninsula remain severed since the end-April Iyakachchi-Elephant Pass runovers, resulting in several conflicting versions in Colombo about the condition of the five lakh northern residents.

On reports that patients were leaving the Jaffna Hospital, military sources said when the curfew was lifted for a few hours those who did not require continued hospitalisation "returned

home". With the security forces destroying the Sanguppiddy jetty and an LTTE communication tower on Friday, "a bit of the problem" has been warded off "at least temporarily", military sources said. However, the military balance between the security forces and the Tigers remains largely unchanged. "Unless the rebels are pushed back, the danger is not over," sources said.

Military experts see "the next week to 10 days" as the most critical in the fight for Jaffna, with the situation prone to drastic changes by the hour.

The Jaffna offensive is crucial

politically and symbolically for the Tigers who have vowed to retake the northern town. Militarily, the greatest significance would be the ability of the Tigers to move in their heavy guns which require holding of adequate territory.

Control over Jaffna would enable the Tigers direct artillery fire at the Palaly airbase. Though "not a large presence", the rebel offensive during the last few days has seen a mix of conventional and guerrilla tactics. "It is a combination of close combat and mortar attacks," war-watchers said, adding such a combination "weighs very much in their favour".

With the conflict crucially

poised, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has convened an all-party meeting on Monday to "discuss the current situation and the measures taken by the Government". Two representatives from all registered parties have been invited.

Pak. denies report

AFP reports from Islamabad:

Pakistan today rejected reports that it was sending arms to Sri Lanka for Colombo's battle against the LTTE. "It is baseless," a Foreign Office spokesperson told the official Associated Press of Pakistan.

Local press quoted an Indian newspaper as saying, "A Pakistani ship, with multi-barrel rocket launchers and 1,600 rockets was on its way to Sri Lanka," the agency said.

U.S. monitoring situation

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MAY 13. In the face of escalating fighting in Jaffna, the Clinton administration has said it was watching the situation carefully while saying there were conflicting reports on what is happening in the peninsula. Washington, at the same time, in taking note of the ongoing peace efforts has said it was willing to facilitate a process, if asked to.

"We are watching the situation closely. We continue to encourage an end to violence, continue to encourage a negotiated political settlement that will provide dignity and security for all Sri Lankans while preserving Sri Lankan unity," the State Department spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher, said.

Asked if anyone from the State Department was directly in touch with Sri Lanka or India, Mr. Boucher said, "we have been, obviously, in close touch with the Sri Lankan Government. We have an Embassy and an Ambassador out there. The Government of Norway, we know, has been consulting with the parties involved in the conflict and we've encouraged those efforts. The Government of India has offered to mediate if asked by both parties and we have actually made clear that we would be willing to facilitate a process if we were asked."

The administration was in touch with "other interested countries" which included India, Norway and the United Kingdom. "... we'll continue our contacts with concerned countries in the hope of reaching a political solution here," he added.

Air Chief briefs Cabinet panel

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, MAY 13. The Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal A. Y. Tipnis, today briefed the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on his assessment of the military situation in northern Sri Lanka.

The half-hour meeting was presided by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and attended by the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, and the three Service Chiefs.

A symbol of Eelam war: Page 8

THE HINDU

1 8 MAY 2000

Sri Lanka against UN intervention

'But India as honest broker? Maybe'

P K Balachandran & AFP
Colombo, May 14

THE SRI Lankan government will not accept any UN intervention to help solve the ethnic conflict in the island, but might agree to mediation by India if New Delhi officially offered to do so.

In reply to a pointed question on the chances of India playing the honest broker, Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told The Sunday Times: "Possibly.

But we must await an official intimation." When the interviewer pointed that there was a move by a Western nation to move a resolution in the UN Security Council on the Sri Lankan situation, Mr Kadirgamar said UN intervention would only erode Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

The Foreign Minister said that India had not officially told Sri Lanka about its readiness to mediate. But Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh had told Sky TV that India was prepared to negotiate a settlement if both parties in the conflict gave their consent.

On the controversial question of whether India was asked to help fight the LTTE, Mr Kadirgamar said the Sri Lankan government had conveyed such a request to the Indian government through the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo, Mr Shivshankar Menon.

AFP adds that Sri Lanka has been pouring hundreds of soldiers to defend the northern town of Jaffna as aircraft pounded Tamil Tiger positions near the region.

Official sources here said today military reinforcements were being sent to the Jaffna peninsula as President Chandrika Kumaratunga vowed she would not allow the half a million minority Tamils to fall into the hands of Tiger rebels.

"It is not just new weapons and ammunition that are being sent up north, but also troops reinforcements to ensure that the Tigers are resisted," a military official said.

Even as the fighting continued, President Kumaratunga invited all political parties in the country for an emergency meet tomorrow to discuss the military situation in Jaffna,

Tigers banned for 2 more yrs

THE CENTRE has extended the ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for another two years, Union Home Minister L K Advani announced in Nashik on Sunday. "The ban on the LTTE was to expire today and the government has extended it for another two years", he told newsmen.

PTI, Nashik

officials said.

The Tigers were firing mortar bombs and artillery towards military positions at Columbuturai near the Jaffna town, the government statement said.

The government said military authorities had already taken up with the International Committee of the Red Cross the issue of rebel long-range attacks on Jaffna.

The government also accused the LTTE of forcibly conscripting school children to battle government forces.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 MAY 2000

Tigers keep army guessing

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 15. A lull has descended on Sri Lanka's northern offensives indicating possibilities of escalation in fighting between the Government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the days ahead. Sri Lankan ground troops, backed by the limited air-attacks by its Air Force have, for now, checked the rebel advances, which have not seen any major shift in the territorial balance in the past few days.

The Government today said six civilians were killed in an LTTE artillery attack at Gurunagar Jetty from Pooneryn, where a joint operation by the security forces destroyed a rebel communication tower. At least 15 rebels and five soldiers were killed in six encounters in Jaffna.

The presence of the rebels at Nagar Kovil in the east, military observers point out, could result in a build-up of fighters along the eastern arm of the Peninsula for a further northern push to take the port town of Point Pedro.

With the Tigers gaining on three sectors - the Nagar Kovil, Kilali and at Ariyalai, east of Jaffna town - the options are now wide open for the rebels to move in several directions towards the northern Palaly airbase, which is still seen as a vital rebel target. A move along the fifth direction -

westwards from Ariyalai - could sever military supply lines to Jaffna.

The most stunning move would be along Kilali towards Kerativu, which would link up the LTTE formations at Tanankilappu and bring the coast of the Jaffna lagoon under the rebel control. This would facilitate movement of heavy artillery as well as access to a large territory along the lagoon's coast, military observers point out.

"The threat to Jaffna remains," military observers said, adding the other possible moves could be along the Kilali - Chavakacheri axis, the Nagar Kovil-Point Pedro sector or along two directions from Ariyalai towards Point Pedro-Palaly.

The army, which is beefing up its positions on all these fronts, sees the situation as "somewhat steady" now, and are gearing up to possible rebel build-ups along any of these sectors.

By mixing conventional tactics such as manoeuvre warfare, with rebel strategies of human wave attacks, the Tigers have kept the army guessing over the next moves. Having perforated defence lines to the east of Jaffna and with a presence at Pooneryn, Pallai, and Nagar Kovil, the much of the unfolding course of the northern conflict would depend on the moves which the rebel group chooses to make.

THE HINDU

16 MAY 2000

ACCEPT INDIAN OFFER, SAYS UNP

Chandrika buoyant after air strikes

By V. S. Sambandan

HD-1
16/5

COLOMBO, MAY 15. Politics overtook warfare in Sri Lanka today as the nation's leaders — the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Opposition Leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, — held separate all-party confabulations on the unfolding military scenario in the northern peninsula. An assertion by the Government that it would thwart rebel advances and a call by the Opposition to accept the Indian offer for a role as mediator, were the high points of the two meetings.

Skimpy details of the offensive reaching here indicated continued offensive between the Tigers and the Government troops on the fringes of Jaffna town. Ground troops, backed by the limited air attacks by the Air Force, have, for the moment, checked rebel advances, which have not seen any major shift in the territorial balance during the past few days.

In this backdrop, a confident Ms. Kumaratunga told the nation's political leaders that she was determined to go ahead with the constitutional reform proposals, with or without support from other parties, a senior presidential aide told *The Hindu*.

Political leaders who attended the meeting said Ms. Kumaratunga, who is also the Defence Minister, and the Deputy Defence Minister, Gen. Aniruddha Ratwatte, expressed confidence that further rebel advances could be thwarted. On the crucial issue of the Indian offer for negotiation, if invited, Mr. V. Anandasangari, vice-president of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), said the President had in-

formed them that there was no official intimation as yet from the Indian Government, prompting the former Chief Minister of the northeastern Province, Mr. A. Varatharajaperumal, to quip that it was for the patient to go to the doctor and not vice versa.

On the LTTE's recent offer for a temporary cessation of hostilities, Ms. Kumaratunga said while the offer was turned down as the Tigers were "not sincere", the Government was open to "genuine talks", and ruled out withdrawal of security forces from Jaffna. No self-respecting Government can accept the offer for a pullout from a part of its country, the President told the delegation.

The Left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) walked out of the meeting protesting the delay in commencement of the conference but made a six-point representation in which it called upon the Government to abandon its devolution package and treat members of all communities as equal citizens.

The Opposition Leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, who stayed away from the meeting, called upon the Government to accept the Indian offer for mediation if invited. At a meeting convened by the United National Party (UNP), Mr. Wickremesinghe said the nation was going through a "crucial moment" and urged for a political solution. On the Indian offer, he said the "friendly hand" should be accepted and called upon other political parties to urge the Government to accept the Indian offer.

The party also appointed a committee to further pursue the Indian offer for help and to impress upon the Government's need to accept the initiative.

MAY 2000

S. Lanka
16/5
Lanka's integrity reinforces India's integrity

Relevance of devolution

9.2-8

THESE are only two solutions to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka — partition or devolution. Partition would mean a two-nation theory for the island: that the Sinhala and the Tamils constitute two separate nations, incompatible, irreconcilable and, therefore, to be separated. Like Pakistan and India. In fact, worse. For, thereafter, there would be those, in India as in Eelam, seeking the disintegration of India in the cause of a single Tamil nation. And they would be assisted by the most ruthless terrorist organisation our subcontinent has known.

Devolution would mean the recognition that while Tamils and Sinhala can share a common nationality, such a nation has to be based on the fundamental principle of unity in diversity. The constitutional expression given in India to the principle of unity in diversity is our Union of States. In Sri Lanka, it has to be a Union of Regions.

This elementary truth, alas, has escaped all the rulers of Sri Lanka except one — the present President, Chandrika Kumaratunga. Ever since she became President, she has been pressing for constitutional reforms which would give the Tamils the identity, autonomy and self-rule and enable them to run their own affairs while securing to them their civic and political rights, and, most important, their human rights, as equal and honoured citizens of the island, free to lead a life of dignity and safety. Her intention was to work out these constitutional reforms in consultation with the LTTE and other Tamil groups. The LTTE initially indicated some willingness to come to the negotiating table but then quickly reneged.

She, therefore, went ahead with fashioning a constitutional package on her own. This was ready three years ago. She did not, however, have the required two-thirds majority in parliament to carry through these reforms on the strength of

her party alone. She needed the cooperation of her main political opponent, the UNP led by Ranil Wickramasinghe. That cooperation has been as consistently denied her by the UNP as by the LTTE. She, therefore, went to the polls prematurely in the hope of securing a mandate from her people to push through the reforms on her own. She won the elections, but not the majority required to amend the constitution. Thus she stands thwarted in her bid to do the right thing.

The Sri Lanka military in Jaffna is now under siege. The war, however, is far from over. The Jaffna town is not the Jaffna peninsula. And Jaffna is not separated from the rest of Sri Lanka by thousands of miles, as East

Muslim majority and much of the rest of the east a more mixed population than the peninsula in the far north. The LTTE will, therefore, have to follow up any military victory it might secure in the north with a thrust down the eastern salient. That will mean civil war.

If the Vajpayee government continues the hands-off policy of the Gowda-Gujral governments, Sri Lanka will be left with no alternative but to save itself by turning to whoever will help. There will be no end of suitors. That is when we will realise that our future is inextricably tied up with Sri Lanka's, and that the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka is as much in Indian interest as in Sri Lanka's.



MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

We have in office the best friend India, and the Sri Lankan Tamils, ever had in Colombo, and Chandrika Kumaratunga deserves our solidarity

Pakistan was from West Pakistan. To expect the Sri Lankan armed forces to pack up as Gen. Niazi did in 1971 is to live on illusions. Even if Jaffna falls to the LTTE, the war will go on.

This is not only because the Sri Lankan army will make every effort to retake the peninsula but also because the LTTE's military objectives do not end with northern Sri Lanka. There is the east still to conquer. For Eelam is conceived as all the northern and eastern half of the island extending from the Palk Straits to the Indian Ocean through Trincomalee, Amparai, Batticalao, and further south. The LTTE has never had in the east the military or political clout it has had in the northern peninsula. Moreover, Trincomalee has a substantial Sinhala population, Amparai a clear

If Sri Lanka now recognises that devolution is the stark alternative to partition, the credit for that goes entirely to the 1987 Rajiv Gandhi-Junius Jayawardene accord. Till then, the standard Sri Lankan argument was that Sri Lanka was too small a country for anything other than a unitary constitution. All attempts from the holocaust of 1983 on to persuade Sri Lanka to see the need for devolution as the only viable solution to the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic problem failed until the Sinhala rebellion in the south of the island concentrated Jayawardene's mind wonderfully. Desperate to pull his troops out of the north and east to fight the revolution in the south, he agreed to undertake the overhaul of the Sri Lankan constitution that would secure to the Tamils their fundamental rights.

The bargain was a process of constitutional devolution in exchange for the right to call on India for help. Recognising that the process of devolution would be complicated, convoluted and, therefore, long-drawn out, there was advantage in accepting Jayawardene's request for interposing a peace-keeping force between the Sinhala army and the Tamil population to protect the Tamils while the slow and tortuous processes of devolution were set in train.

It is nonsense to say that the IPKF was sent to Sri Lanka to assist the Sri Lankan army against the LTTE. It was not sent to fight anyone; it was a peace-keeping force. When one element of those it was sent to protect — the LTTE — turned on the peace-keeping forces, we could have cut and run. That would have ended the devolution option and forced on everyone — India included — all the dangers and horrors of partition. The IPKF's presence forced through the 13th amendment and the elections which gave the Tamils control over the North-East Provincial Council. If the island is still plunged in ruinous strife, it is because the IPKF was stupidly pulled out before devolution was completed.

Fortunately, in contrast to the obtuseness and communalism of the earlier rulers of the island, we now have in office the best friend that India — and the Tamils of Sri Lanka — have ever had in Colombo. Chandrika Kumaratunga has not sought India's military intervention — for there is plenty of fight left in her and her armed forces. But she and her people — Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and others — need to know that India appreciates the sincerity with which the President of Sri Lanka is bent on implementing the 1987 accord — and even going beyond it. She does not need our armed forces. What she seeks is our solidarity.

Aiyar is a Congress MP but these views are his own

INDIAN EXPRESS

INDIAN EXPRESS

16 MAY 2000

Options in Sri Lanka

SRI LANKA'S willingness to accept Indian mediation in order to resolve the ongoing conflict in the island has been conveyed even when New Delhi felt it necessary to extend its ban on the LTTE, which expired on Sunday, for another two years. The development is illustrative of the hard choices the Indian Government may have to make to strike the right balance in a complex situation. Its difficulties are compounded by the fact that any decision it might take will represent the views of a coalition in which some of the constituents have made no secret of their sympathy for the LTTE. The Government has done well in managing such pressures so far and reimpose the ban. Apart from the fact that the reasons for treating the LTTE as a banned organisation continue to be as valid as before, any dramatic shift in that position at this juncture would have been seen in Colombo as an attempt to reward the LTTE and placate the Government's allies.

Although there is a contradiction in mediating with a party that stands outside the pale of legality, and so outside the range of direct contact or communication, it may become unavoidable when dealing with the LTTE. As past experience would indicate, there have been similar situations vis-a-vis the Tamil Tigers earlier. But in each case, the LTTE took advantage of an offer of reconciliation or of talks to make tactical gains before going back to the gun. The message that the Sri Lankan suggestion on India's mediatory role must send to the LTTE is that while there is sufficient sympathy for the case of the Sri Lankan Tamils in India, it is not the same thing as providing any quarter to the Tamil Tigers' continuing campaign of terrorism.

It is patent enough that no effort at mediation can achieve much success unless there is a genuine desire to come half-way on either side. The Tamil Tigers have repeatedly manifested such absolutist positions that these have ended up rendering the middle ground meaningless. Unless there is a basic change in the LTTE's attitude, even well meaning efforts at mediation are unlikely to go very far. The extension of the ban must remind the Tigers that although they may have won a few battles with their military prowess, they have cost a lot to the Sri Lankan Tamils in terms of international sympathy for their not unjustified cause. It is only when the Tigers appreciate this cost-benefit equation that mediation in the ethnic conflict in the benighted island will have a fair chance.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAY 2000

Lanka Constitution changes soon

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, May 15. — Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga today said she would present constitutional amendments in August amid reports of renewed LTTE attacks that killed 6 civilians today.

The Sri Lankan President told an all-party meeting that amendments aim to grant greater autonomy to the provinces, including the north and east where most of Sri Lanka's 3.2 million Tamils live. "It is our duty to work towards obtaining the maximum rights for the minorities," she said.

Mrs Kumaratunga has assured the parties that the proposed amendments would be presented in Parliament by August, said Ananda Sangarai, secretary of the Tamil United Liberation Front.

Mrs Kumaratunga explained in detail at the meeting the steps the government was taking to protect the 500,000-odd civilians in Jaffna.

A government spokesman today said the Tigers fired artillery from Pooneryan across

CHILD WARRIORS

COLOMBO, May 15. — The LTTE has enlisted 140 children to join their battle against government forces defending Jaffna, officials said today. The Tigers were forcibly recruiting young soldiers in eastern Sri Lanka as their forces fought to regain their former stronghold, government officials said. — AFP

the Jaffna lagoon to the southwest of Jaffna this afternoon. Military and government sources said the LTTE appears to be in disarray presumably because of large number of casualties in its ranks in the earlier confrontations.

A spokesman said 271 terrorists have been killed and more than 500 injured in the last five days of intense fighting. Three soldiers were killed and five wounded in the last three days.

On Friday, the air force damaged a vital LTTE telecommunication centre at Pooneryan, through which they used to

communicate. "We're doing air raids and at the moment, the advance of the terrorists is very slow," an air force spokesman said.

Military sources said LTTE positions around Jaffna have been successfully targeted in the last three days of bombing. "The LTTE was trying to breach the defences. But in the last two days, they have not made any further gains."

Govt denial: The government has denied reports that the LTTE men have entered Jaffna and described opposition leader Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe's remarks on this to BBC world service as "most irresponsible".

The Media Minister, Mangala Samaraweera, said: "How can Mr Wickremasinghe make such an irresponsible statement even when the LTTE had not." The minister told the state-run Rupavahini TV last night that Jaffna was very much under the army control.

SC ruling: The Supreme Court today ruled fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution would not be violated by the military censorship.

THE STATESMAN

16 MAY 2000

Fighting spreads to east of Jaffna

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY. 16. Breaking a "somewhat steady" situation which prevailed on the northern military front for the past few days, the LTTE today stepped up its offensive on the east of Jaffna in which at least 40 LTTE militants and six Sri Lankan soldiers were reportedly killed.

The Army made yet another readjustment of defence lines by moving towards northeast from the area of fighting.

The lull in fighting was broken last evening when the LTTE "in large numbers launched a fresh attack" on the troops guarding the Tanankilappu sector, the Government said, indicating the spread of fighting eastwards from Jaffna.

The LTTE also "simultaneously fired a barrage of artillery and mortars on troops" from Poorneryn north. Sri Lankan artillery "engaged terrorist artillery and mortar locations compelling the terrorists to shift their fire units," the Defence Ministry said.

Fighting was also reported from Nagar Kovil in the eastern sector and in Kaithady, the LTTE engaged the security forces "with a heavy volume of artillery and mortar fire", the release said.

The latest rebel offensives place the security forces in the northern Jaffna peninsula under extreme pressure.

Diplomacy moves

In the capital, diplomacy moved in tandem with battlefield

developments, with the Government keeping its option for assistance — including humanitarian assistance — open, but ruling out inviting foreign combatants to help the security forces fight the LTTE.

'Time to end the battle'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 16. What message would the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, send to the LTTE chief, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, at a time when the fighting has intensified?

Mr. Kadirgamar said his message would be: "Is it not time for you to say, 'I have seen a good battle, now it must end?'"

Recalling his earlier message to the guerilla leader four years ago, the Foreign Minister added, "He is driving his own people to the brink."

At a press conference, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, today said the Government was prepared to receive external help to open a dialogue with the Tigers.

Considerable attention was accorded to possible scenarios of Indian assistance. Asked about the Government's response to the Indian offer — which Mr. Kadirgamar termed "a very young of-

fer" — he said the Government would await a formalisation of the offer.

"It won't be an interrogative approach," the Minister said, on the offer of the Indian External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, that India would be willing to play a role, if invited. "Let the nuances lie," Mr. Kadirgamar said, adding that there could be a situation when such assistance would not be required.

India had "ruled out militarily assistance, but has not ruled out humanitarian assistance," Mr. Kadirgamar pointed out, adding that a situation "could arise" when humanitarian assistance could be sought.

He defined the context for seeking such an assistance as "drastic humanitarian deprivation"; and when asked if Jaffna was presently facing such a situation, he said: "Absolutely not."

The continuation of the Indian ban on the LTTE, according to Mr. Kadirgamar, was "not a fatal impediment" to the possibility of resumption of negotiations with an Indian initiative.

Strongly disagreeing with a questioner on whether India had prevailed upon the Tigers to contain their Jaffna offensive, Mr. Kadirgamar said, "I reject absolutely and totally that the Indian Government has anything to do with the LTTE behind our back." The Minister also said, "We are totally convinced" that India does not want a separate state in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

17 MAY 2001

Govt talks peace as LTTE strikes

AP, PTI, UNI & AFP *S. Harker*

COLOMBO, May 16. — The Sri Lankan government today renewed an appeal to talk peace as Tamil Tigers launched a fresh attack on soldiers defending Jaffna after a three-day lull.

The government's chief spokesman and censor, Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, said at least 44 rebels and 6 soldiers were killed in the fighting that erupted late yesterday and lasted nearly 12 hours. The fighting lasted until early today as the troops fought to repel LTTE attacks.

Lankan Foreign Minister Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar acknowledged that Pirabhakaran was fighting a "good battle" but said it was time to come to the peace table after 17 years of civil war. "It is futile to carry on this battle. Tens of thousands of our people are directly being affected. Think about it, Mr Pirabhakaran, and let us talk."

The government renewed its peace overture less than a week after it had rejected the offer of a ceasefire to allow nearly 40,000 soldiers to withdraw from the Jaffna peninsula.

"India has no pact with LTTE," said Mr Kadirgamar. "There are no such contacts. India is totally convinced that a Tamil state ruled by LTTE would have a destabilising effect on it (India). Discouraging separation continues to be the pillar of India's policy."

The government spokesman

said Tigers fired a barrage of artillery and mortars from the direction of Pooneryn North, across the Jaffna lagoon, forcing ground commanders to shift defences to prepared positions more towards the north-east.

Though the LTTE transmission has not revealed any casualty figures, troops had found over 40 bodies at five to six different locations in the Tanankilappu area. In the Nagarkovil area, troops sniped and killed four Tigers.

In Kaithady, Tigers engaged security forces with artillery and mortar fire. The spokesman said six civilians were killed.

The Paris-based Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) has accused the military of preventing civilians from leaving Jaffna.

In Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees expressed concern about civilians caught up in the conflict.

Leader killed: Gunmen killed Santhanam Kandeepan, a member of Jaffna city council. Kandeepan (30) belonged to the Eelam People's Democratic Party, a former rebel group that joined the mainstream.

HC order: Madras High Court issued a notice to the Tamil Nadu government to permit the Tamil Eelam Liberation Supporters Coordination Committee to hold a conference at Chidambaram.

■ Editorial: Try this advice, page 6

■ Another report on page 9

THE STATESMAN

MAY 1988

TRY THIS ADVICE!

Drastic censorship in Lanka is counter-productive

THE Gazette notification issued by the Government of Sri Lanka under Chapter 40 of the Public Security Ordinance is a notification that should not have been issued. It not only strengthens forms of censorship already in force, it gives the government sweeping powers to close down newspapers and take other drastic action. To no one's surprise the Supreme Court has approved it. Despite the censorship it is known that the country is facing a total challenge to its existence, if international support is to be mobilised, the world will want to know what is happening, the say-so of the Government is not enough. This notification does nothing for the government. It merely suggests an attack of nerves and this is not good for morale either of the troops who know what is going on without the benefit of being told by anyone or of the civilian population. Also it did not prevent Ranil Wickremasinghe, the Opposition leader, from saying Jaffna had fallen when it was still in government hands; Ranil is not on the side of the Tigers by any means, he is a responsible leader if a little immature; he spoke on the best available information which was very little.

This is not the first time that the Government has intensified censorship, they must be careful. People have long enough memories, they remember that when the military situation is very bad it coincides with the censorship getting worse. No one can be blamed for thinking that the converse is also true. If rigid censorship is suddenly imposed, it is an indication that the military situation is desperate. Government cannot afford to have such an impression get around. It is not denied that in a crisis of the kind facing Sri Lanka, great care should be taken that sensitive operational details that could help the enemy are kept back. The notification goes well beyond the Johannesburg principles governing such situations. The shrewd and formidable foreign minister, Laxman Kadirgamar understands this very well, he has made no secret of his dislike for the notification and would like to see it repealed. One is left to conclude that the military have convinced the President that a complete ban on information is needed; this is unfortunate. The restrictions give the lie to the courageous statements made by President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her exhortations to her troops to fight on. This is the stuff of leadership but it does no good to show such lack of confidence in the people she is privileged to lead.

Those old enough to remember World War II will note how Churchill kept Parliament going right through the war; when the House of Commons was destroyed he had them meet in the Lords until the end of the war when a new House was built. He spoke to his people regularly on radio, the only medium then available and hid nothing from them. Innumerable secret sessions of the Commons were held where debates were free and full, there was the confidence that none of it would pass to the enemy. He promised the people only blood, toil, tears and sweat and they responded. When England was threatened with invasion, he announced that the Fuehrer had boasted that he would ring England's neck like a chicken. "Some chicken, some neck!" roared the old warrior and the people cheered. Such leadership is not given to all. Besides, times have changed but fundamentals have not changed.

If good governance depends on the willing consent of the governed, the governed must be trusted. And trust begets trust. Try this advice, Madam President! It is sincerely meant.

THE STATESMAN

17 MAY 2000

Lanka SC upholds censorship

INDIA ABROAD NEWS SERVICE

COLOMBO, May 16. — Sri Lanka's Supreme Court today upheld the imposition of censorship, coming unexpectedly to the rescue of Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's government. Local and overseas pressure to lift the measure, however, continued.

A three-member Bench rejected an application challenging the news censorship, saying it does not violate the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.

The decision would take the heat off the government which has been under increasing pressure for the removal of censorship, according to analysts.

"The government will see it as a vote of confidence to continue with the censorship. We are very disappointed with the ruling," Mr Waruna Karunatileke, convenor of the Free Media Movement, said.

A political analyst said the ruling "will be like manna from heaven for the government, considering the outcry against the censorship". But diplomats expect international pressure to lift the censorship to continue.

Quick to capitalise on the ruling, the government issued a

statement through the Special Media Information Centre which disseminates the gains made by government troops in the ongoing battle against the LTTE.

Censorship was extended to foreign news organisations when the blanket regulations were re-imposed on 3 May after the country was put on a "war footing" following a series of reverses suffered by the government forces in northern Jaffna peninsula. The clamp was tightened three days ago on radio and television broadcasts outside Colombo. Besides censoring all reports on the ongoing conflict, journalists have long been prohibited from going to the warfront.

Political and trade union activities were also restricted and the police, armed forces given wide-ranging power.

Media minister, Ms Mangala Samaraweera, had told foreign correspondents that the regulations would be in effect only for "this critical period, not for months, only weeks".

The Editor's Guild — one of the first organisations to react to the tough regulations promulgated under the Public Security Ordinance — called for the ordinance to be amended.

The Paris-based Reporters sans Frontieres issued two statements against the censorship, asking the Lankan government to ensure the security of journalists working in the country.

The latest critic of the censorship has been Sri Lanka's foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar.

On the "very tight blanket censorship" Mr Kadirgamar said: "I don't think that muzzle of free expression is a healthy thing for any democratic society at the best of times. You can't hide the truth, however hard you try, the truth will out. And when the truth outs, after you have tried assiduously to conceal it, the effect is very bad for credibility."

The USA said last week that though Sri Lanka is in the midst of its worst crisis the draconian regulations imposed on the Press and political activities are unwarranted.

Six members of the House of Commons have given notice of a motion deploring the curbs on the Press and other individual rights. The regulation contradict a note sent by the European Union to the Sri Lankan government in March, they pointed out.

THE STATESMAN

17 MAY 2002

17 KILLED IN BATTICALOA BLAST

Tigers zeroing in on Palaly airbase

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 17. In a combined show of firepower and urban terror-bombing, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today stepped up pressure on security forces in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

While in the north the rebels trained their field guns at the Palaly air-base around noon today, in the east, at least 17 persons were killed and 63 injured when a powerful explosion ripped the coastal Batticaloa town this evening.

Information reaching Colombo indicates that on the battle front the Tigers are zeroing in on Palaly, with three shells reportedly landing within close reach of the Army's high-security zone. The airfield, however, remained out of the range of rebel fire with the Government denying reports that the Palaly runway was hit. "Air movement is normal from Palaly," a senior Government officer said. "No damage has been caused to the airfield."

Sources said at least three shells were fired towards Palaly from the "southern sector", but "neither the base, nor the runway was hit." The Palaly base is the only air route for evacuating casualties from the Jaffna peninsula. The Kankesanthurai port is another supply point for Government troops.

The imminent thrust towards Palaly comes a day after Government troops "repulsed" rebel ad-

Military complex overrun: LTTE

LONDON, MAY 17. The LTTE today claimed to have overrun a Sri Lankan military complex at Kaithady, 5 km from the entry point of Jaffna city, after a fierce battle lasting 12 hours.

In a statement here, it said Kaithady forms a crucial supply route for government troops in Jaffna city and the Palaly airport. The statement denied the Government's allegations that the LTTE had been targeting civilian areas.

Amnesty for deserters

AFP reports from Colombo: The Sri Lankan Army today announced a week-long amnesty for thousands of deserters to report for duty without facing disciplinary action.

vances and killed 41 militants on Tuesday.

Vesak festival disrupted

In the east, the coastal town of Batticaloa was rocked by a powerful blast when it was gearing up to celebrate Vesak — a day of religious importance for the island's majority Buddhist community. The blast took place at 5.45 p.m. near a stage which was constructed for the festival, less than 50 metres from the town's police station. The explosives were suspected to be packed in an ice-box mounted on an abandoned bicy-

cle. Policemen on patrol cordoned off the area and called in the bomb disposal squad. However, within minutes, the explosion killed 14 civilians, 2 soldiers and one policeman. Among those injured were 42 civilians and 21 security personnel.

41 rebels killed

Elsewhere in the peninsula, the Government troops backed by artillery and air support killed 39 rebels and "repulsed" rebel attacks at Colombuthurai and Kaithady last night, the Government Situation Report said. In another ambush at the Welioya in the northeast, two militants were killed, taking the toll of rebels killed on Tuesday to 41.

The Government report said, "Over 30 terrorist bodies" were found by troops after confrontations near Colombuthurai and Kithady last night. In another operation, "Troops captured a terrorist bunker on the Kandy-Jaffna highway, west of Navatkuli."

Sri Lankan General visits Chennai

By Our Special Correspondent
CHENNAI, MAY 17. Gen. Rohan Daluwate, Overall Commander of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces, was in Chennai today. He spent a couple of hours at the Officers Training Academy at St. Thomas Mount before leaving for Bangalore. He was given a guard of honour at the OTA though it was stated that "he was not on any official mission".

Indian ships take position: Page 13

THE HINDU

18 MAY 2000

Tigers shell vital air force base in northern Lanka

Agencies
Colombo, May 18

¹⁹⁷⁵
^{(W) S. Lanka}
^{HTC}
TAMIL TIGER rebels shelled a strategically important air base in northern Sri Lanka for a second straight day amid intense battles for control of curfew-bound Jaffna town, diplomatic sources said.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) hit the Palaly air force and army complex in the northern part of the Jaffna peninsula, the sources said quoting security reports.

But the Sri Lankan government rubbished the LTTE claim that fierce onslaught by its cadres forced government troops to abandon a military complex at Kaithadi in Ariyali sector yesterday, saying that the Army has no major base in the area and that only defence lines have been readjusted. Kaithadi lies 5 km from the entry point to Jaffna.

In the face of this denial comes another claim by the rebels that they fired six artillery shells today at Palaly air base. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage to the facility which provides a vital air bridge to troops in the Jaffna peninsula who are also supplied by the Kankesanthurai sea port and the Karainagar naval base.

A Sri Lankan government statement said troops were resisting a major rebel offensive in the peninsula and placed military casualties overnight Wednesday at seven soldiers

wounded.

However, the LTTE in a statement issued here late Wednesday claimed more than 100 army soldiers had been killed.

The LTTE said they overran a military base at Kaithady on Wednesday evening, and captured a large haul of weapons and armoured cars.

The land route to the peninsula is controlled by the Tamil Tigers, forcing authorities to use sea and air routes to supply an estimated 40,000 troops and police and an estimated 5 lakh civilians in the region.

International humanitarian agencies with aid officials in Jaffna said that the town area today was by and large calm because of a curfew but heavy firing was heard towards the evening amid intense aircraft activity.

The number of civilians who were caught up in the fighting had risen by another eight to 22, officials said adding that they were being treated in the main Jaffna hospital.

As the rebels were attacking Palaly, officials

announced that the death toll from Wednesday's bombing of a Buddhist celebration in the island's eastern town of Batticaloa had risen to 29.

The government accused the Tamil Tigers of carrying out the attack.

The government said six of the victims were security personnel while aid officials said six were children below the age of eight.

Lankan Defence chief in Bangalore

LANKAN CHIEF of Defence Staff General Rohan De Silva Daluvatte on Thursday maintained a discreet presence in Bangalore. Though sources confirmed that he was in the city, officials were tight-lipped about his itinerary.

General Daluvatte was speculated to have met with senior Air Force authorities with a view to having Bangalore as the base to transport humanitarian or any other assistance to the war-torn Jaffna region. There are two key air force bases in the city — at Yelahanka and Jalahalli. **HTC, Bangalore**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 MAY 2000

LTTE THRUST ALONG EAST AND NORTH CONTINUES

Sri Lanka resists incursions

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 18. The Sri Lankan troops continued to battle incursions by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) into the crucial sectors of the Jaffna peninsula on Thursday, even as the rebels made "several attempts" to advance further eastwards from their positions along the coast.

Indications of the severity in fighting came in the Situation Report of the Government, which said "troops continue to repulse

several attempts by the terrorists to advance eastwards from the Ariyalai area were contained by the security forces by readjusting the defended localities," according to a statement of the Special Media Information Centre (SMIC) established after the Government reinvoked the Public Security Ordinance and clamped a blanket censorship on news since May 3.

With the rebels maintaining a multi-pronged attack on key Army positions in Jaffna, simultaneous

stake in the north are the Jaffna town, the Palaly base complex, Point Pedro and Kankesanthurai. The Palaly airfield is considered the ultimate target as control over it would seriously impair troop and supply movement to the peninsula. With the road link between Jaffna and the mainland under rebel control, the more expensive air and sea routes are taken by the Government to maintain supplies.

Since the latest offensives commenced with the taking of the Iyakkachchi-Elephant Pass gateway on April 21, the Tigers

have made their presence felt along three sectors of the peninsula which the Army wrested from rebel control with a three-phased operation in 1995.

Consequently, the LTTE has accessed road links to Jaffna and came menacingly close to the town last week, launching attacks at its doorstep. When the focus remained largely on the town, the rebel formations advanced further eastwards to Chavakachcheri. An earlier presence, south of Kilali, gave the rebels the advantage of a possible two-pronged thrust. A northward move, along the eastern Nagar Kovil axis, would take them to Point Pedro and consequently bring Kankesanthurai and Palaly within artillery range.

TV news editor questioned

The Government today said it had taken steps to prevent a possible backlash which could result from stepped-up rebel operations by activating civilian defence committees in the eastern Batticaloa town, where the toll in Wednesday's powerful blast mounted to 29. In a media-related development, a journalist from a private TV channel, was questioned by police for "violating censorship" rules and broadcasting news of the blast.

Willing to talk: Kadirgamar

NEW DELHI, MAY 18. Sri Lanka today said it was willing to open talks with the LTTE if the latter was willing to do so.

"...We are prepared to start talks even tomorrow morning if the LTTE is willing to do so. We have said that and we do not go back on the stand at all," the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar told Aaj Tak in Colombo. — PTI

Jaffna precariously poised

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, MAY 18. The Sri Lankan forces may soon find the pressure on Jaffna town unbearable, highly-placed sources in the Government said today. According to these sources, some LTTE cadres have already entered Jaffna in the last few days and a major assault on the town may not be far away. In fact, defending Jaffna may become untenable beyond "a couple of days", according to a source.

Analysts point out that the Sri Lankan forces are theoretically capable of holding the LTTE surge in Jaffna but are unlikely to do so due to an acute fall in morale. The forces, after offering good initial resistance, have been retreating in an unplanned manner in some of the recent battles. In fact, the retreating Sri Lankan Army had left behind some valuable equipment which has fallen into the LTTE's hands. Not surprisingly, the Tigers on Wednesday shelled the Palaly airbase with captured 122-mm field guns.

According to analysts, the LTTE is sharpening its attack on Jaffna and the firing of some shells near the Palaly airfield was indicative of this. By attacking Palaly — the lifeline of the Government forces in the Jaffna peninsula — the LTTE is creating conditions for further isolating the Jaffna town. The LTTE is ensuring that the troops are prevented from being switched to Jaffna town by keeping alive the threat on the strategically vital Palaly. Without reinforcements,

the defence of a beleaguered Jaffna would be further weakened. Already, the LTTE has cut off the crucial A9 Highway at several points, making it difficult for supplies to reach the forces inside.

The assessment here is that the LTTE is making a calibrated thrust which may ultimately lead to negotiations. The Tigers are expected to establish de facto control over Jaffna by taking over some key establishments such as the strategically located Jaffna University, using which as base, the Tigers could establish control over the town by combining popular support with terror. They may, however, not like to make a formal declaration of takeover since that would mean an unacceptable loss of face for the Sri Lankans.

India, on its part, is ready with contingency plans. Indian ships are set to evacuate trapped Sri Lankan soldiers or Tamil refugees in case of an LTTE thrust into Jaffna. Meanwhile, the combined Navy and Coast Guard surveillance exercise, code-named 'Tasha', gathered further momentum with another Coast Guard ship joining the vigil around Tuticorin.

The Sri Lankan Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Rohan Daluvatte, visited Bangalore today and was briefed by high-ranking Army officers. The Sri Lankans, sources say, are showing an interest in non-lethal equipment from India, but New Delhi is yet to offer any response.

18 MAY 2000

Lanka defence chief returns after secret India mission

Tigers enter Jaffna fringes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, May 18. — Small LTTE groups have entered some Jaffna suburbs, the Sri Lankan government admitted late tonight. But troops had repulsed the major wave of Tigers trying to break into the town, it said. Four soldiers died in the dawn assault.

A government press release said a small group had managed to infiltrate into populated areas of Valikamam East on Jaffna's fringe. "Troops began a search operation ... during the early hours ... This operation is in progress ... Four soldiers were killed and 21 wounded."

The release, however, claimed Palaly air base was safe and in government hands. Military planes were using it to transport essential supplies and new weapons systems.

Lanka defence chief: The overall commander of Sri Lankan armed forces, General Rohan de Silva Daluwate, paid a hush hush two-day visit to south India, SNS adds.

The General reached Chennai

yesterday, and went to Bangalore, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram before returning to Chennai this afternoon. He left for Colombo tonight.

Defence officials at Officers' Training Academy, Chennai, said Gen. Daluwate had come on a "personal" visit to Sathya Sai Baba in Puttaparathi.

In Bangalore, officials refused to say anything about the trip. In Delhi too there was silence. The General himself shunned reporters at Chennai airport.

There was speculation in both cities that the General had had meetings with Indian defence topguns on some sort of military assistance to contain the rampaging Tigers in Jaffna. Communications equipment is understood to have been requested.

Returning to Chennai from Thiruvananthapuram this afternoon, Gen. Daluwate spent some time apparently with his family at the OTA before flying out to Colombo.

He reportedly met senior defence officials in Bangalore. There were also unconfirmed

reports that he met secretly with Mr Joschka Fischer, the German foreign minister, in Bangalore yesterday.

From Colombo came the Sri Lankan government's denial of the LTTE's claim in London yesterday to have busted the army's key Kaithadi base, killing more than a hundred and wounding many more.

There is no major base in Kaithadi, the government said, and the troops have merely readjusted their defence lines. Kaithadi, in the Ariyali sector, lies five km from the entry point to Jaffna.

In London, the LTTE claimed to have pounded the strategically important Palaly airport and a nearby army garrison in the Jaffna peninsula for the second straight day today. In Colombo, the government said its troops were continuing to push back the guerrillas.

Blast toll up: With six more succumbing to injuries, the death toll in last night's powerful bomb blast near a Buddhist temple in Batticaloa rose to 29 today, adds PTI.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 2000

NORWEGIAN MINISTER FOR SRI LANKA

LTTE 'human waves' repulsed: Colombo

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 19. Rebel incursions continued in northern Sri Lanka as Government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) battled over vital military and logistics installations in the Jaffna Peninsula.

In the latest phase LTTE's 'Operation Unceasing Waves-III,' offensives by the Tigers at Sri Lankan defence positions at Kaithady were "repulsed", the Government Situation Report said.

Not much information is available on the situation around the Palaly military base complex, seen as a vital target by the rebels.

The latest offensive using both long-range artillery and close-combat tactics has placed Jaffna under pressure. Military observers say the rebels may not be pressing ahead in large numbers along any specific combat axis, but their effective presence across the peninsula has made their movements unpredictable.

The paucity of information on rebel gun positions, especially the limited but effective deployment of Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs) and heavy guns, is hampering ground advances. Going by terrain situations, the LTTE would have to gain further territory for making effective use of artillery.

In addition to the ongoing discussions between the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr.

'Role will thrust itself on India'

NEW DELHI, MAY 19. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, feels that events may force India to play a role in the Sri Lankan conflict.

"It (India) is gearing itself up for assuming a role, one that might even be thrust upon it by events," he said in an interview to *Outlook*, excerpts of which were put out in a release by the weekly magazine.

"In Sri Lanka there is a mood in favour of India coming in and doing something," he said, but added, "We should not expect the impossible from India."

He said, "I am very pleased that apart from the Centre's reaction, we have the very significant and clear stand taken by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi." — PTI

Ranil Wickremesinghe, the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Raymond Johansen, is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka between May 22 and May 24. Mr. Eric Solheim, Special Adviser on the Norwegian effort to initiate direct talks between the LTTE and the Government, would be accompanying the Deputy Foreign Minister.

A statement from the Norwegian Embassy here said Mr. Jo-

hansen would be here on a "familiarisation visit". Since the Norwegian initiative commenced in February, there has been a great change in the military situation. The escalation of the conflict has also seen a nuanced change in the island's foreign policy — from an emphasis on the "internal" nature of the conflict to seeking assistance from "friendly nations".

Ranil's apology sought

PTI reports:

The Sri Lankan Government today asked Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, Opposition leader, to apologise to the nation for making a "false" statement to the BBC that the LTTE rebels had entered Jaffna town. The Media Minister, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, in a statement said that Mr. Wickremesinghe's remarks were aimed at demoralising the soldiers who were fighting hard to beat back the LTTE offensive.

UNI adds:

Priest arrested

The chief priest of the new Kathiresan temple at Bambalapatiya in Colombo has been taken into custody by police.

The priest's wife allegedly had links with the LTTE leader Pottu Amman and had assisted terrorists in bringing a consignment of explosives to Colombo, the State radio said, quoting the priest's wife who was missing.

Search for Tigers in
Bangalore: Page 13

THE HINDU

20 MAY 2000

Jaffna raiders killed, says Lanka govt

AGENCIES

COLOMBO, May 19. — The Lankan government today said troops had "destroyed" the rebels who had infiltrated into Jaffna suburbs yesterday. In Colombo, 12 suspected LTTE suicide bombers and 120 kg of explosives were seized.

The Tigers today mounted fresh attacks in the peninsula, and shelled the key Kankesanthurai port at its northern tip. They have been shelling Palaly air base for the last two days. *Tamilnet*, a pro-rebel web site, said the runway and communications tower have been hit.

The government said neither Kankesanthurai nor Palaly had suffered damage. A rebel attack on "defensive positions" of the army at Kaithadi early today had been repulsed.

Chief censor, Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, said the army had "successfully thwarted" the Tigers' onslaught on Jaffna town, inflicting heavy casualties on them. The army said its ranks had been bolstered by the return of 1,500 deserters.

The state-run *Daily News* claimed troops had killed Jayneshan Sudhakaran, head of the LTTE's clandestine *Voice of Tigers* radio. The Tigers have not confirmed the death.

The suicide bombers were held after the arrest of a suspected Tiger trying to obtain a forged passport, the Sinhalese daily *Lankadeepa* reported.

The bombers "were assigned to assassinate several ministers, moderate Tamil politicians and senior police and military officials." Police seized two trucks kept ready for bombing missions.

Norway team: A Norwegian team will arrive here on Monday to speak with the government and Opposition on ways to end the ethnic conflict.

Karunanidhi meets PM: Mr M Karunanidhi, today met Mr Vajpayee to clear "misunderstandings" over the DMK chief's statements in the Assembly last week. Mr Karunanidhi reportedly told the Prime Minister of his "compulsions".

■ Another report on page 8

THE STATESMAN

20 MAY 2000

We'll fight to the finish, says General

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 20. The overall commander of the security forces in northern Sri Lanka said today troops in the Jaffna peninsula were determined to fight it out, after an LTTE call for the troops to surrender within a week.

Maj. Gen. Janaka Perera told a private TV channel there was no question of withdrawing soldiers from the peninsula and that they would never allow the LTTE to recapture Jaffna.

His statement came as the Army and the LTTE were reported to be locked in intense combat this morning in the Tannankillappu sector, south of Chavakachcheri. Heavy fighting was reported also from Chavakachcheri, the second biggest town after Jaffna in the peninsula. A Government statement said "intense fighting" broke out in Tannankillappu as "large numbers" of LTTE cadres attempted to penetrate troop defences this morning.

But it claimed to have thwarted the attack using "counter-penetration" forces supported by artillery that caused "many casualties" among the Tigers. Troops recovered 17 bodies of LTTE cadres. The Government reported nine soldiers killed in the confrontation, and 19 including

two officers, wounded.

Denying a claim by the LTTE that its artillery had crippled operations at Palaly air base and Kankesanthurai harbour, the Government said the Air Force and the Navy were maintaining regular supply of all essentials to Jaffna through these two points.

It said wounded soldiers were being evacuated from the air base to hospitals in the capital and Anuradhapura in central Sri Lanka.

Newspaper banned

Meanwhile, Jaffna's Tamil newspaper and its only local publication, *Uthayan*, was banned from today. A statement from the Government Censor, Mr. Ariya Rubesinghe, accused the newspaper of "continuously publishing information... prejudicial to the interests of national security" and "violating the prevailing censorship regulations".

LTTE claims advance

PTI reports from London:

Tiger commandos who "overran" military bases at Kaithady advanced into Chavakachcheri sector bringing vast tracts of territory under their control. Large areas of Madduvil and Sarasali have fallen to the LTTE, an LTTE release here said on Friday.

Chandrika ready for talks: Page 11

INDU

21 MAY 2000

Sri Lanka denies LTTE has won key town near Jaffna

Hand-to-hand fighting erupts in Jaffna

The Times of India News Service
and PTI

COLOMBO: Heavy fighting broke out in the embattled Jaffna peninsula as the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Sunday engaged in fierce hand-to-hand battles in the war-torn region ahead of a high-level Norwegian delegation's visit, commencing here on Monday, to broker peace talks between the warring sides.

A government statement said on Sunday that its troops were engaged in almost hand-to-hand battle with the rebels on the outskirts of Chavakachcheri, located 15 km South-east of Jaffna town since Saturday in which two important LTTE leaders and nine army soldiers were killed.

Refuting the LTTE's last night's claims that Chavakachcheri has been captured by its fighters, the statement said troops had been battling to halt the rebel offensive on the town since Saturday. "At present, troops are in contact with groups of terrorists on the outskirts of Chavakachcheri town," it said.

On Saturday night, the LTTE claimed its fighters had taken control of Chavakachcheri, located in the heart of the peninsula.

While denying the rebel claims, the Sri Lankan government said two LTTE area military leaders, Murali and Vasanthan, were killed in the battle and admitted nine soldiers were killed in both the operations and 47 others, including six officers, were wounded.

The fighting escalated even as a Norwegian delegation led by deputy foreign minister Raymond Johansen was scheduled to arrive in Colombo on Monday for comprehensive discussions with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and opposition United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickramasinghe.

Diplomatic sources said a ceasefire would be high on the agenda of Mr Johansen, as the fighting endangered the lives of over half-a-million civilians. President Kumaratunga, during the past few days, had been expressing willing-

ness to talk to the LTTE but at the same time had firmly ruled out any proposal to pull out troops from Jaffna. The LTTE, on its part, issued a week's ultimatum for over 30,000 government troops to surrender with their weapons, which was rejected by Jaffna army commander Maj. Gen. Janaka Perera.

Mr Johansen will be accompanied by Eric Solhiem, designated as Norway's special peace envoy to Sri Lanka.

Recently acquired Pakistani multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRLs) put into use by the Lankan army a couple of days back had not managed to dull the twin-pronged attack by the Tigers. Despite denials by the information ministry, army insiders admitted to TOINS that the rapid artillery and mortar shelling by the rebels had not only crippled the government's air base at Palaly and sea port at Kankensenthurai (KKS), but also lost the crucial business township of Chavakecheri, located about 30 km from Jaffna.

The LTTE's continued attacks on the air and sea ports was likely to cripple the supply lifeline to the 30,000-odd Sri Lankan troops in the peninsula. The troops obtain their food, fuel and military supplies at the KKS port while the Palaly airbase is used for airlifting the wounded and also sending in fresh troops during war.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

22 MAY 2000

UK dissuaded from seeking UN intervention in Sri Lanka

P. K. Balachandran
Colombo, May 21

BRITAIN IS being dissuaded from seeking the intervention of the UN Security Council in the Sri Lankan crisis, diplomatic sources told *The Hindustan Times* here today. "The British have been told by other members of the Council that it would not be such a good idea," a ranking diplomat said.

The Sunday Times had written about the move by an unnamed Western country to move a resolution in the Security Council seeking an UN intervention citing the humanitarian situation in Jaffna, where an estimated 500,000 civilians are caught in the crossfire between the Tamil Tigers and the Government troops.

The "Western country" in question has now been identified as the UK. Official sources said that a week ago, the other members of the Council, chiefly Russia and China, had told the UK that it would be inappropriate to make any such move.

Sri Lanka had taken up the matter with other members of the Council. *The Sunday Times* had

2215
quoted a foreign official as saying that Sri Lanka would "go to the end of the world" in its fight against UN intervention.

Last year, Secretary General Kofi Annan had put forward the thesis that considerations of human rights should over-ride the issue of sovereignty. But Lankan

ing in various parts of the world. The UK was in the forefront in Bosnia and is now in the thick of the UN intervention in Sierra Leone. Britain has always been interested in playing a mediatory role in Sri Lanka no matter which party is ensconced in Whitehall.

In mid-1997, the Conservatives

headquarters of the LTTE, but a major fund-raising centre for its war chest.

In another development in the UN, the Sri Lankan delegation managed to scuttle a move by a pro-LTTE NGO to obtain consultancy status in the UN system.

Close on the heels of the European Union's second demarche on the Sri Lankan situation, which drew flak here for being pro-LTTE, came another piece of bad news from Brussels on Friday.

The European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the "European Union members states in the UN Council to bring the (Lankan) situation before the UN as a matter of urgency."

But the Lankans did see a silver lining in the dark cloud. The EU resolution was also critical of the LTTE's terrorism. It urged member states "to take steps to proscribe organisations operating on their territory, which continue to provide financial and other support to terrorist activities in Sri Lanka and in doing so relieve the intimidation by the LTTE of the Tamil people living in third countries."

Dalai Lama offers to broker peace

THE DALAI Lama is willing to broker peace in Sri Lanka, reports AP on Sunday. *The Sunday Leader* quoted the Tibetan leader as saying in Berlin that he was ready to lead negotiations to find a political solution to the Tamil homeland issue.

Govt denies fall of key town: The Sri Lankan Government today said its troops were engaged in a close quarter battle on the outskirts of Chavakachcheri, a small but strategic town near Jaffna City, in which two LTTE leaders and nine Army soldiers were killed.

PTI, Colombo

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told the Press here last week that for Sri Lanka, sovereignty was paramount. "We do not want everybody coming here and putting his two penny worth," Mr Kadirgamar said dismissively.

The Sri Lankans view Britain with a particularly deep sense of suspicion because it has been taking an undue interest in interven-

sent Minister Dr Liam Fox to broker a deal between the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the Opposition UNP on the ethnic issue.

But despite protests by Colombo, the British have not made any attempt to close down the LTTE's covert and overt establishments in their territory. The UK is not only the home of the international

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 2000

Conflicting claims on Chavakachcheri

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 21. Fierce battles continued in the Jaffna peninsula with the Sri Lankan Government today saying that troops were engaging the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the "outskirts" of Chavakachcheri town over which the separatist group claimed control on Saturday.

A Government statement said there was "fierce fighting" on Sunday afternoon at Chavakachcheri, which is Jaffna peninsula's second biggest town.

Without denying the LTTE's claim of control over Chavakachcheri made in a press release from London yesterday, the Government's sparse statement said that troops were engaging the Tigers "on the outskirts" of the town. Control over Chavakachcheri would mean the LTTE is within striking distance of the security forces' last lines of defence at Kodikakam to the east of the town. The LTTE may be aiming to breach Kodikakam next with the intention of linking the A-9 Highway and establishing an uninterrupted route for logistics from the Elephant Pass and Pallai for a further northward push into the peninsula.

At Colombuthurai, where the troops claimed to have thwarted the LTTE's attempt to advance further with artillery and air support, two soldiers were killed and five wounded. The Government also claimed that two leaders of the LTTE, Vasanthan and Murali, who led the attack on Chavakachcheri, were among those killed in Saturday's fighting.

Tamil parties meet

With the battles showing no sign of abating, eight Tamil parties met on Sunday afternoon and called for an immediate ceasefire.

Recognising the Norwegian effort at facilitating a dialogue between the Government and the LTTE, the meeting also called for

India to play a bigger role in ending the ethnic conflict. It requested the Government of India not just to restrict itself to possibly lending "humanitarian assistance" to soldiers trapped in the peninsula, but to come up with a comprehensive solution.

The meeting was convened by the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), and attended by representatives of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils (PLOT), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) and a host of smaller Tamil parties. The moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) stayed away from the meeting.

Diplomatic efforts

Meanwhile, there is anticipation here that diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis may gather momentum with the visit of the Norwegian member of parliament, Mr. Erik Solheim. Mr. Solheim, who was in New Delhi earlier this month, is scheduled to

India reviews situation

NEW DELHI, MAY 21. The evolving situation in Jaffna peninsula was today reviewed by the National Security Adviser, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, with the armed forces. The three service chiefs Gen. V.P. Malik, Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis and Admiral Sushil Kumar attended the meeting, sources said.

meet the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, on Monday morning.

In a related development, Sri Lanka is exulting on the European Union resolution adopted last week which included a demand for tough measures against organisations that provide financial aid to the LTTE.

The statement is seen as a major public relations coup by the Sri Lankan Government in Europe, which is host to many of the LTTE's fund-raising operations.

It is also being interpreted here

as particularly aimed at the United Kingdom. Despite Colombo's continued appeals and protests to the British Government, the LTTE operates an efficient propaganda network from London.

The E.U. resolution also urged the LTTE to accept the offer of talks by Sri Lankan Government, and the Opposition United National Party to "expedite discussions" for a consensus.

Chandrika chides leaders

PTI reports:

The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has chided some Sinhalese politicians for branding all Sri Lankan Tamils as terrorists and supporters of the LTTE.

In her interaction with leaders of various political parties on May 15, extracts of which were carried this weekend by the official media here, she said her Government made a clear distinction between the aspirations of the Tamils and LTTE's terrorism. "We refused to call it Tamil terrorism though some of us did it. I do not believe that Tamil people as a whole are terrorists," she said.

Dalai Lama offers to mediate

COLOMBO, MAY 21. The Dalai Lama is willing to broker peace in Sri Lanka, a newspaper said today. *The Sunday Leader* quoted the Tibetan spiritual leader as saying in Berlin that he was ready to lead negotiations to find a political solution to the Tamil homeland issue.

"I always dream of visiting Sri Lanka... what is important in the present context is to bring peace," he said.

The Dalai Lama has never visited the predominantly Buddhist nation and the Government is unlikely to give him a visa since it maintains good relations with China and buys Chinese arms to fight the rebels. — AP



THE STATE VIEW: *The Sunday Times*, an independent Sri Lankan weekend newspaper, features a completely-censored military report in its May 21 edition. — AP

FIERCE FIGHTING RAGES NEAR CHAVAKACHCHERI

Norway begins peace effort

By Nirupama Subramanian ²²⁷⁶ HD-1

COLOMBO, MAY 22. As fierce fighting continued in the Jaffna peninsula, a three-member delegation from Norway including the special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, met the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, today.

They were scheduled to meet the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, later in the day.

The leader of the delegation and State Secretary in Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Raymond Johansen, told reporters that his country would "continue to give assistance" if both sides in the conflict desired it.

"The purpose of our visit is to gain a better understanding of the conflict. We had very encouraging talks with the Foreign Minister," he said. The third member of the team is Mrs. Kjersti Tromsald, a Foreign Ministry official. The delegation is due to leave early on May 24, after a visit to Kandy tomorrow.

Norway was set to facilitate negotiations between the Government and the LTTE, but the efforts were affected by fierce fighting in the Jaffna peninsula following the fall of Elephant Pass a month ago.

The Government's priority now is to somehow stop the fighting, which by all accounts, is not going too well for it. But it has made clear it cannot agree to a ceasefire on the LTTE's terms, which include a withdrawal or surrender of troops.

There are indications that a joint diplomatic effort by Norway and India, with the backing of the United States, could soon begin to solve the impasse.

In an interview to the state-owned *Daily News*, Mr. Kadirgamar said Sri Lanka was exploring



The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Norway, Mr. Raymond Johansen, during a meeting in Colombo on Monday. — Reuters

diplomatic means to invite India and Norway to find a negotiated settlement to the crisis. "It could be an effort where India is involved and... also Norway. Now the U.S. is also saying it would like to get involved in the process in a suitable capacity, but always through India...with the consent of India," he said.

The Government was working on the "diplomatic subtlety" of approaching the offer by India's External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, in helping find a solution to the ethnic conflict.

'70 rebels killed'

The flurry of diplomatic activity here, however, was not accompanied by any reduction in the intensity of the war, with the Government reporting that 70 Ta-

mil Tigers had been killed in the Chavakachcheri region.

Amidst conflicting claims and counter-claims by both sides, the Government said it "repulsed two attempts" by the LTTE to breach defences outside Chavakachcheri. A Government statement said security forces carried out air and artillery attacks on LTTE positions in the Tanankillappu sector.

Independent reports from the north said 10 to 15 civilians were killed in Chavakachcheri over the last few days while about 50 injured persons admitted to hospital in Point Pedro.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it had been asked by the security forces to hand over to the LTTE 50 bodies of its fighters. "We are in touch

with the LTTE and we are working out the logistics of the transfer," an ICRC spokesman said.

He also expressed concern that neither the LTTE nor the Government was able to give guarantees for the ICRC ship that sails between Trincomalee and Kanke-santhurai harbour, ferrying seriously ill civilians to the capital for treatment.

The ship was unable to sail last week due to the absence of a guarantee from both parties.

English paper closed

The Government has closed down the English language weekly *The Sunday Leader* for violating censorship rules, the State-run Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation said.

Following an order from the competent authority, the newspaper's printing press was sealed.

The paper's editor, Mr. Lasantha Wickremetunge, said it was not the paper which had been sealed but the "government's own fate".

In its latest issue, the weekly's lead story had the headline "War in fantasy land, Palaly not under attack".

Attempting to get past the censors by carrying news from the battlefield entirely in the negative, the paper reported that "heavy fighting was not raging in the north and Tigers were not pounding Palaly airbase... No soldiers were killed or wounded and several buildings within the base had not suffered minor damages." Though the technique provided a good laugh for most readers on Sunday morning, the Government Censor, Mr. Ariya Rubasinghe, took a dim view calling it a "dirty trick".

This is the second publication to be closed down following the closure of Jaffna's Tamil daily, *Uthayan* last week.

THE HINDU

23 MAY 2000

LTTE's political thrusts surprise Lankans

P. K. Balachandran (K. V. S. 205)
Colombo, May 22

THE LTTE has long been thought to be strong militarily, but weak politically. However, recent events show that it could be politically savvy as well.

The subtle way in which it has been able to swing the European Community in its favour and win over the Opposition United National Party (UNP), has surprised Sri Lankans.

The first jolt, of course, came from "friendly" India, which refused to come to Sri Lanka's aid militarily, coolly brushing under the carpet pious international resolutions to jointly fight terrorism and its own oft-repeated pleas to the world to help fight cross border terrorism.

As soon as the Jaffna offensive got underway, the LTTE set in motion its lobbyists in Tamil Nadu who rushed to New Delhi to garner support for a "hands off" policy.

In the event, New Delhi refused to get involved militarily, though it allowed Colombo to get arms from elsewhere.

To Prabhakaran's great relief, India would not be a millstone around his neck, thanks to Mr Vaiko and Mr M. Karunanidhi.

The LTTE had worked on the Europeans too.

"Dr Anton Balasingham was sent to Europe from Wannai not just for medical treatment but to prepare the political ground for the big military offensive," said analyst Dayan Jayatilaka.

The European Union's move on the need for a negotiated settle-

ment with Norwegian facilitation, its call for an end to the hostilities, and its concern for the plight for the civilians of Jaffna were unexceptionable.

But where the LTTE's influence over the European Union was evident was in the latter's singling out the Sri Lankan Government for

News Analysis

criticism, while completely ignoring the doings of the LTTE.

The European Union had conveniently ignored the fact that the LTTE launched the Wannai offensive and subsequently attacked Elephant Pass and Jaffna, even as the talks about talks were on through the Norwegian facilitator.

The LTTE had brazenly declared 2000 as the 'Year of War'.

Instead of calling upon the "aggressor" to restrain himself in Jaffna in the interest of the civilians there, the EU's moves equated the two parties.

The latest "declaration" rapped the Sri Lankan Government for clamping Press censorship and outlawing trade union action to meet the grave threat to the integrity of the country.

But there was stony silence on the measure's raison d'etre - the war unleashed by the LTTE to dismember the country.

The LTTE was able to get Mr Neranjan Devadithya, a former British Conservative MP of Sri Lankan origin, and now a nominated member of the European Parliament, to propose that the

European Union Parliament call for United Nation's intervention in Sri Lanka.

The European Union Parliament did pass a resolution but did not include Mr Devadithya's clause. In New York, the UK's Labour regime was busy canvassing for a Security Council resolution calling for UN intervention in the island.

"These two moves were made knowing fully well that Colombo was against UN or European Union intervention and the LTTE was for it. The involvement of the two mainstream British parties is a reflection of the LTTE's clever use of the British politicians' need for the Tamil ethnic vote," observed Jayatilaka.

The LTTE had made deep inroads into Sri Lanka's domestic polity too.

Chandrika in do-or-die cry

FROM OUR COLOMBO
CORRESPONDENT

May 23: Sri Lankan fighter jets resumed bombing Tamil Tiger positions in what the President called a most decisive moment in the country's history.

Air force planes pounded half a dozen rebel positions on Jaffna peninsula, said military spokesman Brig. Palitha Fernando, adding: "We are ready to face the rebels."

Urging the citizens to contribute to the war effort, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, in a television address, said: "People of Sri Lanka in their entirety are today facing a most decisive moment in their history. The whole nation is facing a grave crisis."

She said people should cancel "unnecessary celebrations", donate two days' salary each month to the war fund and join in a welfare programme for wounded soldiers.

In an apparent bid to further strain the army's limited logistical and operational capacity, the LTTE opened another front in the eastern sector. Heavy fighting erupted tonight close to Bat-

ticaloa after the Tigers attacked Vavunathivu camp guarding the eastern coastal town's main approach from the rebel-held western hinterland.

The Tigers shelled the Batticaloa air force base and the army's brigade headquarters. The fighting was set to escalate as the air force despatched MI-24 helicopter gunships to strafe LTTE positions ahead of the Vavunathivu camp. Sources in Batticaloa said the Tigers are firing on the helicopters and are bringing in more troops to their positions west of the camp.

The situation report released this afternoon said heavy fighting had broken out in Chemmani, on the eastern outskirts of Jaffna town, around midnight on Monday. That the LTTE is in Chemmani indicates they have moved closer to the town centre, a defence analyst said.

In Kantale town in the Tamil-dominated area of Trincomalee, two suspected Tiger guerrillas posing as job seekers tried to assassinate former lawmaker M.K. Gunawardene, but guards shot one dead and the other killed himself by setting off a grenade.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 MAY 2000

We cannot let go of 'evacuation'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 23. The following are excerpts from an interview that the President of Sri Lanka, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, gave to The Hindu.

Nirupama Subramanian: What is the military situation in the Jaffna peninsula at the moment?

Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga: There has been strong fighting in the peninsula for over a month now. There are reversals and gains on both sides; but in the last 10 days, the military has been stabilising the situation. But the LTTE is dominating certain areas at the edges of the peninsula. Fierce fighting is on even at this moment, but with the new weaponry that we have been able to send to Jaffna in the last days, the military is

"The LTTE is putting up a determined fight... If it takes over Jaffna... probably Mr. Prabhakaran will not be satisfied with only Jaffna. He would want to be the king of Sri Lanka."

gaining the upper hand.

Do you think your troops will be able to retain Jaffna?

I think so. We have many more men than the LTTE has. We have much more armament, we are better equipped as a whole but we (have) had some shortcomings in the overall strategy in the last few years. As you know, we gained many territories in the beginning. We still hold two-thirds of the peninsula strongly, but the LTTE is putting up a very determined fight.

What we are worried about is the Jaffna population. They are pleading with us not to leave them at the mercies of the LTTE in case the Army has to withdraw, which does not seem a possibility at the moment. They fear they will be killed by the LTTE because they came into Government-controlled areas when we invited them, despite the LTTE forcibly trying to keep them back. We are very worried because we feel responsible, we are respon-

sible for the people of Jaffna, as much as we are for the people in the rest of the country.

What steps have you taken to protect the civilians in Jaffna from the fighting?

We have not killed even by accident... But the LTTE seems to be willfully bombarding civilian houses and areas. A few days ago, they had bombed an old people's home and orphanage, killing many old people and children. In a war like this, it is very difficult.

Do you regard Government control of Jaffna as crucial to your efforts to find a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict?

Normally, if one were not up against an inhumane, ruthless organisation like the LTTE, whether you hold some little part of the land of the country may not be im-

portant to arrive at a political solution. But the people of Jaffna, whom the LTTE is supposed to be liberating, do not want them there. We can't leave Jaffna just like that, we can't let down the people of Jaffna. That's one reason.

Secondly, we are a sovereign Government and we are the Government of the entire country and its entire people, and Jaffna is an integral part of Sri Lanka, and no self-respecting Government will allow a bunch of terrorists who use murder and terror as their only weapon, to exercise their authority or their fiat over any part of the country.

If you were to lose the peninsula, what would be the fallout, politically for you, and for the peace process in Sri Lanka?

Politically, it is neither here nor there. But for the peace process we have begun, it could be very serious because the LTTE will establish *de facto*, if not *de jure*, a

with the Navy is currently underprisingly, the Navy would have to hire to de-induct, but these vessels have sitioned so far.

uld be evacuating troops from the Sri Kankesanturai. Ships would, however at some distance as the 60-metre-kesanturai does not permit big ships ne Sri Lankan forces that are de-in- to be taken to the port of Trincomasaid.

r Force (IAF), along with likely assist-ivil aviation side, is also expected to air-lifting Sri Lankan forces from the air base. Significantly, the Civil Avia-ir. Sharad Yadav, participated in this meeting.

Government was firm in entering Sri er "proper conditions", the armed less visualised the theoretical possi-ig de-induction of Sri Lankan troops. as possible only if a tri- service oper- hored or the IAF under security cover removed Sri Lankan forces from the

firefight in: Jaswant

is now in Colombo, was slated to arrive in New Delhi over the next few days.

As part of the Norwegian commitment to keep India posted on its initiative in Sri Lanka, Mr. Solheim will brief the Government. Mr. Solheim is expected to meet with the Indian Secretary, Mr. ~~_____~~ about accepting the offer.

Humanitarian assistance is only in the event that the Government wants to evacuate soldiers and civilians. It hasn't reached that stage yet. And mediation, there is already a third party facilitating for 15 months. We can't suddenly drop Norway and pick up somebody else. But we are looking at the Indian offer in the background of Norway being our chief facilitator. We have indicated to India, whilst asking for some urgent mil-

We won't take IPKF route: Advani

SHIMLA, MAY 23. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today asserted that the Government would not take the "IPKF route" in dealing with the developments in Sri Lanka but would ensure that no other power inimical to India got a foothold in the troubled island.

Addressing reporters here, he said that India wanted the integrity of Sri Lanka to remain intact and the Tamilians given respectable position in governance.

Mr. Advani said the Centre had taken the right stand on Sri Lanka and all its allies, including the three Tamil Nadu parties, had fully "endorsed" the stand. Attempts of the Opposition to create a wedge between the BJP and its allies on this issue, as also on the issue of price hike, had "failed miserably", he said. — PTI

Sathe sees no alternative to Sonia

NEW DELHI, MAY 23. In a volte-face senior Congress (I) leader, Mr. Vasant Sathe, who recently spoke about a crisis of confidence in the party, on Monday said the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi alone could take the organisation to greater heights of glory.

as it was an Indian Government some time ago that supported the terrorists on their soil, gave them not just refuge, but arms and training so that they could come back and start the war... I suppose this is why Rajiv Gandhi felt obliged to correct the situation, but he was treated in such a shameful manner by the UNP Government.

Are you concerned about the pro-Eelam statements being made by some leaders in Tamil Nadu?

Yes, of course, we are because

THE HINDU

24 MAY 1988

Kumaratunga goes to the people to finance troop activity

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Tuesday warned that the country was facing a grave national security crisis even as an LTTE female suicide bomber detonated herself in a vain bid to kill a ruling party leader in eastern Trincomalee district.



C. Kumaratunga

Ms Kumaratunga, in an address to the nation, called on her people to cut down on their social functions and divert their savings to the ongoing military campaign against the LTTE. "The whole nation is facing a grave crisis," the President said and urged all employees to donate money to help finance the troops currently engaged in heavy fighting in the north.

Reports from Trincomalee said an LTTE suicide bomber set off an explosion while attempting to assassinate the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leader M.K. Gu-

nawardene at Kantale in Trincomalee district on Tuesday evening. Mr Gunawardene, a former member of parliament, escaped with minor injuries.

Even as troops were engaged in hand-to-hand battle in Jaffna, the fighting has now spread to Chammani, south-east of Jaffna town, a government statement said.

This has brought the battle virtually to the doorstep of the town, where several thousand civilians live. Eight militants were reportedly killed in the fighting near Chammani, it said.

On Monday night, the government had claimed that over 150 rebels were killed at Sarasalai east of Chavakachcheri. When asked by reporters what the international community could do to help, Ms Kumaratunga said she would like foreign governments and their peoples to recognise terror when they saw it.

"They don't like it when it happens in their countries. But by their silence, by their tolerance of the most terrifying terrorist group in the world, they are encouraging them to practise all their terror," she said.

She said Norway was trying very hard to persuade the LTTE to come to the negotiating table, but as of now, it did not seem as if the LTTE understood the language of democratic governance. "But I am an eternal optimist," she added.

Dwelling on the personal traumas inflicted on her by the crisis, the President, whose father and husband were assassinated, said she was already prepared to take such a shock. "Because I have had several traumas to get over, each one has become easier.

"So once you are committed to a cause, I suppose you tend to do well and you have the strength to get over this kind of thing," Ms Kumaratunga said.

She said her children hated her for staying on in politics. "They are very concerned and they hate my being in politics, naturally. They have also lost a father through violence. It is difficult when you have children," she said.

Meanwhile, the "informal meeting" between Norwegian deputy minister Raymond Johansen and representatives of the Sri Lankan government.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 MAY 2000

THURSDAY, MAY 25, 2000

40-12 255
TIME FOR A CEASEFIRE *S. Lanka*

EVEN IF THE fall of Jaffna may not be imminent, it is time for the Sri Lankan Government to come to terms with ground realities. Because of the numbers and the recently-enhanced air power, the Government troops have put up a stiff resistance to a determined Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the past fortnight. If the LTTE decides to damage the runway at the Palali air base and the port at Kankesanthurai, the soldiers could be trapped. It seems unlikely that the Tamil Tigers will give up till they wrest Jaffna from the Sri Lankan Government's control. But the fall of Jaffna will do no good to Colombo, New Delhi or even the Sri Lankan Tamils in the peninsula. The fast-paced developments this week and the frequent meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Security in New Delhi tell their own tale on what lies ahead in Sri Lanka. The disappointment and frustration of the island's President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, in her interview to this newspaper is understandable. She must realise that without a professional armed force, a thinking leadership and motivated soldiers, it is difficult to prosecute a war for two decades on the run. The continuing desertions in the ranks and frequent changes at the top confirm this malaise.

The best way out of the present imbroglio is to work for a ceasefire. Apparently, the Norwegian initiative to facilitate a return to the peace process has not made much of a headway. Colombo is now thinking of a multilateral diplomatic effort, including India, to restart negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. For that to happen, a cessation of hostilities is a pre-condition. The question remains, will the LTTE return to the negotiating table without taking control of Jaffna? And if it does, as the President argues, it will establish *de facto*, if not *de jure*, a separate state". What will

they talk about after that? Given its track record, can the LTTE be relied upon to take such negotiations seriously and work for a political solution to the ethnic issue within the constitutional framework and the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka? That is something that the multilateral facilitation group must ponder over. From the LTTE's viewpoint, unilateral declaration of independence will be meaningless as the international community has set its face against the demand for Eelam. The Tamil community has to set its sights on a federal union, guaranteeing the rights of the minorities.

It now appears inevitable for India to get involved once more in Sri Lanka's ethnic tangle. But the Centre is right in ruling out any military intervention, though Ms. Kumaratunga is obviously disappointed at this stance. Her hope that India has the influence with the LTTE to bring it to the negotiating table may be misplaced. But if the U.N., the U.S. and the European Union throw their weight behind this multilateral initiative and exert pressure on the LTTE, which functions out of many European cities and Canada among others, it may at least begin talks about talks. The starting point right now will be a ceasefire. Obviously, Colombo will find it more acceptable if it takes effect before the fall of Jaffna. One formula could be to freeze the present military positions for a cessation of hostilities and begin talks so that an interim package can be evolved to pull out the troops and put in place a civil administration for the north. If the LTTE insists on taking Jaffna first, it may be a loss of face for Colombo. This insistence on speaking from a position of strength can only hamper negotiations, if and when they take place. At least to end the suffering of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the proposed multilateral diplomatic initiative must succeed.

THE HINDU

25 MAY 2000

Winning peace is the tough part

45-13 29/5
An immediate ceasefire may rob the LTTE of a possible victory. But delayed beyond a point, Jaffna could spin out of control, writes ASHOK K. MEHTA

BECAUSE OF press censorship, reports about the war in Jaffna are conflicting. While the LTTE claims it has overrun Palaly airbase and is pounding Kankasanturai harbour, the Sri Lankan Government insists its forces are holding out. Exaggerated claims by the Tigers are part of psy-war and disinformation an adjunct of info-war. On both counts, Colombo is losing.

Loud hailers and Voice of Tigers radio have been asking the Sri Lankan army to surrender as they are cut off. They are also telling the soldiers that they will be treated with honour and handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the only neutral organisation enjoying the confidence of both sides.

The new peninsula war is far from over. It is one month since Elephant Pass fell. The Tigers were expected to capture all of Jaffna including the air and naval bases by now. But the Sri Lankan army beefed up with new Pakistani multi-barrel rocket launchers, Israeli jets and overall force commander, Major General Janak Periera, is making a stand.

The LTTE has made multiple thrusts: along the A 9 highway, the Nagarkovil-Point Pedro axis, across Jaffna lagoon and has infiltrated the town. The advance towards Jaffna town has slowed down as fighting in built-up areas entails streetfighting from house to house resulting in collateral damage. This is something the Tigers want to avoid. Therefore, the preference for military targets like the air base and harbour which makes Eelam a geographical reality.

Maximum military gains is the best possible bargaining position for the LTTE during political negotiations. Their military objective is unarguably all of Jaffna peninsula with the Sri Lankan army either surrendering or evacuating from its positions.

The Tigers are unlikely to massacre their captives for fear of any Sinhalese backlash against Tamils in the rest of the country. And

SRI LANKA

equally importantly they are refraining from full-bloated violence in order to be seen by the international community as reasonable and civilised "freedom fighters" — and not the barbaric terrorist organisation they are known to be.

On the other hand, some Sinhalese fear



Island of discontent

that any humiliation for the Sri Lanka army (like torture and killings of its soldiers) could lead to a Kosovo in Jaffna. LTTE victories on the battlefield have fuelled speculation that Eelam is around the corner and that India's staying out of Sri Lanka is a tacit approval for a realignment of the military balance in favour of the LTTE which would facilitate genuine autonomy for Tamils within a united Sri Lanka.

The only contentious issue is how much land the LTTE needs to capture without crossing (in the Sinhalese perception) the Eelam threshold. For that would make it impossible for the Sri Lankan Government to negotiate at all, let alone conceding an

acceptable devolution package. Is it Jaffna peninsula or Trincomalee too? On the other hand, the LTTE's appetite for military conquest makes anything short of Eelam unrealistic.

An immediate ceasefire may rob the LTTE of a possible victory. But delayed beyond a point, Jaffna could spin out of control. On account of the humanitarian disaster accompanying the war, there is a flurry of diplomatic activity to get the two sides to stop fighting and start talking. The Norwegians,

whose peace mission was disrupted by the fall of Elephant Pass, are back in Colombo. In a turnaround, Sri Lanka is now saying it is ready for unconditional talks. But the LTTE, which made the offer first, is unlikely to accept now.

After a long spell of silence, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told the media that India was monitoring the situation and would act if necessary, only hours before the Sri Lankan foreign minister had noted in an interview to an Indian magazine that India would be sucked in by events. After ruling out any military involvement, India will only be drawn in for humanitarian assistance and mediation. But for this, the assent of both sides is a prerequisite. The LTTE is unlikely to give its consent either for the evacuation of the Sri Lankan army or an Indian role in

the peace process.

India is catalysing the build-up of diplomatic pressure on the LTTE (with which it has no leverage) to accept the ceasefire and join the Norway-brokered negotiations. Since it is the author of the statement that the Norwegian mediation is not a workable solution, India will have to take the initiative in finding an alternative.

Brokering a ceasefire will be as difficult as getting an agreement on the parameters of mediation. The LTTE has to have some incentive to accept the ceasefire, especially when it feels it is on the verge of victory. For the LTTE, winning the war is easier than winning peace.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAY 1987

Lanka civil war spreads east

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW DELHI, May 24. — Sri Lanka's civil war spread to the east today as air force helicopters strafed LTTE positions after they attacked a government army camp and air base, military officials and sources close to the rebels said.

Heavy fighting has erupted near Batticaloa, 280 km southeast of Jaffna city. Rebels fired mortars on two military bases, according to TamilNet, a website that provides the LTTE's perspective, but is not run by the Tamil Tigers.

The Vavunathivu army camp, a few kilometres south-west of Batticaloa, serves as a forward defence for the air base.

Chief government spokesman, Ariya Rubasinghe confirmed the rebels' attack and said one soldier was killed in rebel fire. "Terrorists engaged the Vavunathivu Army Detachment and an air force base with mortar fire," said

Rubasinghe, who is also the chief censor.

Government forces responded by sending Mi-24 helicopters to pound rebel positions east of Jaffna. An estimated 40,000 soldiers are defending the northern Jaffna peninsula.

Sri Lankan military officials reached by the telephone said rebels had shelled the air base twice in the last 36 hours. They did not speak of any damage.

Reports from the military or the rebels cannot be verified because neither side allows journalists into the war zone.

Later today, a Norwegian peace delegation is scheduled to reach New Delhi in an effort to bring the Sri Lankan rebels and the government to the negotiating table.

US under secretary of state, Mr Thomas Pickering, will also meet top Indian defence and foreign affairs officials before going to Colombo for talks with the Sri Lankan government.

THE STATESMAN

2 MAY 1997

India and U.S. reject demand for Tamil Eelam

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: India and the U.S. sent out a reassuring message to Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who faces a very real threat of dismemberment of her tiny island nation, by declaring that there could never be an independent Tamil Eelam.

Foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh and U.S. under secretary of state Thomas Pickering, currently in India for bilateral and regional talks, spent much of their time discussing the spiralling crisis in Sri Lanka. Both sides expressed concern for the civilians caught in the fierce fighting that is now raging for control of the Jaffna peninsula.

Although reports from Colombo say that the Tigers have begun sporadic attacks in the east and that the fighting was minimal in Jaffna on Wednesday, the fact remains that the LTTE's main aim is to get the Lankan army out of the peninsula.

"We remain convinced that there cannot be a military solution to the Sri Lankan problem. We also think this is the appropriate

time to talk. We are supportive of the Norwegian initiative. We will support any positive role that India may play towards a negotiated settlement," Mr Pickering said.

An Indian official said that the U.S. believed New Delhi was in a position to play the peace-broker between the two sides. Norway has already begun the process, but India is familiar with the issue and can make a difference. The minority Tamils as well as the Sri Lankan government had faith in India's understanding of the island's complex problem.

Mr Mansingh also spent time with the Norwegian negotiators, who flew into New Delhi to brief the Indian government. "No Norwegian initiative has failed," Erik Solheim, the negotiator for Sri Lanka, told reporters after a meeting with India's foreign secretary. Explaining Norway's role, he said, "We are channelling messages between the two parties in the conflict." Mr Solheim is in touch with leaders of the LTTE through the rebels' London office.

► Catch-22 situation, page 14



T. Pickering

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 MAY 2000

USA moves ships to Lanka waters, France may follow

KEITH FLORY and
SRINJOY CHOWDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 25. — US warships have sailed from the Gulf and may anchor west of Sri Lanka; far enough to be seen as beyond the possible operational zone but near enough to move in quickly should the need arise, say Intelligence reports.

The French Navy may join the US ships in Lankan waters, though only the Indian Navy is likely to be tasked with a humanitarian mission.

(A foreign ministry spokesman said India would give humanitarian help if Sri Lanka asked for it, but no such request had been received says PTI.)

Diplomatic initiatives backed by military muscle-flexing seem to be at work to mount pressure to cease hostilities in northern Jaffna. The US Navy had contingency plans which it has reportedly discussed with India. US ships are patrolling Malacca Straits and Hormuz and diverting them towards Sri Lanka in what could be passed off as routine manoeuvres.

The French navy has a limited presence in Indian Ocean but may be involved in what seems to be a subtle attempt at gunboat diplomacy, aimed at pressuring LTTE into avoiding action that could cost lives.

Though senior Navy officials confirmed US warships' movement and the possibility of French involvement, they said

neither would undertake unilateral action. It's not the West's war, said a senior Navy officer. If they get involved, it will be for evacuation.

India's involvement is necessary for more than politico-diplomatic reasons. For, only the Indian Navy can evacuate Sri Lankan troops from Jaffna, given the present situation.

US warships won't be able to enter the shallow waters.

LTTE warning

LONDON, May 25. — The *Voice of Tigers* today issued a final warning to over 30,000 Lankan soldiers, asking them to surrender by 6 p.m. tomorrow. The LTTE promised to hand them over to the Red Cross within 24 hours of their surrender. But Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga said she wouldn't withdraw troops even if she was killed. — PTI

Though France has destroyers, frigates and a supply ship in the region, only India has a fleet of specialised landing craft capable of inducting and de-inducting troops in shallow waters.

All six Indian vessels can transport 800 fully-equipped soldiers at a time, hence their deployment is the key to a successful evacuation mission. The larger warships can be anchored in deep waters.

Officially, Indian forces are on high alert, but a government order has to precede any ac-

tion. But such an order isn't expected till diplomatic efforts create a situation for a no-fire-fight operation.

The IAF has moved radars and communications systems to the southern region to facilitate air operations and stationed some Mirage-2000s and MiG-23s, especially to gather electronic intelligence. For, only transport planes may be used for evacuation, fighter cover is integral to the operation.

Norway: The Norwegian initiative should be given a chance at brokering peace in Sri Lanka, the USA said today, warning that there should be no race of mediators. The US under-secretary of state, Mr Thomas Pickering, said everyone must work together for a common cause. The USA sees a supportive role for itself, he said. His government supported the leadership shown by Norway.

UK stand: The British High Commissioner in India, Sir Rob Young, today said the UK favoured a negotiated settlement within Sri Lanka's framework of integrity. "We want to see an end to the fighting, a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement within the framework of the overall integrity of Sri Lanka", Sir Rob said in Chennai.

Refugees rescued: Nineteen Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, left stranded in the fifth islet in the Indian waters, were rescued and brought to Rameswaram this evening, reports UNI.

■ More reports on pages 8, 9

THE STATESMAN

26 MAY 2000

25/5 Gains for LTTE ✓ S. Lanka H.T. 13

THE SUCCESS of the Tamil Tigers in forcing out over 20,000 Sri Lankan troops from two strategic locations in the Elephant Pass area over the weekend denotes a major setback for the Government forces. The reverse nearly spells the end of the tenuous hold gained by the army over peninsular Jaffna after considerable sacrifices five years ago. The Defence Ministry's attempts to camouflage the debacle by claiming that it has "relocated" 14,000 of its troops in the Jaffna town area are clearly untenable. In fact, with ground contact almost cut off, the Sri Lankan forces will now have a hard time maintaining the supply lines to its contingents in Jaffna. Given the determination shown by the Tamil Tigers despite the considerable loss of their cadres in recent months, Colombo's hopes of re-establishing civilian control in Jaffna have been put in jeopardy.

While the latest from the battlefield presents as telling a picture as any of a conflict that neither side is able to win decisively, the Sri Lankan Government's claims that it was fighting to force the LTTE to come to the negotiating table must now appear demonstrably hollow. What makes this development particularly tragic is that nobody seems to have a clue as to how to end the blood-letting which is now well into its second decade. The recent efforts at mediation by Norway failed to take off mainly due to resistance from the hardline Sinhalese, including senior members of the influential Buddhist clergy. The irony is that even as the LTTE was getting ready to launch the Elephant Pass onslaught, the monks were busy trashing proposals for more devolution to the Tamils. Instead, they were pressing the Government to defeat the Tamils once and for all.

It may now be hoped that the Elephant Pass debacle will act as an eye-opener for the hardline Sinhalese and rid them of the chimera of a battlefield victory. However, such a change in perception may not be easy when parliamentary elections are barely a few months away. Besides, the Tigers have proved to be highly unreliable negotiators. Even then, it is to be hoped that a more realistic appraisal by the Sinhalese of the war scene will provide some sign of hope in an ethnic war which is unlikely to produce any winners.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 MAY 2000

LTTE pushing towards Jaffna

HD-1

By V.S.Sambandan

COLOMBO, APR. 24. Over four lakh civilians in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula remained cut off from the rest of the island for nearly a week running as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commenced the end-game of its battle with Government troops over the Tamil heartland.

With the till-now impregnable Elephant Pass military garrison coming under the control of the Tigers, the Sri Lankan Army, Air Force and Navy chiefs today expressed confidence that they would still be able to protect the Jaffna peninsula from further LTTE advances. They said retaking the Elephant Pass was "on the cards".

The possibility of the LTTE gaining control over Jaffna is very much part of possible future settings, especially given the changed nature of warfare with the Tigers blasting Government position with long-range artillery. While transport services were disrupted between the northern Peninsula for more than a week, telecommunication links remain

snapped for the past four days.

"Holding the Jaffna peninsula is our priority. We have to ensure that the LTTE is not able to get Jaffna now," the Sri Lankan Army Chief, Lt. Gen. Sirilal Werasooriya, told a hurriedly-convened press conference late this evening.

On the situation of the civilians and their role in the days ahead, the Army Chief said, "They would have to weigh the pros and cons" of their conditions "before 1995" when the Tigers were in control of Jaffna "and after", when the Army wrested control over the peninsula and "restored electricity and other essential services".

Dismissing reports that the rebels had advanced further north from the Elephant Pass-Iyakachchi complex, the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry described the battlefield developments in a terse statement which said, "The situation remains the same. Troops are consolidating in the newly-occupied defence line, North of Elephant Pass."

On the reasoning by the Army to pull out of the Elephant Pass, the Army Commander said he ordered the withdrawal in the face

of the impending siege on the complex by guerillas. "It is better to save our forces and use it later," the Army Commander said.

While no major change was reported on territorial advances during the day, the Tigers said they had recovered crucial military hardware from the Elephant Pass military complex.

The LTTE list of armaments recovered are five artillery guns — three 152-mm guns and two 122-mm guns. However, Lt. Gen. Weerasooriya said that "only one gun was lost to the Tigers" as the other guns were blasted away by troops withdrawing from the Pass.

Popular reaction to the most drastic reversal faced by the Sri Lankan security forces has also varied along ethnic lines. Muted silence and disbelief from the Sinhala-majority south, contrasted with passive enthusiasm from the Tamil-majority areas in the north and east. "In the areas held by the Tigers they would be celebrating," sources in Government-held eastern Batticaloa district.

Military may strategy:Page 13

THE HINDU

25 MAY 2000

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2000

49-12 ✓
TURNING POINT IN SRI LANKA 26/4

THE MOST FITTING response to the significant military victory scored by the Tamil Tigers in the capture of Elephant Pass will be for the two major parties, the ruling People's Alliance and the Opposition UNP to give up their mutual antagonism and resolve to seek a political solution based on the devolution proposals already on the table. The moment for collective political action has arrived. The capture of the strategically vital pass by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is the most serious setback that peace has suffered in the island in the past five years and must considerably enhance the bargaining power of the rebels as the latest peace initiative moves forward. The military action by the separatists contains basically two messages. One, that the Tigers feel pressured by the Oslo initiative, the first genuine international effort to help end the long civil war, coupled with the fact that for the first time in recent memory the main majority Sinhala political parties seem inclined to some broad agreement on the approach to the "facilitation" by Norway, raising the possibility of a joint national front to push for peace. Second is the LTTE's evident need to gain as much leverage as possible through military action prior to the impending talks-on-talks phase of the peace process.

Having lost ground, the Sri Lankan Government must see its options narrowed and its manoeuvrability reduced. For the present disadvantaged position, the Sinhala parties must blame themselves for their lack of vision and of the spirit of accommodation. Sinhala chauvinism enthroned the LTTE, enabling the outfit to systematically eliminate moderate Tamil groups and leading to the current military stalemate which is but an extension of the political stalemate in the island over the Tamils

question. The Chandrika Kumaratunga Government's bold initiatives to reach out to all sections of the Tamil population through a devolution package were frustrated by the refusal of the United National Party to extend support. This came grudgingly two months ago and has resulted in some movement toward a peace effort. The Tigers will undoubtedly step up pressure on the military to try and gain more advantage on the ground. Their latest gains can be neutralised only if the political leadership unites wholeheartedly behind the effort of the President, Ms. Kumaratunga.

It is the tragedy of Sri Lanka that the LTTE has entrenched itself deep enough to have destroyed all other political alternatives in the Tamil community. The LTTE today stands condemned as perhaps the only dreaded terrorist outfit of its kind, pursuing a civil war that has brought immeasurable suffering on the innocent population. The Tigers supremo, Prabhakaran, autocratic and untrustworthy and ready to sacrifice whole generations to achieve his ambitions, certainly deserves no empathy. He is not in need of supporters like Mr. Vaiko, the member of Parliament from Tamil Nadu whose activities must cause embarrassment to Delhi and concern in Chennai. The Tigers' assault, not altogether unanticipated, must jolt the People's Alliance Government and the Sinhalese parties alike out of their lethargy. If they agree on the devolution package and enabling constitutional reforms and get them through Parliament with the support of the Tamil and Muslim parties, the peace effort will get a self-sustaining boost and deliver a strong and clear message to the separatists, much stronger than what the military has been able to do. //

THE HINDU

26 MAY 2000

Lankan govt. to order probe into army's losses

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan government will institute a court of inquiry into the human and material losses suffered during last weekend's military debacle in which the army lost two strategic garrisons to the LTTE in northern Jaffna peninsula.

Sri Lankan army commander Lieutenant General Srilal Weerasooriya stated that the magnitude of the fighting was so heavy that an inquiry would naturally follow to investigate into the losses suffered by the army.

The previous court of inquiry into the army's debacle in northern Vanni during the LTTE counter-attacks last November had held seven top officials, including two major generals and a brigadier, responsible and prematurely retired them.

When asked if he would own responsibility for the losses and tender his resignation, the army chief said he was prepared to quit if he asked to do so. "I did not ask for this post," he remarked.

Responding to questions about the fate of Jaffna peninsula, he said the army was confident of defending despite the loss of two of its strategic garrisons. The general also denied the LTTE's claims that it had suffered heavy casualties and lost large amount of weapons.

He said the decision to withdraw from the Elephant Pass and

Iyakatchchi garrisons was taken on April 21 in order to strengthen the army defences to protect the peninsula. He expressed confidence that the garrisons would be regained as soon as army strengthened its defences in the present locations.

Admitting that the army had completely pulled out of the Elephant Pass garrison, he denied the LTTE claim that it had captured Soaranpattu, saying the troops had established strong defences there.

He said, contrary to reports, the army had stationed only one division of troops in the Elephant Pass and it was withdrawn in a phased manner. He, however, refused to give the exact numbers. A Sri Lankan division constitutes around 6,000 soldiers.

Denying LTTE claims that over a 1,000 soldiers had been killed, he said the army losses on April 21 were 88 while and

around 100 soldiers were missing.

General Weerasooriya defended his decision to vacate the strategic Elephant Pass base, saying a delay may have resulted in the loss of thousands of army personnel besides arms.

"The reasons to withdraw were purely military, weighing the pros and cons to our benefit. Our main priority is to hold Jaffna. The army made a tactical withdrawal from Elephant Pass to safeguard the peninsula," he said. (PTI)

LTTE hands over soldiers' bodies

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan Air Force fighter jets bombarded two army garrisons, the Elephant Pass and Iyakchchi military complexes, even as the Tamil Tigers handed over 126 bodies of soldiers killed during the recent battle.

"We now have a fair idea of the positions vacated by the troops. Naturally those areas are being subjected to aerial bombardment," an army spokesman said, confirming reports that the Israeli-made KFIR bombers had conducted series of air-raids on these complexes and surrounding areas. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 MAY 2000

The Hindustan Times

W.F.P. Lankan deadlock M.S.

EVEN ASSUMING that the fall of Jaffna is not as close at hand as implied by the Tamil Tigers in their Friday deadline for surrendering, there seems to be no way the Sri Lankan forces can dramatically alter the outcome of fighting in Jaffna. Over the past couple of days, President Chandrika Kumaratunga has responded to the changing situation by mobilising the Sri Lankan public in what she has described as a war for national self-preservation. She has appealed to the youth to join the government's new recruitment drive, offered amnesty to over 20,000 army deserters if they reported back for duty, and even appealed to ex-servicemen to turn up for voluntary service in this hour of national crisis.

However, with about half of the Sri Lankan army locked up at Palaly, the government's fighting capabilities are limited. Jaffna has been the traditional stronghold of the LTTE, and it is able to make full use of this tactical advantage. Rather than committing the bulk of its forces to Jaffna, it makes better tactical sense to accept the ground reality of the situation there and concentrate on the rest of the north-eastern province where the Sri Lankan troops will be better placed to face the LTTE challenge. Thursday's mortar attack — meant to hit an army camp in the eastern district of Batticaloa — in which at least half a dozen members of a family were killed, was indicative of the Tigers' eventual plans to take pot-shots elsewhere in the north-east while the government pours all its energies into the Jaffna operation.

In the circumstances, the only hope of breaking the current impasse in Jaffna rests on the Norwegians' capacity to broker a ceasefire followed by talks. The Norwegian interlocutors must be able to impress upon the Tamil Tigers that they may be better fighters, but international opinion is against the idea of a Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. The exercises conducted by the Indian Navy earlier in the week and the movement of the US warship from the Gulf were indicative of the measure of support for a united Sri Lanka. Therefore, persisting the battle is unlikely to achieve much beyond continued blood-letting on either side. Equally, the interlocutors should tell Colombo that there is no alternative to granting substantial devolution to the Tamil minority in the north-eastern province, and that there should be no going back on promises this time. True, there is a slim hope that such an initiative leading to ceasefire and talks will work — but that is the only one available on the grim landscape of the island-nation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAY 2000

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27/5

LTTE announces 10-hour ceasefire

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 26. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) announced late tonight that they would observe unilateral, temporary ceasefire between 10.00 a.m. and 10.00 p.m. tomorrow in the Thenmarachchi division of the Jaffna Peninsula.

The LTTE said this was to enable civilians to move out of the war zone, raising the spectre of intensified fighting after the ceasefire.

There was no immediate Government reaction to the announcement. Earlier today as the LTTE deadline to soldiers to surrender by this evening approached, the Government announced over State-owned radio that its troops were marching ahead with new weapons and high morale.

Appeal for recruits

Desperate to prevent the fall of Jaffna into LTTE hands, the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry has appealed to retired officers from the three armed services to rejoin for six months of voluntary service.

The appeal was also addressed to Sri Lanka's youth to join and assist the armed forces "to protect the sovereignty and integrity" of the country. Shortage of soldiers has been a chronic failing of the Sri Lanka armed forces, but it is pinching the Government now more than at any other time, when it is engaged in its most crucial battle with the LTTE.

In addition to being small, the Sri Lankan Army is believed to have one of the highest desertion rates in the world. The appeal, issued by the Defence Ministry

mainly through the Sinhala-language press, called on all ranks including and below Lieutenant-Colonel in the Army, Commander and below in the Navy and Wing Commander and below in the Air Force, to rejoin their respective forces.

It said all those below 50 years of age of all other ranks, and those retired from the police service were also welcome to rejoin. It reassured that those who respond to the call would be posted only in non-operational areas. In addition, a number of incentives have been offered to those willing to rejoin the armed forces, including public sector jobs after three years of service.

At this juncture, when high troop morale is top priority, wide

publicity is being given to the 'Human Intervention Facility' that the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, set up two days ago.

A Government statement reported sporadic fighting as an LTTE deadline this evening for the surrender of troops approached closer. Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) announced in its evening news bulletin that troops were marching ahead with new weapons and high morale.

Meanwhile, the LTTE has also been active in the northern mainland near Vavuniya. There have been two confrontations near Omanthai over the last two days, in which nine LTTE cadres were reported killed.

'Be Jaffna CM, stop war'

NEW DELHI, MAY 26. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, today offered the LTTE chief, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, chief ministership of the Jaffna province if he gave up his policy of terrorism and joined the democratic process in the country's political life.

In an interview to a television news channel, Ms. Kumaratunga categorically stated that she would not withdraw Government troops from the province: "Let the LTTE withdraw its troops before we began talks."

The President, who was replying to a question on the Norwegian mediation efforts said her Government had conveyed to Mr. Prabhakaran that "he could even be the leader or Chief Minister of the devolved unit — perhaps even for a certain period without elections — if he gave up his ghoulish politics of murder and terror and came into democratic stream."

She said she was willing to speak to Mr. Prabhakaran, if necessary, to bring peace to Sri Lanka. About India's offer of humanitarian assistance, Ms. Kumaratunga said that need for such aid would arise only "if we lost the war". — UNI

THE HINDU

2007 MAY 27

27 MAY 2007

Colombo denies knowledge about ceasefire

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 27. Fighting eased in the Jaffna peninsula today even though the Sri Lankan Government asserted it had "no information" about the 12-hour ceasefire called by the LTTE in the Thenmarachchi division. The LTTE had said the temporary ceasefire, which began at 10 a.m. today, was to enable the civilian population to move out. Aid workers said the truce had enabled some civilians to get out but details were not available.

Thousands of people had moved north to safer areas several days ago, just before fierce fighting erupted last week for control of Chavakachcheri town and its surrounding areas, 15 km. east of Jaffna town. About 70,000 people are believed to still remain in the area that recently saw pitched battles.

Though a military spokesman said the security forces had no "official information" about the cea-

sefire, Thenmarachchi division was quiet today. "There were no major incidents in Thenmarachchi today. We are holding operations," the military spokesman, Brig. Palitha Fernando said. He said that as far as the security forces were concerned, there was no ceasefire. "There is a proper procedure to declare a ceasefire. If the LTTE wants a ceasefire, they must tell us officially, it has to be discussed."

Meanwhile, efforts are under way to boost numbers in the security forces. Members of the Volunteer Force have been asked to join up, and the Defence Ministry announced an extension till June 10 for its walk-in amnesty to deserters.

The Government claimed in a statement that on Friday afternoon, it had sunk two LTTE barges "presumably loaded with supplies" in the Kilali lagoon south of Jaffna. It also claimed to have killed four LTTE cadres in two separate incidents.

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2000

Between LTTE devil and Sri Lanka deep sea Caution, India's watchword

I WROTE in this column nearly a month ago about the danger signals from Sri Lanka since the LTTE's capture of the Elephant Pass and launch of a major offensive against the Sri Lankan forces. The situation has reached critical thresholds and has been described by President Chandrika Kumaratunga as the gravest threat faced by her country. Appeals have been made to the Indian Government from various segments of the Sri Lankan society to prevent a military debacle for Sri Lanka and revive some kind of negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Speculation on the trajectory which the crisis will take in the coming weeks should necessarily be preceded by recounting of the ground realities as they have evolved.

The LTTE is in control of most of the Jaffna peninsula now. They are barely 10 kilometers away from the main formations of the Sri Lankan army confined within the city limits of Jaffna and perhaps only in the Jaffna Fort and surrounding areas. The Sri Lankan forces are in control of the Palaley Air Base and Kakasenthurai Port, as this column is being written. Their morale is low and they seem to be exhausted by the long campaign of attrition to which the LTTE has subjected them over the last five years.

It should also be remembered that, while sustaining their campaign in the Jaffna peninsula, the LTTE continued to confirm its capacity to undertake major violence in other parts of Sri Lanka from Trincomalee to Colombo, including a near-successful bomb attack on Kumaratunga last December. The overarching ground reality is of the LTTE being militarily and politically strong while the Sri Lankan Government appears to be on the defensive.

The question arises as to why the LTTE has launched its current campaign while only three months ago it had agreed to resume dialogue with the Sri Lankan Government through Norwegian mediation. The answer based on experience of

the last decade or more is that the LTTE's aim was to lull the Sri Lankan Government and the armed forces into a mood of military relaxation, while they themselves regrouped in a bid for significant military victories in order to negotiate from a position of strength. They appear to have succeeded in meeting this objective. The very segments of Sri Lankan politics, which refused to respond to Tamil aspirations despite several commitments given over the years and which demanded the abrupt departure of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force, are now asking for India's intervention.

The Buddhist monks, the then representatives of the former ruling UNP and even sections of the Sri Lankan armed forces now argue for Indian

form is a large-scale supply of food and essential medicines to the people of Jaffna and help in evacuation of the Sri Lankan forces from Jaffna. The last week of May witnessed intense consultations in the Indian Cabinet Committee on National Security and in the Strategic Policy Group of the National Security Council. There have also been reports of the Eastern Naval Command of India being put on the alert for possible evacuation operations.



J. N. DIXIT

The Government of India has also been in touch with the representatives of the Norwegian and US governments (apart from continuous communication with the Sri Lankan authorities) to help resolve the critical military situation. Obviously, India's assistance

Adjusting the square of India's commitment to the circle of the LTTE's demand for Eelam is going to be a difficult task

re-involvement. Given India's reluctance in this regard, they even advocate an Indian role in support of the Norwegian facilitating effort. New Delhi's response so far has been measured and cautious, as it should be in the context of our experiences in Sri Lanka between 1978 and 1990. India has ruled out any military intervention and indicated a willingness to extend humanitarian assistance to the people of Jaffna and the Sri Lankan armed forces bottled up in the peninsula subject to a formal request being received from the Government of Sri Lanka and to certain logical conditions.

Informal suggestions asking for such assistance have been conveyed both through governmental and non-governmental channels from Sri Lanka. Though India has not spelt out details of the humanitarian assistance, its likely

should be preceded by an effective ceasefire. A more important question is about the prospects of resumption of negotiations, if the immediate military confrontation ends. Will the LTTE be amenable to a ceasefire when it is on the ascendant? A pull-back of the Sri Lankan forces from Jaffna will enable the LTTE to consolidate its hold over the peninsula. The LTTE may then focus its attention on the eastern regions of Sri Lanka — Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai which the LTTE considers part of the traditional homeland of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Any negotiations for resolving the crisis and any involvement by India in the process, should be subject to the following considerations. It must be remembered that Prabhakaran and the LTTE have a passionate and deep ideological commit-

ment to create a Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. The military and political successes and survival which the LTTE has achieved would have made these commitments stronger. The Tamil demands of 1987 would be pitched higher this time. Conversely, the military conflict and reverses suffered by the Sri Lankan armed forces would have hardened Sinhalese attitudes about coming to any compromise with the Tamils.

Despite the LTTE's authoritarian and violent culture, Sri Lankan Tamils in general support the LTTE. Whether this support is based on fear or voluntary endorsement of the LTTE is not relevant. The support exists. The Tamil diaspora living in different countries which supports the LTTE has a vested interest in continuing the conflict situation in Sri Lanka because the political uncertainties in Sri Lanka enables them to stay abroad in comfort, with the privileges of political asylum and a refugee status.

The Muslim population of Sri Lanka, though Tamil-speaking, claims a separate ethno-religious identity. They would have their own demands which they would want to be an integral part of any settlement package. Though the LTTE is banned in India, it maintains its connections in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil public opinion in India and the Tamil Nadu politics are bound to influence Indian policies towards Sri Lanka in proportion to the intensity of critical predicament the Tamil population in Sri Lanka may face, even if the present crisis is overcome. In the context of its own geo-political predicament, India has declared its commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Adjusting the square of this commitment to the circle of the LTTE's demand for Eelam is going to be a difficult task.

The nature and content of India's involvement in Sri Lanka, however, cannot be predicted with any certainty. Vajpayee is, therefore, right in keeping Indian options open when stating that India is prepared to cooperate with the Government of Sri Lanka by appropriate means.

Lanka optimistic on eve of Pickering's arrival

Colombo, May 28

WITH ITS 30,000 troops managing to hold on to large territory in northern Jaffna, despite the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacks, the Sri Lankan Government is hopeful that peace moves would gather momentum during US Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering's visit to Colombo tomorrow.

Reflecting the Government's optimism in the face of the grim situation in the peninsula, the State-run *Sunday Observer* newspaper today reported that the peace moves, being sought from India and the US and initiated by Norway,

was expected to gather pace with Pickering's visit to the island nation.

The newspaper said that fighting in the peninsula had died down during the last few days with Government soldiers holding on to their ground after initial setbacks, though the LTTE appeared to be stepping up its attacks in the eastern Batticaloa.

Pickering's visit, being viewed by Colombo as a "powerful gesture of support" from Washington, comes after Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga indicated her terms for a cease-fire and peace talks.

Firmly ruling out immediate withdrawal of

troops from the peninsula, Kumaratunga had said she was ready for a cease-fire if the LTTE accepted freezing present positions and began time-bound talks.

Kumaratunga said in a television interview two days ago that both the sides could stop fighting and hold on to areas they currently controlled till a solution was reached to the vexed conflict. "We cannot withdraw the troops. Why should we withdraw the troops because we are asked by the LTTE?" she said. Reacting to India's offer to evacuate the troops, the Lankan President said she would consider it only as a "last resort" if the Army "lost" the war. (PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAY 2000

Ceasefire offer was LTTE's ploy to trigger civilian exodus, says Lanka

P. K. Balachandran
Colombo, May 28

HI-20 29

The Sri Lankan government did not respond to the LTTE's offer of a 12-hour ceasefire in the Thenmarachchi division on Saturday because it was but a ploy to force civilians to move out for political and military reasons, the military spokesman, Brig Palitha Fernando, said here today.

At any rate, the LTTE itself did not observe what was purported to be a unilateral ceasefire. According to a release from government's Special Media Information Centre today, there was sporadic artillery and mortar shelling by the LTTE in the Columbuturai and Chavakacheri areas on Saturday and that the government troops had replied in kind.

Brig Fernando told *The Hindustan Times* that the LTTE had two interests in mind. One was to get a clear line of fire and the other was to trigger an exodus to the Wannai, an area in its control, so that it could trumpet the exodus as a grave humanitarian crisis and secure the sympathy of the international community.

"But the bulk of the population defied the

LTTE and refused to move.

They had had a bitter experience in 1995 when the LTTE had forced an exodus to the Wannai and lived under LTTE control with all the shortages, lack of basic amenities, high taxes and extortions there. Why should they move when they are secure in Army controlled

'Victory' bash by Tamils

TAMILS OF Sri Lankan descent have announced plans for "victory celebrations" in three Canadian cities for the recent territorial gains made by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels against government troops in the island nation.

IANAS, Toronto

areas?" Brig Fernando asked. Even if one were to go by figures given out by the UNHCR, only 150 people had moved to Mallavi in the Wannai. Another 400 had moved towards the army-controlled areas in Point Pedro. "What is the significance of these numbers when there are thousands of people living there? Obviously, most people had not moved," Brig Fernando

pointed out.

According to a UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) press release today, on May 26, the LTTE had asked it to convey to the Sri Lankan authorities about its offer of a 12 hour ceasefire between 10.30 am to 10.30 pm on May 27 to enable people in the Thenmarachchi division to move to safer areas in the Wannai, which was under its control. The LTTE also said that the UNHCR could monitor the movement.

The UNHCR immediately conveyed this to the Ministry of Defence and the Joint Operations HQ about this on May 26 but till Sunday, there was no response. The UNHCR said that it was "extremely concerned" about the safety and security of the civilians in the area and appealed to both the government and the LTTE to ensure security for the civilians and their freedom to move to safety.

According to sources in the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about 150,000 people had been displaced since the hostilities began in December 1999, and especially since May 10, when the LTTE began its operations in the Jaffna peninsula.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 MAY 2000

Step in and snap out of it

The Government is being held prisoner by its regional allies. Non-action in Sri Lanka will signal India's influence in the region being diminished, argues K. NATWAR SINGH

INSTEAD OF a cohesive, well thought through, well coordinated Sri Lanka policy, what the Vajpayee Government offers is indecision, confusion, obfuscation, assertions, and a certain bewildered complacency. Since this Government is a prisoner of its coalition allies, the Prime Minister has given wide and uncontrolled latitude to Messrs Karunanidhi and Vaiko. Both these distinguished gentlemen are placing their regional compulsions above national interest. They should be refrained from doing so.

Their support for Eelam is at once dangerous and irresponsible. The sinister and wider implications of Eelam are staring us in the face. India cannot, and must not, agree to Sri Lanka becoming another Cyprus. The result of Government non-action is that our influence in the region is grievously diminished. While Norway's mediation is broadly speaking benign, the same cannot be said of several other countries actively fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

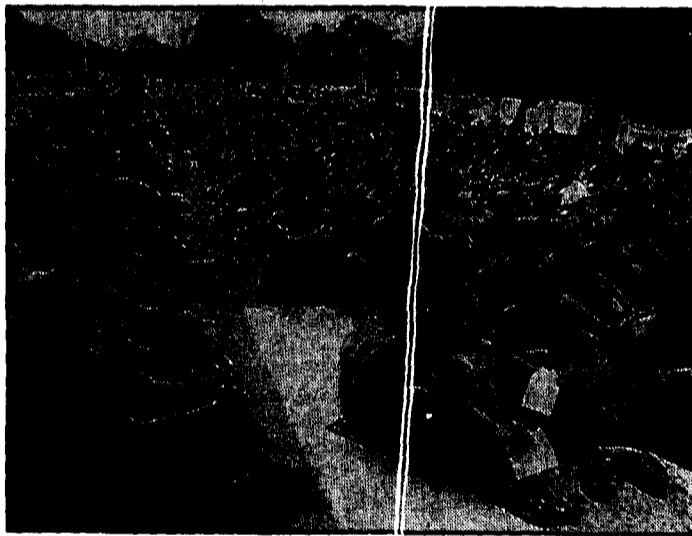
Senior ministers of the Central Government, instead of working for a national consensus on Sri Lanka, keep repeating — "no IPKF route". Pray, tell the world the route you wish to take and do so before the fires in Lanka spread further.

Even on "humanitarian aid", there is a not so calculated aimlessness. There must be a ceasefire. But who arranges it? If there is a ceasefire, then there is no need for India guaranteeing an orderly evacuation of 40,000 Sri Lankan troops from the Jaffna peninsula. Both sides must ask for Indian mediation. But India has banned the LTTE. Confusion worse confounded.

The Americans are now taking active

SRI LANKA

interest in finding a peaceful solution. According to the *Hindustan Times* (May 28, 2000), Messrs Pickering and Inderfurth of the US Department of State "did not label the LTTE as a terrorist organisation". Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth, on the one hand, says that, "We do not want to be in a position to endorse one package or the other" and on the other, he speaks of a "negotiated political solution to (the)



Sri Lankan conflict, one that would include constitutional reforms and devolution of power".

The Norwegians and the Americans maintain that India has a pivotal role if any mediation is to succeed. India, that is Bharat, is adopting an ostrich-like attitude. This is nothing but dereliction of duty. Especially after the emotional appeal of Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga.

It would be interesting to know whether Messrs Vajpayee, Advani and

Jaswant Singh have carefully studied the text of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of July 29, 1987, signed by President J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Colombo. Let me quote from the preamble of the agreement:

1. Desiring to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka,

2. Acknowledging that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual plural society consisting, inter alia, of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims (Moors) and Burghers,

3. Recognising that each ethnic group has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which has to be carefully nurtured,

4. Also recognising that the northern and eastern provinces have been areas of historical habitation of Sri Lankan Tamils, specially people, who have at all times hitherto lived together in this territory with other ethnic groups,

5. Conscious of the necessity of strengthening the forces contributing to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, and preserving its character as multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-

religious plural society, in which all citizens can live in equality, safety and harmony, and prosper and fulfil their aspirations.

In other words, the unitary nature of Sri Lankan polity must be ensured — no Eelam. Secondly, the plural nature of Sri Lankan society must be maintained. The Indo-Sri Lanka agreement clearly spelt out the constitutional means by which these objectives could be achieved.

It is India's moral, political and diplomatic duty to help Sri Lanka.

Battle between Tigers and Lankan troops spills over into sea waters

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's ethnic war entered the sea for the first time in six weeks, with the navy destroying rebel boats ferrying arms and ammunition to LTTE guerrillas in the north.

Government spokeswoman Kusum Rodrigo stated that the navy had intercepted and fired at seven speeding boats of Sea Tigers, the naval unit of the Tamil Tigers, destroying two vessels and damaging the rest. While four navy sailors had been wounded, the separatists had suffered an unspecified number of casualties, Ms Rodrigo added.

The latest sea battle came even as U.S. under-secretary of state Thomas Pickering began talks with Sri Lankan foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar on security issues.

The U.S., making it clear that it would not support the Tigers' demand for a homeland in the north and the east, stated that it would like the conflict to be resolved keeping Sri Lanka's territorial integrity intact.

Both Mr Pickering and Mr Kadirgamar declined to talk to reporters. The U.S. official is scheduled to meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe.

Officials said Mr Pickering was expected to discuss the Norwegian-backed peace initiative aimed at ending the ethnic battle which has

claimed over 60,000 lives in the last two decades.

Meanwhile, the UN said its workers had come across hundreds of people carrying their wounded family members out of the war zone, where civilians were being killed.

"In interviews with UNHCR staff members, these people indi-

WATERY GRAVE

- U.S. will not support LTTE demands
- Thomas Pickering to discuss Norway-backed initiative
- Govt. accuses rebels of conscripting civilians

cated that they were fleeing hostilities. There were injured among them," the UN high commissioner for refugees said in a statement. "They stated that many civilians had been killed or injured during military actions in the past two weeks," he added.

Responding to the UN statement, defence ministry spokesman Brig Palitha Fernando said, "You cannot blame us all the time for the deaths of civilians.

The terrorists are using artillery and some of it is falling on civilian areas." He said the government was doing its best to ensure the safety of about 500,000 civilians

trapped in the Jaffna peninsula.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan government on Monday charged the LTTE with conscripting school children along with men and women above 45 years of age in the northern Vanni region.

An official release stated that the LTTE, in an attempt to boost the depleting numbers of its cadres, had begun a massive conscription drive in the area under its control.

"The LTTE's area leaders are summoning civilians to village schools and asking everyone over 45 years to undergo military training with immediate effect," it said.

Quoting a number of villagers who had escaped into government-controlled areas in northern Vavuniya, the release said civilians, including school children, from the areas not cleared by the security forces had been instructed by the LTTE leadership to give up all their activities, including education, until Eelam, a separate state for Tamils, was established.

Over three lakh civilians, many of whom had migrated along with the LTTE when the army captured Jaffna in 1995, live in the Vanni region which comprises the Northern Vavuniya, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu districts. While Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu are under the LTTE's control, Vavuniya and Mannar are controlled by the army. (Agencies)

India urges Lanka to devolve power

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 30. — India has decided not to broker a ceasefire in Sri Lanka, and has instead concentrated its efforts on urging the Sri Lankan President to move rapidly towards devolution of power.

The government wants Norway and organisations like the ICRC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to bring about a ceasefire and a political settlement thereafter.

Humanitarian aid, however, has not been ruled out.

The government believes that Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's problems stem from her government's failure to devolve power. It has advised the President to obtain a clear political consensus on the

issue, and said that the devolution package should meet the aspirations of all sections.

India, however, made it clear that it does not see the LTTE

AMBUSH KILLS 8

COLOMBO, May 30. — Suspected LTTE guerrillas blew up a police truck near Vavuniya town today, killing at least eight policemen and injuring 10. Seven civilians too were wounded. The army claimed 120 Tigers and seven soldiers were killed in the Jaffna peninsula yesterday.

— PTI & Reuters

as the sole representative of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and that it remains committed to the island nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Observers feel the strategy would yield several advantages.

It would enable the government to keep out of the fluid military struggle, allowing other parties, backed by the USA and EU, to resolve the stand-off. It would satisfy the pro-Tamil groups in the Vajpayee government, while

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allowing India to hold on to its stand supporting Sri Lanka's territorial integrity.

(US under secretary of state for political affairs Mr Thomas Pickering said last night that the USA will not recognise a unilateral declaration of independence by the LTTE, reports PTI. The international community, including India, will always support the integrity of Sri Lanka, he said.)

(At the end of his one-day official visit to Sri Lanka, Mr Pickering warned the rebels: "in the event the LTTE declares a unilateral independence, the international community automatically becomes an arbitrator I don't believe there is any international support I could find for the Eelam".)

THE STATESMAN

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