

Lanka Tamils wary of Delhi role in talks

P K Balachandran
Colombo, December 28

THE CURRENT bonhomie between the Indian and Sri Lankan Governments is worrying Sri Lankan Tamils. Their leaders fear that New Delhi and Colombo may have come to a tacit understanding on the nature of a political settlement of the ethnic conflict in the island, a scheme which may not meet the demands of the Tamils, especially the LTTE.

"India may well want the Sri Lankan Government to desist from handing the Tamils more powers than what is given to the States under the Indian Constitution," said a member of a Tamil think tank and activist group known as Group of Colombo Tamils.

This group, which sees itself as a non-partisan watchdog, had acted as the catalyst in the formation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which swept the December 5 Parliamentary elections in the Tamil-speaking North Eastern province.

"We are anxious that India should not push for a unitary constitution containing an obnoxious article like Art 356 of

the Indian Constitution under which the Centre can sack and take over a provincial Government," said M K Eelaventhan, Secretary General of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELF).

Asked why he thought India should be bothered about the details of a constitutional settlement in Sri Lanka, Eelaventhan said India had "blessed" Wickremesinghe's plan for a political settlement. The TELF leader pointed out that the present United National Front (UNF) Government was trying to find a solution within a unitary State.

"The LTTE, which the TNA had publicly pledged to represent, will not allow the dilution of the Thimphu Declaration, which enshrines the concepts of self-determination and a Homeland for the Tamils, certainly not after the Tamil struggle had resulted in the loss of 70,000 lives," Eelaventhan said.

Prior to Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's visit to Delhi last weekend, pro-LTTE publications like the London-based *Tamil Guardian* had berated Colombo's move to involve New Delhi in the peace process, citing past "unpleasant experiences" with Indian involvement.

Indo-Lanka road link plan welcomed

P K Balachandran
Colombo, December 27

SRI LANKAN business leaders have welcomed the Indo-Lanka plan to build a road link between the two countries across the Palk Strait. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe described it as the "Hanuman Bridge".

"When it does become a reality, the bridge will lead to greater interaction and more business and that will be a positive development," said Nihal Fonseka, CEO DFCC Bank. As a banker he felt that Sri Lanka could develop as a

money market and financial hub for India because Sri Lankan banks are generally more efficient, faster and friendlier than Indian banks.

"We should coordinate with India which is already a world leader. We want visas given to Indians on arrival and currency should be made convertible," said Prema Cooray, chairman of Aitken Spence, a leader in tourism and hoteliering.

Sri Lankan industry should be able to compete with India if multi-national corporations were motivated to set up plants in Sri

Lanka to add value to goods and export them to India duty free under the Free Trade Agreement, Cooray said.

Kosala Wickremesinghe, former president of the Small Scale Industries (SSI) Association, did not think that a greater inflow of goods from India would harm Sri Lankan SSIs if the Sri Lankan Government helped the SSIs with subsidies and inputs and India lowered its tariffs.

Shipping expert Parakrama Dissanayaka said that the opening of the land route would not affect Colombo port significantly.

NORWAY TO MEDIATE

NORWAY IS willing to mediate if Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tiger rebel group want to restart peace talks, the foreign ministry said on Thursday. "We see it as very positive that the new Prime Minister gives high priority to the peace process, but it is too early to say what role Norway can play," acting press spokeswoman Gry Haaheim said.

AP, Oslo

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 DEC 2001

Lankans hail Wickremasinghe's visit to India as a success

By Farah Mihar Ahamed
Times News Network

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan government delegation led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe arrived here on Monday night following a successful visit to India.

Speaking to this newspaper, foreign minister Tyronne Fernando, who was part of the delegation, said Prime Minister Vajpayee had promised help to make the peace process a success. However, there is some doubt over the claim of the Lankan government about having achieved its goal of wooing India to play a crucial role in the peace process.

A joint statement by the governments of both the countries said New Delhi had welcomed the cessation of hostilities announced by the LTTE and the positive response of the Sri Lankan government and expressed the hope that the ceasefire would begin a process

that would restore lasting peace. A government statement said New Delhi was fully supportive of the measures outlined by Mr Wickremasinghe to take the peace process forward. The statement also said following a request made by Sri Lanka, India had agreed to provide 25,000 tonnes of wheat per month for the next one year.

Both the countries have also agreed to co-operate on a number of economic areas, including agriculture, power and the IT industry.

Sri Lanka has never clearly defined the role created for India, only repeatedly saying that it was a crucial one that was intended to put the Norway-led peace process back on the track. Indian involvement in Lankan peace process is not new, for, even the previous government had kept India in the forefront of the process, briefing New Delhi on every move.

Although the Indian response of

simply supporting the new Prime Minister's measures to bring peace appears to fall short of Colombo's expectations, analysts say the most important thing for Sri Lanka is to get India's blessings, and that has been achieved.

Mr Wickremasinghe's visit has also been hailed as a success by political parties and the media alike.

Not only did Indian leaders welcome Mr Wickremasinghe's peace initiative, they also promised economic aid once the peace talks start. In this sense, one could say that the Prime Minister's Indian visit has already paid dividends.

"We are very happy with the outcome, but this is only the starting point. At a later stage, we will want India to either mediate or actively support as a third party mediator," said Joseph Pararajasingham of the Tamil United Liberation Front.

26 DEC 2001

India, Sri Lanka to work for common market

By V. Jayanth

HD-11
CHENNAI, DEC. 24. Building on bilateral ties, India and Sri Lanka today agreed to work on a 'South Asian Common market', the visiting Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, said here tonight.

On a brief stop-over here on his way back to Colombo, Mr. Wickremesinghe said the bilateral and free trade agreements among the countries in the region could be the building blocks for developing the South Asian Common market.

Talking to *The Hindu*, he described his three-day visit to India - his first after taking office as Prime Minister - as "very satisfying and substantive". Apart from the "political bridge we have built, I was surprised at the Indian response to our proposal for a land bridge. We have agreed to launch a feasibility study into the whole project", he explained.

Mr. Wickremesinghe said he had very 'fruit-

ful' discussions with the entire Indian leadership and was "very satisfied" with the exchange of views. India had agreed to fully support the peace process.

The Prime Minister said he had sought Indian cooperation and expertise on a whole range of issues from Information Technology and Agriculture, to enhanced trade and investments. "We have requested that the agricultural scientists, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, could visit Colombo as early as possible and help us identify the Indian agricultural institutions with which we should foster cooperation and collaboration".

A NASSCOM delegation would soon visit Sri Lanka and assist the island Government to switching over to the role of a 'catalyst' and encourage the private sector to emerge in a big way. India had also shown interest in the power sector and the companies here would be invited to take a look at providing medium-term partnership to Sri Lanka to augment its

power generation. Right now, the island was going through an acute shortage of electricity.

The Minister for Economic Reforms, Mr. Milinda Moragoda, explained that Sri Lanka was looking to India for cooperation in the fields of energy, transport, telecommunications, petroleum and also for sharing expertise on the reforms process.

"Our Prime Minister has a vision of developing the island into a gateway to the sub-continent. That means, we will have to push ahead of India with the reforms, which have stalled for some time now", Mr. Moragoda said.

The Sri Lankan delegation left tonight by a scheduled flight, particularly happy at the Indian offer of 300,000 tonnes of wheat over 12 months at concessional prices. Wheat and subsidised bread being a 'sensitive' issue in the island, the import of the grain for milling and use for making bread was bound to be a 'major hit' with the islanders.

THE HINDU

India backs Ranil's peace process

By Atul Aneja

410-1
- 25/92

NEW DELHI, DEC.24. India today extended full support to the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's proposal to push forward the peace process in the island nation. In a joint statement issued at the end of Mr. Wickremesinghe's three-day stay today, India said it was "fully supportive" of the measures outlined by Mr. Wickremesinghe to "take the peace process forward."

During his visit, Mr. Wickremesinghe met several political leaders. After Sunday's meeting with the former Prime Ministers, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao and Mr. I.K. Gujral, he held "substantive discussions" with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, today. He also met the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

India outlined its broad approach for resolving Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis. It also reiterated "its commitment to the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka." Speaking to reporters after his talks with Mr. Wickremesinghe, Mr. Jaswant Singh said that, "peace should be brokered keeping in mind the interests of all the ethnic groups involved."

A delegation of the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) leaders met Mr. Vajpayee, prior to his meeting with Mr. Wickremesinghe. "Mr. Vajpayee told us that he will tell Mr. Wickremesinghe that this was an opportune time to resolve the ethnic crisis," the PMK president, Dr. Ramadoss said.

Later at a press conference, Mr. Wickremesinghe said that he was aware that the talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will not be without hiccups.

"There will be breakdowns," he said. But to override these problems, the foundation of the talks should be gradually strengthened so that "substantive measures" could be discussed, he added. By January 24, humanitarian supplies to the Tamil areas will be fully resumed.

The Norwegian "facilitation" will be necessary for establishing communication with the LTTE, but face-to-face talks were not on the horizon, Mr. Wickremesinghe said and added that he did not envisage



The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

Indian mediation in Sri Lanka. Keen to push economic ties, the two countries have decided to initiate a feasibility study for building a bridge along the Palk Straits.

India will provide 25,000 tonnes of wheat every month to cater to one-third of the Sri Lankan requirement.

Mr. Jaswant Singh is expected to visit Sri Lanka early next year and a meeting of the Commerce Ministers is also on the cards.

India, Sri Lanka to work for common market: Page 11

THE HINDU

25 DEC 2001

Tigers against India's role in talks

P K Balachandran
Colombo, December 20

THE LTTE is against the Government's move to involve India in the peace process. Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando has said that the rebel ceasefire would help strengthen the country's case for a negotiated settlement.

Indo-Lankan prime ministerial-level talks are to be held in New Delhi on December 23 and 24. "We hope this will facilitate our talks with Indian leaders in a constructive way," the State-owned *Daily News* quoted Fernando as saying.

The London-based *Tamil Guardian* quoted "sources close to the LTTE" in Europe saying that there was criticism about the unilateral move by the Government to change the "facilitatory arrangements". The move

to give India a greater role in facilitation was seen as a way of sidelining Norway.

Tamil Guardian quoted Tamil experts as saying that India had "vested interests as a regional power", and was therefore unreliable. It wondered how India could play a neutral role when it had banned the Tigers. LTTE supremo Prabhakaran had said earlier that the Tigers would enter talks with the Sri Lankan Government only if the latter lifted the ban on it.

The peace process broke down last year after Colombo unilaterally downgraded Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim in June. "Facilitation is a process that involves both parties to the conflict. Changes in facilitatory arrangements cannot be unilaterally undertaken by either side without discus-

sion and agreement of the other," the *Tamil Guardian* said.

The publication said that Tamil political circles in Sri Lanka had also expressed dismay over India's increased involvement in the light of the "unhappy" experience of the past.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will be travelling to New Delhi on December 22 to hold talks with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and other Indian leaders on a wide range of bilateral and regional issues.

The Lankan Foreign Minister did not say if the Government would reciprocate the LTTE's gesture and declare a ceasefire, but he spoke of a positive response coming soon.

"We welcome the LTTE's move. It will give a better start to the peace effort. As a gesture of goodwill we will respond to the

LTTE's truce announcement in a few days. As we had stressed since the inception of our political campaign we are determined to reach the goal of peace through deliberations," Fernando said.

While a decision on reciprocal ceasefire was awaited, it was clear that the Government was seriously thinking of easing the economic embargoes against the LTTE controlled areas in the north as demanded by the LTTE.

On Thursday, Minister of Rehabilitation Dr Jayalath Jayawardene was locked in discussions with the officials concerned amidst reports that the embargoes might be eased before the Prime Minister's departure for India.

The LTTE's gesture and the Government's response got multi-party support.

The India-Sri Lanka equation

By V. Suryanarayan

HD-10

21/12

Bilateral relations can be put on a secure footing if Colombo and New Delhi are determined to tackle certain important issues, which unfortunately have not received adequate attention.

THE SRI Lankan Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, is scheduled to visit India from December 22 to 24, his first official visit abroad after assuming power. It underlines the significance Mr. Wickremesinghe attaches to bilateral relations. He will be accompanied by Mr. Tyrone Fernando, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and other senior officials. The two sides can naturally be expected to exchange views on the ethnic conflict and how Mr. Wickremesinghe proposes to revive the Norwegian initiative on talks with the Tigers.

While discussing the prospects of India-Sri Lanka relations, it is necessary to keep in mind two historical realities. First, India's abiding and seminal influences on all aspects of Sri Lankan life; second, despite the shared cultural heritage, the asymmetrical power equation has made the Sinhalese deeply suspicious of India's foreign policy objectives. This "love-hate relationship" can be illustrated by the following: The induction of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), on the invitation of President Jayawardene, enabled the Sri Lankan Army to devote itself completely to countering the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) threat. However, the military marginalisation of the LTTE, at a heavy cost of men and material, did not earn India the gratitude of the Sinhalese. It gave a fillip to Sinhalese-Buddhist chauvinism and justified the argument that Sri Lanka would soon become a client state of its hegemonistic neighbour.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, even while in the Opposition, has repeatedly stressed that relations with India should be based on cooperative co-existence. He is sensitive to the Tamil Nadu factor and devotes a lot of time to understanding the dynamics of the State's politics. Bilateral relations can be put on a secure footing if Colombo and New Delhi are determined to tackle certain important issues, which unfortunately have not received adequate attention.

In the broad canvas of India-Sri Lanka relations, a matter of serious concern for New Delhi should have been the welfare and security of the "stateless" people of Indian origin in the island. The late Jawaharlal Nehru maintained that except for those who voluntarily opted for Indian ci-

tizenship, all the others were the responsibility of Ceylon. Taking into consideration their long period of residence and yeoman contributions to the economy, Nehru advised Colombo to confer on them citizenship. But from the mid-1960s, this policy got sidetracked. The Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964 and the Sirimavo-Indira Gandhi Pact of 1974, which reduced the people of Indian origin to "merchandise" to be divided between the two countries in the name of "good neighbourly relations", were not only a betrayal of the Gandhi-Nehru legacy but also a bad precedent for India's policy towards Indians overseas.

Two aspects of the agreements deserve special mention. These agreements were concluded without taking into consideration the interests of the affected people. Second was the conundrum of natural increase. All children born after October 31, 1964, were accounted in "natural increase". As a result, the fate of unborn generations was sealed. This conundrum was brought to the notice of Indira Gandhi and she decided that "this can't go on for ever". The Pact was allowed to lapse on October 31, 1981, but the repatriation of Indian passport holders continued.

Due to protracted struggles, the Damocles Sword of "statelessness" has been removed. The enactment of the Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act of 1986 and the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act of 1988 were two important milestones. The question naturally arises — what about the future of 84,816 Indian passport holders, residue of the bilateral pacts of 1964 and 1974? The repatriation of Indian citizens was stopped with the outbreak of communal violence in the island and the consequent inflow of Sri Lankan refugees. The India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 unfortunately linked the return of Indian repatriates with the return of the refugees.

For a proper appreciation of the present situation, it is necessary to keep in mind certain basic realities. Many who had applied for Indian citizenship are dead. Others do not want to be repatriated to India to start a new life. In fact, some have petitioned the Indian High Commission seeking permission to withdraw their applications for citizenship. Some have declared themselves Sri Lankan citizens.

Fortunately, the draft constitutional proposals, submitted by the Chandrika Kumaratunga Government to Parliament, and which could not be enacted due to competitive Sinhala politics, contain provisions which can solve the problems of these people once and for all. According to Articles 6(a) and Section 2(6), all those who were permanent residents of Sri Lanka on October 31, 1964, and their 'natural increase', would be entitled to Sri Lankan citizenship. These provisions were finalised by Prof. G. L. Peiris, then Minister for Constitutional Affairs, in consultation with Mr. Wickremesinghe's United National Party. Given the justness of the cause, New Delhi should persuade Mr. Wickremesinghe to enact these citizenship provisions without any delay as a constitutional amendment.

The second issue relates to the problems faced by Tamil Nadu fishermen in the Palk Bay. The root cause of the present tension is a conflict of interests. On the one side are the Governments in New Delhi and Colombo, who in the name of "good neighbourly relations" concluded the Maritime Agreements of 1974 and 1976, which ceded the island of Kachchativu to Sri Lanka. On the opposite side are the Tamil Nadu fishermen, who will not easily give up a means of livelihood they enjoyed for several centuries. It would be foolish to create a "Berlin Wall" in the Palk Bay, for the simple reason that the links between the two countries cannot be severed. They are like Siamese twins; what

afflicts one will affect the other.

The best possible solution, keeping in view the long-term objectives of cordial bilateral relations, security sensitivities of Colombo and the livelihood of Tamil Nadu's fishermen, is to get the island of Kachchativu and adjacent islets on "lease in perpetuity" solely for fishing, drying of nets and pilgrimage. Sri Lankan sovereignty over the islands could be upheld; at the same time, lease in perpetuity would enable the Tamil Nadu fishermen to carry on their vocation as they have done for several centuries. The "Tin Bigha Agreement" between India and Bangladesh could be a precedent. Mr. Wickremesinghe's visit to India presents an opportunity for the two countries to adopt a pragmatic and functional approach. A dialogue should commence between New Delhi and Colombo, with Tamil Nadu's participation, to solve the problem.

India's Sri Lanka policy on the crucial ethnic issue has taken a zigzag course, confounding opponents and supporters alike. The mutually contradictory approach of mediation-cum-militant support, conclusion of the India-Sri Lanka Accord without Tamil participation and the IPKF misadventure illustrate the inherently limited role an external power can play in conflict-resolution in a neighbouring country. Despite the twists and turns, India's commitment to Sri Lanka's territorial integrity remains.

The post-election scenario does not augur well for enduring peace. The LTTE, which remains the most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world, has made its intentions clear by attacking military installations in Trincomalee district. The moderates, represented by the TULF, have been frightened into silence; they have become apologists of the LTTE. While extending support to the Norwegian initiative, New Delhi should, at the same time, try and bring together the UNP and the PA so that a Sinhala consensus emerges on the resolution of the ethnic conflict. But such a consensus appears a distant dream. A long winter of discontent is ahead for Sri Lanka.

(The writer is former Director, Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai.)

THE HINDU

21 DEC 2001

Indian team safe: Lanka board

SNS & Agencies *SK 25/7*

MUMBAI, July 24. - The Sri Lankan cricket board has assured the BCCI of the safety of the Indian cricket team and the continuation of the triangular one-day series involving India, New Zealand and hosts Sri Lanka, BCCI executive director, Mr Sharad Diwadkar said.

The Sri Lankan board has sent a fax message assuring safety of all players. "I have been in constant touch with the Sri Lankan board and the Indian team manager (Mr Anant Mate) and there is no problem."

He spoke to Mr Mate in the morning itself just before the

Indian team were leaving for practice.

The BCCI president, Mr AC Muthaiah said Indian players in Colombo were safe and he had discussed this aspect with the team.

Mr Muthaiah said he had spoken to Mr Mate, coach John Wright and Sourav Ganguly about the developments there.

The Indian team had their usual four-hour practice session this afternoon.

Security beefed up: Security has been beefed up for the one-day triangular series in Sri Lanka after the suicide attack by LTTE, adds Reuters.

India, New Zealand and Sri Lanka have decided to play on

after they were promised increased security by the Sri Lankan cricket board.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka discussed the current situation today with officials in charge of security, match referee Cammie Smith and managers of the three teams," the Board said in a statement.

"All matches will continue as scheduled. Officials in charge of security have given assurances that adequate precautions are being taken to ensure the safety of players and officials, which is of the highest priority."

The Indian and New Zealand teams said they were satisfied with the security arrange-

ments.

"The board has promised us additional security, both at the ground and at the hotel," the Indian team manager said.

The New Zealand manager, Jeff Crowe, was also confident of the rest of the event going through smoothly.

"We are pretty happy with the security provided to us. There are no problems and we will play on," he said.

"I don't think cricketers are the target. It is a distraction but once you get to the middle and start the game, it should go on."

Hosts Sri Lanka take on New Zealand in the next match of the tri-series tomorrow.

NEWSPAPER

Lanka rejects Indian concern at raids

Colombo, July 7

SRI LANKA today rejected as "unrealistic and unacceptable" India's recent statement expressing disappointment over the aerial attacks on LTTE positions in Jaffna. It accepted US comments on the issue as "principled and realistic".

The Lankan foreign ministry issued a statement saying: "What one government said is unrealistic and unacceptable. While expressing great disappointment at these developments that Government made no reference to our Government's assertion that the bombings were a pre-emptive strike in self-defence in the face of an LTTE build-up."

Without directly referring to India, the statement asserted: "It was the unquestioned right of a sovereign state to defend its territorial integrity, a right that has often been exercised by the Government referred to above."

On India's comment that there was no alternative to peace, it said the proposition was "self-evident" but the question was whether Sri Lanka should "seek peace at any cost".

"If the price of peace is that our Government should abjure the right of self-defence and remain passive even in the event of an attack on its territorial integrity, no Government of Sri Lanka will ever pay that price," the statement said.

Referring to the US statement, which voiced concern over the air raids, the foreign ministry said: "The other Government explicitly stated that it respects the right of any nation to defend its territorial integrity."

The foreign ministry statement praised as "principled and realistic" the approach by the US expressing hope that the two sides would cease hostilities and turn towards negotiations.

The statement reiterated that the LTTE was preparing for another assault on the Jaffna peninsula, which it failed to recapture in May last year.

The formal response from the foreign ministry follows strident criticism against the Indian

statement by a section of the media and nationalist parties in Sri Lanka.

A couple of days ago, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar indirectly responded to India's "disappointment" by asserting that his country reserved the right to defend its territory, regardless of what other governments said.

It was clear that India's statement was not seen as an even-handed response to the situation in Jaffna, as it made no reference to the details released by the Sri Lankan Government on the elaborate logistic preparations believed to have been made by the LTTE for a fresh onslaught.

On the other hand, the statement by the US Embassy referred to "the right of any state to defend its territory", but cautioned that "violence begets violence".

This portion, not referred to in the Sri Lankan response, could have been either a common advice to both parties to refrain from attacking each other, or a warning to the Government not to pursue the use of force.

Sri Lanka has taken it as a realistic advice, while India's position is seen as "unrealistic and unacceptable" in the light of its known principle of commitment to the territorial integrity of a sovereign state.

PTI

'An unquestioned right', says Colombo

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 7. Sri Lanka today said New Delhi's stand on last week's air raids in Jaffna peninsula was "unrealistic and unacceptable" but described the U.S. concern at the same event as "principled and realistic".

A Foreign Ministry release, describing itself as a "response to requests for comments" on statements by "two foreign Governments" on the aerial bombings, did not directly name either India or the U.S. and made only a roundabout, though obvious references, to the two countries.

"What one Government said is unrealistic and unacceptable. While expressing 'great disappointment at these develop-

ments', that Government made no reference to our Government's assertion that the bombings were a pre-emptive strike in self-defence..." the release said.

New Delhi had expressed "great disappointment" at events in Sri Lanka after the air raids last Saturday, and said there was "no alternative to peace".

The timing of the bombardment, a week before the minority People's Alliance ruling coalition was to face Parliament on a vote to extend Emergency regulations in the country, gave rise to the interpretation that it was a politically motivated act by a beleaguered Government.

But, Sri Lanka said it was acting purely in national interest, to prevent a massive assault being

planned by the LTTE in Jaffna peninsula.

Today's statement declared that it was the "unquestioned right" of any sovereign state to defend its territorial integrity and made a point of mentioning that it was a right India had "often" exercised.

The U.S. had expressed "concern" at the air raids and cautioned that "violence begets violence" but Sri Lanka appears to have not found that advice half as objectionable because it included a line that about respect for "the right of any nation to defend its territorial integrity" and called on the Government and the LTTE to begin negotiations. "That approach is principled and realistic," the Ministry said.

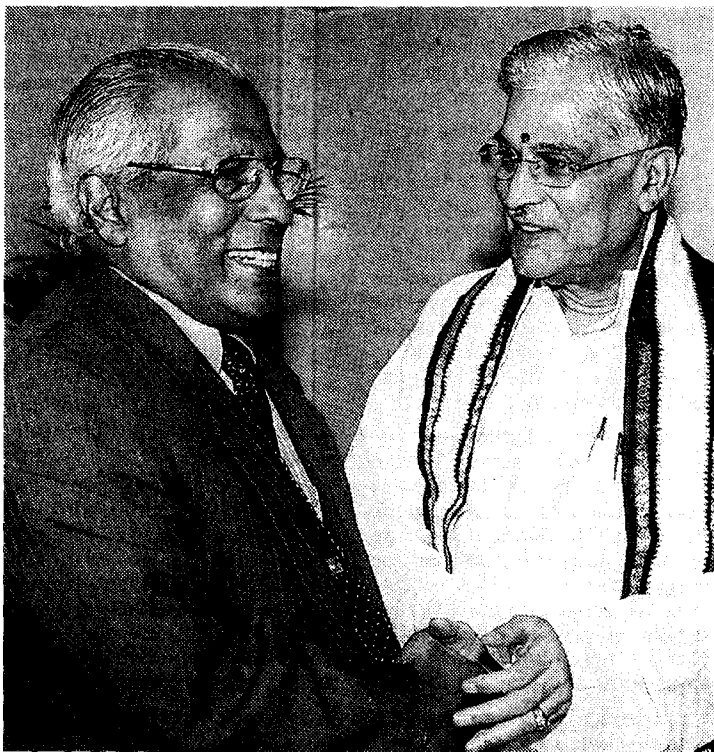
India, Sri Lanka to evolve strategy in patenting

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 25. India and Sri Lanka today decided to explore the possibilities of evolving a regional strategy in patenting. The need for such a strategy came up for discussion during a meeting between the visiting Sri Lankan Minister for Justice, Mr. Batty Weerakoon, and the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, here.

The Ministers shared the opinion that a regional strategy was needed in patenting in view of some of the restrictive WTO guidelines. Another issue that came up for discussion pertained to enhancing scientific cooperation, particularly in phosphates, bio-fertilizers and herbal medicines.

Dr. Joshi is also said to have told the Sri Lankan Minister about the potential for cooperation in the area of bio-technology. According to an official release, Dr. Joshi expressed the hope that Sri Lanka would make the most of the reservation of 15 per cent seats in educational institutions for foreign students.



The Sri Lankan Minister for Justice, Mr. Batty Weerakoon, with the Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

High Commission officials visit fishermen again

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 13. Two senior officials in the Indian High Commission flew to Jaffna today and met the 50 Indian fishermen arrested in Sri Lankan waters since April. HD-121

The fishermen were produced before the Jaffna District Magistrate today for the extension of their remand. They are yet to be charged. 14/6

The Indian officials, Mr K.B. Gokulachandran and Captain M. Gopinath, travelled to the peninsula following rumours that the fishermen had begun a hunger fast demanding their early release. India - S Lanka

"The officials have ascertained that the fishermen are not on fast and have no plans to do so either, but they are naturally anxious to obtain an early release and repatriation to India," the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Gopalkrishna Gandhi, said.

He said the fishermen had made no complaints about prison conditions.

'Indian support to Lanka peace process crucial'

By Sherna Gandhi

OSLO: Eric Solheim, the Norwegian peace negotiator in Sri Lanka, says there are reasons for cautious optimism in the progress of the talks he is holding with the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but it is also true that the situation is very fragile.

"Outside Sri Lanka, India is a most important partner, whose support is crucial. So we have kept the Indian government informed on all developments. We have got very useful support from India and keep in touch on a weekly basis either in Oslo, Delhi or Colombo, he said. He has met external affairs minister Jaswant Singh and foreign secretary Chokila Iyer.

In an interview here last Friday, Mr Solheim explained how Norway came to be involved in the peace process when it was requested by both parties, two-and-a-half years ago, to act as facilitator with the aim

of bringing the two parties together. But finally, Mr Solheim emphasised: "The parties have to sit face to face and reach a solution. We cannot impose anything."

There have been numerous meetings in London with the LTTE leadership and with other parties in Sri Lanka that support the LTTE. However, Mr Solheim was firm in revealing nothing about the substance or even the tenor of the talks. "That is a part of the issue we cannot reveal. Norway cannot reveal directly or indirectly the contents of the talks," he said.

If the aim is to make talks possible, then it is essential to find some middle ground. Are his efforts directed towards a ceasefire before the talks begin?

"Norway is not going into this with any particular aim; we are trying to find out what happened in the past," he replied.

It could be said that such talks could serve a useful purpose for the

LTTE, making them appear reasonable and in a good light even if they do not intend any serious follow up. Does the Norwegian government not fear that it may be used?

"We would not have invested so much time if we thought that," Mr Solheim replied. "We really feel that the government and the LTTE are serious about finding a negotiated peace."

Mr Solheim says from the time the talks started there has certainly been a degree of progress. There has not, for instance, been any military attack from the LTTE after it announced its unilateral ceasefire.

On Tuesday, the LTTE issued a statement that it would not participate in peace talks till the government lifted the ban on it and allowed fuel and cement to pass through to areas controlled by it. Last month the Sri Lankan government had lifted embargoes on 24 items.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 APR 2001

India has key role in LTTE talks: Envoy

'Tiger talks will be hard, but better than war'

BY P. MOHAN DAS

Colombo, April 12: Acknowledging India's role as crucial and positive in the peace process in Sri Lankan, Norwegian special peace envoy Erik Solheim has shrugged off reports that India has opposed to the involvement of any Western country in the peace process.

Mr Solheim denied India's alleged role in trying to block the participation of Britain and Japan in the monitoring committee and said that New Delhi has always been supportive in any peace initiative in the island country. "We have kept India informed about all major steps and got useful advice from a country with deep knowledge of the situation in Sri Lanka," he informed adding that it was for the Lankan government and the LTTE to decide upon any possible future monitoring committee.

Emphasising that Norway was a longtime friend of India, the peace envoy said that it would in no circumstance propose the name of countries for the committee which would be seen as an offence by the lat-

ter. Reiterating the view that the problem to the conflict in Sri Lanka could only be solved through a dialogue between the LTTE and the government, Mr Solheim considered the role of Prabhakaran as crucial in settling the ethnic crisis.

"Even those who strongly disagree with the policy and the methods of the LTTE, will acknowledge that Prabhakaran is the undisputed leader of that organisation," noted Mr Solheim. In an interview to the online *The Lanka Academic*, Mr Solheim said President Chandrika Kumaratunga is absolutely committed to a peaceful settlement of the problem, adding that Prabhakaran, too, was keen for the same.

"If Norway thought that either the government or the LTTE was not serious, we would not spend so much time on trying to assist the parties," he pointed out.

But the most crucial factor is the willingness of the parties. We sincerely trust that both the government and LTTE are seriously trying to find a peaceful solution. But of course, it will take time. Talks will be protracted but are much preferable to war." (UNI)

Lanka troops kill 5 Tigers on eve of goodwill truce

Colombo, April 12: A day before a goodwill truce between the government and Tamil Tiger separatists was to begin, security force soldiers killed five rebels in the northern war zone, a government spokesman said on Thursday. Troops shot and killed two rebels in the northern Jaffna peninsula on Wednesday and three others were killed and four wounded in Welioya, in the northeast, said U. Gajaman, deputy government spokesman.

The government announced on Wednesday that its troops would observe a four-day ceasefire to mark the Sinhalese and Tamil new year, the only holiday the two communities share. The truce was to run from Friday, the holiday, until April 17.

Tamil rebels have been observing a unilateral ceasefire since Christmas eve. It expires on April 24. They have demanded the lifting of a ban on their organisation and a longer truce before peace talks brokered by Norway can begin.

The government has ruled out a long ceasefire, saying the rebels would use it to rearm and regroup. Besides Sri Lanka, the rebels are banned in the United States, India and Britain. (AP)

'India not against LTTE, Lanka pact'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, March 18. - Norwegian special envoy Mr Erik Solheim has said India is "fully supportive and appreciative" of the Oslo-brokered Sri Lankan peace efforts. This has put at rest recent media reports that New Delhi is impeding the peace talks.

"They are all rumours. There has been no such objection from India, which is fully supportive and appreciative of my efforts" Mr Solheim said in an exclusive interview from Oslo to the independent Tamil daily, *Thinakkural*.

Mr Solheim has denied reports that spoke of India's objections to the presence of some countries in a proposed monitoring committee to oversee the implementation of a prospective preliminary agreement.

THE STATESMAN

19 MAR 2001

Saarc stage sets table for Pak talks

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Feb. 23: Less than 24 hours after renewing the Ramzan truce a third time, India has agreed to a Sri Lankan proposal to call a meeting of Saarc foreign secretaries in May this year.

The proposed meeting, the date and venue of which have yet to be worked out, is significant as it could lead to an interaction between the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries on the sidelines. This, in turn, could pave the way for a return to the talks table.

Delhi has, however, made it clear that its green signal to a foreign secretary-level meet does not mean it will agree to a summit meeting of the Saarc nations.

"The standing committee of the Saarc (which is at the foreign secretary level) will meet in the second half of May this year subject to the convenience of all member countries," foreign ministry spokesman R.S. Jassal said. But he added there was no consensus on the Saarc summit yet.

It is significant that the end of the three-month truce and the May meeting comes close to a fortnight of each other.

On one hand, it can be seen as another chance India is giving Pakistan to restore peace. On the other, it gives Delhi an escape hatch to pull out of the commitment if things do not work to its liking.

The last meeting of Saarc for-

eign secretaries was held in the Sri Lankan hill resort of Nuwara Eliya in March 1999. It is too early to say whether the May meet will lead to a Saarc summit, stalled since July 1998.

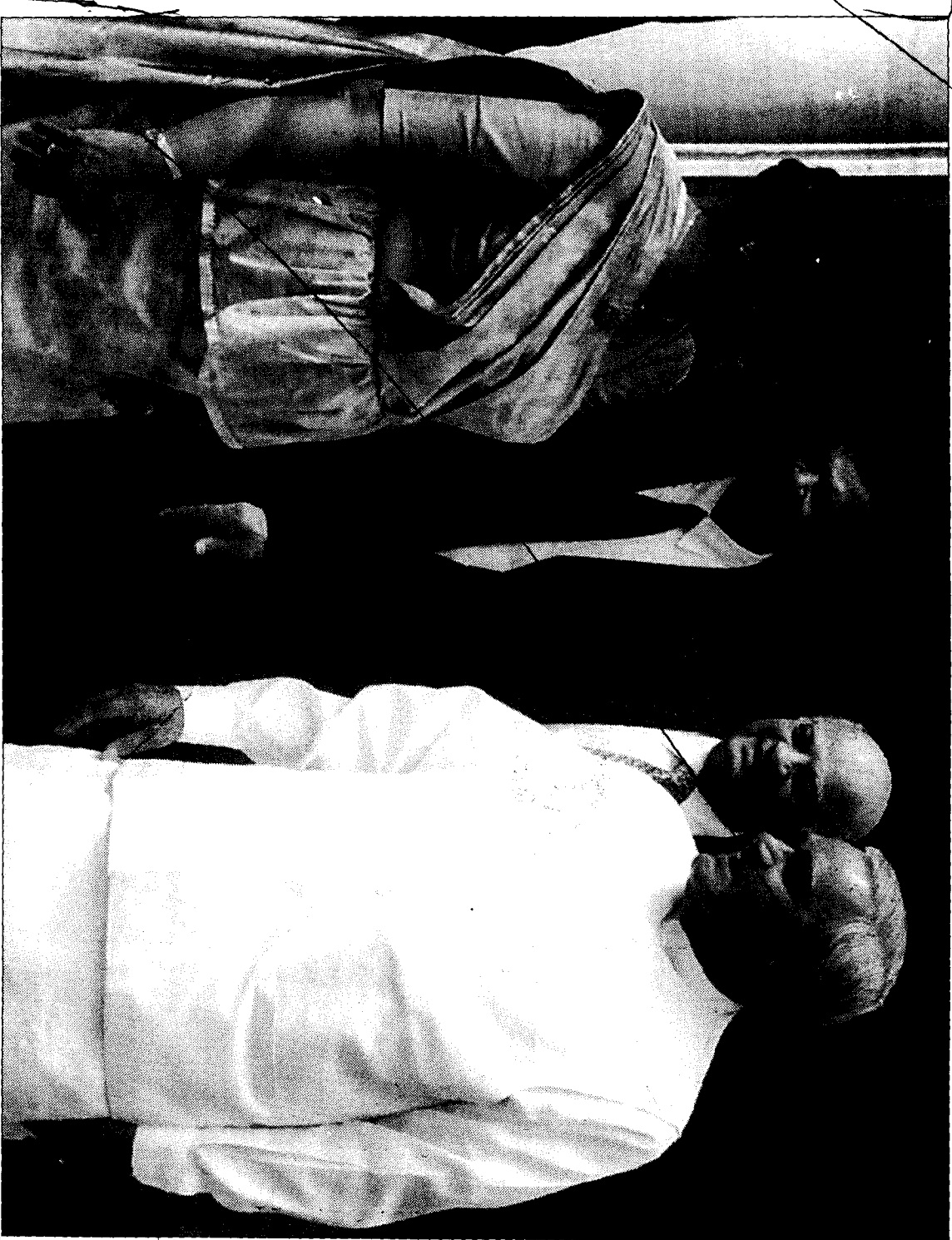
Visiting Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today held wide-ranging talks with the government, including President K.R. Narayanan, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and foreign minister Jaswant Singh. Among the issues discussed were the Saarc summit and a meeting of senior officers of its technical committee.

Asked the agenda of the May meeting, Jassal only said: "Saarc related issues". But South Block does not rule out a meeting between the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries on the sidelines, which could be a precursor to resuming bilateral dialogue.

Indian officials, however, tried to maintain that the proposed meeting of the Saarc technical committee and the India-Pakistan dialogue are separate issues.

"Our stand on reviving the dialogue process with Pakistan remains unchanged. To create the right atmosphere for resuming talks, Pakistan will have to stop cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir," a senior foreign ministry official said.

However, this could be seen as India's public posture only. Developments over the past few weeks, including a first-time phone conversation between Vajpayee and



Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee with Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga in New Delhi on Friday. A Telegraph picture.

Pakistan chief executive Pervez Musharraf, have been positive. Besides, India's three-month extension of the truce in Kashmir, as compared to the earlier one-month renewals, has brightened the chances for creation of a conducive atmosphere that could lead to the resumption of bilateral dialogue.

As chair of the Saarc coun-

tries, Sri Lanka is keen that the summit is held soon.

Kumaratunga, however, appears to have realised that India would not like to rush into it, and has decided to proceed a step at a time.

The two sides also discussed Colombo's ceasefire initiative to restore peace in the embattled island and find a lasting solution

to the decade-old ethnic strife. India assured Kumaratunga that it continued to support Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity and believed that a "negotiated political settlement is the only way to restore lasting peace which will meet the aspirations of all sections of Lankan society."

Kumaratunga apprised the In-

dian leaders about her proposal to set up a constitutional commission that will promote a debate on the devolution package and help build a national consensus on constitutional reforms.

She also spoke about setting up a monitoring group in the Saarc, but the Indian leaders felt that further discussion was required before it is implemented.

Lanka persuades India to revive Saarc talks

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 23 FEBRUARY

SIGNS OF a thaw regarding Pakistan are in the air, with India agreeing to revive the moribund Saarc process. The result of the discussions between the visiting Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was that the Saarc standing committee, at the foreign secretary level, will meet, possibly towards the latter half of May.

This will be the first meeting of senior officials from India and Pakistan in a regional context and informal discussions on the sidelines cannot be ruled out.

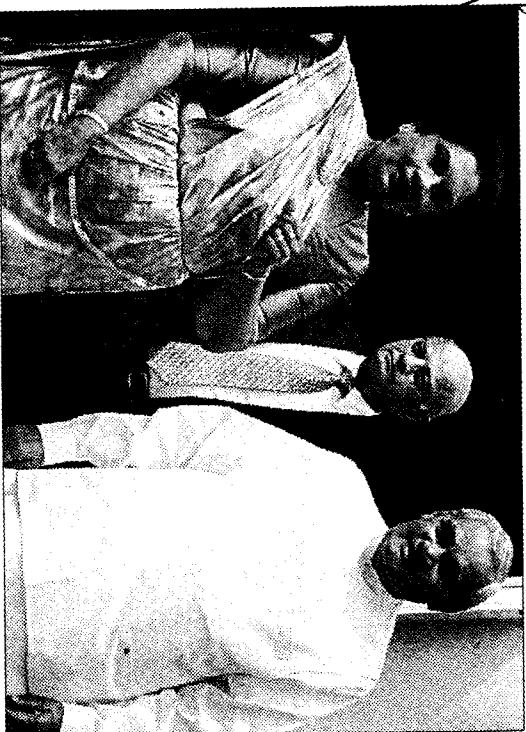
Although there was no consensus on resuming the Saarc summit, the resumption of senior official-level meetings is seen as a significant step forward. The Saarc summit, observers say, will have to take second place to an Indo-Pak summit, since India cannot be seen to be using a regional forum to address a bilat-

eral problem.

The regional grouping has been held hostage to Indo-Pak relations since inception, but there was a virtual dead-end after the 1999 coup in Pakistan which resulted in India calling off the Saarc summit in Kathmandu. As a matter of fact, over the past couple of years, India has concentrated greater energies on BIMSTEC and more comprehensive bilateral arrangements with neighbouring countries to overcome the Saarc logjam.

Ms Kumaratunga had a busy day, with almost back-to-back meetings with the foreign minister, Prime Minister and with the President on Friday evening.

The internal ethnic conflict within Sri Lanka occupied the leaders as well. Although the LTTE extending their ceasefire for the second time, beautifully timed to coincide with Ms Kumaratunga's visit to Delhi, it doesn't seem to have affected the Sri Lanka government's decision



PARTNERS IN PROGRESS: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga (left) meets Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Friday. — AFP

to press on with the military offensive — they view the ceasefire as a “propaganda” trick, aimed largely as getting breathing space to regroup forces. Notwithstanding the military

operations, the devolution package still to be crafted by Ms Kumaratunga remains the cornerstone of their future policy. Last year, Ms Kumaratunga and the leader of the Opposition Ranil

Wickremasinghe had got as far as drafting a devolution proposal, but differences on modalities helped it run aground.

But with a fresh mandate, Ms Kumaratunga now appears to be exploring the possibilities of a constitution commission, which will begin a national discussion on the shape of the package.

However, on the issue of a multilateral monitoring group to oversee an interim MoU between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, comprising teams from Britain, Japan, there appears to have been no agreement in her talks with the Indian leadership.

India has a pathological aversion to other countries wandering through this region, but is yet to work out how to deal with a possible Lankan commitment to such an exercise.

As a matter of fact, senior officials contended that it was the first time that the Sri Lankan leadership was briefing India on the issue.

Chandrika to discuss peace moves

282 By C. Raja Mohan 10-1

NEW DELHI, FEB. 22. The prospects for ending the civil war in Sri Lanka will be among the many issues that are expected to come up in the talks between the visiting Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Indian leadership tomorrow.

With the Norwegian initiative to facilitate talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at a sensitive stage, and elections for the Tamil Nadu Assembly round the corner, there is no expectation here of any ringing statements by either Sri Lanka or India.

The Sri Lankan President arrived here this evening amid tight security. At the request of Colombo, New Delhi has kept the arrangements for Ms. Kumaratunga's visit at a low key.

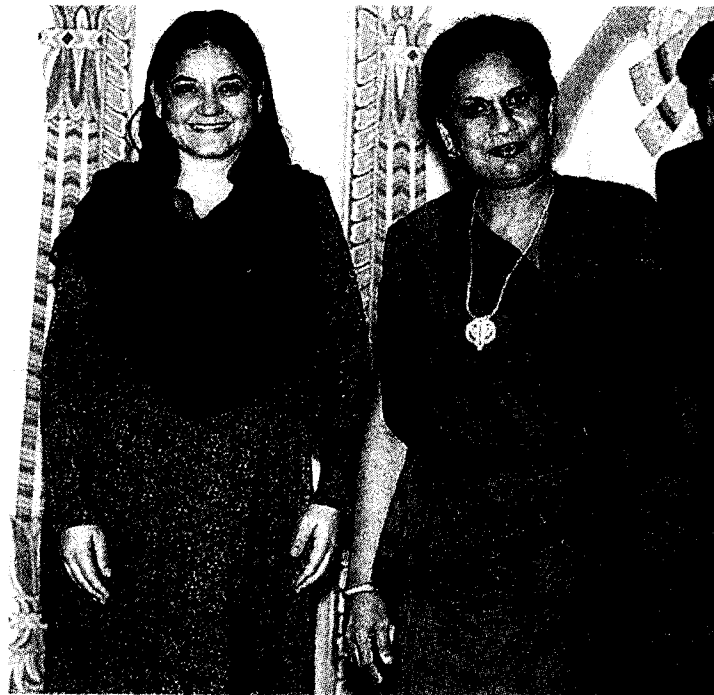
Ms. Kumaratunga will hold substantive talks with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, tomorrow. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, and the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, will call on her. The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, is hosting a banquet for the visiting leader.

While Norway remains hopeful of an early movement in the peace process, there is nothing

yet on the ground to suggest a breakthrough is at hand. The Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are said to be chewing on a set of confidence-building measures proposed by Norway.

The Government is unwilling to confirm or reject media speculation that India is opposed to the use of troops from other countries to monitor any future agreements between Colombo and the LTTE. The warring sides are yet to arrive at an accord and it may be premature to talk about India's attitude towards a monitoring mechanism, sources said. Sri Lanka as Chairman of the SAARC is likely to raise the question of holding an early summit of the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. India has been reluctant to join the summit since Gen. Pervez Musharraf ousted the civilian Government in Pakistan in a coup in October 1999. The Foreign Office spokesman said India remained committed to the SAARC process and pointed to an earlier understanding between New Delhi and Colombo when the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, came here last December. The two sides had agreed that a meeting of the Standing Committee of the SAARC "could be considered" if the current round of expert-level meetings among South Asian nations come up with significant decisions.

Even if India and Sri Lanka agree to hold an early meeting of the South Asian Foreign Secretaries, it may not necessarily imply that New Delhi is now ready for a SAARC summit. The key to the SAARC deadlock may lie elsewhere — in the state of Indo-Pak relations and the ability of Gen. Musharraf to contain cross-border terrorism.



The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, with the Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Ms. Maneka Gandhi, at the Indra Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

THE HINDU

23 FEB 2001

Chandrika visit to India — a mission to test the waters?

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 21. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, will begin a three-day visit to New Delhi on Friday, amid considerable confusion back home over India's position on the Norwegian-backed initiative aimed at resolving the conflict in the island.

During her last visit to India in December 1998, Ms. Kumaratunga signed the Free Trade Agreement with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. Since then, she has been re-elected as President, and her coalition voted back to power.

Sri Lanka's military fortunes have waxed and waned since then, till, at the moment, the security forces are maintaining the stalemate they managed to restore in Jaffna peninsula after offensive by the LTTE in April last.

Now Sri Lanka is at the threshold of talks with the LTTE, and an Indian input at this stage is seen crucial.

"The President's visit to India can be seen as a prelude to peace talks," a Foreign Ministry official said.

Ms. Kumaratunga, who is scheduled to meet Mr. Vajpayee and the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, on February 23, would "compare notes" on the Norwegian-facilitated peace process among other matters of "mutual interest", officials said.

While New Delhi has expressed support for the Oslo initiative to bring the two sides to the negotiating table, it is not yet clear how far

India is willing to be a fellow passenger in this exercise.

Indian position

The Indian position is for a negotiated solution that meets the aspirations of the Tamil minority community within the framework of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity. However, Sri Lanka would want to know how comfortable India is with LTTE as the main negotiator for the Tamil people.

"It is hard to believe that India would want the LTTE, that killed a former Prime Minister and more than 1,000 of its soldiers, to wield any sort of state power, even if it is in partnership with the Sri Lankan Government, which is a possibility if the talks are held and are successful," said Mr. Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council.

A recent statement by the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, in the Rajya Sabha, that the Government of India had

for the extradition of Velupillai Prabhakaran force the persistent anti-Sri Lanka that India with the Norwegian initiative

Besides India's open its purported reluctance "outsiders" dabbling neighbourhood beyond a p reason for this.

That is one reason Lankan weekly newspapers posed the inclusion of t

international committee proposed by Oslo to monitor goodwill gestures by both sides prior to talks, since denied by the External Affairs Ministry, has found ready believers.

Peace activists attribute Sri Lanka's tough posturing on the peace talks and its refusal to reciprocate a unilateral cease-fire by the LTTE to the Government's confidence that India would support this.

Against this background, Ms. Kumaratunga's visit is being viewed as a mission to "test the waters" and perhaps even to discuss the parameters for talks with the LTTE.

Besides the peace initiative, Ms. Kumaratunga is also likely to raise the issue of reviving the SAARC process, paralysed since India vetoed the 1999 Kathmandu summit after Gen. Pervez Musharraf assumed power in Pakistan.

Understandably, Sri Lanka is reluctant to

India denies opposing UK, Japan on Lanka peace

SONIA TRIKHA
NEW DELHI, FEB 20

INDIA has denied reports that it had opposed the inclusion of Britain and Japan in a monitoring mechanism proposed by Norway to broker peace between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. A spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs said "there is no basis for these reports".

The Colombo-based *Sunday Leader* newspaper had reported yesterday that India had opposed the inclusion of any major power in the panel as it did not want them involved in the Sri Lankan conflict and set a precedent for "outside" interference in south asia.

The denial assumes importance in the light of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's upcoming three-day trip to In-

dia starting February 22. Kumaratunga is expected to hold talks with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on regional, international and issues of mutual concern.

The *Sunday Leader* quoting unidentified sources said that India did not want a bigger role for Britain and Japan in South Asia while the LTTE did not want South Asian nations to be included in the truce monitoring panel.

The rebel outfit also objected to the inclusion of any country which was actively funding Sri Lanka's military campaign against the rebels. Japan, Lanka's largest single aid donor, was expected to head the truce monitoring panel and also finance its activities.

"India wants to avoid the setting up of any precedent that may in the future encourage further interference by the West or the

East," the report said. The Sri Lankan Government was also opposed to a large concentration of European nations because the majority Sinhalese is opposed to them, it said.

Norway, which has been negotiating for peace through its envoy Erik Solheim for nearly two years in Sri Lanka, had arranged a nine-member international panel to monitor a truce before talks could begin.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Government has more reasons than one to be unhappy with Britain's role in the peace process. Britain today failed to ban the LTTE when the new Anti-Terrorist Act came into operation — the new law makes it illegal for anyone in Britain to incite terrorism abroad.

Under the new law, anybody raising funds and openly supporting groups in-

volved in terrorism can be arrested. The Terrorism Act 2000 allows the Home Secretary to proscribe any organisation. While Britain has banned the Irish Republican Army under the 1973 Prevention of Terrorism Act (which the new law replaces), it has shown marked reluctance to ban foreign rebel groups under the new law by not giving out a list of banned organisations, and has also sought to circumvent the whole issue.

On Thursday, Kumaratunga had called upon Britain to ban the LTTE under the new legislation. However, the LTTE's London representative Anton Balasingham had opposed the call for a ban and threatened dire consequences for the fragile peace process if the outfit were banned. Several foreign governments, including Sri Lanka and India, had campaigned strongly for the ban on rebel groups raising funds from London.

MONITORING MECHANISM

Fishing in the Palk Straits

By V. Suryanarayan

40-12
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CUTTING ACROSS political differences, members of the Tamil Nadu Assembly recently expressed outrage at the killing of two Indian fishermen at Kodiakkarai in Nagapattinam district by the Sri Lankan Navy. It has become a routine affair and one could easily predict the denouement of events. Indian fishermen lose their precious lives in the Palk Straits; the fishermen go on strike in protest; political parties demand immediate action; the Chief Minister takes up the matter with the Central Government and Indian diplomats in Colombo convey "great concern" to Sri Lanka. As Mr. V. Gopalasamy, general secretary of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), has pointed out, Indian representations to Colombo have fallen on "deaf ears". I have elsewhere compared Indian concerns and Sri Lanka's response to a fire-fighting exercise. When the fire breaks out, one tries to extinguish the fire. What is really required today is to remove the causes of fire once and for all. And this can be accomplished only if New Delhi and Colombo address themselves to the crucial question of Indian fishermen's rights in the Palk Straits.

The root cause of the continuing tension is conflict of interests. On one side are the Governments in New Delhi and Colombo, who in the name of good neighbourly relations, concluded the Maritime Agreements of 1974 and 1976, which ceded the island of Kachchativu to Sri Lanka. On the opposite side are the Indian fishermen, who will not easily give up a means of livelihood they have enjoyed for several centuries.

A few inter-related issues should be kept in mind while discussing the problem. Fishermen throughout the world are no respecters of maritime boundaries. They sail to any location where fish are available in plenty. In the Palk Straits prawns have a magnetic pull and they are in abundance on the Sri Lankan side. The Sri Lankan fishermen also poach into the Arabian Sea, some of them move further west, enter the Maldivian waters to catch tuna. Crossing the maritime boundary is a civilian economic offence. Article 146 of the U.N. Law of the Sea stipulates that "measures will be taken to ensure effective protection of human life". Article 73

mentions that coastal states can take measures "including boarding, inspection, arrest and judicial proceedings to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations". Shooting and killing of fishermen, who cross the international boundary line, violates all canons of natural justice.

The problems of fishermen have arisen because of the ambiguity of the 1974 and the 1976 Agreements. Although Kachchativu was ceded to Sri Lanka by the 1974 Agreement, Article 5 safeguarded the tra-

ditional rights of the fishermen to visit the island. In the course of the discussions in the Lok Sabha, Swaran Singh, then Foreign Minister, said "... the fishermen were generally free to fish even round about Kachchativu and they also used Kachchativu island for drying their nets". Swaran Singh added "Although Sri Lanka's claim to sovereignty over Kachchativu has been recognised, the traditional rights of Indian fishermen and pilgrims to visit the island remain unaffected." The Government of Sri Lanka does not subscribe to this point of view. The senior officials in the Ministry of External Affairs explained to me that Article 5 does not confer any fishing rights, but only the right to dry the fishing nets and the right to visit St. Anthony's Church during the festival season.

The best possible solution (to the Indian fishermen's problems) is to get from Sri Lanka the island of Kachchativu and adjacent islets on "lease in perpetuity" solely for fishing, drying nets and pilgrimage.

The 1976 Maritime Agreement, which delimited the boundaries in the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal, added to the confusion. Speaking in the Lok Sabha on March 21, 1976, Y. B. Chavan, then Foreign Minister, explained the significance of the Agreement: "With the signing of the present agreement, the maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka stands settled along its entire length... Both countries have agreed that after the determination of the maritime boundary, fishing vessels and fishermen of one country shall not engage in fishing in the waters of the other." If this statement is applicable to all sectors, including the Palk Straits,

what happens to the fishermen's rights guaranteed under Article 5 of the 1974 Agreement? Or to be more specific, did the fishermen in 1974 had only the "right of access to Kachchativu" (for drying nets) and not any fishing rights?

With the intensification of the ethnic conflict, there had been a qualitative change in the Palk Straits. For the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, especially the Tigers, Tamil Nadu was not only the sanctuary, it was also the safe haven, the

backyard from which the Eelam struggle derived its moral and material support. After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the backbone of the LTTE in Tamil Nadu was broken. Even then, given the long coastline and the difficulties inherent in the situation, the Navy, the Coast Guard, the Central Reserve Police Force, customs officials and the Tamil Nadu police have not been able to completely prevent the movement of petrol, diesel, machine oil, welding rods and medicines. The activities of the Sri Lankan Navy, which cannot distinguish between fishermen and militants, have affected the Indian fishermen. Frequent appeals made by the Indian authorities to the fishermen not to enter Sri Lankan waters have fallen on deaf ears.

The ceding of Kachchativu is a *fait accompli*; to reiterate historical evidence to prove that the island was, for several centuries, a part of the Zamindari of the Raja of Ramnad will be like whipping a dead horse. The unilateral scrapping of the maritime agreement, as demanded by few political leaders of Tamil Nadu, has to be ruled out, as such a policy will have adverse consequences for India's relations not only with Sri Lanka, but also other maritime neighbours — Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Maldives — with whom New Delhi has signed boundary agreements. There is considerable sanctity in international agreements, which have to be upheld by successor

Governments. Two points relating to the Sri Lankan response deserve mention. Its North and East had been the major source of fisheries in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils were naturally happy with the 1974 and 1976 Agreements. In normal times, the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen will not permit Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters. From the moderate leaders to the militant cadres — the whole spectrum of Sri Lankan Tamils — none of them have expressed a word of sympathy for the sufferings of Indian fishermen. Second, the security sensitivities of the Sri Lankan Government are understandable. This point has to be kept in mind while suggesting a permanent solution.

The best possible solution is to get the island of Kachchativu and adjacent islets on "lease in perpetuity" solely for fishing, drying nets and pilgrimage. Sri Lankan sovereignty over the island could be upheld; at the same time, lease in perpetuity would enable our fishermen to carry on their traditional vocation. The Agreement entered into between India and Bangladesh on May 16, 1974, relating to Tin Bigha could be a precedent. Sovereignty is with India, but Bangladeshis are using the area as a result of lease in perpetuity.

The implementation of "Tin Bigha in reverse" will only solve the problems of fishermen in Rameshwaram region, but what about the fishermen in other areas of the Palk Straits? What is required today, keeping in mind the security sensitivities of Colombo and the interests of Indian fishermen, is a functional and pragmatic approach. In this connection, it is necessary to highlight that according to the 1976 Agreement New Delhi, as a gesture of goodwill to Sri Lanka, had permitted duly licensed Sri Lankan fishing vessels to fish in the Wadge Bank for a period of three years. In the same manner, New Delhi should persuade Sri Lanka that duly licensed Indian fishermen should be permitted to fish in Sri Lankan waters up to five nautical miles. If the principle is accepted, detailed procedures could be worked out not only to regulate fishing but also to ensure that the facilities are not misused for illegal purposes.

(The writer is former Director, Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai).

THE HINDU

15 FEB 2001

Chandrika to visit India next week

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 15. The Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, is scheduled to visit India next week for talks with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on "matters of mutual interest", official sources said today.

The dates of the visit have not yet been announced yet by the Sri Lankan Government for security reasons, but the sources said it was likely to be mid-week.

While no agenda is set for the talks, it is expected that the two leaders will discuss the developments in the Norwegian initiative to bring the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to the negotiating table.

The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, said today that might begin within a few months.

"If all goes well, talks should commence in a few months," Mr. Kadirgamar told *The*

will support any solution that respects the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and the aspirations of the Tamil minority.

The Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, has scrupulously kept the Indian Government informed of his efforts to bring the two adversaries for talks.

Besides meeting Mr. Vajpayee, the Sri Lankan President will also hold discussions with the Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Jaswant Singh. She will pay a courtesy call on the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan.

Mrs. Kumaratunga last spoke with Mr. Vajpayee over telephone to express her condolences after the Gujarat earthquake. They spoke once before last November, soon after incidents of rioting that followed a massacre of LTTE prisoners in central Sri Lanka.

On that occasion, the Prime Minister had extended an invitation to the Sri Lankan President to visit India at her convenience.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

7 6 FEB 2001

PIO cards for Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JAN. 22 The Government of India has accepted in principle that the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka will also be eligible for the People of Indian Origin (PIO) cards introduced by the Centre, according to Mr. M.S. Kandasamy, president, Indian Origin Community Council, headquartered here.

He said a five-member delegation from the council met the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswanth Singh, and the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, during the recent convention of Global Organisation of the PIO in New Delhi.

"We explained to the Ministers and the Home Ministry officials, the problems faced by the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka and the procedural problems in securing visas. They have agreed to sort out these issues and sanction the PIO cards for us," Mr. Kandasamy said.

About two lakh PIOs in Sri Lanka would be eligible for the cards,

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which, he noted, would do away with the need for securing visas or Resident Permits in case of an extended stay in India.

Thanking the Centre and Tamil Nadu for their concern and hospitality in receiving and looking after the thousands of refugees who crossed the Palk Straits and poured into the State after the ethnic violence in 1983, he argued that a majority of them were still resident here and had no intention of returning to the island.

"There are a little more than half a million people from Sri Lanka living in Tamil Nadu. A majority of them are repatriates accepted by India and about 1.2 lakh refugees who will have to return to their homes in the north and east once the ethnic problem is solved. There are another 60,000 or more PIOs who have come and settled in their ancestral villages here after the repeated outbreak of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka," Mr. Kandasamy explained.

Since it was becoming very difficult for the Indian authorities to

distinguish between the Indian origin Sri Lankans and the ethnic Tamils from the north and east of Sri Lanka, the Indian Origin Community Council was established in Chennai to facilitate this process.

The council's president said he had outlined the problems and the solutions to Home Ministry officials and requested that Regional Immigration authorities here should be empowered to deal with applications for renewal or extension of visas, Resident Permits and other formalities, instead of centralising the whole process in New Delhi. If the PIO cards were issued to the eligible Indian origin Sri Lankans, most of these problems would be resolved.

He was concerned about the 'quit' notices being issued to some 'over-stayers' and appealed to the Centre to consider their cases sympathetically as they had no roots now in Sri Lanka. The Council was ready to identify the genuine cases and certify them so that they could be considered for grant of Indian citizenship.

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2000

Indo-Burma border trade deal is yet to be enforced

Moreh (Indo-Burma border town), Jan. 3: The border trade agreement signed between India and Burma seven years ago is still not fully implemented and continues to face many obstacles. The traders in Moreh town point out that Burmese government is not doing what it had assured at that time.

According to the 1994 agreement, traders from both sides may visit to Mandalay in Burma and Imphal in India up to a period of seven days. For that purpose, traders will be issued special travel

documents by governments of both countries. Ironically, it was agreed that the precise format of document to be used for such visits was to be exchanged within a period of six weeks at that time. However, it is now almost seven years that an agreed travel pass has not come out yet.

The Indian government in August this year

approved a particular travel passport for the Indian traders to visit Burma, but the Burmese side had rejected it. The proposed "Travel Pass" of India was to be renewed every year.

Without a proper travel pass, traders from both sides are now unable to undertake the visits to Mandalay and Imphal. And they are at present allowed to visit to Tamu in Burma and Moreh in India up to 12

hours only. Traders and businesspersons from India want to increase the border trade activities

but it is obvious that they become impatient with the slow process in implementing the trade agreement by the concerned authorities. Many people in Manipur are eager that the two countries implement the border trade agreement fully. They believe the Burma can be an opening door for the prosperous Manipur state. (*Mizzima News Group*)

NEWS ANALYSIS

THE ASIAN AGE

4 JAN 2001

Vaiko seeks Indian role to solve ongoing Lankan crisis

Fogs delay Delhi flights

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JAN 3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, JAN 3

MDMK, an ally of the Vajpayee Government, today demanded that the Centre exert pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to accept LTTE's ceasefire offer and reciprocate the initiative.

LTTE's gesture would help the ongoing Norwegian initiative to bring both the Chandrika Government and the LTTE to the negotiating table in a bid to settle the vexed ethnic issue, MDMK General Secretary Vaiko told reporters here.

New Delhi should also play its role in this regard, Vaiko, a sup-

porter of LTTE, said adding India, in order to play a 'meaningful role', should revoke its ban on the outfit.

He opposed any move to extradite LTTE Chief V Prabhakaran, a proclaimed offender in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

Vaiko claimed at least 150 innocent Tamils had been killed by the Sri Lankan Army after LTTE's ceasefire announcement. "This only showed that the Sri Lankan Government is not interested in solving the ethnic problem.

"The Buddhist clergy there will not allow any solution to the problem", he said.

The MDMK leader said he was still of the view that a separate homeland for Tamils in Sri Lanka

alone could solve the vexed issue. However, he would not impose his views on other constituents of the National Democratic Alliance as it was against coalition 'dharma', he added.

Vaiko said his party would contest the coming Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu in alliance with the DMK.

The leader of the NDA in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry was the DMK and it was for it to decide the poll strategy, he said when asked about Ramdoss's statement that PMK would head the ministry in the Union Territory of Pondicherry after the polls in the event of the alliance getting a majority.

FLIGHTS were delayed by several hours and many diverted as fog brought down visibility in the capital today. This was the second day that air traffic was disrupted this winter.

While international carriers were not majorly affected as many had re-scheduled flights as early as mid-December for day departures, the first Indian airlines flight to leave was IC 165 to Mumbai, three-and-half hours late.

Three incoming flights, from Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai were diverted to Ahmedabad as fog enveloped the capital in the early hours of the day, an airline spokesman said.

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