

Norway top gun to broker Lanka peace

P K Balachandran
Colombo, December 30

NORWAY'S DEPUTY Foreign Minister Ivar Helgesen will lead a peace delegation to facilitate talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, Norwegian diplomats told *Hindustan Times* here today.

Erik Solheim, who had earlier lead a team, will be part of the delegation as special advisor to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, they said.

The Norwegians, however, said Oslo would only get involved if both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE formally requested them.

The Sri Lankan Government has already asked Norway to facilitate the peace initiative. The LTTE is yet to do so.

On Friday, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had written to his Norwegian counterpart Kjell Magne Bondevik about the peace initiative.

He also asked Norway to keep India informed on the efforts to bring the Tamil tiger rebels to the negotiating table, the Prime

Ranil Government faces debt crisis

THE SRI Lankan Government said on Sunday it was headed for a major debt crisis with local and foreign loan repayments surpassing total Government revenue for the first time.

Deputy Finance Minister Bandula Gunawardena said debt servicing in the first three months of 2002 would be Rs 46 billion while the anticipated revenue was much less. "There will be no money for any other government expenditure after we service the debt," Gunawardena said.

Debt servicing next year was set at Rs 295 billion compared to estimated Government revenue of Rs 275 billion.

It will be the first time that Sri Lanka's debt servicing exceeds the total State revenue, Gunawardena said.

Asked if the country was headed for an Argentina-style freeze on debt servicing, Gunawardena said Colombo hoped to drastically cut Government spending to overcome the financial crisis.

"We don't want to ask for re-scheduling of the loans because that would seriously damage the financial credibility of the country," Gunawardena said, adding the new Government's budget in February will address the crisis.

Government revenue this year was down by Rs 30 billion widening the budget deficit to 10.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) compared to the original estimate of 8.5 per cent of GDP.

AFP, Colombo

Minister's office said.

The Prime Minister said he was setting up a separate cell within his office to deal with the

peace process. A senior diplomat, Bernard Gunatilleke, is tipped to head this cell.

As for the LTTE, the only thing

that points towards its interest in peace is the announcement of the month-long ceasefire earlier this month.

A Norwegian diplomat said a formal request was imperative as the Governments in both Sri Lanka and Norway had changed since the Norwegian-facilitated peace process came to a halt last year.

Norway now has a Christian Democratic Party-Conservative Party Government and in Sri Lanka the Peoples' Alliance has been replaced by the United National Front.

Norway had been helping the peace process, but it got stalled in April 2001 when the Sri Lankan Government took exception to some of the allegedly partisan statements and activities of Solheim.

They had him sidelined by getting Oslo's Foreign Ministry involved. But, the LTTE protested against the "unilateral action" on the part of the Sri Lankan Government and the alleged that the Norwegian Government was part of the conspiracy.

Ranil Wickremasinghe asks Norway government to revive peace process

By Farah Mihar Ahmed
Times News Network

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe said on Wednesday that he had formally requested the Norwegian government to facilitate in the peace process and expected talks with the LTTE to commence around March next year.

Wickremasinghe refused to set any time frames but told journalists that the negotiation phase should come during March adding that the government was not planning to rush the process.

"I want the first steps to be slow and steady so we have a firm foundation," Wickremasinghe said.

The government is planning to permit all goods except military items to be sent to areas under rebel control by January 15 next year. He said the list of items to be permitted to the north and east was based on one done by the previous government when they were considering signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the LTTE in April this year.

Petroleum and oil products will be permitted on limited quantities to prevent them being stocked by the rebels. Wickremasinghe said he appreciated India's emphasis on safeguarding the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and insisting that any solution to the ethnic conflict must be acceptable to all commu-

nities. Prior to the Indian visit the government was talking of a crucial role for India to play in the peace process but both countries appear to have settled for the neighbour to play the supportive part and let Norway get directly involved.

"India has always given us encouragement and Norway will play the facilitator role," he said.

Wickremasinghe said it was far too early to give any specific details on where the talks would be held and who would be participating in it but denied local media reports on Wednesday that negotiations would be held in India.

He said the modalities of the talks could only be revealed once Norway contacted the LTTE and starts the facilitatory process, which is expected to happen in the next few weeks.

The Prime Minister also refused to say whether the government would lift the ban on the LTTE — a demand the rebels have made a pre-requisite for talks.

The government appears to want to focus heavily on improving the humanitarian conditions in the war-torn north and east and are hoping that they can win the support of the Tamil people by doing this so the rebels may be isolated if the peace process does not work.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28/12/2001

New dawn in Lanka

Chandrika must let Ranil function

Chandrika Kumaratunga may have contemplated the prospect of defeat; her alliance fought a violent campaign, always a sign of weakness. 60 people died in the most violent election in the country's history. It is not suggested that the United National Alliance of the UNP turned the other cheek but they shared far less of the blame. She started off well but turned more and more autocratic as she felt hemmed in from all sides, whereas the truth lay in her own inflexible attitude to those who could have helped her govern. Her frequent absences abroad, often unexplained, gave rise to the impression that she was more concerned about family and friends. The economy is in a shambles and the cost of living going through the roof with no jobs and less investment. Not a recipe for re-election. Ranil Wickremesinghe, looking less than his 52 years, by contrast comes across as a reasonable man without pretensions and willing to try anything to put his country back on track from the debilitating war, which has now lasted eleven years.

Under Sri Lanka's constitution the President has overweening powers to suspend and dissolve Parliament and name the cabinet and Chandrika reminds everyone that she will be around till 2005. The two know each other well but the lady was visibly ungracious when she invited Ranil to become prime minister. She went on to underline publicly that under the Constitution she was supreme commander of the armed forces and could give orders direct. This is not a proposition tested in the courts — President Narayanan is also Supreme Commander but would not dream of saying this in public much less threaten to take command direct. Admittedly the Sri Lankan constitution goes further; it is not intended to go into differences, only to draw attention to the incongruity and to suggest that it betrays an unfortunate attitude of mind. If Chandrika is determined to frustrate any initiative that the new prime minister may wish to take she will be very badly advised. The country's interests demand that the two work in harmony. If indeed *talks about talks* over the Tamil Tigers issue get somewhere it will be progress enough. There is no indication that they will; so far the Tigers have used every opportunity of a cease-fire to re-group and attack again but the electoral mandate must be given its head. If the lady does not allow Ranil to cross the threshold she will be blamed for the continuing deterioration in the political as well as the economic situation and she and her party will reap the whirlwind.

This newspaper has always held that the integrity of Sri Lanka is not up for grabs; we have no possible interest in the break-up of the island nation. The Vajpayee government has reiterated this view often enough. Chandrika should allow Ranil to build upon it. There is a new factor in the situation. Terrorism is in bad odour these days and international assistance will be more readily forthcoming if Ranil's initiative is seen to succeed. No one is suggesting that the new government lower its guard, but if the President crosses her arms, points to the eye she lost to Tamil Tiger violence and dares Ranil to do what he can, both will lose and the country the most. In short this is an opportunity for Chandrika to rise in stature by working closely with her prime minister. There are wild men in every party, Chandrika's has more than its fair share but the lady is a strong character and can overcome them. Ranil is a gentleman; she can do business with him.

Both must remember that the world is watching.

SECRET

12 DEC 2001

CHANGE IN SRI LANKA

Opportunity To Resolve Ethnic Crisis

By SAM RAJAPPA

The 5 December elections in Sri Lanka have thrown up both a challenge and an opportunity to the majority Sinhala community to end two decades of civil strife and resolve the ethnic conflict. Voters chose to lock Ranil Wickremesinghe, United National Party leader, with executive President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, leader of the People's Alliance. Except for a brief interregnum of four months in 1994 when DB Wijekunne of the UNP was President and Kumaratunga, Prime Minister, the two major Sinhala parties had remained in confrontation. While Wickremesinghe has a full term ahead as Prime Minister, Kumaratunga will be President till 2005. A lasting solution to the Tamil separatist movement has remained intractable all these years because of the rivalry between the SLFP and the UNP. For the first time, the two have been forced to work together and it is time they rose above partisan politics.

Portfolios for Tamils

There is a parallel situation in France where Jacques Chirac, Gaullist President, is managing with Lionel Jospin, Socialist Prime Minister. The SLFP-led People's Alliance, which broke the 17 year monopoly of the UNP in 1994, renewed its mandate in October 2000 on the plank of peace, abolition of executive presidency and return to parliamentary democracy. Just 14 months later, the mandate was transferred to the UNP-led United National Front which won 114 seats in the 225-member Parliament in the 12th general election. The PA could win only 77 seats. Its rout was nation-wide. It lost in 18 of the 22 electoral districts. Only in rural Moneragala district did the PA manage to secure a majority. The remaining three districts went to the Tamil National Alliance comprising the TULF, EPRLF, TELO and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress. The Janata Vimukti Perumana, the Sinhala chauvinistic party which had aligned with the PA, secured 16 seats, an increase of six from its tally of 10 in the dissolved Parliament, mostly at the cost of the PA, and emerged as the third largest group. The danger is that the JVP could become the rallying point for Sinhala chauvinistic groups and challenge the new government's peace initiatives. The TNA led by the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front won 15 seats in the Northeastern province, taking fourth place. If only the armed forces had not prevented 80,000-odd Tamil voters in Vanni, the TNA would have taken third place instead of the JVP. Nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in Tamil Nadu were deprived of their franchise.

Kumaratunga was pressurised to part with key portfolios, including Defence and Finance. She continues to be the supreme commander of the armed forces. Wickremesinghe allotted Defence to Mr Tilak

The author, a veteran journalist who retired from The Statesman, is based in Chennai.

Marapone, Attorney-General in President Ranasinghe Premadasa's government who wields considerable clout in the UNP, and Finance to KN Choksy, an eminent lawyer and senior UNP leader. Tyrone Fernando, another lawyer and a UNP stalwart, becomes Foreign Minister.

What is disappointing to the minority community is the absence of any Sri Lankan Tamil in the Wickremesinghe Cabinet. T Maheswaran was elected for a second consecutive term on a UNP ticket

Chelvanayakam pact would have taken care of the Tamil problem four decades ago but JR Jayawardene of the UNP ensured that it was not implemented.

Although co-existence of the two Sinhala parties could be called a shot-gun marriage, Wickremesinghe, in his maiden speech as Prime Minister, expressed his desire to put an end to confrontation and usher in an era of peace and harmony. He even offered to share power with the PA which, Kumaratunga declined. However, a

tunga at an election rally in Colombo in 1999. She escaped with her life but lost her right eye. The LTTE has assassinated former President Premadasa, many ministers and a number of parliamentarians, including Tamils. The list includes Tamil civilians like Appapillai Amirthalingam, Yogeswaran, Sambanthamoorthy, Thangathurai, Sam Thambimuthu, Sarojini Yogeswaran, Kala Thambimuthu, Sivabalan, Velmurugu and Neelan Tiruchelvam. They almost destroyed the holiest shrine of Buddhism the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy and showed the way to the Taliban to commit similar sacrilege against Buddhism in Afghanistan. They even killed fellow Eelam Tamil militants of other armed groups such as Sri Sabaratnam of the TELO, Pathmanabha of the EPRLF and many others.

Setbacks for Kumaratunga

The PA government scored a significant military victory over the LTTE by capturing its citadel, Jaffna, but the militants struck at the Colombo international airport at Katunayake on 24 July that almost crippled the Sri Lankan Air Force and nearly grounded the Sri Lankan flag carrier. The PA government never recovered from this. Exports were hit hard as Lloyds Underwriters imposed a war surcharge on ships calling at Colombo. With defence expenditure mounting, a 12 per cent general sales tax was levied which hit the poor hard. The business community lost its faith in the Kumaratunga government. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress withdrew from the PA last October, depriving it of a majority in Parliament and forcing mid-term election.

For the Tamils of Sri Lanka, there is little to choose between the SLFP and the UNP. Both parties in turn are accused of uprooting Tamils through state sponsored terrorism. It was during the administration of the UNP government that the plantation Tamils of recent Indian origin suffered the most. They were stripped of their Sri Lankan citizenship and rendered stateless. There was state-sponsored colonisation of Tamil areas in the North-East by Sinhala settlers. It was also during the UNP administration that the genocidal attacks on Tamils took place in 1983 and more than one lakh Tamils forced to take refuge in India. The President, under the Sri Lanka Constitution, can command the armed forces. Kumaratunga has been accusing the UNP of thwarting her efforts to arrive at a peaceful solution to the ethnic problem. Since both the PA and the UNP hold pivotal positions in the new government, neither party could blame the other for standing in the way of reconciliation.

The LTTE should realise that international opinion today is clearly against terrorist tactics and secessionism and should co-operate with the new government to usher in an era of democratic federalism in which all communities could live in peace with dignity.



from Jaffna, heartland of the Tigers. Another, Mano Ganesan, was elected on a UNP ticket from the Colombo electoral district. So there was no dearth of talent from the Tamil community. Maheswaran was given a non-Cabinet post. In contrast, the PA government had Lakshman Kadirgamar as Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Douglas Devananda as Minister for the North-East, both Lankan Tamils. Plantation Tamils of recent Indian origin, however, find better representation in the UNP government.

The LTTE's victims

The author of the 1995 peace package, the best ever offered by a Sinhala government, GL Peiris, who defected from the PA to the UNP before the election was retained by Wickremesinghe as Minister for Industrial Development, a shrewd move. The SLFP had a better understanding of the Tamil problem and took more initiatives. The SWRD Bandaranaike-SJV

section of MPs belonging to the PA have agreed to join the government. To get around the disqualification laws, a group called "PA MPs for National Reconciliation" under the leadership of a former Cabinet Minister, Mr AHM Fowzie, has not severed links with the PA. The PA and the UNP are parties to the Lyon Fox agreement that calls for a Sinhala consensus on the Tamil question. Wickremesinghe's main problem is the LTTE who had rejected the devolution package of Minister Peiris. In his Heroes Day speech last month, Velupillai Pirabhakaran, the LTTE supremo, tried to convince the world that his group was engaged in a liberation struggle. The ban on the LTTE by the USA and other Western countries is telling on the flow of funds and propaganda machinery. Pirabhakaran thinks if the Sri Lanka government comes across he can persuade others to follow. Pirabhakaran's appeal is likely to fall on deaf ears, the climate has changed. The LTTE grievously injured Kumara-

Old is beautiful

By NANDITA CHAUDHURI

Adjectives are their own description; but sometimes, when synonyms are inadequate, flavour needs to be added to exactness to give fullness and colour to the true meaning of a word. So, while my Thesaurus tell me that old can be vintage, antique, ancient, aged etc, to my mind antique is also loveliness, vintage is mellow, age is also dignity and experience; and all these, being old, are beautiful.

Who can resist the romance of old things, representing as they do the consummation of aesthetics and sentiment, a loveliness made more lovely as the years roll by? Old houses, old furniture, old art, old music; old lace, old jewellery, old embroidery — is it because of their beauty alone that we value them, or is it because they have been made more beautiful and valuable for their vintage worth? Carrying

with them the fragrance of the past — elusive, haunting and filled with mystery — they bring into our present lives a quality of lost time which we can strive for but never regain. The changed circumstances and pressures of our modern day existence can never recover that "fine" and (my apologies to Browning) "careful rapture".

Neglect and destruction may despoil these beauties, but if they have been cared for and preserved, then age can neither wither nor stale their beauty and style. Rather, time steadily and gradually bestows on them a timeless loveliness — enhancing

with subtle strokes and shades the fluidity of form, elegance of style, richness of colour, intricacy of pattern and delicacy of design. The fusion of all these elements, the union of a subjective idea and its objective execution, undertaken, of necessity, as a profession, but being, too, a profession of love and a vocation — and, one may say, an outpouring of the soul's desire. Even in the remains and ruins of old things, in their bone structure as it were, the lines of beauty speaking of a special grace and dignity, are, nevertheless, still apparent.

I love old songs and music and tales of long ago. Bridging the minds of men and breaking the barriers of space and time, they are universal in their appeal. Lyrical and melodious. Powerful, passionate and poignant. Expressing every feeling. Every mood. They are of their time, for their time and, yet, for all time.

Born in 1947, I am now — slowly — growing old. I do not have "silver threads among the gold", but I do have white hairs among the black. I neither dye them nor hide them. I have the first, faint lines on my forehead and the beginnings of crow's feet at the corners of my eyes. I do not contemplate a face lift. But I do contemplate. Let time leave its impression on me physically, but let it also mould me spiritually, mentally and emotionally so that I grow beautiful as I grow old.

Be realistic about tuitions

Sir, — Your paper reported that the state government plans to crack down on private tuition and that teachers of government-aided schools shall have to file declarations stating that they are not engaged in any such activity. All this is to improve teaching standards, as if there is no better or sensible way to ensure that! Having worked in a government-aided school for nearly seven years I would like to point to a phenomenon which is very disturbing. After the recently concluded Madhyamik examination we found that a few of our students had obtained unusually high marks in a particular subject. We had to do a little investigation to find that all these students, very weak in studies, went to a particular tutor and that 'suggestions' offered by him a day before the exam, had come in handy.

As much as we know, this man does not teach in any government school or college, has no credentials whatsoever to guide students. There are innumerable others like him who offer private tuition to thousands of students whose parents are not enlightened enough to realise that admitting them to such 'coaching centres' is not their road to salvation.

As far as teachers in the government-aided schools are concerned, there are indeed shirkers, as there are in every other profession. But there are many teachers, and will be in future, who are conscientious enough to uphold all that is good for students and the academic atmosphere in general.

If doctors, lawyers or men in any other profession have the right to some extra income, why should the teachers be satisfied with what they get as salaries? We seem to be used to the image of teachers

being totally indifferent to the material pleasures of life, that most often we do not realise how ridiculous this is. Teachers themselves seem to have got stuck in this image!

It is high time we come to terms with reality. Every profession needs dedicated personnel and the responsibility to save society does not lie solely with the teaching community.

— Yours, etc., S MUKHERJEE, Kolkata, 12 December.

Nuisance

Sir, — It is really a tragedy that the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, a distinguished literary figure and a statesman

letters to the EDITOR

himself, thought it fit to deprive the young Ashramites of Santiniketan from getting a "Saptaparni" of the Chhatim tree on grounds of security and shortage of time during his very first visit to this abode of peace.

This was possibly the first time that history was brushed aside, prompting an enraged and courageous girl student from Mr Vajpayee's home state of UP, Pratibha Tripathi, to protest over the public address system against this injustice to them, breaking the rule prevalent from time immemorial. This is also the first time that a Prime Minister-cum-Acharya had to face spontaneous protests from the young students themselves.

The Acharya visits Santiniketan once every one or two years for the Convocation of Visva Bharati. It is not in keeping with the tradition of the university that the Acharya should leave in haste to fulfil engagements with industrialists on the excuse of security and time crunch. Every Acharya used to preside over the Court meeting to discuss the state of affairs of the university and issue directives, meet groups of students at the Uttarayana for discussions on their Alma Mater and even pose for photographs.

The people of Santiniketan, if not Bolpur, are upset by this sort of "harassment and suffocation" in the name of security. Discontent has been brewing in this quiet town for some years now against making VVIPs the Acharya of the university. They should be replaced by academicians of excellence.

— Yours, etc., DIPAK BYSACK, Kolkata, 16 December.

Unwelcome rudeness

Sir, — I am shocked to read the caption "Government plans more diplomatic rudeness" (22 December). It is really painful to note that a newspaper of your status should use the words "rudeness" for the government's timely and welcome action in recalling the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad and the cancellation of Samjhauta Express and New Delhi — Lahore bus service. What sympathy does your reporter have with the enemy country which has been playing havoc on your peaceful society?

— Yours, etc., Dr BALRAM MISRA, Noida, 24 December.

100 years ago TODAY

DECEMBER 26, 1901

(News Item)

CHRISTMAS IN CALCUTTA

In every Christian land Christmas is regarded as a period of the year when gaiety and merriment reign supreme, though these feelings are damped to some extent when familiar faces and forms are missed. As a rule, however, sadness is debarred from making its appearance, for the time being at least, and Christmas week is devoted almost entirely to merry-making. So far as festivities are concerned, Calcutta is not behind any other city in the world, and Christmas here is eagerly looked forward to by old and young alike. During Christmas week there is a general cessation of work, which is gladly hailed by all business men, advantage being taken of it to have one continuous round of amusements. Probably none hail the advent of Christmas with more delight than children, to whom it means plenty of fun and plenty of toys.

LTTE truce boost to Ranil peace bid

P K Balachandran
& Agencies
Colombo, December 19

SRI LANKA swung back on peace tracks on Wednesday with LTTE declaring a month-long unilateral ceasefire from Christmas Eve and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe deciding to form three high-powered committees to revive talks.

LTTE chief Vellupillai Prabhakaran "has issued orders to all units and combat formations of the Tamil liberation army to cease all hostile military actions against the armed forces from midnight December 24 till midnight January 24, 2002", a statement from the rebel headquarters said.

"We are confident that the new Government will utilise this time to implement goodwill measures to create congenial conditions of normality in the Tamil homeland," it said.

Last year also the Tigers had declared a Christmas truce and extended it thrice but the ceasefire fell apart on April 25 after the People's Alliance regime rejected it.

In his first move to revive the stalled peace process, Wickremesinghe told his Cabinet on Tuesday that the first committee, comprising key ministers, would advise him on political matters relating to the conflict, the second would prepare the ground for talks with the LTTE, and the third would work out contingency plans in case the talks failed.

The state owned Daily News said that one of the panels, comprising representatives of various sections of society, would put forward alternative political solutions. The Prime Minister did not say if any of the panels would have representatives of opposition parties.

Explaining the need for these committees, Wickremesinghe said that all earlier steps to find a political solution to the crisis failed due to the lack of a strong foundation. There was, therefore, a need to study all past experiences and plan future steps, he said.

Advocating a measured approach, the Prime Minister said: "We should not have high

UNP passes Speaker test

SRI LANKA'S new Government passed its first test with its nominee elected Speaker of Parliament on Wednesday. The appointment coincided with the convening of the country's 12th Parliament attended by 225 members including a Buddhist monk and a former cricket captain.

Unchallenged by the Opposition, the United National Party's Joseph Michael Perera (60) was elected Speaker.

For monk, Baddegama Samitha, the path to the House of peoples' power was not smooth with senior Buddhist clergy calling on him to resign from his seat. On the eve of the session, the monks issued a statement saying Samitha's presence in Parliament would bring disrepute to Buddhism. Samitha is a member of the socialist Lanka Sama Samaja Party.

Across the aisle from Samitha was Arjuna Ranatunga, former captain of the cricket team. He became the first captain to become a Deputy, as MPs are called here.

HTC & Agencies

hopes. We should move forward step by step. We should remove all barriers on this rough path." Wickremesinghe's cautious tone was not reflected in the capital Colombo where national flags were flown from buildings "as symbols of peace" in response to a government appeal.

LTTE said it was encouraged to call the ceasefire by the collective mandate for peace and ethnic harmony given by the Sinhala and Tamil masses in the general elections. It hoped that the new United National Party (UNP) regime would reciprocate its "goodwill gesture" and ask its armed forces to observe peace. It offered to extend the ceasefire if the government responded positively.

LTTE, which has been pleading for global acceptability for its armed rebellion as a "freedom movement" rather than a terror campaign, said its deci-

sion to cease hostilities should be seen as an "expression of goodwill" that shows its desire for peace and a negotiated political settlement.

It demanded the withdrawal of what it called an "economic embargo" and other restrictions imposed on its people and said such measures would help create conditions of normality in the "Tamil homeland".

But the Government has made it clear that it is not committed to ordering a ceasefire or lifting the ban on the LTTE ahead of talks. Reacting to speculation in the press, Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando said that Government was ready for "unconditional" talks.

Political observers interpret this to mean that the Government would expect the LTTE also to shed all its pre-conditions, including de-proscription before talks.

In his cabinet meeting, Wickremesinghe said he would meet the government agent of the Northern Vavuniya district before discussing further measures with President Kumaratunga.

Thereafter, he would leave for India to discuss the issue with Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, as part of his revived peace efforts, he said. The idea of setting the Vavuniya district authorities is an indication that the new government wants to understand the ground situation in the war-torn north, where the movement of goods is severely restricted to prevent supplies from falling into the hands of the LTTE.

The decision to have "unconditional" talks should pave the way for cooperation with Kumaratunga, who had been a forceful advocate of talks without conditions and an opponent of de-proscription before the talks had made adequate progress. Kumaratunga had also said that she would not sign any order deproscribing the LTTE until Parliament had passed a resolution calling for it. She knew that given the sensitivity of the issue, passage through Parliament might not be easy.

Peace groups to meet LTTE leaders

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Dec. 16. - Over 3,000 people from 60 peace groups in Sri Lanka plan to cross over to LTTE-held areas of the northern Vanni region next month to meet leaders of its political wing to create a conducive atmosphere for peace.

The organisations would go to Vanni with a declaration that the people of Sri Lanka would support any peace endeavour that would not involve formation of a separate state.

"The visit will show the LTTE leadership that the average Sinhala wants peace," said Mr EP Nanayakkara, head of the Association of Relatives of Servicemen Missing in Action.

Its members, along with those from the Society for Love and Understanding, headed by business tycoon Lalith Kotalewala and other groups, would meet the LTTE's political wing chief, S P Tamilchelvam, and his colleagues, Mr Nanayakkara said.

About 1,500 members of his association had been chosen to travel to Madhu in the north-western Mannar district, while the rest would be drawn from other organisations, he said. "We sent our request last Sunday to the LTTE through our channels and we have got a reply that they are not averse to meeting us", Mr Nanayakkara said. The organisation had undertaken such a mission in the past to press for release of Sri Lankan Army men held as prisoners of war by the Tigers.

The peace advocates would request for a cessation of hostilities during their meeting with Tamilchelvam, who was the LTTE's principal interlocutor in preliminary parleys with Norwegian envoys earlier this year. "We have also appealed to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and his United National Party to call for a ceasefire. As the party has promised early peace talks, we expect a favourable response", Mr Nanayakkara said.

The parallel peace efforts come

amidst signs that the new UNP-led government is moving cautiously in its attempts to revive a deadlocked peace process.

Mr Wickremasinghe will undertake a visit to New Delhi on 22 December, but the contours of his broad plans to get India to play a role in the peace initiative are yet to be unveiled. Foreign minister Tyronne Fernando has said the new government favours India playing a major role but it is not yet clear whether they want India to join Norway in peace facilitation, or even in mediation.

The Sri Lanka police has begun crackdown on around 150 absconding politicians and supporters of People's Alliance for alleged possession of unauthorised weapons and their involvement in poll-related violence, local media reports said.

Puttlam district parliamentarian of People's Alliance and former deputy minister DM Dassanayake was arrested early this week after the police found automatic assault rifles, shotguns, grenades and bombs at his residence at Anamaduwa in the Puttlam district.

Puttlam was the worst-affected electoral district with more than 330 poll-related violence, including several killings, during the recently-concluded general election. The local Sunday Times, quoting the Anamaduwa police inspector, reported the police had already arrested 13 suspects linked to Mr Dassanayake and was now hunting for more than 100 supporters, most of whom were believed to be Army deserters and underworld kingpins.

In other areas also police had carried out a series of raids on the houses of former ministers general Anuruddha Ratwatte, Reggie Ranatunga and Janaka Bandara Tennakoon and found some clues about their involvement in the poll-related violence. Police and CID investigations are still underway.

However, the People's Alliance stalwarts have denied these allegations and said they are systematic revenge campaigns of the UNP-led government.

THE STATESMAN

LTTE asks Ranil to replace minister

PK Balachandran
Colombo December 14

THE LTTE has asked Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to replace the Sinhala Minister for Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees, by a Tamil from the North Eastern province, reliable Tamil sources say.

A top source in a Tamil parliamentary party said the deputy leader of the LTTE's political wing, S P Tamichelvan, had conveyed the message that Dr Jayalath Jayawadena should be replaced by T Maheswaran, the lone Tamil MP from Jaffna belonging to the ruling UNP.

Tamil sources said there were two reasons why the LTTE wanted a change, if a Jaffna Tamil is the Rehabilitation Minister, the LTTE can get its work done. Maheswaran, being a Jaffna Tamil, will be dependent on the LTTE's goodwill for his very survival. But Dr Jayawardena, being a Sinhala and a resident of Colombo, will not be so accessible.

Secondly, the Tamils of the North and East (Sri Lankan Tamils as they are called) generally feel that the Prime Minister has handed out a raw deal to them in terms of ministerial appointments. They are deeply disappointed that none of them, including Maheswaran, have

EX-MINISTER WITH HUGE ARMOURY ARRESTED

A FORMER Sri Lankan minister has been arrested after assault rifles, bombs and grenades were found in his house, a police officer said. Former deputy minister D M Dassanayake, alleged to be the man behind what local newspapers call "the election war in Puttalam district", was arrested on Thursday, a day after he was released on bail in connection with violent incidents that marked Sri Lanka's bloody parliamentary election. The second arrest came after a police raid on his home that led to the detection of a secret armoury containing 11-56 assault rifles, 12 shotguns, ammunition, grenades and bombs of both local and foreign make, police said.

PTI, Colombo

been given a cabinet post or included in the National List.

While enough Muslims have been given a place in the National (nominated) List, and made Ministers of Development of the West, East and Wannai, the

for Wannai, a Tamil majority area. They also wonder if a separate Development Minister for Wannai is a ploy to separate the Wannai from Jaffna.

Defection likely

Unhappy with the lukewarm response of the People's Alliance to the United National Front's offer to form a Government of National Reconciliation (GNR), several PA MPs are poised to switch sides and even join the Council of Ministers.

For this purpose, a former minister AHM Fowzie has formed a group called "PA MPs for National Reconciliation".

Violence mars Lanka swearing-in

13/12

S. Lanka
SI-6

From The Times of India

COLOMBO, Dec. 12. — The LTTE today staged major attacks against army troops and police, killing at least 16 people on the eve of a new Cabinet of ministers being sworn in, defence officials said.

The 25-member Cabinet led by Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe was named after his arch-rival President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga agreed to give up the defence and finance portfolios she has held since becoming President in 1994. Parliament reconvenes on Tuesday.

LTTE rebels fired 120 mm mortar bombs at the Pahala Toppur army base in the north-eastern district of Trincomalee in a bid to

overrun the camp, officials said.

Defence ministry spokesman Mr Sanath Karunaratne said security forces beat back the pre-dawn rebel assault by killing at least six guerrillas. Three soldiers were also killed and 20 of them wounded.

"Troop reinforcements were able to repulse the attack and take back a bunker line that the terrorists occupied briefly," Mr Karunaratne said. Security forces captured four automatic rifles used by the attackers.

In a simultaneous attack, the LTTE struck Valachhenai police station in the adjoining Batticaloa district. Six constables and a civilian employee of the nearby telecommunications exchange were killed.

Another 11 were wounded in the attack against police, when the guerrillas set ablaze the police station. The guerrillas also destroyed the local telephone exchange at Valachchenai.

A UNI report says that members of the Tamil United Liberation Front today met Indian High Commissioner Mr Gopalkrishna Gandhi today and urged India to pressurise the Sri Lankan government to lift the ban on LTTE in order to kick start the peace process. TULF later said the Indian High Commissioner has positively responded to their demands and assured them that he would make necessary arrangements for the newly elected MPs to meet the Indian leaders after their swearing-in ceremony.

ST/12/12

Chandrika gives up key posts

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 12. Following a decision by the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to shed all her portfolios, including Defence and Finance, a 25-member United National Front Cabinet was sworn in today in Sri Lanka, preceded by a bloody reminder of the ethnic conflict from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Nine security personnel and a civilian were killed and 27 others wounded when the LTTE carried out two separate attacks in eastern Sri Lanka, shortly before midnight on Tuesday, destroying a police station in Batticaloa and taking on an Army camp in Trincomalee. Hours earlier, on the advice of her party members, Ms. Kumaratunga conveyed to the new Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, her decision to relinquish the key Ministries, clearing the way for the swearing-in of the Cabinet.

The new Defence Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Tilak Marapone, was sworn in along with 24 other Ministers of Cabinet rank and 37 non-Cabinet rank before Ms. Kumaratunga at her official residence in the afternoon. Mr. Marapone was the Attorney-General in Ranasinghe Premadasa's government, and rose to considerable influence in the same position during the succeeding short presidency of Mr. D. B. Wijetunge.

The Finance Ministry has been assigned to Mr. K. N. Choksy, eminent lawyer and a senior member of the United National Party. Both are staunch Wickremesinghe loyalists, which could mean that real control of the two Ministries would be in the hands of the Prime Minister, who has assigned to himself the relatively insignificant portfolio of Plan Implementation.

Mr. Tyrone Fernando, another lawyer and a UNP stalwart, is Sri Lanka's new Foreign Minister.

The pre-election defectors from the People's Alliance have not been left out. Mr. G. L. Peiris is the Industrial Development Minister, the portfolio he held in the Kumaratunga Government. And, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim

Congress (SLMC), Mr. Rauf Ha-keem, retains the Ministry of Ports, from which Ms. Kumaratunga sacked him, an action that eventually led to the fall of her Government.

Mr. Armugam Thondaman, leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress representing the Indian Tamil plantation workers, too retains the portfolio that has a direct bearing on his constituency — Estate Infrastructure.

There must have been a fair share of disappointments. Mr. Milinda Moragoda, a Wickremesinghe confidante, thought of as the shadow finance minister while in the Opposition, had to be content with the non-Cabinet charge of Economic Reforms, Science and Technology. The late Sri Lankan President, Premadasa's son, Mr. Sajith Premadasa, is also a non-Cabinet Minister, assigned to Health.

As Mr. Wickremesinghe was giving the final touches to the Cabinet last night, the LTTE attacked the police station at Valachenai, a town to the north of Batticaloa, destroying it along with the State telecom facility next door. Six policemen and a civilian employee of the telecom department were killed and 15 constables wounded in the attack, the Defence Ministry said.

The LTTE also took away weapons from the police station before bombing it and the telecom facility. The town was cut off, and the Defence Ministry said shops and businesses remained closed today, there was no transport in the town and public life was disrupted.

In a simultaneous attack, 30 to 40 LTTE cadres surrounded an Army camp near Muttur in Trincomalee, firing with mortars and machine guns. Three soldiers were killed in the attack and a dozen wounded. The LTTE initially managed to take control of a bunker but was eventually pushed out. The soldiers later found the bodies of two LTTE cadres. The Ministry estimate said more than 20 LTTE cadres must have been killed in the two attacks.

THE HINDU

13 DEC 2001

Sriyantha Walpola

Not blocking Cabinet formation: Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 9. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, indicated here today that the delay in Cabinet formation was not due to any obstacles from her side though newspapers today speculated that she wanted to retain the defence portfolio.

"I am waiting for the Prime Minister's proposals on the Cabinet. He wants time. I am ready to swear them in at any time," she told journalists after swearing in Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister at a brief ceremony at her official residence.

Hinting at the limited role she might now have to play, Ms. Kumaratunga side-stepped a question on why her party was defeated, instead asking journalists to come by for a longer "session." "Now I have all the time. I used to run the government. But now I shall only run the Presidency," she said.

Asked if she would keep the key portfolios of defence and finance,

Ms. Kumaratunga smiled and said: "Wait and see".

After the ceremony, Ms. Kumaratunga and the new Prime Minister chatted over tea for nearly 30 minutes, giving no hint of the uneasy partnership that lies ahead.

But the indications were elsewhere. Later in the afternoon, addressing the nation over State TV, Ms. Kumaratunga asked law enforcement agencies to punish those indulging in post-election violence, and reiterated that as the President, Defence Minister, and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, she would not allow those violating the law to get away.

There was also an angry denial from the Presidential Secretariat of a report on a TV/radio station owned by Mr. Wickremesinghe's brother that Ms. Kumaratunga had agreed to part with the defence and finance portfolios.

The statement accused the station of "misleading" the public. The television station was kept out of the swearing-in ceremony.

THE HINDU

10 DEC 2001

Uneasy alliance begins as Wickremasinghe is sworn in PM

S. Lanka
11-13
10/12

COLOMBO: Ranil Wickremasinghe was on Sunday sworn in as Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister, ushering in a period of uneasy cohabitation with his arch-rival, President Chandrika Kumara-



Wickremasinghe tunga.

Although Ms Kumaratunga avoided a confrontation with the newly elected Parliament by allowing Mr Wickremasinghe, 52, to choose his own cabinet, tensions are simmering. Mr Wickremasinghe has pledged to reopen talks with Tamil Tiger separatists in a bid to resolve the long-running civil war. But one of the major challenges ahead of him is reviving an economy mired in its worst performance in over 50 years.

The first shot of the uneasy relationship was fired by Ms Kumaratunga who tried to take the shine off her rival's hour of glory by blocking the live broadcast of the official swearing-in ceremony. While a television network owned by Mr Wickremasinghe's brother was banned from entering Ms Kumaratunga's tightly-guarded home to cover the ceremony, the state television announced that it could not telecast the ceremony because of "obstacles" placed by Ms Kumaratunga's office.

Soon after being sworn in, the new Prime Minister drove down to

a nearby Buddhist temple to seek blessings.

Meanwhile, in a statement that underscored the potential trouble ahead for Mr Wickremasinghe in shaping his cabinet, with Ms Kumaratunga seemingly intent on playing a central role in the new government despite the rout of her Peoples' Alliance, senior officials said the President was furious over news reports that she had agreed to give up the key finance and defence ministries. The ministries are in addition to six other portfolios that Ms Kumaratunga still holds. "Reports of the President handing over the finance and defence portfolios to Mr Wickremasinghe are totally false," a statement from her office said.

Mr Wickremasinghe's United National Party (UNP) won the parliamentary elections on Wednesday, beating Ms Kumaratunga's party by 37 seats in the 225-member assembly. During her talks with Mr Wickremasinghe on Saturday, Ms Kumaratunga indicated that she was keen to appoint a cabinet immediately. But he reportedly told her that he would decide on his ministers later. Mr Wickremasinghe also informed Ms Kumaratunga that he was planning to hold talks with the third-placed Marxist JVP, minority Tamil and Muslim parties and some members of the PA about sharing of portfolios.

Meanwhile, a nationwide curfew was eased at dawn on Sunday amidst tension in several provincial towns where rivals clashed. (AFP)

Opposition UNF heads for victory in Lanka

S. Lanka
SFB



United News of India

COLOMBO, Dec. 6. — Sri Lanka's main Opposition United National Front today headed towards victory in yesterday's parliamentary elections winning nine of the 10 electoral districts announced so far.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance coalition could win only one district, as the Election Commissioner withheld the final announcement of results in ten other districts — Kandy, Gampaha, Colombo, Batticaloa, Digamadulla, Galle, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Wannai and Kegalle.

The EC, Mr Dayananda Dissanayake, said the reason behind his decision was the election-related violence in these districts, which is expected to have some bearing on their results. The decision about whether to call for a repoll will be taken tomorrow morning after he meets all party secretaries, he said.

However, political sources said that a repoll is likely. In such an event, the final result would only be announced along with the repoll results. Otherwise, they will be announced tomorrow morning.

Heavy poll violence in these areas has resulted in annulling polls in some booths. The blockade of routes for over 1,00,000 Tamil voters by the military in Bat-

ticaloa and Wannai areas has hit the Tamil National Alliance very hard.

Meanwhile, UNF stalwarts are confident of winning 120 seats in the 225 seated Parliament and form a majority government.

The UNF, led by the United National Party, has already won nine out of ten electoral districts with 40 seats, while the ruling PA coalition is trailing with only one win in Monaragala district, with 28 seats. The UNF has won in Anuradhapura, Kalutara, Ratnapuara, Nuwara-Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Badul-

la, Matale and Puttlam districts. It has won 89 out of the 120 electorates, the results of which have been announced and wrested control of well over 23 PA fortresses.

The TNA, led by the Tamil United Liberation Front, has already won in Pattiruppu and Kalkuda electorates with a massive lead.

Unofficial reports from Wannai and Jaffna said this alliance has won nine seats in these two districts despite army blockade.

The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna, which supported the PA for a one-year probationary government before the dissolution of parliament, has got only four seats so far and might be dropped from its position as the third force.

The UNP has got 27,91,577 votes, the PA has got 22,66,916 votes and the JVP has got 5,67,468 votes. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress has won at and Digamadulla electorate in the eastern province.

Meanwhile, with election results showing a winning trend for the Opposition, President Kumaratunga appealed to the people to humbly accept victory and defeat and maintain law and order under all circumstances. With postelection violence escalating in certain parts of the country, the police have extended the curfew again from this afternoon to 6 a.m. tomorrow.



A boy plays cricket in front of campaign posters of UNP leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, in Colombo on Thursday. — AP/PTI

THE STATESMAN

7 DEC 2001

UNP poised for a comeback

S. Lanka
By Nirupama Subramanian HD-1

COLOMBO, DEC. 6. The United National Party (UNP) was today poised to make a comeback after a gap of seven years following its unassailable lead over the ruling People's Alliance (PA) in Sri Lanka's parliamentary election.

A decision by elections officials to withhold the results of several districts, till 8 a.m. on Friday and perhaps order repoll in some areas hit by violence, is unlikely to affect the overall outcome of an impressive win by the UNP.

All eyes are now on the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the leader of the PA, who faces the challenge of co-existing with a UNP-majority Parliament for the remainder of her term, which runs till 2005.

Her decisions in the next few days could be crucial for determining if the country is headed for political reconciliation or an administrative deadlock and constitutional crisis.

With more than two-thirds of the ballots counted by late afternoon, the UNP-led United National Front (UNF) had 47.47 per cent of the votes with the PA trailing at just over 39 per cent.

The radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), projected as a potential ally of the PA, had 9.5 per cent, theoretically making it possible for the two to stake their claim to power. But as the day progressed, it was clear that the UNP would emerge as the strongest contender for forming the government.

The Elections Commissioner announced the withholding of results of nine districts out of 22 till Friday morning. Repolling in some electoral divisions is to be taken in consultation with representatives of parties on Friday.

The affected districts include Kandy and Kuruenegala, which saw violence and bloodshed on Wednesday, and the north-eastern districts of Jaffna,

Batticaloa and Vanni, where a large number of voters were unable to exercise their franchise.

7112
The development is not expected to alter the overall picture significantly. Of the 11 districts for which results have been declared, the UNP has won all but one, including traditional strongholds of the PA. The seat tally so far is 40 for the UNP, 28 for PA, four for JVP.

The UNP is leading in the other districts, raising hopes within the party that it would cruise to the magic number of 113 seats to win a simple majority in the 225-seat House.

This would be the first time since the Executive Presidency was introduced in 1978 in Sri Lanka that the President will be forced into co-habitation with an Opposition party holding a parliamentary majority.

Mrs. Kumaratunga, who had declared before the election that she would be unable to work with a UNP-led Parliament, now faces the near-certain task of inviting its leader and her arch foe, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, to form the new Government.

"We hope she will respond positively," said the UNP spokesman, Mr. Karunasena Kodituwakku, describing his party's victory as a "turning point for the national unity and the economy" of the country.

"This will be the beginning of a new era under the leadership of Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe," he said.

Signalling a mood of reconciliation, Mrs. Kumaratunga asked the people to "accept victory and defeat with humility", and appealed to all to act peacefully in a brief message that was read out on state-TV and radio.

The UNP's conduct would be equally crucial. The party has said a victory for it would automatically transform the all-powerful Executive Presidency into a largely ceremonial office like the French presidency.

DEC 2001

Chandrika invites UNP to form new government

By Farah Mihar Ahamed
Times News Network

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President



Chandrika Kumaratunga on Friday invited opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe for discussions over forming a new government after his United National Party (UNP) claimed a clear victory at the country's national poll.

The invitation was extended to Wickremasinghe after Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake resigned from his post following the defeat of the ruling party.

According to the final results released on Friday, the opposition United National Front (UNF) had obtained 114 seats in the 225-seat Parliament, giving it only a two-seat majority. The ruling Peoples' Alliance managed to get 77 seats, while its ally the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) captured an impressive 16 seats, six more than what it previously had.

Wickremanayake tendered in his resignation on Friday afternoon even before the final results of the poll had been announced. Kumaratunga in a statement did not formally say she was appointing Wickremasinghe as premier, but invited him to talks on Saturday to decide on cabinet appointments.

This is the first time the UNP will form a coalition government which will have to include the heads of the party's allies, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC)

which represents plantation workers of Indian Origin.

Kumaratunga's quick decision to invite Wickremasinghe for talks was unexpected following her previous tough stance that she would find it impossible to work with the UNP.

Her decision suggests an unprecedented level of cooperation between the two hostile parties that augurs well for the country, specially with regard to resolving the crucial ethnic conflict.

The mandate the people have given the UNP has clearly been for a quick resolution of the ethnic conflict and for a lifeline to be provided to the country's ailing economy, both issues having dominated the UNP campaign.

Public confidence in UNP's ability to manage the economy was evident on Friday as the Colombo Stock Exchange shot up by more than 100 points in the first half hour of trading.

The UNP has won enough seats to be able to form the government without the help of the Tamil National Alliance, which in turn would strengthen the party's reputation amongst the majority Sinhalese.

But because of its small majority and commitment to quickly start peace talks, the party will have to work closely with the alliance of four main Tamil parties who have won 15 seats in Parliament despite campaigning in support of the LTTE.

The Kumaratunga-Wickremasinghe talks on Saturday will be a critical point in Sri Lankan history that would envisage a working agreement between an Executive President from the opposition party and the Prime Minister from another party.

Wickremasinghe

57-6 invited 8/8

to form govt

S. Lanka

Agence France Press

COLOMBO, Dec. 7. — Sri Lanka's President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, today invited the main Opposition leader, Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe, to form a new government after his party swept the parliamentary elections this week. Mrs Kumaratunga said in a statement that she had invited Mr Wickremasinghe (52), to form a government. The two have scheduled a meeting tomorrow.

Mr Kumaratunga, whose People's Alliance was routed in Wednesday's election, will now have to work with a hostile parliament controlled by Mr Wickremasinghe's United National Party.

Meanwhile, police slapped curfew on a town in Sri Lanka's tense central hills today to quell riots over the killing of 12 supporters of an Opposition Muslim party in the elections, adds Reuters.

Mobs set ablaze a petrol station near Madawala town, which was turned into a tinder-box by Wednesday's killings, blamed on majority Sinhalese gunmen supporting the ruling People's Alliance.

"Police and paramilitary units have been moved into the area and the curfew will be in force indefinitely," a senior military official said. The unrest erupted just after the government lifted a 36-hour islandwide curfew meant to defuse tension between Sinhalese and Muslims who rioted in central Sri Lanka this year.

An estimated 7,000 mourners defied curfew to bury nine of those killed in a single attack in Madawala after voting closed.

"They were killed by PA thugs while escorting a ballot box," one mourner, Mr MY Asheef, said.

"It was a premeditated attack." The other three victims, also supporters of the Opposition Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, were killed elsewhere in the central Kandy district, which saw massive violence and ballot-box stuffing on election day.

The Congress is allied to the United National Party which has taken a virtually unassailable lead even though counting has been delayed by the abuses and polling annulled in several areas.

Mrs Kumaratunga ordered an immediate investigation into the killings which took the death toll from a violent election campaign to almost 60. Sri Lanka has been wracked by an 18-year ethnic war pitting Sinhalese against the larger Tamil minority but, clashes involving Muslims are rare.

THE STATESMAN

8 DEC 2001

VOTE FOR CHANGE

Sinhala, Tamils and Muslims give UNP a chance

THE People's Alliance lost because it couldn't hold its government together and did almost nothing in the year it was in power, except try desperately and ensure its own survival, which ultimately weakened it from within. President Chandrika Kumaratunga had to dissolve the national assembly in July when a portion of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress detached itself from the parent body to sit in the opposition. After which, she had to come to terms with allowing the JVP into the government, because the others weren't willing.

This went down badly not only with her voters, but also with her party colleagues, mainly because the JVP set conditions which envisaged aborting the Norwegian peace initiative and economic reforms. It also forced the government to set up four independent commissions to regulate democratic institutions. Four ministers began by resigning from her government and then took another nine MPs over with them to the UNP, including deputy speaker Sarath Munasinghe. The manoeuvre seems to have helped only the JVP which increased its constituency from five to nine percent. Kumaratunga tried to make up for the loss by offering a salary hike to government employees, compensation to Muslims who had lost their property and a reduction in the turnover tax on bank loans to set the fears of the business community at rest. She tried insinuating that the UNP was selling out the country's interest to the LTTE.

All to no avail. The remaining Tamil parties, including the TULF, the strongest Tamil political force outside the LTTE, constituted themselves into a platform called the Tamil National Alliance and went with the UNP which promised to form an interim council in Jaffna and talk to the LTTE. About 80,000 Tamils from Jaffna and LTTE held areas, who would, in all likelihood, have voted for the pro-UNP TNA, were prevented from voting. One doesn't know whether the Army stopped them under instructions from Colombo, but the suspicion remains.

What is clear is that the Sinhala majority, on whom the outcome between the SLFP and the UNP traditionally depends, want something done about the Tamil issue and about the economy. Devolution, though sensible, is a complicated constitutional manoeuvre calling for a protracted parliamentary struggle. Kumaratunga, after all, could not hold the referendum she was threatening to in October. She may have realised it wasn't feasible. In its absence, Ranil Wickremesinghe's idea of talking to the LTTE and involving them in local administration, must have sounded practical, especially since Pirabhakaran has been making moderate noises of late. Above all, the UNP having secured the support of the Muslim and the Tamil parties, looked much more like a ruling combination than the PA.

A cohabitation between Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga cannot be easy, not only because of their importance but also because of their radical differences in approach towards the ethnic conflict in the north and the east. This is the first cohabitation since 1978 when the executive presidency was introduced. The jury is out on the outcome.

THE STATESMAN

- 9 DEC 2001

Chandrika reasserts authority over armed forces

S. Lanka

SE-12

9/12

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Dec. 8. — President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga issued a special directive to armed forces saying she continued to be their commander.

Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the United National Party-led United National Front, will be sworn in as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka tomorrow afternoon.

The decision to this effect was taken at an hour-long meeting between Mrs Kumaratunga and Mr Wickremasinghe.

A top-ranking UNP source said that during the meeting Mr Wickremasinghe didn't touch on the important issues. The sources, however, said the discussion took place in a cordial mood.

Mrs Kumaratunga, who invited the UNP leader to form

government, asked the armed forces and police to act impartially while dealing with law and order problems, especially of a political nature.

"As president, defence minister and commander in chief" she said she was fully empowered to issue directives to them. "I will not hesitate to take stringent legal action against security forces or any police officer who acts extraneous to these directives or neglects them, regardless of their stature", she said.

Her order came amid charges of attacks on People's Alliance supporters by UNP men in various parts of the country. It has also been alleged that the new regime might direct the police to arrest PA bigwigs allegedly behind electoral violence.

■ Editorial: Vote for change, page 8



Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe with President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga at the President's residence in Colombo on Saturday. — AP/PTI

THE STATESMAN

- 9 DEC 2001

Rivals thrown together

S. Lanka

IN THE affairs of a democratic nation, elections are the high point, the ultimate expression of the people's will. In Sri Lanka, the people have emphatically spoken for change, just 14 months after an ambiguous vote that led to political chaos, worsened the chances of peace in the strife-torn island and left the economy crippled.

The victory of the United National Party (UNP)-led United National Front (UNF) in the general election last week was a mandate by a people who had wearied of seven years of rule under the People's Alliance (PA), which started off the blocks with great promise in 1994 but was unable to live up to expectations.

Today, there are similar expectations of the UNP for a magic cure to all the complex problems the country faces. The UNP leader, Mr. Ranil

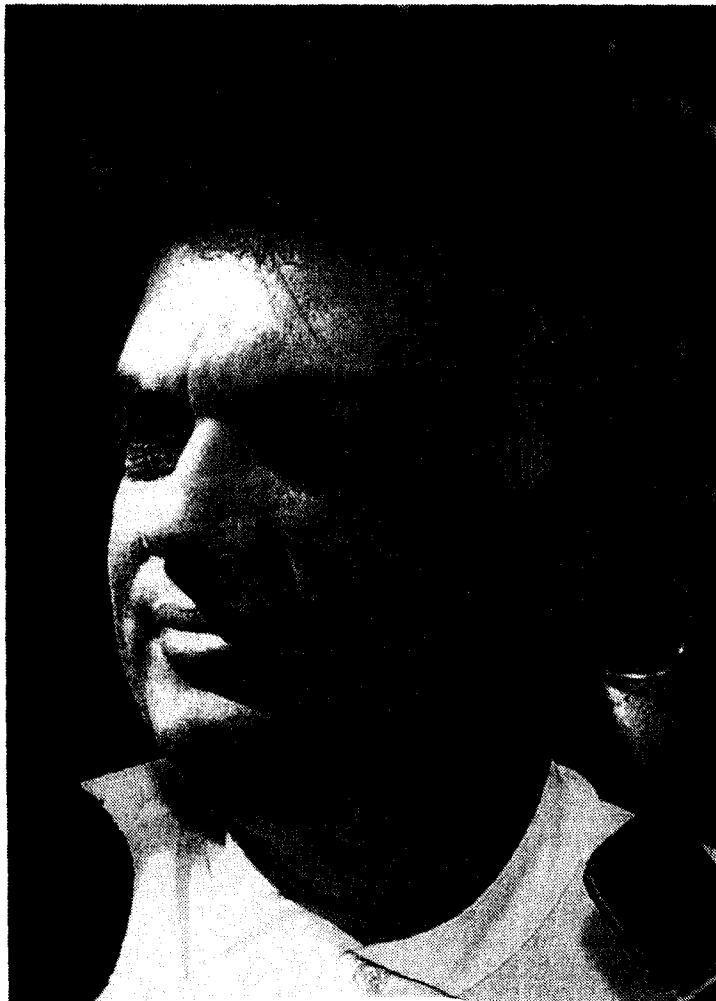
For Sri Lanka, much will depend on how the mandate in the just-concluded polls is interpreted by Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremesinghe, says Nirupama Subramanian.

Wickremesinghe, has promised a quick end to the war in the northeast through talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). He has also promised to undertake an immediate revival of the economy. But it might prove as difficult for Mr.

Wickremesinghe, to live up to the hopes the people have reposed in his election-time promises, as it was for the PA.

For one, while voting quite decisively to deny the PA another term in office, the electorate has at the same time also denied the UNP an outright majority in Parliament, giving it 45.6 per cent of the vote and 109 seats, four short of the half-way mark in the 225-member House.

The PA received 37.3 per cent of the vote, nearly seven per



Ranil Wickremesinghe... the real test begins now.

cent less than its share in the last election, winning 77 seats. Its potential ally, the JVP, won 16 seats, six more than in 2000, and obtained 9.1 per cent of the vote share. Far short of the required numbers to stake a claim to forming the Government, the PA immediately conceded defeat.

The UNP is expected to make up the shortfall in its numbers with the help of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which has won five seats, and perhaps consolidate this with outside support from the Tamil National Alliance which has 15 seats, but the new dispensation is bound to be as dependent as the previous one on its allies.

But more importantly, for the first time since the Executive Presidency was introduced in Sri Lanka through the 1978 Constitution promulgated by J. R. Jayewardene, the incumbent of that all-powerful office will have to co-exist with a hostile Parliament, creating a piquant situation.

The leader of the vanquished PA, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, was re-elected as

President in 1999. Her term will run till the end of 2005. The animosity between Ms. Kumaratunga and the UNP leader is Sri Lanka's worst-kept secret and the question being asked now is whether the two can cooperate in the interests of the nation or will the country once again descend into chaos as they battle for political supremacy.

At the time of writing, Ms. Kumaratunga had invited Mr. Wickremesinghe "to discuss measures" to appoint a Prime Minister and a Cabinet. But it is not clear what role she envisages for herself in the new set-up, or indeed if the UNP is willing to allow her to play any role at all. Much will depend on how the mandate in the just-concluded election is interpreted by the two most important players in this game.

One point of view, advanced by the UNP and many within the PA itself, is that the election results are really a verdict against Ms. Kumaratunga. She campaigned actively for the PA in this election, warning people not to elect the UNP as she

would find it difficult to work with it.

And if the people voted against the PA despite knowing this, their message is that she should hand over the running of the Government to the UNP, shed the draconian powers vested in her office and play a ceremonial rather than executive role for the remainder of her term.

On the other hand, the vote could also be interpreted as a mandate to force the country's two main parties to work together. If the voters gave a mandate to the UNP fully aware that the reins of the Government would still be controlled by the President, it could only be in order to enforce a national government that many in Sri Lanka see as the only way to resolve the country's problems.

Part of the reason why the ethnic conflict has become so intractable today is the inability of the ruling and Opposition parties through the years to see eye to eye on proposals to resolve it. In this sense, the mandate can be seen as a verdict not just for a simple change of guard at the palace, but for a change in the very concept of governance.

Whether the island's political leadership has what it takes to do this, is another question.

Certainly, the voters rejected the staple majoritarian-communal rhetoric that the politicians have always resorted to when they perceive themselves to be under siege. This was discovered not just by the PA this time but other hardline parties too. The Sihala Urumaya, a party formed just before the 2000 election advancing an openly chauvinistic line and a military solution to the ethnic conflict, which managed one seat in the last Parliament, sank without a trace this time.

Without doubt the people have made it clear through this election, by voting for the TNA in the Tamil-dominated northeast and the UNP in the Sinhala-Buddhist south, that what they want from the new Government is a quick resolution of the ethnic conflict, not by war but through talks with the LTTE.

This is what both the UNP and the TNA promised. Now, it is up to them to bring the LTTE to the table for negotiations on a political settlement that will end the war without dividing the country.

Sri Lanka goes to the polls tomorrow

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 3. Sri Lanka's top election official today appealed to voters and contestants to ensure that Wednesday's parliamentary poll would be free and fair amid fears of violence and intimidation on voting day.

"We have taken all precautions and made all arrangements to make it a free and fair poll. I appeal to voters, candidates, contesting parties, election observer groups and civil society groups to make this endeavour a successful one," Mr. Dayananda Dissanayake, the Elections Commissioner, said.

His appeal came hours after police lifted an overnight curfew that had to be clamped in several areas of the north-central district of Anuradhapura which were rocked by violent incidents on Sunday, the last day of the election campaign.

The curfew was imposed after one person was killed in the district last night and 13 wounded when a grenade was thrown at a ruling party procession.

As many as 10 election-related murders were reported over the weekend alone from various parts of the island.

A hand grenade was thrown at a PA rally in Kandy district, leaving at least 17 people wounded.

In another incident on Sunday, two guards attached to the Presidential Security Division (PSD) were arrested for their involvement in firing at the vehicle of a prominent opposition politician who recently defected from the ruling party.

The police recovered a grenade launcher, AT-56 automatic rifles and a pistol from the duo. "This is irrefutable proof of what we

have been saying," said the Opposition spokesman, Mr. G.L. Peiris.

The UNP-led United National Front has alleged that guards of the PSD have been sent out to spread an atmosphere of fear and violence during the election.

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, said supporters of the ruling party were creating a "fear psychosis" in Kandy district, particularly in areas inhabited by Muslim and Tamil minorities to prevent voters from turning out on election day.

Voicing similar concern for the entire country, the private Centre for Monitoring Election Violence said today the "indicators of exacerbated violence of an organised nature taking place on polling day are very clear."

The centre has recorded over 2,300 incidents of election-related violence in 37 days of campaigning, which it described as "in excess of" incidents for any election since 1994.

It said 38 people had been killed so far in the violence.

It said the violence had escalated by "alarming proportions" in the last stages of the campaign and identified Anuradhapura, the western districts of Puttalam and Gampaha, the central district of Kurunegala and Ampara in the east as the worst affected areas.

Mr. Dissanayake said "vulnerable" areas had been identified and extra precautions taken to ensure that polling in those areas would be conducted smoothly.

Over 40,000 policemen have been deployed on election duty, with stand-by support from the police force of each district, and the army in identified trouble-spots, he said.

THE HINDU

S. Lanka
HD-12

Opinion polls put UNP ahead

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 2. Opinion polls are giving the Opposition United National Party (UNP) a clear lead over the ruling People's Alliance (PA) in the December 5 general election.

However, the UNP is accusing the Government of attempting to rob it of what it believes will be certain victory on Wednesday through violence and intimidation.

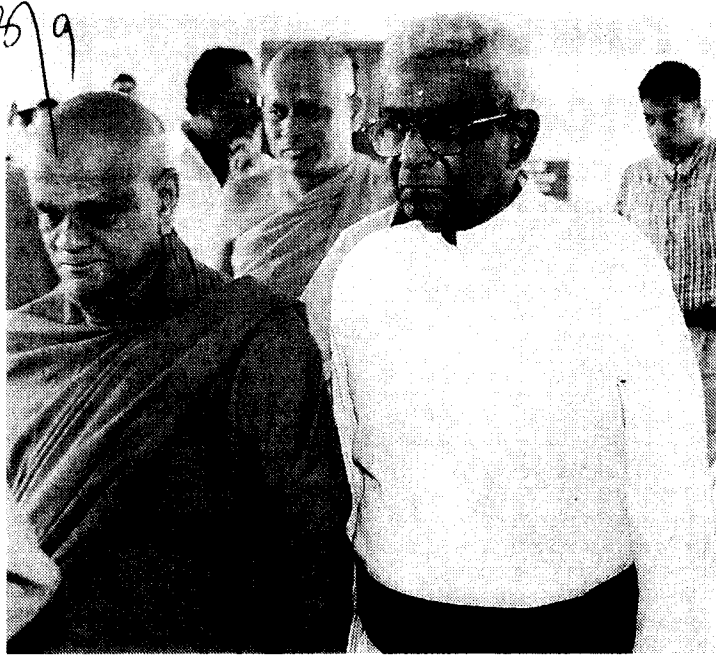
Two opinion polls published in the *Sunday Times* today, the last day of the campaign, put the UNP five per cent ahead of the PA.

An opinion poll conducted by the Indian firm ORG-MARG with its Sri Lanka partner SMART gave the UNP 38 per cent of the vote-share, and the PA 33 per cent.

Both parties have improved their standing over a previous round of polling, with only 13 per cent undecided this time, against the 31 per cent who fell in that category two weeks ago.

Another poll, conducted by Survey Research Lanka (Pvt.) Ltd. gave the UNP 43.5 per cent while the PA had 38.8 per cent, with the undecided voters constituting less than three per cent.

According to this poll, support for the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which is expecting to play a crucial role after the election, has



A Catholic priest and a Buddhist monk going to meet Sri Lanka's Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Dayananda Dissanayake, on Sunday to urge him to ensure a violence-free poll. — AFP

fallen to 10 per cent from 12.8 per cent two weeks ago.

The UNP-led United National Front (UNF) said today the party had information about personnel of the Presidential Security Division (PSD) sent out into various districts "to engage in unlawful

and illegal election-related activity".

The UNF spokesman, Mr. G.L.Peiris, said a delegation of senior members of the party met the Defence Secretary today and handed over to him the names, ranks, serial numbers and identification

classifications of 41 PSD personnel who had been sent to the north-central district of Anuradhapura.

"The only legitimate function of the PSD is to protect the President. It is the duty of the Defence Secretary to instruct the Inspector-General of Police to ensure that they are physically brought back to Colombo. They have no business being outside Colombo," Mr. Peiris said. The UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, today wrote to the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, demanding a public commitment from her that she would not tolerate election violence by PA candidates and supporters.

"You will also instruct the PSD to return to Colombo and restrict their activities to the job of protecting you. You should instruct the IGP and the Army to act impartially and against anyone committing acts of violence," Mr. Wickremesinghe said.

The polls showed 62 per cent of respondents saying talking to the LTTE was the best solution to the conflict in the north-east, which the UNP has promised to do.

But the UNP scored poorly compared to the PA on its ability to ensure human rights and press freedom and to control bribery and corruption.

THE HINDU

12 DEC 1992

Ranil Govt faces Speaker test

Colombo, December 18

SRI LANKA'S new Government will face its first test when Parliament votes for a new Speaker, officials said today.

The secret ballot will take place tomorrow when the new Parliament is due to hold its first session.

The United National Party (UNP), which won the polls, is expected to put forward senior party member Joseph Michael Perera (60), for the job of Speaker of the 225-member Assembly.

The UNP and an allied Muslim party have 114 seats giving the coalition a slender two-seat majority in Parliament.

Parliament sources said the Speaker election would show whether the government had the full support of its own members.

It was not immediately clear if the main Opposition People's Alliance (PA) would field its own candidate for the post.

The government has offered the Deputy Speaker position to the PA and is trying to woo Opposition legislators to join the administration.

The UNP, led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, has invited Opposition legislators to join a Government of national reconciliation, an offer the PA has turned down.

Wickremesinghe's party has decided to keep the Deputy Speaker's post vacant for at least a month to give more time to PA defectors to take the job in addition to several other Cabinet positions which are also being offered.

Although the PA is the Opposition in Parliament, its leader, Chandrika Kumaratunga, is the President since she was elected directly at a separate election in

SOLHEIM MAY BE BACK

PK Balachandran
Colombo, December 18

ERIK SOLHEIM, the Norwegian peace envoy who was sidelined by the previous Sri Lankan Government for an alleged tilt towards the LTTE, may be brought back by the present one to help liaise with that militant group in a renewed peace effort.

A Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader said Ranil Wickremesinghe had hinted at bringing Solheim back during a recent meeting with a delegation from the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF).

Wickremesinghe, however, may have to face some problems in this regard. Still in power as the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga could halt Solheim's return.

That apart, Solheim's penchant for a high-profile role may clash with Wickremesinghe's wish to keep the peace process a low-profile activity till a real breakthrough is achieved.

Meanwhile, the TNA said New Delhi had "informally" indicated that it was ready to receive a TNA delegation after Wickremesinghe's talks with Indian leaders later this month.

The TNA would formally write to the Indian Government seeking appointments with AB Vajpayee, his Cabinet colleagues and Sonia Gandhi.

Asked what the TNA expected India to do, senior vice-president of TULF, V Anandasangaree, said India should ask the for an immediate ceasefire and get Colombo to lift the ban on the LTTE and start peace talks with the Norwegian help.

Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) leader Sri Kantha said India should go beyond the India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987. "As the accord had miserably failed, India should work out a Lanka policy, keeping in mind the changed circumstances and past experience," he said.

December 1999 for a six-year term.

Meanwhile, for the first time in years, the island nation's Government said today it wanted India to get involved in the peace process to pressure the Lankan Tigers Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to end their 18-year war.

"We want the Indians to get more involved in bringing about a settlement to the ethnic crisis," Tyrone Fernando, Foreign Min-

ister in the new Government, said.

Wickremesinghe is set to discuss the issue during his three-day visit to New Delhi on December 22.

"They are a very big country, our closest neighbour and a great power in the world. We expect a lot of pressure to be exerted on the LTTE to enter into talks," Fernando said about what he expects from New Delhi.

In 1987, India sent a peace-keeping force to Sri Lanka to fight the LTTE, but the troops failed to beat the guerrillas in what Indian media often refer to as "India's Vietnam."

The force was withdrawn in 1990 after 1,200 Indian soldiers were killed and thousands of others wounded or maimed.

Army men surrender

Five army men have surrendered before a court for their alleged involvement in the massacre of 10 Muslims on the day of the parliamentary elections, while the police continued their search for the son of a former Deputy Defence Minister.

An army lieutenant and four soldiers yesterday turned themselves in before a magistrate in Kandy, as a special police team claimed that it had evidence pointing to the alleged involvement of the son of former Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatt in the mass killing.

The army personnel were remanded in custody, giving a dramatic turn to the political killings in Kandy district that took place on December 5, after polling was over, while the victims were travelling in a van behind a Government vehicle carrying ballot boxes at Madawala.

The troops pumped bullets from T-56 assault rifles into the van, apparently as punishment for preventing large-scale rigging by their vigilance.

Ratwatt, Kumaratunga's uncle and a senior leader of People's Alliance, is widely accused by opponents of unleashing terror in Kandy.

Agencies

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 DEC 2001

Lanka PM's offer upsets Chandrika

United News of India

COLOMBO, Dec. 17.— The People's Alliance coalition, led by President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), is divided over whether to accept Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe's offer of forming a National Reconciliation government.

More than 20 MPs, including three former senior ministers, were reported to have decided to accept the Prime Minister's offer despite PA's executive committee rejection. Although the executive committee of the PA, that met on Saturday, decided not to accept the offer of Mr Wickremasinghe, the PA stalwarts such as former ministers Mr Richard Pathirana and Mr AHM Fowzie have decided to accept the Cabinet portfolios in the UNF-led government.

The PA faction favouring the national government was trying to persuade former foreign minister Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar to join the proposed government for finding a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict. According to sources, these two former ministers have strongly lobbied several newly elected PA MPs and other senior members to accept the offer to form the national government to solve the burning issues of the country. Former minister of the PA government and close confidant of Mrs Kumaratunga, Mr Al Haj Alavi Mowlana, said: "The party will certainly expel any member who acted in violation of the decision of the executive committee," he said. Mr Wickremasinghe initially made the offer to all political parties, including the main Opposition PA, soon after he was sworn-in on 8 December as the 14th Prime Minister of the country. Again on 13 December he announced that his offer for PA members to join the United National Front government would be open for another month.

Meanwhile, the foreign minister Mr Tyrone Fernando said the government would hold unconditional talks with Tamil rebels next month.

THE STATESMAN

18 DEC 2001

SRI LANKA'S POLITICAL EXPERIMENT

THE DIFFICULT CHOICE made by the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to personally relinquish her powerful portfolios, defence and finance, has certainly facilitated the relatively smooth formation of a new Government. With her own People's Alliance being decisively rejected by the electorate in the latest parliamentary poll, she could no longer hope to have a political friend as the new Prime Minister under her executive presidency which remains unimpaired at this time. Ms. Kumaratunga has, therefore, reconciled herself to the inevitable emergence of her chief political adversary, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party, as the new Prime Minister. More importantly, however, she has surprised her critics by parting with the defence and finance portfolios without any significant political fight. Having held these portfolios until the dissolution of the previous Parliament, she normatively retained them during the transition to a new Government. Under Sri Lanka's present constitutional web of power centres, the President can indeed breathe down the necks of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet at any given time. Her prerogative of being the Head of the Cabinet cannot be erased by the results of the latest general election. With her term as President yet to run its full course, Ms. Kumaratunga will stay as the legitimate Head of state as also the Head of Government. Now, as a duly elected Prime Minister, Mr. Wickremesinghe too commands a definitive majority within the new Parliament. However, a grey label marks the political complexion of his constitutional prerogative of sharing power with the President, who belongs to an opposition outfit. As the two key opposing figures within the mainstream political spectrum, Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe are strangers to the politics of accommodation. Their efforts or struggles to coexist as two distinctive functionaries, who also need to cooperate, promise to turn into a salient

experiment in constitutional politics. 18/12

An issue that has troubled Sri Lanka is one of constitutional architecting. The principle of harmonious construction, which is often cited in constitutional jurisprudence, will now be put to a serious test. Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe need to manage a state that is prone to endemic crises on account of the majoritarian politics of the Sinhala community and the psyche of deprivation among an alienated minority, which consists of Tamils and Muslims as separate groups with historical connections. In a practical sense, the answers to the riddles of Sri Lanka's constitutional conundrum will be determined by the manner in which these two interact as duly elected leaders with agendas, even visions, of their own for the future. HD-10

An immediate confrontation been averted, because the President has had no hand in shaping the new Cabinet. However, her status as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces is no residuary function, although she has given up defence. The simple but profound reason centres on the Sri Lankan military's long and controversial forward deployment within the country in the ongoing fight against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). A disturbing sign in this overall context is that the President and the Prime Minister have not been able to fashion a Government of "national reconciliation". Irrespective of who is to blame, the fact is that the two, known for their different styles, may wish to see how far they could influence each other on policy matters. Mr. Wickremesinghe has struck a relatively more conciliatory posture towards the LTTE in recent months. So, the more immediate questions, which directly impinge on Sri Lanka's future, pertain to the scope for any fresh political move to engage the LTTE. To be closely watched is the direction that Sri Lanka's foreign policy might take in this new context.

18 DEC 2001

18 DEC 2001

Ranil: A man who doesn't mind getting his suit dirty

Lanka 10/12
COLOMBO, Dec. 9. — Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe is an unlikely veteran of the tough and dangerous world of Sri Lankan politics.

The tall, ungainly leader of the United National Party was set to be sworn in today after the UNP and its allies won a majority in Wednesday's parliamentary vote.

An unimpressive orator, Mr Wickremesinghe is as unashamed of Western business suits as he is of spelling out the unpopular choices facing his war-weary country. "You can't make policy with a public-relations machine," says Mr Wickremesinghe, whose cherubic face belies his 52 years and masks his mastery of political manoeuvres.

His staid, pragmatic approach paid off handsomely in the parliamentary vote when voters, reeling under economic decline, war and political turmoil abandoned the ruling People's Alliance. "I want to step away from confrontational politics," said Mr Wickremesinghe as his supporters lit fire-crackers and danced in the streets.

Confrontation is the last thing Mr Wickremesinghe needs because People's Alliance leader Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga re-

tains the powerful presidency with sweeping powers to dissolve and suspend parliament and name a cabinet.

Mrs Kumaratunga will remain president till 2005.

Mr Wickremesinghe was first appointed prime minister in 1993, but held the largely ceremonial post for just 16 months before

Media banned

COLOMBO, Dec. 9. — President Kumaratunga today administered the oath of office to Mr Wickremesinghe at a function held at the President's House here, but banned several media organisations from covering the ceremony. — PTI

losing a 1994 election to the Peoples' Alliance.

Analysts say that what Mr Wickremesinghe lacks in charisma he makes up for in style, running a campaign of slick television commercials and trips on a luxury campaign bus that may be commonplace in the West but a novelty to Sri Lanka's rough-and-tumble election world.

Until now his message of market-driven modernisation had failed to fire the imagination of voter-rich rural Sri Lanka, costing his party dearly at elections.

His refusal to play the populist

saw Mr Wickremesinghe lampooned by Mrs Kumaratunga's left-leaning government, but nothing brought him more flak than his stand on the ethnic war.

Mr Wickremesinghe makes no bones about his plans to talk to, and, if possible, accommodate the LTTE, fighting since 1983 for a separate Tamil state in the country's north and east.

Mrs Kumaratunga, who has favoured military marginalisation of the LTTE along with power sharing for Tamils, frequently called Mr Wickremesinghe a pawn of the rebels. "I will not retaliate with mudslinging. This country has to talk peace and I will do that as I win power," says Mr Wickremesinghe, who also escaped a suicide bombing in 1999.

Mr Wickremesinghe had planned to start "talks about talks" within weeks of his election and has vowed to set up an interim administration in the predominantly Tamil north and east — a move his opponents called a sell-out to the rebels.

Mr Wickremesinghe, who married university lecturer Maithree Wickremesinghe in 1995, hails from a prominent family of politicians and businessmen with large interests in the media, and has twice been thrust, somewhat prematurely, into the political spotlight.

THE STATESMAN

S. Lakshana
HD-17
2/12

✓ Polls and polarisation



A NO-HOLDS-BARRED CONTEST: Chandrika Kumaratunga and (right) Ranil Wikremesinghe and his wife.

ON WEDNESDAY, Sri Lanka will vote to choose a Government for the second time in 14 months, but there are no indications yet that the election will in any way resolve the political instability in the strife-torn island.

In the run-up to the election, brought on by the ruling People's Alliance loss of majority in Parliament after less than a year in power, one theme dominated the debate and could impact powerfully on the outcome: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a non-participant in the election, but present in it right through.

The Opposition United National Party (UNP) tried hard to keep the focus on the Government's failings, including its inability to guide the economy.

But the PA, finding itself on the mat on every major issue of governance, successfully hijacked the debate by resorting to the time-tested tactic of using communal rhetoric to appeal to the Sinhala majority.

The main burden of this rhetoric has been the allegation of a "secret pact" between the UNP and the LTTE, and that if voted to power the UNP would hand over vast portions of the country to the LTTE.

The repeated use of this propaganda by the PA, starting with the presidential election in 1999, has served only to reinforce in the popular Sinhala psyche the mistaken notion that the island's ethnic problem equals the LTTE.

This time, the PA has the assistance of the Janatha

Vimukthi Peramuna, its main ally in the last months of its short-lived Government, in beating the majoritarian drum.

The UNP denied the accusations of a "secret pact", but was unable to divert the focus back to what it considered its main plank in these elections — ending the war and putting the country's economy back on the rails.

The cumulative result of the PA-JVP propaganda has been a complete erosion of minority faith in the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga.

It has given new strength to the LTTE-brand of Tamil nationalism, and left those against the LTTE voiceless.

wave — the TNA and the JVP are expected to play crucial roles.

From the way in which the campaign was conducted, it is widely expected that the JVP, which is hoping to improve its performance in this election, will lend critical support to the PA if it seems likely to have the better chance to form the next Government.

On the other hand, the UNP has few friends outside itself, which could prove to be a drawback if it is to make a pitch for government formation.

There are indications that the TNA, whose constituent parties have declared their

Candidates of the TNA have claimed LTTE support as they canvassed for votes in the northeast.

One candidate even said that all those seeking election on the TNA ticket were Tigers. It is only to be expected that after the elections, the LTTE will demand returns from those elected using its name.

But even if it does form the Government, either on its own as its supporters believe, or with the help of the TNA, the UNP still has to contend with Ms. Kumaratunga, who will continue to remain President. She was re-elected to office for a six-year term in 1999.

In fact, an important side-show in this election has been the PA warning the people that if they vote in the UNP, they can expect a deadlocked Government, as under the Constitution all power is vested with the Executive President.

Parliament cannot function as an independent or alternate power centre, the PA and its allies have been saying. And some have even warned of another election if that happens.

Against this background of uncertainties and fractious politics, it seems unlikely that this election will resolve any of the major issues facing Sri Lanka today, including the ethnic problem.

In fact, judging from the run-up, it may leave the country more polarised than before along political and communal lines with the important players unable to extricate themselves from the traps created by their own election-time rhetoric.

Judging from the run-up, the December 5 elections may leave Sri Lanka more polarised than before along political and communal lines, writes Nirupama Subramanian.

But as she fights to retain the Sinhala vote, this does not seem to have overly worried Ms. Kumaratunga.

Articulating the LTTE agenda in these elections is the Tamil National Alliance, a grouping of four Tamil parties, contesting the elections in the north and the east.

In a post-election scenario in which neither the PA or the UNP is able to win a simple majority in the 225-seat Parliament — a real possibility considering that while there is resentment against the Government, there is no simultaneous pro-Opposition

dissatisfaction with the PA Government, might offer assistance.

Last week's appeal to the Sinhala electorate by the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, not to vote for Ms. Kumaratunga, is a clear direction to the Tamils that there has to be a change of Government.

But the important question here is whether the UNP, for all its pre-election generosity of promising unconditional talks with the LTTE, and offering to consider removing the ban on it, would want the backing of the TNA which would be remote-controlled by the ruthless guerilla group.

YIP...
2000

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2001

THE LTTE'S NEW DILEMMA

HD-10
1/12

THE INTERNATIONAL 'CAMPAIGN' against terror has caught the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a very awkward posture. Quite unusually but almost inevitably, the LTTE itself seems to have recognised how conspicuously untenable its position has become. Not surprisingly, therefore, the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, has now demanded that the West define political terrorism in the light of a "deep insight" about the concepts of an armed struggle for self-determination and the like. Discernible beyond his painstaking attempt to educate the global community on this score is his plain discomfort, which borders on a deep concern, over the LTTE's unprecedented predicament. With Canada recently joining the U.S. and the U.K. among the Western powers in identifying the LTTE as an international terrorist organisation for their legal purposes, Mr. Prabhakaran seems worried that his political game is virtually up in the wider global arena. The LTTE remains banned by India and Sri Lanka too. Given the stark reality of such a comprehensive isolation on the international stage, he still clings to the respectability that was arguably conferred on him by the recently failed Norwegian attempt to broker talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Not only that, Mr. Prabhakaran is no less eager to plead with the prime movers of the ongoing 'campaign' against globalised terror. His transparent objective is to try and define terrorism on his own terms. This being an impossible order though, he appears willing at the same time to moderate his style at the margins. This accounts for some of the politically 'soft' statements that he made during his latest annual traditional "Maaveerar Naal" speech, dedicated to the memory of the "heroes" of the "liberation struggle" by the Tamil Tigers.

Mr. Prabhakaran should, however, know that there is simply no place for self-serving definitions of either terrorism itself or even the concept of a struggle for political emancipation. This

is not to suggest that all is well with the ongoing U.S.-led 'campaign' against international terror. Yet, the fact remains that the global community is becoming increasingly cognisant of the immorality and irrationality of all forms of terrorist violence for political or ideological purposes. The litmus test is about the proven track record or the perceivable hidden agenda of the practitioners of terror. On this reckoning, Mr. Prabhakaran and the LTTE can hardly hope to erase their infamy. However, if they genuinely choose to ponder over their past with a view to reinventing themselves now as agents for peace and stability in Sri Lanka and its adjoining region, the latest international 'campaign' against terror may have been a good wake-up call.

S. Lanka ✓

On balance, the signs from the LTTE camp are not really encouraging at this time. Arguably, Mr. Prabhakaran's 'soft' politics centre on his apparent willingness to consider a settlement with Sri Lanka's Sinhala majority within a framework of some form of coexistence that remains ill-defined all the same. In fact, there is no definitive shift in his well-known stand about the political and economic rights of the Tamils with respect to their traditional lands. He is eager to avoid indicating a direction towards any prescriptive formula that might resolve the island-republic's existential ethnic problem. Within these self-imposed parameters, the LTTE leader has sought to portray the organisation's activities as the manifestation of "reactive violence" to Sri Lanka's "state terror" as also its alleged "genocidal" tendencies. By harping on such old themes in the new situation, Mr. Prabhakaran cannot hope to whitewash his record of terrorising the Tamil political fraternity itself. The question, therefore, is whether his reported willingness to let the Tamils participate in Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections, scheduled for December 5, can mark a new beginning in his politics.

1000000
- 1 000 201

VIOLENCE MARKS POLLING

80,000 Tamils not allowed to vote in Sri Lanka

S. Lanka
1107

8/12

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, DEC. 5. Up to 80,000 Tamils living in the LTTE-controlled areas in northeast Sri Lanka were barred from voting by the Sri Lankan Army in today's parliamentary elections, which were marked by a high voter turnout elsewhere, despite several incidents of violence in parts of the island.

An estimated 70 per cent of the over 12.4 million voters turned out to vote. Ten persons were killed, all except one in the central district of Kandy, where the maximum number of violent incidents were alleged to have taken place. Seven persons were killed and six wounded in one incident alone when unidentified gunmen opened fire on their vehicle and threw a grenade at it.

Police and the private Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) reported incidents of intimidation of voters by armed supporters of candidates and ballot-stuffing in several polling stations in the district.

One killing was reported from the northwest district of Kurunegala.

The incidents followed a night of violence in which police reported two killings in separate incidents. The CMEV reported that six persons had died in several overnight clashes.

But of most significance was the Army's decision not to permit Tamils living in the LTTE-held areas north of Vavuniya and in Batticaloa to travel to polling stations in Government-controlled areas to cast their votes on grounds of security.

As is the usual practice, provision was made for these people to cast their votes at clustered polling stations outside the "uncleared areas" as the LTTE-controlled territory is known here.

But the Army closed the checkpoints through which civilian traffic flows daily to and from the "uncleared" and "cleared" areas citing intelligence reports of planned infiltration by the LTTE.

"To ensure free and fair elections in the cleared areas of Vanni and Batticaloa, entry points were not opened today. There were credible intelligence reports to the effect that the LTTE was planning to enter cleared areas today in the guise of voters to create violence to disrupt the free and fair elections," a Defence Ministry statement said.

Four checkpoints were closed in Batticaloa district affecting 40,000 voters, while in the north, the Pirmanalankulam checkpoint was shut down, preventing another 40,000 voters living in the LTTE-held areas of the Vanni from reaching 73 polling stations clustered in Vavuniya town, the CMEV said.

Voting in the Jaffna peninsula was reported to be peaceful, but the main contestants traded allegations of impersonation, rigging and intimidation.

The results of the elections are expected to be declared on Thursday.

Curfew declared

The Government declared an islandwide curfew from 9.30 p.m. today till 6 a.m. on Thursday.

Monitors want repoll — Page 11

THE HINDU

11 DEC 2001

Lanka votes, it's as peaceful as it gets

■ State radio estimates 70 per cent voter turnout, first results are expected early today

T N GOPALAN
COLOMBO, DECEMBER 5

VOTING concluded in the crucial Sri Lankan parliamentary elections concluded by 4 pm today, minus the anticipated break-down of law and order.

Perhaps the most glaring instance of misuse of government machinery is the reported denial of opportunity to over 80,000 voters living in LTTE "controlled areas" to travel to the "cleared areas" and cast their votes.

There were also sporadic instances of chasing away of agents and stuffing of ballot boxes in some southern parts and a couple of killings, all of which would look banal to any Indian, especially from Bihar.

Interestingly, though differ-

ent watchdog bodies are monitoring the election process, none of them, nor even the island nation's Election Commissioner, appeared to be in a position to give an approximate voting percentage until late evening.

In fact, a leading light of one of the respected organisations seemed bemused when asked for the figures. "Percentage? We've no idea at all. It's a fairly brisk pace all right, but there have been innumerable instances of violence and intimidation, according to our observers."

After all, this is an exercise involving over 12 million voters,

with two players like the LTTE and the Lankan army are locked in a mortal combat, each with a vested interest in manipulating the polls to its advantage. However, State radio reported that an estimated 70 per cent of voters had cast their votes.

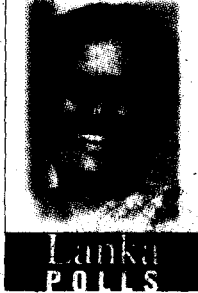
The curiosity does not end there. The counting process itself takes off immediately after the polling hours, starting with the transporting of ballot boxes to the counting centres. Initial results could be out by early tomorrow.

Not so strange, though, is that the Lankan media as a whole is so openly hostile to the

Chandrika Kumaratunga regime. The media have been going through electoral reports with a fine tooth comb, striving to spot anything that would embarrass the President. But probing revealed that the opposition United National Party too had violently attacked its rivals, not to speak of its unabashed support to LTTE-backed candidates in the North.

Still, neither the Tamilians or Sinhalese in the media would say anything against the UNP. While the Sinhalese media, which is controlled by big businesses, has never taken kindly to the left-of-centre People's Alliance, the Tamil media are safely in the hands of those who pay hosannas to LTTE chief Prabhakaran day in and day out.

Chandrika's CHALLENGE



INDIAN EXPRESS

6 DEC 2001

Lanka parties battle to avoid hung Parliament

HT Correspondent
& Agencies
Colombo, December 4

SRI LANKA'S two main political parties were desperately trying to sway undecided voters today in a bid to avoid the second hung Parliament in 14 months. Campaigning for Wednesday's elections ended at midnight Sunday, but parties were using radio, television and newspapers to canvass support as opinion polls suggested a close fight in the blood-splattered vote.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe said he was confident that his United National Party (UNP) would get a clear majority to form the next Government, but the same optimism was also expressed by the ruling party.

According to the most recent survey done by Prof S T Hettige of Colombo University, the PA has 35 per cent support while the United National Party (the main constituent of the UNF) has 32 per cent support.

Even in terms of individual leadership, the PA is ahead with President Chandrika Kumaratunga polling 38 per cent as against 22 per cent secured by the UNP chief, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"It is very clear that the people will come out and vote for a Government of the United National Front (UNF) that will have an absolute majority,"

LANDMINES DETECTED

THE POLICE on Tuesday defused three landmines planted near a bridge in central Sri Lanka on the eve of general elections.

The bombs were found at Panvila in Kandy.

Sporadic clashes were reported among political rivals from across the country but there were no immediate reports of fresh killings.

AFP, Colombo

Wickremesinghe said. The UNF is a loose alliance of the UNP with two minority Tamil and Muslim parties and a group of defectors from the ruling party.

Irrespective of the outcome of Wednesday's vote, Kumaratunga will remain in office as executive head of State until December 2005. She was elected directly for a six-year term at a separate vote in December 1999.

Wickremesinghe said he was offering "friendship" to Kumaratunga and rejected Government claims that an opposition victory would lead to a constitutional crisis.

Kumaratunga charged in interviews with national television that she could not work with an opposition Parliament. "The UNP is full of bribe takers, murderers and Mafia-types," Kumaratunga said.

She argued that she had execu-

tive power and asked voters to return a legislature she could work with.

However, Wickremesinghe said he was looking for a French-style cohabitation Government and expected the President to remain a virtual figure-head responsible for foreign policy only.

The acrimony between the two parties has been highlighted by political rivalry during the election campaign, which has resulted in 41 deaths in the past five weeks.

Sri Lanka's business community remains concerned that another hung Parliament could lead to more instability with little hope of reviving the economy or resolving the island's long-running ethnic war.

The PA would almost certainly have to depend on the Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, to cross the magic number of 113 seats required to have a simple majority in Parliament.

The JVP provided a crucial prop for Kumaratunga's Government for 35 days before it collapsed in October, completing just one year out of its six-year term after mass defections.

The opposition UNP, on the other hand, might have to depend on another minority Tamil coalition to form a Government, which would also reduce room for political maneuvering.

THE INDUSTRIAL

Buddhist blow to Lanka party

P K Balachandran
Colombo, November 26

THE JANATHA Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which has been threatening to eat into the Sinhala Buddhist support base of the fancied United National Party (UNP) in the December 5 Sri Lankan parliamentary elections, suffered a major blow on Sunday, when the influential Buddhist clergy confirmed that the JVP had committed the sacrilegious act of attacking the Temple of Buddha's Tooth in 1989.

The Mahanayake's of the Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters of the Buddha Maha Sangha said in a statement that the JVP had indeed attacked the Buddhists' holiest shrine in the island on February 8, 1989. They came in the guise of worshippers, robbed the weapons of the army and police personnel on duty and killed some of them. The LTTE was only the second militant group to attack the shrine and spill blood in it. That was in 1999.

"The JVP must admit facts. They cannot, even now, apologise for what they did then," said the Malwatte prelate Ven Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi Mahanayake Thero. The JVP, however, has denied having committed the sacrilege.

In a press release on Sunday it said that no bloody incident had taken place at the temple on February 8, 1989 as alleged. The release further said that since

1989 the leaders of the JVP had worshipped at the temple several times and had been the guests of the Mahanayakes. The charge amounted to mudslinging in the run up to the elections, the JVP said.

Previously, only the LTTE was accused of attacking the temple. In the election campaign, the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the JVP had been linking the LTTE with the UNP and calling the latter an anti-national, anti-Sinhala Buddhist party unworthy of ruling a Sinhala Buddhist majority country. But now, the charge of sacrilege has been laid at the door of the JVP too. This is bound to take the wind out of the sails of the JVP which propagates an extreme form of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism to get the vote of the majority community.

The erosion of support for the JVP will affect the PA too because a section of the JVP's Sinhala Buddhist vote will now go to the UNP. Since the PA is not averse to forming a government in alliance with the JVP, any erosion of support for the JVP will affect the PA's chances of forming a government.

Indian election observers

Seven observers from India arrived here today at the invitation of Sri Lanka's election authorities to monitor the December 5 parliamentary election, officials here said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 NOV 2001

Putin optimistic about U.S.-Russia compromise

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that he was "very optimistic" that a compromise could be found with the United States on missile defence and that he looked forward to hearing President George W. Bush's specific proposals at their summit next week.



Vladimir Putin

an evening interview in the Kremlin on Saturday. Russia has proposed new limits on U.S. and Russian stockpiles of warheads for each country, down from a current total of about 6,000 each. The Bush administration was said to be considering 1,750 to 2,250 warheads apiece.

Mr Putin said that Russia was ready to discuss a compromise on U.S. missile defence plans but must know specifically what in the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty stands in the way of Washington's proposed missile shield.

"We believe it's right to consider offensive and defensive weapons together", he told a group of American journalists gathered for an evening interview in the Kremlin on Saturday. "We are also ready for a compromise. We should see what specific compromise proposals our American partners have", he said at the beginning of the interview, adding it would be up to experts to set specific parameters for both offensive and defensive weapons.

Mr Bush and Mr Putin are to meet next week in Washington and at Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas during the Russian leader's first visit to the United States. "When we see specific options it will be up to the political leaders to make a choice between different options, and I am very optimistic they can be found", Mr Putin said. (AP)

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has sacked 31 air force personnel for lapses during the devastating suicide attack by the LTTE on the country's main air base and international airport on July 24, a media report said on Sunday.

Those dismissed included air commander R.A. Ananda, base commander of the Katunayake air force base, four other officers and 26 others of lesser ranks, the *Sunday Times* said in an exclusive report.

The President ordered the "termination of service and discharge" of the officers and men following the recommendations of the air force commander, air marshal Jayalath Weerakkody, based on the findings of a five-member court of inquiry within the force.

A separate presidential commission, a judicial inquiry, is

yet to begin its sittings, while a regular police investigation is also on into the deadly pre-dawn offensive that left two Israeli-built Kfir combat jets, a Russian Mig 27 aircraft, two MI-17 helicopters, and three Chinese trainer aircraft destroyed.

Four airbases of the Sri Lankan Airlines, the national carrier, were also written off after the attack. Fourteen black tigers, members of the LTTE's suicide squad, were killed in suicide bomb explosions and exchange of fire with security forces, among whom seven were killed.

The "negligence" of the base commander contributed to the failure to defence of the SLAF base at Katunayake, the inquiry said, charging him with also failing to review the defence plan after taking charge on January 9, 2001. The 26 air-men had been removed for negligence and cowardice in performing their duties, the weekly said. The report of the court of inquiry, headed by air vice-marshal Vijitha Tennakoon, listed multiple instances of failure of security measures in its 1000-

Chandrika sacks base commander, 30 airmen for airport attack

page report after examining 283 witnesses.

Two airmen failed to carry out a thorough search of items thrown away by the assailants, despite being alerted by civilians about the presence of strangers in the vicinity of the air base the night before the attack.

A corporal at the regiment operations room had failed to alert the authorities after being warned of suspected enemy intrusion into the camp, the report said. It also mentioned instances of airmen "shamelessly withdrawing for cover and failing to counter enemy fire."

Besides the base commander, other officers also came in for scathing indictments. Wing commander R.A.N.R. Ratnayake, responsible for ground defence, was indicted for failing to implement the defence plan during the attack, and had been negligent in maintaining the perimeter fence through which the assailants broke into the base.

The particular spot at which they ripped through the fence was overgrown with shrubs and not illuminated. (PT)

THE TIMES OF INDIA
12 NOV 2001

'Canada ban on LTTE a timely move'

UNITED NEWS AGENCY

Colombo, Nov. 10. - Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga has welcomed Canada's decision to ban the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and freeze its assets, saying it was a timely move in the current battle against terrorism in Sri Lanka and other countries. "The landmark decision by Canada is also the result of the sustained diplomatic efforts by my government...", she said in a statement last night.

The ban is expected to sharply affect the funds flow of the Tigers. As many as 150,000 expatriate Tamils living in Canada are known to be a major source of funds for the organisation, that has been battling for a separate homeland in Sri Lanka for two decades. The Lankan civil war has so far claimed over 60,000 lives.

The LTTE, which was ban-

ned earlier by India, the UK and the US, was re-listed by Washington last week at par with Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida network.

However, foreign minister Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar said that though the country should join the international coalition against terrorism, it would have to solve its own problems. "Ultimately, we have to sit down...and bring the war to an end and usher in a just and durable peace", he said. He said the government was pleased at the recent decisions of the United States with regard to combating terrorism.

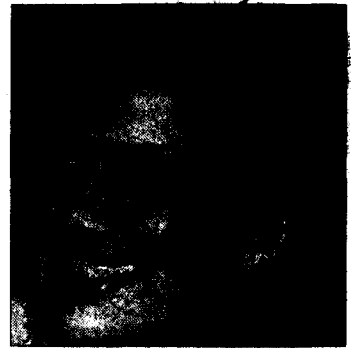
Opposition leader Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe yesterday assured that if he were elected to office in the ensuing December elections, he would immediately commence talks with the Tamil rebels to find a lasting political solution.

He also pointed out that the fight against global ter-

rorism came up only after the September 11 attacks on the United States and had nothing to do with the local scenario.

But, Sri Lankan hard-line parties like the Sihala Urumaya and the Marxist Janata Vimukthi Peramuna blamed both the ruling People's Alliance and the opposition United National Party for not making use of the existing global situation to crush the LTTE once and for all.

Political analyst Mr Kethesh Loganathan of the Centre for Policy Alternatives said the global war against terrorism and the ban on the LTTE by foreign governments had different implications. "As far as the LTTE and the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is concerned, all foreign governments which have banned the LTTE have also been strongly advocating peace talks between Co-



Mrs Kumaratunga

lombo and the LTTE with third party involvement. Likewise, the Sri Lankan Government and the main opposition UNP are publicly committed to negotiating with the LTTE... The ban on the LTTE by foreign governments appears to be linked more to their own internal political and security concerns, rather than being linked to ...war and peace in Sri Lanka," he said.

THE STATESMAN

11 NOV 2001

Chandrika questions Wickremesinghe on LTTE pact

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has asked her rival Ranil Wickremesinghe to come clean on whether he plans to sign a secret accord with the LTTE and whether he has accepted the outfit's demand for a separate "Tamil homeland."

Continuing her tirade against the opposition United National Party for allegedly striking a 'clandestine deal' with the Tigers, she posed a series of questions to the UNP leader in an interview to state television on Thursday night.

Mr Wickremesinghe, she said, should answer the question whether he recognised the right of self-determination for Tamils, the LTTE's "Tamil homeland" theory and demand for "separation."

He should also spell out his view on the common stand taken by four Tamil parties ahead of the December 5 parliamentary election that negotiations should be held with the LTTE alone and nobody else.

"I also wish to ask Mr Wickremesinghe whether he will also sign a secret accord with the

LTTE, like his uncle JR did with India," she said, in a reference to the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka accord signed by the late President J.R. Jayawardene and Rajiv Gandhi.

Ms Kumaratunga's People's Alliance has been focussing primarily on the alleged pact between the UNP and the LTTE, making Tamil separatism the principal election issue.

The UNP has repeatedly denied the accusation, contending that its stand that the ethnic conflict should be resolved through negotiations with all parties, including the

LTTE was no different from the past regime's policy.

Ms Kumaratunga said she was determined to resolve the conflict by devolving powers to the Tamils, but would not allow division of the country.

She said the Tamil alliance, containing "stooges of the LTTE," was supporting the UNP on the condition that the ban on the would be lifted and that an interim council for the north and east would be set up and handed over to LTTE leader V.Prabhakaran for five years. (PTI)

The tremors spread far afield

THE AMERICAN war in Afghanistan has polarised key South East Asian nations. Predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines has emerged as an enthusiastic supporter of the American war and has even invited U.S. military advisers to help in the battle against the Abu Sayyaf group.

Indonesia, on the other hand, has expressed the most serious and direct criticism of the American military operations. The country's leadership has repeatedly called for a halt to military strikes during Ramzan.

Malaysia, a country of 23 million people, 60 per cent of whom are Malay-Muslims, opposed the military strikes in principle even before they began. The country's long-serving, outspoken Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, has said the strikes would not result in a defeat of terrorists.

There is little doubt that, like in other parts of the world, individual nations are responding to the American war against terrorism on the basis of their own interests.

The Philippines, which has so far not been able to "crush" the Abu Sayyaf, a bunch of self-proclaimed Islamist militants operating in the southern island of Mindanao, is keen on bringing the American military might to bear on these bandits.

The Abu Sayyaf, which has specialised in kidnappings for ransom, has also targeted American nationals. Given the apparent links between the Abu Sayyaf and Al-Qaeda, the decision to send military advisers to the Philippines to advise the Government on how to tackle these militants hardly comes as a surprise.

So far, the Filipino military has not shown much aptitude in being able to deal with the Abu Sayyaf. There have been serious allegations in the recent past that military personnel actually let a band of Abu Sayyaf men escape. Such charges hardly match with promises made by the Philippine President, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, that the Abu Sayyaf would be crushed.

In Indonesia, the Megawati Government appears to be caught between appeasing a bunch of small, but noisy Islamist militants and the need to be seen supporting the "global" campaign against terrorists.

Earlier this week, a grenade was thrown into the premises of the Australian international school in Jakarta. Mercifully, the attack took place at night. Such incidents put pressure on Indonesia's reputation as a safe place to live

and do business.

After meeting the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, in September, the Indonesian President, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri, signalled support for the American position on anti-terrorist measures.

However, as the noisy militants (who, by all accounts, count for a tiny, but visible fringe in Indonesian politics) took to the streets, Ms. Megawati backed down and launched a broadside against the U.S. for bombing Afghanistan — without naming Washington.

The Indonesian President, some analysts believe, took the "new position" after consulting political leaders in Jakarta. Her Government is part of a coalition.

The American military strikes have complicated the domestic scenarios in Indonesia and Malaysia, while the Philippines has an opportunity to step up ties with an old ally, says Amit Baruah.

In the last few years, the PAS has grown in strength and popularity and mounted a serious challenge to the ruling United

upon Malaysian authorities to protect their places of worship after there were fires in at least five churches in the country following the attacks on Afghanistan.

It is evident that countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia must resist the temptation of cosying up to militant Islamist groups in their respective countries.

In the long-run, "adopting" radical agendas for political purposes, can end up compromising mainstream parties and sometimes expanding the narrow extremist base.

Countries with large Muslim populations, which are susceptible to whipping up passions on continuing civilian deaths in Afghanistan, need to be extremely



Widespread protests in Jakarta against the U.S. raids on Afghanistan.

The Vice-President, Mr. Hamzah Haz, heads an "Islamic" party and Mr. Hamzah personally opposed the military strikes.

Even moderate, respected newspapers such as *The Jakarta Post* have editorially opposed the military campaign. There is little doubt that the death of hundreds of civilians in Afghanistan is a matter of grave concern — and not just in "Muslim" countries.

Unlike in Indonesia, where mainstream groups such as the Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are opposed to the calls for "jihad" in Afghanistan, the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS) has publicly said it is sending volunteers to fight in Afghanistan.

Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Whether growing support for the PAS was the result of dissatisfaction with the ruling party or amounts to a swing to more conservative forces in Malaysia remains unclear.

The arrests of individuals linked to the Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM) for allegedly conspiring to overthrow the Government was the first indicator that the Prime Minister was serious about tackling the issue. The son of a senior PAS leader is among those detained under the Internal Security Act, a preventive detention law.

Earlier this week, Christian groups in Malaysia have called

careful in how they deal with such issues.

The American military strikes have complicated domestic scenarios in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. In the case of the Philippines, it has provided an opportunity to step up security cooperation with an old ally — the U.S.

Few people will disagree that an early end to the American military campaign will ease the situation in key nations of South East Asia.

Events outside national borders, it would appear, have the potential of influencing the direction of domestic politics in far-flung regions of the world.

9- Social work
- Tribes
110-10
6/11

The Adivasis of Orissa

By Sanjay Kumar

BIHAR IS generally considered the worst-off of India's States with little hope of things getting better. But Orissa cannot be considered in much better shape. The two are among the most backward of the States in terms of per capita income, literacy and any of the human development indices. Another common feature is that they have gained the most negative publicity — Bihar for caste violence and Orissa for starvation deaths.

Every year there is a hue and cry over starvation deaths in Orissa — in Kalahandi, Koraput and Bolangir. These Adivasi-dominated districts have long been known for endemic poverty. The latest addition to this list is Kashipur block of Rayagada district, from where there have also been reports of poverty-induced sale of children.

Kashipur was also in the news for another reason about 10 months back. Three Adivasis were killed in police firing. The tribals were protesting against the mining of bauxite from this region and the setting up of industries, which they felt would adversely affect their livelihood.

Since 1992, the Adivasis have been protesting against the attempts by a consortium known as Utkal Alumina International Ltd (UAIL) to mine bauxite ore at Baphimali and process all of it into ready-for-export alumina at a plant to be erected in the fertile valley at the foot of these hills. There have been several ups and downs in the struggle by the tribals to preserve their way of life against the onslaught of 'civilisation'.

However, real attention to addressing the basic issues behind the Adivasis' plight has been lacking; ad hocism has been the rule.

Whenever incidents of starvation deaths are reported, Orissa's Adivasis are in the news. But public memory is short and once the initial hullabaloo dies down, things are back to square one. Follow-up action is rarely, if ever, taken

up. Reports of diversion of relief supplies are legion. Year after year, reports of starvation deaths in Orissa are publicised. Earlier these were associated with the most backward Kalahandi district, but now we hear of them from the other areas as well. As the years go by the situation seems to be going from bad to worse. The politicians and the bureaucrats have been full of pious promises,

keep the Adivasis in Orissa on the fringes.

Nearly 66 per cent of them are illiterate, while another 32 per cent began schooling, but dropped out after only two-three years. Only two per cent managed to complete college education. This is a crucial factors that has stunted their progress. Education has its impact on the occupational structure. A higher lev-

Long-term programmes are needed for solving the endemic poverty of Orissa's Adivasis so that there are no more starvation deaths. Piecemeal efforts will not help.

but little else has been done.

In most of the cases, the Government of the day tries to cover up by saying the deaths were due to food poisoning caused by eating mango kernels or some other traditional food or drink.

It may be true that the Adivasis, who live in very primitive conditions, may not be able to maintain high standards of hygiene; but this is not the whole story. One needs to examine why they are driven to eat mango kernel. Even if for argument's sake one were to grant that mango kernels are a traditional delicacy, how can selling their children be passed off as a matter of the Adivasis' tradition or culture? What is needed is a close look at the general economic condition of the Adivasis.

Orissa is one of the most backward States. The data with regard to per capita income or expenditure released by the Government put this beyond doubt. But even among such a poor people, the Adivasis are the worst off. And it is important to find out why.

Data collected through a survey conducted in Orissa during April-May 2000 by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, highlight the factors that have worked to

el of education is the key to the higher echelons of the job market.

Since most of the Adivasis are illiterate, very few among them are employed in the services sector. A vast majority, nearly 38 per cent, is engaged in unskilled work. About 20 per cent work as agricultural labourers or are engaged in petty farming. But nearly 23 per cent are "non-workers". This implies that they do not get any work at all. Most of the time this is not because of an unwillingness to work but because of the lack of jobs.

None of the occupations mentioned above provide reasonable earnings, let alone a decent living. So the Adivasis remain poor. The CSDS survey confirms the Government figure that nearly 48 per cent of the people in Orissa live below the poverty line, but that is not all. Nearly 72 per cent of the Adivasis are below the poverty line. With the help of the survey we tried to classify the poor into two categories, very poor — those who have no means to spend beyond Rs. 300 rupees a month for all their needs — and those relatively less poor — who spend between Rs. 301 and Rs. 400 a month to meet all their requirements. The data reveals that while 28 per cent of the people in Orissa live the life of destitutes; among

Adivasis, nearly fifty per cent are in this category. The economic condition of the Adivasis is more or less similar both in the tribal-dominated areas and in the rest of Orissa.

Nearly 86 per cent of the Adivasis survive on a family income of less than Rs. 600 a month to meet all their needs — 37 per cent survives on less than Rs. 300 a month, another 24 per cent spends between Rs. 301 and Rs. 400 a month, while 26 per cent spends Rs. 401-600 to meet all needs. This means many of them do not even have the money to buy subsidised grain on offer under the Public Distribution System.

The Adivasis have been living in such extreme poverty that they do not even have big expectations. More than half do not even desire more than Rs. 1,000 as monthly family income. Another 34 per cent desire a monthly family income of between Rs. 1,000 and 2000. But there are no employment generation schemes to meet even these very modest expectations.

The Adivasis' quality of life is naturally very poor. Nearly 93 per cent still use firewood as their primary source of cooking fuel; kerosene or liquified petroleum gas (LPG) is beyond their reach.

Also, only nine per cent of the Adivasis have access to electricity; 91 per cent depends only on kerosene for light once the sun sets. And of the nine per cent, most are those who moved out from rural settings to urban locations. Those who are moved to the cities and towns have not had it much better. They are still on the fringes of mainstream society.

This is the state of Orissa's Adivasis. Even after fifty years of independence, people die of hunger and starvation. Long-term programmes are needed for solving the endemic poverty of the tribals so that there are no more starvation deaths. Piecemeal efforts will not help.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi.)

THE HINDU

6 NOV 2001

Prelates to probe UNP-LTTE ties

P K Balachandran
Colombo, November 8

THE MAHANAYAKES of the Malwatta and Asgiriya chapters of the powerful Buddhist Maha Sangha said that they would investigate the allegations that the opposition United National Party (UNP) has a secret deal with the LTTE.

"We strongly believe that our country, race and Buddhism must be safe and intact. We will study the allegation and if we realise there is any truth in it we will take action," *The Island daily* today quotes the Mahanayakes as saying.

The prelates told the visiting UNP leaders Karu Jayasuriya and Prof G L Peiris that given the gravity of the charge, the UNP should convince the people that it was baseless.

Jayasuriya assured the prelates that there was no truth in the allegation which was being repeatedly made by the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA). "We are bound and committed to safeguarding the integrity of the land and protecting our race and Buddhism," he assured.

The UNP's former whip W J M Lokubandara said that the UNP does not even recognise the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamils. "We will discuss a political solution with all parties, the clergy and civil society groups, including the LTTE," he clarified on Tuesday.

PA chief and President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga has been charging that the UNP had not only scuttled her Govern-

ment with the help of the LTTE but has promised to make LTTE chief Prabhakaran the President of Sri Lanka in two years' time. The UNP had agreed to divide the country, she charged.

With the help of the UNP and the Tamil parties, the LTTE was planning to put proxy MPs in Parliament and then capture power by blowing up the building and killing top leaders of her Government. The ultimate goal of the LTTE was to take over the whole of Sri Lanka, the President said.

JVP allegation

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna's (JVP) propaganda secretary Wimal Weerawansa told the State owned *Daily News* today that the UNP had concluded a pact with the LTTE to create a separate homeland in the North-east for the separatist elements. He said that efforts to form a national Government failed because of the "mysterious" UNP-LTTE pact. Wimal Weerawansa also saw significance in the UNP leader Ranil Wickemesinghe's not criticising the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US.

13 Tigers killed

Sri Lankan troops have killed 13 LTTE cadres in the northern part of the country in an ambush, an army statement said on Thursday, adds *PTI*. Troops lying in ambush fired at the rebels moving towards the Omanthal area, about 23 km north-east of Vavuniya, on Wednesday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 NOV 2001

PUG MARKS ON SRI LANKA'S POLLS

AS SRI LANKA gears up to elect a new Parliament, the island nation has difficult choices to make. Unlike the 1994 polls, which had an air of optimism over the possibilities of a solution to the decades-long separatist conflict, the issues now spread over a broader canvas. To start with, the changed electoral line-up — with most of the erstwhile members of the People's Alliance coalition moving away from it — is a pointer to the lack of progress by the PA during its tenure on the core issue of conflict resolution. Clearly, politics of survival had overtaken the well-intentioned plans of the Government headed by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga. That all her proposals were frustrated by a non-responsive Opposition headed by Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe only highlights the mutual acrimony between these two parties, and their unwitting eagerness to continue to take the island along the primrose path through their political one-upmanship. In addition to conflict resolution, other issues such as the state of the economy and the general hardship faced by the people are bound to compete for campaign space. If there has been one distinguishing factor in the coming polls, compared to the past, it is that this election campaign is likely to focus more on immediate concerns.

As electoral day, December 5, approaches, the poll campaign is likely to get not just murkier, but also dangerously violent. The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has remained intransigent with respect to its core demand, and continues to dictate its terms in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, is bound to spread its tentacles of terror to the south as well. Ironically, competitive majoritarian politics between the PA and the UNP and the inability of the parliamentary Tamil parties to deliver on their promises has provided the space, by de-

fault, to the Tigers. The overarching presence of the Tigers is apparent from the references made to the banned organisation, its perceived impact on Sri Lanka's polity in the post-election scenario and its 'ability' to swing the crucial Tamil minority vote. Those playing out this dangerous game of seeking to accommodate the wishes of the Tigers will do well to realise that their ultimate target is the Sri Lankan state and its democratic players. The long list of assassinated political leaders — cutting across party lines — should come as a grim reminder to those who wish to gain political mileage by riding the tiger during elections. In addition, a military escalation ahead of the polls in the north and the east, as well as the high probability of assassination attempts on key electoral contestants are threats that the island will have to guard against.

20-12 9/11
The entry of the JVP in support of the PA in recent months marks another difference from the past. Once dreaded in southern Sri Lanka, the party's attempts to gain parliamentary legitimacy saw a new high when it all but bailed out the PA in the recently dissolved Parliament. The rise of the JVP as a mainstream party is indicative of the disenchantment among certain sections of the Sinhala south over the performance of the two major parties. One long-term correction that the major political parties — both Sinhala and Tamil — will do well to make is to realise that politics in the island of turmoil is best carried out by accentuating the similarities rather than aggravating the differences. If the tragic lessons of the past are not to be in vain, it is now time for the island to focus on forging a mutually acceptable solution to the bleeding separatist conflict within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

9 NOV 2001

Chandrika plays the LTTE card

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, NOV. 5. On the defensive over its poor track record on virtually every issue of governance, the ruling People's Alliance seems to be banking on a campaign for the December 5 parliamentary election that revolves entirely around the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and its alleged links with the Opposition. S. Lanka

Leading the charge is none other than the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga. At a meeting of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Youth League on Sunday, she is reported to have made the sweeping allegation that if the United National Party (UNP) was voted in, the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, would become the next President of the country. R.P.V.

Ms. Kumaratunga charged that the LTTE was using the UNP to defeat the PA Government which had thwarted its ambitions of a military victory. She even suggested that by inducting its members into Parliament through an alliance of Tamil parties that were

Mr. G.L. Peiris, described the allegations as a "red herring across the trail" to divert the attention of the voters from the "real issues" of this election, namely a collapsed economy, a paralysed administration and the continuing war. Ms. Kumaratunga, who recently returned from a "working visit" to the U.K., has been the butt of ridicule and scorn in the national press for her distracted and defensive performance in a series of interviews on international TV channels. She now seems to be making up for that with hard talk on home turf.

She kicked off her party's campaign in the north-central city of Anuradhapura by alleging a "secret plot" between the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE, and warned that if her Government was not elected back to power, Sri Lanka's territorial integrity could not be guaranteed. Not to be left behind, Ms. Kumaratunga's brother, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, who recently left the UNP to rejoin the SLFP, said in an interview to the state-run *Daily News* that there were

the responsibility if any PA leader was assassinated in the run-up to the election, he said. He charged that the LTTE was "hell-bent" on ensuring that Mr. Wickremesinghe became the Prime Minister.

Senior PA campaign managers have picked up the refrain which has become the coalition's main platform in the race for the majority Sinhala votes. Though the PA Government only two months ago said it would offer a ceasefire to the LTTE and begin peace talks, exactly what the UNP has said it will do if it comes to power, not many in the ruling coalition are talking about that at this moment.

Charge against Minister

AFP reports:

Ms. Kumaratunga told a meeting of her party yesterday that Mr. S.B. Dissanayake, a senior minister who defected to the opposition, had suggested killing editors to save the government from collapse, the *Daily News* said.

"Madam, the Government is very weak and it could collapse at any time," Ms. Kumaratunga said. The Minister was saying

THE HINDU

6 NOV 2002

Ayodhya: SC again questions ministers' let-off

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 19

FOR the second time, the Supreme Court today issued notices to the Uttar Pradesh Government and CBI on the re-prieve given to Union ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti over a technicality in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

A bench comprising Justice G.B. Pattanaik and Justice N. Santosh Hegde gave four weeks to the UP Government and CBI to respond to two petitions — one by an NGO called Society for Justice and another by a



group of eminent citizens including Kuldip Nayar, Swami Agnivesh, A.G. Noorani, Teesta Setalvad and Javed Anand.

Four months ago, the court had issued a similar notice on a petition by Mohammad Aslam Bhure, who had fought a PIL related to Ayodhya even before the demolition.

In its response to the notice on Bhure's petition, the UP

Government questioned Bhure's locus standi to challenge an Allahabad High Court order barring the Ayodhya special court to deal with FIR No 198/92,

which accused the three ministers and top leaders of VHP and Bajrang Dal of delivering provocative speeches near the disputed site on the day of the demolition, December 6, 1992.

The high court had found a technical defect in the state government's notification referring FIR No 198/92 to the special court. But the high court also said that "the mistake in issuing

the said notification of October 8, 1993 is curable and it is open for the state government to cure the legal infirmity."

Bhure's counsel O.P. Sharma argued that his client had locus standi because barely 10 days after the demolition, the apex court expressly ordered that he was "at liberty" to approach the court "at any stage".

All the petitioners are seeking direction from the apex court to the state government to take necessary steps to correct the mistake pointed out by the high court so that the accused persons could be tried for their alleged offence case.

Lanka Opposition candidate shot dead

HG-11 ✓
18/11

Colombo, November 17

TAMIL TIGERS shot dead an Opposition politician in eastern Sri Lanka on Saturday, making him the first candidate for next month's parliamentary elections to be assassinated, police said.

Thambirajah Jayakumar was gunned down as he travelled by car in Batticaloa district, police said, adding that the gunmen had stopped the vehicle and then opened fire.

Jayakumar of the main opposition United National Party (UNP) is the first candidate for the December 5 elections to be killed. Three other people have been killed in election-related violence since nominations closed three weeks ago.

Police and local military officials blamed Saturday's killing on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who are leading a drawn-out campaign for an independent Tamil homeland in the island's northeast.

The ruling People's Alliance had earlier accused the UNP of

Arms banned in polls

SRI LANKAN police have banned the carrying of firearms during electioneering in the north and east, where pro-government groups are generally allowed to carry arms for self-defence. Police said some activists had been detained for carrying arms during canvassing for the December 5 election and police had been asked to enforce the arms ban stringently.

PTI, Colombo

having a secret pact with the Tiger guerrillas, a charge vehemently denied by the opposition. The UNP had in turn argued that the track record of the ruling party in managing the economy would help the Tigers to further their cause against the backdrop of a weak economy unable to sustain the ongoing war.

Tiger rebels carried out bomb attacks against ruling party meetings during last year's elec-

tions, which resulted in a hung parliament where President Chandrika Kumaratunga was able to cobble together a coalition.

However, the coalition collapsed in October leading to parliamentary elections five years ahead of schedule. Police said on Friday that they had sought the help of army reinforcements to quell rising campaign-related violence.

Since the one-week election nomination period closed on October 27, the police have received 802 complaints of politically-motivated attacks from across the island, police said.

Elections chief Dayananda Dissanayake announced last month that he feared violence and vote rigging and could not guarantee a free and fair election. However, he has urged the authorities to cooperate with him. Dissanayake said last year's election which returned a hung parliament was "anything but free and fair."

AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 NOV 2001

S. Lanka
HD-14

Fear stalks candidates ahead of elections

16/11

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, NOV. 15. Rising incidents of violence and intimidation blamed on rival parties and the LTTE are casting a long shadow on Sri Lanka's upcoming parliamentary elections.

In the three weeks of campaigning so far, more than 600 complaints have been filed with the authorities, alleging physical violence, thuggery and threats to candidates and their supporters from rivals and organised gangs.

A large number of incidents, unlike in the past, have involved the use of firearms. With the December 5 election widely expected to produce a hung parliament, the battle for power has become intense, producing a bitterness not seen even in the keenly-fought 2000 elections.

The LTTE has already made its presence felt by kidnapping two candidates and a supporter in the eastern district of Ampara and demanding Rs 5 millions in ransom for their release. All three are Muslims. One of the candidates is an independent and the other, a member of the ruling People's Alliance (PA).

Police sources said five suspected LTTE cadres were arrested from a hideout in Trincomalee and suicide jackets and explosives

recovered shortly after security forces nabbed a man lurking suspiciously at the office of a senior Tamil politician.

A little over 4,000 candidates are in the fray for 225 seats. The main contest is between the People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party-led United National Front (UNF). But analysts say neither coalition can hope to achieve a decisive victory.

The PA led by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, is leaning on the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the south and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) in the north to make up for any shortfall in its own performance.

This, Tamil politicians say, has made the EPDP desperate to capture as many seats as possible in the Jaffna peninsula that sends nine MPs to Parliament.

Other Tamil parties fear that the EPDP may resort to intimidation and rigging, an allegation vehemently denied by its leader, Mr. Douglas Devananda, who holds a Cabinet post in this Government.

Interestingly, in Tamil-dominated northern Sri Lanka there have been hardly any complaints of election-related incidents so far.

Asked to explain why, Mr. Abbo Yousuf, a candidate of the four-party Tamil National Alliance, said: "That is because the most violent personality in the north is the LTTE, and it is the silent observer so far. Its policy of wait and watch seems to have restrained contestants from unleashing violence against each other."

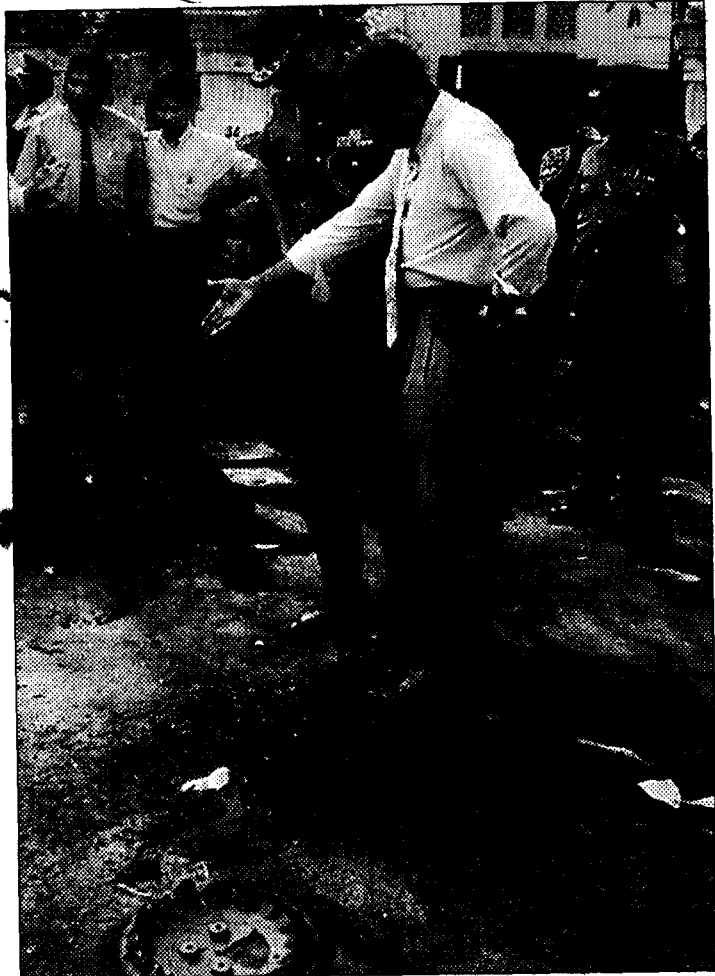
A Tamil candidate who did not want to be identified told *The Hindu* that the threats were not just from rival parties but from disgruntled elements within each party as well.

The leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, said though he was aware he was a target, he could not let that affect his high-profile campaign style.

"I have to do a visible campaign. I have no other way," said Mr. Wickremesinghe, who has adopted the Indian campaign style of travelling in a custom-built bus for his electioneering.

Ms. Kumaratunga, who survived an assassination attempt by an LTTE suicide bomber in 1999 at an election rally, has largely avoided attending public meetings. Instead, she addresses gatherings using high technology involving satellite-linked television from the safety of her heavily-guarded Colombo residence.

Lanka PM escapes suicide blast



Security personnel conduct investigations at the site of the suicide attack. (Reuters)

FROM SCOTT MCDONALD

Colombo, Oct. 29 (Reuters): An explosion rocked the capital of Sri Lanka today at the start of a parliamentary election campaign, killing at least three people in an attack that may have been targeted at the Prime Minister, officials said.

They said another 15 people were wounded, three seriously, in the suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bombing.

"We suspect the target could have been the Prime Minister," a police official said on state television.

The blast came about 30 minutes after Prime Minister Ratanasiri Wickremanayake had passed through the area, said military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne.

"There are two police constables dead and the suicide bomber," he added.

One witness said the number of dead could reach four, but that it was difficult to tell because of the different body parts left by the explosion.

Of the wounded, five were policemen and 10 were civilians.

The explosion came at the start of a campaign that election monitors and others were already predicting would be violent after about 70 people were killed during a parliamentary election campaign last year.

1-3 30/10
The explosion happened after a suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam suicide bomber was spotted by police in Narahenpita, a suburb not far from the centre of Colombo, Karunaratne added.

"At around 3 o'clock, a suicide bomber was chased by the police and exploded himself," he said.

The Tamil Tigers, fighting for a separate state in the north and east, have used previous elections to target politicians as they move around more publicly to campaign for votes.

Suicide bombers have targeted high-level officials in past campaigns, including President Chandrika Kumaratunga who was wounded in a December 1999 attack that killed at least 34 people.

In 1994, presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake and 51 others were killed in a bomb blast during an election rally.

Even before the blast took place, the war with the separatist Tamil rebels, which has dragged on for 18 years and killed more than 64,000 people, was the main issue of the campaign along with how to revive a sputtering economy that is facing its slowest growth in three decades.

Sri Lanka has a history of marred elections, and besides possible attacks by Tamil Tigers, violence among the various parties is

also common, and ballot stuffing last October was so widespread the country's elections chief called the vote "anything but fair".

That election ended in a hung parliament, a result that forced Kumaratunga to cobble together a shaky coalition that finally fell apart earlier this month when several Cabinet ministers defected to the opposition, forcing her to call a snap election.

THE TELEGRAPH

THE TELEGRAPH

30 OCT 2001

HPD-17
28/10

Tiger watch *S. Lanka*

ONLY TWO months before the terrorist attacks in the U.S., in Sri Lanka, an outfit proclaimed as a terrorist organisation by at least four countries including the U.S., struck at the island's only international airport, destroying commercial aircraft and military planes at the nearby airbase. It was the most audacious attack by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in its 20-year separatist campaign against the Sri Lankan state and it underlined its image as one of the most dreaded guerilla groups in the world.

So when terror struck the U.S. on September 11, in Sri Lanka, there was certainly sympathy, but more than that there was a sense of *deja vu*. Sri Lanka has not seen anything yet on the scale of the attacks in New York

The LTTE's capacity to wage an armed struggle could be limited by the wide crackdown on terrorism in the west.
Nirupama Subramanian
reports.

or Washington but it has lived with terror for over two decades and Sri Lankans have long forgotten the ordinary, everyday freedoms the Americans now fear they have lost.

Suicide bombings, which the American media now casts as a specialisation of Islamic fundamentalists, have been the leitmotif of life in Sri Lanka for several years. Check-points, bomb detectors, frisking, triple-layered security checks at the airport and handbag examinations at all offices and high-rise buildings have been around so long, they are now part of normal life.

When America launched its war on terrorism, many in Sri Lanka hoped the LTTE would also be targeted. Certainly, the Government was right up there, offering condolences within hours of the attack, laced with a reminder to the U.S. of its own experiences with terror. With deliberate empathy, Sri Lanka's three service chiefs presented wreaths to the U.S. Embassy in Colombo in memory of those who died in the World Trade Center bombings.

When realisation dawned that the U.S. was fighting the current war mainly for itself and that other Governments' battles were not included in it, there was disappointment and accusations of hypocrisy and double standards flew. The only consolation was that though the LTTE did not figure in the list of 27 groups specifically targeted by the U.S., it was re-confirmed on the State Department's list of terrorist organisations.

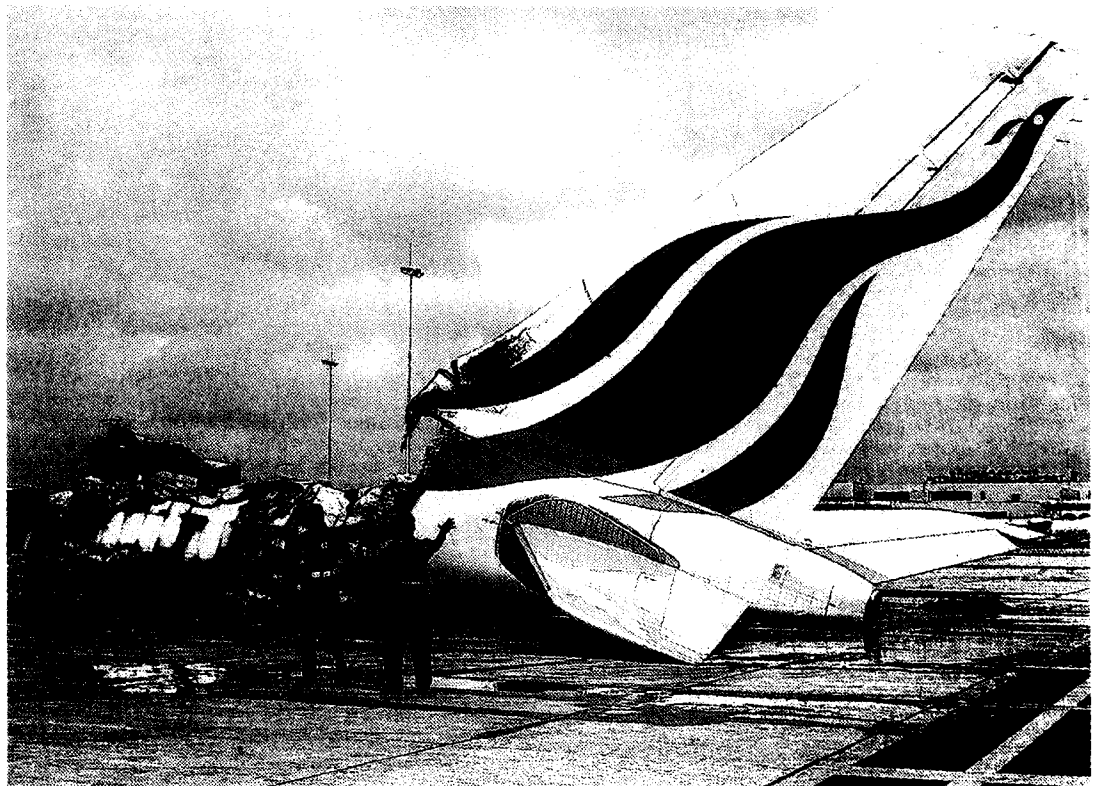
But many found it galling that while declaring there could be no negotiations with terrorists, in Sri Lanka, the U.S. was advocating peace talks with the LTTE, a terrorist group by its

Sinhalese that urge that there is no better time than now for an all-out military solution against the LTTE.

As for the Government, it is torn between getting the LTTE declared a terrorist organisation worldwide, and wanting to begin peace talks with the group. The Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, recently said his Government was prepared to talk to the LTTE and ruled out offensive military action against the group. At the same time, Government newspapers castigated an alliance of Opposition parties as agents of terrorists for promising the same if elected in the

armed struggles against states for the just rights of a people, the post-September 11 world might prove an increasingly tough place even for groups that fight their battles within a defined geographical territory in remote corners of the globe, like the LTTE, to use terror as a strategy.

The LTTE has fallen back on this strategy to good effect whenever it feels itself hemmed in, either militarily or politically. Its Tamil sympathisers, most of whom live in the west, have so far cheered and justified these as legitimate acts for the Tamil cause. Given the current climate, such justifications may



LTTE TERROR: Part of the devastation after the July attack on Colombo's airport.

own designation. However, the fact is that even within Sri Lanka today, opinion is as divided as it ever was on whether the LTTE is a terrorist outfit that ought to be wiped out, or a group waging an armed struggle for the rights of an oppressed minority that should be engaged in negotiations for a peaceable settlement of the country's ethnic conflict.

Some of the Tamil political parties in the fray for the December 5 election have stated quite clearly that the LTTE would be the sole representative of the Tamil people at the negotiating table whenever peace talks are held. On the other hand, there are influential voices from among the majority

December 5 general election.

Last year, as the appointed facilitator Norway was making preparations to bring the two sides to the table, Sri Lanka mounted an aggressive diplomatic campaign for the LTTE to be proscribed in the U.K. under a new anti-terrorism legislation. Whether or not as a result of Sri Lanka's efforts, the LTTE was banned by the British Government this April. Almost as a price for that, the group has stood firm on its demand that it will participate in peace talks only if Sri Lanka lifts its own 1998 ban on it.

But irrespective of the debate within Sri Lanka and outside on the distinction between terrorist organisations and those perceived to be engaged in

not be possible.

Even the LTTE's capacity to wage an armed struggle could be limited by the wide crackdown in the West on suspicious bank accounts, funds, and money-laundering operations. The Sri Lankan Government is hopeful that the LTTE will be restrained by such incidental impact from the war against terrorism.

It remains to be seen if that will happen. But, by itself, it will provide no solution to the island's ethnic conflict, unless the Sri Lankan state simultaneously displays political maturity of a high order and gets down to the task of addressing the genuine grievances and aspirations of the Tamil people.

28 OCT 2001

Claymore attacks point to cracks within LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, OCT. 20. Yet another claymore mine attack deep inside LTTE-controlled territory in eastern Sri Lanka aimed apparently at a senior leader of the group has seriously raised the possibility that cracks have developed within its monolithic organisation.

The claymore mine went off seconds after a vehicle, said to be used by Mr. Karikalan, the LTTE's political wing leader for Batticaloa, passed the spot. According to reports, Mr. Karikalan was not in the four-wheel drive at the time, and both the vehicle and its driver escaped unscathed. There is no word yet from the LTTE on the incident.

The incident, in Kadukkamunai in Batticaloa district, came weeks after the killing of Shankar, another prominent LTTE cadre, in a similar attack in the north. Shankar, who bore the LTTE's rank of Colonel, was known to be a close associate of the group's leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, and acted as the interpreter during his meeting with the Norwegian special envoy for the Sri Lankan peace process, Mr. Erik Solheim, last year. There have been several attacks targeting senior LTTE leaders since the first unsuccessful one on the overall head of the political wing, Mr. S. Thamilchelvam, in May this year. Some have got their targets and some have failed, but with each attack, the mystery about the identity of the perpetrators has only grown.

The LTTE has pointed a finger at a "deep penetration group" of the Sri Lankan army targeting its leadership, the first time anyone has accused it of competence. After initially denying the existence of such a crack unit within its ranks, with the attacks continuing, the army has preferred to neither confirm nor deny the stories of a covert operation by it in LTTE-held areas.

Within the LTTE, there is said to be panic at the efficiency with which the attacks are being carried out. Those carrying out the claymore attacks seem to have an intimate knowledge of the movements of the targeted persons.

Even if a unit of the Sri Lanka army is really behind the attacks as the LTTE claims, the access the perpetrators have to such information makes it almost certain that it could not be without the involvement of the LTTE's own cadres.

But if the LTTE knows or suspects this, it is still a tightly guarded secret. News trickling out from these areas tells mainly of punishment being meted out to civilians suspected of collaborating in the attacks with the supposed "deep penetration unit" of the army. It has been reported that some "suspects" were even executed.

The LTTE is also reported to have sounded an alarm for extra vigilance by civilians and cadres alike in the areas controlled by it. Thursday's incident was the seventh attack in six months.

THE HINDU

21 OCT 2001

capable of being... tempered with judicious restraint.

Chandrika's Gamble, Lanka

Three months after Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga suspended parliament and announced a referendum, her cynical bid to sustain herself in office has driven her to dissolve the House and call for elections in December. Going by Ms Kumaratunga's record this is not surprising. Like the suspension of parliament, the dissolution too came just ahead of a no-confidence motion against the ruling People's Alliance which had been reduced to a minority. When she virtually shut down parliament in July, it was pointed out in these columns that the consequences of her action were bound to recoil with mounting political unrest compounded by the spiralling economic crises. But neither the vehemence of the political opposition, fuelled by the country's financial situation, nor the ever-present danger of terrorism have restrained Ms Kumaratunga from persisting on her perilous course. Her authoritarian bid to snuff out all opposition, and even silence parliament, has alienated her from some of her most credible and highly-regarded colleagues, namely, S B Dissanayake, general secretary of her own Sri Lanka Freedom Party and G L Peiris. Mr Peiris was her cabinet's most articulate spokesman on issues of statute reform, including proposals for devolution of powers to the minority Tamil-dominated areas. That they too should have jumped ship along with six others, including all four members of the Ceylon Workers Congress, and reduced her Alliance to a minority, underscores how isolated she is from her party stalwarts as well as parliament. Had she opted to face the no-confidence vote, there is little doubt that the Alliance would have been defeated. And unlike in July, when she bought time to strike a deal with the Janata Vimukti Peramuna for survival in office, this time she was faced with the real prospect of the opposition United National Party forming an alternative government.

There is no doubt that Ms Kumaratunga enjoys many advantages — not only of incumbency but also overwhelming personal popularity and a stature unmatched by any other politician. She has also shown herself to be skilled at manoeuvring parties and groups, be it Tamil factions or Sinhala chauvinist outfits to secure her political power. So when the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress abandoned her in July, she was quick to win over the JVP. Yet such manipulative prowess and personal appeal have not strengthened her position. On the contrary, her latest gamble betrays a nervousness about facing parliament on level ground. This is a result of having squandered the massive goodwill, including that of the Tamils in the north-eastern part of the island, with which she ascended to office in her first term as president. In the years since then, she has failed to deliver on any of her promises: devolution of powers, constitutional reform, and an end to the Tamil-Sinhala conflict. Worse, she has suffered successive military reversals in the war against Tamil separatists, pandered to Sinhala chauvinism and alienated the minorities. Combined with her impatience with parliament and an electoral system which denied her a two-thirds majority, Ms Kumaratunga is exhausting her constitutional options to a point where an election could leave the republic even more badly fractured than it already is.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 OCT 2001

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2001

A POLITICAL GAMBLE IN SRI LANKA

THE UNTIMELY DISSOLUTION of Parliament in Sri Lanka may not have surprised the country's politicians. However, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has once again acted with authoritarian disdain for political propriety by dissolving Parliament with unseemly haste in a cynical attempt to confound her opponents. At the stroke of the midnight hour when the House completed just one year of its full term, the President played her 'ace' by resorting to the letter and not the spirit of the law that stipulates a mandatory minimum period of existence for the elected Parliament. In a purely legal sense, she is not guilty of violating the present Constitution that grants her such a prerogative under a system of executive presidency. Yet, the dissolution is the opportunist device by which she has thwarted the House from voting on a pending no-confidence motion that was duly moved against the Government headed by her People's Alliance. When the President struck, there was surely little doubt that the Government found itself clueless about how to survive in the context of a clear loss of parliamentary majority due to the latest desertion of the ruling camp by eight members. The gallery of defectors to the Opposition ranks included Mr. S. B. Dissanayake, General Secretary of the President's own Sri Lanka Freedom Party until a few days ago, and Prof. G. L. Peiris, who had at one stage served as Ms. Kumaratunga's constitutional wizard on issues concerning the reform of the polity as also a fair deal for the country's minority Tamils.

Simmering has been the President's ire against the House that she now has done away with. It was only a few months ago that she prorogued Parliament in somewhat similar circumstances when the Government was reduced to the virtual status of a minority formation in the House. The Government's predicament then was traceable to a series of political developments that followed the President's estrangement with

Mr. Rauf Hakeem, a pan-Sri Lankan leader from the minority segment of Muslims. In the totality of those circumstances, Ms. Kumaratunga began acting in a manifestly autocratic fashion that marked a decisive shift from her practised politics of fairness and firm direction. Seeking to portray a higher purpose as her political compulsion for suspending Parliament at that stage, she even ordered a referendum on the need for a new Constitution. Finding the going tough, though, the President soon beat a retreat and entered into a controversial understanding with the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), which still makes its presence felt as a radical champion of the rights of the majority Sinhala population. 10.10.2001

The real political price that Ms. Kumaratunga agreed to pay for the JVP's support remains unacknowledged, but it is evident that she has soft-pedalled in respect of several economic and political policies including her one-time preference for a quick and fair resolution of Sri Lanka's national question about the rights of the Tamil people. The latest parliamentary crisis, which she wants to forget as a bad dream by holding elections next December, may not have had much to do with the JVP which does not appear to be the direct instigator of trouble. Yet, it is hardly surprising that some of Ms. Kumaratunga's own associates have rocked her boat in a situation that has increasingly come to be defined by her stylised political arrogance which perhaps conceals a certain nervousness. There has indeed been no political threat to her own highly empowered presidency. So, Sri Lanka may have been better served if she had, instead of dissolving Parliament, allowed the Opposition to form a Government. To argue that this might be a recipe for a constitutional gridlock is to ignore the basic statute itself in some essentials. In any case, the President requires the cooperation of the Opposition to steer the country through its difficult times. To belittle the Opposition is not the best way.

THE HINDU

13 OCT 2001

Meltdown in Colombo

S. Lankara H.P.S.

WHEN SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga indicated her plans to call for early elections last summer, she had possibly hoped to scare the opposition into submission. But in the confrontation that followed, she was the first to blink. Since then, her leadership of the ruling coalition has been under attack from a determined opposition forcing her to yield even more ground. However, it was only after several of her own party men deserted the government in the past few days that she decided to dissolve Parliament and order fresh elections. That was all she could have done to escape defeat on the floor of the House. Though Mrs Kumaratunga has since charged some of those who left her with having been bought over, the fact remains that many of her colleagues were upset over the deal she had struck with the JVP last month in exchange for parliamentary support.

But the timing of her latest move, which clearly was forced on her, could not have been worse. The elections will be held amid a deepening sense of public frustration. The economic situation has rarely been as dismal

as it is today. Her government also has little to show by way of progress in securing peace with the LTTE or gaining on the battlefield. The claim that the LTTE has been contained is no longer believed. On top of all this, the scars of the Tamil Tigers bombing of the Katunayake international airport are too fresh in public memory not to make an impact on the outcome of the December 5 polls.

Thus, barely a year into her second term, Mrs Kumaratunga will be seeking a fresh mandate against an opposition that has been on the offensive all through this period. The deal with the JVP, too, appears to have added to her liabilities. It has dented her image as a moderate — someone the minority Tamils could do business with to resolve the ethnic issue. She will now have difficulties in persuading the Tamils to take her proposed devolution package seriously. Though Mrs Kumaratunga is known to be a doughty fighter, it remains to be seen how she manages to get over the odds facing her in this election — several of which are her own creation.

THINK IT OVER...

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 OCT 2001

Chandrika dissolves House after defection

Colombo, Oct. 10 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's embattled president dissolved parliament today, hours before a no-confidence vote which her defection-hit minority government seemed certain to lose.

Eight lawmakers defected from the ruling coalition today, depriving the government of a majority and leaving President Chandrika Kumaratunga with little choice but to call a snap election, just one year after the last parliamentary polls.

"Parliament is dissolved and the election likely to be in early December," said a senior government official.

The defection, followed by scuffles in the 225-member house, left the ruling People's Alliance coalition and its allies with a total

of 111 seats.

"We have eight in our group at present. There are four others who will cross over today," said former minister S.B. Dissanayake, a top coalition official until he was sacked on Monday.

Parliament was suspended after a similar defection in July.

The defection coincided with the first anniversary of the parliamentary election — the earliest date by which President Chandrika Kumaratunga is allowed to dissolve the assembly.

The government had earlier ruled out dissolving the parliament.

There were four former ministers among the defectors and three of them, including Dissanayake, resigned last month

saying they could not work with the government's new ally, the Marxist Peoples' Liberation Front (JVP), which has agreed to prop up the coalition for a year.

"I was not elected to serve with the JVP," said one of the defectors, Parakrama Gunawardene, echoing the sentiments of others.

As a price for its support the JVP wants the government to shelve a Norwegian-led bid to end the country's ethnic war and roll back economic reforms at a time when the economy is facing one of its slowest periods ever.

Sri Lanka's stock market appeared to celebrate the imminent collapse of the Marxist-backed government with a leap of almost 5 per cent.

THE TELEGRAPH

11 OCT 2002

Lanka okays statute panel amid protests

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

51-10 26/9
COLOMBO, Sept. 25. - Sri Lanka's parliament has unanimously approved major reforms in a law aimed at freeing key democratic institutions from political influence, but Tamil MPs boycotted the voting and the marathon debate that preceded it.

A last-minute climbdown by the People's Alliance government saved the 17th constitution amendment Bill that may have otherwise failed to garner the required two-thirds majority in the 225-member House last night.

Moderate Tamil parties, led by the Tamil United Liberation Front, walked out of the debate, refusing to be a party to what it called "piecemeal" efforts towards constitutional reform and "lack of effective representation" for minorities on a Constitutional Council created by the new law.

However, the compromise created three posts in the 10-member council for the minority communities - one each for Tamils, Muslims and plantation Tamils of Indian origin.

The council, which will make all appointments to four independent commissions to hold

elections, make judicial and public service appointments and run the police, is considered central to the democratic functioning of these institutions in future.

The Opposition United National Party had threatened to vote against the Bill, unless a clause providing for the President to nominate one member to the council was dropped.

Finally, the government agreed to a compromise under which the Prime Minister and Opposition leader will appoint five members, three of whom will be from the minority communities. The President will have one nominee, while smaller parties represented in parliament will appoint one member.

The Speaker, Prime Minister and Opposition leader will be ex-officio members on the Constitutional Council.

Bangla phone ban

DHAKA, Sept. 25. - Bangladesh has ordered mobile telephone operators to shut down their networks during next Monday's national election for security reasons, a government spokesman said today. - A

THE STATESMAN

26 SEP 2001

Lanka passes Bill to change statute

REUTERS

59-5
COLOMBO, Sept. 24. — Sri Lanka's parliament today voted to change the constitution to introduce key democratic reforms, handing the new ruling alliance victory in its first major test since being formed.

A radical Marxist party, which has agreed to prop up the minority government for one year, had said the reforms were a condition for its support.

The main Opposition United National Party voted for the reforms after the government agreed to several amendments, giving the Bill the two-thirds majority needed to change the constitution and put various arms of the state under inde-

25/9
pendent commissions.

"We have not got everything we wanted, but we will support the Bill," said UNP leader Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe just before the vote was taken.

The 225-member Assembly approved the Bill by 210 votes with 14 abstentions. The Speaker didn't vote.

Fresh strikes kill seven:

Seven civilians were killed today, including six of a family, in northern Sri Lanka, in a landmine blast that blew up the three-wheeler they were travelling on, the defence ministry said, PTI adds.

The blast was apparently triggered by a pressure mine or a remote-controlled mine, the military said.

THE STATESMAN

25 SEP 2001

Four Lanka ministers quit

REUTERS

59-8
14/9
COLOMBO, Sept. 13. — Sri Lanka was plunged into fresh political turmoil today when four senior ministers resigned, saying the minority government's new Marxist allies were an obstacle to peace and economic growth.

The resignation came a week after President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga reopened the suspended Parliament and restored a measure of political stability by signing a one-year coalition deal with the Marxist Peoples' Liberation Front or JVP.

The ministers said they wouldn't seek positions in the new 20-member Cabinet expected to be named tomorrow, having the number of ministers under terms of the coalition deal. The coalition deal topped the list

of grievances set out by aviation minister Mr Jeyaraj Fernando-pulle, constitutional affairs minister Ms Gamini Peiris, environment minister Mr Mahinda Wijesekera and welfare minister SB Dissanayake in a joint letter to Mrs Kumaratunga.

"The JVP accord has shattered hopes for a political solution of the ethnic problem," the letter said. "The accord has also exacerbated the problem of the government's failure to deliver on its promise to create a private-sector-and-investor-friendly environment," it said.

The support of the JVP, a former rebel group known to be opposed to economic reforms and a Norwegian bid to end the 18-year-old ethnic war, gives the government a seven-seat majority in the Parliament.

Despite the deal, the Opposi-

S. Lanka
tion has vowed to launch a fresh bid to oust the government plagued by rumours of dissent ever since a key Muslim ally defected in June.

The ministers said the resignations had also been prompted by "the painful and unpleasant memories" of disputes with Mrs Kumaratunga since she suspended Parliament on 11 July ahead of a no-confidence vote.

Mr Dissanayake, general secretary, Sri Lanka's Freedom Party — the main constituent of the ruling alliance, has traded allegations of corruption and misrule with Mrs Kumaratunga.

Mr Dissanayake shares the junior finance ministry portfolio with Peiris who is also the architect of constitutional reforms which form the cornerstone of the government's plans to resolve the conflict with the LTTE.

THE STATESMAN

Anti-LTTE operation a mistake: Kadirgamar

By Nirupama Subramanian

S. Lanka
COLOMBO, SEPT. 9. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, has said that a military operation, launched against the LTTE in April, was a mistake which had caused a set-back to the Norwegian-facilitated process for peace talks.

"On April 24, there was a military operation near Pallai. That I think was very regrettable. Further time was lost and there was a set-back," Mr. Kadirgamar said in an interview to the state-run TV channel, 'Rupavahini' on Saturday night.

At least 250 soldiers were killed and many hundreds more wounded in the operation that was launched in the Jaffna peninsula days after Mr. Kadirgamar told Parliament that a date for peace talks with the LTTE would be announced by the end of April.

The operation ended when the security forces had to hastily retreat in the face of a massive counter-offensive by the LTTE. Launched hours before the LTTE was to end its four-month unilateral ceasefire, the oper-

110-13
ation cost the government considerably in terms of moral high ground, besides the losses of men and material.

Code-named Agni Kheela, or fireball, the operation is held to be the point at which a downslide began in the Norwegian-assisted process to initiate talks with the LTTE.

Mr. Kadirgamar said serious efforts were on to revive the process, which now stands deadlocked over one major issue, the lifting of the ban on the LTTE by Sri Lanka. "What can be the most effective way of moving forward: this is under very serious discussion with the Norwegians in the last fortnight," the Foreign Minister said.

He reiterated what he said at a press conference two weeks ago, that the government wanted the UNP to join it in inviting the LTTE for talks, but if the Opposition party did not respond, it would do so on its own.

"A joint appeal remains the preferred option, but we are considering a unilateral appeal, if the Opposition does not join us," Mr. Kadirgamar said.

109
The government position is that whenever an invitation to the LTTE is made, a "mutually agreed" temporary cease-fire would also be proposed. This is a significant shift from its earlier position that there could be no cease-fire before peace talks. Mr. Kadirgamar described the change as a "reassessment" of the situation.

The Foreign Minister also admitted, for the first time, to the Sri Lankan government's displeasure with Mr. Erik Solheim, Norway's chief facilitator for the peace process till four months back.

"We entertained doubts about how one of them was conducting himself," Mr. Kadirgamar said, without naming Mr. Solheim. It is believed the government was unhappy with his perceived closeness to the LTTE.

The government succeeded in having him sidelined, but cleverly described the move as an "upgradation" of the process, as Norway appointed a four-member team that included Mr. Solheim, but was headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Raymond Johansen.

THE HINDU

10 SEP 1990

HD-11

Peace process will continue: Chandrika

8/9 S. Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, SEPT. 7. Refuting criticism that the Sri Lankan Government's survival pact with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) had put the resolution of the island's two-decade old ethnic conflict on the backburner, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has said the peace process would continue unaffected. In an interview to state TV on Thursday night, Ms. Kumaratunga said that the Government would soon begin a consensus-building process on constitutional amendments for devolution. "Once a consensus is reached with the widest number of people possible, then the JVP has no objection to that being implemented," she said.

Under the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Government and the JVP, the Government has agreed not to bring in proposals for devolution of power until a broad consensus is arrived at with "all segments of society".

The President said a legal framework in the form of a Constitutional Commission had already been set in place to which various groups of people could ex-

press their opinion on devolution. "The consensus will be drawn up in the form of a report and then we can take those also into consideration when drafting the amendments to the Constitution or in the form of a new Constitution," she said. She also said the talks with the LTTE were not affected. "We haven't even talked about it in the agreement. (The talks) will go on," she said.

Ms. Kumaratunga said there had been no progress on that front in the last two months because the LTTE had told the Norwegian facilitators that they would not negotiate with an unstable Government. "Hence they have refused to talk. The Government has continuously been in touch with the facilitators. And the LTTE has said we will see what happens... They halted the talks, not us. We are still proposing to them. The new proposals have something extra now, which they should be happy with," she said.

The PA has appealed to the opposition United National Party to join it in inviting the LTTE for talks. A proposed joint invitation was circulated to the press on Thursday.

SEP 10 1993
S. LANKA

Marxists to vote for Chandrika

Colombo, Sept. 5: President Chandrika Kumaratunga's minority government and a Marxist group will cooperate to end political instability on the island nation, a government spokesman said on Wednesday.

The People's Alliance and the People's Liberation Front will sign an agreement later on Wednesday, said Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, the government spokesman. He declined to give any further details.

The front is expected to vote for the government in Parliament on Thursday and defeat an Opposition no-confidence motion.

The governing alliance controls 107 of 225 seats in Parliament and needs the support of 10 front legislatures to continue in power.

Ms Kumaratunga had suspended Parliament on July 11 for two months after her government was reduced to a minority. A group of legislatures quit her coalition after she fired a Muslim minister.

She turned to the Marxists after she failed to reach an understanding with the main Opposition, the United National Party. (AP)

LTTE executes 'spy' in public with landmine

Batticaloa (Sri Lanka), Sept. 5: Tamil rebels publicly executed a suspected Army spy by attaching a mine to his body and exploding it in a rebel-controlled area, travellers said on Wednesday. Execution of Kandaswamy Yogeswaran, 32, on Tuesday was the fifth such reported killing in the past three months by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The rebels tied the claymore mine to Yogeswaran's body and set it off at a road intersection near Batticaloa, a town nearly 220 km east of Colombo, the travellers said on condition of anonymity.

The rebels claimed that the mine was recovered from Yogeswaran, and accused him of monitoring the rebel movement in the area for the Sri Lankan Army, the witnesses said. Local people watched the suspected spy's execution, according to the witnesses. The government controls Batticaloa city, but the adjoining areas are held by the rebels. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

- 6 SEP 2001

PA-JVP deal criticised

119-12
By Nirupama Subramanian

S. Lawka
ing over the direction in which the party will take the Government's economic policies.

COLOMBO, SEPT. 5. Sri Lanka's main Tamil party, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), today described the Government's one-year survival pact with the radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), as a "foolish" decision by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"I would say that it is the most foolish decision the President has taken since she came to power in 1994," said the TULF leader and parliamentarian, Mr. V. Anandasangaree.

The ruling People's Alliance (PA) today signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the JVP to seal the agreement under which the JVP is to offer outside support to the minority government for one year. In return, the Government has agreed to a number of conditions laid down by the JVP.

One of the conditions is that there will be no peace talks with the LTTE unless the group renounces its demand for a separate state, nor will the Government undertake any constitutional amendments to devolve power to the minorities.

"Any undertaking not to deal with the most important national problem, the ethnic issue, is unwise," said Mr. Anandasangaree.

The TULF was one of the three Tamil parties that aligned itself with the Opposition. United National Party's (UNP) efforts to topple the minority government through a no-confidence motion.

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Mr. Rauff Hakeem, whose sacking from the Cabinet and subsequent walk-out with seven parliamentarians from the ruling coalition, triggered off the PA's battle for survival, also expressed concern at the PA-JVP deal.

With a large concentration of Muslims in eastern Sri Lanka, the SLMC also wants an early political solution to the armed conflict in the north-east.

If the minorities are alarmed by the one-year moratorium imposed by the JVP on the resolution of the ethnic conflict, the business community is panick-

The president of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Chandra Jayaratne, told a radio station that the JVP's policies might result in a closed economy, affecting the country's economic development. He said the business community believed that for an economic recovery, it was important for the Government and the LTTE to begin talks at once.

Under the terms of the PA-JVP deal, Parliament, that was prorogued in July by the President to avoid the no-confidence motion, is to reconvene on Thursday.

But in an ironic turn of events, the UNP no longer wants the no-confidence motion to be taken up on the first day, while the PA now wants it debated as soon as possible.

The UNP would rather wait for the Government to first implement another of the JVP's demands, namely reducing the Cabinet to 20 from its present strength of 44, before pushing the no-confidence motion.

Senior UNP members said it was meaningless to pursue the motion against an out-going Cabinet and that they would wait till the new Cabinet was sworn in.

The main reason behind the UNP's new "wait and watch" strategy seems to be that the downsizing of the Cabinet is certain to create discontent in Government ranks, and that the rejects might gravitate towards the Opposition, giving the no-confidence motion a better chance.

With the PA-JVP deal, the Government's strength in Parliament has gone up from 109 to 119, a majority in the 225-member House. The UNP claims that several PA dissidents, including senior ministers, are ready to vote for the no-confidence motion.

But right now, even the Ministers who have publicly fallen out with the President, are waiting to see how the Cabinet will be recast before they make their next move.

119-12

Chandrika cancels referendum

4/9
By Nirupama Subramanian

HD-12
COLOMBO, SEPT. 3. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, today prepared to close a deal with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) for outside support to her minority People's Alliance (PA) Government by announcing the cancellation of a controversial referendum and resuming the prorogued Parliament ahead of the due date.

The JVP and the PA were scheduled to meet this evening for another round of discussions and perhaps to sign "a memorandum of understanding" formalising the agreement between the two parties. But before that, as demanded by the JVP, the President ordered the cancellation of a referendum for a new Constitution, first fixed for August 21 and then put off to October 18.

The Presidential Secretariat also announced that Parliament, prorogued in July, would be reconvened on September 6, a day ahead of schedule, again as laid down by the JVP. Both decisions were approved by the PA parliamentary group and the Cabinet on Sunday night, the state-run *Daily News* said today.

The PA also agreed to the other JVP demand that the present cabinet of 44 be cut down to 20. A frontline Kumaratunga loyalist, the Minister of Posts, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, was the first to pick up the cue. He handed in his

resignation to the President last night to "strengthen her hands" to recast the Cabinet.

The PA also decided to give the "highest priority" to reforms in governance, namely the setting up of independent commissions to insulate various arms of the Government from political interference.

The JVP had asked for commissions for elections, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the police and the media.

Describing the deal as a "probationary government", the JVP has promised to extend its support to it for one year, provided all its demands are met. One of the demands is that there should be no talks with the LTTE during the "probation", but it is not known if the Government, which said last week it was considering inviting the LTTE for talks on its terms, had agreed to this.

At a public meeting on Sunday to mark the 50th anniversary celebrations of her Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), chief constituent of the PA, Ms. Kumaratunga declared she was prepared to do a deal with "any demon" to foil a bid by the Opposition to topple her Government.

The tie-up with the JVP, a party which twice mounted an armed insurgency against the state and has an ideology that is a potent mix of Sinhala nationalism and socialism, might see the PA through an Opposition no-confi-

dence motion that has to be taken up when Parliament reconvenes.

But the United National Party (UNP), which is spearheading the motion, said the tie-up was irrelevant as at least 15 to 17 members of the PA would vote against the Government and help carry the motion.

Said to be among the dissidents are three senior Ministers, including the Constitutional Affairs Minister, Mr. G. L. Peiris, who crossed swords with Ms. Kumaratunga over the calling of the referendum. She has also publicly fallen out with the Poverty Alleviation Minister, Mr. S. B. Dissanayake, who was once in her inner coterie. The two are not expected to be named to the new Cabinet.

Meanwhile, a meeting between parliamentary party leaders and the Speaker, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, to fix the agenda for the opening day of Parliament scheduled today was put off to Tuesday.

While the UNP wants the no-confidence motion taken up first, the PA leader, Mr. Richard Pathirana, said that as the PA and the JVP together were in a majority in the House, they should be allowed to fix the agenda. At this, the JVP asked for a postponement of the meeting till tomorrow as it was yet to finalise its deal with the Government.

THE HINDU

- 4 SEP 2001

HD-12

SRI LANKA'S ELUSIVE TRUCE

379

AN AGGRESSIVE REJECTION of the Sri Lankan Government's latest offer of a temporary truce exposes the anarchist thinking of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) regardless of Colombo's own compulsions. The LTTE, never really known to look beyond its combative calculus, has instead chosen to flay the Government's "political duplicity" in wanting a ceasefire as a diversionary gambit. Now, politically beleaguered indeed is the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga. But Colombo's insistence on a "mutual agreement" as the pre-condition for a truce with the usually intransigent LTTE is hardly devious. So, it seems that the LTTE may not have wanted a respite soon after its recent success in crippling an elite wing of Sri Lanka's Air Force, while Colombo's current calculations may partially be linked to the very same reason. Official Colombo's overall objective is to draw the fascist LTTE to the table for talks on how to bring the ferocious separatist war to an end and also on how to carve out a rightful place for the minority Tamils in the country's unstable polity. Sri Lanka's sad history of a long ethnic-political war of strategic attrition and senseless violence is replete with bright ideas of ceasefire or even peace, at one level, and disturbing tales of broken hopes or promises at another inter-related level. To say this is not at all to condone the LTTE's often cynical and sometimes lethal ways of fooling the potential or actual peace interlocutors, be they Sri Lankans themselves or their external friends.

The executive presidency of Ms. Kumaratunga has been under siege in the past few months. In one sense, many of her current political troubles have been caused by the nihilist

agenda of the LTTE, most recently its assault on Sri Lanka's passenger planes and not just its military aircraft as the arguably 'normative' target of violence-prone separatist wrath. Yet, Ms. Kumaratunga's political woes are no less traceable to her own regalist style of placing herself above the system itself in the name of a popular mandate that she had undoubtedly secured to function as a highly empowered President. Even as the President's Bonapartist tendencies have alienated her from some key allies in her own political coalition and reduced it to a minority in Parliament, Ms. Kumaratunga tried a series of gambles including a controversially timed move to hold a referendum on the need for an ethnically equitable and politically balanced constitution.

Discernible beyond the spirited dialogue that took place between the UNP-led Opposition and the President's People's Alliance is a grim reality. The two sides, mainly representing the majority Sinhala community but also some moderate and reformed sections of the Tamil political opinion, drew a blank in their efforts to evolve a power-sharing formula that might somehow provide a transition to a future constitutional debate. This was a tall order in a debate-savvy political society, and the blame game is in full swing now. But both sides agree, however, that an end to the country's internal conflict, involving the LTTE, is as much a priority as the proposed constitutional changes with a possible core of fairness towards the minorities. While the UNP wants this core to be fashioned as part of an overall constitutional framework, the Government is eager to overcome its frustrations by co-opting the Opposition to probe the LTTE's mind.

THE HINDU

- 3 Str - 201

JVP's two conditions to Chandrika on deal

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, SEPT. 1. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna has said that the 'deal' it has struck with the Sri Lankan Government would be off if the Government did not meet two of its conditions by Sunday midnight.

The JVP wants the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to announce by the deadline that the prorogued Parliament would be reconvened before the due date of September 7, and cancel a controversial referendum for a new Constitution, originally scheduled for August 21, but later put off for October 18.

The State-radio, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, quoted the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri

Wickramanayake, saying that the Government, by Sunday, would put an end to efforts to topple it.

He said an agreement had been reached between the PA and "a group in Parliament" and that the two would put out a joint statement on Monday. He said Parliament would most likely be resummoned before September 7.

A memorandum of understanding between the Government and the JVP would be signed in the presence of a supervisory committee of "religious leaders and intellectuals" after the Cabinet and the PA parliamentary group approved it, the SLBC said.

Details of the MoU were not available, but indications are that the Government has agreed to implement reforms in governance

demand²¹⁹ed by the JVP, including independent commissions to insulate elections, the police, the judiciary and the bureaucracy, from political interference.

Included in the JVP's original list of conditions was also a moratorium on peace talks with the LTTE for the one-year period during which it would lend its support to the PA.

It is not clear if the Government, which last week said it was considering inviting the LTTE for peace talks and was prepared to meet its pre-conditions for such talks, has agreed to this demand as well. If the PA-JVP deal is sealed, the Government, which has only 109 MPs in the 225-member House, will benefit by its newfound ally's 10 MPs to fight an Opposition no-

confidence motion, spearheaded by the United National Party (UNP), that is expected to come up in Parliament when it reconvenes.

The UNP has said several times it does not need the JVP's assistance to vote out the Government as it expects several PA members to cross over to the Opposition, but the veracity of that remains unconfirmed. The agreement between the Government and the JVP was apparently reached at a meeting at the President's House on Friday that began in the afternoon and continued till midnight.

The Government's deal with the JVP — a party with an ideology that is a curious mixture of right and left — follows its failure to strike a power-sharing deal with the UNP earlier this week.

RECEIVED

CONFIRMED

2 SEP 2001

Opp defies talks with Chandrika

HT Correspondent
Colombo July 27

S. Kank
HG U

THE SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's bid to mend fences with the Opposition parties following the national crisis precipitated by the LTTE's devastating military strike on Tuesday ended in failure today.

On Thursday evening, her hurried invitations to the Opposition parties for separate meetings today drew poor response. The main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP), said that its top leaders were to address a party rally in Kandy today and sent a non-MP, Charitha Ratwatte, as its delegate.

KA

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) excused itself saying that the notice given was too short. It wanted another mutually convenient date to be fixed. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said that its stand on national issues would have to be discussed first at the meeting of its Central Committee on August 5. It sought a meet after that.

The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), which represents the Indian Tamils of the plantation areas, alone met the President. This was because its leader, Arumugam Thoondaman, had a pressing problem on his hands. He was under pressure from his Tamil allies to oppose the August 21 referendum on the need for a new constitution because that constitution may replace the present Proportional Representation (PR) system by the First Past the Post (FPP) System. The argument is that the FPP system will not enable small communities and parties to have a reasonable representation in parliament.



CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGA

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7

Sri Lankan Airlines shifts hub to Dubai

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, July 26. - Sri Lanka's national carrier Sri Lankan Airlines today announced it was shifting operations to Dubai and Singapore after a Tamil rebel attack knocked out half its fleet.

Sri Lankan Airlines, which is partly owned and fully managed by the Emirates of Dubai, said it was struggling to work out a weekly schedule after Tuesday's LTTE attack on Sri Lanka's international airport put six of their planes out of service.

Mr Peter Hill, the airline's chief executive officer, said they would not be able to operate direct services to Europe and the Far East and would be using Dubai and Singapore as new operational hubs.

The airline's 40 per cent equity partner, the Emirates will pick up Sri Lankan passengers from Dubai and Singapore to farther destinations, Mr Hill said.

The airlines would also bank on other airlines out of Singapore to carry their passengers to other destinations.

"In the east, we will be using Singapore, again relying on our partner, the Emirates, who also serves Singapore very extensively."

Minibus seized: Sri Lankan police, today, have seized a minibus they believe was used by Tamil Tiger rebels who attacked the international airport and adjoining air force base on Tuesday, an AP report said.

Police detained driver of the minibus, and three other Tamil men in overnight raids.

This brought the total number of men arrested in this relation to seven.

They are detained under a security law that allows soldiers or police to hold people for up to 18 months if they suspect arrested persons of links with the rebels. Police are also looking for the

driver's assistant.

The attack on the Bandaranaike International Airport and the next-door air force base coincided with 18th anniversary of the start of the separatist campaign for the Tamil land.

A senior police officer, preferred to remain unanimous, said the seized minibus is generally used for inter-city travel here.

The Tamil driver had no explanation why the bus was in Katunayake, 30 km north of Colombo, where the incident occurred, he added.

Opposition demand: Sri Lanka's combined Opposition demanded today Parliament's restoration to discuss the Tamil rebels' attack on the only international airport of the country.

The Opposition that is in majority in the Assembly - called for immediate summoning of Parliament that President Chandrika Kumaratunga has suspended till 7 September.

Chandrika asks Opposition to drop confrontation

110-19
27/7
By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 26 As Sri Lanka began putting together the pieces from the LTTE attack on its only civilian airport, the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, reiterated her government's commitment to a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict and appealed to the Opposition to join hands with her in the task of nation-building.

"Let all those who act in the name of hatred and terror in the north-east and their supporters in the south be warned: far from being weakened by fear of attack, our resolve for peace has been incalculably strengthened," she said in an address to the nation over state television on Wednesday.

She asked the UNP and other Opposition parties to "put aside all political and other differences, as well as petty personal desire or power and privilege" and join the Government in creating a new political culture.

It was not clear whether by this Mrs. Kumaratunga was hinting at a national Government, or merely asking the Opposition parties to drop their no-confidence motion against the People's Alliance (PA) Government and cooperate with it from outside.

But she accused the leader of the UNP, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, who has criticised the Government for its failure to prevent the attack on the airport, of forgetting that it was his party which, while in power, was responsible

for the growth of the LTTE.

Pointing out that the UNP had not condemned the act of terror and the devastation caused by the LTTE on Tuesday, Mrs. Kumaratunga said the party must once and for all decide where it stood on this question.

"On the side of peace and that of our people or whether they still want to compromise with terror," she said. She said it was the LTTE's intention to disrupt the August 21 referendum "with the express purpose of sabotaging the resolution of the Tamil people's problems."

Mrs. Kumaratunga said a new Constitution that rectified the electoral system and guaranteed a stable Government was the need of the hour.

THE HINDU