

Military probe into LTTE weapons acquisition

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, July 28. — Military authorities are probing how the LTTE suicide squads that struck at the air force base and the Bandaranaike International Airport on Tuesday had acquired ultra-modern high-powered assault weapons that made no sound during attack.

Airport security chief Wing Commander Buwankea Abeyasuriya, it was due to the swift action by army commandos that saved the airport building from being blasted by the terrorists who fired rocket launchers from the top of the building. The commando operation forced the rebels to commit suicide. The chief said he had never seen such weapons which the terrorists had at the time of attack. The air force authorities, have placed three airmen under open arrest in connection with the incident.

Inquiries are also being made to ascertain whether there was any help given to the enemy from within the airbase. Sri Lanka stepped up security at the airport, adds AFP. Another perimeter fence had been put up at the airport.

■ Editorial: Tiger strike, page 8

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Chandrika mulls House quota ^{S Lanka} for Tamils ^{HG 11}

By K Balachandran ^{29/7}
Colombo, July 28

SRI LANKAN President Chandrika Kumaratunga is mulling over the Indian Tamils' demand for reservation in Parliament keeping in view the Proportional Representation (PR) system giving way to the First Past the Post (FPP) system in the new Constitution, which she expects to enact by the end of this year.

On Friday, the President told the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), which represents the Indian Origin Tamils (IOT), that she had to replace the PR system by the FPP system. But she had thought of a scheme that would ensure adequate representation in Parliament for the IOT and other minorities.

Kumaratunga said she would give the details at the next meeting with the CWC on Monday. "The IOT's case is such that under the FPP, their representation in Parliament will dwindle from the current ten to just one out of 225. Actually, being 7 per cent of the population of the country, we should get 16 seats," said CWC MP R Yogarajan. Another CWC MP, Sivalingam has suggested that some electorates be reserved for the IOT.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Attack on airport: Tigers escaped 3 detection chances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, July 29. — The LTTE suicide squad that attacked the Katunayake military airbase on Tuesday escaped three chances of detection while trekking near and in the air force installation, media reports said today.

They entered the sprawling 700-acre installation by cutting the fencing on Monday night, the defence analyst of *Jane's Defence News*, Mr Iqbal Athas, said in a graphic account of the operation.

The operation began with the well-prepared LTTE unit arriving in a tourist luxury bus and parking itself for a "last supper" at the adjacent Raj Fernando playground.

A local resident informed two airmen on duty about their presence, but by the time the airmen reached, they had left. The sacks, they left, contained only some clothes, food items and some tablets, the report, published in *Sunday Times*, said.

The airmen, now under detention for negligence, decided there was no cause for worry. Thus the first chance of detecting the presence of the Black Tigers, as the suicide squad is called, was lost.

A second opportunity came on Tuesday when an Air Force sergeant noticed some people crossing a road, and told a corporal on duty about it. But the information was not passed on to superiors. Barely half an hour later, a group of men were seen moving close to the jet squadron, where Israeli Kfir jets and MiG 27 jets were parked, the report said. A sergeant on duty asked the operations if any

SUICIDE BOMBER KILLS SELF

COLOMBO, July 29. — A LTTE suicide bomber killed himself and a suspected accomplice in northern Sri Lanka today when he accidentally set off explosives strapped to his body, military officials said. The accident took place in the northwestern Mannar area as the bomber prepared to set out "on a mission" from the fishing village, his hiding place. — Reuters

ambush parties had been detailed for operation. He was told "Yes" as a party had been assigned a task, but it was nowhere near the jet squadron then. The LTTE was, thus, lucky for a third time.

The squad then split into two groups and went into a storm water drain that separates the jet squadron from the civilian aprons where Sri Lankan Airlines parks its airbuses.

They struck at 3.50 a.m., having waited until then to ensure that all foreign airline flights had taken off from the adjoining airport.

The *Sunday Leader* regular columnist on LTTE affairs said 21 LTTE men participated in the attack, but seven had escaped, including a video team that recorded the operation for its leadership. He said the LTTE supremo V Prabhakaran blueprinted the attack and its training programme with the help of intelligence chief Pottu Amman, anti-aircraft wing head Shankar and the Tigers' deputy military commander Balraj.

THE STATESMAN

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We'll confront China on human rights: Powell

Beijing, July 28

US SECRETARY of State Colin Powell said he is intent on confronting China about military and weapons exports in violation of agreements. He planned to meet with President Jiang Zemin and other Chinese leaders.

Powell's visit to China comes just days after Beijing deported two US-based scholars following their convictions on charges of spying for Taiwan.

Powell, who arrived here on Saturday morning, was expected to voice strong US objections to "all Chinese transfers of missiles and weapons of mass destruction-related technology to other countries," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said in Washington.

"The US expects China to live up to its non-proliferation commitments, and we will continue

to press China to adhere to those policies," Fleischer said.

President Bush and Powell had pressured China to release the scholars, and Beijing eventually granted them medical paroles. The Chinese moves were apparent attempts to prepare the way for a successful visit by Powell. He will be the most senior US official to convene talks with the Chinese following months of bilateral tensions that began in April with the collision of a US spy plane and a Chinese jet near China.

The Bush administration has made human rights a priority. "Our relations with China represent some serious opportunities, particularly on the trade front. (They) also represent particular challenges involving human rights," Fleischer said.

On arms sales, at issue is China's compliance with a

November 2000 agreement in which Beijing promised not to sell missiles or components to countries developing nuclear weapons.

The agreement was a breakthrough because it addressed U.S. concerns over suspected Chinese assistance to Pakistan, Iran and North Korea.

Powell called China's compliance record mixed — "some successes, some areas that need improving." Fleischer's comments were more strongly worded. "It's important for the United States to continue to press China, as Secretary Powell and as the president will continue to do so," he said.

A senior official traveling with Powell said that Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan told Powell at a conference in Vietnam this week that China was putting in place an export

control system.

Powell was meeting with Tang, Jiang, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji and other high officials during his 24-hour visit.

During Powell's stop in Seoul, topics related to North Korea dominated his talks with senior South Korean officials. At a news conference, Powell said he hopes Russian President Vladimir Putin will point out to North Korea's leader that he is on a dangerous path with his weapons development program. Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader, is travelling by train to Moscow and is expected to meet Putin during the first week in August.

Powell also encouraged Putin to tell Kim that it is in his interest to begin reconciliation efforts with Seoul and to reopen the stalled security dialogue with Washington. AP



U S Secretary of State Colin Powell is greeted by Chinese ambassador to Washington Yang Jiechi at Beijing airport on Saturday.

LIMITED OPTIONS

516 Constitutional impasse in Sri Lanka

POWER sharing with the UNP is not going to be an easy proposition either for President Chandrika Kumaratunga or for the People's Alliance, nor are they obliged to form a government of national unity, the constitution providing Kumaratunga with more attractive options. The deal with the ultra-Leftist Janatha Vimukthi Perumana, which looked promising at first, fell through probably because the demands it made on the government, its ideological differences with the erstwhile ruling coalition being sharper than any other Sinhala party. The UNP stepped into the picture fairly quickly, proposing to cooperate with the Alliance if Kumaratunga called off the referendum scheduled for August 21. In the event the referendum has been put off till October 10, a date which should look very suspicious to the UNP, since it marks the end of the first year of this parliament's term at which point the President can exercise her prerogative to dissolve it. It remains to be seen whether this is what Kumaratunga eventually does. Sri Lanka is in dire financial straits — the opposition no-confidence motion mentioned several instances of economic mismanagement on the president's part — and recent terrorist attacks on the Katunayake airport and police stations in Jaffna have damaged the credibility of her government. She might not think this to be the opportune moment to risk elections.

Ranil Wickremasinghe, the leader of the opposition, has his own set of demands: he wants to be an executive prime minister. Which is fine by Kumaratunga's own standards since this is precisely what her constitutional reform bill proposes. Which is the other problem. The UNP had asked for the referendum to be called off altogether, but if Kumaratunga goes ahead with it on or after October 10, she might have a government speaking in two voices on the issue and, in no time, no government at all. Meanwhile, there have been allegations of horse-trading by both the People's Alliance and the UNP. Add to this, the UNP has moved the supreme court to prevent the government from re-inducting the 32 deputy ministers who had tendered their resignations in a display of solidarity with Kumaratunga. So, power-sharing, for the moment, looks like a pretty long shot. If the talks between the government and UNP fail, we might see some more street politics and, possibly, dissolution of parliament. Unless, the UNP, by some miracle, can get the JVP on its side.

Sri Lanka ready for ceasefire with LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian ^{20/8} HD-1

COLOMBO, AUG. 29. A day after talks for power-sharing between the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the Opposition United National Party (UNP) broke down, the Sri Lanka Government said that it would, on its own, invite the LTTE for talks and was prepared to call a ceasefire before such talks began.

"Before the talks it is desirable to have a ceasefire if it is mutually agreeable," said the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, at a press conference today to explain the failure of the PA-UNP discussions.

The Government had earlier rejected an LTTE demand for a ceasefire, saying it would consider this only when peace talks had progressed to a mutually satisfactory level. Mr. Kadirgamar said the Government had made a "reassessment" of the "constantly changing situation". At the time the LTTE made its demand for a ceasefire, the Government "did not judge them to be serious".

Asked if the Government now believed the LTTE was serious, Mr. Kadirgamar said: "It is possible. But I do not judge if it is probable." There was currently a lull in the Norwegian facilitation, which could have been broken if the PA and the UNP had arrived at an agreement on power-sharing.

Mr. Kadirgamar, who was one of the Government delegates in the three-day deliberations with the UNP, explained the two sides had agreed that if an "overall agreement" was reached, they would jointly put out a statement inviting the LTTE for talks.

The statement, drafted by the PA, also included the declaration of a "mutually agreed temporary halt to offensive military operations", and the "implementation of measures to alleviate any hardships and dangers to civilians".

The LTTE had deemed these to be "essential prerequisites" for talks with the Government.

A PA press release on the failed talks with the UNP appealed to it "to agree to issue this state-

ment as a joint statement even at this stage so that, finally, the two major parties could raise the resolution of the ethnic question to the level of the highest priority that supersedes all other considerations of domestic politics on the national agenda".

At its press conference to explain the failure to reach a power-sharing agreement, the UNP said it was always prepared to assist the PA to find peace and referred back to the 1997 British-brokered deal between the two, known as the Liam Fox agreement, on a bipartisan approach to the talks with the LTTE.

But there was no point in issuing a joint "paper invitation" to the LTTE for talks, said Mr. K.N. Choksy, a senior UNP parliamentarian who participated in the deliberations with the Government.

For the invitation to have some credibility, the two sides must also sit together and hammer out a constitutional alternative to Eelam that could be offered to the LTTE.

See also Page 12

THE HINDU

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Lanka govt,
Opp talks
collapse
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Aug. 28. — Talks between the Sri Lankan government and Opposition to solve the country's political crisis broke down tonight.

A joint statement by the foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, and Opposition United National Party MP, Mr KN Choksy, said the delegations "terminated their discussions without reaching an overall agreement."

"The talks are over. There is no settlement. We will either fight it out in Parliament or to the people," UNP assistant leader Mr Gamini Atukorale said after three days of hectic deliberations aimed at power-sharing arrangement collapsed over irreconcilable differences between the two main parties.

The collapse of the talks means that there will be no government of national reconciliation that many believed to be the solution to the intractable political problems and inexorable economic crisis gripping the conflict riven island nation.

THE STATESMAN

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Chandrika to share power

FROM DAYAN CANDAPPA

Colombo, Aug. 27 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's beleaguered President said she was ready to share power with her opponents to end the country's worst political crisis in years as her minority government held coalition talks with the Opposition.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, whose suspension of parliament ahead of a no-confidence vote has brought opposition parties on to the streets, was "ready to unite with the opposition for one or two years", state media said.

Kumaratunga's Peoples' Alliance, which has 109 seats in the 225-member parliament, held a second day of talks with the opposition United National Party (UNP) in the hope of cobbling together a coalition before parliament reconvenes on September 7.

It was "the popular wish that the two principal parties should unite", the *Daily News* quoted Kumaratunga as telling government officials. But the two parties were tight-lipped about progress.

"The delegations continued their deliberations on the agreed agenda for over four hours with a view to concluding them on August 28," said a terse joint statement.

There are slim hopes of a breakthrough in the closed-door talks, which the United States helped broker, because the UNP has made clear it does not want to work with Kumaratunga.

With little sign of a compromise in sight, both sides have also tried to play down the role of the US embassy which said last week it had carried a message between the parties.

Special US role

"The Peoples' Alliance will continue to engage the UNP in discussions...independent of representations or messages which any foreign government may make or carry," said a statement by foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, head of the government delegation.

UNP officials said the party had met US ambassador Ashley Wills but were not aware that he played a "special role".

The talks are due to end tomorrow while a Marxist party which has reported progress in discussions with Kumaratunga has given her until August 31 to cut a coalition deal. The UNP has 89 seats while the Marxist Peoples' Liberation Front has 10.

They refuse to support Kumaratunga unless parliament is reconvened before September 7, a

controversial October 18 referendum on constitutional reform is cancelled and new laws are passed to strengthen democracy.

Kumaratunga suspended parliament on July 11 and called the referendum on the widely criticised reforms, saying they were needed to change an electoral system she blamed for her party's failure to win a majority.

The opposition denounced the referendum as a ploy to bypass parliament and launched a campaign of street protests which forced Kumaratunga to postpone the plebiscite from August to October. Sri Lanka was plunged into political turmoil in June when a key government ally crossed the floor of parliament which cannot be dissolved until October 10, one year after it was elected.

Bus frenzy

A Sri Lankan man stole a bus and drove at break-neck speed towards the country's northern war zone aiming to run over the reclusive leader of the Tamil guerrilla group battling the government, police said today.

The man, identified as L. Piyasena, seized the empty bus outside Colombo on Saturday and headed for the jungle hideout of rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, 250 km to the north.

But he did not get that far. Police in the town of Kurunegala shot out the tyres of the bus 80 km down the highway, but not before the man had sent a dozen vehicles careening off the road and smashed through the gate of a railway crossing.

"Sir, I am on my way to kill Prabhakaran, why did you stop me?" local media quoted Piyasena as telling police when they arrested him. Police said the man had a history of mental illness.

Date with doom

A Sri Lankan stargazer has urged the president, under fire over her suspension of parliament, to summon the assembly early or risk making a date with doom.

Nandana Viduruwan, a leading astrologer, has written to President Chandrika Kumaratunga, saying the September 7 date set by her for reconvening parliament was replete with "highly malevolent planetary combinations", a local newspaper said.

The stars would bring "horrors of fire and war, economic crisis, death to leaders of the country and many more horrible happenings" if the date was not changed, the *Daily Mirror* said. Viduruwan recommended August 31 as a "suitable day" for the summoning of the assembly.

THE STATESMAN

28 AUG 2001

Lanka govt, Opp to talk on 'power sharing'

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Aug. 24. - A five-member Sri Lankan ministerial team will meet the Opposition United National Party (UNP) for forming a "power sharing government" to overcome the political and economic crisis facing the country, the government said today.

The talks would begin tomorrow and end on 28 August, a government spokesman, Mr Ariya Rubasinghe, said.

The government team includes the foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, the fisheries minister, Mr Mahinda Rajapakse, the communication minister, Mr Nimal Siripala de Silva, the power and energy minister, Mr Anuruddha Ratwatta, and Urban Development Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

The delegation was approved by

President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga. But Mrs Kumaratunga, Prime Minister Ratanasiri Wickremanayake, or the Opposition leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, won't participate in the talks.

The UNP will be represented by its deputy leader Mr Karu Jayasuriya, the chairman, Mr Charitha Ratwatta, and senior MPs Mr Tyronne Fernando and Mr KN Chosky.

The response from the government came after Mr Wickremesinghe told the Prime Minister yesterday that a four-member UNP team would be ready to



Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga

meet with the ruling People's Alliance delegation at a mutually agreeable venue that would seek to resolve the present political and economic crisis within the accepted democratic norms and principles.

The Prime Minister on Tuesday had sent a letter

to the Opposition leader inviting the UNP on talks to explore the possibility of a "government of consensus" being formed between the People's Alliance and the UNP.

USA cold shouldered: The UNP today played down a US initiative to broker unity talks with Mrs Kumaratunga's government, adds AFP.

The US embassy had yesterday expressed concern over Sri Lanka's political uncertainty and said it had acted as a messenger between two political parties.

But the UNP leader denied he was given a message by the US ambassador, Mr Ashley Wills. Mr Wickremesinghe said his position on resolving the conflict was reiterated in a letter to the Prime Minister yesterday.

Soldiers missing: Nine Lankan soldiers were listed as missing today, a day after the LTTE unsuccessfully tried to overrun their camp, sparking battles that left at least 15 dead on both sides, Reuters reports quoting military officers.

The soldiers were part of a patrol that left the Kokkutudu Wai camp in eastern Sri Lanka hours before the rebels began their pre-dawn assault.

THE STATESMAN

25 AUG 2001

Will they smoke the peace pipe?

SRI LANKA is going through its worst crisis in more than a decade. The minority People's Alliance (PA) Government is enmeshed in a battle for its own survival against the Opposition United National Party. With the political turmoil, governance has virtually ground to a standstill. Having brought the economy to its knees by its devastating attack on the country's only airport, the LTTE is now turning on the heat in the northeast.

Ever since the walkout by the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress from the Government which turned into a minority in Parliament, the subsequent no-confidence motion against the Government by the UNP and other parties, and the decision of the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to prorogue Parliament to side-step it, Sri Lanka has been plunged in political chaos.

In a situation of grave uncertainties, the question uppermost on everyone's minds is if a national government can provide the political stability required for peace and economic progress. Sri Lanka's intellectuals, its media, and its business leaders, all say yes.

After more than two months on collision course, the two main protagonists, the PA and the UNP, were, at the weekend, saying they were ready to meet and find out the answer to that question for themselves. In inviting the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, for talks on a "constructive agreement" for governance last week, the PA appeared to have finally come to terms with the fact that it could not find the MPs to face the no-confidence motion when Parliament reconvenes on September 7.

Despite a brief dalliance with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, it was never a serious option for the Government to hitch its survival to the mercy of a party with a violent past and an ideology afloat in the nether regions between the extreme left and the extreme right. Now, the UNP and the PA are set to meet between August 25 and 28 to find out if they can set aside their differences and work as a team in the interests of peace and political stability in the country.

The latest developments have opened the possibility of governance by consensus in Sri Lanka. But given the different agendas of the two sides and the animus between their leaders, which is more personal than political, it would be nothing



A demonstration against the Chandrika Kumaratunga regime in Colombo... can confrontation give way to reconciliation?

short of a miracle if this can be achieved.

The discussions will revolve around the exact terms of power-sharing. The UNP leader's demand is that in any deal struck between the two sides, he will be the Prime Minister, and the President should hands over the running of the Government to him. In other words, not the present system of Executive Presidency, in which the

President runs the Government, but a French-type system, in which the President will hold no portfolios though she will be consulted by the Prime Minister in all decisions.

According to Mr. Wickremesinghe, only the UNP is capable of effecting a turnaround in what he has described as "the mismanagement" of the economy and resources, and of the war against the LTTE, but for that, it would first need control of these key portfolios, namely finance, defence and power. The UNP has also declared that its priority would be to implement reforms in governance, so that the police, judiciary, the bureaucracy, the media, and most importantly, the election commission, are free of "political interference".

At the moment, it is difficult to see Ms. Kumaratunga agreeing to work with the UNP on its terms and conditions, not counting her personal differences with Mr. Wickremesinghe. On the other hand, the UNP leader too, is

under tremendous pressure from within his party not to throw a life-line to the PA at this stage. For the first time since being swept out of office in 1994 by the PA led by Ms. Kumaratunga, the UNP sees its first real opportunity of unseating the Government, and regaining power. Joining hands with the Government at this stage would spoil that.

An influential segment of the party is of the firm opinion that any deal between the two sides must come after the PA Government is defeated on the floor of the House, not before. Such an arrangement should last only for a brief period, and should essentially take the form of a caretaker government for the next elections, which can be called in October, a year after the last general elections.

But despite the deep differences, if the two sides were to actually succeed in coming together over these three days, it would be hailed both within Sri Lanka and by the international community. Confrontation and partisanship have been the hallmark of Sri Lankan politics, and many believe it to be the main reason why the armed separatist conflict in the northeast has worsened over the years to the point where it now seems intractable.

In the weeks since the attack on the airport, the business community, directly hit by its domino effect on the economy, has been demanding that the two parties drop the confrontation and agree to a common agenda that would include talks with the LTTE on ending the conflict.

Sri Lanka's civil society and political parties representing the minority communities too have demanded that a power-sharing arrangement must set the resolution of the ethnic conflict as its first priority. Tamil and Muslim parties have pointed out that a national government should not become a power-sharing deal between the two big Sinhala groupings, but should also include the minority political parties.

Every adversity brings opportunity. The current situation in Sri Lanka presents the best chance in recent times for Sri Lanka's two major political parties to come together to forge a consensus on important national issues. If they fail to do so, the political uncertainty that has gripped Sri Lanka since May this year looks set to continue indefinitely, and may not end even with another general election.

The current situation in Sri Lanka presents the best chance in recent times for the two major parties to forge a consensus on national issues, writes Nirupama Subramanian.

Lanka Govt agrees to Opp's of

AGENCIES

COLOMBO, AUGUST 24

SRI Lanka's minority government on Friday agreed to an Opposition suggestion for early talks to resolve the country's political crisis within a timeframe and named a ministerial delegation to hold discussions from Saturday and end the parleys by August 28.

State-run radio said on Friday afternoon that six senior ministers would begin talks with a four-member United National Party (UNP) team from Saturday on the possibility of forming a government of national reconciliation or a broad agreement for consensual governance. On Thursday, Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe had sought commencement of talks from Friday and

favoured an agreed timeframe.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickrem-anayake had taken the initiative for official talks with the Opposition by inviting Wickremesinghe, who consulted the UNP and other parties before laying down a set of parameters within which alone the talks could be held.

The joint Opposition, commanding the support of 115 MPs in a 225-member Parliament, has made it clear that the talks should focus on vital imperatives like revival of the prorogued Parliament and cancellation of a national referendum fixed for October 18.

The Opposition is also pushing for establishment of five independent commissions to deal with elections, judiciary, public services, police and the media. Once these panels are in place, the Opposition has also indicated it will

press for holding fresh elections to Parliament under a caretaker regime.

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation said the government would be represented at the talks by senior ministers D.M. Jayarathne, Mahinda Rajapakse, Lakshman Kadirgamar, Anuruddha Ratwatte, Mangala Samaraweera and Nimal Siripala De Silva. The UNP has already named its deputy leader Karujayasuriya, chairman Charitha Ratwatte, and senior MPs Tyrone Fernando and K.N. Chosky to handle the negotiations.

The UNP on Friday played down a US initiative to broker unity talks with the beleaguered government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga in a bid to restore political stability. The United States embassy on Thursday expressed concern about Sri Lanka's political un-

certainty and said it has messenger between two political parties in the island. But former prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of the main Opposition United National Party (UNP), denied he was given a message by the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Ashley Wills.

"He has not carried any message to us from anyone," Wickremesinghe said. "I have explained to him, as we have done with the British High Commissioner Linda Duffield, Indian High Commissioner Gopalkrishna Gandhi and several other ambassadors, the position of our party."

The Prime Minister had earlier said the talks should give priority to finding a solution to the ethnic conflict through negotiations with the LTTE and making constitutional changes to

the executive presidency. The Opposition's agenda and the government's priorities will have to be reconciled during the next four days.

Meanwhile, in a sign that Kumaratunga was not solely banking on an agreement with the UNP-led Opposition, she has given a detailed response to the Leftists, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna's proposals for a 'probationary government' for at least one year.

While the details of her response were not disclosed, the JVP said its politburo would consider the President's communication. The party had held two rounds of talks with the President earlier, and laid down some basic demands in return from its support for a 'probationary' government for a year.

Protesters take to streets as Lanka Opposition agrees to talks

REUTERS
COLOMBO, AUGUST 23

SRI Lanka's main Opposition party agreed today to discuss a power-sharing arrangement with the embattled minority government. But the United National Party (UNP) said it would insist on tough conditions including the reconvening of the suspended parliament before any agreement.

Tens of thousands of Opposition supporters, however, defied a ban on rallies and marched into the capital Colombo today, demanding the coun-

try's suspended Parliament be reconvened. "Dictators go home" shouted protesters from several Opposition parties as they converged along three routes on the white colonial-style city hall for a rally as rush-hour traffic jammed the streets.

Heavily armed riot police did not enforce the rally ban as hopes have been raised of a power-sharing deal between the embattled minority government and the UNP in talks the United States helped broker.

Prime Minister Ranasinghe Wickremesinghe on Tuesday invited the UNP to begin official talks on forming a coalition in parliament where the com-

bined Opposition has 115 of the 225 seats.

UNP officials said the party's willingness to talk would not stop it from defying a ban on marches by holding the city's first major rally today since police crushed a protest last month, killing two people and wounding 80.

"The UNP stands ready to meet a delegation nominated by the President on Friday, August 24," said UNP leader Rani Wickremesinghe in a letter to Wickremesinghe.

The UNP leader said he would insist that President Chandrika Kumaratunga lift a suspension of parliament imposed before a no-confidence vote

last month, and cancel an October 18 referendum on widely criticised constitutional reform.

He also reiterated an Opposition demand for laws to strengthen democracy, but declined comment on the Prime Minister's proposals for a common agenda, including constitutional reform and efforts to end an 18-year ethnic war waged by minority Tamil rebels. "There are many cynics who question the bona fides behind this most recent initiative at achieving rapprochement," he said.

Protest marches in the city were banned the day before last month's demonstration on the grounds that they were aimed at influencing the

outcome of the referendum which was postponed from August to October amid growing Opposition pressure.

The government had warned that Tamil rebels, who have launched a series of attacks in the east of the country in recent days, were believed to be planning attacks in Colombo and people should not gather in large crowds for rallies or marches.

Minority Tamil rebels have been fighting for a separate state in the island's north and east since 1983. Several soldiers and rebels were killed early on Thursday when the rebels raided Army camps in the east of the country.

INDIA EXPRESS

24 AUG 23

...attacks and eight in the morning. He said troops of The Liberation Tigers of Tamil preparing further attacks in airlines. (PIL, Reuters)

Cape fear: Rape still haunts Lanka's women

BY SHIMALI SENANAYAKE

Colombo (Sri Lanka), Aug. 23: Exhausted after a night's work at a busy cafe and an anxious encounter with the police, Velu Arshadevi was fast asleep when the loud thumping came at the door of a house shared by the cafe's employees.

"I sat up in the bed. It was about 3 in the morning and who would come?" Arshadevi recalled asking herself. At the door, the 28-year-old mother of two found the policeman who had stopped her on the street hours earlier. He said she would have to come with him to the station as the police

needed to further verify her identity because she was a Tamil. The ID check earlier was normal though — as always — unnerving.

The police regularly question Tamils about possible ties to the militants who have waged a civil war for 18 years to establish a separate homeland for Sri Lanka's 3.2 million minority Tamils, but what came next scared Arshadevi's life, and her case has come to represent Tamil women's worst fears — being raped by members of the Sinhalese-dominated security forces who exercise control over their day-to-day lives. While the government denies the rebels' charges that Tamils are

discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese, Tamils point to their treatment at police checkpoints as just one example of how their lives are different.

A Sinhalese who presents his national identity card usually is allowed to go on. A Tamil in most cases will be detained if he does not also have a separate police report verifying his name, age and address. Standing outside her home after the knock on her door that night in June, Arshadevi was afraid to go with the policeman. She argued that her ID papers had already been checked and were in order. But he insisted, and she had no choice. Under the preven-

tion of terrorism act, the police and military in this island nation have special powers to interrogate, arrest and indefinitely detain anyone they suspect of connections to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Arshadevi told the Associated Press that instead of being taken to the police station, she was pushed into a narrow concrete staircase leading to an Army camp. For the next hour and a half, she said, she was gang raped as she cried out for her attackers to stop. The policeman who led her to the stairway, S. Premathilake, now faces charges of rape along with two of his colleagues. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

14 AUG 1984

LTTE storms police station, 22 killed

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, Aug. 21. - Tamil Tigers overran a police station in eastern Sri Lanka today in an attack that left 22 people dead while the military retaliated with air strikes against the rebels.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas launched the pre-dawn assault against the Central Camp police station in the eastern Ampara district triggering heavy fighting, the defence ministry spokesman Mr Sanath Karunaratne said.

He said four Israeli-built Kfir jets pounded suspected positions of the LTTE in the northern peninsula of Jaffna a few hours after today's raid on the station.

There were no immediate reports of casualties in the air attacks. There was also no reaction from the guerrillas to the attack on the police station or

Mr Karunaratne said the rebels had simultaneously attacked a nearby base of the elite police special task force commandos to prevent immediate reinforcements to the police station.

However, Mr Karunaratne said STF patrols that were outside their base managed to help the station, and beat back the rebels after two hours of fighting.

The guerrillas killed 14 police constables and two civilians employed by the station, and wounded at least another 18 policemen, local sources said.

Local police officials in Ampara, 350 km east of Colombo, said rebel radio communications indicated six guerrillas were killed, and nine wounded during the fighting.

The STF commandos found the bodies of police victims, and admitted the injured to hospital. Some of the more critically wounded were airlifted to the

capital for treatment.

Mixed day for Chandrika: In an expression of solidarity, three Cabinet ministers have handed over their undated resignation letters to the Sri Lankan President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, but a senior lawmaker raised a banner of revolt by questioning a probe into his ministry's financial dealings, adds PTI.

Labour minister Mr Alavi Moulana, food minister Mr Reggie Ranatunga and youth affairs minister Mr Jeevan Kumaratunga handed over their letters to the President last night, repeating a step taken by 28 deputy ministers last week to strengthen her hands.

However, the senior minister and Sri Lanka Freedom Party general secretary, Mr SB Dissanayake, aired his grievances against the President in a statement, defending his Samurdhi affairs ministry from charges of financial misdeeds.

LTTE attacks police station, 20 killed

REUTERS
COLOMBO, AUG 21

AT LEAST 15 Sri Lankan policemen were killed and 25 people were wounded when separatist Tamil guerrillas attacked a police station in eastern Sri Lanka on Tuesday, the military said.

Two civilians and three rebels were killed in the battle, a military official said. The Sri Lanka air force struck back and bombed rebel positions in the Jaffna peninsula in the far north of the country hours after the pre-dawn assault, the worst on a police station since 1997.

About 150 rebels briefly overran the Central Camp police station in Ampara district,

some 240 km east of the capital Colombo, but were beaten back by reinforcements of elite police commandos.

"We had lost radio contact with the station during the two-hour battle but the situation is now under control," said military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne. He said a total of 15 policemen were killed and 18 wounded by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels, who had made off with the bodies of several policemen.

The International Committee of the Red Cross confirmed it had been contacted by the rebels about a transfer of bodies, but could not say how many there were. Two civilians were also killed while enemy radio transmissions reveal that the LTTE suffered three

dead and seven wounded," said Karunaratne. There was no immediate comment from the rebels.

Four Israeli-built Kfir jets pounded the LTTE position in Jaffna's Pallai area, but there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage. Residents said the rebels used a tractor to batter down the defences of the heavily fortified police station which guards a key highway to Ampara.

The district is part of the Sri Lanka's north-east province where the LTTE has been fighting since 1983 for a separate state for minority Tamils. Police said commandos of the paramilitary Special Task Force spent hours combing the jungle around the station for bodies of policemen who were gunned down as they fled.

The rebels captured some weapons but could not break into the station's main arsenal, police said. "The main armoury is intact, but they have got away with several weapons," said one police officer. Karunaratne said the rebels made their getaway in a truck, ransacking shops as they withdrew. The Ampara district is officially under government control but military officials said the Central Camp was less than 7 km from rebel hide-outs in the jungle.

It was the worst rebel attack since July 24 when an LTTE suicide squad destroyed the country's only international airport in a 10-hour blitz. Seven military personnel and 13 guerrillas were killed in the raid, which cost the country more than \$1 billion in damage to aircraft and tourism industry losses.

Opp mobilised for Chandrika ouster

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, Aug. 20. — Sri Lanka's main Opposition today moved to impeach the President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga on charges of violating the constitution and cited her deal with the IMF as an abuse of power.

The main Opposition, United National Party, circulated to other political parties a draft impeachment motion listing nine counts of "intentional violation of the constitution," "misconduct" and "abuse of power."

Mrs Kumaratunga is accused, among other things, of entering into a memorandum of understanding with the IMF in March without obtaining prior approval from her cabinet ministers.



Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga

The IMF granted a \$253 million stand-by credit line to Sri Lanka in April and immediately released \$131 million to shore up Sri Lanka's depleted foreign reserves.

Mrs Kumaratunga is charged

with "subjecting the country to unspecified and unlimited conditions which the IMF may impose... and thereby guilty of misconduct involving the abuse of the powers of her office."

The IMF is yet to announce the release of the second tranche of \$ 30 million and a review mission of the IMF last week said Sri Lanka should enter into a fresh agreement to receive further funding.

The IMF warned that the country was headed for more difficult times following the 24 July Tamil rebel attack against Colombo international airport.

Mrs Kumaratunga is also blamed by the Opposition for allowing the local rupee to float freely against the dollar in January without seeking approval from her cabinet, which led to a 21 per cent devaluation.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, Aug. 20. — Some 3,000 Sri Lankan Buddhist pilgrims in India cannot afford to fly home because airlines are demanding a \$40 war-risk insurance surcharge, AFP added following a state-run daily report today.

The pilgrims left the island before the LTTE attack, and were due to return this week.

The state-run *Dinamina* daily said the pilgrims, who had scrimped and saved to raise the money for the journey of a lifetime to visit Buddhist sites in India, were unable to pay the unexpected surcharge. The newspaper said the authorities were asking Indian Airlines to waive the surcharge for those who began their journey before 24 July. Airline fares have gone up by as much as 80 per cent since the attack. Meanwhile Sri Lanka has offered a sovereign guarantee worth \$50 million to get London-based underwriters to remove a newly imposed war risk surcharge on insurance covering ship-

AIRPORT ATTACK PUTS LANKA PILGRIMS IN TROUBLE

ments to Colombo, adds PTI.

The international underwriters have raised insurance premiums for aircraft and ships going to Colombo following the attack that destroyed four passenger jets, and damaged two others.

"We will be able to secure the removal of the surcharge on insurance premia within two weeks," President Chandrika Kumaratunga was quoted by the state-run media.

"We have already provided them with the guarantee they were seeking after the recent terrorist attack at Katunayake Air Force base and international airport," she said yesterday.

Officials said the guarantee had been the government's trump card while negotiating in London with the War Risk Rating Committee (WRRC). While they were not expecting a total removal of the surcharge, a percentage of the hull value, a drastic reduction was on the cards, they said. At present, ships are required to pay as much as \$400,000 per call at the Colombo port, but this could be cut by more than half.

38 Lanka dy ministers quit

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

MOVE TO STRENGTHEN CHANDRIKA HAND

COLOMBO, Aug. 17. — Thirty-eight deputy ministers have resigned from President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's Cabinet even as a Sinhala political party demanded the arrest of a Cabinet minister and a member of Parliament for having toured the LTTE-controlled area in Wannai.

The state media described the en masse resignations as a display of solidarity with the President and a move to strengthen her hands and foil attempts by the Opposition to subvert the government.

"MPs were offered millions of rupees to cross over. The Opposition UNP tried its best to buy them to topple the government using wheeler dealers' money," one of the deputy ministers was

quoted as saying.

In their undated resignation letters, handed over to the President last night, all the MPs stated they would stand by any decision taken by the President in the present political crisis. The Kumaratunga government was reduced to a minority on 20 June after the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress crossed over to the Opposition.

The combined Opposition with 115 MPs in a House of 225, had presented a no-confidence motion against the government. Sensing a defeat on the floor of the House, the President prorogued Parliament till 7 September. The Opposition has since then been demanding the President to summon Parliament.

Opp warning: Opposition leader Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe warned the government that public unrest would be inevitable if the present minority government continued in office. "The President must either allow the party with a majority in Parliament to form the government or resign and give the people the right to choose," he said in a statement.

In another development, all Opposition MPs have been asked to attend a meeting in Parliament today, sparking speculation that they are planning to resubmit a formal sitting of Parliament in defiance of the President and the Speaker. **Minister's arrest demanded:** The Sinhala Urumaya, refer-

ring to minister Mr Jeyraj Fernandopulle's visit to the LTTE-controlled territory early this week, has demanded his immediate arrest.

"It is surprising how a minister gets hospitality and security by the LTTE, particularly at a time when the LTTE suicide squads are said to be targeting senior ministers," party general secretary Mr Tilka Karunaratne said.

The minister, during a Christian pilgrimage to the Madhu church located in the rebel-held area of Madhu, reportedly met local LTTE leaders and held talks with them.

'Govt scuttles peace efforts' The LTTE accused the Sri Lankan government of scuttling Oslo-brokered peace efforts and called for an end to the decade-long bloodshed, a report said.

JVP against talks with LTTE

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Aug. 12. — In an interesting development in the Sri Lankan political scenario, the leftist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) has demanded that the peace process with the LTTE be suspended.

The JVP and the minority People's Alliance government had held talks last Friday to strike a deal, whereby JVP, having 10 crucial seats in the now suspended Parliament, would provide conditional support for the seven party PA coalition, to remain in office for one year. The JVP had offered conditional support, if the government accepts its demands to reconvene

Parliament, cancel the referendum, form a caretaker government for one year and set up five independent commissions.

Quoting JVP spokesman Mr Wimal Weerawansa, *The Sunday Times* reported that JVP had told President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga to halt the peace talks for at least an year, till a caretaker government implements the independent commissions they are demanding. The President had not agreed to this demand, admitting there was conflict between the two parties on the issue, he added. He also said that the government had to stop the peace process, as it had no right to go into any kind of debatable

discussions during this period.

However, the JVP spokesman admitted, the President agreed to abolish the Executive Presidency and appoint independent commissions on judiciary, police, election, and public service, though no formal statement has yet been issued by the government on such an agreement. But the President did not agree on the state media commission, holding of the election under a caretaker government and reducing the number of cabinet members to 20, he clarified.

LTTE attack: Two civilians were killed and five injured, including a 14-year old girl, when Tamil rebels opened fire at civilians attending a religious



Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga

ceremony, on late night yesterday, inside a Kovil (temple) in Eravur, about 300 kilometres east of the capital, the military claimed today, reports DPA.

THE STATESMAN

10 AUG 2001

LANKA TO COURT-MARTIAL 11 AIRMEN

3 suspended officers & 8 airmen in dock for security lapses in July 24 raid

BY K. VENKATARAMANAN

Colombo, Aug. 5: Sri Lanka will court-martial 11 suspended air force personnel, including three officers, for their alleged failure to prevent the LTTE attack on the Katunayake air base and adjoining international airport, a state-owned newspaper said on Sunday.

The three officers are base commander Air Commodore R. A. Ananda, ground defence officer Wing Commander Nihal Ratnayake and security chief of the Bandaranaike International Airport Wing Commander Bhuvanake Abeysuriya, it said.

Among the eight airmen, three had been on

duty at the air force base and five at the BIA at the time of the attack on July 24 in which 11 military and three civilian aircraft were destroyed and three airbuses damaged. Fourteen LTTE cadres and seven security personnel died in the operation.

The 11 personnel had earlier been suspended by air force chief Air Marshal Jayalath Weerakkody.

Air Vice Marshal Vijitha Tenekoon is currently heading a court of inquiry into the attack, while a police investigation is continuing. Several tamil suspects and three airmen have been detained for questioning, the *Sunday Observer* reported.

Meanwhile, another daily published a pur-

ported police intelligence report dated June 30 warning of a possible attempt by the LTTE to use a mandatory power cut to "enter the BIA by cutting the wire fence around the airstrip and try to hijack an aircraft."

The report, filed by the divisional intelligence unit at Negombo police station, was ignored by the air force, it said. The *Sunday Leader* also claimed that the Tigers' original plan had been to hijack one of the combat jets and use it to bomb the Palaly air base and the Kankasanturai naval base, both in the Northern Jaffna peninsula. Investigators had uncovered elaborate plans to capture an Israeli-made KFIR jet and lethal explosives

from the air force bomb storage facility. The crack team that the LTTE sent out included a militant with a pilot's license obtained abroad and an aeronautical engineer, the report said.

There was also a contingency plan to fill the aircraft with explosives and crashland at the Palaly base in "Kamikaze" style, it said.

Meanwhile, more details have emerged about the LTTE's operation, with investigators claiming a masked accomplice could have led the "Black Tigers" team to the air base. CID detectives have found a *bataclan* *va*, a pull-on cloth hood used to cover the face, abandoned at a playground in the outer perimeter of the base. (PTI)

THE ASIAN AGE

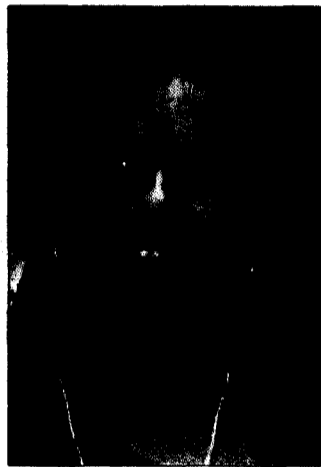
Chandrika offered Jaffna to LTTE: Opp

P K Balachandran
Colombo, August 4

THE OPPOSITION United National Party's draft impeachment motion against the Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga mentions, as one of the grounds, an offer she had allegedly made to the LTTE in 1998 to let it control the country's north for a period of ten years.

The offer, made to the LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran in exchange for his giving up the goal of an independent "Tamil Eelam", had been described as "treason", a reliable opposition source told Hindustan Times here today.

Other acts of "treason" mentioned are: the bid to make A Varatharajaperumal a National List MP in 2000 overlooking his infamous unilateral declaration of an "Independent Tamil Eelam" in 1990; and the non-publication of the 40 odd letters Kumaratunga had exchanged with the LTTE supremo soon after she came to power in 1994. The other charges related to Kumaratunga's controversial political, and economic decisions in the past seven years. However, the impeachment



CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGA

motion is unlikely to get the required number of backers because the ten-member Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the one-member Sihala Urumaya (SU) have opted out on the grounds that the charges are not worthy of impeachment. Tamil parties, like TULF, TELO and ACTC, do not consider the President's alleged offer to the LTTE to be bad for the Tamil cause. These parties are expected to ask the UNP to drop.

GORKHAS MUST GUARD AIRPORT

SRI LANKAN tour operators have asked the Government to get British army Gorkhas to provide security at the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA), which bore a devastating attack by the LTTE on July 24, reliable sources told *Hindustan Times*.

Like the Indian army, the British army has also been recruiting Gorkhas from Nepal under an agreement with the Government of Nepal. The British and the German Governments, which were among a number of Western Governments to issue advisories to their nationals against travelling to Sri Lanka, have a different solution to the security problem.

They have told the tour operators that the security should be handed over to a reputed international private sector company if world confidence in the airport is to be restored.

HTC, Colombo

Chandrika caught on the horns of a dilemma over referendum

By Farah Mihar Ahamed
Times News Network

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga may call off a proposed referendum if she gets the support of one of the opposition parties, but both her government and the opposition



C. Kumaratunga

seem to have ignored the possibility and are engaged in critical deal making, trying to win over the smaller players.

The Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which is sitting on the fence but calling the shots, on Thursday kept up the suspense on whether it would give the government its crucial support in Parliament. The party said it was offering Ms Kumaratunga a grace period of one year in which she is expected to restore democracy; and if there is no immediate sign of her doing so, it will initiate a joint opposition bill to dissolve Parliament as soon as it opens on September 7.

Speculation was rife on Thursday that Ms Kumaratunga would postpone or call off the referendum but election commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake said he was unaware of it and top cabi-

net ministers vehemently denied it. It wasn't surprising because, traditionally, they are kept in the dark over such decisions. But the strong rumours are based on the fact that with less than three weeks to go no order has been placed to print ballot papers and campaigning is progressing at snail's pace.

Ms Kumaratunga may damn the referendum if she gets a guarantee from the JVP, but relying on the party is risky. At a special meeting earlier this week, the president is reported to have asked the party to support her government, in return for which she would call off the referendum and reconvene Parliament. The government has realised that bearing the extra cost of the referendum is difficult and that defeating the joint opposition is almost impossible. Some of Ms Kumaratunga's most loyal vote getters are not supporting the referendum and that makes winning more difficult.

Pramoda Wickremasinghe on Thursday had an important meeting with a government ally, the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), which represents Tamil plantation workers. The party is against any change in the electoral system that could affect their parliamentary representation and have warned Ms Kumaratunga they will not support the referendum if it leads to such a move.

The CWC had several discussions with the president who needs the support of every MP in her minority coalition and therefore agreed to look into their proposals, but the opposition, not sure if they can count on the JVP, will also do their best to pull the CWC to their side.

For both the opposition and the government, the numbers are vital. Without the JVP's ten votes, the opposition has no majority, but the CWC's four would reinstate them.

If the government manages to keep back the CWC, the JVP needs to abstain in any motion against the ruling alliance.

To add to the political confusion, citizens were given a new worry — trade union strikes. With the airport still limping back to normalcy, striking trade unions have left goods stranded in the country's main port of Colombo. Paramedics are demanding a pay hike which has sent hundreds of patients home without medication.

And to add to the heat the one billion-rupee Walls ice cream factory, run by the multinational Unilevers, has closed down because of a two-week strike by employees that prevented operations. The government has little time to focus on the quietly rising strikes but nipping it in the bud may be essential to prevent an uprising.

Referendum put off in Sri Lanka

S. Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 7. Bowing to mounting Opposition protest, the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, today postponed the August 21 referendum on the need for a new Constitution.

An announcement on the State-run Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation said the referendum had been put off till October 18.

The radio quoted Ms. Kumaratunga as saying that she had decided to postpone the referendum as it seemed that it might "exacerbate confrontation at various levels" rather than facilitate a consensus on Constitutional reforms.

Ms. Kumaratunga, however, pledged to carry out the reforms and appealed to all parties and

others to come together in a broad consensus for this purpose. She now faces the task of pulling the minority People's Alliance Government through Parliament when its two-month prorogation ends on September 7.

A no-confidence motion against the Government by the Opposition United National Party and three Tamil parties is pending before Parliament.

But, with the postponement, the Government, which has 109 members in the 225-strong Parliament, might be in a better position to take on the Opposition.

One of the Opposition parties, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), said last week it was willing to support the Government if the referendum was called off. The postponement also opens up the possibility, more strongly than

before, of a national government. The UNP had said it was willing to withdraw its no-confidence motion and consider a "government of national reconciliation" if Ms. Kumaratunga cancelled the referendum.

However, the other condition for the withdrawal of the no-confidence motion is the setting up of independent commissions to oversee elections, the functioning of police, the judiciary, the public service, and the media.

The JVP too said it would support the Government only on this condition but is prepared to give it one year for the purpose of setting up the conditions.

The bottom line is that all parties want to avoid elections, but that might become inevitable if the Opposition persists with the no-confidence motion.

While the UNP might be able to bring down the PA Government through a no-confidence motion, it is doubtful whether the parties that might join hands with it in the task, would lend their support to the formation of an alternate government by the UNP. In such a scenario, the only option left is an election.

The other possibility is of Ms. Kumaratunga proroguing Parliament once again. This time, she will be able to keep it that way till she can dissolve the House.

The Constitution lays down that Parliament cannot be dissolved for at least one year after its formation, which in this case is October 10, well within the two-month prorogation allowed by the Constitution. This scenario too will take the country to early elections.

THE HINDU
8 AUG 2001

Referendum delay no loss for Chandrika

S. Lanka

9/18

P K Balachandran

Colombo, August 8

WT-11

SRI LANKAN President Chandrika Kumaratunga appears to have bowed to the Opposition by postponing the referendum on the need for a new Constitution from August 21 to October 18. But in fact she has given away precious little.

Tuesday's late night announcement said that the President was postponing the referendum to give extra time to the on-going talks on key amendments to the existing Constitution. The President also wanted this process to take place in an atmosphere free from the confrontation and acrimony generated by the referendum.

However, she made it clear that if the parties did not come to a consensus by October 18, the referendum would be held.

She has held out the referendum as a threat knowing that the opposition is as wary about its outcome as the Government is.

Right now, the Opposition has little to shout about because the President has not met the demand that she cancel the prorogation of Parliament and call a session immediately; appoint five independent commissions; drastically clip her wings as Executive President and form a government of National

Reconciliation with the Leader of the Opposition and United National Party (UNP) chief Ranil Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister.

Leaders of the UNP who have been negotiating with the PA do not think that a compromise is possible.

The President does not seem to be in a mood to clip her powers and accept Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister with a Cabinet having full powers as in a parliamentary democracy.

"And we are not fighting for mere ministerships in a lame duck Cabinet," said Mahinda Samasinghe UNP MP.

The Sinhala Urumaya leader Thilak Karunaratne, who has been brokering a PA-UNP deal, felt that the President might not compromise on her powers.

But the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) MP Bimal Ratnayake said that the PA and UNP might come to a compromise because of their love for office and also to ward off the threat from the smaller parties.

Under the present circumstances, neither the Peoples' Alliance nor the UNP can run a Government without the support of the smaller parties, like the JVP or the Muslim and Tamil outfits.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

AUG 2001

President to convene House if Opp. can break impasse

Chandrika offers to resign

Colombo, Aug. 10 (Agencies): Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has offered to give up her office within 30 days if all political parties can reach an agreement on ways to end the country's constitutional crisis.

"I am prepared to give up the presidency in 30 days, if we can arrive at a workable solution to take this country forward and out of this morass of confusion and instability," Kumaratunga told a large delegation of business leaders at her residence last night.

She said her efforts to get the main Opposition United National Party (UNP) to agree to a solution had not yielded results. Therefore, she had offered to convene the prorogued parliament if the Opposition agreed on some measures to end the political impasse.

Her offer to resign comes within days of the postponement of a

referendum fixed for August 21 to October 18. The deferment, she explained, was to give time to the country's squabbling parties to forge a consensus on sweeping constitutional changes she wanted.

Sri Lanka is in the throes of a national crisis with its parliament shut down till September 7 by Kumaratunga, who has kicked off a debate on the need for a new constitution to solve the island's problems.

She is seeking the people's mandate to replace the 1978 constitution, blaming it all for Sri Lanka's woes.

"The parliament will meet on September 7, and I am prepared to summon it even earlier, if we can arrive at some form of consensus to end the constitutional crisis," Kumaratunga was quoted by the state media today as telling the

business delegation.

The President has been holding individual meetings with political parties. She has also briefed the diplomatic corps and the leaders and representatives of major religions on why she prorogued parliament and called for a referendum.

However, the Opposition has been sceptical about her intentions, arguing that she is planning to adopt a new Constitution by bypassing parliament, in which her People's Alliance has lost the majority. The House, they contend, was prorogued only to avert voting on a no-confidence motion that she was certain to lose.

She criticised the UNP for repeatedly changing its position in each discussion with the government and claimed that it was far easier to discuss matters with the Left-wing Janatha Vimukthi Pera-

muna (JVP) than the UNP.

"We have had long discussions with the UNP but we have been let down with no result," she said adding: "The JVP, on the other hand, was consistent in whatever it said".

Tamil refugees

Sri Lanka has asked Tamil refugees scattered around the world to testify before a commission probing the bloody race riots that sparked the country's 18-year ethnic war.

The probe, modelled in part on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is calling for "representations and evidence" about racial violence in the early 1980s. "We are here to find out what happened and we want everyone affected from all over the world to testify," a former chief justice said.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 AUG 2001

SRI LANKA CRISIS

5-8 Peace process likely victim 1518

SRI Lanka's political crisis is deepening, President Chandrika Kumaratunga is being pushed into a corner regarding her plans for holding a referendum on changing Sri Lanka's constitution. The plans are running into determined resistance from almost all political groupings. The Opposition has called the referendum unnecessary and is suspicious of Kumaratunga's motives because the referendum simply solicits the public's view on whether the present constitution, drawn up in 1978, needs to be changed or not, without specifying the character of the changes. Meanwhile, Kumaratunga's act of proroguing parliament has forestalled the no-confidence motion which would almost certainly have unseated the alliance. Her gameplan was to win the referendum with the help of minorities including Tamils, since she plans to push through a devolution package for the provinces, thus answering the thirst of local autonomy. But from the concerted Opposition campaign against her it now looks unlikely that she can win the referendum. *S. Lanka*

The People's Alliance is now in talks with the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna, which holds 10 seats in Parliament, for support to the ruling coalition. The JVP, however, is imposing tough conditions, among them is cancellation of the proposed referendum. Another is halting peace talks with Tamils. One of the victims of a patch-up of the current political crisis, therefore, is likely to be the peace process. Kumaratunga had made some promising moves in this direction, such as setting up a Truth Commission to probe the 1983 pogroms against Tamils. Sri Lanka's government is prone to policy paralysis, for reasons very similar to India's: coalition partners tend to hold the government to ransom over minority demands. For example, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, with seven MPs, withdrew support to the government over the removal of its leader and trade minister Rauff Hakeem from the cabinet. Kumaratunga conceived reforming the constitution as a bold way of resolving the frequent impasses. But those plans have run aground, possibly due to her reluctance to spell out the extent and circumscribe the limits of constitutional reform.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to see any light at the end of this particular tunnel.

THE STATESMAN

15 AUG 2001

Deadlock continues in Sri Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, Aug. 14. Sri Lanka's political uncertainty appears set to continue for the time being, with the People's Alliance (PA) Government unable to reach an understanding with any of the Opposition parties and the United National Party (UNP) threatening to intensify its agitation for the reconvening of Parliament.

The UNP has called for a mass protest demonstration on August 23 to demand the reconvening of Parliament and the resignation of the minority Government.

against the Government is pending before Parliament, which has to be reconvened latest on September 7 when the maximum permissible period for its prorogation ends.

The UNP leadership has staunchly denied all reports of backroom talks between itself and the PA on a power-sharing agreement. "We are not prepared to give oxygen to this dying government," the assistant leader of UNP, Mr. Gamini Athukorale, is reported to have told a meeting of

party representatives. Meanwhile, the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, appears to have embarked on a strategy to scare the UNP into an agreement with her Government by assiduously wooing the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

As a first step in this strategy, Mrs. Kumaratunga chose a soft target, namely the business community, which is believed to have close links with the UNP.

Last week, soon after extensive talks with the JVP, Mrs. Kumaratunga called a meeting of 600

business representatives, where she virtually threatened to close a deal with the radical party if they did not use their clout to influence the UNP for a rapprochement with her Government.

If there is one entity that scares Sri Lanka's business community more than the LTTE and its ability to cause major economic setbacks by its terrorist strikes, it is the JVP and its potential to disrupt the economy. The months since the last general election have seen a heightening of trade union activity in Sri Lanka, much of which is attributed to the JVP.

Mrs. Kumaratunga told the gathering of business representatives that she found it easy to negotiate with the JVP because they stuck to one position, while the UNP shifted and prevaricated all the time.

It remains to be seen if the business community will rise to the bait and use its influence to broker peace between the Government and the UNP.

The UNP is of the opinion that the Government is not interested in a genuine power-sharing agreement with it. Instead, it wants to break the party by offering inducements to individual UNP MPs.

The party has said on several occasions that its share in any arrangement with the People's Alliance has to be the Prime Ministership for its leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, with substantial powers to go with it in contrast to the present arrangement in which he would only be a figurehead.

At the moment, Mrs. Kumaratunga appears to be strongly opposed to such an idea.

LTTE leaders come under bomb attacks

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 15. A series of claymore mine explosions in LTTE-controlled areas targeting senior LTTE leaders has given rise to speculation that either a "deep-penetration" unit of the Sri Lanka Army is at work or that feuds within the rebel group are behind the incidents.

The state-run *Daily News* reported today that a claymore blast had seriously wounded a former bodyguard of the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Quoting intelligence sources, the newspaper identified the cadre as Jeyam, and said he was the "chief bodyguard" of Mr. Prabhakaran from 1990 to 1994. The incident took place in Periyamadhu in the LTTE-controlled Vanni "a few days ago," the report said.

This is the sixth such incident in LTTE-controlled territory. The LTTE political wing leader, Mr. S. Tamilchelvam, escaped a similar attack at Kokkavil in May this year while travelling through the Vanni to meet the Norwegian facilitator, Mr. Erik Solheim, but one of the cadres escorting him was killed.

In another claymore attack, this time in Mannar district, the LTTE sea wing deputy leader, Gangai Amaran, was killed along with his wife and child and the driver of

the Pajero in which they were travelling.

Within a week of this incident, Balraj, a senior fighting cadre, was targeted at Nedunkerni. Again, it was a claymore blast. He escaped but six cadres in an escort vehicle were killed.

Nizam, a senior cadre in charge of the political wing in Batticaloa and Ampara, was also killed two months ago in Vavunatheevu, which is under LTTE control, in a claymore attack.

Claymore mines are fixed at a height, usually on trees, and triggered by remote control.

The Government is putting out that the attacks are evidence of growing rifts within the LTTE, and that rival groups within it are carrying out mafia-style killings against each other.

One theory which gained ground immediately after the attack on Mr. Tamilchelvam was that it was the work of those in the LTTE against peace talks. The po-

litical wing leader is said to be a staunch supporter of talks with the Government.

The LTTE, on its part, is taking the attacks seriously, and perhaps even panicking that a hit-group targeting its leaders is now among its ranks. It said the attack on Mr. Tamilchelvam was the work of a "deep-penetration unit" of the army. It believes this unit is working with LTTE renegades who know the area well. According to Tamil sources, leaflets have been distributed to civilians living in LTTE-controlled areas to be vigilant and not to entertain or even speak to strangers. "Would you betray your own?" one leaflet asks.

Soon after the Nizam incident, the LTTE "police" in Batticaloa declared that they had information that 30 claymore mines had been smuggled into its territory, and carried out several "arrests." According to reports, five of the "arrested" were executed summarily in public.

Four of the six routes in Batticaloa to LTTE-controlled areas have been closed down by the LTTE so that it is better able to monitor the daily traffic of traders and others in and out of these areas.

According to unconfirmed reports, the LTTE carried out "arrests" in the Vanni too after the killing of Gangai Amaran and the attack on Balraj and two weeks ago.

'Talks' denied

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 15. The LTTE today denied that it held "talks" with a Sri Lankan Cabinet Minister, and said the cadres he met were security guards whose position and role the Minister had misunderstood.

The LTTE spokesman, Mr. Anton Balasingham, is quoted on the TamilNet website as saying that the Minister, whose Government was facing a political crisis, had "falsely" raised hopes of peace talks with the LTTE with his "peculiar claim."

The Minister of Aviation and Christian Affairs, Mr. Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, said on Tuesday night that he had met local leaders of the LTTE while on a pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine in Madhu in northern Sri Lanka.

They had escorted him on the pilgrimage to the shrine, which is in LTTE-controlled territory, and told him that the group was not for a separate State, but only wanted equal rights for Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Minister said.

"Mr. Fernandopulle only met our border guards who provided security for the Minister who had entered territory under our control for the purposes of pilgrimage to the Madhu shrine. (He) appears to have misunderstood the role and capacity of the cadres whom he met during the crossing," Mr. Balasingham is quoted as saying.

16 AUG 2001

LTTE warns against use of 'chemical weapons'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 16. The LTTE today accused Sri Lanka of purchasing a banned chemical weapon and warned of "dangerous consequences" if it was inducted in the battlefields of northeastern Sri Lanka.

The LTTE statement appeared to be referring to the Russian-manufactured RPO-A Shmel rocket launcher without naming it. *The Sunday Leader* newspaper reported this week that the Government had purchased 1,000 units of the weapon.

The Sri Lankan Army spokesman, Brig. Sanath Karunaratne, confirmed the purchase of the Shmel, but denied it was a chemical weapon or that it was banned.

The RPO-A Shmel is a rocket-propelled incendiary/blast projectile launcher whose warhead contains a "thermobaric" flammable mixture, that is, it simulates high pressure conditions when detonated in enclosed structures and in the open.

The use of this weapon by the Russian Army in Chechnya came in for strong criticism by the human rights groups.

Described as a "bunker buster", the shoulder-fired weapon uses a fuel-air explosive warhead that is most destructive when detonated inside structures, kill-

ing living beings through suffocation and burns, but also causes death and destruction over wide areas.

"We are perturbed over reports that the Sri Lanka Government has purchased new infantry weapon system with chemical warheads... The acquisition of this banned weapon by Sri Lanka marks a new and dangerous escalation of the armed conflict in the island", the LTTE statement declared.

The decision by the Sri Lankan Government to introduce mass destruction technology into the northeast theatre of the conflict was a reflection of its single-minded determination to continue with the military option and escalate the war against the Tamil people, the LTTE said.

It appealed to the international community, specifically naming India, the U.S. and Britain, to condemn Sri Lanka for buying the weapons.

The consignment purchased by the Sri Lanka Army was delivered on July 17 this year by a British go-between company, Gladstone Industrial Holdings Limited.

The Sunday Leader, which broke the news of the Shmel purchase, has alleged that senior officials in the Sri Lanka Army wanted bribes totalling over \$500,000 for the deal.

THE HINDU

11 AUG 1988

LTTE vows to free Jaffna

S. Jankka
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UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Aug. 16. - The LTTE has asserted their pledge to liberate Jaffna from oppressive aggressors.

In a statement titled Our dearest people of Jaffna, sent to the Jaffna-based *Uthayan* newspaper, they said the LTTE was fighting to free the people from slavery.

In a warning, the LTTE has asked the civilians not to cooperate with the Lankan Army or the administration.

"On the one hand, the peninsula is subjected to aggression by Sinhala chauvinists, and on the other, traitors want to put out the great revolutionary fire set alight by thousands of great heroes who are shedding their blood for the cause of the Eelam."

The LTTE said: "The day when entire Jaffna is liberated from oppressive aggressors, no traitor will be allowed to escape reprisal."

This contradicts the recent statement of a senior Cabinet minister, Mr Jeyraj Fernando-pulle, who during a Roman Catholic pilgrimage to Madhu Church in the rebel-held area

in Wannu on Monday, claimed to have met some local LTTE leaders. He said the LTTE were not interested in a separate state, and wanted to live peacefully with the rest of the country. He was the first minister to visit the rebel-controlled areas since 1995.

Meanwhile, LTTE's chief negotiator, Mr Anton Balasingham, denied the claim.

"There were no such meetings. Mr Fernadopulle only met our border guards who provided security to him within the territory under our control while he was on a pilgrimage to the Madhu Shrine," Mr Balasingham said.

Opposition demand: Seven Lankan Opposition lawmakers today sought a probe by a select committee of Parliament into the LTTE attack on the Katunayake Air force base and adjoining airport on 24 July, and the government's failure to act as per several warnings, including an intelligence report, adds PTI.

Eight killed: Three government troops and four Tamil Tigers were killed on Thursday in a clash in north-eastern Sri Lanka, Reuters adds.

THE STATESMAN

FRIDAY, AUGUST 17, 2001

A CHANGE OF COURSE IN SRI LANKA?

SRI LANKA'S PRESIDENT, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, is in a conciliatory mood which the Opposition parties in that hapless country's mainstream political arena are now scrutinising for signs of any hidden agenda. By postponing a planned referendum on the need for a new Constitution, she seems to have surprised her adversaries in conventional politics. Ms. Kumaratunga's willingness to delay consulting the sovereign people is being packaged variously on her behalf. It is being portrayed as a non-partisan quest for consensus and also as a declaration of the President's courage of conviction. Discernible beyond such hype by Ms. Kumaratunga's friends and allies is her democratic climbdown from the pedestal of an imperious autocracy that she herself had shaped in the place of her popular mandate. Now, irrespective of her new tactics and strategy, the emerging reality, insofar as it might last, should be fair to the people of Sri Lanka. Two inter-related reasons have been cited officially to justify the deferral of a referendum that was ordered in a highly surcharged political environment. Underlined is the President's belief that any appeal to the people "at this time" for their opinion "might exacerbate confrontation at various levels rather than facilitate the evolving consensus on constitutional reforms". The reasoning is noteworthy for what it conceals and not just for what it reveals.

The President's latest sighting of an "evolving consensus on constitutional reforms" must be seen in the context of her belief that political parties might support urgent constitutional amendments to fulfill her "wishes" even "without a referendum". Most Opposition parties at first viewed her plebiscite ploy as a means to bypass Parliament which had in recent months gone beyond her control and to evoke people's sympathy on the basis of a vague proposition about the necessity of an altogether new statutory framework for the polity. Not surprisingly, the campaign towards the now-deferred referendum was dominated by perceptions about Ms. Kumaratunga's gameplans. It is in this context

that she is seeking to gain a respite before fine-tuning a strategy to stamp her presidential will over any measure that Parliament itself or even the people might endorse in respect of constitutional changes.

HD-12 17/8
A redress of the genuine grievances of Sri Lanka's minority Tamils and the political-ethical question of a rightful place for them in the polity constitute a key aspect of the grand constitutional debate. An almost endemic search for a viable system of checks and balances as also frequent doubts over the relative merits of a Gaulist-style presidency and a prime ministerial government have also defined the political discourse over time. While the battle over ideas was often scintillatingly high-minded in the past, even as Neelan Tiruchelvam and Prof. G.L. Peiris raised the quality of the discussions, the current phase of the constitutional debate has remained bereft of inspirational resonance. The President, too, wanted the people to act the arbiter only after proroguing Parliament where her coalition was known to have been reduced to a minority. Now, by postponing the proposed referendum, Ms. Kumaratunga is hoping to bring about a realignment of forces within the House. The Janata Vimukti Peramuna, an ultra-nationalist outfit of the majority Sinhala community, is trying to engage the President in political negotiations with unpredictable consequences. Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, the main Opposition leader, seems convinced that a confident executive President must be able to function in conjunction with a less powerful Prime Minister from an adversarial camp. The notion of a national government, too, is in focus pending the settlement of the constitutional question. However, any such dispensation will be meaningless if it is based entirely on a bargain among the Sinhala-oriented parties. No case can be made to exclude the moderate and reformed Tamil political groups. Hardly addressed in the current debate is the strategic presence of the subterranean kind which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commands.

17 AUG 2001

110-11 15/8

Minister meets LTTE cadres

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, AUG. 14. A senior Minister met LTTE cadres in northern Sri Lanka on Monday, the first contact between the Government and the rebel group in many years.

"I met and spoke to LTTE cadres. They were not senior people, they were local leaders, they were all heavily armed and they gave me full protection," the Minister for Aviation, Mr. Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Fernandopulle, who took additional charge as Minister for Christian Affairs last week, said he crossed military lines into LTTE-controlled territory on a pilgrimage to the Christian shrine of Madhu.

The LTTE cadres arrived in four motorcycles and two cars with 'Tamil Eelam' number

plates and escorted him during the pilgrimage.

Mr. Fernandopulle said the cadres told him that they had lost faith in the Government and blamed it for not negotiating with the LTTE. "I asked them how a Government could negotiate with anyone asking for separation," the Minister said. "They told me they do not want separation, they only want to live like the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka," he said.

When Mr. Fernandopulle asked them how the Government could be sure this was also the view of the top leaders, the cadres said it was, and invited him to visit them.

"I have told them I will do so. That way, at least I can put the foundation for a peace process. They say they have no faith in us, so we must take steps to build confidence," he said.

The Minister said he would brief the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and his colleagues on his visit when the Cabinet meets.

The Government is in a battle for its survival at the moment and has all but shelved the Norwegian-assisted process for peace talks with the LTTE.

The LTTE last month carried out a suicide attack on Sri Lanka's main air-base and the airport, and the as Aviation Minister, Mr. Fernandopulle was one of the first members of the Government on the scene.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, with whom Ms. Kumaratunga has been in talks for one-year conditional support to her Government, has said one of its conditions is that the Government should not pursue talks with the LTTE during this period.

10 Aug 88

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, July 31. - Amid widespread opposition, the government plans to call off the 21 August referendum for making changes in the present constitution, media reports said today. Though no official indication was available, reports say that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is ready to offer conditional support to the People's Alliance government for at least two

years, as a way out of the current political turmoil.

A JVP spokesman was quoted as saying that the party would support a national reconciliation government if ministers and MPs agreed to sacrifice their perks as a step towards settling the economic crisis.

Mrs Kumaratunga had prorogued Parliament on 10 July till 7 September and ordered a referendum in an extra-gazette notification, which prompted

the Opposition to submit a no-confidence motion against the government.

Ms Kumaratunga today briefed the diplomatic community here about her government's strategy for a new constitution. She said the government will adopt a democratic and legally acceptable strategy to get the constitution passed, in the event of not securing the requisite two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Media reports said several senior min-

isters were opposed to the referendum and were refusing to fully support the campaign for a yes vote.

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) general secretary, Mr SB Dissanayake, reportedly said it would be difficult to win the referendum because of the Opposition's joint campaign against the government.

Five killed: LTTE rebels killed five village guards in Welikanda, north-eastern Sri Lanka, today, police said, adds AP.

Sri Lankan govt may call off referendum

1 AUG 201

Chandrika begins parleys to defuse crisis

By Nirupama Subramanian *S. Lanka*

COLOMBO, JULY 31. As the dust settled on the LTTE's devastating attack at the Katunayake airport complex, the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, began a series of meetings with allies and opponents in what seemed to be a bid to disentangle the country's political imbroglio.

Ms. Kumaratunga is in the eye of a political storm after she prorogued Parliament last month to avoid a no-confidence motion against her Government and simultaneously called a referendum on August 21 on the need for a new Constitution.

A court today heard 13 petitions against the referendum asking for writs against the Election Commissioner to restrain him from hold-

ing the referendum, and also challenging the referendum itself on several grounds. The arguments will continue on Wednesday.

Against the gathering protest, Ms. Kumaratunga last week wrote to all the opposition parties in Parliament inviting them for discussions on the political situation.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which has said it would launch a massive island-wide campaign against the referendum, is the only party to have taken up the invitation so far.

Its representatives met her today amid press reports that the party was all set to cut a deal to rescue the minority People's Alliance Government.

Details of the meeting were not immediately available but the JVP was expected to demand that the President cancel the referendum and

HD-14
reconvene Parliament and set up five independent commissions to oversee the judiciary, the police, bureaucracy, elections and the media as the price for its support.

11/8
A delegation of 300 monks representing the Buddhist Mahasangha also landed at the President's house today in response to Ms. Kumaratunga's invitation to religious leaders for a meeting on their views of the political situation.

Sri Lanka's two most pre-eminent Buddhist monks, the chief priests of Kandy's Malwatte and Asgiriya chapters, were not in the delegation.

Ms. Kumaratunga gave no indication of backing down on the referendum or the prorogation of Parliament as she kicked off the flurry of meetings with a briefing on Monday night for Colombo-based diplomats.

THE HINDU

1990

Lanka rules out lifting ban on LTTE

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, July 30. - Sri Lanka has ruled out lifting the ban on the LTTE to facilitate the Norway-initiated peace talks, saying the attack on the Katunayake air base and the Bandaranaike International Airport negated any such possibility.

The LTTE has been banned by the USA, Britain, India and Malaysia. The USA and some other countries are to review their decision, as they annually do, in September.

Britain will consider the appeals of proscribed organisations listed last February. But the LTTE is yet to forward its appeal.

"The de-proscription of the LTTE by these governments is out of the question," the foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, told the Daily News. "The amount of condemnations issued by the USA, the UK and Russia shows the attitude of these nations towards the LTTE's brutality."

Mr Kadirgamar has asked the

Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Canada to request the International Civil Aviation Organisation to send aviation experts to advise the government on steps to bolster security in the Bandaranaike airport.

Kumaratunga move: President Chandrika Kumaratunga has invited various religious leaders and the clergy for talks on the proposed referendum for a new constitution aimed at ending ethnic strife in the country.

Discussions are on with the Opposition and other political parties though many have charged the ruling party with squandering money on the referendum ordered on 21 August.

United National Party spokesperson Mr Karunasena Kodituwakku said the government had diverted nearly Rs 650 million from ministries to hold the referendum.

The Janata Vimukhti Peramuna has also sent a letter requesting the election commissioner to prevent abuse of state resources for the referendum.

9 MORE DETAINED FOR AIRPORT ATTACK

COLOMBO, July 30. - Sri Lankan Police has detained nine Tamil youths for questioning in connection with last week's LTTE attack on the Katunayake air base and the adjoining international airport. Police said nearly 100 people have been questioned, but only 16 civilians and three air force personnel have been detained for further probe.

The youths, hailing from Mullaitivu, Kopay and Valaichenai in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, were found at a guest house at Wennappuwa, near here, police said.

They claimed a businessman had asked them to stay there while he made arrangements to send them to Italy, but could not give details about this person. Seven people have already been questioned to verify the possibility that they helped transport LTTE suicide bombers to the vicinity of the air base the night before the attack. Police are probing whether a few LTTE members escaped after the incident. - PTI

The Institute of Human Rights has introduced a special programme to collect data on abuse of public property and take appropriate steps.

A meeting with the Sihala Urumaya is scheduled for today, while the JVP will meet here tomorrow. A meeting with the Tulf is slated for 8 August.

Addressing a rally in Kuruna-

gela, near here, yesterday, the President said the attack on the Katunayake air base and Bandaranaike airport was aimed at disturbing the proposed referendum process.

The LTTE was opposing the move as minority parties would reject it once the constitution offered a solution to the ethnic problem, the President said.

3 JUL 2001

Colombo airport reopens; 7 held

AFP

COLOMBO, July 25. - Sri Lankan police arrested seven persons in connection with the attack on the Bandaranaike International Airport and the adjoining military airbase yesterday, state television said today.

Police seized two buses similar to the one used by LTTE rebels. No further details were available on the arrests.

The international airport reopened today with a flight from India. "We have a flight arriving from Madras shortly," said Sri Lankan Airlines chief executive officer, Mr Peter Hill. "Six more planes will land in the next three hours." The first departure flight UL 543 was scheduled to leave at 5.30 p.m. (local time) for Zurich.

The Sri Lankan director-general of civil aviation, Mr Lal Liyanarachchi, today reviewed the restoration measures at the international airport and cleared it for functioning.

Eighteen Indians including Sonal Mansingh, who were in transit, are safe, an MEA spokesperson said today, adds SNS from New Delhi. The third special Saarc Standing Committee will be held as per schedule in Colombo on 9-10 August. "The situation in Colombo is calm" and "so far, the announcement stands," Ms Nirupama Rao said. Immediately after the LTTE attack on the airport, the Indian high Commission in Colombo got in touch with all the hotels there and confirmed the safety of the Indians in transit. Arrangements are being made for their safe return. The Indian cricket team is also in Colombo.

India expressed "concern and disappointment" over the developments in Sri Lanka. Ms Rao, said: "There is no room for violence and terrorism in efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict." The government urged all parties to commence talks for a political settlement within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Indian high commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr Gopal Gandhi, who was in the capital for routine consultations, left for Colombo today.

WHILE the wreckage of Sri Lanka's military and civilian air fleets lay smouldering on the tarmac of the Bandaranaike International Airport near Colombo, the air force on Tuesday launched retaliatory strikes against LTTE positions, hitting targets in Jaffna.

The attacks will do little to answer critics who question how 15 or 20 suspected Tiger rebels managed to infiltrate heavily guarded Katunayake, Sri Lanka's main air force base, and the adjoining civilian airport.

Wearing military fatigues and carrying rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank weapons, 40-mm grenade launchers and general purpose machineguns, the rebels are thought to have sneaked in through the northern end of the civilian airport under cover of darkness between 3.30 am and 3.50 am.

Other reports say the suicide squad gathered after midnight on the main Colombo highway from which the airport road branches off, then walked through a dry canal that joins the Negombo lagoon with a sewer behind the airbase without being seen by guards at two checkpoints and one bunker.

Although airport officials said passengers were evacuated in an orderly manner, many spoke of fleeing toward the main Colombo road with little or no help from staff, and of no vehicles arriving to take them away.

A mortar was fired into a transit lounge and security forces say one gunman was killed inside the terminal building by army commandos.

The charred body parts of others, including one who is thought to have set off a suicide bomb inside the terminal building, were later recovered among the bullet-ridden suitcases, clothing and shattered glass panels.

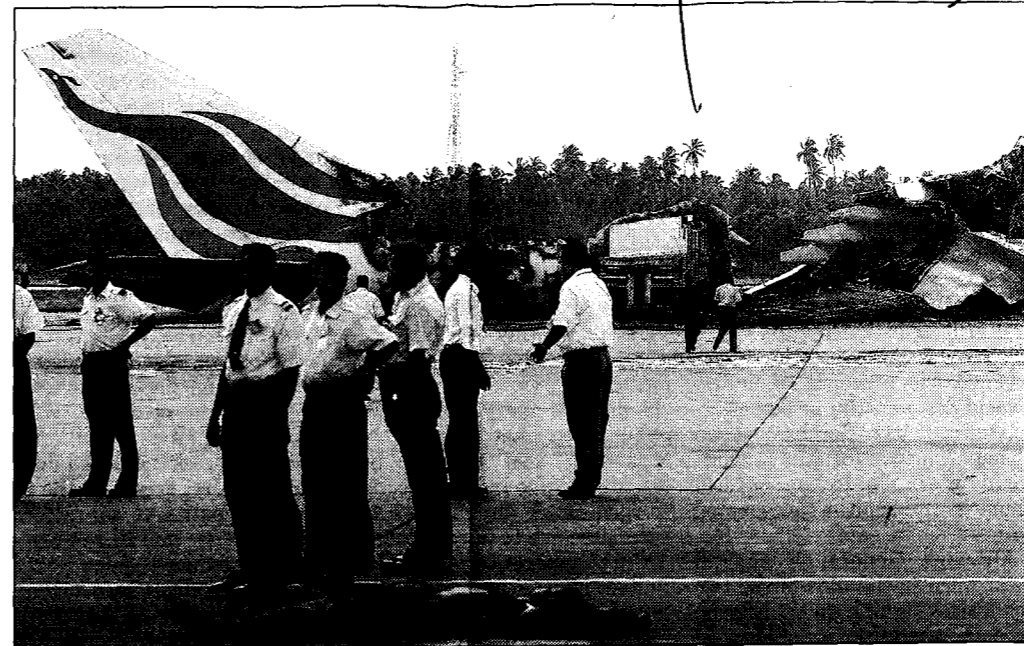
The attack is thought to have been timed to mark the 18th anniversary of "Black July", when mobs of Sri Lanka's Sinhalese majority killed 2,000 to 3,000 Tamils on 23-24 July in 1983.

The 1983 riots, which were sparked by rebel killings of 13 policemen the previous day, are widely seen as the start of the 18-year-old civil war in which more than 64,000 people have died.

Analysts also believe the attack was designed to weaken the Sri Lankan government's air power, which was boosted when President Kumaratunga spent millions of pounds on new weaponry

In memory of 'Black July'

The attack is thought to have been timed to mark the 18th anniversary when mobs of the Sinhalese majority killed 2,000 to 3,000 Sri Lankan Tamils on 23-24 July in 1983. Analysts also believe the attack was designed to weaken the Sri Lankan government's air power, which was boosted when President Kumaratunga spent millions of pounds on new weaponry last year, writes **STEPHEN FARRELL**



Airport staff look at the body of an LTTE cadre on the tarmac of the Katunayaka International Airport, 20 km north-east of Colombo on Tuesday. — AP/PTI

after the humiliating defeats at Elephant Pass in the northern Jaffna peninsula in 2000. On 2 July, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had

warned the government to stop bombing rebel positions after a series of June air raids in the north that the rebels described as "provocative aggression" that would damage the peace process. However, the government said it was acting on Intel-

ligence that the rebels intended to launch another attack on the northern capital and that it was merely seeking to defend the town's 500,000 population.

Though the air force has sufficient strike aircraft remaining — around seven Kfirs and seven MiGs — the rebels have scored a double coup by penetrating a high-security base and causing huge damage to Sri Lanka's lucrative tourist earnings.

Iqbal Athas, of *Jane's Defence Weekly* in Colombo, said: "An attack of this magnitude cannot have been planned in two weeks. I suspect it must have been done over six or eight months."

They have been meticulous in collecting data and infiltrating the airport.

"They chose a time when there were only Sri Lanka Airlines planes on the ground and none belonging to foreign airlines."

He said that though it was sheer good fortune that no tourists were hit in the crossfire, it was unlikely that the rebels had set out to kill civilians, or many would have died.

Tuesday's was the first attack on the Katunayake air

FOR nearly two decades Sri Lanka, a beautiful island once known as Serendib, has been riven by a civil war fought between the Colombo government and one of the most efficient and ruthless guerrilla organisations in the world. Since 1983, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has fought for an independent homeland for the island's 3.2 million minority Tamil population in the north and north-east.

The fighting has killed 64,000 people out of a population of 18.6 million. It absorbs £600 million a year from the budget and the government has deployed more than 100,000 troops. The Tamil Tigers were among 21 militant organisations from around the world banned from Britain four months ago on the grounds that they were terrorists.

British Home Secretary Jack Straw had announced that the LTTE would be banned under new legislation introducing permanent anti-terrorist laws.

The ban, which came into effect on 23 March, outlawed the LTTE and made it an offence to raise funds for or promote the organisation. A few months before the ban was introduced, the British Tamil Association, based in Borough, south London, was set up. It is seen by security sources as the political wing of the LTTE.

The LTTE is led by the secretive military leader, Velupillai Pirabhakaran, who is thought to operate from a network of underground hideouts near the northern town of Mullativu.

The LTTE has refined its tactics over the years. Drawing funds from a large expatriate Tamil population worldwide, they tend to avoid all-out assaults on army front lines, instead striking at poorly-paid and demoralised bases staffed by a largely conscript army.

They regularly use suicide bombers to hit important targets, using explosives strapped to waistcoats. These suicide hits are by no means confined to the areas

Unending mayhem

The LTTE was among 21 militant organisations from around the world banned in Britain four months ago on the grounds that they were terrorists. A few months before the ban was introduced, the British Tamil Association, based in south London, was set up. It is seen by security sources as the political wing of the Tamil Tigers

north of Vavuniya, large swathes of which come under their control. They have regularly struck in towns such as Batticaloa and the capital, Colombo. Targets include politicians from the Buddhist Sinhalese majority population, moderate Tamils and even President Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who was hit in one eye by a suicide bomber who eluded her security cordon.

The very essence of the LTTE's *modus operandi* is unpredictability. The Sri Lankan government was taken by surprise when last year rebels seized its seemingly impregnable garrison at Elephant Pass, guarding the peninsula leading to the northern capital of Jaffna.

In January 1998, the LTTE also struck at the heart of the Sinhalese Buddhist faith when they drove a

lorryload of explosives into the majority population's mountain heartland and blew up the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, one of the most sacred shrines in the Buddhist world.

Thirteen people died and 25 were injured.

Norway is trying to broker a peace deal between the Sri Lankan government and the rebels, but this has stalled after a five-month Tiger ceasefire was called off in April.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has declared a twin-track policy of defeating the LTTE militarily, while trying to bring about a political solution by offering some autonomy for Tamil-majority areas.

However, these proposals for constitutional reform have run into problems with the opposition United National Party and are bitterly opposed by hardline Buddhist monks.

However, Mrs Kumaratunga has rejected the rebels' demands that the government declare a ceasefire and recognise the LTTE as a legitimate organisation. As well as Britain, India and the USA have outlawed the LTTE as terrorists.

They were behind the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 after he sent an Indian peacekeeping force into the north of the island in a failed attempt to bring peace during the 1980s.

— *The Times, London.*



LTTE cadres in an undisclosed training camp in Sri Lanka. — AP/PTI

force base, though terrorists have hit the international airport before, killing 16 people in an explosion on an Air Lanka aircraft in 1986.

The latest attack is the biggest in the capital since the separatist campaign began.

A government spokesman said on Tuesday night: "Throughout its history of armed action, the LTTE has attempted to seriously damage or destroy the economy, push back the development of the country and disrupt constitutional processes that were not to their liking."

— *The Times, London.*

Lanka Govt faces heat all round

P K Balachandran
Colombo, July 25

WITH SRI LANKA yet to recover from the Tigers' Tuesday strike, the Chandrika Kumaratunga Government is in complete confusion.

The LTTE raid has left the Government with only the following options: war or peace; co-opting the cantankerous Opposition in a national effort or confronting it head on; facing an angry Parliament or shying away from it. There are economic questions too. Can the country bear Tuesday's loss of \$ 318 million, which is 45 per cent of the annual Defence budget of \$ 698 million?

AIRPORT REOPENS

COLOMBO'S INTERNATIONAL airport reopened in the evening on Wednesday, after 36 hours. Three Tamils were detained by the authorities for questioning. The air force has ordered a court for inquiry into the daring attack early on Tuesday morning.

PTI, Colombo

And what will be the impact on tourism with the country's only international airport having proved to be vulnerable and the Sri Lankan Airlines having lost 40 per cent of their route capability?

A bewildered Government condemned the LTTE for Tuesday's attack and threatened aerial raids against it, but also blamed the Opposition United National Party (UNP) for the incident, saying that the LTTE was only commemorating the July 24 1983 anti-Tamil riots perpetrated by the then UNP regime. Curiously, an edit in the State owned Daily News said today that peace lovers should not be discouraged by the crisis but use it to launch fresh initiatives for peace. The UNP said in a statement on Tuesday that she was "politically deranged" and that she and her Government must resign forthwith.

THE HINDUSTAN

শ্রীলঙ্কায় কার্যত যুদ্ধ-পরিস্থিতি

মঙ্গলবার শ্রীলঙ্কার এক মাত্র সামরিক বিমান ঘাঁটি এবং আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দরে মঙ্গলবার ভোরে তামিল গেরিলাদের দুঃসাহসী হানা কেবল শ্রীলঙ্কাসীকে নয়, সমগ্র বিশ্ববাসীকেই স্তম্ভিত করিয়া দিয়াছে। মাত্র ডজন খানেক গেরিলা সর্বোচ্চ নিরাপত্তা বলয় ভেদ করিয়া যে ভাবে বোমারু ও যাত্রীবাহী মিলাইয়া মোট ১৩টি বিমানকে হয় সম্পূর্ণ কিংবা আংশিক ধ্বংস করিয়া দিয়াছে, তাহার তুল্য অভিযান সন্ত্রাসবাদ কিংবা গেরিলা সংগ্রামের ইতিহাসে বিরল। বস্তুত এই আক্রমণ কার্যত শ্রীলঙ্কার গোটা বিমান বাহিনীকেই পঙ্গু করিয়া দিয়াছে। বিমান বাহিনী অবশ্য ঘটনার পরেই তামিল গেরিলা ঘাঁটিতে বোমা ফেলিতে কয়েকটি বোমারুকে অন্তরীক্ষে উড়াইয়া দেয়। সেই অভিযান গেরিলাদের কতটা দমিত করিতে পারিয়াছে, কে জানে। শ্রীলঙ্কার তামিল গেরিলারা যে বিশ্বের আর পাঁচটা সন্ত্রাসবাদী সংগঠনের চেয়ে অনেক শক্তিশালী প্রতিপক্ষ, ইহা এত দিনে কলম্বোর শাসকরা টের পাইয়া গিয়াছেন। যদি সাধো কুলাইত, তবে অনেক আগেই জাফনা সহ তামিল অধ্যুষিত এলাকার গেরিলা ঘাঁটিগুলিকে বোমা-বর্ষণে সরকার নিশ্চিহ্ন করিতে পারিত। গত দেড় দশক ধরিয়৷ এই দ্বীপরাষ্ট্রে যাহা চলিতেছে, তাহাকে তো কেবল তামিল বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদের সন্ত্রাসের মোকাবিলায় শ্রীলঙ্কা সরকারের দমননীতি বলিয়া ব্যাখ্যা করা যায় না, তাহা রীতিমত একটি পূর্ণাঙ্গ গৃহযুদ্ধ, যে যুদ্ধের দুটি পক্ষই রণসজ্জা ও সমরপ্রস্তুতিতে প্রায় সম-শক্তিশালী।

তামিল গেরিলারা বিমান বন্দর ও ঘাঁটিতে আক্রমণ হানার জন্য যে দিনটিকে বাছিয়া লইয়াছিল, আঠারো বছর আগে এই দিনেই তামিল-বিরোধী জাতিদাঙ্গায় সিংহলিরা অন্তত চারশো তামিলকে হত্যা করিয়াছিল। সেই শুরু। তামিল সমানাধিকারের দাবি ক্রমে, তামিল স্বায়ত্তশাসনের দাবিতে এবং ভেলুপিলাই প্রভাকরণের নেতৃত্বে সার্বভৌম তামিল ইলমের দাবিতে রূপান্তরিত হইতে থাকে এবং সে দাবি আদায় করিতে প্রভাকরণের গেরিলা যোদ্ধারা অস্ত্রসজ্জা ও প্রশিক্ষণ চালাইতে থাকে। এত দিনে গেরিলাদের শক্তি সরকারি সেনাবাহিনীর শক্তির প্রায় সমান-সমান। নাগরিক হিসাবে যে অধিকার তামিলরা এক সময় পান নাই, গেরিলাদের উর্দিতে স্বয়ংক্রিয় আয়েয়াস্ত্রে সজ্জিত হইয়া তাহা উসুল করিতে তাহারা বদ্ধপরিকর। গৃহযুদ্ধ অব্যাহত, রক্তক্ষয় অবিরাম। মাঝে-মাঝে প্রভাকরণ যুদ্ধ-বিরতি ঘোষণা করেন বটে, কিন্তু শ্রীলঙ্কা সরকারের সন্দেহ সেই অবসরে গেরিলারা নিজেদের অস্ত্র ও রসদের

ক্ষয়িষ্ণু ভাণ্ডারটিকে আবার পূরণ করিয়া লয়। সর্ব ক্ষেত্রে এই সন্দেহ যে অমূলক ছিল না, তাহাও ঘটনা। তাই সে যুদ্ধ-বিরতি ও তাহার অবকাশে আলোচনার তামিল আস্থানে সরকার কর্ণপাত করে না। অন্য দিকে তামিল প্রদেশগুলির জন্য সর্বোচ্চ স্বশাসন মঞ্জুর করার প্রতিশ্রুতি লইয়া প্রেসিডেন্ট চন্দ্রিকা কুমারতুঙ্গা আগাইয়া আসিলেও তামিলরা তাহাকে অপরিপুষ্ট মনে করিয়া সাড়া দিতে অস্বীকৃত হন। এ ভাবেই গৃহ যুদ্ধ চলিতেছে। সম্প্রতি অবশ্য প্রেসিডেন্ট কুমারতুঙ্গার দল সংসদীয় গরিষ্ঠতা হারাইয়া খিড়কির দরজা দিয়া জরুরি অবস্থা জারি করার তাগিদ ছিলেন। বিরোধীদের অসহযোগিতা ও অনাস্থার সামনে অসহায় তিনি এমনকী তাহার ক্ষমতা আঁকড়াইয়া থাকার সাংবিধানিক বৈধতা আদায় করিতে গণভোটের আয়োজনও করিতেছিলেন। কলম্বোর বিমান বন্দর ও ঘাঁটিতে গেরিলা হানা হয়তো সেই সব আয়োজনকে বানচাল করিতে পারে। আবার বিপরীতে এই হামলা কোণঠাসা চন্দ্রিকাকে জাতীয় ঐক্য ও সংহতির ধূয়া তুলিয়া জরুরি অবস্থা জারির সুযোগ করিয়া দিতে পারে।

প্রেসিডেন্ট কুমারতুঙ্গাকে এখন এক দিকে গণতান্ত্রিক রাজনীতির পরিধির মধ্যে সংসদীয় বিরোধী পক্ষের মোকাবিলা করিতে হইবে, অন্য দিকে গণতন্ত্রের সীমার বাহিরে থাকা তামিল গেরিলাদের মোকাবিলাও করিতে হইবে। শেগোক্ত ক্ষেত্রটিতে তিনি যে সামরিক বিকল্পটিই বাছিয়া লইবেন, তাহা একপ্রকার চোখ বুজিয়া বলিয়া দেওয়া যায়। কেননা বৌদ্ধ ভিক্ষু সম্প্রদায় সহ যে সব দক্ষিণপন্থী গোষ্ঠী তামিলদের প্রতি কঠোরতর অবস্থান লইতে চাহিবে, বিমানবন্দরে বিস্ফোরণ তাহাদের হাত শক্ত করিবে। সর্বোচ্চ স্বায়ত্তশাসন দূরস্থান, অতঃপর তাহারা বিনা যুদ্ধে সূচাগ্র ভূমিও তামিলদের দিতে রাজি হইবে না। সেই হিসাবেও এই আক্রমণ তামিলদের কাছে ধাক্কাধরপ। ক্ষমতার বিকেন্দ্রীকরণের যাবতীয় সওয়াল এখন দ্বীপভূমির তামিল প্রতিরোধের দেওয়ালে গিয়া ফিরিয়া আসিবে, এই অজুহাতে প্রতিক্রিয়াশীল সিংহলি গোষ্ঠীগুলি যুদ্ধোন্মাদনাকেই জিয়াইয়া রাখিতে চাহিবে। অসমর্থ আরও রক্তপাত, আরও আর্থিক ও মানবিক সম্পদের সমূহ উপচয়। নরওয়ারের মধ্যস্থতায় এল টি টি ই-র সহিত সরকারের যে বোঝাপড়া হইবার সম্ভাবনা ছিল, তাহাও আজ দূরপর্যায় হত। উপরন্তু দুই সহাবস্থানকারী জাতীয়তার মধ্যে পারস্পরিক আস্থার মনোভাবও বিন্দুমাত্র অবশিষ্ট নাই। দ্বিজাতিতন্ত্র ভারতকে দুই টুকরা করিয়াছিল, দ্বিজাতিতন্ত্র কি শ্রীলঙ্কাকেও দ্বিখণ্ডিত করিতে চলিয়াছে?

WEDNESDAY, JULY 25, 2001

TERRORISING A FRACTURED SRI LANKA

A SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN of terror has been launched by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to confound the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, at a time of turmoil in the hapless country's mainstream politics. The LTTE's latest attack on Colombo's international airport as also the nearby air base was planned with diabolical precision to send a threatening message to the military authorities of Sri Lanka and its fractious civilian establishment. A two-pronged "suicide" mission has destroyed or crippled some of Sri Lanka's warplanes and surveillance aircraft as also a fleet of several passenger planes belonging to the country's designated carrier. With this, the nihilist guerilla organisation has come close to declaring a strategic war on the state's military and economic infrastructure in the present context of a dangerous drift in Sri Lanka's conventional politics. The initial death toll in the latest acts of dare-devilry by the LTTE — nine terrorists and five military personnel — is indicative of a tactical shift in its gameplan. But inexplicably, instead of moving to maximise her political advantage against the LTTE's sole reliance on blind terror some of Ms. Kumaratunga's recent political initiatives have lost focus and direction. It is all the more a pity since she had first taken off on a positive trajectory of addressing the ethnic-political divide with much fairness. Her latest experiments with a precious political asset, the people's mandate, may even boomerang if she does not check her steps. The new reality is that she has antagonised or alienated sizable sections of the minority Tamils as also the Sinhala majority and the mainstream opposition United National Party.

Indeed, the Tamil Tigers seem to have noticed some glaring chinks in Ms. Kumaratunga's political armour even as she now fumbles and falters while playing the supreme arbiter of the nation's destiny in a style better suited to an imperious autocracy than the stewardship of a fragile civil society. It is this new climate of a gathering national crisis that the separatist leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, appears deter-

mined to turn to his perceived advantage. He may be laying siege to the Sri Lankan state itself in a larger sense. He does not carry all the aces, though. Even as he reversed his recent ploy of observing extended periods of 'truce', the military authorities, who rightly discounted the LTTE's peaceable intentions, signalled their readiness to 'hound' the guerrillas. This accounted for the most recent aerial bombardment of some suspected mobile and static formations of the LTTE. An offensive of that magnitude caused an international furore and raised doubts over Ms. Kumaratunga's willingness to let Norway reinvigorate its stalled initiative of facilitating a dialogue between Colombo and the LTTE. It is also arguable that the LTTE's ostensibly retaliatory bid to clip the wings of Sri Lanka's Air Force may now put the Norwegian role in further jeopardy.

The real tragedy, however, is that Ms. Kumaratunga may have narrowed her options by losing friends and allies in recent weeks and by proceeding headlong on a path of collision with the leaders of the Opposition. Her slide towards an increasingly intolerant style of politics can perhaps be traced to the circumstances in which she parted ways with a notable ally, Mr. Rauf Hakeem who is quite adept at articulating the views of both the minority Muslims and the overall multi-ethnic and multireligious nation. Mr. Hakeem's estrangement with the President sparked a chain-reaction of political ferment within the parliamentary arena. As a direct consequence, an alliance led by the President transparently lost its majority in the House. Unable to manage the setback, which would not have in any case affected her firm hold on the presidency itself, she prorogued Parliament and hastily decreed a referendum on the need for a new Constitution. Yet, with the country in disarray, her only viable option is to think of applying the healing touch. Otherwise, her confrontational politics within the mainstream arena may only weaken her further, although the constitutional draft in focus has many salutary features.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
THE HINDU

20 killed as LTTE attacks Colombo airport

AGENCIES

COLOMBO, July 24. - LTTE suicide bombers attacked the Katunayaka military airbase and the Bandaranaike International Airport early this morning triggering a fierce encounter with security forces. Thirteen rebels and seven securitymen were killed and 13 military and civilian aircraft were destroyed or damaged.

Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga has ordered an inquiry into the attack on the international airport. She said her government was committed to save the public from violence.

In a breach of security, a dozen LTTE rebels penetrated deep into the airbase with grenade launchers, machine guns, assault rifles, explosives and light anti-tank weapons targeting combat jets and helicopter gunships. They moved to the Bandaranaike International Airport where they destroyed three Sri Lankan Airlines planes and damaged two.

Two rebels blew themselves up, while 11 were gunned down by security forces. Three airforce and two army men were killed in the ensuing fighting and 12 were wounded. Two more servicemen died later. Two civilians were also injured in the crossfire.

The rebels apparently smuggled themselves inside the high-security area under the cover of darkness using a canal connecting the Negombo lagoon with the airbase, unofficial reports said. The Sri Lankan military has initiated a probe into the security breach.

As the fighting raged for six hours, the international airport was closed to traffic and

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- 'Bullets were flying...'
- Another photograph

all incoming flights were diverted to Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram and Dubai.

An official statement said the situation had been brought under control and the civilian airport would be reopened for international traffic shortly. Within hours of the attack, Sri Lankan air force resumed bombing of Tamil rebel camps in Jaffna, a military spokesman said.

Two Israeli jets, a Mig-27 fighter plane, three trainer aircraft, two Mi-24 helicopter gunships were damaged. But the rebels said they were completely destroyed and

an oil storage depot set ablaze.

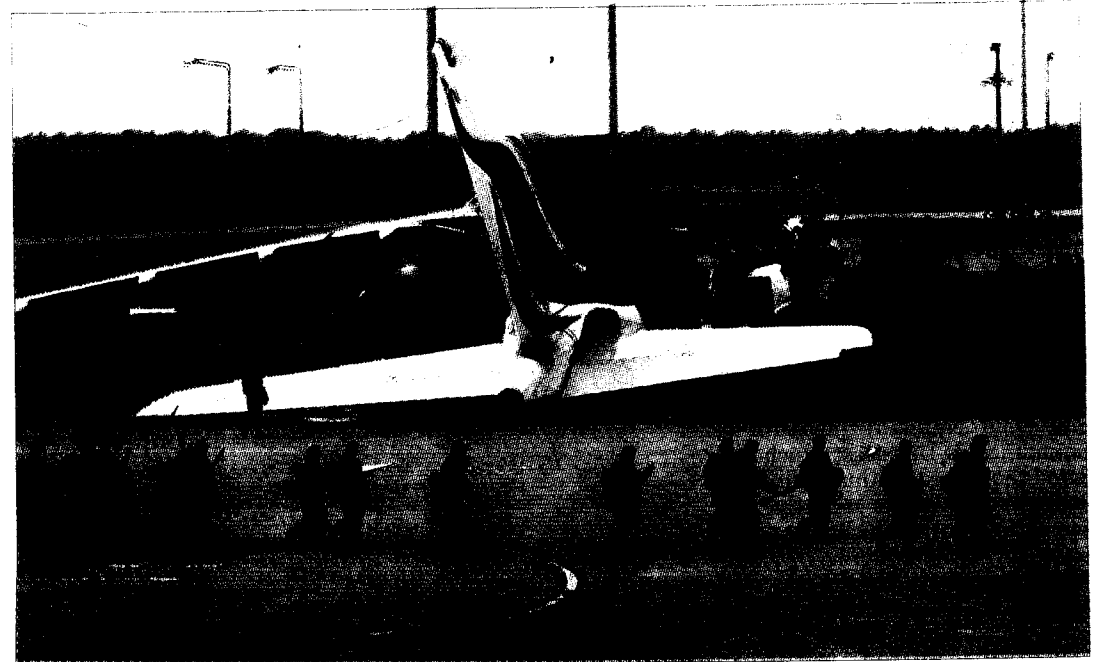
The Sri Lankan Airlines suffered an estimated loss of \$340 million as two of its A-340 Airbuses and one A-330 were completely destroyed while two A-330s were badly damaged.

An indefinite curfew has been clamped in and around the airport and passengers leaving the country were stopped about a km away and turned back by the security forces.

Opp reaction: The Opposition flayed Mrs Kumaratunga for her "incapability" to protect key installations from LTTE attacks. The UNP leader, Mr Ranil Wickramasinghe, demanded that the prorogued Parliament be convened immediately.

Tourists stranded: About 4,000 foreign tourists, including Indians, were stranded in Sri Lanka today after the airport was closed, adds AFP. The official Ceylon Tourist Board said the tourists who could not leave were accommodated in hotels in Colombo and at the Negombo coastal resort.

Flights land at Chennai: Four Colombo bound planes landed at the airport here after the Bandaranaike International Airport was closed, SNS adds from Chennai. One plane landed at the Thiruvananthapuram airport.



Sri Lankan troops take positions at the Bandaranaike International Airport after it was attacked by LTTE rebels on Tuesday morning. The tail of a damaged Sri Lankan Airlines aircraft is seen in the picture - AP/PTI

PRE-DAWN ATTACK; 13 REBELS, 5 OTHERS KILLED

LTTE storms Colombo airport, destroys 11 planes

By Nirupama Subramanian

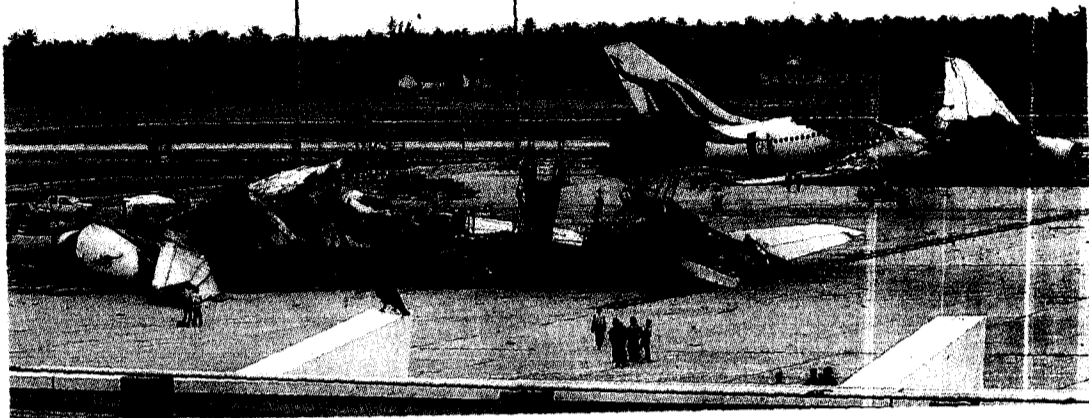
COLOMBO, JULY 24. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today launched a devastating pre-dawn attack on Sri Lanka's only international airport and an adjoining airbase, destroying 11 military and civilian aircraft worth millions of dollars and paralysing the island's airlinks with the rest of the world.

In the gunbattles that continued till about mid-day within the sprawling airport at Katunayake, 35 km. north of the capital, 13 LTTE cadre who infiltrated the high-security complex were killed, including two suicide cadre who blew themselves up. Three airmen and two soldiers were also killed and a journalist was wounded in the crossfire.

Two Israeli Kfir bombers, two Mi-17 transport helicopters, one MiG-27 fighter aircraft and three Chinese K-8 trainer aircraft were destroyed in the attack on the airbase, while three Airbus planes on the tarmac of the international airport were reduced to debris. Two other planes were damaged. There was no passengers aboard any of the planes at the time of the attack, which began at 3.50 a.m.

The airport was shut down immediately, incoming flights were diverted, outgoing flights cancelled and all passengers and other civilian employees in the complex evacuated to hotels.

Later in the day, a Sri Lankan Government release said the situation had been brought under control and that the airport had reopened at 2 p.m. It asked all employees to report for work. However, with the charred remains of the aircraft still on the tarmac till late in the day, it did not seem as if flights would re-



The charred remains of two Sri Lanka Airlines aircraft on the tarmac of the Bandaranaike International Airport outside Colombo, on Tuesday, after an LTTE attack devastated the airport and an adjoining military airbase. A total of 11 aircraft were destroyed. — AFP

sume immediately.

The LTTE infiltrators first struck at the airbase, specifically picking out the hangars. But three aircraft, including the two Israeli jets, which were parked on the tarmac were the first to be destroyed.

Eyewitness account

Eyewitnesses watching from the Bandaranaike international airport terminal, separated from the air base by the tarmac, saw flashes of light, billowing flames, and heard explosions and the sound of machinegun fire.

They reported that within minutes, the LTTE cadre, who had met with little resistance at the airbase, were dashing towards the airport terminal.

When the attack began, there were at least 200 passengers in the airport's departure lounge, waiting to board a 5.30 a.m. Sri Lankan Airlines flight to Milan, along with airport employees and staff at the duty-free shops. Chaos and panic erupted in the airport

buildings as people rushed towards the main entry doors. But airport officials said everyone got out of the terminal building before the armed cadre gained access to it.

The LTTE attackers climbed to the roof of the terminal and it was apparently from there that they fired mortars at the aircraft parked on the tarmac. Two A-330s and one A-340, recent acquisitions by the national carrier Sri Lankan Airlines, were reduced to rubble. They also set ablaze a fuel storage facility at the complex.

Precision attack

The entire attack was carried out with military precision, though there was no official word on how the attackers infiltrated the complex, one of the most tightly-guarded installations in Colombo. But official sources said they had waded through an open canal from a nearby lagoon that runs under the perimeter fence of the airbase and is used to drain water from the runways.

Some of the cadre were in military uniforms. Among the arms recovered from the scene by the security forces were shoulder-launched anti-tank weapons, mortars, T-56 rifles and RPGs.

It is not clear how many infiltrators were involved in the attack but a military spokesman said they had killed all of them. Today is the 18th anniversary of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots in the Jaffna peninsula. Earlier this month the LTTE had warned of retaliatory strikes against the air force raids in the Jaffna peninsula on July 6.

Hours after today's attack, the Sri Lankan Air Force carried out raids against identified rebel targets in Mullaithivu and Trincomalee.

Probe ordered

UNI reports:

Meanwhile, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has ordered an inquiry into the security lapse at the international airport during the attack.

More reports, picture: Page 14

Totally false charges: Jayalalithaa

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 24. Accusing the DMK of instigating writ petitions against her in the Supreme Court, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalithaa, today denied that IAS officials in her office had "confessed" in "secretly-taped telephone conversations" that her Government had foisted cases of heroin possession against certain people to retrieve from them cash and jewellery, allegedly taken away by her disowned foster son, Mr. V. N. Sudhakaran.

Speaking to presspersons at the secretariat, Ms. Jayalalithaa dismissed such reports as "fanciful and far-fetched" and "completely false." They were intended to defame her and disrupt the

smooth functioning of the AIADMK Government.

She did not know whether the Supreme Court had accepted the petitions containing the "transcripts of the taped conversations" relating to the "foisting" of heroin cases, Ms. Jayalalithaa said. The State Government and the officials had not received any notice from the court. On receipt of notice, they would deal with it through proper legal channels.

Asked whether she had talked to the officials in her office, Mr. Natarajan and Mr. Chandramohan, whose "confessions" were reportedly taped by an accused in the cases, Ms. Jayalalithaa said the officials had, on their own, denied the charges.

Claiming that there was no

truth in the charges, she said it was the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption which had taken away the jewellery and cash from her house during a raid while she was in jail. Mr. Sudhakaran could not have taken away anything.

Referring to the "telephone conversations," she said her office received hundreds of calls everyday and it was not difficult to imitate the voice of the officials in the office.

Fabricated cases, says Karunanidhi

The DMK president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, said the "substance" of the petition filed in the Supreme Court by the wife of a

Chennai-based businessman, Mr. P. K. Salahuddin, implicated in the case relating to Mr. Sudhakaran, was "a standing example of how cases are fabricated by the present AIADMK regime."

Speaking to reporters at the DMK headquarters, Mr. Karunanidhi said what had been narrated in the plea "read like a mystery novel."

"I am now apprehensive of the safety of Mr. P.K. Muyeenuddin," he said, of the other accused arrested in the case relating to the assault on Mr. Gopu Sridhar, former secretary to Mr. Sudhakaran, adding that the authorities concerned would be responsible if "something happened to the accused."

Parties do a rethink on unseating^{29/7} Chandrika

PK Balachandran
Colombo, July 23

SEVERAL POLITICAL parties which had pledged support to the opposition United National Party's campaign for impeachment of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the unseating of her Peoples' Alliance (PA) Government, are now having second thoughts.

If any of these parties opts out, the UNP will not be able to carry through a no-confidence motion or get the Speaker to accept a motion to impeach the President. With 115 MPs in a total of 225, the combined opposition has a thin majority. A no-confidence motion as well as an impeachment motion requires the support of at least 113 MPs.

Joseph Pararajasingham, a Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) MP, told *Hindustan Times* that the UNP should first declare openly that a Government led by it would immediately lift the ban on the LTTE, order a ceasefire and begin peace talks.

Selvam Adaikalanathan of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) said the UNP must first state "in writing" its proposed solution for the Tamil problem.

Sihala Urumaya's Thilak Karunaratne feels the charges the president faces for her impeachment are legally unsustainable while a Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader said his party's stance would depend on the charges against Kumaratunga as they finally emerge.

Nandana Gunatilleke of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna also indicated that his party had not made up its mind on its support to the no-trust and impeachment motions, saying it would depend on the charges. Also, he said, the JVP would support the motion only after all other opposition MPs had signed it.

Lanka to prevent 'false' news on referendum

ASSOCIATED PRESS
COLOMBO, JULY 23

THE Sri Lanka Government on Sunday revoked a 20-year-old law, preventing publication of what it called 'false' news relating to the forthcoming controversial referendum that seeks to change the country's constitution.

A government notice didn't call it a censorship, but said that any news originating from "any false statement" made by a political party or a person on the conduct and management of the Aug. 21 referendum was banned.

The notice did not elaborate what it will consider a "false statement", but warned that any comment by any political party or person which is capable of influencing the result of the referendum would be guilty of "an illegal practice".

The government didn't bring in any new law to impose the restrictions, but said it was merely reminding newspaper editors of the provisions of the state's referendum laws, imposed in 1981 when Sri Lanka held its first referendum.

The move came amid growing criticism of the referendum that President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced on July 11 when she suspended the federal Parliament. Her political opponents had said she was using the referendum to buy time and avoid a no-confidence motion in the Parliament where her Peoples' Alliance coalition had lost its majority.

Kumaratunga sparked the political crisis by sacking a key Muslim minister from her Cabinet.

The ally defected with six other supporters, reducing her government to a minority.

2 killed in Lanka Oppn-police clashes

REUTERS
COLOMBO, JULY 19

SRI Lanka's political turmoil spilled on to the streets of its capital on Thursday as two people were killed and more than 60 injured in clashes between police and Opposition supporters, hospital officials said.

Police fought pitched battles with demonstrators protesting against the suspension of the country's Parliament.

They used buses, barricades and barbed wire to seal off Colombo as tens of thousands of slogan-shouting protesters poured down six highways into the city in defiance of a ban on rallies.

Riot squads won the first exchanges with a few well-timed volleys of teargas, dispersing a thin crowd on the north-bound road linking Colombo to its international airport. But the densely populated suburbs to the south and east became rock-littered battlegrounds as up to 20,000 protesters burst through barricades urged on by fire-brand politicians from the left and right of an unwieldy Opposition alliance.

"Make way for people power," chanted activists, wearing funeral black and white to mourn Sri Lankan democracy, which they say died when President Chandrika Kumaratunga suspended Parliament last week ahead of a no-confidence vote in her minority government.

They also waved the *swastika* emblem of Nazi Germany, saying



Sri Lankan police chase protesters in Colombo on Thursday. Police fired teargas and rubber bullets to try to enforce a ban on rallies and force back thousands pouring into the capital for a huge Opposition protest against the suspension of Parliament — Reuters photo

the country was sliding into a dictatorship. Where police did not yield, the crowds, some led by saffron-robed Buddhist monks chanting hymns, surged into a warren of side streets only to be cut off at intersections by blankets of teargas and a hail of rubber bullets.

"Fire at 45 degrees, over their heads," yelled a harried inspector of the Narahenpita police, but the

appeal was ignored by his men and rock-throwing protesters as casualties from missiles, rubber bullets and baton charges rose to two dead and more than 60 injured.

Traffic was snarled for miles as the crowds fought their way to the leafy residential districts in Colombo's south, trapping commuters and schoolchildren in clouds of teargas.

"So this is democracy," said bystander Gamini Wijetilake, tears streaming down his face as drivers in the plush Park Road area rolled up their shutters to keep out the pungent fumes. In the poorer Maradana district, where the marchers were due to converge, the two sides dug in as mooning, cat-calling crowds repulsed police charges.

Constitutional imbroglio in Sri Lanka

By V. Suryanarayan

Even if Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga wins the referendum on a new Constitution, the political impasse in Sri Lanka is likely to continue.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT by Sri Lanka's President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, that Parliament would be prorogued and a national referendum would be held on August 21 to ascertain whether the people desire a new Constitution took the country, to say the least, by surprise. The question that would be posed to the people in the referendum would be: "Are you in agreement with the proposal that the country needs a new Constitution, which is nationally important and an essential requirement?"

The Presidential announcement, coming as it did in the midst of an unprecedented political crisis, when the Peoples Alliance Government had lost majority support in Parliament and a no-confidence motion was on the anvil, is an example of political one-upmanship. The Opposition groups have been completely disarmed.

There is a general consensus that Sri Lanka requires a new Constitution. The differences among various political groups revolve around the nature of the Constitution. Should the executive presidency be abolished and should a parliamentary form of government replace it? Should Sri Lanka be a unitary state or a federal state? Should the system of proportional representation be given up and the first-past-the-post system reintroduced?

Even if Ms. Kumaratunga wins the referendum hands down, as is very likely, the political impasse is likely to continue. According to media sources, the Constitutional Affairs Minister, Mr. G. L. Peiris, has informed the President that since no Constitution has been placed before the people, it would be difficult to interpret the results. The present 1978 Constitution will have to be amended by two-thirds majority in Parliament and the new proposals will have to be approved by the people in a subsequent referendum. According to observers, Ms. Kumaratunga may resort to another option. After winning the referendum, she may dissolve Parliament and hold another general election, win a decisive majority and convert the new Parliament into a constituent assembly.

There are two sources of political legitimacy in Sri Lanka. The first derives from a

liberal constitutional order and second comes from nationalism and ethnicity. Unfortunately, the two sources are in conflict. The two sources, as Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy has pointed out, are "used and usurped" either to push political reforms or to engage in political repression.

In the annals of constitutional history, Sri Lanka has established a new record. The draft Constitution, introduced by the Chandrika Government, if it had come into force, would have been the fourth since independence. What is more tragic, constitutional changes in Sri Lanka have not led to political stability nor paved the way for national integration. Centralisation of power, whether in Parliament as in the 1972 Constitution or in the President as in the 1978 Constitution, did not lead to the attainment of desired goals. There had been two Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) uprisings; what is more, the ethnic fratricide in the northeast has converted this serendipitous island into one of the worst war zones of the world.

The first Constitution of Sri Lanka, the Soulbury Constitution of 1947, promulgated by the United Kingdom one year before independence, enshrined majoritarian democracy in a unitary state. The Constitution-makers did not consider it necessary to enact an American-style Bill of Rights; it was assumed Ceylon would abide by the customs and conventions which had developed in the U.K. over the centuries. Years later, Lord Soulbury remarked: "In the light of later happenings... I think it is a pity that the Soulbury Constitution did not also recommend the entrenchment in the Constitution of guarantees of fundamental rights on the lines enacted in the Constitutions of India, Malaya, Nigeria and elsewhere".

The 1972 Republican Constitution marked a definite departure from the past. The United Front Government led by Sirimavo Bandaranaike equated its overwhelming majority with a national

consensus. The Tamil demand for a federation and protection of minority rights were ignored. On the other hand, the Constitution gave Buddhism an exalted position. It made Sinhala the official language and emphasised the subordinate position of Tamil. The role of the Judiciary was eroded. These constitutional provisions, combined with the discriminatory policy of standardisation, contributed to the parting of ways between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils.

The Second Republican Constitution of 1978 introduced the executive presidency and proportional representation. The main objective of the Constitution-makers was to provide for political stability by having a strong executive head, free from the whims and fancies of Parliament. The "mighty executive" coupled with a "devalued parliament" hastened the downfall of liberal democracy and paved the way for an era of authoritarianism. During the 1977 election campaign there was no mention of executive presidency. The introduction of the presidential form of government, by a constitutional amendment, was an example of constitutional manipulation. In December 1982, a referendum was held which extended the life of Parliament by another five years. The essentials of vibrant democracy — free press, independence of the Judiciary, rule of law, free and fair polls, strong trade unions and active students' unions — all became memories of the past. The Sri Lankan Parliament even debated a no-confidence motion against the Leader of the Opposition! The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution paved the way for the withdrawal of TULF members from Parliament. It had disastrous consequences. The TULF was sidelined and the LTTE was catapulted to centre stage. Most of the moderate Tamil leaders were brutally murdered by the Tigers.

The present political impasse is in many ways a consequence of the electoral system in Sri Lanka. The system of propor-

tional representation no doubt has enabled minority groups to get representation in Parliament. The Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and the Muslims have gained representation in Parliament because of the system of proportional representation. On the negative side, it must be highlighted that under this system no party can get two-thirds majority, an essential pre-requisite for the introduction of a new Constitution. A small swing can lead to disastrous consequences as far as seats in Parliament are concerned. In 1970, under the first-past-the-post system, the SLFP, part of a united front, polled 36.9 per cent of the votes and got 91 seats; whereas the UNP polled 37.6 per cent but could get only 17 seats. The 1977 elections resulted in exactly opposite consequences. The UNP polled 50.9 per cent and secured 140 seats; whereas the SLFP polled 30 per cent but could win only eight seats. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, the Peoples Alliance polled 45.2 per cent and won 107 seats; the UNP polled 40.29 per cent and got 89 seats. Ms. Kumaratunga was able to get the support of smaller parties such as the SLMC, the CWC and the EPDP and form a Government. As is well known, the SLMC withdrew support; the party got split; the Government lost its majority. It was in this backdrop that Ms. Kumaratunga decided to prorogue Parliament and hold the referendum.

From an Indian point of view, the emerging political trends will have disastrous consequences. Competitive Sinhala politics has come to the fore and there is likely to be more mudslinging and mutual recrimination between the UNP and the PA. The Norwegian initiative to facilitate talks between the LTTE and Colombo has receded to the background. What is more, the devolution proposals cannot be implemented unless there is cooperation between the PA and the UNP. A Sinhala consensus, which is an essential pre-requisite for any amicable settlement of the ethnic conflict, looks an impossible dream. All these can benefit only Mr. Velu Prabhakaran.

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

THE END

Chandrika desperate to stay in power, says Ranil Wickremesinghe

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 19. Two persons died when police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at several places in and around Colombo today to disperse protesters defying a ban and marching towards the city centre for a joint Opposition rally against the prorogation of Parliament by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga.

More than 60 were hurt and some of them had to be hospitalised, the United National Party leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, said. Mr. Wickremesinghe was present when police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at Nugegoda, a suburb of the city, to disperse a large group of processionists.

Mr. Wickremesinghe told *The Hindu* that he was bundled into his vehicle by his security officers and escaped unhurt. "Everything they did to stop us was illegal. But the people have successfully resisted the Government," the Opposition leader said.

The police said on Wednesday that permission for the rally could not be granted as it was disallowed under the Referendum Act.

Ms. Kumaratunga announced a referendum on August 21 on the need for a new Constitution simultaneously with the suspension of Parliament last week. The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, the State-run radio, said the UNP had to take responsibility for the loss of lives as they had been told in advance that permission could not be granted for the protest.

People from various areas were to converge in the Capital at Maradana this afternoon for a mammoth rally to protest Ms. Kumaratunga's action, which seemed primarily aimed at skirting an Opposition no-confidence motion against the People's Alliance Government.

Mr. Wickremesinghe said the Government's decision to ban the protest rally was its "biggest mistake". "This is her (Ms. Kumaratunga's) last desperate struggle to remain in power," he said.

All entry points to the city had been barri-



Police chasing away protesters who had gathered for a demonstration against the suspension of Parliament in Colombo on Thursday. — Reuters

aded. Police fired tear gas in at least 10 places and used rubber bullets to disperse protesters who attempted to break through the barricades.

The highway to the airport was the worst-hit, and was closed for several hours as police and protesters battled it out at Peliyagoda. There was fighting on the streets in several other spots, including some parts of the Capital. One of those who died today was identified as a UNP supporter, Mr. Wickremesinghe said. Later in the day, the Opposition leaders who managed to enter the city along with their supporters held a smaller meeting than planned, close to the original venue. Among the speakers were the UNP leader, the leader

of the Democratic Left Front, Mr. Vasudeva Nanyakkara, and the TULF vice-president, Mr. V. Anandasangaree. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna did not participate in the protest but the UNP spokesman, Mr. Karunasena Kodittuwakku said the joint Opposition would still appeal to the party to join in.

"This is just the beginning. We will continue with our agitation until this Government goes or the President revokes the prorogation of Parliament," Mr. Kodittuwakku said.

The party leaders of the Opposition combine are scheduled to meet tomorrow to chalk out what to do next, and the UNP is hopeful that the JVP will send its representative to this strategy powwow.

Lanka Opp. to take battle to streets

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Colombo, July 17 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's fractious Opposition parties announced plans today to unite in a major campaign of street protests to fight President Chandrika Kumaratunga's suspension of parliament.

More than 15 parties across the political spectrum appealed to Sri Lankans to join a protest march in Colombo on Thursday to denounce the suspension, which came ahead of a no-confidence vote in Kumaratunga's minority government.

"We call upon all people to challenge this unconstitutional, dictatorial rule in their thousands..." the Opposition said in a joint statement. Yesterday, opposition leaders vowed to try to impeach Kumaratunga.

Conspicuously absent from the opposition alliance was the radical Marxist Peoples' Liberation Front (JVP), which has planned its own protest march next week.

The JVP has a pivotal role in parliament, where the government lost its majority last month with the defection of a key ally. The party has criticised the suspension of the assembly and an August 21 referendum called by Kumaratunga on her plans to change the constitution.

But it has not openly thrown in its lot with the opposition on several issues, including the no-confidence vote and the impeachment bid, which requires a near impossible two-thirds vote in the 225-member house where the combined opposition has 116 seats.

The JVP also stayed away from Monday's protest by opposition

lawmakers who forced their way past police barricades to meet in parliament.

Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe said his United National Party, the country's main opposition group, had little in common with many of its current allies.

"But we agree on one thing. Democracy is in danger and must be safeguarded," Wickremesinghe said at news conference called jointly with a motley collection of radical Marxists, hardline nationalists and their traditional protagonists from the Tamil and Muslim minorities.

Kumaratunga said her new constitution would be similar to the one she was forced to shelve last year amid street protests by nationalists and leftist parties opposing provisions for regional autonomy to Tamil areas where rebels are fighting for a separate state.

Sri Lanka today began the final round of its first census in 20 years even though the count has become deeply mired in the island's 18-year ethnic conflict.

More than 130,000 government officials fanned out across most of the country to finalise data gathered over the past few months, but Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the country's north and east will not give them access to nearly one million people.

Private businesses closed early today, a public holiday, and most of the country's estimated 20 million people were asked to stay at home. "Tie your dog, keep the gates open and be awake until census offi-

cial visit you," said a message in the state media. But counting was called off in the northern Jaffna peninsula, home to around 500,000 minority Tamils, amid threats from the rebels and criticism from Tamil politicians who say the census could upset the country's delicate ethnic balance.

"We have some serious problems in Jaffna where our staff have been threatened and cannot go ahead," said H.R. Gunasekara, director of the census and statistics department.

Gunasekara said the department had also dropped plans to tally an estimated 400,000 people in a large swathe of rebel-held territory in the north of the island with assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"We did not get a favourable response from UNHCR," he said.

Tamils say the census can change demographics in the north and east where hundreds of thousands have been displaced since the guerrillas began fighting for a separate state in 1983.

"The census will distort the entire ethnic picture," said V. Anandasangaree, vice president of the Tamil United Liberation Front, the island's main moderate Tamil party.

Members of the main opposition United National Party removing barricades on the road leading to Parliament before entering Parliament in Colombo on Monday. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

Impeach motion planned against Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 16. Parliamentarians of Sri Lanka's Opposition parties, who defied police barricades to enter Parliament today, said they would move an impeachment motion against the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The parliamentarians had planned to meet in a show of strength inside the premises of the prorogued Parliament this morning, but were stopped by police barricades on the road leading to the complex.

After arguments with the police proved futile, the MPs forcibly wheeled aside the barricades and walked up to the building, but had to cool their heels outside for a couple of hours till the Speaker intervened to allow them access to one of the meeting rooms in the complex.

"What has taken place is unprecedented in the history of Sri Lanka. Never before have MPs been stopped from going to Parliament," said the Opposition leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, at a news conference later.

Finally gathered in a committee room of the Parliament building, the MPs decided they would move an impeachment motion against the President. "The party leaders decided to prepare articles of impeachment against the President, and they will submit it to the Speaker," Mr. Wickremesinghe said.

The leader of the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress, Mr. A. Vinayagamoorthy, said this was the only option open to the MPs to chastise the President for her "dictatorial and authoritarian" tendencies.

Except the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, all other Opposition parties were present, including three Tamil parties, the TULF, TELO and ACTC, and the Rauff Hakeem faction of the Sri Lanka Muslim Con-

gress. Mr. Wickremesinghe said the Opposition's other plan was to reconvene Parliament to show that the Government had lost its majority. Last week, the Opposition parties had petitioned the Speaker to do so, but on Sunday Mr. Bandaranaike told them he had no powers under the Constitution to recall a prorogued Assembly.

Mr. Wickremesinghe said as the President was answerable to Parliament, it had to reconvene to debate the validity of her decision to prorogue the House to pre-empt a no-confidence motion against the Government. The doctrine of necessity could be invoked in order to do this, he said.

The Opposition parties also plan a mass protest demonstration against the prorogation on July 19, where the Buddhist clergy and civil society groups are scheduled to participate. But they have yet to decide on a common stand on the referendum.

Mr. Wickremesinghe said the Opposition parties had been given two weeks to decide their positions on the August 21 referendum on the need for a new Constitution. Fired by the events of this morning, the Opposition did not seem to be discouraged by the daunting process for the impeachment of the President.

The 1978 Constitution, which gives the President sweeping powers, says at least half the number of MPs have to sign the motion for the Speaker to accept it.

The charges against the President have to be then examined by the Supreme Court, where the President has the right of defence. Thereafter, if the court accepts the charges, the motion will be debated in Parliament where it has to be passed by two-thirds of the MPs.

HD-16

For a place in the sun

15/7



Children at a refugee camp for Muslims at Puttalam... displaced.

SAHABDEEN MANSOOR still remembers that day in October 1990 in Jaffna. The LTTE, then in control of the peninsula, called all the Muslims living there, and gave them two days to pack up and leave. "They said to us, take whatever you can of your belongings, but we don't want you here anymore," recalled Mr. Mansoor. He and his family ran a toffee-manufacturing unit. "We could not carry that with us, so here we are, languishing for the last 10 years."

Mr. Mansoor is one of more than 70,000 Muslims who fled the peninsula and the northern mainland districts, and now live in a chain of refugee camps at Puttalam on the western coast, 100 km north of Colombo. Muslims form eight per cent of Sri Lanka's population and are mainly a trading community, therefore, perceived as economically advantaged. They constitute a significant percentage of the population in eastern Sri Lanka, in the central province and along the western sea-board.

Almost entirely Tamil speaking, bar a tiny percentage who speak Malay, the community has been fighting for a separate political identity since the time of the first Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915. From the beginning, Tamil leaders sought to project the Muslim community as part of a larger Tamil linguistic ethnic identity. If the LTTE's purge in the north and the mass killings of Muslims in the east contributed to the final shattering of that myth, recent events have underlined its tense relationship with the majority Sinhala community.

A Sinhala-Muslim clash in Mawanel-la in central Sri Lanka in May left two dead, several injured and much prop-

erty destroyed. A Minister, also the area heavyweight of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the chief constituent of the ruling People's Alliance, allegedly played a prominent role in the riots.

A month later, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, a party formed in the 1980s to give voice to the Muslims of the east, broke from the PA coalition precipitating the current political crisis in the country. The action has given rise to open resentment against the Muslims in the majority Sinhalese community, and accusations that unlike the founder-leader of the SLMC, M.H.M. Ashraff, who was killed in an air crash last year, the present leader, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, lacks political maturity and an "accommodating" spirit.

Even those opposed to the PA Government accuse him of exploiting the party's king-maker position after the last general elections to make "unreasonable" demands to the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga.

But Mr. Hakeem's contention is that in their eagerness to build a niche within the larger political set-up, Sri Lanka's Muslims have become less, not more strident, and steadily diluted their demands. "All we are asking is to be treated with dignity. We are prepared to be elastic, but we are working

Muslims who form eight per cent of Sri Lanka's population are fighting for a separate political identity. Nirupama Subramanian reports.

against an increasingly nationalist and intolerant political leadership of the country."

However, the community itself seems divided over the approach to adopt in its dealings with the Sinhalese, with the fear that the SLMC's confrontational style might provoke a violent backlash. Some even question the need for the SLMC, arguing that both the United National Party and the SLFP, the country's two main political groupings, represent the Muslims sufficiently, particularly the former.

But there are others who view the Muslims in the national parties as window-dressing, who have no say when it comes to decision-making, even with regard to Muslim issues.

There is anger in the Muslim community, particularly amongst the youngsters, that Muslim leaders of the SLFP did not force the party to take action against the Minister allegedly involved in the Mawanella riots.

In Puttalam, the refugees, who have to put up with small acts of discrimination from the Sinhala-dominated local administration everyday, were vociferous in their support for the party. "The SLMC has shown the Sinhalese that the Muslims of this country count for something," said Mr. Segu Mohammed, a resident of the Mujahideen Puram refugee camp.

The SLMC rose to prominence on the fears of eastern Muslims that they would become a helpless minority in a Tamil-dominated northeast. By its open and uncharacteristic defiance of the Sinhala leadership, it seems poised to broaden its support among other Muslims searching for an identity in Sri Lanka.

Parliamentary group supports Chandrika

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA 51-5

COLOMBO, July 12. - The government Parliamentary group endorsed the President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's action though her call for a referendum evoked protests from several quarters.

Senior minister SB Dissanayake walked out of a cabinet meeting yesterday after an argument with the President, while a few others spoke out against the cabinet not being consulted before such a major decision, news reports said.

Constitutional affairs and industrial development minister GL Peiris complained that he heard of the President's action from an Opposition MP. He also expressed reservations about the "defective" nature of the referendum called for, the 'Daily Mirror' said.

However, the government Parliamentary group endorsed her decision as a timely action

to curb Opposition moves, allegedly backed by "media businessmen", to disrupt the government's functioning.

As expected, Opposition, United National Party leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe attacked Kumaratunga's "autocratic" decision to suspend Parliament. He, however, did not comment on the referendum.

"We condemn the move to pro-rogue Parliament, which will undoubtedly clear the path for an authoritarian leadership in the country", he said in a statement. The referendum has been called on 21 August on whether the country needs a new Constitution or not.

Opposition seeks Speaker's defiance : Sri Lanka's political crisis deepened today as the Opposition pushed Parliamentary Speaker, Anura Bandaranaike, into a showdown with his estranged sister, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, adds AFP.

ALL STATE

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11-10 Chandrika's Gauntlet

Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga, whose government is already at war with Tamil separatist rebels, has, by suspending parliament and announcing a referendum, now launched an offensive against her political opponents. Ms Kumaratunga enjoys many advantages including that of incumbency, a superior mass appeal and towering stature in relation to other politicians. And yet, her decision to take recourse to rarely-invoked provisions of the constitution is certain to compound the many crises that bedevil the island republic. The immediate objective of suspending parliament is to pre-empt a no-confidence motion against the People's Alliance which has been reduced to a minority with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress withdrawing support to the government. Only once before had this clause of the 1978 constitution been resorted to — in 1991 by president R Premadasa of the United National Party (UNP). Premadasa had done it to thwart an opposition move to impeach him. That crisis split the opposition and, thanks to defections, the impeachment bid was scotched. The referendum provision too was exploited only once — in 1982 — by president J R Jayewardene of the UNP to extend parliament's term from five to six years. Mr Jayewardene's objective was to avoid an election in which the UNP was certain to be defeated. Unlike Mr Jayewardene and Mr Premadasa, Ms Kumaratunga's authoritarian leap has been taken by using both the provisions.

At stake here is not only Ms Kumaratunga's political future but that of also other parties, and with parliament shut down, the battle for supremacy may well shift to the streets. This could cause serious civil and political turbulence by further aggravating divisive tendencies and ethnic strife. It would also deal another blow to a battered economy, already being bled by bloated defence spending to sustain the military offensive against the Tamil rebels. Despite the risks to her, Ms Kumaratunga has surprised the opposition and put them in a tight spot. The referendum is only on the question of whether there should be a new constitution or not. Though the draft proposals aim at sweeping statute changes, including devolution of power to the regions, Ms Kumaratunga's real intention is said to be limited to doing away with the system of proportional representation, which has denied her a two-thirds majority. This is borne out by the president's reference to smaller parties gaining undue leverage and paralysing the government in parliament. Once she wins the referendum, she can go in for fresh elections and convert parliament into a constituent assembly. There is also speculation that she may seek to perpetuate herself in office by introducing provisions for a third term. The problem for the opposition particularly the Tamil parties, barring the LTTE, and the Muslims is that they cannot unequivocally campaign against a new constitution; because they have been advocating changes in the statute, albeit for the objective of devolution of powers. Since the referendum would be confined to a yes or a no for a new statute and not to any specific proposals, the opposition cannot mobilise much support for a 'no'. In fact to attempt to do so would drive the majority Sinhala community, regardless of political loyalties, to rally behind Ms Kumaratunga. How a doubly disadvantaged opposition chooses to pick up the gauntlet will determine the shape of things to come.

Chandrika defends referendum

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 12. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, went over state television today to defend her decision to prorogue Parliament and simultaneously kicked off her campaign for the August 21 referendum by asking the people to give her a "clear and unequivocal" mandate to change the Constitution.

Ms. Kumaratunga promised that once she had the required mandate, she would change the Constitution within a year, "after necessary consultations with broad sections of society", and called for the formation of a "broad national alliance" with her Government to achieve this.

Earlier this week, Ms. Kumaratunga used the sweeping powers vested in her by the same Constitution that she was seeking to replace to side-step an imminent no-confidence motion against her minority Government, and called for a referendum on the need for a new Constitution.

The move has attracted widespread condemnation as an authoritarian and dictatorial tactic to block a legitimate democratic process.

The President said today that she had taken the step in view of "the unstable situation" in the legislature.

"With a view to providing the necessary space and opportunity for the political parties concerned to find a solution to their differences, I decided to prorogue Parliament for two months," she said.

The main thrust of her address was the unfairness of the electoral system in the present Constitution that made it impossible for any party to establish "a stable Government", and the need to change it through a new Constitution.

Ms. Kumaratunga did not specify what the new Constitution might be, but dropped a hint by referring to the Constitution Bill that her Government sought unsuccessfully to rush through Parliament last year, as containing provisions to establish the independent commissions that the Opposition had been clamouring for and to scrap the Executive Presidency.

She said the new Constitution would also provide

"fair, constitutional and political solutions to the curse of the ethnic crisis".

The draft new Constitution that was put to Parliament last year was opposed by Sinhalese as giving away too much to Tamils, and by Tamils as too little. The United National Party also said it was opposed to provisions in it that allowed the retention of the powers of the Executive Presidency for a transitional period.

Though Ms. Kumaratunga needs to win only 51 per cent of the mandate at the referendum, analysts said she would require more than 60 per cent of the mandate to claim popular support to change the Constitution. It is not yet clear how she can do this if the Opposition does not support her as a referendum is not legally binding on Parliament, and the creation of a Constituent Assembly, where constitutional changes can be effected by a simple majority, needs a resolution by Parliament where the PA has lost its majority.

Local newspapers reported today that even the Cabinet was unhappy with the decision by the President. The Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Mr. G.L. Peiris, was one of those who reportedly complained at the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday that he had not been consulted on the move. Several others too registered their protest, and one stormed out, the papers said.

The Leader of the Opposition United National Party, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, accused Ms. Kumaratunga of taking the "first step" towards a dictatorship, and called for all democratic forces to unite against the Government. He said the Government should have resigned when it became clear that it no longer commanded the majority to defeat the no-confidence motion of the Opposition.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna called it a "dangerous move" and said it seemed like an attempt to revive the Constitution Bill of last year. Meanwhile, the leaders of 115 combined Opposition Parliamentarians submitted a petition to the President, asking her to sack the Prime Minister and the Cabinet as the Government had clearly lost its majority and appoint to the office a person who commanded the confidence of the House.

FRIDAY, JULY 13, 2001

SRI LANKA'S CONCERNS AND CHOICES

THE DIVIDING LINE between constitutional choices and political concerns is becoming increasingly blurred in Sri Lanka. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga's latest decision to order a referendum on the need for a new Constitution is so timed as to try and put the country on a fast track towards her proposals to reshape the fundamental features of the polity itself. Pushed to the centre stage are also the immediate political fortunes of the 'ruling' People's Alliance (PA). Surely, Ms. Kumaratunga's legitimacy as the duly elected executive President remains unchallenged. However, there can be no doubt, too, that she has opted for a calculated risk of playing the constitutional architect at a critical time marked by the PA's perceived loss of parliamentary status as the 'governing' coalition. In a sense, she is seeking to capitalise on the basic characteristics of Sri Lanka's present Constitution in a transparent bid to combine statecraft with some mundane objectives of creating a political cushion for the beleaguered PA. The opposition United National Party (UNP) is, of course, quick to accuse her of grasping for a concealed agenda of nothing less than "dictatorship". An angry denunciation of this order by the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, must be seen in the unimaginably murky context of accusations by some PA leaders that the UNP and the other opposition groups are engaged in a "conspiratorial" and "treacherous" game of thwarting the President's mission of fashioning the political destiny of Sri Lanka.

Now, Ms. Kumaratunga has so far managed to sustain her visionary enthusiasm for a fair constitutional deal for Sri Lanka's minority community of Tamils. Although she has often run foul of some extremist sections within the mainstream Sinhala society, her track record in office certainly does not smack of any neglect or negation of the interests of the majority community itself. Well known, too, is the President's sense of frustration over her inability to push for a virtual constitutional revolution in the face of inevitable objections from diverse groups within a politically

conscious society. From her perspective, the problems arising out of a perceivably nihilist politics of the militant-separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are in many ways compounded by the obscurantist negativism of some segments of the Sinhala community. A case can, therefore, be made for some political empathy with the President over her persistent dilemma. Yet, it is difficult to see the ruling dispensation's present parliamentary crisis as the ennobling backdrop for a momentous referendum on the country's constitutional future.

The unresolved parliamentary stalemate, evident in the PA's loss of its numerical majority and the ruling alliance's apparent hesitation to face a no-confidence motion sponsored by the Opposition, is sought to be addressed through a presidential prorogation of the House. The breathing space so gained will be utilised for a Constitution-changing referendum, scheduled for August 21. The issues at stake in the referendum span a wide spectrum — devolution and the related rights of the Tamils, besides a new and broad system of electoral and constitutional checks and balances at the national level. Closely related to such high stakes is the fact that the President's compulsions for a referendum have been largely determined by the manner in which Parliament has, over time, managed to stop her in her constitutional tracks. Now, it is entirely possible that an overwhelmingly decisive mandate for a new Constitution can transform the planned referendum into a national opportunity to move towards a resolution of the basic ethnic-political crisis among other issues. In the event, questions about the enforceability of the outcome will lose their political vigour. Yet, in fairness, the people's likely verdict on the statute reform cannot be interpreted as a guide to resolve the current parliamentary crisis. This should be addressed in the context of inter-party dynamics as in any democracy, irrespective also of the military confrontation between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE.

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THE HINDU

13 JUL 2001

Chandrika ties Opposition's hands

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 11. In proroguing Parliament and announcing a referendum, the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has not only disarmed the Opposition, but virtually tied their hands.

The United National Party (UNP) and other opposition parties had on Tuesday submitted a letter to the Speaker asking him to schedule the debate on a no-confidence motion against the Government for next week. The letter was signed by 115 members of the 225-member House.

The fear in the Opposition ranks till yesterday was that the Government would do its best to postpone the debate to August. That would enable the President to prorogue Parliament for the maximum stipulated period of two months, which would safely take her through to October, when she could legally dissolve the House.

It was not expected that she would prorogue Parliament immediately, and even less so that she would announce a referendum for a new Constitution.

The wording of the question for the referendum, asking the people if they are agreeable to the proposal that "the country needs a new Constitution which is nationally important and an essential requirement", is such as to make it difficult for the Opposition parties to campaign against it. Almost everyone in Sri Lanka agree that the 1978 Constitution — that is in operation today — gives the President unbelievable powers and needs to be replaced by a less authoritarian document. Indeed, it is this Constitution that empowered Ms. Kumaratunga to serve last night's political ace.

It is clear that the new Constitution referred to in the question is none other than the Constitution Bill that her Government presented in Parliament in August 2000 and withdrew when it sensed it would be defeated.

In the campaign leading up to the August 21 referendum, Ms. Kumaratunga is likely to dwell less on the devolution and conflict-resolution possibilities of a new Constitution, as these would be controversial, and more on the possibilities of electoral reforms.

She is likely to argue that the present system of proportional representation gives undue leverage to smaller parties, whose demands paralyse the functioning of the Government.

The communique from the President's office giving reasons for the decision to pro-

Sinhala hardline.

The Opposition might also campaign that the Government is seeking to change the Constitution only to ensure its own survival.

The referendum poses a big dilemma for the Tamil parties that supported the no-confidence motion against the Government, but who are not in principle opposed to a new Constitution that promises devolution.

But their decisions are more likely to be influenced by the fact that a new Constitution, irrespective of the extent of devolution it offers, would be unacceptable to the LTTE for the simple reason that it was not consulted on it. In any case, the LTTE had rejected the draft new Constitution even as it was being drawn up.

One possible scenario if Ms. Kumaratunga wins the referendum, is that she might seek to convert Parliament into a Constituent Assembly, where a simple majority, instead of the two-thirds required in Parliament, can change the Constitution.

She might use this method to enact the 2000 Constitution Bill despite the fact that political parties, including Tamil parties, are divided on it and are not in agreement with many of its proposals.

Sri Lanka's only other referendum was held in 1982 by the late President, J.R. Jayewardene, on extending the life of the then Parliament by an additional full term. The Sri Lankan parliament has also been prorogued just once before, when the former President, Premadasa, resorted to the measure to buy time when his opponents were planning an impeachment motion against him.

This is the first time the two will happen together, and the fact that both are perceived as a move by a cornered Government to subvert Parliament and democracy could give rise to great political and civil unrest in the coming weeks.

NEWS ANALYSIS

rogue Parliament and hold the referendum said as much. It said that although the People's Alliance had won two-thirds of the seats in the 1994 and 2000 elections, that mandate was not "properly" reflected in the composition of Parliament. "It has been difficult to find solutions for the problems faced by the people as a result of the distortion caused by the improper reflection of your mandate in Parliament. Moreover, political factions and cliques who seek to further their narrow and self-centred motives are attempting to gain an undue advantage by exploiting the situation," it said.

The argument might go down well with the Sinhala majority community, that, irrespective of its political loyalties, sees the current political crisis in Sri Lanka as precipitated by the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress that walked out of the Government, reducing it to a minority.

For its part, the Opposition might attempt to whip up a campaign against the referendum as a ploy by the Government to bring back the draft new Constitution that was withdrawn from Parliament last year in the face of protests by the Buddhist clergy and

THE HINDU

Sri Lankan parties cry foul

HD-14 12/7
By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 11. Stunned by the mid-night Presidential order proroguing Parliament and notifying a referendum, Sri Lanka's Opposition parties that were attempting to oust the Government through a no-confidence motion today condemned the move as anti-democratic and authoritarian.

"This is a very, very anti-democratic and anti-parliamentary act. The President did this because she was aware that the collapse of the Government was imminent," said Mr. Karunasena Kodittuwaku, the spokesman of the main Opposition United National Party.

In a sudden move late on Tuesday night, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, prorogued Parliament till September 7 and announced a referendum on the need to have a new Constitution on August 21.

According to a communique from the Presidential Secretariat, at the referendum, people will be asked to vote 'yes' or 'no' to the proposal that "the country needs a new Constitution, which is nationally important and an essential requirement."

The move has pre-empted the no-confidence motion against the Government and two impeachment motions, against the Chief Justice and a junior Minister, that were presented to Parliament by the Opposition.

While it was expected that Ms. Kumaratunga might take recourse to proroguing Parliament to stall the no-confidence and impeachment motions, the decision to hold a referendum was a surprise.

Questioning the right of the President to take a decision to prorogue the House when a no-confidence motion against the Government was pending before Parliament, the UNP spokesman further said the question for the referendum was "incomplete."

Independent analysts too described the question as vague and misleading. "That question (of the necessity for a new Constitution) was resolved by the 1994 elections. No one doubts that this country needs a new Constitution. The real question is what sort of new Constitution," said Mr. P. Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

"The President has set a new

agenda, and the Opposition has to hit the ground running. It is up to the Opposition now to treat the referendum as a no-confidence motion," said Mr. Saravanamuttu.

It is not clear yet what the Opposition's next move will be. "We will work with all pro-democratic forces to oppose this action by the President," said Mr. Kodittuwaku.

The leadership of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna was closeted in a meeting through the morning.

The vice-president of the Tamil United Liberation Front, Mr. V. Anandasangaree, condemned the suspension of Parliament as a "disgrace to the country, and a disgrace to the Bandaranaike family which has a long history of parliamentary politics."

"She has run away from the no-confidence motion," he said. But the party is yet to take a stand on the referendum. Though Tamil parties have been arguing for a Constitution that devolves more political power to north-east Sri Lanka, the vaguely worded question for the referendum has left them wondering about the President's intentions.

The Tamil parties were not entirely satisfied even with the proposed new Constitution that was presented by the Government to Parliament in August 2000 and hurriedly withdrawn before it could be put to vote.

"We don't know what is meant by the words new Constitution. It should not become a case of jumping from the frying pan into the fire," a senior Tamil leader said.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which precipitated the current political drama by walking out of the ruling coalition, said even if the Government won the referendum, the task of drafting a Constitution acceptable to all "would take months if not years, given the acrimonious relationship existing between the political parties".

The SLMC leader, Mr. Rauff Haqueem, said if the aim was to change the Constitution, the President should rescind the orders proroguing Parliament and announcing a referendum and immediately work towards a consensus on a new Constitution, following laid-down constitutional norms.

Lanka Opposition against referendum

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, July 11. - Opposition today criticised President Chandrika Kumaratunga's decision to hold a referendum on whether the country needed a new constitution and proroguing Parliament till 7 September in the face of the Opposition UNP's no-confidence motion against her People's Alliance government.

"There is a no-confidence motion on the Order Paper of Parliament. As many as 115 MPs out of 225 have signed the letter to the Speaker that the motion should be taken up on 18 July. When these issues are pending, it is an undemocratic move to prorogue Parliament - an attempt to establish a dictatorship. We will take every possible step to defeat this move," the UNP spokesman, Mr Karunasena Kodituwakku said.

The President blamed the 1978 Constitution for the present crisis in Parliament. "Although the PA won more than two-thirds of the seats at the last two elections, that mandate is not properly reflected in Parliament due to the prevailing electoral system," a special government communique said last night.

"Various political cliques and factions seeking to further their narrow motives are attempting to gain undue advantage by exploiting the system of proportional representation that re-distributes votes in such a way that many parties get into Parliament without winning at any place. This results in the leading party's mandate getting 'distorted.' This is a very serious situation that threatens to drag the country, people and the entire nation to the brink of disaster," the government said.

The present political turmoil was created by the withdrawal of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress from the coalition.

THE STATESMAN

Chandrika ouster will lead to civil war: Govt

Colombo, July 10

SRI LANKA'S ruling party warned today of an uprising if the Opposition ousts President Chandrika Kumaratunga's coalition and called for a national unity Government.

Senior Minister SB dissanayake acknowledged in an interview with the Sinhalese-language daily Divaina that there was a possibility of the People's Alliance Government collapsing at a confidence vote, which could take place next week. "You cannot judge the popular support of the PA by counting the heads in Parliament," said Dissanayake, General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which is the main constituent of the PA coalition. "If they try to oust us, we will take to the streets with our supporters. I am the best man to organise such an agitation," he said. Dissanayake also warned that Kumaratunga would exercise her executive powers and dissolve the Parliament when it completes one year of its six-year term in mid-October if no party had a clear majority. But Dissanayake appealed to the main Opposition United National Party to join the PA in a national-unity government, which he said was necessary to overcome the instability that has plagued Sri Lanka. **PTI**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 JUL 2001

Chandrika suspends Parliament

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, July 10.— Sri Lanka President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga today suspended Parliament for two months as the main Opposition united to topple her coalition government.

The government said in a statement that the Parliament, will now reconvene on 7 September.

The move effectively stalled a vote on a no-confidence resolution against the government. The Opposition today united to call for a vote on the ouster move on 18 July.

Vote for new Constitution: Sri Lankans would vote for a New constitution on August 21, adds UNI. This was announced here by Presidential secretariat at midnight.

Earlier, Prime Minister, Mr Ratnasiri Wickremanayake,

broke talks with the Opposition on the consensual governance issue after hardline Opposition parties insisted on a vote in Parliament to remove the People's Alliance government, adds PTI.

"I don't believe we can work together for a stable government. UNP will talk, even agree to a common working programme, and then go to Parliament and create trouble for the government," he said.

Meanwhile, another senior Cabinet minister and the general secretary of Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Mr S B Dissanayake has revived his campaign for a national government of willing parties to solve the political imbroglio caused by the pull-out of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress from the ruling coalition.

ARMS HAUL

COLOMBO, July 10. — In one of the biggest arms seizure during the past five years in Sri Lanka, police recovered a huge cache of high-powered sophisticated weapons worth million of rupees in the Jaffna peninsula today.

The LTTE hid the arms inside a concrete bunker in the Northern peninsula of Jaffna. Some of the weapons bore the Indian Army crest and several Indian characters.

One 84 mm Rocket Grenade Launcher is mainly used to destroy battle tanks and was not in the armoury of the Armed Forces, said Jaffna Police Division Senior Superintendent of Police, Mr B Premaratne. — UNI

THE STATESMAN

Sri Lankan Muslims oppose ties with Israel

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 10. Sri Lanka's main Muslim party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), has protested the Kumaratunga Government's recent re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.

Sri Lanka resumed diplomatic ties with Israel last year, but it was only last week that the Israeli envoy to Thailand presented credentials to the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, for simultaneous accreditation to Sri Lanka.

The SLMC, whose walk-out from the People's Alliance Government last month plunged the coalition into crisis, has described the resumption of diplomatic relations as an act of "ideological bankruptcy" by the Government.

"(It) reveals the duplicity of the Government in its claim of advocating peace while implementing the agenda for prolonging the civil war," the SLMC leader, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, said in a press release.

The decision to resume diplomatic relations with Israel was taken last year in the aftermath of the military debacle against the LTTE at Elephant Pass, when the Government had to go on an emergency arms-shopping spree. Israel was one of the sellers.

A Sri Lankan mission began functioning in Tel Aviv soon after. But it took more than a year for Israel to put its envoy to Colombo in place. A previous attempt by the Israeli Ambassador to Bangkok to become accredited with the Sri Lankan Government a few months proved unsuccessful, and he went back without meeting the President. The recent exit of the SLMC from the PA might have made it easier for the Government to welcome the envoy this time.

Although Sri Lanka resumed diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv only last year, it has bought arms from Israel for more than a decade, and some of its elite security forces were trained by the Israelis. However, the protests from Muslim pressure groups began only after formal resumption of ties.

Colombo tentatively reopened its doors to Israel in 1985, allowing them to operate an "interests section" from the U.S. Embassy. But that too was discontinued in 1990.

As Tamil political parties protested the rise in sexual violence against Tamil women by the Sri Lanka military personnel, yet another rape case was reported in the Jaffna peninsula.

A 42-year-old woman in Kodikamam has lodged a complaint with the army and police that two armed men in uniform had dragged her out of her house and raped her.

A government press release claimed initial investigations had revealed the sexual assault to be a "deliberate attempt by the LTTE to discredit the army", and to disrupt the resettlement of displaced people in the Thenmarachchi area.

The incident came two weeks after the rape of a Tamil woman at a checkpoint in the capital. The woman and her husband were stopped at the checkpoint in the early hours of the morning. The woman was raped after the policemen and soldiers at the checkpoint sent off her husband to buy tea for them. At an identification parade on Monday, the victim identified a police constable as one of the persons who assaulted her.

Tamil political parties organised a shut-down last Friday to protest the incident, as well as those before it, including, the rape of three women in Mannar earlier this year. The protest paralysed all of the north-east and some parts of Colombo too.

In a statement today, the Tamil United Liberation Front said the armed forces seemed to have taken the success of the strike as "a challenge and got involved in another gang rape incident in Thenmarachchi within four days of this massive hartal". It demanded expeditious and exemplary punishment for the culprits. "Unless very severe and deterrent punishment is meted out to the assailants, incidents of this nature will be on the increase".

It was incidents of this nature that had driven the Tamil parties to support an opposition no-confidence motion against the government, the statement added.

The TULF also condemned the arrest and detention of an undergraduate student of Jaffna University, and demanded his immediate release. This is the first time in Jaffna's troubled history that the university has been shut down.

Lanka slams India for air raid concern

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE 5/5

COLOMBO, July 8. — Sri Lanka has taken exception to India's concern over air attacks against rebel Tamil Tigers, officials said today, vowing the island will not seek peace at any price.

In a second statement issued within three days, the foreign ministry chided India for not making any reference to Sri Lanka's assertion that the bombing campaign was aimed at pre-empting an offensive by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"What the government said is unrealistic and unacceptable," the foreign ministry said referring to a statement by New Delhi.

"It is an unquestioned right of a sovereign state to defend its territorial integrity, a right that has often been exercised by the government referred to above," said the foreign ministry statement.

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

THE STATESMAN

LTTE-backed Opp. plot defeated: Govt

Colombo, July 6 (PTI): Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today said the government had managed to defeat an "LTTE-backed Opposition plot" to remove emergency by voting against it in Parliament.

"The government has been able to defeat a treacherous conspiracy hatched at the behest of the LTTE by the United National Party and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna to remove emergency," she said in a statement.

Kumaratunga invoked the country's ordinary counter terrorism and public security laws to put alternative arrangements in place after emergency powers lapsed on Wednesday. The government decided to shelve plans to bring in a motion to extend it in

parliament after the Opposition announced that it would vote against it.

The government's main concern was that with the lapsing of the emergency, the ban on the LTTE, imposed in 1998, might automatically end and special powers granted to the armed forces would cease.

Kumaratunga passed special orders under the Prevention of Terrorism Act to continue the ban on the rebel outfit and declared all districts in the country as "security areas".

She also issued orders under the Public Security Ordinance to empower the armed forces to maintain law and order and essential supplies throughout the country.

G.B. 7/7
"The regulations will not apply to anyone not involved in acts of terrorism and the working class should not harbour an iota of fear on this count," Kumaratunga said. She said the Opposition's no-confidence motion would also be defeated whenever it is tabled in Parliament.

The President's remarks on the no-confidence motion came even as the government was fighting to put off voting till August 7, while the UNP wanted it to be taken up as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake said the government was not obliged to resign if defeated in this particular no-confidence motion, as it was not based on a common Opposition programme. "The UNP and Tamil parties may have a common agenda, but other parties like the JVP and Sihala Urumaya do not subscribe to this. Therefore, we are not obliged to resign," Wickremanayake told a pro-government television channel last night.

Asking political parties to sink differences and unite on common issues, he said some in the government had also embarked on a mission to discuss a common programme with other parties. "We have begun discussions with a view to arriving at some consensus on a common programme for the welfare of the country," he said.

Unsure Sri Lanka Govt. may put off Emergency vote

H0-19
5/7

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 4. The People's Alliance (PA) minority ruling coalition said today it was willing to debate a no-confidence motion against the Government in the first week of August, but the dates were opposed by the Opposition, which wants the debate scheduled for later this month.

The leader of the House, Mr Richard Pathirana, informed a meeting of parliamentary party leaders that the PA was ready to debate the motion from August 7 to 10.

He said the third week of this month was unsuitable as the national census was due to be conducted on the July 17, and parliament would be unable to meet on that day.

However, with the UNP opposing the schedule set out by the PA, a final decision on the dates was put off till Friday.

For the UNP, postponing the no-confidence debate till August would give the Government enough time to gather its resources and take steps to ensure its survival.

Moreover, in case the PA were to lose the battle, it would enable the President to prorogue Parliament and keep it suspended till the time she can dissolve it and call fresh elections.

Under the 1978 constitution, the President can prorogue the Parliament for a maximum of two months. The House cannot be



A street protest organised by the People's Alliance, denouncing the Opposition moves to defeat the Emergency regulations, in Colombo on Wednesday. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

dissolved till October 10, a year from the date of the last elections. Scheduling the debate for August would meet both conditions, if the need were to arise.

Meanwhile, the Government media have been painting a grim picture of Sri Lanka in case the motion to extend the Emergency is defeated.

The State radio warned that the LTTE would be able to strike anywhere at any time if the Emergen-

cy was not extended.

The People's Alliance organised a massive street protest in the capital today denouncing the Opposition moves to defeat the Emergency.

The debate and the vote on the monthly extension of the Emergency are scheduled for Friday but the minority ruling coalition seems as yet unsure of being able to secure a simple majority to push it through the House.

There are indications that the uncertainty might even induce the Government to put off the vote.

In such an event, the Emergency regulations would lapse, but the President may then issue a fresh proclamation of Emergency, and reconvene Parliament to vote on it within 10 days of the new proclamation, when the Government might feel more confident of itself.

U.S. concern over air-raids

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 3. The U.S. today expressed concern at the weekend air-raids by the Sri Lanka Air Force in Jaffna peninsula and reiterated its support for a negotiated settlement to the island's conflict.

In response to a query from an international news agency, the U.S. Embassy here said it had noted with concern the Sri Lankan government's decision to carry out the air-raids.

"While we respect the right of any nation to defend its territorial integrity, it is also true that violence begets violence," the U.S. Embassy said.

It said the U.S. supported Norway's attempts to facilitate negotiations between the government and the LTTE.

The response came on the heels of an expression of "disappointment" from New Delhi at "events" in Sri Lanka soon after the air-raids.

The Sri Lankan government has said it acted to pre-empt a massive offensive by the LTTE in Jaffna peninsula. However, the air-raids have been interpreted as a response by the government to the political crisis that it is facing with an Opposition attempt to defeat it in Parliament over a vote to extend the Emergency regulations in the country.

EMERGENCY REGULATIONS / UNP OPPOSES EXTENSION

Battle lines drawn in Sri Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 3. With the Opposition United National Party today deciding to vote against the extension of Sri Lanka's Emergency regulations, all eyes have now turned to Mecca, where six parliamentarians — who could make or break the vote — have gone on a pilgrimage.

The six MPs belong to the faction of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) that pulled out of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) coalition last month, reducing the Government to a minority in Parliament.

A seventh parliamentarian of the faction is in Chennai for medical treatment. The vote to extend the Emergency is taken every month and this time it is scheduled for Friday.

It will be the first test of strength for the Government after the SLMC's walk out ahead of an Opposition no-confidence motion against it later this month.

The Government has warned that defeating the motion to extend the Emergency would be an "anti-national" act, as it would automatically lead to the de-proscription of the LTTE.

However, the UNP parliamentary group today decided that it would vote against the extension. A party statement said the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other constitutional provisions were sufficient to deal with the LTTE and challenged the Government to prove its majority.

The battle lines are now drawn. The Government has 109 MPs of its own. It has the support of the lone parliamentarian of the hardline Sihala Urumaya, taking its strength to 110 in the 225-member parliament.

On the other side, besides the 88 UNP MPs, there are nine Tamil MPs of the TULF, TELO and ACTC who will vote against the motion, as they have always done.

But in order to defeat the motion, the Opposition needs 14 more MPs on its side. Mr. Ravi Karunayake, a UNP parliamentarian, said his party had received assurance from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) that their 10 MPs would support it.

Like the Tamil parties, the JVP has also always voted against the Emergency, describing its provisions as draconian and anti-people. But this time it does not seem to have made up its mind yet.

Even if the JVP votes against the Emergency, the Opposition is still four short of the number required to defeat the Government.

The UNP hopes it can get the support of the seven SLMC members who walked out from the PA coalition. But their leader, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, has given no indication of which way he will finally go.

With the motion needing only a simple majority of members present and voting, it is enough for the Government if the six MPs simply do not return from their pilgrimage.

But if the UNP is to defeat the Government this Friday, assuming it has the JVP on its side, it needs to ensure that at least four of the seven SLMC members complete their religious obligations and return before Friday.

The UNP's decision might have been influenced by its Tamil allies on the no-confidence motion.

Had the UNP decided to abstain on the Emergency vote, it would have become difficult for the TULF, TELO and ACTC to support the UNP on the no-trust vote.

War only way to stop LTTE, says Lanka

Colombo, July 2

THE ONLY way to end the Tamil separatist insurgency is full-scale war, the Lankan Government said on Monday, appearing to backtrack on peace efforts.

A strong statement was issued two days after the military launched a massive aerial attack on bases of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in northern Jaffna Peninsula.

The Government said the air strikes were necessary to prevent a planned guerrilla attack on Jaffna, the main city in the northern war zone.

Tamil Tiger rebels responded by calling the statement "military adventurism", and warned of adverse consequences if the Government follows through on the threat. The rebels, in a statement called the reasoning "misplaced strategy of escalating the conditions of war".

Capturing Jaffna would give the rebels a position of strength. The city, inhabited by Tamils for centuries, is the biggest trophy in the civil war. The rebels ran a virtual state from Jaffna from 1990-95.

"It is the duty of the Government to defend the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. It will do so by every means at its command," the statement said.

Sri Lanka's civil war, which started in July 1983, has left more than 64,000 people dead and 1.6 million displaced. The rebels say that Sri Lanka's 3.2 million Tamils can prosper only away from the domination of the Sinhalese, the island country's majority making up 14 million of Sri Lanka's of 18.6 million people.

Norway has been trying for two years to bring the two sides to peace talks. The rebels declared a unilateral cease-fire

earlier this year, saying it was a step toward peace talks, but demanded that the guerrilla organisation be legalised and that the Government offensive stop.

The Government rejected the ceasefire, saying it was a ploy for the guerrillas to regroup and build up supplies.

Monday's Government statement accused the LTTE anew of "steadily recruiting, regrouping, training and strengthening its fighting cadres, moving weapons, building fortifications and positioning heavy artillery" to attack Jaffna.

Pope John Paul II has also appealed for peace in Sri Lanka. "The negotiated solution is the only way to confront the serious questions that are at the base of the present conflict," he said on Sunday at St. Peter's Square.

Tamil Tiger rebels, however, accused President Kumaratunga of ordering air attacks against them to divert public attention from the deepening political crisis she faces.

"We can say categorically that there is no imminent offensive plan by the LTTE as fantasised by the Government," the LTTE said. "The so-called intelligence reports to this effect are a sham."

The Government faces a key test on Friday when the monthly extension of emergency laws comes up for vote in parliament, where Kumaratunga's ruling People's Alliance lost its majority last month.

A no-confidence resolution against the Government is set to be voted on the third week of this month.

The Tigers also warned that the "provocative aerial attacks on the LTTE forces will permanently damage the peace process".

AP/AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

LTTE warns of permanent damage to peace

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JULY 2. As Sri Lanka Air Force bombers continued their raids in Jaffna peninsula, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today warned that the attacks would "permanently" damage the peace process.

"The Sri Lanka Government should bear total responsibility for the adverse consequences that might arise from its misplaced strategy of escalating the conditions of war in the Tamil homeland," it said in a statement.

The Government today said the Air Force hit LTTE targets in northern Sri Lanka for a second day on Sunday, causing "heavy damages". An earlier statement from the Government said the air-raids were "pre-emptive" as there were indications that the LTTE was preparing for a massive attack in Jaffna peninsula.

Denying it had plans to launch an offensive in the peninsula, the LTTE accused the Government of

whipping up Sinhala patriotism as a response to the political crisis facing the ruling People's Alliance.

India has responded sharply to the air-raids, expressing "disappointment" at the "events" in Sri Lanka and reiterating its support for the peace process, stalled since last month over an LTTE demand that the Government lift the ban on it.

Also, Norway, the official facilitator, has yet to make a move after the Sri Lankan Government's request to it to upgrade its role, in other words, sideline the special envoy, Mr Erik Solheim.

The minority PA Government faces the first round of the numbers battle ahead later this week, when the motion on the extension of the Emergency is put to vote. In a bid to ward off defeat in Parliament, the Government today warned that if the emergency regulations lapsed, the ban on the LTTE would automatically cease to exist.

THE HINDU

Peace prospects are dim in Lanka

By Jai Taraporevala

MUMBAI: The prospects of achieving progress in the peace process in Sri Lanka in the near future appear fairly bleak. This is partly a reflection of the political uncertainty created in the aftermath of the tabling of a no-confidence motion against the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) by the main opposition United National Party (UNP).

Whatever the outcome of the no-confidence vote, it will not be easy to restore political stability in the near term. The smaller parties, like the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the JVP, will seek to exercise an influence which is far greater than the number of seats they hold in the national assembly.

In any case, given the wide differences between the PA and the UNP and the requirement for a two-thirds majority in parliament to pass a constitutional amendment, the finalisation of a devolution package for the country remains an elusive

goal.

Among the contentious issues on which significant differences persist are the precise extent of the powers to be devolved, the terms of the merger between the eastern and the northern provinces and the legal status of the land settlements in the east.

More important, it is a measure of the level of mistrust that exists between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE that

— NEWS ANALYSIS —

instead of focusing on the substantive issues involved in the peace process, the two sides have been squabbling about the mediation role of Norway in general and the part played by special envoy, Erik Solheim, in particular.

Sharp divisions exist on the preconditions for the commencement of substantive discussions. These include the establishment of a ceasefire, the setting into place of confi-

dence-building measures and a lifting of the ban on the LTTE which is being insisted upon by the Tigers.

The fact that the leadership in Colombo and the Tigers are in no real hurry to begin a detailed dialogue is an indication of the low chances of success they attach to any talks at this juncture.

Besides, both parties have avoided making any significant concessions in advance of substantive discussions, so as not to undermine their potential negotiating leverage in any way.

Moreover, the government and the LTTE seem to have calculated that they can improve their military position on the ground in the near future and thereby strengthen their bargaining stand at a later stage in the negotiations. Indeed, they have been using the past few months to build up their stock of weapons and redeploy their forces.

Aug-17

An army of monks? 1/7

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD Suresh Saman Kumara is not old enough yet to attach the prefix Venerable to his name. But from now on, he will bear all the other trappings of a Buddhist monk — orange robes, shaven head, a begging bowl, an umbrella, and the new name of Kandegama Rajithawansa Lankara. He was one of 118 boys — the youngest of them just five years old — ordained earlier this month at the Dimbulagala temple in Polonnaruwa, north-central Sri Lanka.

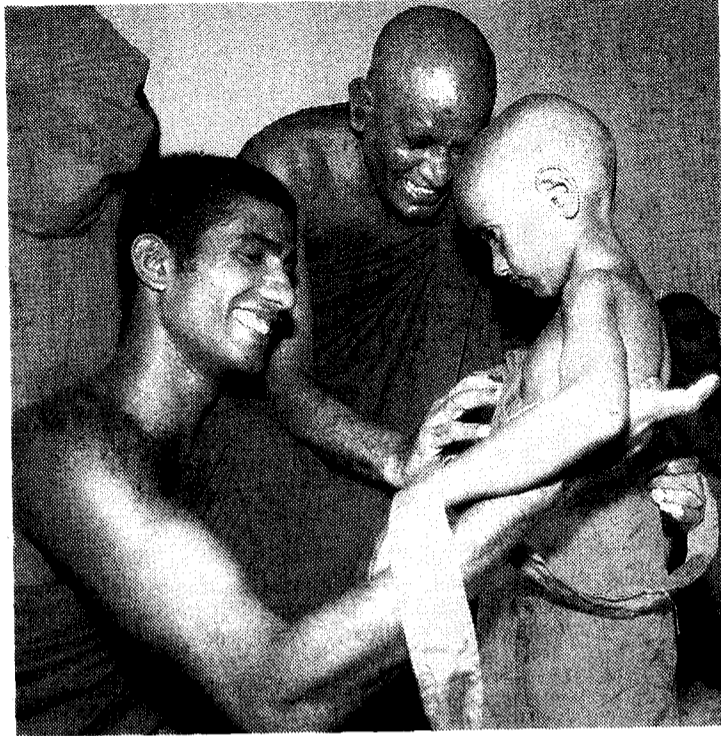
The new recruits will learn everything they would have at a school, in addition to the Buddhist scriptures. From the very first day, they will also be taught to train their minds and bodies, including controlling hunger from noon to dawn.

The ordainment ceremony was part of a recruitment drive by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Buddhist Affairs, headed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, to increase the ranks of the clergy. Mr. Wickramanayake believes the clergy's present strength of about 37,000 is insufficient, and the main reason for the decline in Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The drive has attracted some 700 recruits so far, the Prime Minister's information secretary, Mr. Seelaratne Senarath, told *The Hindu*.

"These boys will grow up to guide the destiny of Sri Lanka. Bhikus are the main leaders of our people. We have undertaken the campaign for the benefit of the country, because the more bhikkhus we have, the better the people will be served," says Mr. L. Sugunadasa, Secretary to the Ministry of Buddhasasana.

But the recruitment has come in for sharp criticism from others. "Buddhism is in decline in Sri Lanka not because there are not enough monks. It is because the monks are becoming too worldly and are not interested in performing their parish roles any more," says Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, who taught sociology at Princeton University and is the author of several books and articles on Sri Lankan Buddhism.

From holding shares in banks and accepting luxury cars as gifts to heading trade unions, Buddhist monks, especially the urbanised leaders of the clergy, are firmly plugged in to the real



A young recruit is helped into his monk's robes.

The Sri Lankan Government is promoting a recruitment drive to increase the ranks of the Buddhist clergy. But this has come in for sharp criticism. Nirupama Subramanian on the controversy.

world. They consider themselves the key stake-holders in the political process of Sri Lanka and important members of its power elite. They are particularly vocal when they feel that the country's Sinhala identity is under threat, and have been at the forefront of protests against giving political concessions to the island's ethnic minorities.

"In such a situation, it is better to have a few good monks than a whole lot of potentially bad ones," says Prof. Obeyesekera.

Critics have questioned if mass recruitment drives can attract those truly committed to Buddhist principles, particularly as the boys are of an age at which they are not expected to know their minds. The writers of a feminist column in the daily *Island*, known by the pseudonym Cat's Eye, have demanded that the minimum age for ordination be raised to 18 to give a person the democratic right of choice of vocation. At present, there is no

minimum age.

At the Dimbulagala ordination ceremony, many of the new recruits were from families struggling to eke out a living in the harsh and dry conditions of the region, which borders the conflict zone of the north-east and where the threat of LTTE attacks on civilians is ever present.

There were three brothers, aged between five and 10, from one family. Their parents appeared not to be present for the ordination ceremony. Suresh Kumara's mother, Dayawanthie, a daily wage, had sacrificed a day's work to witness her son's ordination but her husband, who is bed-ridden with a chest ailment, could not make it.

As many as 38 boys from Suresh Kumara's village were ordained that day. "Their families are too poor to bring them up. They have sent them here so that they will at least get an education and proper food,"

said Mr. H. W. Ariyaratne, a school teacher from the village.

It is anyone's guess how many will continue to remain monks later in life. "We have told our school pupils who are here that even if they wish to drop out, they should do so only after getting an education, so that they can make something of their lives when they come out," said Mr. Ariyaratne.

While monkhood may offer upward mobility to the poor, critics believe that Buddhism cannot benefit from such recruitment drives and that the motives behind it are purely political. "One possible result of this recruitment is that it will add to the number of 'political monks', that is, lobbyists and pressure groups who act as stooges of politicians in perpetuating ideas of Sinhala glory, superiority and hegemony, and the so-called 'ekiya' or unitary state, which historically never existed," says Prof. H. L. Seneviratne, who teaches anthropology at the University of Virginia and is the author of the acclaimed book on Buddhism in Sri Lanka, "The Work of Kings".

Prof. Seneviratne sees the recruitment of monks as the "twin" to the recruitment of soldiers, especially in the light of the Prime Minister's recent exhortation to the Sinhalese to produce more babies so that there would be more volunteers to the clergy and the army. "This recalls the Mahavamsa idea of the monk as warrior, and it echoes the Sinhala paranoia that the numbers of Muslims, Tamils and Christians are increasing and the Sinhalese decreasing." He described Mr. Wickramanayake's call as "an economically disastrous, and socially retrograde" project, which would only create more divisions in society and obstruct nation-building.

As they struggled with their voluminous new orange attire and learnt to chant *Buddham Sharanam Gachchhammi*, the young boys at the Dimbulagala temple could not have been more oblivious to the impact of their mass ordainment on Sri Lanka, Buddhism or Sinhala society, or even on themselves. It was only as they bid goodbye to their family at the end of the ceremony that the tears came rolling down.

Lanka launches air attacks against Tigers

Colombo, June 30 (Reuters): Sri Lanka launched its first air strikes in months against Tamil Tiger guerrilla positions in the country's north today, saying the rebels had been gearing up for a major offensive.

Air force jets bombed LTTE bases in Pooneryn, part of a swathe of rebel-controlled territory that separates the northern Jaffna peninsula from the rest of the island, a government statement said.

"The Sri Lanka air force commenced a series of attacks on LTTE positions... in order to preempt a major offensive to recapture the town of Jaffna for which the LTTE has been making intensive preparations in recent months," the statement said.

"The voluntary moratorium on aerial bombings in the past two months has considerably helped the LTTE to reorganise its war machine," it said, giving details of the alleged rebel build up at Pooneryn, separated from Jaffna town by a four-km stretch of sea.

Military officials said they were not immediately aware of the outcome of the air strikes, the first since early April when the rebels demanded an end to air force attacks as a condition for talks with the government.

There was no immediate comment from guerrillas who have been fighting since 1983 for a separate state for minority Tamils in the country's north and east.

A Norwegian-brokered peace bid is stalled as the two sides haggle over conditions for negotiations to end a conflict in which some 64,000 people have been killed. The rebels have said they cannot begin peace talks unless the government lifts a ban on their organisation and declares a ceasefire. The statement reiterated the government's rejection of both demands, saying the "LTTE is not willing or ready for peace".

There have been no major battles in the country since the guerrillas beat back a massive arm offensive in Jaffna two months ago.

Chandrika flies out of Lanka, leaves troubled island in PM's hands

By Farah Mihar Ahmed
The Times of India News Service

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Wednesday clearly acknowledged the serious crisis facing her government by appointing the country's Prime Minister to discharge her duties while she is out of the island nation. This is the first time that such a move has been made.

Ms Kumaratunga left Sri Lanka early on Wednesday morning. A government statement said she had sworn in Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake to act on her behalf. Ms Kumaratunga is regarded as a prime target for assassination by separatist rebels, so the government seldom discloses her travel plans. But an acting president has never been named before. The statement did not mention when Ms Kumaratunga is expected to return. However, it is believed she is in London where her children are studying.



C. Kumaratunga R. Wickremanayake

The government faces a no-trust vote next month after a key Muslim ally walked out of Ms Kumaratunga's eight-month-old coalition, the People's Alliance.

Government spokesperson Ariya Rubasinghe declined to say why the unprecedented step of naming an acting president was taken. But sources close to the president said that Ms Kumaratunga acted on the advice of constitutional experts in view of the fluid political situation.

The sources, who asked not to be

named, said she agreed to delegate powers to Mr Wickremanayake so that he could deal with any unexpected political developments.

The President's unusual move clearly implies the government's concern over the latest political developments. Commented political analyst Dayan Jayatilake, "Somebody's hand has to manifestly be on the tiller with a political crisis of this nature." He feels the government will face its first test when parliament meets to extend emergency rule in the country. The monthly practice is always ensured because previously, the government had a majority in parliament. But this time it will be almost impossible for the bill to be passed.

Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council said that Ms Kumaratunga's move in empowering the Prime Minister was meant for him to act immediately and prorogue parliament if the opposition presented a bill that was not favourable to the government.

JVP holds key to Chandrika Govt.

By Nirupama Subramanian

S. Lanka
COLOMBO, JUNE 24. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a radical political group that led two armed insurgencies against the Sri Lankan state but transformed itself into a parliamentary party, now holds the key for the shaky Chandrika Kumaratunga Government.

The JVP's 10 MPs could make or break the People's Alliance (PA) Government, which has been reduced to a minority in Parliament after a walkout by seven MPs of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) last week.

The minority Government may face an Opposition no-trust vote next month. The motion has already been submitted in Parliament, signed by the Opposition United National Party, and three Tamil parties, the TULF, the TELO and the ACTC.

On Saturday, the JVP politburo met to decide where it stood with regard to the no-confidence motion. The meeting concluded in the early hours of today, and the only fact to emerge from it was that the politburo had empowered the party's parliamentary group to arrive at a decision.

So far, the JVP's stand on the motion has been ambiguous, and both the UNP and the Government have been lobbying furiously for its support.

The UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, met JVP leaders last Thursday. The media reported that the JVP had also been in talks with a senior Cabinet Minister.

With a strong base among the rural poor, the JVP has declared its opposition to the PA Government on many counts, including the rising prices. But it remains suspicious of the UNP, which was responsible for the decimation of thousands of JVP cadres in the late 80s when it was the ruling party.

However, that has not stopped it from cooperating with the UNP on the impeachment motion against the Chief Justice, which is also due to come up before the House soon.

For the Government, it would be ideal if the JVP decides to vote against the no-confidence motion, but sufficient if the JVP were to merely abstain. A no-confidence vote has to be passed by a simple majority of parliamentarians present and voting.

The Government seems to be hopeful that the JVP

25/6
will stand with it, especially as the party has expressed opposition to the "communal" grounds on which the SLMC walked out on the PA.

While a majority of the SLMC's 11 MPs are now in the Opposition, their leader, Mr. Rauff Hakeem, too is being non-committal about the no-confidence motion. The SLMC has given notice till Tuesday evening to the four MPs who continue to remain on the Government benches.

With the political situation fluid, senior members of the Government are suggesting that the only way out of the crisis for the PA is to form a national Government.

But the UNP assistant leader, Mr. Gamini Athukorale, has rejected the suggestion, but has said the UNP would welcome individual PA members who cross over to its fold and take them on board in a "Government of national reconciliation".

There is one other escape route for the PA. The Constitution vests in the President the power to prorogue Parliament for up to two months. One of Ms. Kumaratunga's predecessors, R. Premadasa, exercised this option when he was faced with an impeachment motion and used the two-month reprieve to break his opponents.

It is believed that Ms. Kumaratunga could take recourse to the same option in order to stall the no-confidence motion against the Government and the impeachment motion against the Chief Justice.

In the meantime, she could strike new alliances, which does not exclude tempting the SLMC back into the PA.

If Parliament is prorogued, the President would have to reconvene the MPs to vote on the monthly extension of the Emergency, but on that specific issue, she can perhaps count on the support of the both the JVP and the SLMC.

With the President barred from dissolving Parliament for one year from the last general election, the only other option is to walk the tightrope of a minority Government till October 10 this year.

PA managers will have to stump up adequate numbers each time a vote is taken in Parliament, which could entail appeasing parties outside the Government, as well as partners in its own fragile coalition.

No-trust motion against Chandrika

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

S. Lanka
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MUSLIM CONGRESS UNDECIDED

COLOMBO, June 22. - Sri Lanka's Opposition today brought a no-confidence motion against the People's Alliance government which lost its majority two days earlier.

Opposition leader Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe said the motion, with signatures from members of his United National Party and Tamil parties was presented to the secretary general this morning, ahead of a crucial meeting with President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, later in the day.

The Tamil United Liberation Front, with five MPs, the three member Tamil Elam Liberation Organisation, and the lone All Ceylon Tamil Congress member also went ahead with Opposition deputy leader Karu Jayasuriya to present the no-confidence motion to the secretary general.

The motion will have to be included in Parliament's order paper first and thereafter, floor leaders will have to agree on a date for the debate.

The UNP's motion does not as yet have the support of even the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which set off the controversy by walking out of the ruling coalition, and the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

Meanwhile, Mrs Kumaratunga is scheduled to meet Mr Wickremesinghe in what is ostensibly a discussion on the stalled peace process involving the LTTE, but speculation is rife that she may moot the idea of a national government to tide over the crisis gripping her government, which was elected last October.

Mr Wickremesinghe himself was non-committal, saying he believed that the meeting was only about the peace process, and did not want to speculate on a possible suggestion from the President for a 'national government'.

SLMC leader, Mr Rauf Hakeem, whose sacking from the cabinet, sparked the crisis

2378
and led to his 11-MP party withdrawing support from the government, is maintaining an ambivalence about his future plans.

While his opposition to the present government is certain, whether he would join the UNP in forging an alternative is unclear.

The seven-member Hakeem faction's lack of clarity in their plan is matched by the ambivalence of the rival four-member group headed by Mrs Ferial Ashraff, who also resigned from the government after Hakeem's removal. Government floor managers are working on Mrs Ashraff, widow of late SLMC founder MHM Ashraff, to keep her loyal to the government.

However, the JVP holds the key, it seems, as its 10 members will have to wait for a direction on how to vote in the motion from the party central committee meeting on Saturday.

The Tamil parties joined the Opposition in presenting the motion, peeved as they are with the government's approach to the peace process, which they perceive as 'negative'.

Lanka Opp. marshalls no-trust ranks

Colombo, June 22 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's main Opposition party said today after submitting a no-confidence motion to parliament that it was confident it would get enough support from other parties to oust the government.

Officials of the United National Party (UNP) which included representatives from minority Tamil parties, said, they would be in talks with other parties ahead of the no-confidence vote, expected to be held within the next month.

The UNP's chances of winning the vote were given a boost when the ruling alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga lost its majority in parliament after losing the support of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC).

But for a no-confidence vote to succeed, the UNP still needs the SLMC and the Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) to back the measure. Both have said they are undecided on what they will do.

"We are confident of winning the support from the JVP and SLMC," said chief opposition whip W.J.M. Lokubandara. "There are others in the government benches who could support us on that day," he said.

The no-confidence motion submitted to parliament today was signed by 88 UNP lawmakers and nine from Tamil parties, leaving the UNP 13 votes short of overcoming the 109 the ruling People's Alliance has in the 225-seat chamber.

The JVP, which has 10 seats, has said it could decide this weekend whether to support the no-confidence vote.

The Muslim Congress has 11 seats in parliament but only seven crossed the floor, with four remaining with the government. UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe met Kumaratunga today, but made no mention of the two discussed the latest political developments.

THE TELEGRAPH

Kumaratunga Govt reduced to minority

HT-11
21/6

Colombo, June 20

PRESIDENT CHANDRIKA Kumaratunga's Government was reduced to a minority in the Parliament in fast developing political moves on Wednesday that saw her sacking a top Muslim leader from her Cabinet.

Hours after the State-run radio announced the sacking of Rauf Hakeem, he hit back and persuaded four deputy ministers of his Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Party to resign from the Government.

"Under the order of our leader, four deputy ministers submitted their resignations," said Muhammad Jafer, a spokesman for Hakeem.

All 10 members of Hakeem's party will now sit as a separate group in the opposition, Jafer said.

This effectively reduces Kumaratunga's Peoples' Alliance Government to a minority. There is, however, no immediate threat of the Government falling because a no-confidence motion would have to be brought first.

Kumaratunga also has special emergency powers under which she can suspend parliament for

up to 90 days. Sri Lanka is in the middle of a civil war and the emergency laws give wide powers to the President.

The Government gave no reason for sacking Hakeem, who heads the country's main Muslim party and was an ally of her coalition Government. Hakeem held the portfolios of trade and Muslim affairs.

Differences between Hakeem and Kumaratunga had been widening since Saturday when Hakeem announced his party would quit the shaky coalition unless her administration stopped vilifying him and his party.

Kumaratunga's People's Alliance had enjoyed only a four-seat majority in the 225-member parliament with the backing of 10 lawmakers from Hakeem's Sri Lanka Muslim Congress.

Hakeem joined Kumaratunga's People's Alliance, giving it a majority in parliament, after it emerged as the single largest party in last year's general election. The people's alliance won 107 seats, six short of the 113 needed to form the Government.

The opposition United National Party won 89 seats.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21/6/88

Muslim ally threat to Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

S Lanka *HD-9* *1916*
COLOMBO, JUNE 16. Amidst heightened back-room efforts by the opposition United National Party to muster support for its proposed no-confidence motion against the Government, a crucial partner of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) today said it was disillusioned with the Government and made veiled threats to withdraw support to it.

Accusing the PA of attempting to break up his party, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Mr. Rauff Hakeem, said at a news conference that his relations with the Government were at a "low ebb". "My message to the Government is don't mess with my party. I am not going to be a partner to the Government when the dignity of my party and my leadership is at stake," said Mr. Hakeem, who held a long discussion with the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, on Friday night.

Mr. Hakeem said the SLMC was also disappointed that the Government had not implemented many of the promises made to it. On Friday, the Government upgraded a Muslim-majority town in the eastern district of Ampara to that of a municipality. The SLMC welcomed the elevation, but pointed out that the demand was for a Muslim administrative district in the east. However, Mr. Hakeem said he would not join issue with the Government on any one demand, and that there was a "whole chain of events" that had made the SLMC's support to the Government difficult to justify to its followers.

The SLMC has 11 Members of Parliament, and it was their support that enabled Ms. Kumaratunga's PA coalition to form the Government after the last election.

The 42-year-old lawyer, who assumed the leadership of the SLMC after its founder, M.H.M. Ashraff was killed in an air-crash days before the 2000 general elections, said he had neither sought any reassurance from Ms. Kumaratunga in return for his support to the PA nor was he given any.

In response to a question about the UNP's pro-

posed no-confidence motion, the SLMC leader said: "I can be persuaded, but that applies to both (PA and UNP)." However, according to other reports, any move by Mr. Hakeem to quit the Kumaratunga Government would split his party vertically.

There is now a power struggle within the SLMC between Mr. Hakeem and the party founder's widow, Ms. Ferial Ashraff. Supporters of Ms. Ashraff from Ampara laid siege to Mr. Hakeem's home on Friday night. Fearing for his safety, he moved to a five-star hotel. Mr. Hakeem admitted his relations with Ms. Ashraff were strained and made a reference to the "agents of the Government" within his party, but emphatically denied there was a challenge to his leadership. He drew a connection between the attempts to break the SLMC and statements by ruling party members that he was making unreasonable demands to the PA, when in fact, all he was asking for was the implementation of old promises.

"I have been humiliated and slandered by forces within the Government," he said. Mr. Hakeem revealed he had told Ms. Kumaratunga during Friday night's meeting that the PA's mandate in the last election was "flawed" due to poll irregularities.

"She disagreed but I told her that had there been an independent (election) commission, there wouldn't be a PA Government today," he said.

The SLMC's credibility had suffered for participating in such a Government, he said. "We are guilty by association," he said. One of the SLMC's early demands in return for its support to the Government was for the setting up of independent commissions to oversee elections, and the functioning of the police, judiciary and public service.

Mr. Hakeem had given a 100-day deadline to the new PA Government for setting up these commissions, but the Government deflected it by announcing it would set up a parliamentary select committee chaired by him to go into the demand. The SLMC leader said today no such select committee was set up.

THE HINDU

H10-19

LTTE protests 'sidelining' of Solheim

11/6 By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 10. The process for peace talks in Sri Lanka has come up against a new snag with the LTTE protesting the Government's "unilateral initiative" to "downgrade" the role and function of the Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim.

In a statement today, the LTTE also accused Oslo of a breach of protocol in failing to consult it before reaching an agreement with the Government to upgrade Norway's role in the process.

"The facilitatory process in peace-making is not an exercise in inter-governmental relations; it involves tripartite relations between the facilitator and the parties in conflict," the LTTE said.

As a facilitator, the Norwegian Government was under obligation to consult both protagonists before making crucial decisions about its level of engagement in the process, the statement added.

The Government, last Friday, announced that Norway would henceforth participate at a "high level" in the peace process,

which was interpreted as a move to marginalise Mr. Solheim.

The announcement followed talks between the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Mr. Thorbjorn Jagland, last Thursday.

Mr. Jagland flew here for the discussions at the invitation of the President. He was accompanied by Mr. Solheim, but the special envoy did not participate in the dinner meeting.

The LTTE accused the Sri Lankan Government of seeking to "down-grade and marginalise" the role of Mr. Solheim through a "ploy" of upgrading Norway's role. It said that Mr. Solheim's "impeccable neutrality" had proved unacceptable to Sri Lanka.

The LTTE representative in London, Mr. Anton Balasingham, told *The Sunday Leader* that his leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, with whom he had been in touch over the latest development, was "extremely concerned" at Sri Lanka's "unilateral action".

"They cannot simply find a substitute for Mr. Solheim without consulting us. Both

sides accepted him as facilitator. They have to provide a satisfactory explanation for this. Unless this is done, we will not accept or tolerate Mr. Solheim's removal," Mr. Balasingham said.

He accused Sri Lanka of meting out "shabby, unfair and insulting" treatment to the envoy. Official and diplomatic sources maintain that the move to "up" the level of Norwegian participation was an indication of Sri Lanka's willingness to raise its stakes in the peace process.

A letter from the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, to Mr. Jagland, last month regarding the developments in the peace process was an early indication that Sri Lanka wanted a greater level of participation by the Norwegian Government, the sources pointed out.

They said this need not mean that Mr. Solheim would no longer be involved in the process. It was now up to Norway to use Mr. Solheim's experience in a manner it deemed fit. The man at the centre of the controversy has also rejected the suggestion that he has been sidelined.

"I can only say that everything is exag-

gerated in the media," Mr. Solheim told the website Lanka Academic.

"I can confirm you that while the Foreign Minister and the deputy Minister will be involved at a high level, myself and the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Jon Westborg, will continue to act as the facilitating team," he said.

However, there have been indications that Government was unhappy with Mr. Solheim's failure to arrange direct talks after more than a year of shuttle diplomacy between the two sides. His efforts got stalled last month on the LTTE's demand that it would not participate in talks as a banned organisation.

The press speculated that Mr. Solheim was in the doghouse with the Government because he was seen as trying to put pressure on Sri Lanka, through the international community, to concede the LTTE's de-proscription demand. His visit to Washington immediately after the LTTE placed this demand was not well received here.

Besides his perceived closeness to the LTTE, he was also seen as too accessible to the media.

Lanka Supreme Court ban on Speaker

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

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COLOMBO, June 9. - Sri Lanka's parliamentary Speaker, Mr Anura Bandaranaike, has put off a foreign tour amid a deepening constitutional crisis after the Supreme Court issued a ban on him, officials said today.

Mr Bandaranaike who was due to leave for London later today delayed his travel plans amid fears that the ruling party may pull off a surprise in his absence, parliamentary sources said.

"A state attorney had appeared on behalf of the Speaker without his consent and agreed to a Supreme Court order restraining him from proceeding with an impeachment of the Chief Justice," a parliamentary official said.

He said under the circumstances, Mr Bandaranaike feared that his absence would leave room for the ruling party to manoeuvre and even reject the impeachment resolution against the Chief Justice.

Ruling party stalwarts, however, said they were opposed to the Supreme Court's interference with the legislature while making it clear that they were prepared to block Opposition attempts to remove Chief Justice Sarath Silva.

The battle between parliament and the Supreme Court began after the Opposition on Wednesday tried to begin impeachment proceedings against the Chief Justice who is a personal appointee of the President.

The Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, joined forces with the right-wing United National Party to hand a petition to parliamentary Speaker, Mr Bandaranaike, charging Mr Silva with misconduct, including adultery.

But on the same day, the Supreme Court, also appointed by the government, issued an interim order preventing the Speaker from setting up a panel to investigate the allegations.

The full case will be heard on 3 September.

Mr Bandaranaike is expected to give a ruling on whether he will abide by the Court or will press ahead with impeachment inquiry when parliament resumes sitting in 10 days.

The Opposition on Thursday made use of a routine debate to assert parliament's authority and criticised the Supreme Court's move to block impeachment proceedings.

Behind closed doors, ruling party MPs objected to the controversial order, causing a rift within the already shaky coalition of President Chandrika Kumaratunga that will shortly face a crucial no-confidence motion.

Opposition legislators began signing the no-trust resolution against the government yesterday and it is expected to be handed in at the next sitting of parliament.

On 28 May the Supreme Court rejected a case in which three petitioners, including two journalists, had demanded the removal of the Chief Justice.

THE STATESMAN

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Sri Lankan court order may lead to constitutional tussle

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 6. Sri Lanka's Supreme Court today passed an order that virtually disallowed an impeachment motion against the Chief Justice in Parliament and is expected to trigger off a tussle for supremacy between the two institutions.

Acting on a petition that the impeachment motion was against the fundamental rights of lawyers, the Supreme Court ruled against the formation of a parliamentary select committee to study the charges made in the motion.

The motion was submitted to Parliament today and was signed by at least 75 members, including those of the main opposition

United National Party (UNP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

As the impeachment motion can be put to vote only after a select committee studies it and submits its findings, the ruling has virtually declared that the motion cannot come up before Parliament at all.

The motion was supposed to be a test of strength for the ruling coalition ahead of the no-confidence motion planned against it next month by the UNP.

With 116 MPs, the coalition, headed by Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, has a slender majority of four in the 225-member House.

Opposition members described the court's decision as a challenge

to the powers of Parliament, and urged the Speaker, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, to ignore the ruling.

The decision now lies with the Speaker, who was elected to Parliament as a member of the UNP. He is also the brother of the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and in recent weeks, has been accused by sections of the media of turning pro-government.

Mr. Bandaranaike has said that in view of the "gravity" of the issue, he needed time to study the ruling. The main ground for the impeachment motion against the Chief Justice, Mr. Sarath N. Silva, is that he obstructed a divorce petition in which he was named a co-respondent and accused of adultery.

THE HINDU

17 JUN 2011

Diversities and linkages in Sri Lanka

By V. Suryanarayan

110-12
6/6

"HISTORY." ERIC HOBSBAWM has pointed out, "is the raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction". In many developing countries, the sense of national identity is built on the glories of the past, real or imagined. In his autobiography, as told to Cindy Adams, President Sukarno boasts about the greatness of the Malays and the spread of Malay culture by reeling out words with similar sounds: "Manila, Madagascar, Malaya, Madura, Maori, Himalaya". As is well known, Himalaya has nothing to do with the Malays. It is derived from the Sanskrit words Hima and Alaya, which mean the abode of snow.

The People of India Project, the ongoing research programme of the Anthropological Survey of India, attempts to provide the cultural profile of all communities in India, the impact of change, and linkages and diversities among them. One interesting conclusion needs specific mention. Communities, cutting across religions, share a many cultural traits. Thus the Hindus share a high percentage of traits with Muslims (97.7 per cent), Buddhists (91.9 per cent), Sikhs (88.99 per cent), and Jains (77.46 per cent). Other communities that share a high percentage of traits are Muslim-Sikh (89.95 per cent), Muslim-Buddhist (91.18 per cent) and Jain-Buddhist (81.34 per cent). As K.S. Singh, former Director-General of the Anthropological Survey of India, has remarked: "Diversities and linkages, freedom and tolerance go together".

The diversities in Sri Lanka are well known. According to the last census held in 1981, the Sinhalese formed 74.0 per cent of the population, the Sri Lankan Tamils 12.6 per cent, the Indian Tamils 5.5 per cent, Muslims 7.1 per cent and others 0.6 per cent. There is an overlapping of ethnicity and religious affiliation. Buddhists constitute 69.3 per cent (all Sinhalese), Hindus 15.5 per cent (all Tamils), Muslims 7.6 per cent and Christians 7.5 per cent (Sinhalese and Tamils). As far as language is concerned, Sinhalese speak Sinhala, Tamils and Muslims speak Tamil and all the elite is familiar with English.

Looking at the past through the prism of the present will lead to falsification of his-

tory. Despite the diversities, the people of the island, like their Indian counterparts, have come to share many common cultural attributes. But with the exacerbation of ethnic conflict, the chauvinists among the Tamils and the Sinhalese, two sides of the same coin, started projecting the two communities as two antagonistic entities, who were at war with one another for several centuries. Two illustrations are given below to substantiate the point that truth and objectivity are the first casualties in times of conflict.

tion's ancestry far enough, all lines would in major part lead back to South India". According to Obeyesekere, "Biologically speaking, those whom we call Sinhala are in fact racially inter-mixed with South Indian peoples and with aboriginal groups like the Vedda; and the Tamils, who live in the north and the east, are also similarly biologically mixed".

Dr. K.S. Singh has pointed out that in India there are several communities which can be classified as having more than one religion. It is interesting to note that Sinha-

The chauvinists among the Sinhalese and the Tamils propagate the falsehood of age-old animosities between the two communities. The conflict is actually a product of post-independence politics.

Satchi Ponnambalam claims that the original inhabitants of the island were Tamils; Sinhalese were originally Tamils, who later on were converted to Buddhism and adopted the Sinhalese language and much of what the Sinhalese consider as their great monuments were actually produced by Tamil artisans. The Sinhala Commission provides an entirely opposite view. According to the Sinhala Commission, there is no evidence of a distinct Tamil community or a Tamil kingdom in the Jaffna peninsula before the 13th century. On the contrary, Sinhala chronicles and inscriptions indicate that there were large and extensive Sinhala settlements there from very early times. The Sinhalese were the lawful rulers of and legal heirs to the Jaffna kingdom until 1815.

What is the reality? Prof. Stanley Tambiah, after years of painstaking research, has come to the conclusion that the Sinhalese and the Tamils share many parallel features of "traditional caste, kinship, popular religious cults, customs and so on. But they have come to be divided by their mythic charters and tendentious historical understandings of the past". The common belief in Sri Lanka is that Sinhalese are "fair Aryans" and the Tamils are "dark Dravidians". Prof. Tambiah has exploded this myth. Quoting Gananath Obeyesekere, Tambiah adds, "if it were possible to trace the present day Sinhalese popula-

lese religious practices also point to the same direction. The Hindu Bhakti cult has influenced Theravada Buddhism and there are images of Hindu Gods in Buddhist temples. The deity of Skanda (Muruga) in Kataragama, located near the Yala sanctuary in the northeast of the island, continues to be the "major institutional intersection of several religious faiths. Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims, all go to Kataragama, where the atmosphere is one of tolerance and goodwill". During my last visit to the temple two years ago, I found Buddhist pilgrims far outnumbering the Hindus. The Sinhalese carry the Kavadi with great devotion and fervour.

According to Buddhist chronicles, the founding father of the first Sinhala kingdom was Prince Vijaya, a Kshatriya from North India who came to the island with 700 followers in 544 BC. Vijaya aligned himself with an aboriginal princess named Kuveni, married her and with her assistance became the king of the country. Later he drove Kuveni away and married a princess from Madurai and made her the queen. His followers also married maidens of high birth from the Pandyan kingdom. In other words, even according to Buddhist texts, from the very beginning, the Sinhala nation was a product of assimilation between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Given the geographical contiguity, Sri

Lanka had close cultural contacts with Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The narrow and shallow Palk Strait was not a barrier; it was a bridge through which religious leaders, merchants and ordinary people moved freely. Few Sri Lankan scholars want to subscribe to the objective truth that Buddhism was a virile religion in South India and the spread and efflorescence of Theravada Buddhism in the island had much to do with fruitful contacts with Buddhist centres of learning in Kanchipuram, Kaveripatinam and Madurai. Buddhaghosha of Magadha, "poet, philosopher and commentator" of Theravada Buddhism was patronised by Sanghapala, King of Kanchipuram. It is a matter of pride for the Tamils that one of the greatest epics of Theravada Buddhism is in Tamil language. Manimekalai, written in the second century AD, is one the finest jewels of Tamil Buddhist literature.

Kerala's relations with Sri Lanka and interaction with the Sinhalese and Tamils remain a neglected area of historical research. According to Gananath Obeyesekere, when Hinduism began to dominate the religious scene in Kerala from the tenth century, a large number of Buddhists migrated to Sri Lanka.

Despite the cultural commonalities, the chauvinists among the Sinhalese and the Tamils propagate the falsehood of age old animosities between the two communities. It is my submission that the Sinhala-Tamil conflict is a product of post-independence politics, an offshoot of the nation building experiment, when the Sinhalese leaders tried to build the nation on the basis of Buddhist religion and Sinhala language to the exclusion of minority claims. The situation was aggravated when the chauvinist Sinhalese and Tamil leaders began to resort to the politics of ethnic mobilisation.

In his absorbing novel, "When Memory Dies", A. Sivanandan narrates a conversation between Uncle Para and Vijay. Uncle Para tells Vijay, "When memory dies a people die". Vijay asks Uncle Para, "But if we make false memories". Uncle Para responds "That's worse, that is murder".

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

THE HINDU

6 10 201

We'll back Chandrika's peace move: Opp leader

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, June 4. - Sri Lanka's Opposition leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, today said his United National Party would support any initiative taken by the Chandrika Kumaratunga government for a negotiated settlement to end the ethnic strife in the country between the government armed forces and the LTTE.

Talking to reporters after meeting the Tamil Nadu chief minister, Miss Jayalalitha, at the state secretariat, Mr Wick-

remesinghe said: "We will support any attempt to start negotiations. We are all for a negotiated settlement."

Mr Wickremesinghe met Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Jaswant Singh in New Delhi on Saturday to discuss the ethnic conflict in the island nation and the future of Indo-Sri Lankan ties.

On the ban on the LTTE, the UNP Opposition leader said he didn't want to talk about it as the Norwegian government was already taking the initiative on the matter. Asked about the

LTTE's demand that the ban be lifted before any negotiations began, Mr Wickremesinghe said: "We will support an amicable agreement reached between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. We are not for complicating the issue."

Mr Wickremesinghe said he briefed Miss Jayalalitha on his talks with Mr Vajpayee and Mr Jaswant Singh. During their discussions, Miss Jayalalitha told him that she was all for peace in Sri Lanka. The contentious Kachchatheevu issue also figured prominently in the



Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga

talks, he said. "No one wants it to be a Sri Lanka issue but an issue of the fishermen," he said, adding that he would take up the matter with his government.

Miss Jayalalitha told reporters that during the meeting with Mr Wickremesinghe, she emphasised the need for setting free immediately the Indian fishermen languishing in Lankan prisons.

Fishermen who strayed into the Lankan waters accidentally, were taken into custody and ill-treated, she said.

THE STATESMAN
 5 JUN 2001

The numbers game

ON JULY 17 this year, an army of 100,000 men and women will fan out all over Sri Lanka on a mammoth operation. Armed with questionnaires, they will call at every home, bus stop, railway station and bazaar, and stop people on the streets, even beggars and the homeless, to ask 25 seemingly innocuous questions about their age, the size of their families, their marital status, their religion and their ethnic affiliation. The replies will form the substance of Sri Lanka's 13th national census, and its first after a gap of two decades.

Although a census was due in 1991, it was deemed unfeasible then due to the escalation of the ethnic conflict in northeast Sri Lanka and the armed insurgency in the south which had been put down with a brutal hand just a year previously.

Given the long gap, the 2001 census has assumed added urgency. The Census and Statistics Department has asked the Government to declare a half-holiday on the day, and to restrict public transport, so that the job of the enumerators is made easier.

But not everyone wants to be part of this vital document that will provide a long overdue demographic profile of Sri Lanka. People living in the strife-torn Tamil-dominated northern district of Jaffna, that has been affected by large-scale displacement and migration over the last two decades, are demanding that the region be excluded from the census.

"We must not have a census here till peace and normality are restored. It will not provide an accurate picture of the district," parliamentarian and leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), Mr. Douglas Devananda, recently told a group of journalists visiting Jaffna Peninsula.

A census could determine crucial issues such as development resource allocation and also quotas for university education. By making official what is only informally known about the depletion of the population in Jaffna, it is feared that the census could become a handy tool for discrimination against the district by Colombo.

The main concern is that an enumeration of the population of Jaffna could drastically cut the number of MPs from the peninsula. In fact, that has already happened. The number of MPs representing the district has al-

ready been cut from 10 in the 1994 general elections to nine in the present parliament for which elections were held in 2000.

There is apprehension that if the present population becomes an official statistic, the number could come down by as much as half, weakening whatever clout mainstream Tamil parties wield in Parliament at present.

The population of Jaffna since the time it came under the control of the Government in 1996 has hovered under five lakhs. Of these, many thousands fled last year due to the sudden and dramatic escalation in the fighting between Government forces and the LTTE.

At the moment, it is estimated that about 4.5 lakh people live in the peninsula, compared to the 8.6 lakh population recorded in the 1981 census. Most have gone abroad, and many are living in other parts of the country including Colombo. The population of Jaffna has declined from around seven per cent to under two per cent of the total population of the country.

Nothing illustrates this depletion better than the island of Karainagar. Part of Jaffna district, it once had a population of 40,000. From 1991 to about 1996, it turned into a battlefield between the Sri Lanka Navy and the LTTE, leading to a massive exodus. There was a trickle back after the Navy established control on the entire island, and there are now about 6,000 people living there. The senior-most Government official in Karai-

nagar has written to the Government Agent, the top civilian authority of the district, asking for a postponement of the census.

But social scientists disagree, arguing that whatever the reasons, it is important to record the changes in the population as this would be a vital tool in social and historical analysis. "A census is a document that will determine the present population and certain other aspects relating to that population. The information is critical. If there have been changes in the population, we cannot brush them under the carpet or ignore them," said Professor S.Hettige, head of Colombo University's Centre for Sociological and Anthropological Studies. The enumeration would assist in understanding the events of the past and to project events in the future, he pointed out.

Officials said there were adequate safeguards in the census questionnaire that would address the concerns being raised about conducting an enumeration in the war-affected northeast.

Included in the 25 questions are four on migration: the district of birth, the district of usual residence, the duration of stay in the district of usual residence, and the district of present residence.

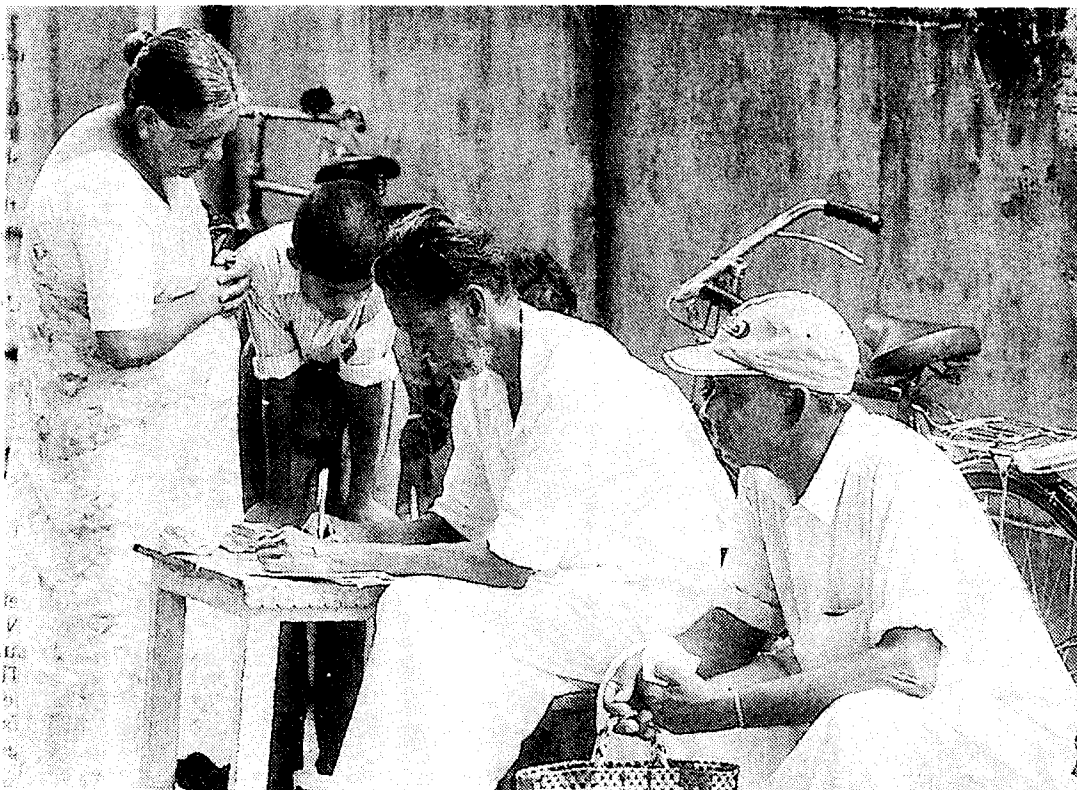
"With this, we can do a special tabulation that will take into account migration and displacement due to the war," said Mr. A.G.W. Nanayakkara, Director-General of the Census and Statistics department. The census will not include those who live abroad as citizens or permanent residents of those countries. There will be a special count of those abroad for employment, though they too will not be included in the final count.

Despite the protests in Jaffna, the first two stages of the census operations have already been completed, that is the preparation of maps of homes and buildings in every "census block", and pre-listing, in which each house has been marked with a red sticker. The preliminary census is to be conducted nation-wide between June 25 and July 5, while July 17 is the date for the final enumeration.

Surprisingly, there has been not a murmur against the enumeration in the area where opposition was most expected. Mr. Nanayakkara said that except for a small delay, the pre-listing operation was being carried out at present in LTTE-held northern Sri Lanka without a hitch, with the UNHCR providing logistical assistance.

Social scientists are eagerly awaiting the results of the census, which are certain to throw interesting light on the events in Sri Lanka, both the Sinhala-dominated south and the Tamil-dominated north, in the 20 years since the last census.

People living in strife-torn Jaffna are demanding that the region be excluded from Sri Lanka's first census in 20 years.
Nirupama Subramanian on the issues involved.



Residents of Jaffna fill out requisitions for compensation... fears of further erosion of their strength.

...ing impractical chimeras.

Talking for Peace

There is a noticeable lowering of temperature on both sides in Sri Lanka. Although the government has not been forthcoming on lifting the ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), President Chandrika Kumaratunga's reiteration of her commitment to the ongoing peace process is a significant advance in that direction. The LTTE has been insisting that the ban should go if it has to come to the negotiation table; and that unless its status as an outlawed organisation is remedied the prospects of talks and a political settlement would be jeopardised. In her interview to Sinhala state television, Ms Kumaratunga skirted any reference to this demand, but at the same time described the environment as better "than ever before" to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table. And for good measure, she added that the government was "trying to make the most of this opportunity". The government has consistently rejected the LTTE's demand for a lifting of the ban. For its part, the LTTE never misses a chance to reiterate that this would set back the peace process. Yet, despite this verbal contest, the fact is that efforts towards negotiations — despite being stalled more than once — have never been irretrievably derailed during the last seven months. This attests to both Colombo and the LTTE being supportive of the Norwegian-assisted track towards a rapprochement; and the realisation that the avenues it has opened up should not be closed at any cost. Both sides are under tremendous international pressure to resolve the conflict that has claimed over 63,000 lives in the last 18 years and wreaked havoc on the Sri Lankan economy.

Therefore, the impasse over the ban needs to be viewed as another of those rough patches which have to be overcome on the road to peace, because eventually neither side can afford to let this become an insurmountable obstacle. Much more serious impediments that arose in the period after Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim's first meeting with LTTE chief V Prabhakaran in November last have been crossed despite obdurate posturing by both parties. The most difficult stage was when the LTTE threatened to call off the truce in the face of the continued military offensive by the Sri Lankan government. That crisis too passed like the earlier one created by the LTTE's demand for easing the embargo on the Tamil Tiger-controlled areas. At that time, without formally conceding the LTTE demand, Colombo relaxed restrictions to enable movement of several essential goods. The threat that the gains brokered by Norway, including the unilateral truce, would be lost if Britain did not desist from listing the LTTE as a terrorist organisation also turned out to be a passing squall. Discernible through these various stages is a toning down of verbal hostilities. The tenor of the pronouncements of the government as well as the LTTE would seem markedly different and, on closer scrutiny, calculated to appeal to their respective constituencies to make the necessary compromises. Ms Kumaratunga's emphasis now is on how the Sinhalese would be the biggest beneficiaries of an end to the war, and the LTTE has ceased to be strident about an independent Tamil homeland. These, as much as the LTTE's urge to be accepted as a legal entity, are welcome signs of a new resolve towards a political settlement.

THE ... OF ...

Chandrika's desperate move to thwart no-trust

PK Balachandran
Colombo, May 31

GIVEN THE possibility of being defeated in a no confidence motion which the opposition United National Party (UNP) proposes to move soon, the Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga is on a desperate damage control and wooing exercise to thwart a collapse.

To keep the truculent 5 member Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the 11 member Sri Lanka Muslim Congress-National United Alliance (SLMC-NUA) combine in her fold, the President went on television to say that her government "will now forge ahead with new constitutional proposals, with a new vigour and new strategy, to grant the Tamils and all the minorities their due rights." Waving the olive branch at the Tamils she said that she was committed to the internationally backed and Norwegian brokered peace process. She appealed to the LTTE to come for talks here and now.

Earlier, she had revived the promise to set up a Muslim majority Kalmunai district in the East. On Wednesday, the "Daily Mirror" said that she had asked key ministers to probe the possibility of reviving the dialogue between the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) and the UNP on a new constitution to settle the ethnic question.

To keep MPs belonging to the majority Sinhala community on her side, the President had taken the internationally unpopular

NO LIFTING OF BAN ON LTTE BEFORE TALKS

THE SRI Lankan Government has rejected the LTTE proposal for lifting of ban on it as a pre-condition to talks. The LTTE has said it should be allowed to participate in direct negotiations only as a legal entity, but the Government while rejecting the condition, said any reversal of the 1998 ban could only be a result of progress in the talks and not otherwise. AP

decision not to lift the ban on the LTTE ahead of talks. In her telecast, she assuaged fears among the Sinhalas about talks with the LTTE by assuring them that they would be in an "advantageous position" if the war ended. Prime Minister Mr Ratnasiri Wickramanayake has been assuring the Sinhala hardliners that government will not bow to international pressure on the peace process. He had lashed out at the Norwegian facilitators but saw to it that only the Sinhala media carried his remarks.

The government's desperation stems from the dicey situation in parliament in which even allies are unreliable. At present, the government's side consists of 116 MPs and the opposition 109 MPs in a house of 225. For the motion to be carried, the UNP needs 113 votes, just four more than its present optimal strength.

SLMC-NUA administered a shock when it said that it would take a decision on the no trust motion at the appropriate time.

NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION / PARTIES FEAR INSTABILITY

Pro-LTTE Tamils want Govt. defeated

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 15. Pro-LTTE sections of Tamil opinion are egging on Sri Lanka's Tamil parties to back the Opposition United National Party's proposed no-confidence motion against the Government despite fears that political instability at this stage could disrupt the Norwegian-assisted peace process.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) has found itself under fire from the Jaffna Tamil newspaper *Uthayan* and on pro-LTTE Internet sites for declaring that it would oppose the no-confidence motion as toppling the Government now would upset the process for peace talks with the LTTE.

The TULF swiftly toned down its stand to stress that it would be forced to reconsider its support to the Government if it did not take positive steps towards peace talks quickly.

The UNP resolved last month to table a no-confidence motion in June in response to an internal crisis in the party when disgruntled members challenged Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's leadership and accused him of being lukewarm in his opposition to the Government.

Mr. Wickremesinghe was specifically charged with scuttling moves by UNP parliamentarians to bring down the Government during the vote on the budget.

The UNP leader took what was presumably the best course for him to stave off the crisis. Several UNP parliamentarians are convinced that if the party makes a concerted bid to woo

smaller opposition parties, including three Tamil parties, it could succeed in ousting the Government with the help of a group of ruling party parliamentarians who are said to be waiting to break away.

With 116 members, the PA Government has a slim majority of three in the 225-member Parliament, while the UNP has 89 members. A no-confidence vote can be passed with a simple majority.

However, it is yet a matter of speculation if the motion will be tabled at all, and if it is, whether the UNP will be actually able to muster enough numbers to defeat the Government.

But already, the Tamil parties, whose main preoccupation thus far was how to get the Government to talk to the LTTE, find themselves drawn into the centre of a debate on how to topple the Government that is finally saying it will talk to the LTTE.

It is expected that the two Tamil parties, the Eelam People's Democratic Party and the Ceylon Workers' Congress, (both are partners in the Government) will reject any overtures to them by the UNP.

But the Tamil parties in opposition are a different story. In an exact mirror image of the TULF's toned down position, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) has declared it will support the no-confidence motion, but says it will be forced to reconsider its stand if the Government calls a cease-fire against the LTTE immediately.

The vociferously pro-LTTE All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), that has one member in

Parliament, has said it will back the UNP, come what may. It is well-known that the LTTE has never really wanted to engage with the Kumaratunga Government. The eagerness that it has displayed in exploiting UNP moves to topple the Government make that more obvious than ever before.

Those arguing on behalf of the LTTE have suggested quite openly that the group would prefer to do business with the UNP rather than with the Kumaratunga Government.

Commenting on the hesitation of some of the Tamil parties to back the no-confidence motion, a noted pro-LTTE columnist in the weekly *Sunday Leader* has warned them not to be "deluded" by the Kumaratunga Government that an agreement has been reached for peace talks.

It is being put out that even if the Government were to now signal an acceptance of the LTTE's pre-conditions for talks, the LTTE would refuse to play ball at this stage, as any positive steps towards peace talks will send the Tamil parties decisively to the Government's side, thereby strengthening its position vis-a-vis the UNP.

"The LTTE would be in no mood to help extricate the Government from the mess it is in. The Government is in bad shape, economically, militarily and politically. There is no compulsion (for the LTTE) to rush in and help it. It would be far better for the LTTE to pause a while and await the outcome of the Sri Lankan political struggle," the columnist has written.

THE HINDU

16 MAY 2001

Norway envoy back in Lanka

HT Correspondent
Colombo, May 15

NORWEGIAN Peace envoy Erik Solheim, here on a two-day visit, is expected to go to Wannai to discuss with the LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Sri Lankan Government's proposal for a time bound ceasefire and other humanitarian measures meant to pave the way for direct peace talks.

The last time Solheim went to the Wannai, he met Prabhakaran. Sources said that Solheim was carrying with him the Government's proposal for a "time bound" ceasefire during which it wants talks to begin and make definitive progress.

Solheim is also carrying a Government document on a set of confidence building measures

16/5
entitled "Agreement in Pursuance of an MoU Regarding Humanitarian Measures".

Against opposition from the LTTE, the Government had insisted on the use of the term "agreement" as it would give the document "legal validity."

With both the Sri Lankan Government and the Norwegian embassy tightlipped on Solheim's itinerary, it is not clear as to when the peace envoy would journey to the Wannai. But it is likely he will be in the Wannai on Wednesday. While in Colombo he would meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, Muslim leader and minister Rauff Hakeem and Leader of the Opposition Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Kadirgamar had said it would be premature to say that direct

talks would begin soon.

But an understanding could be reached on the commencement of talks soon. He reiterated the Government's position on lifting the ban on the LTTE ahead of talks and said that while the LTTE was proscribed talks with it were not proscribed.

Asked if the Norwegians would graduate to being "mediators" from being "facilitators," Kadirgamar said: "There is no question of their becoming mediators. And they have made it very clear they have no intention to play the role of a mediator, unless they are invited by both parties. We have taken the view that there is a great deal that the Norwegians can do to facilitate not only the commencement of talks but the progress of the talks."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAY 2001

Movement forward in Sri Lanka peace process

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 11. In a significant development, both the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have announced progress towards the Norwegian-assisted peace talks, though both disagree on the extent of the forward movement.

The LTTE said today that there had been a "substantial progress" on a set of reciprocal confidence building measures (CBMs) with the Sri Lankan Government to create a congenial atmosphere for direct talks. In a statement, it also said that it was studying a Norwegian proposal for a bilateral cessation of hostilities and a final agreement on this could be reached only after "further clarifications and discussions."

However, the statement denied a release from the office of the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, that an "agreement" had been reached on "several issues" between the two sides and charged that it was "premature and irresponsible" to say so.

The Norwegians too joined the debate with a statement that strove to maintain Oslo's carefully cultivated neutrality in the process. "There is no overall agreement between the parties in the Sri Lankan

conflict. On the other hand, the parties agree on certain issues but until they agree on all issues it is definitely too early to say that an agreement is reached which will be the fundament for talks," said Mr Erik Solheim, Norwegian Special Envoy, in a statement from Oslo.

Mr. Kadirgamar's statement was issued on Thursday, based on a letter from him to his Norwegian counterpart, Mr. Thorbjorn Jagland, reaffirming the Government's commitment to the Oslo-assisted process.

It said the parties to the conflict had decided to take measures to "alleviate any hardships and dangers to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict, and contribute to building understanding and a foundation on which negotiations can take place." The measures would be embodied in a document, the Minister's release said, adding that the letter to the Norwegian Foreign Minister outlined matters on which agreement had been reached.

However, the LTTE said that while "substantial progress" had been made, no agreement had been reached so far on any of the issues under discussion. "The Norwegian project, which calls for goodwill measures of mutual reciprocity, aims at de-escalation of the conflict and creation of a congenial atmosphere conducive for talks.

We hope an agreement can be reached soon on the Norwegian proposal after further discussions and clarifications on certain matters," it said.

A proposal for a bilateral ceasefire submitted to it by Norway on Wednesday was "constructive" but it too required "further clarifications and discussions." Crucially, the LTTE hinted in a roundabout fashion in its statement that the demand for lifting Sri Lanka's ban on it was not a pre-condition for talks.

"Though normalisation of civilian life in the Tamil homeland and cessation of armed hostilities are crucial for the resumption of peace negotiations, we have also called upon the Sri Lanka Government through the Norwegian facilitators to lift the ban on our liberation organisation so that we can participate in the peace negotiations as the authentic political organisation representing the people of Tamil Eelam," it said.

The Norwegians, in their statement, said they would continue their shuttle diplomacy to sort out all issues of disagreement between the Government and the LTTE and said the special envoy expected to meet the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Foreign Minister and the LTTE leaders in the "near future" without specifying a date.

THE HINDU

12 MAY 2001

Lanka bans rallies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, May 10. - The Sri Lankan government today banned processions and demonstrations in the country to prevent organised protests over the Mawanella communal clashes.

The prohibition was timed to prevent a demonstration by a radical Sinhala group at Maradana, the scene of pitched battles last Friday in Colombo.

The Api Sinhala (We are Sinhalese) had announced the demonstration to protest against the violence by the minority community, but, apprehending further trouble, disallowed it.

Meanwhile, the Opposition, United National Party, leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, said national unity had suffered a setback due to the Mawanella incidents.

In a statement issued here, he said Mawanella violence was not a communal conflict and blamed armed supporters of a minister for stirring up the trouble.

He demanded action against the politician who allowed the situation to develop by extending "patronage" to criminals. He also wanted the government to ask police to act decisively in such situations.

Mr Wickremesinghe appealed for consolidation of national unity. "This is not the time to blame each other, but to take action", the UNP leader said.

THE STATESMAN

11 MAY 2001

Lanka govt reaches agreement with rebels

Colombo, May 10 (Reuters): Sri Lanka said today that it had reached an agreement with Tamil Tiger separatist rebels on several measures to lay the foundation for peace talks.

In a letter sent to the Norwegian government, foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said Sri Lanka and the LTTE shared an "overall objective of finding a negotiated political solution to the ongoing armed conflict".

The letter said the two "had decided to take measures to alleviate any hardships and dangers to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict and contribute to building understanding and a foundation on which negotiations can take place".

The letter, which came after officials and diplomats said the government and Tigers were moving closer to agreeing to a truce in a run-up to possible peace talks, also said that the humanitarian measures would be "embodied in a document".

Although peace talks have collapsed several times in the past under accusations of mistrust, officials said they were more optimistic this time because of the involvement of Norway.

THE TELEGRAPH

Norwegian envoy holds talks with Kumaratunga on peace process

COLOMBO: Special envoy Erik Solheim has met Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga to discuss steps to re-kindle the tenuous peace process that suffered a setback last week after an abortive military offensive that left over 400 dead.



C. Kumaratunga

A Norwegian embassy spokesman said Mr Solheim had a discussion with the President on Monday, but declined to divulge details. The envoy is scheduled to meet leader of the main opposition United National Party Ranil Wickremesinghe later in the day.

Mr Solheim also called on Indian high commissioner in Sri Lanka, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, on Monday. Mr Gandhi said the Norwegian envoy had apprised him of his assessment of the present situation and his plans.

Norway keeps India posted of developments in the peace process as it believes that India has a role to play in resolving the problem.

Mr Solheim's present efforts revolve around forging a preliminary understanding on certain confidence-building measures before the parties can go in for direct negotiations.

The military had launched a fresh offensive on April 25, within hours of the LTTE calling off its four-month-long unilateral ceasefire.

However, the offensive was rolled back after four days of intense fighting during which the army lost 221 soldiers and the LTTE about 190. Thousands were injured on both sides.

Meanwhile, Canadian high commissioner in Sri Lanka Ruth

Archibald, met LTTE's political wing leader S.P. Tamil Chelvan in the northern Vanni regio, a Tamil diaspora website reported quoting the rebels' clandestine radio, "voice of Tigers".

In its morning bulletin, the radio said Mr Tamil Chelvan had told Ms Archibald that the Sri Lankan government was keen only on a military solution.

"This is harming Tamil civilians," he was quoted as saying. The discussion was described as "constructive".

Canada has in the past offered its help to resolve the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. However, it keeps a close watch on pro-LTTE fundraising activities in its territory.

Meanwhile, sporadic fighting continued in parts of northern Lanka on Monday, the military said on Tuesday.

Four LTTE cadres were killed in an attack on a rebel bunker north of Janakapura in Weli Oya on Monday, while a sniper killed an LTTE combatant at Eluthumadduval in the Jaffna peninsula, the army's situation report said.

Two officers and four soldiers were wounded in artillery and mortar fire by the LTTE near the forward defence lines at Kodikamam, Navatkadu, Mrusuvil and Muhamalai in the peninsula on Monday.

Ten bodies belonging to the LTTE cadres killed in the four-day battle last week were handed over to the rebel group's representatives by the International Committee of the Red Cross at Kalmunai Point, it said.

Eight bodies belonging to the security forces retrieved by the LTTE were also handed over to army representatives, it added. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

6 MAY 2001

6 MAY 2001

Lanka not ready for ceasefire

P K Balachandran
Colombo, May 4

~~THE~~ Government is unwilling to declare a ceasefire in response to the LTTE's threat that it would not enter peace talks unless a bilateral ceasefire was in place.

"There is no change in the government's position," said the Cabinet spokesman, Anura Priyadarshana Yapa, when asked whether the Government was contemplating a formal or informal ceasefire. He read out an earlier Press release stating the government's position. It said that the government was ready to start peace talks with the LTTE "forthwith", that the talks should revolve around the substantive political issues and a conclusion should be reached within a given time frame. The government's stand is that talks can be held even during fighting between the Sri Lankan forces and the Tamil rebels and a ceasefire agreed upon if there is sufficient progress in the talks.

A few days ago, the LTTE had stated categorically that there

could be no peace talks in the midst of a "savage war". Norwegian facilitator, Erik Solheim, was convinced of the validity of this contention and he pressed for a ceasefire or at least a de-escalation of military operations during the three meetings he had with President Chandrika Kumaratunga. According to diplomatic sources here, Kumaratunga accepted the idea of an "informal cessation of hostilities" as a *via media*.

Kumaratunga held a meeting of the National Security Council here today and there was speculation that the ceasefire issue was discussed. Sources said that an informal, undeclared de-escalation of the military operations was very much a possibility.

Curfew in Colombo: Authorities imposed a curfew on Friday in Colombo and the surrounding areas after Muslim demonstrators clashed with police in a protest against ethnic riots in a central town. Disturbances broke out in several parts of the city. Police used teargas to disperse a crowd in Maradana, reports Reuters.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 1988

Canadian envoy makes peace offer to LTTE leaders

COLOMBO: A Canadian envoy has met Tamil Tiger rebel leaders for the first time and conveyed her country's desire for a political settlement to the 17-year civil war. Ruth Archibald, the Canadian high commissioner, met S.P. Thamichelvam, leader of the LTTE political wing, in the northern Wanni jungles on Tuesday.

"The meeting provided an opportunity to communicate directly, and to all parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka, Canada's desire for peace, and belief that the fighting must stop," said a statement from the embassy on Thursday.

Ms Archibald said Thursday that she had spoken later to Erik Solheim, the Norwegian envoy who has worked for two years to broker peace talks.

Ms Archibald's trip to the Wanni jungle was the first time a Canadian diplomat has visited the rebels in Sri Lanka. The main purpose of her visit was to inspect humanitarian projects funded by the Canadian government, said the embassy. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 MAY 2001

Peace process not dead yet, says

110-19 Erik Solheim 115

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 30. The Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, arrived in Sri Lanka today amidst speculation over the fate of the peace process after the heaviest fighting in seven months in the Jaffna peninsula left at least 300 combatants dead and hundreds more wounded last week.

Mr. Solheim, who has been trying to facilitate talks between the Government and the LTTE, was quoted by the BBC as saying that the fighting was a 'definite set-back', but that the peace process was not dead yet.

Official sources said Mr. Solheim's mission was to persuade the Sri Lankan Government not to indulge in any more military adventures in the Jaffna peninsula as that would only vitiate an atmosphere charged with mistrust between the two sides.

Mr. Solheim was expected to hold discussions with the President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, this evening. He will also meet the leader of the main opposition United National Party, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe.

New Delhi's expression of concern on the escalation of hostilities and a call to both sides to begin talks early, a departure from its usual reticence on the conflict in Sri Lanka, are expected to strengthen Mr. Solheim's hands.

He and the Norwegian ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Jon Westborg, called on the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Gopal Gandhi, this afternoon.

Mainstream Tamil parties that have been accusing India of turning a blind eye to the developments on the island, welcomed New Delhi's stand but said it was 'insufficient'.

"India must intervene now and tell the Government that they cannot go on like this. They must bring more pressure on Sri Lanka to call a ceasefire and start talks," said Mr. V. Anandasangaree, parliamentarian and vice-president of the Tamil United

Liberation Front (TULF).

Reiterating this view, Mr. N. Srikantha of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) said "India should, at least now, do what it can both politically and diplomatically to contribute positively and effectively to bring both parties to the military conflict to the negotiating table."

Meanwhile, the body count from the battle continued without respite. The toll on the Government side went up to 213 soldiers, while the LTTE has so far admitted to losing 75 cadres.

The LTTE returned bodies of eight more soldiers through the International Committee of the Red Cross today taking the total number of bodies returned by them to 64, while the Army returned bodies of 10 LTTE cadres.

Despite the intensity of the fighting, it is hoped that Mr. Solheim will be able to revive the process that he has guided for the last year. Both sides have reiterated their commitment to it, the Government as recently as Saturday, and the LTTE last week, while announcing its decision not to extend a unilateral ceasefire.

While the decision not to extend the ceasefire may not have been a major setback in itself, clearing the way as it did of a suspiciously regarded unilateral gesture, the Government's decision thereafter to blink first is being viewed as particularly confrontational.

Official sources said Norway's first priority now was to bring down the level of hostilities before it spun out of control amid fears that buoyed by its victory, the LTTE may now go on an offensive.

The finalisation of the other confidence-building measures for the commencement of talks contained in a draft agreement drawn up by the Norwegians was a 'non-problem' as there was virtually no disagreement between the two sides on the agreement, the sources added

THE HINDU

1 MAY 2001

Lanka govt ready for talks with LTTE

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, April 29. — The Sri Lanka government has reiterated its readiness to start peace talks with the LTTE after its troops were forced to retreat and suffered heavy casualties in Jaffna.

The ministry of information and media, in a statement issued last night, said the government was ready to talk with the LTTE as early as possible and pursue it expeditiously.

They will also finalise a document on the implementation of humanitarian measures and implement them with the assistance of monitors.

In a 4,000-word statement, the government called on the LTTE to engage "honestly and swiftly" in starting the peace process, but was silent on the need for a ceasefire before the talks.

India reaction: India today expressed deep concern over heavy fighting between the Sri Lankan army and LTTE, adds SNS. Advocating the idea of holding dialogue between both parties to achieve lasting peace, India hoped that the parties would continue to follow the peace process.

THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2001

Eight soldiers killed in Macedonia

Skopje, Macedonia, April 29

MACEDONIA SENT reinforcements to an area near Kosovo on Sunday after eight members of its security forces were killed in the first serious violence since an ethnic Albanian insurgency was quelled a month ago.

Six security force personnel were reported wounded as well as the eight dead, the highest casualty toll for a single incident since the conflict between security forces and the rebels erupted in the former Yugoslav republic in February.

Nato Secretary-General George Robertson said violence would not work. "I condemn the cowardly acts of the extremists and my message is simple: the violence must end and their tactics will not be successful," he said.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said, "I want to appeal to the citizens and the political leadership of the country to pursue and intensify all efforts to promote inter-ethnic understanding."

Avram Vankovci, chief of staff of the military hospital, told State radio six wounded members of the security forces had been brought in, one of them seriously injured. The radio said the gunmen were thought to have fled toward neighboring Kosovo.

While officials did not name any particular group, Macedonian media pointed the finger of blame at the National Liberation Army ethnic Albanian guerrilla force. Ali Ahmeti, the political leader of the guerrilla group, said he was still collecting information on the incident but maintained his forces had not attacked.

Rueters

An army handout photo shows Lanka troops in Jaffna on Friday.

Lanka withdraws troops, urges Tigers for talks

Colombo, April 29

SRI LANKAN Government has urged the LTTE to "engage honestly and swiftly" in negotiations and hold talks on substantive political issues, hours after the Army withdrew its offensive against the Tigers.

The Government statement asked the rebels not to squander a valuable opportunity for peace. But it justified its refusal to announce a ceasefire.

After claiming troops recaptured three square miles of territory from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the defense ministry said troops had pulled back to their original positions in Eluthumadduval, on Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka.

"Preparation of a new defence line would have given little advantage but would have cost more in terms of lives," a defence ministry statement said. The defence ministry said 157 soldiers were killed and 860 injured in three days of fighting. It claimed 190 rebels were killed and more than 400 injured, but the rebels put the toll at 43.

Stressing on 'honesty' and 'swiftness', the Government was apparently asking the LTTE not to impede the process by raising some 'concerns', not mounting to 'preconditions', including a Government ceasefire and lifting of the ban on the outfit in Sri Lanka.

LANGUAGE LEVELLER

The Government will teach Sinhalese and Tamil lawmakers each other's language to bridge their ethnic divide, considered the main cause of the nation's 17-year-old civil strife. "We hope to improve interaction between parliamentarians from the two communities and enable them to understand each other better," Padma Jayaweera, head of the official languages department, said.

AP, Colombo

The Government also made a series of accusations against the LTTE, including alleged misuse of its ceasefire for rebuilding its forces. It also held the rebels responsible for holding up finalisation of the preliminary accord.

On the LTTE's bitter comment in its April 23 statement announcing the end of its ceasefire that the international community, especially UK, US and India, had failed to persuade Lanka to persuade positively its truce, the Government said these countries knew the LTTE's 'track record' of announcing ceasefire and not adhering to them.

The Sunday Leader said Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim would arrive tomorrow to continue efforts to forge a preliminary understanding to pave the way for future political dialogue.

PTI/AP

THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2001

SF-12
28/4

LTTE forces Lankan Army to pull back

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, April 28. - In a major military reverse, the Sri Lankan army today said it was forced to pull back its troops to their original positions in the face of ferocious resistance by the LTTE after a three-day offensive that cost the army 157 lives and left 860 soldiers wounded.

"Initially, troops successfully advanced and captured forward areas, but due to very heavy artillery and mortar fire by the terrorists, troops had to be re-deployed in the original defence line, as preparation of a new defence line would have given battle advantage, but cost more in terms of lives," the military said in a special press release here.

Nearly 350 lives were lost in the three-day battle for territory towards the strategic Elephant Pass.

Forces engaged in Operation Agni Khela, were successful in achieving their main aim of destroying LTTE deployments that posed an

immediate threat to the defence lines at Eluthumadduvaland Muhamalai, it said.

It was confirmed that about 190 LTTE combatants were killed and over 400 others.

"The operation's secondary aim of expanding the control areas had to be changed," the military said, in an indirect admission that it failed to consolidate on the opening day's gains when it managed to capture some eight square kilometre of territory south of Eluthumadduval and Kilaly in south Jaffna peninsula.

The military claimed that the operation preempted LTTE plans to conduct a major attack on the security forces in the peninsula. Taking into account "the weapons systems and facilities they had brought to the Elephant Pass sector, it was obvious that the LTTE was poised to launch a major operation."

With the latest round of hostilities coming to an end the stage may be set for resumption of preliminary discussions to get the Norway-facilitated peace process going, sources said.

V V
Tamil Tigers claim 500 deaths, retreat by army G-4

Bloody battle erupts in Lanka

29/4

FROM CHAMATH ARIYADASA

Colombo, April 28 (Reuters): Tamil Tiger guerrillas claimed victory today in Sri Lanka's bloodiest battle in a year and said nearly 500 combatants had been killed before government troops were forced to retreat in the country's north.

The military said earlier its troops pulled back in the face of a ferocious counterattack by the LTTE and put the death toll at 377.

Fierce battles raged overnight as the army tried to hold on to an 8-sq-km (three-square-mile) sliver of land wrested from the guerrillas last Wednesday in an offensive launched on the town of Pallai in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

"The Sri Lankan army suffered a humiliating military debacle with unprecedented heavy casualties..." the LTTE said in a statement, adding that the army had now been pushed back to its original lines.

The rebels and army differed in their accounts of casualties since the start of the offensive, but it was clearly the bloodiest fighting since rebels captured the key Elephant Pass military base, just south of Pallai, in April last year.

"More than 400 Sri Lankan troops were killed and over 2,000 injured. On our side 75 LTTE fighters...were killed," the LTTE statement said.

The Sri Lankan military said in its statement 157 soldiers have been killed and over 800 soldiers wounded, 450 of them seriously, since troops began advancing on Pallai, the last position from which rebel artillery can shell the Jaffna peninsula's two ports and only airstrip.



An armoured personnel carrier moves towards LTTE-held areas in the Jaffna peninsula. (Reuters)

The military statement put guerrilla casualties at 190 dead and over 400 wounded, while The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it had received the bodies of 30 soldiers, taking the official military death toll to 187.

The defence ministry said the battle was not a major setback. "We could have held on to these defences but it would have cost too many lives...(but) no major strategic adjustment was made," said military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne, blaming the heavy casualties on artillery and mortar fire.

"The launching of this offensive still has strategic value to the

security forces because it was a pre-emptive strike and caused heavy casualties to the enemy as well," said Karunaratne, adding that the two sides were still exchanging artillery fire.

Last year's loss of Elephant Pass was seen as the army's worst defeat in an 18-year-long conflict that has claimed an estimated 64,000 lives.

Rebels then pushed ahead to threaten the gates of Jaffna city, 30 km north of Pallai

The huge defeat proved to be a turning point in the conflict, and though the military has since rolled back most of the rebel gains, a Norwegian-brokered peace initiative also began to gath-

er momentum as the country grew weary of the war.

Earlier this week the Tamil Tigers declined to extend a four month unilateral truce, but President Chandrika Kumaratunga said yesterday that peace talks with the rebels were still possible without a ceasefire in place.

"As far as we are concerned, having a ceasefire is irrelevant to the peace process," she said in a statement published on the government's official website.

"This is a tragedy, but I wouldn't call it a major setback because both combatants are officially committed to fighting and talking simultaneously," said a western diplomat.

Conflicting claims on Sri Lankan toll

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 27. As fighting continued in Jaffna peninsula for a third straight day on Friday, there were claims and counter-claims about the death toll on either side, making it evident that both the LTTE and the security forces had suffered huge casualties.

The security forces said they had lost 131 soldiers, including three officers, while 126 were wounded, and said they knew from monitored LTTE radio transmissions that 180 Tamil Tiger cadres were killed in the fighting.

For its part, the LTTE claims to have killed over 300 soldiers and wounded more than 1,000 with artillery and mortar fire. Its clandestine radio, Voice of Tigers, said 30 of its cadres were killed in the fighting. It named eight of the dead cadres.

A Defence Ministry release said today they had eight "recognisable" bodies of LTTE cadres, while the Voice of Tigers said it had bodies of 30 soldiers with it.

A spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross said the LTTE had contacted it for handing over the bodies to the army, and that the handing-over may take place on Saturday morning.

The army said it had advanced 8 sq.km. from the Eluthumadduval-Muhamalai-Nagarkovil sector in the offensive operation that it launched on Wednesday, but the LTTE, in a release on Thursday night, said it had repulsed the advance and pushed back the troops.

"The Government troops suffered heavy casualties as they ran into minefields and fell prey to accurate artillery and mortar fire by the Tamil Tigers," it said.

The LTTE also refuted the Government claim, reiterated in today's statement from the Defence Ministry, that Air Force bombers had successfully targeted two bus-loads of LTTE cadres. It said it had destroyed "several battle tanks and armoured vehicles" of the army.

Ceasefire irrelevant for talks, Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 27. The Sri Lankan President, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, said today that a ceasefire was not relevant to the ongoing peace process with the LTTE, and emphasised that her Government remained committed to the peace process.

"As far as we are concerned, having a ceasefire is irrelevant to the peace process," she is quoted as saying on a Government website.

She said her Government was committed to commencing negotiations with the LTTE and working out a solution to the problems which have led to the war.

"We do not believe it can be solved only through military means," she said.

Her remarks came as the security forces and LTTE

THE HINDU

28 APR 2001

Ceasefire collapse triggers bloodshed in Sri Lanka

FROM DAYAN CANDAPPA

Colombo, April 25 (Reuters): At least 26 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed today in the heaviest fighting in months as Tamil Tiger guerrillas put up fierce resistance to an army offensive in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

Military officials also said 78 soldiers were wounded in battles that erupted at dawn, hours after a unilateral ceasefire by the LTTE expired. "There is very heavy fighting. The terrain is narrow and favours the LTTE, but we have advanced about 2 km using a zigzag movement," said military spokesman Brig. Sanath Karunaratne.

Air force jets and heavy artillery bombarded rebel positions as tanks and troops broke through the first LTTE de-

fence line around Pallai, the last rebel-held town within artillery range of Jaffna peninsula's two ports and only airstrip.

Karunaratne said the rebels hit back with a barrage of artillery and mortars from Elephant Pass, the isthmus gateway to the peninsula, that along with Pallai was captured by the LTTE last year during a massive offensive that brought them to the gates of Jaffna city, 30 km to the northwest. The military has since rolled back most of the rebel gains, but a push to take Pallai in January was stopped in its tracks by ferocious rebel resistance.

Karunaratne could give no casualty figures for the LTTE, whose only comment on the latest fighting was a report on a pro-rebel website

(www.tamilnet.com) that said the battles had begun one hour before the truce expired at midnight yesterday.

A government statement issued today dismissed the truce as a farce and said the rebels had violated it 224 times since it took effect on Christmas Eve. The government refused to match the truce, but the battle fields have been relatively quiet since the end of January and foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar suggested the army had scaled back operations "out of a degree of decency".

The lull in the fighting was accompanied by growing hopes that peace talks were around the corner as a Norwegian-brokered peace initiative to end the conflict, which has claimed as estimated 64,000 lives, gathered momentum.

Today, President Chandrika Kumaratunga was quoted by state media as saying the door was still open to talks. "We are hopeful of achieving something tangible and constructive in the coming months. The door is still not closed to the LTTE entering negotiations," she was quoted as saying by the *Daily News*.

Bomb explosion

A suspected parcel bomb exploded about 50 metres from the gates of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's official residence today, wounding an officer of her security division. The explosion occurred in an abandoned building in Colombo's tightest security zone, hours after a unilateral truce by separatist Tamil rebels expired.

"A member of the Presidential Secu-



A soldier loads a rocket launcher during a military offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels in Jaffna. (Reuters)

rity Division saw the suspicious parcel. It went off when he tried to handle it," said a police spokesman. Several buildings were evacuated after the blast which took place in a part of the city that still bears the scars of a big truck bombing by the LTTE in 1996 that killed 100 people and wounded more than 1,400.

Police did not blame anyone for the explosion, the first to hit Colombo since a spate of rebel suicide bombings ended in October as a Norwegian-brokered peace initiative gathered momentum.

Troops cordoned off the already heavily guarded area and armoured cars blocked access to what used to be Colombo's commercial hub before the 1996 blast that was aimed at the central bank building. The explosion occurred in one of several high-rise buildings.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 APR 2001

5,412 DEATHS

HT-11 24/4

Suicide the biggest killer in Lanka

PK Balachandran
Colombo, April 23

THE ETHNIC war, which has gone on for 18 years, has so far claimed 63,000 Sri Lankan lives at an annual average of 3,500. But a widespread suicidal tendency may well turn out to be the bigger killer.

As per police records, 5,412 Sri Lankans had committed suicide last year — not an unusually high figure in the island country which has had the dubious distinction of the highest rates of suicide in the world. Health Secretary Thilak Ranaviraja said Sri Lanka has the highest female suicide rate and is second only to Hungary in the suicide rate for both sexes.

A recent study of suicides in Sri Lanka conducted by Dr Neil Thalagala of the Government's Family Health Bureau blames 48 per cent of the suicides on health problems. Patients suffering from cancer and terminal diseases tend to end their lives.

Family quarrels, unsuccessful love affairs, financial difficulties and alcoholism are the other major causes of suicide. But the most distressing feature of suicide here is the increasing number of children taking their lives, says Ranaviraja.

The suicidal tendency is higher among the majority Sinhalese as compared to the minority Tamils and Muslims. Perhaps the structure of Tamil and Muslim societies gives the individual greater support in times of grave need.

An editorial in Monday's Virakesari Tamil daily says the dwindling of the religious spirit is the main reason for people's inability to cope with personal crises.

Ranaviraja said there is an acute shortage of qualified psychiatrists in Sri Lanka. While

there are about 200 Sri Lankan psychiatrists working in the US alone, there are just a handful back home. "We are trying to get those in the US to work here and the response has been good."

LTTE executes two "convicts": Two men convicted of heinous offences by the courts established by LTTE in northern Sri Lanka were executed on Friday last, media reports said today.

Mahalingam Kamalanathan was handed out the death sentence by the court at Mallavi in the Vanni region after being convicted of killing a 38-year-old man with a hand grenade, reports PTI.

In the other case, Francis Xavier Alwis was found guilty of raping a woman by a court set up at Mullaitivu. The *Voice of Tigers*, the clandestine radio of LTTE, announced the two were executed on Friday, media reports from Vavuniya said.

The LTTE's courts, functioning for several years now, are manned by young cadres, both men and women, with a brief initiation into legal affairs. It was not clear if the executions were carried out after an appeal.

LTTE bomb expert arrested: An LTTE bomb expert allegedly preparing to bomb Colombo port has been arrested by Sri Lankan police in Nuwara Eliya in the central province, reports PTI.

Jebamalaipitchai Christopher alias Ravi, 27, was nabbed when he was in the hill town to visit relatives. He had allegedly provided the LTTE with drawings of the layout of Colombo harbour and helped a senior cadre carry out a mock attack on a simulated target in the northern Vanni region.

Joining the rebel outfit at the age of 17, Ravi had allegedly been involved in major offensives in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

Lankan Navy saddled with unusable vessels

HT Correspondent
Colombo, April 23

EVEN AS the LTTE lands lethal supplies on the north eastern coast with impunity, an ultra modern Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) sold to the Sri Lankan navy by India recently is lying idle in the island's peaceful western and southern sea.

Officially, its is said to be on patrol in the Colombo-Galle stretch which is under no threat from the LTTE but the truth is that the OPV's safety in the volatile north eastern sector cannot be guaranteed in the absence of a fleet of escort vessels. As on date, the Sri Lanka Government has no money to buy escort vessels. So, the OPV and a number of other big ships are almost on anchor.

"Requiring half a dozen escorts themselves for every voyage, they are more a liability than an asset," The Sunday Leader said today, referring to the Indian-built OPV and the other big ships in the Sri Lankan navy — the Sub-Chaser SLNS Parakrama and two SAAR 4 Fast Missile Crafts. "A blue water navy is a different kettle of fish altogether from a brown water navy which Sri Lanka is now. Its requirements are very different. It is far more expensive," says The Sunday Times and Jane's Weekly defense analyst Iqbal Athas.

"Fast Attack Craft (FAC) skippers, voicing their opinion on grounds of anonymity, say the operational requirement is for more FACs and Inshore Patrol Craft (IPCs) and not for the larger vessels envisaged by the top defense officials."

It is said the decision to buy the two OPVs was made by "a higher authority above the Naval chain of command" on grounds "other than operational requirements". According to Athas, the navy could have bought 10 to 15 Fast Attack Craft or IPCs with the money spent on buying the two OPVs.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 APR 2001

Navy sinks five Tiger boats

Lanka rivals clash on sea

Colombo, April 20 (Reuters): Sri Lankan navy boats and Tamil Tiger rebel craft clashed today in their second sea battle this week, military officials said.

The fighting, which coincides with efforts by Norway to broker a peace deal, took place off the northeastern coast when a navy patrol came across a supply convoy belonging to the LTTE just before dawn. "We have destroyed five LTTE boats. Four were hit by naval fire and the other was blown up after air support was called in at first light," military spokesman Brig. Sanath Karunaratne said.

He said six rebels were rescued from the water, but could give no details of LTTE casualties. Four sailors were wounded, Karunaratne said, adding there was no serious damage to any of the Israeli-built Dvora gun boats that took part in the three-hour battle. Comment from the rebels was not immediately available.

One of the boats was later spotted on a nearby beach, but Karunaratne said the airforce did not open fire because it was being unloaded by civilians. On Tuesday, the navy and separatist rebels fought a fierce sea battle in the same area despite a government truce called for the Sinhalese and Tamil New Year and a

rebel ceasefire called earlier.

Both sides blamed the other for starting Tuesday's clash off the coast of Mullaitivu in which two rebels were killed and seven sailors were wounded.

The rebel LTTE, fighting for a separate Tamil homeland in the country's north and east, declared a unilateral ceasefire four months ago to push forward a Norwegian-brokered peace initiative.

The two sides have been moving closer to talks since then but have accused each other of not being sincere about wanting negotiations. The 18-year conflict has killed an estimated 64,000 people.

A group of Sri Lankan soldiers have been taken into custody for beating up a policeman after an argument at a checkpoint in the country's war zone, military officials said today. Military police arrested a major and detained 12 soldiers for questioning over an assault on Inspector W.P.J. Senadheera, officer in charge of the northeastern Pulmoddai police station. Senadheera was beaten up on Tuesday by a group of soldiers in the presence of his wife, while police say there was a second assault inside the local army camp. Senior police officers in the area have signed a petition demanding an investigation.

THE HUMANITARIAN

21 APR 2001

Lanka Navy, Tiger rebels wage heavy sea battle

Colombo, April 16: Sri Lankan Navy gun boats and Tamil rebel craft were locked in a heavy sea battle off Sri Lanka's northern coast on Monday shattering a fragile ceasefire declared separately by both sides.

Defence ministry spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said the fighting broke out off the coast of Chalai at about 3 am (local time).

The Navy had detected a movement of boats of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at Chalai, a stronghold of the guerrillas, Mr Karunaratne said. At least five sailors were wounded in the attack, he said adding

there were no immediate reports of casualties among the rebels. However, military sources said they believed at least two rebel craft were sunk after the attack.

The intense fighting erupted even as both sides pledged separately to observe unilateral ceasefires.

The Air Force was called in to provide close air cover to the two damaged navy craft, officials said.

The latest fighting came as troops observed a one-sided truce to mark the Sinhala and Tamil New Year on Saturday. The government-declared ceasefire is set to end on Tuesday

morning. The LTTE has been observing its ceasefire since Christmas, Eve and has been extending it every month till April 24.

The defence ministry has accused the rebels of violating their own truce and trying to plant mines outside military bases during the government's New Year ceasefire.

There was no immediate reaction from the LTTE to the latest fighting.

Meanwhile, according to a Reuters report, a ship carrying an arms shipment worth more than \$2.5 million from the Czech Republic on Monday arrived in

Sri Lanka despite indications that peace talks were on to end the country's 18-year ethnic war. "The ship arrived with a cargo of arms. They were part of the consignment ordered last year," said military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne.

He said the timing of the shipment, which includes tanks, tank transporters and other military vehicles, had nothing to do with developments in a Norwegian-brokered peace initiative between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels.

Sri Lanka said it would announce a date for peace talks with the Tamil Tiger rebels by

the end of this month as both sides made gestures of goodwill to push forward the peace process.

Military officials declined to name the vessel, but said its cargo included more multi-barrel rocket launchers which last year helped stall a major rebel offensive in April and swung the military balance in favour of government troops.

Czech defence companies are key suppliers of military hardware to Sri Lanka and the country's defence minister Vladimir Vetschy visited the island in February to pledge more assistance. (PTI, Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

17 APR 2001

Will the lion and the tiger live in peace?

S. Lanka

HD-17
15/4

LIKE THE pieces of a giant jigsaw in the hands of an expert, the various elements of the Sri Lankan peace process facilitated by the Norwegians seemed to be progressively falling in place till last week, when the LTTE produced a piece that did not fit in with the rest of the pattern.

tion for the Government to revoke the ban now.

By placing a condition that it knew would be impossible for the Government to meet, even more so than a ceasefire or the lifting of economic embargoes on areas controlled by it, it seemed as if the LTTE was preparing the ground to torpedo the peace initiative.



Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga... more problems.

ognition of Norwegian efforts". Further, the Norwegian version of the meeting was that it was "constructive".

That was a markedly different take on the discussions than the one the LTTE sought to convey through its press release demanding "de-proscription" in Sri Lanka as a precondition for talks.

The same statement also demanded that the Government lift restrictions on fuel and cement, and reiterated the LTTE's other condition, that the Government reciprocate the ceasefire before talks.

According to official sources, the LTTE's demand for de-proscription may not have been placed in the same way to Mr. Westborg as it was in the tough-talking statement, which asserted that the LTTE would under "no circumstances participate in peace negotiations as an outlawed organisation".

Indeed, the Government's silence on the LTTE's new demand as put out in the statement seemed to suggest that it too was not overly worried about it.

The question now really is why the LTTE chose to put out a belligerent statement. Theories abound on why the LTTE did this, but they have to remain guesses. One explanation is that the LTTE is keen to project the image of a tough negotiator for the benefit of its supporters, particularly those living overseas who contribute to its coffers. The other is that the statement is the handiwork of a hardline segment within the LTTE and need not necessarily represent the view of its top leadership.

Backing this theory is the statement by the LTTE's London representative, Mr. Anton Balasingham, way back in November last year, in the context of the impending British move to proscribe the group, that the peace talks would not take place if Sri Lanka failed to revoke its own ban on the group. In all the debate about the U.K. ban on the LTTE since then, this particular demand was not mentioned again, till it surfaced last week.

Whether or not the LTTE is serious about the lifting of the ban as a pre-condition for talks should become clear in a few days. If it is, the reciprocal gestures that both sides have made will dry up and the peace process will almost certainly come to a premature end, because it is a demand that the Government cannot concede. So far, it does not seem that dire.

On the face of it, the LTTE's demand that Colombo lift the ban on it is one the Government cannot concede. But, says Nirupama Subramanian, the situation does not seem that dire.



The LTTE's supporters demonstrate in front of the headquarters of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva.

Hours after a meeting between the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Jon Westborg, and the political wing leader of the LTTE, Mr. S. Tamilchelvam, in Mallavi in the northern mainland, the LTTE issued a press release which set forth a new pre-condition for peace talks with the Government.

The release categorically stated that the LTTE would not participate in peace talks unless the Sri Lankan Government lifted its ban on it. The LTTE was proscribed by Sri Lanka as recently as January 1998, after the bombing of the island's holiest Buddhist site, the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy. Politically, it is out of the ques-

Or was it? Other developments seemed to suggest that the peace process was still firmly on course. The Government had by then already conceded a key demand of the Tigers, namely the lifting of restrictions on 24 items that could be taken by civilians crossing into "uncleared" areas, that is, territory under the control of the LTTE.

Then came the Norwegian envoy's visit to the Vanni to meet LTTE representatives, days after the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, said in Parliament that the Government would announce a date and venue for the peace talks by the end of April.

The Westborg-Tamilchelvam

discussions that reportedly stretched over a marathon 10 hours on Friday and Saturday ended with the LTTE offering to send back with the Ambassador four people it had been holding captive for several years, including a soldier from 1993. The four were released later that day through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Norway later said in a press release that Mr. Tamilchelvam had told Mr. Westborg the LTTE was releasing the four captives to reciprocate the "positive steps taken by the Government of Sri Lanka", apparently a reference to the lifting of the embargoes, and in "rec-

THE HINDU

15 APR 2001

LTTE taking undue advantage of Govt. ceasefire'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLONBO, APRIL 13. Sri Lanka said today that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was taking advantage of a Government ceasefire to plant mines near forward positions of the security forces in the conflict areas and warned that it might take preventive action.

The Government's unilateral ceasefire for the Tamil and Sinhala New Year, celebrated on April 14, came into force at midnight on Thursday and is to last till 6 a.m. on April 17.

A Government release said monitored LTTE radio transmissions indicated that junior cadres had been ordered to take advantage of the limited truce to plant the mines.

"In view of this, ground troops have been instructed to monitor the situation very closely. Security forces reserve the right to take appropriate measures to prevent such actions by the LTTE," the release said.

Meanwhile, the Government is yet to implement its other New Year goodwill gesture of releasing 10 persons whom it described as LTTE cadre.

In a New Year message to the nation, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, said she believed that the country's "dreadful war" could be brought to an end this year.

Arrest of securitymen ordered

The Justice Minister, Mr. Batty Weerakoon, has ordered police to arrest the security personnel involved in the alleged rape

of two women in the north-western district of Mannar and produce them in court.

Mr. Weerakoon, as chairman of a Presidential committee on unlawful arrests and harassment, has, in a letter to the Inspector-General of Police said there was enough evidence to arrest the Navy personnel and policemen suspected of involvement in the alleged gangrape.

The women were arrested by the Navy on March 19

on suspicion of being LTTE cadres while they were visiting Mannar from Vavuniya. They were handed over to the counter-subversive unit of the district police.

The district medical officer who examined the two women, confirmed rape in the case of one. The incident has created outrage in the Tamil community and the Gov-

ernment has been under growing pressure to take action.

Amnesty International, following the alleged incident, said the security forces were committing crimes with impunity because of the Government's failure to take steps against the culprits.

Mr. Weerakoon has said that he was "surprised" to learn that the only steps taken in respect of the police personnel, allegedly involved in the incident, was they had been transferred within the district.

"The Committee sees that there is clearly sufficient evidence to arrest and produce before court the suspects (police and Naval personnel) and have them remanded pending an identification parade," he said.

THE HINDU

14 APR 2001

Chandrika strikes deal to keep coalition intact

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's ruling party is set to offer more jobs to coalition partners in a bid to prevent defections that could bring the government down during a key vote on Wednesday, officials said.



C. Kumaratunga

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who met leaders of the minority Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), has reportedly offered two junior ministry posts to them. A senior minister said a total of five junior ministries may be offered to coalition partners as well as to members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) which is the main constituent in the coalition.

The minister, who declined to be named, said the coalition had comfortable numbers in parliament and was confident it could have the budget passed without difficulty.

Ms Kumaratunga went to the national parliament on Tuesday to meet legislators ahead of

Wednesday's vote on the 2001 budget, officials said.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) and the Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front boycotted a banquet hosted by Ms Kumaratunga on Monday in a sign of growing problems for her government.

The UNP said it had never been invited to such a banquet by Ms Kumaratunga in the past six years and felt the move was a thinly disguised attempt to garner support for Wednesday's key vote.

"Every time the president opens her mouth, she attacks us," UNP chief whip Tyrone Fernando said. "We don't think the invitation to us was extended in the right spirit."

State media reports said on Monday that intelligence agencies had uncovered a plot to bribe ministers and backbenches and topple the government which has a slender four-seat majority in the 225-member assembly.

Five leading businesses have offered millions of rupees in cash to ministers, deputy ministers and other ruling party legislators to stage a mutiny, the state-run *Daily News* said. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF SRI LANKA

17 APR 2001

GOODWILL GESTURE / 10 LTTE 'CADRES' TO BE RELEASED

Sri Lanka offers limited ceasefire

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 11. The Sri Lankan Government has declared a five-day ceasefire to mark Sinhala and Tamil New Year on April 14 and announced a surprise decision to release 10 prisoners that it said were Liberation Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) cadres.

The ceasefire is to take effect from the midnight of April 12 till 6 a.m. on April 17.

A communique from the Ministry of Defence said instructions had been issued to the commanders of all the three armed forces to refrain from offensive operations against the LTTE in military zones during the period.

The LTTE has been observing a unilateral ceasefire since Christmas, saying that the measure would provide "space" for the Norwegian efforts to bring the two sides for direct talks.

One of the LTTE's demands that the Government reciprocate the ceasefire in order to create a cordial atmosphere for talks. The current truce is due to end on April 24.

The limited ceasefire by the Government, an unusual practice for the New Year celebrations, apparently not intended as a reciprocal gesture. The Government has said that it would accept a proper ceasefire with the LTTE only when talks begin.

The release of the prisoners may hold more significance for the on-going Norwegian-facilitated process to bring the two sides together for peace talks. Earlier this month, the Government lifted restrictions on 24 items for LTTE-held areas.

The LTTE, which last week set a new pre-condition for talks by demanding that the Government ban on it be lifted, has not yet reacted to either the limited ceasefire or the decision to release 10 persons who are said to be its cadres.

That description is likely to be contested, as, going by the names on the list, two of them are Sinhalese and two others Muslims, making them improbable members of the LTTE.

Reacting to the Government move, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) parliamentarian, Mr. V. Anandasangaree, said a ceasefire limited to five days was "useless" as it would not take the peace process anywhere.

"The Government should have called an indefinite ceasefire from New Year. That could have led to talks," he said.

The LTTE's fresh pre-condition for lifting the ban on it before talks had come because of the Government's dismissive attitude to its unilateral truce, and the aggressive campaign to have it banned in other countries. "It is the

Government's fault that the LTTE has put up this new demand," he said.

The Government has still not reacted to this latest demand of the LTTE, reported to have been conveyed to it by Norway.

Government wins budget vote

The Government won the budget vote today after all the parliamentarians of the ruling coalition and its allies hunkered down to thwart a rumoured plot by Opposition parties to stage an upset. The budget was passed with 116 votes, which is the total strength of the People's Alliance and its partners, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), put together. Of the 109 Opposition MPs, 107 voted against. One was absent, while another Opposition member, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, is the Speaker.

Seized by panic at rumours that the Opposition United National Party (UNP), assisted by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), was attempting to defeat the Government at the vote, the President, Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike, held discussions on Tuesday with the SLMC and another difficult coalition member, the Ceylon Workers' Congress to enlist their support.

THE HINDU

APR 11 2001

Lanka set to declare partial truce

REUTERS

COLOMBO, April 10. - Sri Lanka is set to declare a ceasefire for the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, but has stopped short of meeting a rebel demand for a full truce before possible peace talks, a senior government official said today.

"There will be a cessation of all hostile military operations from 13 April midnight to 16 April midnight," said a senior government official.

The LTTE said in a statement on Saturday that the rebels would not take part in any peace talks unless the government lifts a ban on them and responds positively to a unilateral ceasefire.

The rebel stance has dampened hopes for early negotiations to end the ethnic conflict which has raged for 18 years.

The government said last week that a date for peace talks would be announced by the end of the month and confirmed it had eased an economic embargo on rebel-controlled areas, which was another demand of the rebels. However, Sri Lankan fighter jets attacked two rebel bases in northern Jaffna peninsula today.

"The pilots have confirmed the effective engagement of the targets," Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne said.

Meanwhile official sources said the LTTE's links with different terrorist groups in Central Asia and East European regions will henceforth be close-

SUICIDE BOMBERS

COLOMBO, April 10. - Two female suicide bombers trained at an LTTE camp, are presently in Colombo on their mission to assassinate VIPs, reports here said.

According to information given by a female Tiger suicide bomber, Nandani, to the police intelligence during interrogation, the two suicide bombers were among 27 Black Tigers, comprising 17 men and 10 women, who passed out recently after receiving training at an LTTE camp in Muttur in Eastern Trincomalee.

- UNI

ly monitored by Sri Lankan and Russian intelligence agencies under an agreement signed between the Lankan and the Russian police last week, UNI adds.

The LTTE has been noted for foreign links with different terrorist organisations for more than a decade.

The Tigers had links with the Tamil Nadu National Retrieval Force and trained 600 of its members. The LTTE also reportedly assigned about a dozen of its instructors to the Afghan Mujahideen guerrilla camps.

It has been revealed that an Assam-based terrorist group had also established training camps with LTTE assistance. The latter had provided the Assam group with mine technology training.

THE STATESMAN

11 APR 2001

Lanka lifts some curbs from LTTE-held areas

HT-11 8/4

Colombo, April 7

SRI LANKA has partially lifted an economic embargo on LTTE-held areas, conceding one of the main demands put forward by the guerrillas to enter Norwegian-backed peace talks.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian ambassador to Sri Lanka, Tomas Westborg, and Norwegian diplomat, Tomas Strangland, crossed Army front-lines and went across to Mallavi for talks with the LTTE.

The Voice of Tigers Radio said Westborg yesterday held a two-hour discussion with the LTTE political wing leader, Thamil Chelvam, and three others. They are to meet again today. But no mention was made whether Westborg will meet the LTTE supremo, Velupillai Pirabhakaran.

The latest Norwegian mission began talks after Colombo eased economic embargo on

Tiger-held areas in the north. Westborg's visit to Tiger territory comes in the wake of the Government removing over 25 commodities from a list of items banned from selling in LTTE-held areas.

The Norwegian ambassador was involved in talks with Pirabhakaran on November 1 with the special peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Erik Solheim.

Sri Lanka's foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, announced earlier this week that the Government is considering a "package of humanitarian measures" in line with an "agreement of understanding" to be reached with the Tigers.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, announced earlier this week that the Government was considering a "package of humanitarian measures" in line with an "agreement of understanding", ahead of talks, which would



Chandrika Kumaratunga

increase the flow of essential commodities to LTTE areas.

The minister said there was never an "embargo" on rebel-held areas. He blamed the rebels for taking away the supplies meant for civilians and thereby creating shortage of items.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

LTTE sets new pre-condition

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 7. Just when it seemed as if Norway's efforts to facilitate the peace talks in Sri Lanka were succeeding, the LTTE has suddenly hardened its position by declaring it will not participate in negotiations till the Government lifts the ban on it.

This latest pre-condition was conveyed to the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Jon Westborg, who visited LTTE-held northern Sri Lanka on Friday for discussions with its political wing leader, Mr. S. Tamilchelvam.

"We will not under any circumstances participate in the peace negotiations as an outlawed outfit," a statement from the LTTE today quoted Mr. Tamilchelvam as telling the Norwegian envoy.

The LTTE has also reiterated its other demand that the Government reciprocate its unilaterally declared ceasefire and described it as an "essential pre-condition" for talks, according to the statement seen on the Internet.

It also demanded that the Government lift the restrictions on fuel and cement for areas under its control. Mr. Tamilchelvam is said to have expressed dissatisfaction that the Government had termed a "memorandum of understanding" on confidence-building measures

between the two sides as an "agreement of understanding on humanitarian measures".

The statement described the talks between Mr. Westborg and the LTTE representative at Mallavi last evening as a "marathon six-hour discussion".

Mr. Westborg was accompanied by another official from the Norwegian embassy, Mr. Tomas Stangeland. On the LTTE side besides Mr. Tamilchelvam, there were three others identified as Mr. George, Mr. Thangan and Mr. Pulidevan. The Norwegians and the LTTE held another round of discussions lasting two hours this morning before the diplomats began their journey back to the Sri Lankan capital.

According to the statement, Mr. Tamilchelvam told Mr. Westborg that the Kumaratunga Government should "embrace" the LTTE as the "authentic representative" of the Tamil people, and to this end, lift the ban on it.

Sri Lanka proscribed the LTTE in 1988 after the separatist group carried out a bomb attack on the Dalada Maligawa, the country's most-revered Buddhist temple located in the central hill town of Kandy, and it would be almost politically impossible for the Government to lift the ban at this stage.

The demand for de-proscription was raised by the LTTE's London

representative, Mr. Anton Balasingham, a few months ago, but was not set down as a pre-condition by the LTTE leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, in his statement last November calling for negotiations.

Peace talks had seemed imminent with the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, telling Parliament last week that a date and venue for the negotiations would be announced by the end of April, and the lifting of Government restrictions on a range of items that could be taken across to LTTE-controlled areas.

Against this background, it was believed that Mr. Westborg was visiting the Vanni to tie up the details for peace talks, not to bring back fresh demands from the LTTE. Mr. Westborg has reportedly told the LTTE he will place its demands before the Sri Lankan Government. No official of the Norwegian Embassy was available for comment.

Frees 4 prisoners

The LTTE today released four persons who were in its custody through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

One of them was a soldier the LTTE had been holding since 1993, while the other three were civilian crew members from two merchant ships that it destroyed, a spokesperson for the ICRC said.

THE HINDU

- 8 APR 2001

Lanka eases curbs on rebel areas

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, April 6. - In a prelude to the peace talks, the Sri Lankan government has eased economic restrictions allowing transportation of essential goods and other day-to-day use items to the Tiger-controlled areas in the Wannu region.

A senior military official said the government had, on 24 March, issued the order of lifting of restrictions on 24 items of everyday use "with immediate effect"

The items include fruit juice packets, soap cubes, gelatin powder, coconut oil, photocopying paper, Bristol board, normal gum and agricultural equipment.

Restrictions on these items had been in existence since April 1995 when the peace talks, initiated in 1994, by the Kumaratunga government broke down.

Foreign minister Mr Laksham Kadirgamar, during an interview to the state-run *The Daily News*, had indicated that transportation of these articles to the Wannu region would start at any moment.

"This will be part of an agreement of understanding between the two parties, but will definitely not be a pre-condition," Mr Kadirgamar had emphasised. "In return, the LTTE will desist from carrying out attacks in Colombo," the minister had said.

Mr Kadirgamar had informed Parliament that the government would announce the schedule of time and venue of talks (with the LTTE) by April end.

'Plot' foiled

An alleged plot to assassinate Opposition leader Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe was revealed after a woman LTTE cadre told the police that she had been asked to meet a certain "Ranil" at a public meeting in central Anuradhapura.

Media reports, quoting senior police officials, said the alleged plot was revealed by a 15-year-old girl who was arrested from Trincomalee and brought to Colombo for questioning.

However, deputy defence minister Mr Anurudhha Ratwatte told Parliament yesterday that no evidence had been found of a plot against the life of the Opposition leader.

He said: "There was no basis to suspect that the leader of Opposition was a target," the minister said.

However, the government was willing to provide security to the leader on his trip to Anuradhapura, he assured the Opposition members.

United National Party sources said Mr Wickremesinghe's visit to Anuradhapura, scheduled for tomorrow, has been cancelled as a precautionary measure.

THE STATESMAN

A Sri Lankan Buddhist monk standing outside a shrine in Colombo on Wednesday.

Sri Lankan Govt. demolition of Buddha

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 4. The Sri Lankan Government was on Wednesday forced to defend itself from comparisons with the Afghan Taliban after the demolition of a Buddhist shrine at a busy traffic intersection in the capital sparked off angry street protests.

Defending the demolition, the Minister for Urban Development, Construction and Public Utilities, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, said only those parts of the temple that were unauthorised had been pulled down.

In a statement, Mr. Samaraweera said the idol of the Buddha and other religious material at the shrine were in safe custody and would soon be restored to the monks managing the temple.

Earlier in the day, several hundred Buddhists mobilised by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress staged a protest at the demolition site, shouting slogans comparing the Government to the Taliban, which last month destroyed two giant Buddha statues in Afghanistan.

The angry protestors ordered top politicians of the ruling party and opposition who arrived at the scene, to keep off.

The Government Information Director, Mr. Ariya Rubasinghe, told journalists that the comparison with the Taliban was unfair, and that the demolition had been undertaken in keeping with a plan for the beautification of the capital.

Navy denies sexual assault on women

Police and a human rights wing of the security forces have launched separate investigations into the alleged rape and sexual harassment of two women by the navy and police in north-western Sri Lan-

ka, but the navy

In a statement,

the allegations to be investigated.

It said the navy had arrested a man and a woman from a lodge in Mannar on March 19 and handed them over to the counter-subversive unit of the Mannar police.

"No naval personnel had assaulted or sexually harassed either the male or female suspects during the period when the suspects were under naval custody," it said.

The military spokesman, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne, said the human rights division of the security forces had begun a probe into the allegations, separately from a police investigation.

The alleged incident has sparked widespread protests in the Tamil community and demand for action against the culprits.

Security pact with Russia

Sri Lanka and Russia today signed an agreement to co-operate in combating drug trafficking, illegal immigration and financial crimes.

The agreement was signed by the Inspector-General of Sri Lanka Police, Mr. Lucky Kodituwakku, and the head of the visiting Russian delegation, Colonel Nikolai Patrushev.

Colonel Patrushev, a top-ranking intelligence officer, is the Director of Russia's Federal Security Service.

According to a statement from the Government, the agreement would also facilitate "greater co-operation in the exchange of expertise, resources and experience between the organisations with a view to develop and strengthen interaction at all levels of responsibilities".

THE HINDU

37 APR 2001

Chandrika Govt agrees to sign MoU with LTTE

H/C-11
374

P K Balachandran
Colombo, April 2

IN A major change of stand, the Sri Lankan Government has agreed to have a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the LTTE ahead of direct peace talks.

But Colombo asserts that the MoU cannot be seen as satisfying any precondition for beginning talks and that it is independent of peace talks. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told the state-owned *Daily News* in Paris that as part of the MoU, there would be an immediate increase in the supply of commercial goods to the LTTE-controlled areas of Wannai.

This will be part of the agreement of understanding between the two parties. But this will definitely not be a pre-condition for peace talks, "Mr Kadirgamar cautioned. The ltte has been wanting the government to lift the 'embargo' on consumer goods and medicines on wannai. It has been saying that this should be done to facilitate the start of peace talks. Kadirgamar rejected the ltte's assertion that there was an embargo and said that only some items of dual use (of civil-cum-military use) were banned. However, he admitted that there were shortages and delays. Now, the Government would increase

the entry points, reduce the bottlenecks and increase supplies, he said. And this might begin "any moment, he said. Political observers here see the Sri Lankan government's announcement not just as climbing down from a high horse but as a step towards peace talks. The LTTE should be pleased that the Government has eased and increased supplies to wannai at its instance.

Better supplies will enhance the LTTE's political position among the suffering people of wannai. The LTTE's other condition for holding talks on ceasefire is yet to be met, but an informal ceasefire cannot be ruled out. Now that it is under increasing international pressure, Colombo is likely to further reduce the intensity of its military operations.

It is significant that Kadirgamar should make the announcement on a MoU while in Paris. French President M Jacques Chirac had last week strongly urged the visiting Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga to begin talks with the ltte. With the British House of Lords voting for a ban on the LTTE, and with other western governments due to put severe curbs on it, the ltte is also under mounting international pressure to come for talks for a settlement within a united Sri Lanka.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 3 APR 2001

U.S. envoy's speech angers Sri Lankan Tamils

10-13
23/3

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 30. The U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Ashley Wills, has been branded anti-Tamil after a speech he made during a visit to Jaffna earlier this month, with the town Mayor joining the chorus of protests against him.

At the monthly Municipal Council meeting on Thursday, the Mayor, Mr. N. Raviraj, of the Tamil United Liberation Front, described Mr. Willis' speech as "irresponsible" and said it had angered Tamils, according to the Tamil Internet site, TamilNet. "We strongly condemn the U.S. Ambassador's speech that was made with a view to rejecting the principle of the Tamil people's homeland," the Mayor was quoted as saying.

In his speech, delivered to an invited audience on March 7, Mr. Wills reiterated his Government's position that a solution to the ethnic conflict had to be found within the framework of the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, and that an independent Eelam carved out of Sri Lankan territory was unacceptable to the U.S.

He said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam remained a terrorist organisation in the eyes

of his Government, and that the U.S. did not consider it the sole representative of the Tamil people, but because of its "military standing" was willing to accept that it would be involved in peace negotiations.

Though he also said Washington was for equal rights for Tamils, the speech provoked protests from the Tamil community as being 'patronising' and "dismissive" of Tamil aspirations, including the demand for self-determination and a homeland.

Backing for LTTE

The weekly *Tamil Guardian*, published from London, said in an editorial that Tamils living in the north, and all Tamil parties except the EDP had endorsed the LTTE's leadership.

It criticised the U.S. envoy for being "quite specific in what the Tamils cannot aspire to", but "less than keen to suggest a system that would guarantee them equal rights" and for arguing instead that it was a matter for the negotiators of the Sri Lankan government and the Tamils.

"...the Tamil reaction to his lecture is not quite what the U.S. Ambassador might have expected or hoped for. Anger has quickly superseded dismay in the Tamil north and east.

There is a growing sense that appealing to international humanitarian sentiment is futile; that the Tamils are only able to command attention for their plight because of their military potency. As a consequence, there is an increasing belief that strengthening this is the only practical means of advancing their political aspirations," the paper, known to be pro-LTTE, said.

Attempt to clarify

Later, Mr. Wills attempted to clarify that the U.S. had "great sympathy and respect" for the Tamil people and that it was quite aware of the discrimination and violence that the Tamils faced in Sri Lanka.

But he emphasised that their aspirations could be met only through negotiations that would give rise to a new political system guaranteeing equal rights, and reiterated that territorial exclusion on the basis of ethnicity was an "extreme" view.

The speech provoked protest from the other end of the political spectrum too, with the lone MP of the Sinhala right-wing Sihala Urumaya, Mr. Thilak Karunaratne, terming it an interference by the U.S. in the island's internal affairs.

LTTE to revive political wing to defeat ban

HT-4

29/3

PK Balachandran
Colombo, March 28

THE LTTE will revive its political wing — the People's Front of the Liberation Tigers (PFLT) — to enable it to beat the ban in the UK, Sri Lanka and other countries, and hold talks with the Sri Lankan Government, a Tamil source said yesterday.

The PFLT was formed in 1989 in Colombo during the Premadasa-LTTE honeymoon, with the ostensible purpose of joining Sri Lanka's political mainstream. But it was apparent even then that it was part of a narrow deal to get rid of a common enemy — the Indian Peace Keeping Force and reduce the 1987 Indo-Lankan

accord to a dead letter.

The PFLT was launched with a press conference addressed by Dr Anton Balasingham and Yogi. The LTTE's then Deputy Leader, G Mahendrarajah alias Mahaathya, a cousin of Pirabhakaran, was named the PFLT chief.

It was announced that every LTTE member would be a member of the PFLT also. The PFLT was formally registered as a political party by the Sri Lankan Commissioner of Elections.

Though the LTTE was banned after the blast in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy in 1998, the PFLT was spared and even today, it is a recognised political party in Sri Lanka and eligible to fight polls.

But the PFLT has not contest-

ed any elections so far. Predictably, within weeks of the IPKF's quitting the island in April 1990, peace talks with the Premadasa Government began floundering and the LTTE resumed hostilities in June. The PFLT became inactive, though it was never wound up. Its leader Mahaathya was executed for alleged links with RAW.

Chandrika in Paris: The Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is now in Paris to urge France to curb LTTE activities there. "Her visit is well-timed. We must make a common appeal to all European countries to take tough steps against the LTTE," the *Daily News* quoted a French diplomat as saying.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAR 2001

Lanka to build Bamiyan Buddha replicas

Colombo, March 25

SRI LANKA is set to build replicas of the Bamiyan Buddha statues that were destroyed by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, a Buddhist organisation said today.

The Sri Lanka Maha Bodhi Society said it was seeking public donations to build replicas of the two Bamiyan statues that dated back to more than 1,500 years.

The Maha Bodhi Society is an organisation that provides funding for the upkeep of historic Buddhist sites in India. The statues will be built at the Society's premises in Colombo.

Sri Lanka, the seat of Theravada Buddhism, had earlier offered to finance an international operation to save the two statues, which were destroyed by the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan this month. Later, the Government offered to buy the rubble and any remains of the statues.

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake and foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar made separate visits to Pakistan in a bid to pressure the Taliban to spare the priceless statues.

Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, ordered all statues in Afghanistan to be destroyed to stop idolatry, regardless of their historical importance.

AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAR 2001

LTTE extends ceasefire till April 24

10-14

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 22. The LTTE announced today that it would extend its unilateral ceasefire by one more month till April 24, but threatened to terminate the truce if the Sri Lankan government continued with military offensives. With this, the ceasefire will enter its fourth month. Initially, the LTTE declared a ceasefire last Christmas eve, and has extended it three times so far on a monthly basis.

Unlike on the earlier extensions, this time the LTTE made no appeal to the international community to "persuade" Sri Lanka to re-probate the truce. Instead, it made a bitter reference to the "foreign policy determinations" of powerful nations that had "criminalised" the LTTE and "encouraged" the hardline "militaristic approach" of the Sri Lankan Government towards the ethnic conflict.

The LTTE statement announcing the extension said it had been "rigidly" observing the truce for the last three months, "in spite of provocative military operations" by the security forces and "derogatory and dismissive remarks" by the Government.

The LTTE said it had registered its "strongest protest" to the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, through the Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, over the aerial bombardment of "Tamil civilian areas".

"In this context we wish to warn the Sri Lankan Government that we reserve the right to terminate our self-imposed truce if it refuses

to de-escalate the war and continue with its armed offensive operations including air strikes," the LTTE said.

So far, LTTE statements have been issued by its London offices, but reflecting one of the immediate consequences of the British ban on the group, today's press release did not bear its U.K. address. Instead, the statement was marked "International Secretariat, Vanni, Tamil Eelam". Vanni is mainland northern Sri Lanka, which is under LTTE control.

As in the two earlier extensions, this time too, the LTTE said its decision was "to provide further time and space for the Norwegian facilitatory efforts to bring the parties in conflict to the negotiating table".

Air Force destroys LTTE base

Amidst conflicting claims over Wednesday's battle at sea, the Sri Lankan Air Force said its bombers destroyed an LTTE base in the eastern district of Batticaloa today.

The sudden escalation in the fighting came against the backdrop of efforts by Norway to resume peace talks. Reports from Belgium said the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Mr. Thorbjorn Jagland, and the special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, called on the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, in Brussels on Tuesday. Ms. Kumaratunga is on a tour of Europe.

According to a Government statement, Air Force bombers raided the so-called Beirut Base of the LTTE located in thick jungles approximately 35 km west of Batticaloa town

early this morning. Quoting Air Force sources, it said the base was destroyed and "heavy casualties" were inflicted on the LTTE.

The base had been in existence since 1990 and was believed to be the nerve centre of LTTE operations in eastern Sri Lanka. It was said to be the main training centre for fresh recruits from the region. The bombing came 24 hours after the LTTE sank a Navy Dvora fast attack craft in Sri Lanka's north-eastern waters. The LTTE clandestine radio Voice of Tigers (VoT) said they also sank another gunboat after stripping it of its arms.

The radio, quoted by the internet site *TamilNet*, claimed that the LTTE had taken away a 23 mm cannon, a 20 mm cannon, two 40mm grenade launchers, two heavy machine guns and other arms and ammunition from the second Dvora before sinking it.

It said four Sea Tiger cadres were killed in the fighting, but the military said the interception of LTTE radio transmissions had revealed that 15 cadres were killed and the same number wounded.

The military said it was the Sea Tigers who attacked the naval patrol. The Defence Ministry yesterday said it had lost one Dvora and six men, classified as missing. A search operation for the missing is said to be continuing.

The LTTE radio also claimed that four civilians were killed and 11 wounded in an attack mounted by the Air Force and the Navy on the Mullaithivu coast on Wednesday, hours after the fighting at sea.

THE HINDU

23 MAR 2001

Erik Solheim bets on peace

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 24. Mr. Erik Solheim, Norwegian special envoy who has been trying to bring the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE to the negotiating table, said reports that New Delhi had recently told the Sri Lankan Government that Norway should restrict itself to a facilitatory role, and not become a mediator, were "untrue". He pointed out that Norway was assisting Sri Lanka "because we are asked to do so by the sovereign Government of that country and by the LTTE."

Questions have been raised in Sri Lanka about Norway's role after peace talks begin. Mr. Solheim, speaking to *The Hindu* from Oslo, said that would be decided by those who are party to the conflict. "We will assist to the extent that the Government and the LTTE find useful. We will never do more. We will try not to disappoint anyone by doing less. We are not in any business of peace enforcement, only offering our services as long as the parties so wish," he



said. The special envoy said there was "room for optimism" that the peace initiative was headed in the right direction, but cautioned that the process was "fragile and vulnerable".

Mr. Solheim said the aspects of the process that gave hope were the clear indications by the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, that she stood for a negotiated settlement and was ready for peace talks, and the LTTE ceasefire because of which there had been no attacks in southern Sri Lanka since his meeting with Mr.

Velupillai Prabhakaran last November.

"The LTTE has also refrained from making the demand that there should be a withdrawal of troops from the Jaffna peninsula as a precondition for talks." But, he said, there was lack of trust between the two sides. Plus, the situation on the ground was "tense, and therefore fragile".

Norway was working towards building confidence between the two sides, but in the spirit of confidentiality with which Oslo has approached its mission in Sri Lanka, Mr. Solheim refused to say what measures to this end were being discussed. He declined comment on the LTTE's recent renewal of the truce or its threat to terminate it if the Government did not reciprocate, saying the Norwegian duty was to find common ground between the LTTE and the Government, and not to dwell on issues on which there were differences between them.

On the recent military confrontations between the two sides, he

said, "Any developments in the battlefield to us are reasons to speed up the peace process, to reduce future suffering". Mr. Solheim said he could not make any predictions on when peace talks would commence but said considering the loss of life and property, and the money spent on the war, "we should do whatever possible to avoid wasting time".

He clarified that Norway had kept out of the whole issue of the ban on the LTTE in the U.K. and had not given any advice on it to the British Government.

To a question on whether the ban would affect the functioning of Mr. Anton Balasingham, who lives in London and is the chief negotiator for the LTTE: "I think it is in everybody's interest that Anton Balasingham is able to function somewhere. Mr. Balasingham is an important actor in what we all hope and pray for, a peaceful settlement. It is well-known that he is the chief negotiator of the LTTE, and it is essential that he can function in that capacity."

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2001

Draft Constitution not to cramp talks with LTTE

Colombo, March 17

SRI LANKA is willing to discuss any issue that the LTTE may raise in future direct talks and will not be bound by the draft Constitution that it unsuccessfully presented to Parliament last August, Constitutional Affairs Minister G L Peiris has said.

"The Government is ready to reconsider its offer made in the draft Constitution, if such a demand is made by the LTTE when negotiations begin," Peiris told the foreign correspondents association here last night.

"The underlying principles and the spirit of the draft are more important than the text, and the negotiations would be of any use only if the Government is open to more suggestions," he said.

Peiris was responding to a question on the LTTE rejecting the political package of devolution of powers envisaged in the draft and instead, insisting that due recognition for Tamil language, the concept of a Tamil homeland and right to self-determination should be the basis for talks. The main Opposition United National Party had opposed the Government's move on August 3, 2000, to rush the draft Constitution through Parliament.

UNP MP Tyrone Fernando, who was also present at last

night's interaction, said his party had not disagreed with the substance of the draft, but was against pushing through a Constitution without the involvement of the LTTE. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, in her Independence Day address last month, had underscored the importance she attached to devolution of power as envisaged in the draft Constitution.

Peiris said the draft went far beyond any other peace proposal in the past and reflected the Government's political will to solve the problem. On the Government's war against the LTTE, he said that its aim was to contain its attack capability and force it to come to the negotiating table, adding the government disfavoured a military solution.

He was optimistic that the ongoing Norway-backed peace process was bound to succeed, and any cynicism or pessimism based on past experience of failed negotiations with the rebels was needless at this juncture.

Peiris said there were three factors that gave reasons for hope, the political will of this government, the presence of a skillful third party facilitator, and the conducive international situation. He paid tributes to Norway's negotiating acumen and persistence, and sought to remind sceptics that the last round of direct talks with the LTTE in 1995 had taken place without the presence of a third party. Peiris also noted with satisfaction the transformation in the attitude of hardliners within the Sri Lankan polity, saying "perceptions and attitudes to the problem are changing".

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's leading Tamil moderate political party has asked Britain to lift the ban on the LTTE as soon as direct negotiations between the Government and the rebels commence.

"It will be opportune for the United Kingdom Government to take steps to de-proscribe the LTTE on the commencement of negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government", a delegation from the Tamil United Liberation Front told British High Commissioner in Colombo Linda Duffield on Thursday.

"Such a step will be a recognition of the serious commitment of the LTTE in the process of negotiations", a TULF statement said here. TULF secretary general R Sampanthan said Duffield had conveyed to them the circumstances in which Britain's anti-terrorism law was applied to the LTTE, adding she had also reiterated Britain's support to the Oslo-facilitated peace process and willingness to use its influence to get the parties to initiate talks.

PTI

Norway envoy to meet LTTE chief

Colombo, March 18: Norway's peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Erik Solheim, will meet the LTTE supremo V Prabhakaran in next few days to clear the way for possible talks to end ethnic conflict in the island, a state-owned newspaper said on Sunday.

Mr Solheim would return to Colombo in the next few days and proceed to the Vanni to hold talks with Prabhakaran, the *Sunday Observer* said, quoting diplomatic sources.

However, a Norwegian embassy spokesman said Mr Solheim did not have any plans at present to come to Sri Lanka. The Norwegian special envoy was in India last Thursday to brief external affairs minister Jaswant Singh on the progress made in Sri Lanka's tenuous peace process.

If the meeting materialises, it would be Mr Solheim's second personal meeting with Prabhakaran after his path-breaking interaction on November 1, 2000.

The talks gave a fillip to the peace process and has now resulted in a prolonged interlocution involving Colombo, London, Oslo and New Delhi. During his visit, Mr Solheim is expected to convey to the Sri Lankan government the understanding, if any, reached with the LTTE on how to carry forward the peace process.

S. K. K. K.
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19/3
The newspaper, quoting political sources, claimed that the government was keen that Prabhakaran should personally participate in at least one round of negotiations, if direct talks began at some stage.

This crucial round of talks could be held at the Madhu church in Mannar district in northern Sri Lanka, it said. The state-owned daily also mentioned a draft "memorandum of understanding" prepared by Norway containing a preliminary agreement prior to direct talks.

Sri Lanka officially denies the existence of any draft MOU. Under this preliminary pact, the government

Lanka offers to buy debris

Colombo, March 18: Sri Lanka will offer to buy the debris of giant statues of Buddha destroyed by Afghanistan's Taliban regime and reconstruct them in the island nation, a report said on Sunday. President Chandrika Kumaratunga will make the proposal when she returns from her European tour, her adviser Lakshman Jayakody said. (AP)

should agree to lift its 'economic embargo' on the north in exchange for a promise by the rebels to refrain from all attacks on military, economic and civilian targets in the south. The government denies the existence of any economic embargo on the north, but only acknowledges restrictions on the quantity and nature of the commodities it would allow to be transported. Meanwhile, government agents — heads of district administration in five districts of the north have said that there was an enormous shortage of food and essential drugs in the region, considerably affecting standard of living and health services. (PTI)

LTTE shifts out of London after UK ban

Colombo, March 18: The LTTE has shifted its "international secretariat" in London to a secret location in Sri Lanka's northern Vanni region after being banned under new laws in Britain, an independent newspaper reported on Sunday.

The shifting out of London came in the wake of Britain designating the LTTE a foreign terrorist organisation last month, the *Sunday Leader* said. "Realising that a clampdown is inevitable after the proscription came into force, the Tigers have pre-empted unnecessary friction with the British authorities by shifting the secretariat to Vanni," the leader said quoting informed sources.

The ban would come into effect as soon as the House of Lords approves it. (PTI)

THE ASIAN AGE

19 MAR 2001

Lanka seeks European support to ban LTTE

BERLIN: Sri Lanka on Thursday urged Germany and other West European nations to follow Britain's example in banning the LTTE, asserting they should send a strong message that "politics of terror" was not welcome from their soil.



C. Kumaratunga

"The Western countries can lend their support to Sri Lanka in a big way by not permitting the enemies of our country to exploit and abuse the freedom they get abroad," Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga said on the first leg of her three-nation West European tour here. During talks with German leaders and interaction with the business community, Ms Kumaratunga said Sri Lanka will leave no stone unturned to bring peace in the island nation.

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said after summit talks with Ms Kumaratunga, that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and LTTE's activities were a "major issue" at the parleys. But, Mr Schroeder skirted a issue on whether Germany would announce any ban on the LTTE's activities saying these are topics not for "public debate" as they had the potential of making those forces whom we have to "counteract" more aware of what is being thought of. Mr Schroeder, however, agreed that all efforts must be undertaken to fight international terrorism, "wherever it crops up". Germany backs all efforts made by Sri Lanka in combating terrorist activities, he added.

Mr Kumaratunga told the German leaders, including President Johannes Rau, that there is a lot of "optimism" in Lanka that some peace talks between the government and the rebel Tamil Tigers could take place within this year. (PTI)

Rajiv murder suspect hiding in Sweden?

STOCKHOLM: Indian police suspect a person living in Sweden of involvement in the 1991 murder of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and have asked the Swedish police to help their investigation, the Swedish daily *Expressen* reported on Thursday.

The newspaper said an Indian court sent a request for "international legal assistance" to the Swedish justice ministry in February. The Swedish ministry then forwarded the request to the prosecutor's office. Deputy chief prosecutor Kerstin Skarp confirmed that Swedish authorities had received a request for help, but would provide no other details.

"I can't say what it concerns. They want us to take certain proceedings," she said, adding that the request was "still being examined."

According to *Expressen*, the Indian police have asked Sweden to gather information and "conduct several interrogations". (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 MAR 2001

15 MAR 2001

Lankan govt. asks LTTE to announce date for talks

COLOMBO: The peace process in Sri Lanka appears to be gaining momentum with the government asking the LTTE to announce the date for commencement of talks.

"We are waiting for the LTTE to give us the date when peace talks can commence, to prepare the programme and move further in the peace initiative," agriculture minister D.M. Jayaratne said in Parliament on Monday.

He said that the government was ready for talks but was wary of setting the timetable and added that it wanted the rebels to fix the date.

Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim, currently shuttling between Colombo and London in a bid to get the two sides to the negotiating table, is expected to return to Sri Lanka soon with the LTTE's response.

Tamil United Liberation Front member Joseph Pararajasingham said the LTTE was genuine in its peace offer and ceasefire announcement.

He, however, added that it was indicative of a change in LTTE's stance due to battle fatigue or military weakness.

Meanwhile in Colombo, the Sri Lankan police on Tuesday arrested four suspected LTTE cadres from a hideout which was possibly used by the rebels to plot assassinations, including an attempt on President Chandrika Kumaratunga's life.

Police said they had dug out three jackets of the sort used by the rebel suicide bombers, 10 kgs of powerful explosives, detonators and bombs from the "tiger den" in Colombo's Dehiwala district.

The hideout was possibly used by the rebels to plot the killings of TULF leader Neelam Thiruchelvam, industries minister C.V. Gooneratne and the Town Hall blast in December 1999 in which Ms Kumaratunga was injured, they said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 MAR 2001

LTTE willing to extend ceasefire

Colombo, March 11

LTTE HAS expressed willingness to extend its unilateral ceasefire by another month after March 24 and open negotiations with the Sri Lankan Government, a State-owned newspaper reported today.

This was conveyed by LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham in London recently to Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim who is engaged in shuttle diplomacy between London and Colombo.

Solheim is expected to return to Sri Lanka shortly to continue the process, the Sunday Observer said. The LTTE announced a unilateral ceasefire on December 24 and has been extending it every month, but the Sri Lankan Government has not responded to it, calling it a ploy to gain international sympathy.

Meanwhile, another newspaper reported that Sri Lanka is set to jettison a draft of preliminary understanding prepared by Norway to facilitate de-escalation of hostilities ahead of possible peace talks between the Government and the LTTE.

Instead of agreeing to Norway's draft that envisages lifting of an alleged economic embargo on LTTE-controlled territory in the country's north and east, the Government would allow more essential items to be transported to the region on its own, the Sunday Leader said.

The Government does not acknowledge the existence of an economic embargo and, therefore, cannot accept a memorandum of understanding that contemplates lifting the ban in exchange for the LTTE announcing a moratorium on attacks in

Colombo and rest of the country's Sinhalese-majority south, the report said.

Chandrika Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar have denied the existence of any MoU, but acknowledged that talks were on through Solheim or some sort of preliminary understanding prior to talks that may get underway in a couple of months.

Meanwhile, LTTE has decided not to allow another personal meeting between Solheim and its Supremo V Prabhakaran, unless the Government announced a formal ceasefire in response to their own unilateral ceasefire that is into its third month now, the report said.

Solheim's meeting with Prabhakaran in the latter's well-guarded operational headquarters

in Vanni in November kicked started a peace process to which Norway had been invited as a facilitator by Sri Lanka.

The reason for not allowing another personal meeting, the report said, was the alleged attempt by the army to ambush LTTE's political wing leader Tamilchelvan last month after a rebel delegation held talks with an inter-faith peace group.

The incident, confirmed by bishops who had joined the peace initiative, happened while LTTE men were returning to their base after the discussions with the peace group at Madhu in Mannar district, but there were no casualties. LTTE, however, was circumspect about arranging any such meeting in future without a formal ceasefire, the report added.

PTI

410-14 / Sri Lanka increases Defence allocation 197

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 9. Sri Lanka's budget for 2001 has been dictated by the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, with the Government raising its defence levy by one per cent and placing a 20 per cent surcharge on corporate income tax in an effort to balance its increasing defence expenditure.

The allocation for defence in this year's budget is Rs. 75 billion, approximately \$882 million, and Rs. 12 billion more than the projected estimate.

Presenting the budget before Parliament on Thursday, the Deputy Finance Minister, Mr. G. L. Peiris, asked the people to tighten their belts and promised relief after six months, but the opposition United National Party criticised the budget for not containing any concessions for the middle and poor classes who were already hard hit by the high cost of living.

The Government hopes to mop

up Rs. 6,100 million from the increase in the national defence levy from 6.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent. This is the second increase in the levy in less than a year. Last year, it was increased by one per cent from 5.5 per cent during the escalation of the war against the LTTE, during which the Government made emergency purchases of arms.

An additional revenue of Rs. 2,600 million is envisaged from the corporate tax surcharge, but Sri Lanka's tiny corporate sector predicted that this would put a dampner on growth. The Government also hiked the annual levy on casinos from Rs. 1 million to Rs. 25 million, and from Rs. 100,000 to Rs. 1 million on betting centres where punters flock to place their money on races abroad. There are no races in Sri Lanka.

Resident visa charges and the airport embarkation tax have also been hiked steeply in the desperate search for additional revenue.

Austerity measures to save valuable foreign exchange have finally forced the Government to freeze the duty-free vehicle import perk for parliamentarians, members of local Government and public servants.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said the budget proved that the war had to be brought to an end quickly. "I think the majority community has to realise that a negotiated settlement is essential to end the problem," said Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, TULF parliamentarian.

The lone MP of the right-wing Sihala Urumaya, Mr. Thilak Karunaratne, said his party stood for a military solution to the conflict and would therefore not oppose the high allocation for defence but would bring attention to the corruption and wastage in the military.

Mr. Peiris said the Government's aim was to bring down last year's 9.8 per cent deficit to 8.5 per cent this year.

REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA
10 MAR 2001
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...the government's action.

Lanka, LTTE gap narrowing: Norwegian envoy

BY DILIP GANGULY

Colombo, March 6: The differences between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels over holding peace talks are narrowing, an envoy said, raising hopes that the sides may meet soon after a gap of five years.

"The way things are going, I feel that gaps are indeed narrowing," Mr Erik Solheim told the Associated Press before leaving Sri Lanka late on Monday.

"In a situation like this you can't have an 'I do or I don't' answer. But I feel that in the coming months, the two will be thinking

seriously about a meeting," Mr. Solheim said.

Mr Solheim met with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, top Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party, constitutional affairs minister G.L. Peris and Indian high commissioner Gopalrishna Gandhi on Monday. Mr Solheim left for London, where he was expected to meet chief rebel negotiator Anton Balasingham.

The rebels' international headquarters is in London.

Mr Solheim declined to give a time for any talks between the government and the Liber-

ation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who have been fighting since 1983 for a homeland for the Tamils in the country's north and east. They say Tamils face discrimination by the majority Sinhalese.

While the Tigers want a truce before resuming peace talks, the government says it will consider a cease-fire only if negotiations show progress toward ending the war that has killed more than 65,000 people.

Mr Solheim has been trying for more than a year to bring the sides back to the table. The last peace talks were held in 1995, a year after Ms Kumaratunga's peoples alliance coalition came to power.

The rebels demanded separation, but the government refused, offering greater autonomy to areas where Tamils were in the majority.

Mr Solheim appeared to be in constant touch with people during his visit.

He broke off his dinner at least five times in an hour on Monday night to take calls on his mobile phone at a Colombo hotel.

A spokesman for the Norwegian embassy called the envoy's talk with the President useful.

"The meeting was constructive, and we hope to bring the two parties together," spokesman Tomas Stangeland said. (AP)

Norway resumes Lanka peace bid

Colombo, March 4

NORWAY'S SPECIAL envoy Erik Solheim arrived here today to revive the wobbly peace process in Sri Lanka following the British ban on the island's Tamil Tiger guerrillas, diplomats said.

The Norwegian embassy here said Solheim was due to hold talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and other leaders, but declined to say how long he would remain in Sri Lanka on his latest mission.

Solheim arrives here four days after the British Government outlawed Sri Lanka's separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a "terrorist organisation."

The LTTE's London-based ideologue, Anton Balasingham, had earlier warned that they would pull out of the peace process if they were banned by Britain, but later climbed down saying they would support Norway's initiative.

The British Government in a statement that followed Wednes-

day's ban on the LTTE said that London hoped that both parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka would remain committed to a negotiated settlement.

Kumaratunga late last month raised hopes of early negotiations between her Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, saying there could be talks in about two months.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been observing a unilateral ceasefire since Christmas and had extended it till March 24 and asked the international community to pressure Colombo to reciprocate.

However, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said Friday that the truce was a Tiger ploy and the Government would not agree to a ceasefire until substantive talks had commenced.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in the island's drawn out Tamil separatist conflict led by the LTTE which is fighting for an independent homeland in the island's northeast.

AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 MAR 2001

British ban will hamper peace: LTTE

BY DILIP GANGULY

Colombo, March 1: The Air Force attacked Tamil rebel bases on Thursday, hours after Britain classified the separatist group fighting for a Tamil homeland as terrorists.

The MiG-27 and Israeli-built Kfir jets bombed rebel positions in the Jaffna peninsula, a stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the north.

"The morale of our forces is very high and our Air Force is bombing terrorist targets," defence ministry spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne told the Associated Press. He declined to say whether the fresh bombing was linked to the British decision to ban 21 radical groups, including the LTTE.

"Now is the time to hit the terrorists as

much as we could... I can tell you the air raids are big," Mr Karunaratne said, but did not give details. The bombers apparently targeted rebel ammunition depots and camps that dot the Vanni jungles close to the peninsula.

Meanwhile, the rebels reacted sharply to the British decision, saying the move would hurt a Norwegian-backed peace plan for Sri Lanka aimed at ending this small island nation's 17-year civil war.

"It is a sad day for the Anglo-Tamil relations," rebel chief negotiator Anton Balasingham said in a statement on the rebels' web site.

"The (ban) will adversely affect the Tamil interests and severely undermine the current peace initiatives. Furthermore, the British decision will encourage the repressive Sri

Lankan regime to be more uncompromising, intransigent and to adopt a military path of state violence, terrorism and war," the statement said.

The rebels have their international headquarters in London and the ban could seriously affect their fund-raising capabilities. The rebels are already banned in the United States and India.

The anti-terrorist legislation would empower the British government to ban groups that commit violence abroad and crack down on supporters who channel funds and recruits to terrorist organisations. The ban still requires Parliament's approval.

"The British decision-makers have paid scant regard to the lengthy and complex history of the Tamil political struggle, the ugly history of the genocidal mode of state

repression and the glorious history of armed resistance against repression and gross violations of human rights," Mr Balasingham said.

The rebels call themselves freedom fighters and say Tamils, who comprise 3.2 million of Sri Lanka's 18.6 million people, can only prosper without domination by the 14 million Sinhalese. More than 63,000 people have been killed in the ethnic conflict since 1983.

The government has blamed the LTTE for several bombings in Colombo, including a failed attempt to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga last year.

Norway has been trying to broker peace, but has yet to get the two parties together. On the Net: rebel home page: www.Eelamweb.Com. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

2 MAR 2001

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Sinhala hardliners favour war

S. Linn

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 1. Hardline Sinhala opinion today called on the Sri Lankan state to seize the opportunity provided by the British ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, to break off the peace process, but moderates said the onus was now on the Government to demonstrate its seriousness in finding a political solution to the conflict.

"We commend the British Government for its action. But our efforts will not stop at this. We call on the Sri Lankan Government to call off peace talks with the LTTE immediately and defeat it militarily," said Mr. Thilak Karunaratne of the right-wing Sinhala Urumaya. The party would launch a campaign for the LTTE to be banned in Canada, Norway, South Africa and all the European Union countries, the parliamentarian said.

Condemning Norway for being partisan towards the LTTE, he said it had no role to play in resolution of the conflict. The grievances of the Tamil people, "if any", could be resolved after the LTTE had been crushed.

Hours after the British decision was announced, Sri Lankan Air Force bombers pounded a LTTE

base in Iyakachchi, four km. north of Elephant Pass at day-break today.

Warning sounded

Striking a note of caution, Mr. R. Sampanthan, secretary-general of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), said the Government had got what it wanted from the British, and it had to demonstrate "by word and deed" that it was serious about negotiations to find a "just and honourable" solution. "I hope nobody will gloat over the ban. From the point of view of the main issue, this is not important. What is important is that the Government should now seriously think in terms of taking the peace process forward."

The Government today announced that the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, would fly to London at the weekend to thank the British Government for including the LTTE in the list of organisations recommended for proscription under a new anti-terrorism law.

On the planned visit, Mr. Sampanthan said: "Eventually he has to come back to Sri Lanka and the conflict has to be resolved here."

The main opposition United National Party also called on the

Government to "redouble its efforts" towards peace through negotiations "with all parties concerned". "Now the responsibility falls fairly and squarely on the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, to bring the war to an end and establish peace within the framework of a united Sri Lanka," the UNP chief whip, Mr. Tyrone Fernando, said in a statement.

LTTE turnaround?

On Tuesday the LTTE said it would remain in the peace process despite the British ban. Earlier, the group's London representative, Mr. Anton Balasingham, had warned that such a move would "scuttle" the Oslo initiative.

Observers said the LTTE's decision to remain engaged in the process may have been brought about by a recognition that its over-emphasis on military and terror tactics over the last 17 years have not yielded any dividend. "It is beginning to read the writing on the wall that the international community is not going to anymore accept its role as a protagonist in this conflict unless it shifts its emphasis to the political," said Mr. P. Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a private think-tank here.

Events since the Prabhakara Solheim meeting, including the LTTE leader's call for talks, and the unilateral cease-fire declared by the group, showed it was beginning to accept this reality. The military weakening of the LTTE could also be a factor in its acceptance of the inevitability of the political process.

According to government estimates, over 2,000 LTTE cadre had been killed last year in battle around the Elephant Pass and in the Jaffna peninsula. Even before that, the cracks in the LTTE's military prowess had been exposed when it failed to complete its rolling offensive into the Jaffna peninsula. Since then, though not completely defeated, it has not launched any offensives and rapidly given back land to the Army.

But, warned Mr. Saravanamuttu, it would be unwise to go on this alone, as the LTTE had in the past demonstrated its ability to bounce back. "Yes, the Tigers are operating under constraints. However, this should not be translated to mean that they are on their knees. Rather, it should reinforce the urgency for talks. The LTTE is a symptom of the conflict, not the cause. The ban (by the U.K.) should be seen in this context."

FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2001

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FOR PEACE IN SRI LANKA 213

THE LONG ARM of the laws of major powers seems to be finally tightening its grip over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The latest move by the British Government to proscribe Sri Lanka's notoriously ruthless separatist group is a salutary step on the world stage. It is in harmony with the evolving ethos of the global community whose determination to combat international terrorism is often trifled with by the votaries of violence. The Labour Government's move to ban the LTTE under a new domestic legislation, designed to curb terrorism at home and abroad, might not have had its original impulse in the distinctive circumstances in which India and the U.S., in that order, earlier took a dim legal view of this outfit. But, despite having virtually become a byword for strategic terror in the political domain of Sri Lanka and its immediate neighbourhood, the LTTE had so far managed to exploit the grey areas of the law in several 'hospitable' countries, including Britain. Colombo, on its part, had also stepped up its international campaign against the terror tactics of the LTTE, particularly its suicide-bombing streak in recent years. The main objective was to try and dislodge the LTTE from its 'sanctuary' in the U.K. so that the organisation's suspected activities of raising funds and acquiring arms could be seriously curbed.

By recognising that the LTTE (among a host of other organisations) should be disabled to operate from Britain, Whitehall has made clear its abhorrence of terrorist activities that might not directly affect its own interests at home. However, it is just as well that London's action will not impinge, one way or the other,

on Colombo's current evaluation of the prospects of engaging the LTTE diplomatically with the help of Norway as the facilitator. An obvious question will be whether the LTTE would now like to shift its main centre of international publicity to Norway from London. But it is a moot issue, given the current willingness of Colombo for a fresh dialogue with the LTTE in a context of suitable safeguards against its proven proclivity for insincerity and even callous cruelty. The Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga's latest talks in New Delhi with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, have manifestly brought out Colombo's dilemmas regarding a final settlement of its ethnic problem.

Ms. Kumaratunga's studied diplomacy of bilateral exchanges with India encompasses the sensitive issue of how far Norway may be able to facilitate talks between Colombo and the LTTE in the quest for a settlement between them regarding a rightful place for Sri Lanka's minority Tamils. The point is not that Colombo's existential compulsions of geopolitics can only induce it to take India into confidence on every facet of Norway's increasing role as a facilitator. Ms. Kumaratunga indeed appears to have gone beyond the fine logic of diplomacy in seeking to keep India informed at every stage of the Norwegian intercession, although New Delhi certainly has no power of veto in this regard. The current indications augur well for further interactions between Colombo and New Delhi on this aspect, and it is in their mutual interest to try and harmonise their perceptions over how to reconcile the imperative of vesting the peace process with durability and the wider interests of security in the region.

THE HINDU

MAR 2001

Sri Lanka rallies support for saving Buddha statues

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 28. Sri Lanka today said it had begun rallying support to safeguard the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan which face the threat of being destroyed by the Taliban following an order by its leader to tear down all statues in the country.

According to a statement, Sri Lanka will chalk out a joint strategy with the Governments of Buddhist countries like Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and also India and Nepal to prevent the destruction of the statues of Buddha that are said to date back to 2nd century A. D.

The Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, had instructed Sri Lanka's Envoys to these countries to hold "urgent consultations" with the Governments there "in order to work out a common strategy to safeguard these ancient statues", the release said.

Sri Lanka will also approach Islamic countries for assistance in preventing the destruction of the two statues.

Mr. Kadirgamar today spoke to his Pakistani counterpart, Mr. Abdus Sattar, about the threat to the statues. Mr. Sattar promised that his Government would do its "utmost" to safeguard them.

"The Foreign Minister also instructed the Ambassador in Paris to contact UNESCO and urge immediate preventive action," it said.

The statues are declared UNESCO world heritage monuments. Their destruction seems imminent after an order by the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, for the destruction of all statues in Afghanistan.

Sri Lanka, where the majority of the people follow Buddhism, has expressed concern at the development.

The two statues, which at 178 feet and 125 feet respectively, are believed to be the tallest of the

Buddha anywhere in the world.

"They should realise the value of these statues, and we hope they will not destroy it," Mr. Ariya Rubasinghe, media director to the President, said

One of the statues was partially damaged in the fighting in Afghanistan in 1997. At that time too, Mr. Kadirgamar played a key role in persuading the Taliban not to destroy the statues completely.

Bamiyan is located in central Afghanistan, 110 kms north-west of Kabul, and was known to be a centre of Buddhism up to around the 9th century.

Chandrika pledges eye

By Our Special Correspondent

COLOMBO, FEB. 28. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, who lost an eye in an attempt on her life by the LTTE in 1999, pledged her other eye at a cornea donation drive today along with thousands of other women.

The donation campaign was launched today by the mothers of soldiers in the Sri Lankan Army.

IAF copter with six missing

ITANAGAR, FEB. 28. An Indian Air Force helicopter with six crew members, including two pilots, has been missing since Monday afternoon, the Deputy Commissioner of Lower Subansiri district, Mr. Keshav Chandra, told PTI over phone from Ziro, district headquarters, today.

The helicopter dropped ration at Tali in the remote area at 3.15 p.m. and went missing within 15 minutes.

A round-the-clock search operation, involving police and Assam Rifles jawans besides local residents, was continuing. No wreckage was found so far.

THE HINDU

9 MAR 2001

Sri Lanka Minister leads march for U.K. ban on LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

10-13

COLOMBO, FEB. 27. Hundreds of demonstrators led by a Government Minister today marched to the British High Commission here demanding that the U.K. ban the LTTE under its new anti-terrorism law. The Deputy Minister for Social Services, Mr. Mervyn Silva, led the demonstrators who handed over a memorandum demanding ban at the High Commission.

The law came into effect on February 19, and it was widely expected in Sri Lanka that the British Government would on that day announce a list of organisations outlawed under the legislation. That did not happen, but it is evident that the Government intends to keep up the pressure on the British to take action against the LTTE.

The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has said that a ban on the LTTE would in no way affect the Norwegian-facilitated peace process. Instead, a turning of the screws on the LTTE by the international community would hasten talks. Earlier this month, the LTTE's London representative, Mr. Anton Balasingham, had said a ban would jeopardise the peace process. Speaking to journalists at the demonstration, Mr. Silva attacked the Opposition United National Party (UNP) for not supporting the Government on the issue.

THE HINDU

28 FEB 2001

Lanka is set for talks with LTTE

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is set for talks with Tiger rebels as the European Union backed Norway's attempts to broker an end to the island's separatist war, officials and diplomatic sources said on Sunday.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga raised the possibility of talks with LTTE during her visit last week to India, officials here said.

They quoted Ms Kumaratunga as having said in an interview with the CNN in New Delhi that the two sides could probably meet in two months as the Tigers had asked for time to implement certain conditions.

Diplomatic sources here said despite Sri Lanka's refusal to reciprocate a unilateral truce called by the Tamil Tiger rebels, Norway was pressing ahead with attempts to arrange a face-to-face meet between the two antagonists. Tiger rebels on Thursday extended their truce by a month until March 24 and urged the international community to pressurise Sri Lanka to accept and reciprocate their "gesture of goodwill."

However, a visiting delegation of the European parliament on Saturday said it believed Norway's peace envoy, Erik Solheim, was best equipped to decide and call a ceasefire when he thought the time was right.

The head of the five-member MEP delegation, Ger-

ard Collins, said the EU strongly backed Norway's efforts, a non-EU member-state, in trying to broker peace in Sri Lanka where over 60,000 people have been killed since 1972.

India has denied that it objected to Britain and Japan being included in the team that could give them a larger role in a South Asian issue. "India wants to avoid the setting up of any precedent that may in the future encourage further interference by the West or the East," *The Sunday Leader* newspaper had said here last week.

Japan, which is Sri Lanka's largest single foreign aid donor, was expected to head the truce, monitoring panel and finance its activities, it said.

Norway's special envoy Solheim has made it a point to brief India's top envoy in Colombo during his visits for talks with Sri Lankan leaders. The peace process was further complicated with new anti-terrorism laws going into effect in Britain and pressure from Sri Lanka to have the Tiger rebels outlawed by London.

The Tigers have maintained that any proscription by Britain will jeopardise the peace process. However, EU mission leader Collins said the European Union had made its position clear to Britain that "all those who engage in terrorism" must be banned. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

26 FEB 2001

'Ask Chandrika not to negotiate with LTTE'

By Our Staff Reporter

MADRAS, FEB. 24. The Janata Party president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, has urged the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, to make it clear to the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, that her Government "cannot negotiate with the LTTE leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran or Pottu Amman" as they were proclaimed offenders in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

Addressing newsmen here today, Dr. Swamy wanted Mr. Vajpayee to demand the immediate implementation of a "Federal Constitution" in Sri Lanka to replace the "Unitary Constitution" in existence.

The Sri Lankan Government, he said, should not hold talks with the LTTE leader, as demanded by Norway, and instead "capture Prabhakaran" and hand him over to the Indian Government.

Criticising the condemnation of U.S.-U.K. air strikes on Iraq by the Vajpayee Government and the Congress, Dr. Swamy said the U.S. decision should be seen in the context of Mr. Saddam Hussein's "unwavering commitment" to destroy Israel.

"Unless Mr. Saddam Hussein gives up his call for destruction of Israel, there is no alternative but to keep bombing his military machine," he added.

Dr. Swamy said the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, in a letter thanking him for his congratulatory message, had expressed hope that the people of India and the U.S. "can work together to advance peace, freedom and prosperity".

Mr. Bush, in his letter, has said, "We will undoubtedly face a number of challenges in the years ahead.

I am confident that, with a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and open dialogue, we can successfully meet these challenges. The future also presents enormous opportunities."

While describing the extension of the ceasefire in Kashmir as an "anti-national act", Dr. Swamy claimed that the civilian casualties in the ceasefire period had risen up by 50 per cent and the number of militants killed by the armed forces had come down by 75 per cent.

He also blamed the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, of doing a "flipflop" while endorsing the extension of the ceasefire.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2001

C11-10 Lankan Free-float

The Sri Lankan central bank's sudden decision to place the rupee on a 'free-float' with reference to the US dollar has thrown the country's economy into a tailspin. Commodity prices and interest rates have skyrocketed, business confidence has plummeted, and the rupee itself has turned extremely volatile. In a small country where imports account for 40 per cent of the GDP and include essential needs such as foodgrain and sugar, the 'rupee shock' has led to mass distress. On independence day, 40,000 people led by the opposition United National Party sought blessings from the Buddhist clergy in the ancient city of Kandy, before starting off on a five-day padayatra to Colombo protesting against mismanagement of the economy by the government. The trade unions are talking of calling a general strike soon. The government decision to place the rupee on a free-float was precipitated when the "managed float" policy became untenable. Foreign exchange reserves had fallen by 40 per cent in the past year, and despite the steady depreciation of the currency, the trade deficit was worsening and inflation and interest rates had shot up into the twenties. The central bank's hope was that the free-float would stabilise the currency and induce the exporters to bring back dollar proceeds held abroad — but this is not happening yet, as economic uncertainty continues.

Essentially, the problem is that the continuing civil war has ravaged Sri Lanka's economy to a point that only peace can restore its health. Besides the direct economic costs of the war, the human costs have been appalling: 60,000 killed, eight lakh displaced, over 15,000 veterans rendered disabled and a steady and increasing emigration of professionals that the country can ill afford. And tourism industry, a high foreign exchange earner and a large employment provider, has collapsed. Most Sri Lankans increasingly believe that the island's political stability and prosperity hinge on close economic relations with India. However, India's policy towards Sri Lanka has essentially been one of benign neglect, understandably so after the IPKF fiasco. The Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement signed in December 1998 was a very positive development, but it remains on paper and few follow-up measures have been taken to implement it seriously. With President Chandrika Kumaratunga now in New Delhi, the thread must be picked up to build closer economic and political relations between the two countries. It is a good augury that the climate for peace talks has improved dramatically: the LTTE's unilateral ceasefire continues; the Norwegian initiative is reportedly on the point of a breakthrough with both parties coming around to agreeing on an MoU; and an inter-faith delegation, including a large contingent of Buddhist clergy, has returned highly encouraged from talks with the LTTE. This is the time for India to help advance the peace process, and even more importantly, to take immediate steps to give effect to provisions of the free trade agreement. With economic integration and development of a free trade area between the two countries, currency stability would be the least of Sri Lanka's problems as its currency would be linked to the Indian rupee rather than to the dollar.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 FEB 2001

LTTE extends ceasefire

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 22. The LTTE today extended its unilateral ceasefire till March 24, once again urging the international community to persuade the Sri Lankan Government to reciprocate the truce. The ceasefire, initially declared last Christmas-eve, was due to end on February 24.

In a statement seen on the internet site TamilNet, the LTTE said it was ready to talk peace as soon as the Government reciprocated its "goodwill gesture" of extending the ceasefire. It also asked the Government to agree to the implementation of a "memorandum of understanding" drawn up by Norway for the "de-escalation of war and normalisation of civilian life".

The Government has made no comment so far on the existence of a MoU, but has maintained that it will not reciprocate the ceasefire till talks commence, and that too, only if the talks progress satisfactorily.

In response to the Government accusation that the LTTE had taken the initial decision to call a ceasefire without informing either it or Norway, the statement mentioned that Oslo's special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, had been informed of the decision to extend the truce, with the request that he should convey this to the Government. Mr. Solheim is reported to have met the LTTE theoretician, Mr. Anton Balasingham, in London on Tuesday.

The announcement of the ceasefire extension came as the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, left on a two-day visit to New Delhi this afternoon.

The LTTE also made a "fervent appeal" to India, the E.U., the U.S. and the U.K. to "use their

diplomatic good offices" to persuade Sri Lanka to "abandon its destructive militaristic approach and adopt the rational path of peace, reconciliation and constructive dialogue".

It said its decision to extend the ceasefire in spite of "serious military disadvantages in a defensive war" was made to "provide further space and time" for the Norwegian initiative to bring the two sides to the table. The LTTE said this demonstrated its sincere commitment to a peaceful means of resolving the conflict.

Earlier this week, a group of Buddhist monks and Catholic priests crossed military lines in northern Sri Lanka for a meeting with the LTTE. They came back with the message that the group was ready to give up its demand for a separate state in return for a "just" settlement for the Tamils.

The LTTE team that met the representatives of the Inter-Religion Alliance for National Unity comprising third-rung leaders of the group, but the monks and priests seemed convinced that the views expressed by these cadres represented the views of the top leadership of the group.

Mr. Balasingham had last week warned that the peace process would be "jeopardised" if the U.K. outlawed the LTTE under a new anti-terrorism law that came into effect on February 19.

Contrary to expectations, the British Government did not proscribe any of the groups that were potential targets — the LTTE is considered one — under the new law on that day, but have the authority do so at any time.

It is believed that by keeping the LTTE in suspense over the proscription, the British are exerting more pressure on the group to remain in the Norwegian process than they could have ever done by outlawing it.

THE HINDU

23 FEB 2001

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27

LTTE RELENTS?

This time it may not be tactics

EARLIER this month, President Chandrika Kumaratunga spoke of a favourable response from the LTTE to a government invitation for talks. This must be the outcome of two visits that Eric Solheim, the Norwegian facilitator, made to the country, during one of which he briefed the LTTE chief, Velupillai Pirabhakaran, about his outfit's international position and arrived at a minimum framework for the commencement of negotiations: namely, that the LTTE would cease operations in the Sinhala south, while the Government of Sri Lanka would lift the economic embargo on north and east. The Government, understandably, viewed the whole thing with suspicion. Peace and negotiations have limited tactical significance in the LTTE's scheme of things, the only circumstances in which they can have any real meaning is if and when the LTTE lose their fighting and, more importantly, financial edge. Its spectacular foray into the Jaffna peninsula was fairly quickly reversed and the Sri Lankan Army has made considerable progress in regaining the critical Elephant Pass camp, which controls the land route to the south. That leaves them with bombs and assassinations, but Colombo has gotten inured to the phenomenon and takes them in its stride.

What they do have, on the other hand, is the determination to carry on fighting and the support of some of the mainstream Tamil political parties. So, it's a good time to make a pitch for negotiations. This is indicated by the manner in which their unilateral ceasefire was extended by another month, just after Anton Balasingham issued an ultimatum that the Tigers would go back to war in case Government refused to respond appropriately. Also, according to sources, the LTTE is no longer as adamant about Eelam. Solheim may have contributed to this decision, there may also have been some positive feedback from the Government, even though, officially, the ceasefire was rejected. But it is certain the LTTE has suffered in morale, not least because its international position, that is, its fund-raising capacity, is in jeopardy. Britain, where they shifted their international office after the French closed it down in Paris, may pass a new anti-terrorist law to effectively ban the organisation. The LTTE is threatening to pull out of any peace process if this happens, but, one, it may not deter Britain, two, even if it does, it indicates a lack of support for its cause. President Kumaratunga may seize this moment of relative weakness to at least find out what Pirabhakaran has in mind.

THE STATESMAN

22 FEB 2001

W Hope for peace H-10

THERE HAVE been some indications recently that the Norwegian peace initiative may finally break the ice in Sri Lanka, paving the way for a dialogue between the Government and the LTTE. The fact that the Tamil Tigers have appeared conciliatory and in a reasonable frame of mind ever since they made their ceasefire offer two months ago, has partly helped to open up the channels of communication between the two sides. The uncharacteristic change in the LTTE's attitude may not all be due to military pressure, as some hawks in Colombo suggest, but probably has more to do with the Tigers' concern about their growing isolation in the outside world. The fact that the LTTE was close to being declared a terrorist organisation by Britain following a new enactment on terrorism in that country must have added to its anxieties. But it may be best for Britain not to jump the gun, as it were, at this juncture and let the Norwegian initiative run its course.

According to reports, the composition of a team to monitor the ceasefire is currently under consideration. It is important that such a team should enjoy the full confidence of both the parties. It will be even better if persons of eminence among the Tamil and Sinhalese communities, who enjoy public trust cutting across ethnic divisions, are also associated with the exercise. A group of members of all communities are at present on their way from Colombo to the Wannu jungles to interact with the LTTE representatives there. This step can mark the beginning of other confidence-building measures. Such endeavours can yield a peace dividend far better than any 'international' monitoring team, who in any case will be strangers in the local terrain.

There have been other public expressions of support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict from time to time, but these have often been swept aside by the chauvinist elements in Colombo who would yield nothing. There have also been occasions when the LTTE has used the periods of lull to regroup and launch fresh offensives. It is time, however, for the moderate opinion on either side to assert itself for a fair and durable solution of the conflict. The peace initiatives have failed too often in the past for anyone to feel too hopeful about the latest effort. But given how long the civil war has lasted, it is possible that battle fatigue has at last set in among the combatants, especially because both may have realised that neither can win an outright victory.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 FEB 2001

Sri Lanka, Pak. to hold regular consultations

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 19. Sri Lanka and Pakistan will soon finalise a free-trade agreement to expand trade. A statement issued by Sri Lanka after a three-day visit last week to Islamabad by the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, said Sri Lanka and Pakistan decided to hold "early consultations" to finalise the text of this agreement.

The two countries have also decided to hold regular Foreign Secretary-level consultations, with the first such meeting to take place here later this year. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister met Pakistan's Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and his counterpart, Mr. Abdul Sattar, during his visit.

The statement said Mr. Kadirgamar thanked the General for giving "considerable assistance" to Sri Lanka last year during the escalation in the war with the LTTE. In turn, Gen. Musharraf reiterated Pakistan's support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

Besides bilateral issues, the talks also focussed on the revival of SAARC. There has been no summit meeting of SAARC since 1998 and Sri Lanka, which holds the chair of the regional grouping, has been trying its best to breathe life back into it.

THE HINDU

20 FEB 2007

HO-19
20/2

Colombo disappointed

S. K. H. HO

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 19. After the frenzy of appeals to the British Government for and against a ban on the LTTE, there was a sense of anticlimax today as it became clear that London had no intention of announcing a list of organisations to be proscribed under its new counter-terrorism law yet.

The law, known as Terrorism Act 2000, came into effect today. Sri Lankans expected that the British Government would herald it in with a ban on some of the organisations that operate from its soil and that the LTTE would be one of the first to go.

Over the weekend, realisation dawned that this was unlikely to happen and newspaper headlines screamed that the UK had let the LTTE "off the hook".

However, the state-run *Daily News* pointed out today that despite this "setback", the possibility remained that the LTTE might be

included in the schedule at some later date.

"Accordingly, diplomatic and other efforts must continue to further disclose the true face of LTTE terror and what this ugly visage entails for the peace-loving world," the paper urged stoically.

A delegation of the hardline Sinhala party, Sihala Urumaya, did just that. It met the British High Commissioner, Ms. Linda Duffield, today and handed over to her a mass signature petition asking the UK to ban the LTTE.

The daily *Island* goaded all parties to come together to appeal for the ban, chiding the opposition United National Party (UNP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) for dragging their feet on the issue. While the British Government's decision not to proscribe the LTTE yet is seen as a betrayal by some, mainly Sinhala, sections of Sri Lankan opinion, the Tamil minority view it differently. Some Tamils would dub this as a victory

for the LTTE, which furiously lobbied London not to take action against it.

Subtle pressure?

There are others who take the more sober view that by not making an announcement now, the UK has subtly increased the pressure on the group to participate in peace negotiations, and made it difficult for it to walk away from the table like it did in 1995.

"It is a good thing that the British Government has decided not to ban the LTTE, but to keep them in suspense. With this, they can persuade the LTTE to fall in line," said Mr. V. Anandasangaree, parliamentarian senior vice-president of the TULF. With the British playing their cards close to the chest, the LTTE will now need to be on its best behaviour, and in this context, it would not be surprising if the unilateral ceasefire by the Tigers is extended once again.

THE HINDU

26 FEB 2001

20 FEB 2001

Lanka peace bid hits new snags

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO, Feb. 18. — Norway's peace attempts in Sri Lanka have run into fresh trouble over the composition of an international panel to monitor a truce between government troops and Tiger rebels, a press report said today.

Oslo assembled the ceasefire monitoring team drawn from nine countries, including Britain and Japan, but the Tigers as well as neighbouring India had objected to some of them, the privately-run Sunday Leader said.

The newspaper, quoting unidentified Western sources said India had objected to Britain and Japan being included in the team that could give them a larger role in a South Asian issue.

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

Japan, which is Sri Lanka's largest single foreign aid donor, was expected to head the

truce monitoring panel and finance its activities, it said.

There was no official reaction today to the Leader report.

Norway's special envoy, Mr Erik Solheim, has made it a point to brief India's top envoy in Colombo during his visits for talks with Sri Lankan leaders.

The Leader said the Sri Lankan government too was against having a high representation of

LTTE SUICIDE

COLOMBO, Feb. 18. — A suspected woman member of the LTTE's suicide squad died after swallowing a cyanide capsule on being arrested by Sri Lankan troops in the northern Vavuniya town yesterday, official reports said today.

Immediate medical treatment could not save the life of the girl, who was carrying an identity card with the name Weerasingham Jeyanthi, the report said. — PTI

Western nations in the panel, fearing a backlash from nationalistic elements among the majority Sinhalese community.

Equally, the LTTE had objections against any country which was funding the Sri Lankan government's military campaign.

The peace process has got further complicated with the impending British legislation to outlaw foreign terrorist organisations.

The LTTE has told Norway it feared proscription under Britain's laws and that such a move could jeopardise peace prospects in the island where more than 60,000 people have been killed in the past two decades.

THE STATESMAN

19 FEB 2001

Sri Lanka Today

Between the Devil and Deep Sea

By SHASTRI RAMACHANDARAN

COLOMBO: From the air the 'Emerald Isle' looks more lush and inviting than "God's own country" in neighbouring India. On landing, exit is easy even for a suspected Tamil from Kerala despite the dreaded cross-border linkages of the terrorism to which Sri Lanka is hostage.

First glimpses of ground reality, from the airport to the city centre, are no less enchanting. The sights — of people, their complexion, features and attire, of cultivated fields, of houses, shops and stalls selling vegetables, coconuts and fruits — are strikingly akin to those off the Cochin-Mumbai highway in southern India's west coast.

The slow progress through traffic with brief hold-ups all the way makes one feel as much at home as in Chennai or Cochin. Checkposts and bunkers manned by uniformed gunmen are the first intimations of a republic stalked by terror. Yet, much like in Srinagar, they have come to be accepted as part of everyday life. Anything could happen anytime, a bomb explosion here, a shoot-out there, but the daily business of living goes on. It's too routine to be frozen by fear. "Otherwise, Colombo is safe. No crime and violence like in Delhi", says the host. But the ubiquitous bunkers and armed security men are ever-present reminders that this is a country at war. And the price of war is heavy.

The first brush with the economic crisis at the airport is not unwelcome. For tourists, the recently-floated, tumbling Sri Lanka rupee (SLR) is a fortunate stroke of serendipity. The rupee is more worthless than in India. One US dollar fetches close to SLR 90. Despite the central bank's reference rate, the SLR fluctuates wildly, shooting over a hundred to a dollar on some days. Small wonder then that Indians are seen as 'upper class foreign tourists'.

In the mid-segment hotels, room rates in US dollars are moderate but the price of food in rupees is near-extortionate. One can have the same spread in the equivalent of a Mumbai Udipi-type hotel for less than a tenth of that. "Otherwise, now with the rupee floating, we would have gone under", is the justification. That does not explain how smaller hotels, where the majority eat, say appams with chutney and sambar for as little as SLR 25, will cope with the crisis. "We have to do something or we will become

bankrupt. But we cannot keep changing prices to match the rupee's slide. A sudden and steep hike will cause riots", says one restaurant owner. "How can you change the price of tea or coffee everyday? And you cannot double it, which is what we should do", he complains.

Prices of essentials, and non-essentials, have shot up. Petroleum prices, already high, are poised to climb further. A litre of diesel is about SLR 25 and with the currency weakening the import bill will be bigger. At another extreme a mug of fresh coconut toddy, at SLR eight is cheaper than a medium-priced kingsized cigarette. Yet, while smokers seem to manage, not all those who flock to the toddy vends can afford their drink. Taxis and autorickshaws are prohibitively expensive. Autos charge a minimum of SLR 30 and the DLY-type taxi (the only kind) for about 80 kms during eight hours within the city

men, enjoy enviable access to politicians who, whether in or out of office, live in extravagant style with much property at home and holidays abroad. An argument, one evening, over which politician — Indian or Sri Lankan — was more corrupt and could amass more wealth, was predictably inconclusive. The Sri Lankan refused to let Indian politicians claim the top prize. "But", enlightened a friend, "there is no petty corruption, no harassment of the commoner. You are not pinched and picked for telephone connections, electricity bills, hospital admission and routine matters. Here it is high-level loot, in millions".

The absence of small-time greasing is no consolation given the cumulative impact of bigger rip-offs: all-round high prices and an economic crisis that people are certain can only get worse. The only unaffected area is gambling — on horse races in England. Hugely popular, millions of rupees are at stake in the event which is telecast live.

The war is uppermost in everyone's mind. But it takes a few hours at any party for the subject to surface. When an Indian is on the scene, the question invariably is, "Why doesn't India do the right thing by Colombo?" The impression, in some circles, is that after the IPKF fiasco, New Delhi deliberately let Sri Lanka stew in its own brew. "Now, I think, the Indian government is ready to help in the peace process", was a common view.

"Reach airport three hours before departure and keep enough time to get there", is the recurrent advice. There are many security hurdles en route. A traveller, not from India, was stopped and her baggage opened and contents searched at three checkposts. You are frisked and bags scanned at the airport entry. Before check-in area baggage is searched again and then there are seething queues for embarkation fee, immigration and then security again. Three hours is just about enough to get through these.

The LTTE is a brutal, militarised force. The counterforces and structures created to fight it are no less exacting. These, like taxes and surcharges, rarely disappear when the crisis is overcome. Even when the war is over, this machinery to which recruits are drawn daily through glamorised television promos, will continue to bleed the economy.

IN BRIEF

- It is a country at war, yet life is not frozen by fear
- The floating of the rupee has triggered economic crisis and political unrest
- India is seen as a country that can help end the war if it wants to

won't budge for less than SLR 2000. Public transport buses are better than in Delhi but nowhere near that of Mumbai or Chennai and far from adequate.

The sheer fall in the central bank's foreign reserves, worsening trade deficit, the pressure of international agencies and the ever-swelling defence budget to maintain the armed forces and buy weapons have resulted in an unprecedented economic crunch that could snowball into a political crisis.

The beginnings of unrest are already evident. The massive padayatra from Kandy to Colombo by tens of thousands, including Buddhist monks, signals rising popular protest — against corruption, mismanagement and "death" of the rupee — cutting across party lines. The opposition United National Party has challenged the legality of the government floating the rupee.

Corruption is as much an issue as in India. Politicians live off the state and its resources with a retinue of staff. Contractors, as key resource

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 FEB 2000

HD-1 12/2

U.K. ban will not affect talks: Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 11. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, has joined issue with the LTTE's London representative, Mr. Anton Balasingham, over his warning that a ban on the group in the United Kingdom would derail a Norwegian peace initiative in Sri Lanka.

The state-run Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation today said the President had "rejected" this giving the example of the British Government's talks with the banned Irish Republican Army (IRA).

In a newspaper interview on Friday, Mr. Balasingham said the LTTE would pull out of the Norwegian-facilitated process to bring it and the Government to the negotiating table if the UK banned the group under its Terrorism Act 2000, which is to come into effect on February 19.

Ms. Kumaratunga was quoted by the SLBC as saying this was "LTTE propaganda".

However, a number of Tamils seem convinced that a ban on the LTTE in the U.K. could put a spoke in the slow-moving wheel of the peace initiative.

The British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Ms. Linda Duffield, who toured eastern Sri Lanka recently, was petitioned by several organisations of Tamils against banning the LTTE. In Batticaloa as well as Jaffna Universities, students have begun signature campaigns against the possible ban.

Britain is likely to put out a list of organisations, proscribed under the new legislation, on or around February 19. It is not known yet if the LTTE is on that list.

Those against the LTTE, and opposed to negotiations with the group, are also seeking to pressure the British Government to ban the group. The hardline Sihala Urumaya began a signature campaign last week demanding that London outlaw the LTTE.

The Sunday Leader reported today that the British police were investigating an attack on the London home of Mr. Balasingham. It said unidentified persons had tried to forcibly enter the house last Saturday, but were put off by an alarm system that began ringing at the break-in. However, they are reported to have smashed the windows and the light of his car, and slashed its tyres.

THE HINDU

12 FEB 2001

'U.K. ban will jeopardise peace initiative'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 13. As the D-day for the United Kingdom's new counter-terrorist legislation draws closer, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which faces the possibility of being proscribed under it, is using the Norwegian peace initiative in Sri Lanka as a bargaining chip to retain its legitimacy on British soil.

It is far from clear yet if the LTTE will be included in a list of organisations to be banned under the law that comes into effect next Monday. But the group, which uses London as a base for many of its fund-raising and propaganda activities, wants to ensure that it is not.

In an interview with the London-based *Tamil Guardian*, published on the Tamil InterNet site *amiNet*, the LTTE ideologue, Mr. Anton Balasingham, has reiterated what he told another newspaper last week — that the Norwegian process to bring the two sides to negotiations would be jeopardised if the U.K. outlawed the group.

It was time also for Sri Lanka to lift its ban on the LTTE, imposed in 1998 after a suicide bombing at

the Tooth Relic Buddhist shrine in Kandy. Mr. Balasingham said the groundwork for talks with the Sri Lankan Government continued through the Norwegians. Both sides had yet to settle on a mutually acceptable formula for de-escalation of hostilities.

He said a cessation of hostilities was a must for the talks to begin, a stand that has so far been publicly rejected by the Government, and dismissed the assertion by the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, that the draft new Constitution would form the basis for a political resolution of the conflict.

Describing it as a "dead letter," he said the right to a Tamil homeland, the status of the Tamil people as a "nationality," and their right to self-determination were the "fundamentals" underlying the Tamil national question, and it was only on these "core issues" that a permanent peace could be based.

The tone of the interview suggests that the British Government would have to take the responsibility for any breakdown of the process that would inevitably follow the ban.

"We have been making represen-

tations to relevant British authorities that a ban from a major European power at this stage of Norwegian peace initiative will seriously undermine the peace effort. A serious indictment of one party by Britain as 'terrorists' at this stage would be considered a partisan intervention in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and therefore destroy trust in the Norwegian peace initiative," he said.

It would also "seriously undermine" the interests of the Tamils and their bargaining power in peace talks while it would encourage the Government to be intransigent and pursue a military solution. The LTTE's standpoint that a ban by the U.K. would "definitely scuttle the peace process" had also been conveyed to the Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim.

Describing the new law as "draconian," Mr. Balasingham said it was "unfortunate" that Britain had enacted it "without giving due consideration to the legitimate political struggles of the oppressed humanity which has resorted to violence as the ultimate alternative to defend and liberate itself," from repressive Governments.

THE HINDU

13 FEB 1998

'Ban on LTTE will not affect peace talks'

COLOMBO: Banning the LTTE by Britain will not affect the ongoing peace talks between the government and the Tamil rebel outfit, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga said on Sunday.



Chandrika

Citing the example of Britain itself engaging the Irish Republican Army in peace negotiations after outlawing it, Ms Kumaratunga refuted LTTE's propaganda that proscribing the outfit in Britain would affect the Oslo-backed peace process, state-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Radio said, quoting the President.

The LTTE says banning it will not only impede the peace initiative, but also undermine Britain's neutrality in the long-drawn conflict. "It is goodbye to the peace talks if Britain bans Tamil Tigers," LTTE's London-based chief negotiator Anton Balasingham was quoted on Sunday as having said by a Tamil daily, the *Sudar Oli*.

"If the talks are hindered, the struggle will intensify and the government should take responsibility for it." Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has warned that any failure on the part of Britain to outlaw the LTTE would affect Anglo-Sri Lankan relations and cast a shadow on Britain's commitment to elimination of international terrorism. Britain is expected to de-

cide on the issue later this month when its new anti-terrorism law comes into effect. It has been gathering opinions for and against banning the LTTE from various quarters. Meanwhile, media reports continue to give rise to conflicting opinions on the peace process.

State-owned *Sunday Observer* reported that Norwegian peace envoy Eric Solheim will be back in Colombo soon to get the warring sides begin negotiations.

It pointed to the difficulty involved due to LTTE's insistence on truce prior to talks and the government's stand that ceasefire could only be considered after progress was made in the talks.

The Island newspaper suggested that the talks would be held in Europe, probably Oslo, Paris or London, and spoke of an agreement that LTTE would stop bomb attacks in Colombo as a goodwill gesture. Earlier peace talks have been held in Bhutan's capital Thimpu in 1985, Colombo in 1989-90 and Jaffna in 1994-95.

However, the *Sunday Leader* said the peace process was heading for a breakdown on issues like the possible ban on LTTE in Britain and lack of reciprocation from the government side to the rebels' ceasefire. A Norwegian delegation is also due in Sri Lanka this week under the leadership of deputy foreign minister Sigdun Modegal but is unrelated to the process, the daily said. The delegation would discuss trade, investment and development activities, it said. (PTI)

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 FEB 2001

LTTE will pull out of talks if banned in U.K.

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 10. The LTTE will pull out of the Norwegian peace initiative if the U.K. bans it under its new anti-terrorism law, its representative in London, Mr. Anton Balasingham, has said. In an interview in the Tamil weekly, *Sudaroli*, on Friday, Mr. Balasingham said he had conveyed this to the Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, during discussions with him earlier in the week.

The LTTE ideologue, presently its chief negotiator with Oslo, said if the international community was interested in a political solution to the island's conflict, it must prevail upon the U.K. not to ban the group.

The British Terrorism Act 2000 is to come into effect on February 19, when London is expected to announce a list of organisations proscribed under the new law.

The LTTE is evidently using the Norwegian initiative to bring pressure on the British Government not to take action against it under this legislation. Mr. Balasingham also accused the Sri Lankan Government of holding up the peace process by not giving its consent to an agreement drawn up by the Norwegians for the de-escalation of the conflict.

While the LTTE had already agreed to its part of the deal, that is, not to carry out attacks in southern Sri Lanka, the Government was yet to agree to the removal of economic embargoes on

LTTE-held areas, he said. Instead, it was denying that there were any embargoes on there. Mr. Balasingham said the two sides had not been able to reach a consensus on which countries should be on the international committee to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

So far, there has been no comment from the Government on the existence of the so-called "memorandum of understanding". A Foreign Ministry statement issued at the end of Mr. Solheim's visit only said there was "progress" in taking the peace process forward.

The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, talked of a "ray of hope" for a political solution to end the conflict during her speech on Sri Lanka's national day, celebrated earlier this month. That, and Mr. Solheim's shuttle diplomacy since January, have indicated that talks could begin soon.

According to observers, the main points of speculation now are the impact of a ban by the U.K. on the LTTE, besides the agenda for the first round of negotiations and the reaction of the opposition parties and the Sinhala hardliners to peace talks.

Another question is about the Norwegian role once the talks begin, with observers wondering if the facilitators will continue to play a role in the proceedings once their mission of bringing the two sides is completed.

THE HINDU

11 FEB 2001

Lanka, Tigers may hold talks in Oslo

519
512
UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Feb. 4. — In her address to the nation on Sri Lanka's 53rd anniversary of Independence today, President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga said her government is likely to hold talks "very soon" with the LTTE in Oslo to end more than a decade-old ethnic conflict that has ravaged the island nation, diplomats said here today.

Mrs Kumaratunga's address to the nation raising hopes of peace came hours after Norwegian peace envoy Mr Erik Solheim left Colombo following fresh attempts to end the deadlock in the peace process.

Expressing her willingness to enter Norway-brokered peace talks, Mrs Kumaratunga today said there was a "window of opportunity" to end bloodshed.

She strongly hinted of imminent peace talks

with the separatist LTTE by saying that there were "somewhat positive signals" from the rebels to the Norwegian initiative.

Mrs Kumaratunga said her government "never closed its doors to peace talks with the Tigers."

"I propose that we make use of this opportunity which is the result of our own far-seeing policy for peace. Let us take this moment of opportunity to explore whatever prospects there are for achieving peace in our land."

She stopped short of suggesting dates or a venue for the first round of talks, but diplomats here said a meeting between the two sides was likely in Oslo "very soon." "It would now appear that the enemy has been somewhat tamed by the resoluteness of our armed forces. Hence, we are now receiving favourable signals from them to our open invitation for negotiations," she said. Ms kumaratunga said she would press ahead with her plan to bring a new Constitution.

THE STATESMAN

5 FEB 2001

Solheim begins fresh talks with Lankan govt

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Feb. 1. — Norway's special envoy Mr Erik Solheim, who arrived here yesterday, has started fresh talks today with Sri Lankan leaders amid hopes of ending a deadlock in the fragile peace process, sources said.

Mr Solheim met the main Opposition leader, Mr Ranil Wickremesing, today and was also scheduled to meet President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Mr Solheim was seeking to push forward the peace process bogged down over the issue of a ceasefire. The Tiger rebels want the government to reciprocate the truce they called since Christmas day.

Earlier, Mrs Kumaratunga cleared that the government would not discuss the LTTE's demand for a separate state and also firmly ruled out a truce before the conclusion of peace talks.

"We don't want to waste time discussing mundane things," she said. "They must agree to discuss substantial issues."

Diplomats said, however, there was a softening of positions on both sides and a preliminary round of talks, possibly in Oslo, was a distinct possibility in the near future.

The government was keen to get on with a peace process because of the financial crunch faced by the country.

Sri Lanka free floated the rupee last week which resulted in a loss of the value of rupee by over 10 per cent in just two days.

The central bank has said the rupee was allowed to float freely against other currencies as the government was keen to discourage and make imports more expensive in order to save the country's foreign reserves.

The reserves had fallen by over 45 per cent to \$ 900 million at the end of December last year, compared to a position the country enjoyed a year earlier.

The Tigers too wanted to initiate talks as they had problems recruiting men to keep up the war against government forces in the island's north-east.

THE STATESMAN

2 FEB 2011

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2001

FINE-TUNING A PEACE AGENDA

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TUSSLE between the Sri Lankan President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) over a peace agenda, which she had first unveiled several years ago, seems to be entering a sensitive new phase now. Running high at this juncture are some deep concerns among the Sri Lankans about the state of their economy, which has for long borne the consequences of the internal conflict between the LTTE and the military. The impact of the fluctuating international oil prices on the domestic market and the move by the Sri Lankan authorities to allow their currency to find its level can be seen as the new context now for a possible peace offensive by her. Yet, with a characteristic finesse for crisis management, Ms. Kumaratunga has reportedly left the LTTE in no doubt that she will not choose any soft option in the quest for peace. Firmly ruled out at this stage is a cessation of the military's armed engagement with the LTTE in the absence of any credible indication by the latter to enter into talks with Colombo on the modalities of a peace settlement within the explicit parameters of Sri Lanka's indivisibility as a state. In her reckoning, a dialogue with the LTTE will be worthwhile in the present circumstances only if the organisation were to agree to hold time-specific talks on substantive issues. Wanting to steer clear of any trap that the LTTE might wish to lay in the guise of peaceful intentions, Ms. Kumaratunga says her administration is no less prepared for a sustained military showdown if that be necessary. Given her enduring political vision that favours a fair deal for Sri Lanka's minority Tamils, her firmness of such sweeping magnitude cannot be mistaken for inflexible hawkishness.

Ms. Kumaratunga is now reported to have taken the line that the LTTE's latest decision to extend its "unilateral ceasefire", which was first announced as being effective from last Christmas, is traceable to a combination of factors. Besides the "pressure" of the Sri Lankan military's ongoing operations, the LTTE is said to be

smarting under the critical gaze of the British Government, which has been thoroughly briefed by Colombo about the separatist outfit's "terrorist" methods. The LTTE operates an office in London. The Interpol's "red alert" concerning the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran, is also cited on behalf of official Colombo as a transparent rationale of the LTTE's "truce" overtures. Colombo's impressionistic profile of a "truce"-seeking LTTE is to be evaluated against the organisation's portrayal of its own new posture. By addressing a key aspect of Ms. Kumaratunga's rejection of its first truce offer last month, the LTTE has now clarified that Norway, the current external interlocutor on the Sri Lankan scene, has been asked to convey the latest decision regarding 'truce extension' to Colombo. It is in this context that Norway's next move will be watched with interest.

40-12

With Ms. Kumaratunga reassuring the Sri Lankans in a televised phone-in session that the economic problems will be addressed and that there are some signs of a "fair response" from the LTTE to her proposals, the mainstream Opposition United National Party (UNP) is no less being put to the test. While the Opposition has in a legitimate fashion brought the economy into a sharp focus at this time, a measure of the UNP's statesmanship will be how well it can advance the nation's peace agenda. For a variety of reasons, the UNP stood second to the Kumaratunga-led People's Alliance in the recent parliamentary poll, although the gap between the two was very narrow indeed. But this existential reality itself should suffice to impel the two sides to break the logjam in their stalled discussions over a constitutional settlement of inter-related issues concerning the Sri Lankan polity. An argument in the Sri Lankan Tamil political circles is that any agreement between the LTTE and Colombo may somehow need to be a devolution-plus package. But the mainstream parties will first need to revive their consultations.

THE HINDU

1 FEB 2001

'Estrada stashed away hundreds of millions'

Manila, January 30

PROSECUTORS CLAIMED today that former president Joseph Estrada began making large bank deposits under aliases two months after taking office and had stashed away hundreds of millions of dollars before he was forced out. They said they had put together a paper trail that would prove the allegations and would release details of their investigation by early next week.

Eduardo De Los Angeles, leader of a group of private prosecutors investigating ill-gotten wealth, graft and corruption, said evidence shows Estrada had 15 accounts in 15 banks — nearly

every one operating in the Philippines — under six aliases. Officials so far have found a total of 10 billion to 15 billion pesos (\$200 to 300 million) of unexplained wealth in the accounts.

That does not include dollar-denominated accounts linked to Estrada and mansions or accounts in the names of his acknowledged mistresses, De Los Angeles said.

One of those women, Laarni Enriquez, had 600 million pesos (\$12 million) in one account, he said. The money came "from bribes and kickbacks and some other sources we still don't know about," De Los Angeles said. "You can see the president using fictitious names and banks to launder money." **AP**

Norwegian envoy meets senior LTTE leader

Colombo, January 30

NORWEGIAN PEACE envoy Erik Solheim has met a senior LTTE leader in London and is likely to meet Sri Lankan leaders here over the next few days to resume the stalled peace process.

Solheim and LTTE spokesman in London Anton Balasingham discussed yesterday the current situation in the north and east of Sri Lanka and steps to resume the peace process, the news update on pro-LTTE website, eclamweb, said today. Solheim plans to go to Colombo to meet Lankan leaders both in government and the opposition as part of his continuing

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efforts to facilitate direct talks, it said. There was, however, no official word here on the visit.

The development comes close on the heels of president Chandrika Kumaratunga stating that some "favourable signals" had been received from the Tamil rebels. She asked the LTTE to come out with a specific time frame for the dialogue. The government has earlier made it clear that it will not announce truce until substantial progress is made in the talks.

The LTTE has announced a month-long extension from January 24 of its unilateral ceasefire that is in effect from December 24.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 JAN 2001

LTTE extends ceasefire

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JAN. 23. The LTTE today announced that it would extend its unilateral ceasefire by another month.

The announcement came in the midst of another operation by the Sri Lankan security forces in the Jaffna peninsula aimed at recapturing Elephant Pass from the LTTE.

The military spokesman, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne, said the operation, launched on Monday night, took the LTTE "completely by surprise."

The military claims to have extended the area under its control by another 8 sq kms in Muhanjalai, south of Eluthumaduval, including a small stretch of the highway to Elephant Pass.

"The LTTE offered no resistance at all last night," Brigadier Karunaratne said.

According to a government statement, "the surprise achieved was such that the (LTTE) could not use their heavy concentration of mortars and artillery as they were unaware of the security forces' positions until consolidation had progressed to a great extent."

However, fighting erupted this morning, when LTTE fired mor-

tars at the army's newly acquired positions. The security forces lost two soldiers and six were wounded when they carried out a raid on a LTTE strong point in the area in the early hours of today.

Soldiers found bodies of five LTTE cadres after the raid and claimed to have killed at least 15 more.

Feeble resistance

One explanation for the LTTE's feeble resistance is the government claim that it has been militarily weakened to a point of no return.

The other theory, favoured by independent military analysts, is that rather than retaliate on the ground, which entails the risk of losing manpower for territory that is not terribly crucial, the LTTE may be keeping its powder dry for a possible attempt by the security forces on Pallai, the outpost for the psychologically and militarily strategic Elephant Pass.

For now, by extending its unilateral ceasefire to February 24, the LTTE seems keen to keep its side of the battle on a different plane.

The declaration will certainly earn it more brownie points from the international community and increase the pressure on the Sri

Lankan government, especially from its European donors, to reciprocate.

Already, the LTTE's initial month-long ceasefire, combined with its desire to talk since last November, seems to have accorded it a degree of international acceptability that it did not have before this.

The extension of the ceasefire may also help its case against a possible ban on the group by the U.K. under its new anti-terrorism legislation, due to come into effect next month.

In a statement from its London headquarters, the LTTE said it had taken this step "to prevent the escalation of current hostilities into an all-out war and to provide further space to facilitate the peace effort undertaken by the Norwegian government."

The decision to "observe peace" for a month was a sign of its commitment to genuine and earnest desire for peace, it said.

"We have taken this decision in conformity with the collective will of the Tamil nation which demands peace and also in compliance with the wish of the international community which pleads for a peaceful means of resolving the conflict," it added.

THE HINDU

24 JAN 2001

Tamil parties to campaign for ceasefire by

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JAN. 3. Eleven Tamil parties today came together to announce that they would launch a campaign across Sri Lanka to pressure the Government to respond to the LTTE's unilateral ceasefire.

The parties are the TULF, the TELO, the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), the PLOTE, the EPRLF (Suresh Premachandran group), and a host of others representing Indian Tamils, including the breakaway group of the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) and the Up-Country People's Front (UCPF).

At a press conference, representatives of these parties said they would forge a broad alliance with "like-minded forces" in southern Sri Lanka to begin a campaign for the Government to respond positively to the LTTE's ceasefire.

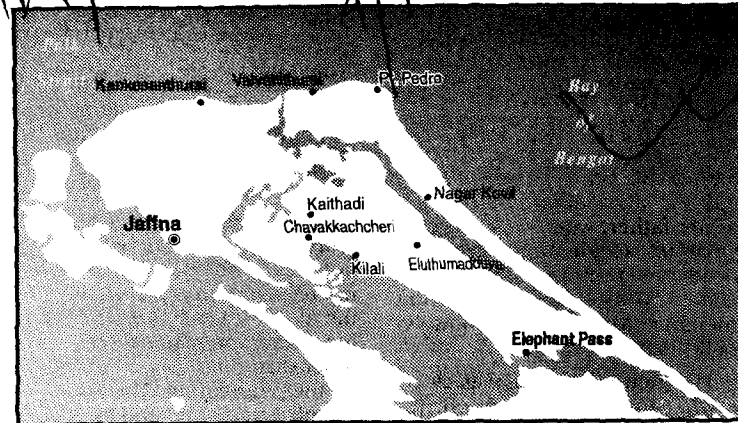
Such forces would include the Left parties and the NGOs, they said.

The Tamil parties reiterated the appeal they made last week to the international community to persuade the Government to reciprocate the ceasefire.

The Government has so far ignored the ceasefire, launching a military offensive just before, and two others less than a week after it came into effect on Christmas eve. The operations have given the army control over much of the territory it lost to the LTTE last April-May.

The army said it had recaptured a total of 139 sq. km. in Jaffna peninsula since last September in two stages of Operation Rivikirina and eight stages of Operation Kinihira.

The Defence Ministry said 268 security forces personnel had died in these operations. It said



Map by Varghese Kallada

that the LTTE had lost nearly 800 fighters during this period.

The ACTC Member of Parliament, Mr. A. Vinayagamorthy, today accused the Government of intensifying its operations after the declaration of ceasefire by the

LTTE. "We would like to know from the Government who it is fighting, when Prabhakaran has said that he is not fighting," Mr. Vinayagamorthy said.

The Tamil parties refuted suggestions that they were acting at

Talks encouraging, says Colombo

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JAN. 12. Sri Lanka today said talks with the Norwegian special envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, on ways to take the peace process forward were "encouraging", but once again made clear that a cease-fire with the LTTE was ruled out.

A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Mr. Solheim would now discuss matters "further" with the LTTE, and thereafter, again with the Sri Lankan Government.

Official sources said the statement was an indication that there had been some progress in the peace process, and that the Government was now awaiting the LTTE's response.

It is believed that Mr. Solheim's shuttle diplomacy between the parties to the conflict may now take him to London where the LTTE's pointman for this peace process, Mr. Anton Balasingham, is based.

An anticipated visit to the LTTE-controlled Vanni mainland by Mr. Solheim to meet its leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, did not take place.

Mr. Solheim, who left Sri Lanka early this morning, met the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickramanyake and the Constitutional Affairs Minister, Mr. G.L. Peiris.

He also held meetings with the Speaker, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Mr. Rauff Hakeem and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"They had an encouraging discussion on the ongoing process of negotiation with the LTTE with a view to taking the process forward. In the meantime, there will be no cease-fire," the Foreign Ministry communique said.

The LTTE is currently observing a unilateral cease-fire for a month ending January 24. The Government rejected the cease-fire on the

ground that it was a ploy by the separatist group to buy time when it was militarily weak.

Representatives of 11 Tamil parties, including the TULF, TELO, EPRLF, ACTC and a host of parties representing the Indian Tamils met the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr. Gopal Gandhi.

They gave him a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, urging him to persuade the Sri Lankan Government to respond positively to the LTTE cease-fire. They have also sought a meeting with Mr. Vajpayee.

Mr. Gandhi told *The Hindu* he had assured them that he would forward the letter, and also reiterated New Delhi's commitment to a political solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, as well as its support to the Norwegian initiative to facilitate peace talks.

THE HINDU

13 JAN 2001

Army offensive in Jaffna, Norway in peace thrust

Colombo, Dec. 31 (Agencies): As Sri Lankan troops battled Tamil guerrillas on the Jaffna peninsula in the north, Norway launched a drive to revive the peace process.

Government forces pressed today with attempts to capture strategic areas lost to the Tigers earlier this year.

"We have captured more than 50 sq km of territory since last night, clearing entirely the Thanankilappu and Ariyalai areas," military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne said.

Ariyalai is a suburb of Jaffna while Thanankilappu is a tongue of land jutting into the Jaffna lagoon which gives rebels on the mainland relatively easy access to most of the peninsula.

The LTTE had captured both areas during a big offensive between March and May. Military officials said the loss of Thanankilappu would make it difficult for the LTTE to threaten Jaffna city, the peninsula's second largest

town of Chavakachcheri, or the key 15-km stretch of highway linking them.

Norwegian peace envoy Erick Solheim would meet Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga and LTTE leaders next week to put forward new proposals to end the ethnic conflict.

Solheim would visit Colombo to discuss the proposals with Kumaratunga and her ministerial colleagues before going to London where he is expected to hold talks with LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham, weekend newspaper *The Sunday Leader* said.

As per Solheim's new peace proposals, the LTTE, in addition to the ceasefire, should declare a moratorium on all hostile activities, including its suicide bomb attacks and assassination attempts on top government leaders.

The rebel group was also expected to release all prisoners in its custody.

In return, the Sri Lankan government would have to lift the eco-

nomie embargo on areas held by the rebels before talks could commence, the report said. The newspaper said that Norway has also suggested setting up an international committee to monitor the preliminary phase of the de-escalation process.

However, it is not clear whether Solheim would visit the rebel-held areas in the north to meet LTTE chief V Prabhakaran for a second time.

Earlier, Solheim had initiated the process after meeting Prabhakaran at LTTE-held northern Vanni in November this year.

After that LTTE, which said it was prepared to hold unconditional talks with the government, started insisting on both sides declaring a ceasefire.

But the government rejected the LTTE offer saying the talks could begin without any interruption to the fighting and an agreement could be reached on a ceasefire, depending on the progress of the talks.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 JAN 2001

Emergency remains in Lanka as peace efforts take beating

ASSOCIATED PRESS
COLOMBO: JAN 12

PARLIAMENT has extended emergency rule in Sri Lanka for another month, while a Norwegian peace envoy continued with his efforts to revive a flagging peace process.

Emergency rule, which empowers armed forces to detain any person suspected of involvement with Tamil Tiger rebels, has been in force for long periods during the 17-year civil war and requires monthly renewal.

It was extended in the 225-seat assembly with a majority of 94 votes yesterday.

Meanwhile, peace envoy Eric Solheim, who arrived in the Colombo on Wednesday, met Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickrematunge at Parliament. The Prime Minister's office had no comment on the talks.

Solheim also met the leader of the main opposition United Na-

tional Party, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Wickremesinghe told journalists that they had a "general discussion" on the current status of the peace process, with no specific reference to any Norwegian proposals aimed at bringing the two sides to the negotiating table.

Earlier, Solheim met Indian High Commissioner Gopalakrishna Gandhi as part of an understanding that the neighboring country is kept informed of developments.

Solheim was due to hold discussions with President Chandrika Kumaratunga before his departure late last night.

It was Solheim's first visit since November when he traveled to the northern rebel-held territory to meet leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Norway has been trying for the past two years to start the two sides talking.

INDIAN EXPRESS

13 JAN 2011

US reiterates stand against Eelam

US envoy to Lanka calls for end to war

By P. MOHAN DAS

Colombo, Jan. 11: The United States has reiterated its stand that it is against an Eelam state in the island. The statement of US ambassador to Sri Lanka Ashley Wills comes at a time when Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim is trying to convince the LTTE that a negotiated settlement is the only solution to the conflict.

"It is the responsibility of the government and the LTTE to stop war and resolve their problems through discussions. The war is being dragged on as there is no trust between the two," the state-run *Daily News* quoted Mr Wills as saying. "It is the aspiration of the US to see the minorities live together with the majority community within a united Sri Lanka. The US is against an Eelam state," he said.

Meanwhile, Mr Solheim met Indian high commissioner Gopalkrishna Gandhi and apprised him of his mission. The meeting is part of the established pattern that India will be kept informed of the progress of peace initiative, a high commission official said. (UNI)

Opposition irked by Chandrika remark

Colombo, Jan. 11: The Opposition in Sri Lanka are up in arms over President Chandrika Kumaratunga's statement in Paris that the amendments Constitution would be made with or without a two-third majority in Parliament.

"The impugned statement poses a threat to the country's constitutional government," the local media quoted United National Party vice chairman Daya Pelpola as saying.

The UNP has appointed a committee of three legal luminaries to inquire into the possibility of impeaching the President. The working committee of the party has empowered them to find out whether the alleged statement would amount to international violation of the present Constitution.

They will also study the legality of the statement in the light of the fact that the President has been sworn to uphold the Constitution against any threats, the *Daily Mirror* reported. In Parliament, on Wednesday, UNP member Mahinda Samarasinghe pointed out that the President had said she would use "other means" of bringing the amendments through. (UNI)

Lankan migrants duped by smugglers

Almaty, Jan. 11: Twenty-four Sri Lankans who arrived in Kazakhstan, after being duped into believing it was Germany, appear to be economic migrants, not refugees, a UNHCR official said on Wednesday.

Abdul Karim Ghaul, head of the UNHCR office in Kazakhstan, said only around a fifth of the 24 Sri Lankans had been interviewed so far but it seemed they had been deceived into thinking they were on their way to Germany to find work. "At first glance these are not refugees. They appear to be migrants who were fooled around by some smugglers and brought to Russia on the border with Kazakhstan as if it was already Germany," he said.

He said the detainees had not claimed refugee status so far and that it appeared they wanted to return home to Sri Lanka. They were detained near the Kazakh border with Russia in late December after walking four days across the Steppe in bitter temperatures, during which one of their number died from the cold. (AFP)

THE ASIAN AGE

12 JAN 2001

LTTE not interested in peace: Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

10/1
COLOMBO, JAN. 9. In a hard-hitting speech which indicated that the chasm between her government and the LTTE was growing, not lessening, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, said the separatist group was not interested in finding a solution to the island's ethnic conflict. HD-14

The speech, made to the Tamil people of the north through a satellite link-up with Jaffna on Monday night, came ahead of a visit here by the Norwegian peace envoy, Mr. Erik Solheim, to work a way out of the impasse in the peace process. S. Lanka

The process is now stalled at the point where the Government rejected a LTTE pre-condition that a "conducive" atmosphere had to be created before negotiations could begin, including a unilateral ceasefire called by it last month.

Ms. Kumaratunga reiterated the Government's position that the ceasefire was possibly only a bluff to buy time to regroup. "My government and I especially are 100 per cent sincere in our desire to end the war. I do not believe the LTTE wants to end the war," she said.

Compared to an earlier response in which the ceasefire was deemed as a "consequent step" to the satisfactory progress of negotiations, Ms. Kumaratunga said she was prepared to reciprocate the LTTE's unilateral move if the latter agreed to begin talks. "A ceasefire without an agreement by both sides to enter into negotiations in order to end the war is only an empty promise... we say even now we are willing to effect a ceasefire, but a ceasefire without an agreement from the LTTE to enter into serious negotiations on the serious matters that affect the Tamil people is pointless." It was not possible to ascertain if this was a shift in position, but in the main, the speech gave no indication that this was a Government in the midst of a peace process, supposedly preparing to talk to its adversary with the assistance of a foreign facilitator.

Rather, it was a throwback to three years ago when peace talks were not even a remote possibility. Ms. Kumaratunga described the LTTE as an undemocratic organisation that killed Tamil people, and obstructed government programmes to alleviate their living conditions.

THE HINDU

10 JAN 2001

Norway boost to Lanka peace talks

PTI & UNI

COLOMBO, Jan. 7. — Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga has assured the National Security Council that there will be no ceasefire before peace talks with the LTTE. The declaration comes ahead of a proposed visit by the Norwegian special envoy to break the deadlock over peace talks.

At a council meeting on Thursday, the President congratulated the security forces for their recent gains in northern Jaffna and made it clear that the government would not accept LTTE's ceasefire offer till unconditional peace talks get under way.

The *Sunday Times* reported today. Media minister, Mr Anura Priyadarshana Yapa, said the government would consider LTTE's ceasefire proposal only after the two sides enter a fresh round of negotiations. The government iterated its position, saying the LTTE would have to come up with some concrete proposals before a ceasefire.

The Norwegian envoy is slated to meet Mrs Kumaratunga and the LTTE leader Pi-

rabhakaran.

Mr Erik Solheim was in New Delhi last week to discuss peace efforts in Sri Lanka.

He was earlier scheduled to arrive in Colombo on 5 January but the visit was postponed as Mrs Kumaratunga wanted to consult her ministers on current developments before the meeting. Instead, the envoy went to

London where he met LTTE spokesman, Mr Anton Balasingham. Mr Solheim told the Tamil Broadcasting Corporation that both parties should resume talks immediately.

During his last visit, Mr Solheim, accompanied by the Norwegian Ambassador, travelled to

Wanni to meet LTTE leaders. On his return, he had said Pirabhakaran was serious about holding unconditional peace talks.

LTTE boat destroyed

Sri Lankan navy destroyed a boat carrying Tamil Tigers near Vettlilaikerni yesterday. The number of tigers killed could not be ascertained. The troops shot dead rebels in Muhamali, Jaffna peninsula, adds UNI.

Prisoners' families protest

COLOMBO, Jan. 7. — The families of 70 Sri Lankan fishermen, languishing in Indian jails, will stage an agitation outside the Indian High Commission here on 18 January, an NGO spokesman said. About 60 fishermen were released last month but may remain imprisoned in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Andamans. — UNI

THE STATESMAN

8 JAN 2001