

LTTE's partial talks boycott

P K Balachandran
Colombo, December 27

THE PEACE process in Sri Lanka, which began with the signing of a MoU between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on February 22, has hit a snag as the year draws to a close.

On Thursday, the LTTE announced that it would boycott the sittings of the Sub-Committee on De-escalation and Normalisation (SDN) following a row with the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) over the dismantling of the SLA's High Security Zones (HSZ) in the Jaffna peninsula.

The LTTE described as "un-

realistic and unacceptable" the SLA's demand that it remove its artillery and mortar positions beyond striking range of the HSZs and disarm its cadres there, as a quid pro quo for the dismantling of the HSZs.

The LTTE further said that it would boycott the meetings of the SDN as long as the army insisted on these conditions.

The LTTE argued that the conditions cut at the very root of the normalisation process by hampering the return and resettlement of refugees. It warned that the army's stance would hamper the work of the Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilita-

tion Needs (SIHRN).

But the LTTE may not be able to brow beat the SLA this time because the Scandinavian-staffed Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) supports the SLA's stand on this issue.

SLMM chief, Maj Gen Trond Furhovde, said in a statement on Thursday that the LTTE was not being true to the ceasefire agreement by demanding the dismantling of the HSZs. He argued that there could be normalisation only if the present military balance was kept. The LTTE's insistence on getting the HSZs dismantled would tilt the balance against the army and disturb peace, he said.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

SLMM rules out one-sided de-escalation

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 26. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) today ruled out any one-sided reduction in the balance of forces between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), weakening the Tigers' argument for gaining a military upper hand in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

Trond Furuhovde, head of the SLMM, a team of Nordic truce overseers, also termed as "unrealistic" any normalisation programme that was at the "expense of security".

In a clear message that the humanitarian argument could not be advanced for de-escalation of Government troops, Maj. Gen. Furuhovde said: "In Jaffna, simply dismantling the 'high security zones' for resettlement and handing over land for cultivation will decrease both security and combat potential of the Government forces".

The "balance of forces", he added, "is the basis of the ceasefire agreement and disturbing that balance is disturbing the ceasefire".

The observation gains significance against recent demands by the LTTE for de-escalation of Government forces in the north as a precondition to resettle-

ment of the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The main argument by the Tigers was that the humanitarian issue of resettlement of the IDPs could not progress without de-escalation. "We want the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, so that it will increase the confidence of the civilians," the LTTE spokesman, Daya Master, told *The Hindu* this evening, before the SLMM statement was released.

Sorting out the linkage between humanitarian and military issues, Maj. Gen. Furuhovde said: "Representa-

tives of the LTTE have stated that maintaining their military strength is vital if they are to be successful in their negotiations. What applies to the LTTE in this context should also apply for the Government. The paradox in the peace argument is that the priority of normalisation goes before that of security, while both rest on the present military balance. In order to build peace, the forces on both sides must be kept stable. An unrealistic normalisation program in the name of progress and development should not be allowed to come into force at

the expense of security, as this could undermine the building of permanent peace".

Meanwhile, the LTTE today ruled out disarming its cadres and decommissioning weapons and said these were "non-negotiable issues". In a pointer to the difficulties that the peace process is headed for in the months ahead, the LTTE, in a statement published in the TAMILNET website, said raising such issues "at this stage" and to "stipulate it as a condition for humanitarian issues of resettlement has a diabolical motive of disrupting" the peace process.

A precursor to a breakdown?

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 26. The continued difficulties over the issue of resettling the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the insistence by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that this "humanitarian concern" be addressed urgently could well be a precursor to a possible breakdown of talks, a senior military analyst has cautioned.

Referring to the chain of events during the month — the Tigers' demand for taking up resettlement issues, the abductions and killings of non-LTTE members — the analyst told *The Hindu* that "the doings of the LTTE in the recent

past points to a possible breakdown in the peace talks".

On the sensitive issue of linking the resettlement of IDPs to de-escalation in the north, he said: "As the ceasefire agreement provides for maintaining the 'forward defence lines' under the ceasefire, the Government should not have even entertained such thoughts in the first place".

"This could be cited by the Tigers as a setback to the peace process," the analyst said, adding that "the killings of non-LTTE party members and the ex-militants who were working with the Army" could all be signals of an impending breakdown in the talks.

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THE HINDU

Civilians targeted in Nepal's 'people's war': Amnesty

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24. More than 4,366 persons have been killed in Nepal since November 2001 when the peace talks between Maoist rebels and the Kathmandu Government broke down, Amnesty International said in a new report.

Half the victims of the ongoing "people's war" in Nepal were civilians, targeted for their "real or perceived support" to the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist); others were Maoists deliberately killed after being taken prisoner.

The report entitled, 'Nepal: A deepening human rights crisis', said at least 66 persons were reported to have "disappeared" in the last year after being taken into custody by the security forces. "The total number of disappearances reported to the organisation in the context of the people's war is over 200. This makes Nepal the country with the third highest number of disappearances reported worldwide in the last four years," it said.

Human rights abuses, Amnesty alleged, had reached an unprecedented level since the Army was called out and the security forces given fresh powers. "It is clear that the authorities in Nepal lack the willingness to remedy the situation and tackle the endemic impunity in the country. There is an urgent need for international assistance to provide increased human rights protection and create a law enforcement system capable of addressing human rights violations with greater transparency and accountability," the London-headquartered organisation said.

Amnesty said the Maoist forces had also been responsible for a number of human rights violations, including the killing of an estimated 800 civilians said to be "enemies of the revolution", hostage taking for ransom, torture and the custodial murder of security personnel.

"In one incident, around 300 Maoists dragged all male villagers above age 15 from their homes in Sumshergunj, Banke district, on July 9, 2002. Around 25 people were beaten with clubs, rifle butts and spears and accused of handing over two Maoists to the police who earlier that day had attacked one of the villagers. Two men, Moti Lal Tamauli and Sohan Yadav Ahil died on the spot..." the report said.

It said recruitment of children by the Maoists had been reported on a regular basis. It had evi-

dence of how children were being trained in the use of arms. Torture by the Nepalese Army, the Armed Police Force (APF) and the police, the group alleged, was reported almost daily. "The APF which was established in 2001, has been increasingly cited in allegations of torture. The Army systematically held people blindfolded and handcuffed for days, weeks or even months. Torture methods included rape, falanga (beatings on the soles of the feet), electric shocks, belana (rolling a weighted stick along the prisoner's thighs causing muscle damage), and beating with iron rods covered in plastic and mock executions."

Amnesty quoted official figures released in August as saying that 9,900 "Maoists" had been arrested, of whom 1,722 remained in custody. "Most arrests and initial period of detentions take place outside any legal framework, especially when suspects are held in Army custody. The Army denies holding detainees beyond the legally permitted period of 24 hours... There is overwhelming evidence of people being held for long periods incommunicado in Army barracks."

The group also said that the international community had been slow to wake up to the impending human rights crisis in Nepal. "Despite being a party to all major human rights treaties, Nepal has so far largely escaped scrutiny by the United Nations."

Amnesty said the internal conflict had adversely affected the overall development of the country. "Tourism, one of the main sources of income, has collapsed. The Maoist strategy of targeting infrastructure, including airports, bridges, power plants and communication centres combined with numerous roadblocks and checkpoints set up by the security forces presented major obstacles to economic development".

A combination of drought with Government restrictions on supply of food and medicines to areas controlled by Maoists on the one hand and restrictions imposed by Maoists on the transport of food to the district headquarters on the other, has led to increasing concern among development aid organisations. These factors have also led to the internal displacement of thousands (of) people, many of whom have moved to town areas and are staying with relatives. Other people have moved across the border to India," the report added.

Human rights to figure in next round of Sri Lanka talks

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S. Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 23. Sri Lankan peace negotiators will start the New Year by taking on contentious political and human issues such as power-sharing and the deployment of child soldiers in the next round of talks to be held in Thailand between January 6 and 9.

Terming the coming talks as a "process which is just beginning" the head of Colombo's delegation, G.L. Peiris, said a "framework for division of powers" as well as "human rights" issues, will be discussed during the four-day talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The fourth session is expected to take forward the broad framework reached earlier this month in Oslo when Colombo and the Tigers agreed to explore a federal model to find a solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

Striking the normal tone of not raising hopes before each session of talks, Prof. Peiris said it will be "unrealistic" to expect conclusions to be reached during the next session.

Human rights, which is a matter of concern in Sri Lanka's political discourse, will figure for the first time in the talks. The two issues highlighted by Prof. Peiris - child soldiers and the cases of disappearances (missing in action) - have international and domestic ramifications. The LTTE, which has



Buddhist monks, aligned with the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna, staging a protest outside the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo on Monday, against alleged bias towards the Tamil Tigers. Later, they proceeded to the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's office to hand over a letter demanding the expulsion of the Norwegian Ambassador. — AFP

come under condemnation by human rights organisations, has of late displayed its intention of returning child soldiers to their families.

The issue of missing soldiers has domestic implications. Several organisations representing soldiers who are missing in action (MIA) have made calls for greater clarity on this issue. The exact number of the MIAs is not known, but estimates place it in thousands. In addition, some

organisations say that the Tigers have "hundreds" of soldiers in captivity, a charge that the LTTE has not accepted as it has maintained that it has released all those under custody.

At the level of political discussions, the contentious issues of power-sharing such as the geographical region for which greater powers will be given, the political and administrative mechanism envisaged, matters relating to public finance and

law and order, will have to be discussed.

Against the backdrop of a ground-level consolidation by the LTTE of its apparatuses of state - courts, police stations, banks etc., - the main challenge will be how this will be translated into a framework that will be accepted by all players. The LTTE has already indicated that it is seeking a predominant role in any future administration of the northeast.

...to assassinate ... visit to Pakistan, begin- Kasuri.

LTTE gets licence to go on air

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Dec. 15. — Sri Lanka has issued a licence to LTTE to set up a broadcasting station in the northern town of Kilinochchi and has assigned an FM frequency, a newspaper said today.

The licence was issued to the LTTE's 'Peace Secretariat' "to maintain and operate a private broadcasting station for which LTTE had imported equipment worth over \$100,000 last month, *The Sunday Leader* said.

It said the rebel group was keen to

legalise its clandestine 'Voice of Tigers' and had sought a licence to "disseminate news to Tamil people on the ongoing peace process."

In a communication to the rebel group's 'peace secretariat', which was reproduced in the weekly, the mass communications ministry secretary was reported to have said that the "licensee shall provide broadcasting programmes in accordance with the norms, standards and code of ethics followed by the state-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation.

The import of the equipment had raised concerns in India as to whether the group, outlawed in India, would

use it to broadcast propaganda in Tamil Nadu to gain support.

However, India won't be worried as long as the broadcasting facilities were only for FM transmission, which are only specified frequencies with limited range. An LTTE cultural wing functionary had recently said the rebel radio had expansion plans to cover South India and Singapore.

Another weekly, *The Sunday Times*, said India was concerned that there was a 'cloak of high secrecy' over the import of broadcast equipment and the manner in which it was brought into the country under the name of the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo.

A million turn out against Chavez

CARACAS, DEC. 15. Masses of Venezuelans streamed from different sections of Caracas today to meet in a mass demonstration that called for the resignation of the President, Hugo Chavez, on the 13th day of a national strike.

Some estimates put the crowd at more than 1 million people. As they converged on a highway in eastern Caracas, protesters waved signs with anti-Chavez slogans, sang and blew whistles.

The main speaker of the rally, Carlos Ortega, chairman of Venezuela's federation of trade unions, said Mr. Chavez had caused terrible damage to the country. "Chavez is trying to divide the people and stir up hate, which is foreign to Venezuelans," he said.

Mr. Ortega also denied government claims that the general strike, which began December 2, had broken up. "This irresponsible government says that there is no strike," he said. "Naturally, there is a strike, Mr Chavez — a strike that demands



The Venezuelan Army, General Nestor Gonzales (right), joins hundreds of thousands of opponents of the President, Hugo Chavez, during a march in Caracas on Saturday. — AFP

your resignation."

Meanwhile, the Foreign Minister, Roy Chaderton, rejected a U.S. call on Friday for early elections. He said Venezuela's con-

stitution did not allow for the vote to be moved up.

He also accused striking workers in the vital oil industry of wanting to grab more power

than the people or the military. Mr. Chaderton called the crippling of the industry in the world's fifth-largest oil exporter a "violent sabotage". — DPA

THE HINDO

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N. Korean move triggers new crisis

By P. S. Suryanarayana

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SINGAPORE, DEC. 12. A new crisis over North Korea's nuclear profile loomed large on the Asia-Pacific horizon today, even as Pyongyang announced that it would resume its programme of generating electricity at the facilities that were 'frozen' under the Agreed Framework (AF) of 1994. The AF an essentially bilateral accord between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the North's official name, and the United States carries, however, the force of a commitment by Pyongyang to eschew its nuclear weapons programme.

The AF is often read in conjunction with the other commitments that North Korea had made under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the related safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) besides the Inter-Korean Denuclearisation Declaration. The DPRK's latest statement, which deeply disturbed neighbouring South Korea among others in the region, was first monitored in Seoul. The "freeze" encapsulated North Korea's commitments to give up its nuclear weaponisation programme which in 1994 was based on the 'plutonium route'. The agreed reciprocal gesture from the U.S. was to ensure the annual supply of 500,000 tons of heavy oil. Amplifying the "present situation", North Korea said today that the U.S., which made its intentions clear by the middle of last month, had actually turned off the heavy oil tap from this month. Viewing



South Koreans read newspapers reporting North Korea's move to reactivate its nuclear facilities, in Seoul on Thursday. — AP

this as a fatal breach of the AF, Pyongyang took the line that the U.S. President's "Special Envoy", James Kelly, had recently used a "phraseology" quite "arbitrarily" to portray the DPRK as a proliferator engaged in a clandestine nuclear weaponisation programme on the basis of enriched-uranium

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production. The U.S. has in recent weeks explained its moves regarding the fuel oil issue by harping on North Korea's confessional acknowledgment of a uranium-based atomic-weapons programme. However, Pyongyang today blamed the U.S. attitude as regards the fuel oil issue to justify a decision to "immediately resume the operation and construction" of the nuclear power-generation facilities that had been shut down under the AF. With this, North Korea has now notified its intentions to produce electricity by all available nuclear means that could provide the sensitive materials for the production of atomic weapons. The new North Korean move has caught the international community, more especially South Korea, by surprise in the evolving context of the latest controversy over the shipment of scud missiles to Yemen, as now determined, from the DPRK. The U.S., which first blew the whistle to arraign North Korea on this missile-shipment issue, has since acknowledge Yemen's rights, as an American "anti-terror ally", to receive such a missile shipment.

Richard Armitage, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State who is at present touring North East Asia, had yesterday condemned North Korea as a proliferator in the context of this issue of missile-shipment. Mr. Armitage underlined the need to "find a way to denuclearise the peninsula of Korea". He expressed optimism that China would urge North Korea to opt for "some different behaviour" as regards the nuclear issue.

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Fashioning a federal Sri Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

The LTTE's present offer to talk about a federal option is a manifestation of its need to consolidate its appearance of a state.

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"In Ceylon each province should have complete autonomy... some form of federal government would be the only solution to our problems." — S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. (Quoted by the late Neelan Tiruchelvam in the Bandaranaike Memorial Lecture -1992).

SRI LANKA'S most controversial word — federal — is back in the nation's political discourse. After conjuring images of separation in a sharply divided southern Sri Lankan polity, the same word is now offered as an acceptable framework to end decades of separatist bloodshed.

Though it may appear quixotic to recall the words of the late Bandaranaike — seen as one whose introduction of the 'Sinhala Only' concept started the separatist conflict — their appropriateness is in the context of a sharply divided Sri Lankan politics, marked by extreme nationalist positions. Two assassinations — that of Bandaranaike by a Buddhist monk in 1959 and of Neelan Tiruchelvam by a Tamil suicide bomber in 1999 — reflected the hardline opinion in the two communities that have stalled any meaningful resolution of the conflict.

Reconstructing a nation as fragmented as Sri Lanka is a tall order. Visible territorial distinctions apart, the fissures within its polity run too deep to expect an early solution to the decades-long separatist conflict. The latest stand by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), favouring a federal model, though belated and still fluid, poses an opportunity, however slender, to cage the Tigers' demand. To even a casual observer of Sri Lankan affairs, the incompatibility of a unitary constitution was apparent. This was eloquently argued by the late scholar-parliamentarian, Neelan Tiruchelvam, in his last speech before his assassination: "The entrenchment of the unitary state often leads to the absurd contradiction of imposing a mono-ethnic state on a multi-ethnic polity".

The challenge now is to channel the conflict-resolution process to ensure a viable constitutional outcome. This task, evidently, is much easier said than done, particularly given questions of accountability for the LTTE's past activities. For the southern polity, the acceptable starting

point should be the draft constitutional proposals prepared by the earlier Chandrika Kumaratunga administration. Apart from building upon an overwhelming consensus between the two major parties — the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party — this has the advantage of starting a process of inclusiveness in a sharply divided southern polity. Still, much more requires to be done.

The torn agreements that lie by the blood-splattered wayside of Sri Lankan politics have one common attribute: the repeated episodes of the Opposition of the day rejecting a Government plan, only to resuscitate peace-making when it is back in power. This unending cycle of mutual denial has, in its own way, also contributed to the transformation of what essentially was a question of political power sharing into a bloody civil war. Central to this implosion of Sri Lanka has been the LTTE's campaign of violence and terror aimed at projecting a picture that a separate Tamil Eelam exists. This it achieved by the systematic dismemberment of the island into two — physically as well as emotionally. In addition, assassinations annihilated Tamil dissent. The most crucial component of the state-building project of the LTTE was the construction of adjuncts of power. The military apparatus, the exact numbers of which are at best estimates, is the more visible component.

Its present offer to talk about a federal option is a manifestation of its need to consolidate its appearance of a state and the need for legitimacy. Though significant on paper, the challenge now for the negotiators is to translate this into action. Before an acceptable federal option is reached, the negotiators would have to cross several contentious issues — power-sharing, geographical region, human rights protection, political and administrative mechanism, public finance and law and order — making conflict resolution a distant solution.

Fashioning a federal Sri Lanka to meet the Tigers' specifications could well see the start of another war of nerves. Broadly put, control over land, military, legislation, judiciary, administrative and revenue structures constitute the claim to a state. Before the fall of Jaffna, the LTTE's writ ran across the north. Since 1996, however, the consolidation has been confined to areas held by it.

With democracy and pluralism not even a distant guiding light, the 'laws' of the rebel-territory are a mix of fiat and reiterations or adaptations of existing Sri Lankan legislation. In the rebels' 'judicial' sphere, the first 'district court' was established in 1993, the 'Tamil Eelam Department of Justice and Law' in 1994 and a 'Penal Code of Tamil Eelam' followed soon after. A two-year stint at the "Tamil Eelam Law College", in place since 1994, is a prerequisite for court appointments.

The LTTE's policing dates back to more than a decade, and is reportedly placed under the "Department of Justice and Law". From a start with three 'police stations', latest reports are that this has increased to 19 over the decade. The blue-uniformed 'police' have developed their own structure. Unlike the conventional one, their salute — the right palm raised to the chest, with fingers pointing upwards in a one-handed "Vanakkam" — is the clearest symbolism that cultural revivalism co-exists with modern military strategies as the LTTE's agenda of state. Another face, overshadowed by the general awe over the Tigers' military machine, is its economic wing. As early as 1994, "the infrastructure development of Tamil Eelam" was drawn up. Informed Sri Lankan town planners concede that this is as comprehensive a document as could be envisaged for a 'nation-state': complete with locations for 'international' and 'national' airports, its own structure of 'states', economic regions, roadways and ports.

It is, therefore, just a step away from consolidation that the Tigers of-

ferred to accept "regional self-rule" and followed it up with a nod for considering the federal option. Known as a "military strategist", the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, has now started visibly pushing his political path, based on a reading that a fragmented Sri Lankan polity will not deliver upon his request.

International positioning has seen a complete change since the 1980s, largely due to the work done by the earlier PA Government. The India factor, breathing down the neck of the conflict-resolution process, even without a direct involvement, will have its own dynamics, given the legal, strategic and linkage-politics effects of peace or war in Sri Lanka.

As recent international statements make clear, the quest for legitimacy by the LTTE will remain elusive as long as it does not renounce the concept of secession and the resort to violence and terror to meet political ends. Above all, the most serious test that the LTTE has not faced is winning the acid test of political legitimacy — the consent of the governed through popular ballot and commitment to pluralism.

Behind all the current bonhomie is the political compulsion for the UNP to strengthen its position against an all-powerful President, Ms. Kumaratunga, who also heads the main Opposition party. In that context, the agreement on December 5, the day from which Ms. Kumaratunga was no longer restrained by the Constitution from dissolving Parliament, is as much an exercise aimed at checkmating southern politics as it is of formally constraining the Tigers and the Government to a federal framework.

Any conflict resolution process requires, as a precondition, a move away from the status quo by all the important actors. Now that a seemingly different start has been made, it is time for the Sri Lankan state, and its sharply divided political actors, to agree to do so and call the shots, not whistle in the darkness and slide into politics of denial. For this, the agreements reached over the past few years on the Kumaratunga constitutional proposals could form a starting point. It is also time that the LTTE was made to stick to its latest position, rendering difficult a return to mutually destructive war-games.

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THE HINDU

Lanka takes step forward, to share power

K. VENKATARAMANAN
COLOMBO, DECEMBER 9

THE Sri Lanka government came out in full support of sharing power under a federal system with Tamil rebels and the issue would be discussed in the next peace talks in January in Thailand, a government official said today.

"Now that the (Tigers) have ruled out separatism, we are working on how to share power and yes, we fully agree to the federal status formula," chief government negotiator G.L. Peiris said here. The issue of division of powers between the centre and regions in their proposed federal constitutional model would be discussed in the next session at Niporn Pathom in Thailand from January 6-9, he said.

The basis for sharing of power and Human Rights protection would be discussed in the next session, said Peiris Sri Lanka's Constitutional Affairs Minister.

Division of powers is an essen-

Cabinet briefed on progress in peace talks

COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan Cabinet was briefed on Monday on the progress made in the latest peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels where both sides agreed to pursue a federal power-sharing formula to end 19 years of civil war. The breakthrough came at negotiations last week in Oslo, Norway. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had previously demanded a separate homeland for the island's 3.2 million Tamil minority, claiming that they have been the targets of discrimination by country's 14 million Sinhalese.

The Cabinet also discussed ways of allowing the rebels to share power in the north and east, where most Tamils live. Meanwhile, an influential Buddhist group says it opposes moves to give some power to the Tamils.

that any solution would be based on internal self-determination, federalism and within the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. This has enabled us to address specific political issues separately, Peiris said. He said federalism was not a new idea in Sri Lanka, having been raised as early as 1930 on behalf of the Sinhalese of Kandy, and introduced into the government's devolution proposals of 1995 and incorporated in a draft constitution that failed to get parliamentary support in August 2000. "But the difference

feature of any federal state. There can't be a political resolution in the absence of sharing of powers, he said, referring to the parties' agreement in Oslo last week that they would explore the possibility of resolving the ethnic question on the basis of federalism.

"The solution is to be within federalism, that is, the outer boundary has been fixed," he said. The rebels had agreed that they were neither pursuing separatism nor confederacy, he added.

The parties had agreed in Oslo

now is that the LTTE is now part of the process. Previously, they had no confidence in the idea," he said.

However, Peiris said neither the 1995 proposals, nor the 2000 draft could be adopted in toto. There had to be some modifications. "We are not excluding anything of value, whether from our experience or from outside." The government and LTTE had, therefore, decided to study various federal models, including the Swiss and Canadian systems. The issue of Human Rights protection as part of the proposed solution was another subject to be discussed.

Ian Martin, former secretary-general of Amnesty International would offer his help in evolving a Human Rights framework, Peiris said. He said wider consultation among various sections of opinion had already begun.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had recently convened a meeting of leaders of various parties and heard their views on the peace efforts.

—PTI

Human rights next on peace agenda

SCOTT MCDONALD
COLOMBO, DECEMBER 9

THE Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger rebels, riding a wave of breakthroughs in peace talks to end 19 years of war, plan to tackle human rights issues in their next meeting, a senior cabinet minister said on Monday. "Human rights is going to be one of the major topics to be discussed," Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris said of next month's peace talks set for a resort outside Bangkok.

"We think that the discussions of human rights are going to be very important because they will lay the foundation for the donors' meeting that is scheduled to be held in Tokyo in May of next year," Peiris said. The Tigers run a ruthless one-party state in the area of northern Sri Lanka they control and have been accused of using child soldiers in the war that has killed 64,000 people and displaced more than one million.

But in peace talks held last week in Oslo, the government and LTTE agreed to work out a system of regional autonomy within a federal framework. The accord on a federal model with limited self-rule for Tamil areas is a big step toward ending the war and comes after the rebels dropped a cornerstone demand for independence for the north and east of the island.

—Reuters

Guaranteeing peace in Sri Lanka

By Asoka Bandarage

The ceasefire between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the prospects for a peaceful settlement have been eagerly welcomed both within and outside the island.

Before reconstruction and development can take place, however, the underlying conditions for peace need to be guaranteed.

Absence of war is not necessarily peace. The peace-at-any-cost approach that seems to be pursued now does not guarantee a lasting peace.

To avert a return to war and the emergence of new types of violence and terrorism, a number of important, hitherto neglected issues need to be addressed.

The postponement of the core issue, that is, the nature of the administration for the North and the East, will enable the LTTE to consolidate its rule over those regions ignoring both demographic realities and democratic norms.

While the LTTE has demanded a separate Tamil homeland in the North and the East of Sri Lanka, the Eastern Province is not a Tamil majority region. Sinhalese and Muslims constitute about 68 per cent of the population there.

Since the ceasefire, violence has erupted between ethnic communities in the Eastern Province and the Muslim political lobby has become increasingly vocal in its demand for a separate Muslim administrative unit there.

The postponement of the core issue could contribute to balkanisation of Sri Lanka and the attendant problems of population transfer, ethnic cleansing, hardened enmities and further turmoil and violence.

To guarantee peace, representatives of Sinhala

and Muslim communities in the North and the East need to be included in negotiations and the administration of those regions. The right of all Sri Lankan citizens to own property and reside in any region of the island, including the North and the East, must be guaranteed in any final agreement.

This will also ensure that Tamil people, the majority of whom live in the so-called Sinhala areas in the South, could continue to live in those regions.

The LTTE continues to attack dissident Tamils, abduct children as soldiers, smuggle arms, storm security camps in the North and the East using civilians as

OPINION

shields. It has even abducted a Scandinavian peace monitor.

Yet, in their efforts to keep the terrorist LTTE at the negotiating table, the Sri Lankan Government and the Norwegian facilitators have overlooked these ceasefire and human rights violations. The LTTE has opened its own police stations under the flag of Tamil Eelam in the Eastern province in the districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

A Norwegian Government representative is scheduled to address a pro-LTTE peace conference in Norway which raises questions about Norwegian neutrality in the mediation process. Norway must not compromise the peace process.

The international community must not facilitate the creation of a mono-ethnic, authoritarian state in the North and the East, in the name of peace. Rather, international aid promised for reconstruction and development in the North and the East must be linked to human rights, democracy and multiculturalism. The

international community must set conditions to ensure that the vast sums of money made by the LTTE is used entirely for reconstruction and rehabilitation purposes rather than warfare.

The peace-at-any-cost approach pursued in Sri Lanka has overlooked the conditions that need to be placed in order to make the LTTE commit to a path of justice and democracy.

It has also contributed to the suppression and marginalisation of alternative voices within both the Sinhala and Tamil communities.

The protests and massive demonstrations against the de-proscription of the LTTE in Sri Lanka have hardly been reported in the local or international media.

The Sri Lankan Government recently refused the renewal of the visa of British journalist, Paul Harris, who has raised serious concerns about the peace process.

The 'self censorship' of the press and the relative silence of Sri Lankan and international NGOs on ceasefire violations and human rights issues does not bode well for democracy. The repression of opposition could potentially lead to new types of terrorism in the South and other parts of the island.

Peace calls for communication and the expression of alternative voices and concerns, not their suppression.

The international community needs to support open dialogue so that the peace in Sri Lanka becomes a democratic and just peace rather than what many observers see as the creation of a terrorist state.

(The writer is currently a Ford Fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute, School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC.)

8 DEC 2002

Australia
T-9

House to house, Sydney fights fire

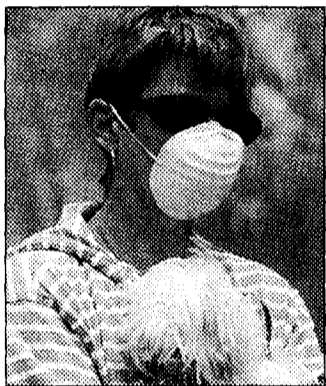
2
7/12

Sydney, Dec. 6 (Reuters): Engulfed in choking, blinding smoke, firefighters fought flames house to house in northern Sydney today as gale-force winds whipped up fierce bushfires threatening scores of homes in Australia's main city.

Desperate residents wearing swimming goggles and wet scarves around their faces stood shoulder-to-shoulder with firefighters, trying to douse burning fences with garden hoses or throwing buckets of water towards the sound of roaring, crackling infernos.

"This is what we have been dreading, a very big, uncontrolled fire, flaring up with strong winds. We are fighting the fire house by house, which is the hardest way to fight a fire," said fireman Ian Krimmer standing in front of a smouldering house.

The body of an 81-year-old man was found in a burned-out caravan in scorched bushland today, bringing to two the num-



A resident of Berowra, northern Sydney, carries her dog through smoke as bushfires approach her home. (Reuters)

ber killed since Sydney's fire crisis flared on Wednesday.

A man trapped by huge walls of fire near Dead Horse Bay in Sydney's far north today was winched to safety by a helicopter as flames and smoke surrounded him. There were 79 fires burning

through New South Wales state, which like the rest of Australia is in the grip of drought, but a major blaze to Sydney's north and another in the Blue Mountains to the west of the city posed the greatest danger.

"EL NINO in your area NOW be fire wise," read a sign hanging on a telegraph pole at Berowra Heights in northern Sydney.

More than 20 Sydney homes have been destroyed, but exhausted firefighters said no houses were lost today. One house was earlier reported destroyed. "We have had thousands of houses saved. The firefighting effort has been remarkable," said Cameron Wade, a spokesman for the New South Wales Rural Fire Service.

"The sheer tenacity of the crews is amazing. They have fought fires up to backyards. They will not give up." More than 4,000 firefighters and 80 water-bombing aircraft have joined the fight against fires.

Oslo deal evokes mixed reaction

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 6. Thursday's Oslo agreement by Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to look at a "federal model" as a solution to the decades-long separatist crisis marks the simultaneous crossing of one difficult step and the start of another complex phase of the conflict resolution process. The announcement has received a mix of cautious optimism and scepticism by political parties.

Domestic political compulsions have weighed heavily on the negotiators. December 5 — the day of the Oslo agreement — was also when the Constitutional restraint on the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, to dissolve Parliament was removed as one year had lapsed since the last elections.

The immediate political significance of the Oslo deal is that it would strengthen the prospects of the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, as his Government sits under the Damocles' sword of parliamentary dissolution.

The next few weeks would have to be watched for the manner in which the southern Sri Lankan polity responds to the re-emergence of the 'federal' concept in the island's politics. When first mooted over five decades ago, it was seen as separation, but over the past few years, there has been an overall acceptance of the need for a move away from a unitary constitution.

The main Opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) recently said that it was acceptable to a federal solution if "there was consensus" on the concept. Hours before Thursday's agreement was announced the party's senior leader, Anura Bandaranaike, told a press conference that while the party was opposed to a confederation it was committed to support the greatest degree of devolution as a solution.

The party emphasised that its leader, the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, was the first to come out with a set of devolution proposals aimed at solving the ethnic crisis. The Oslo agreement was a "development that merits careful study and this is what the PA proposes to do", the senior adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar, told *The Hindu*. Not all are convinced by the latest announcement. The Eelam People's Democratic Party does not see a big change in the position. "We welcome it, but we don't trust it", the party's leader, Douglas Devananda, said. "Similar positions were taken during earlier talks," he said adding, "we have had historical experience of the Tigers".

The President of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), V. Anadasangaree, tracing the decades of opposition to the very term "federal", said in the present stage of the negotiations "the ball is in the Opposition's court".

Recalling the Opposition party's support for greater devolution of powers he said: "They should not go back on what they have said in the recent past". On India's position on the conflict, he said, "very, very unpleasant events have taken place" in the past, "but I hope that Indian leaders will be magnanimous".

7 DEC 2002

Lanka, LTTE agree to regional autonomy

Sri Lanka 11-11
6/12

Oslo: Sri Lanka's government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) agreed on Thursday to work out a



A. Balasingham federal model granting regional autonomy for the island nation in a breakthrough in efforts to end a 19-year separatist war.

"Both parties have made an unprecedented historic decision," rebel negotiator Anton Balasingham said after four days of Norwegian-brokered peace talks in an Oslo hotel with chief government negotiator G.L. Peiris. The accord on limited au-

tonomy for Tamil areas is a big step towards ending the separatist conflict in which 64,000 people have died. The rebels last month dropped a demand for full independence for the north and east of the island.

"This federal model will be within a federal Sri Lanka," Mr Balasingham said. The two sides agreed to a truce in February and have held three rounds of peace talks in Norway and Thailand. "The parties have decided to explore a political solution founded on internal self-determination based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka," said Norwegian deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen, who hosted the talks. The two sides have been

discussing existing federal models, such as those of Canada, Australia, Germany, Switzerland and India.

"The parties agreed to initiate discussions on substantive political issues such as power sharing between the centre and the region, as well as within the centre," Mr Helgesen said.

The rebels' reclusive leader, Mr Velupillai Prabhakaran, paved the way for talks on core political issues in Oslo when he conceded last week that Tamil aspirations could be met by self-rule and regional autonomy rather than a separate state.

The LTTE also agreed not to expand their regional courts and police forces beyond areas dominated by it. Reuters

'BREAKTHROUGH' IN OSLO TALKS

Colombo, LTTE agree on federal structure

APD-1
6/12
OSLO (NORWAY), DEC. 5. Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today agreed to develop a government that would give the rebels regional autonomy — a breakthrough decision after months of efforts to end the 19-year-old ethnic conflict in the island nation. Both the sides agreed to pursue a peace based on the principle of internal self-determination in the Tamil-dominated areas of the north and east, according to a draft copy of the joint statement obtained by the Associated Press.

"The parties have decided to explore a political solution founded on internal self-determination based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka," the statement said. It also said that political steps must be supported by measures to ensure continuation of the existing ceasefire and "that new concrete measures will be taken to



The LTTE chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham (left), with the Sri Lankan Government chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, in Oslo on Thursday. — AP

facilitate further de-escalation." Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, said the three days of talks were conducted in a "frank, open and constructive manner." The

agreement was reached a week after the LTTE leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, said for the first time that the Tigers were in favour of a solution that offered "substantial regional autonomy." The statement said that the rebels would let competing political parties stay in their regions as long as they were unarmed, and that the activities of their courts and police would not extend to Colombo-held areas.

The LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, said "both parties made an unprecedented historic decision... Our struggle was based on the concept of self-determination." The peace process would move forward, step-by-step. "There is no need to resort to violence."

And the Government negotiator, Gamini Peiris, said the commitment to peace was in place. "There is not going to be a war. We are certain of that," he said. "The people of the country are yearning for peace." Ways of incorporating the Tigers into the Government will be examined in the next round of talks in Japan.

Mr. Balasingham said a Muslim delegation would be included in the next round of talks.

'Major step'

V. S. Sambandan reports from Colombo:

Oslo's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka's peace process, Erik Solheim, termed today's agreement as a "major step" but expressed caution that a "long and bumpy road" was ahead before a final solution could be reached.

"They have decided what sort of house they want to build. They want to build a house with a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka. The decision to raise this house takes a long time," Mr. Solheim told *The Hindu* over phone from Oslo. The Tigers had made it "very clear that they will settle for a federal option based on self-determination but within a united Sri Lanka." While the two sides were "definitely closer" to a solution than they were at the start of the talks, it would be "absolutely illusory" to expect an early solution, he said.

Different models : Page 12

Australia rush to defuse crisis

Canberra, Dec. 4 (Reuters): Australia called in ambassadors from Southeast Asia today to try to defuse a crisis over comments by Prime Minister John Howard that pre-emptive action in a foreign country is a legitimate response to terrorism.

Officials said foreign minister Alexander Downer called in 10 ambassadors from countries in the region to explain Howard's comments and stress there would be no action without consultation.

Downer said Australia was trying to work closely with

Asian neighbours to head off such attacks as the October 12 bombings which killed more than 180 people, including up to 90 Australians, on the Indonesian island of Bali.

"None of the governments in our region sponsors or supports terrorism," Downer told Australian television.

Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand have lashed out at Howard's comments, saying such action would amount to an act of war, although Howard did not specifically mention military action

and insists his comments were not directed at the region.

The meeting with Asian ambassadors followed reports that two Asian nations had threatened to pull out of counter-terrorism cooperation deals with Australia. Australia was quick to join the US-led war on terrorism after last year's September 11 attacks.

One of Howard's most outspoken Asian critics, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, said today that Australia's stance could undermine regional counter-terrorism co-

operation.

"We are cooperating as much as we can today in the fight against terrorism. But if they are going to blame us, we will have to rethink about cooperating with them," Mahathir said.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo, whose government has also suggested counter-terrorism cooperation could suffer, said today it was important to understand global responsibility. "All countries in the world who value peace and freedom must help one another," Arroyo said during a visit to Tokyo.

F 5 DEC 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Dalits' conversion meet tomorrow

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, DEC. 4. Asserting that Dalits would be among the most affected by the latest Tamil Nadu law, SC/ST organisations plan to hold a 'conversion meet' here on December 6, B.R. Ambedkar's memorial day.

Addressing mediapersons here today, Joseph D'Souza, president of the All-India Christian Council, and R. Tirumavalvan, Dalit Panthers of India leader, said the anti-conversion law was commonly perceived as anti-minority and anti-Dalit. Though the organisations were not surprised at the Governor giving his assent to the Bill, the fears and apprehensions among the minorities and Dalits had increased, as the law would have serious repercussions.

Despite the new hurdle put up by the Government, the Dalits would continue to exercise their constitutional right to freedom of religion. "On December 6, 2,000 Dalits would convert from Hinduism to Buddhism and 1,000 from Hinduism to Christianity, at a ceremony to be held at Kam-

arajapuram in Selaiyur, a suburb of Chennai. The social activist, Kancha Iliah, besides church leaders from other States, as well as international observers from the media and civil rights organisations would be present, to show that conversion was being done without use of force, inducement or threat," Mr. Tirumavalavan said.

Later in the evening, at a function at Aminjikai here, hundreds of Dalits and Tamils would change their Hindu names into secular pure Tamil names. "We are being humiliated and not allowed to even draw water from community wells and tanks, but the casteist forces are trying to prevent us even from leaving the so-called Hindu faith. We cannot tolerate the perpetuation of this social order," said Mr. Tirumavalavan.

Dr. D'Souza said the issue was not confined to a State and concerned the Dalits countrywide. The law was in total contravention of the concept of 'freedom to practise a religion' and against international covenants on human rights. The Dalit organisations would challenge the law on the appropriate forum.

5 DEC 2002

THE HINDU

Lanka, LTTE begin autonomy talks

ALISTER DOYLE
OSLO, DECEMBER 4

SRI Lanka began negotiations with Tamil Tiger rebels on the issue of regional autonomy on Tuesday, and hailed it as a breakthrough in the peace talks aimed at ending their 19-year war.

"We began the discussion of the core political issues," Chief government negotiator G.L. Peiris said on the second day of Norwegian-brokered talks in Oslo. "This is the breakthrough today — the commencement of this work."

The government and rebels

will examine how Canada guarantees the rights of French speakers among an English-speaking majority and look at other models for integrating minorities, including Australia, Germany, Switzerland and India.

Peiris said Tuesday's talks were a landmark in addressing the issue of how Tamils in the North and East can live alongside the Sinhalese majority after a separatist war in which 64,000 people have died.

"It is a long haul, it is going to take time," Peiris said in an Oslo hotel, adding that "A conflict that has raged for two decades and which has assumed these serious



The two sides at the negotiating table File photo

proportions cannot...be resolved in a matter of two months or three months."

He said the reclusive leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, had paved the way for the talks by conceding last week that Tamil aspirations could be met by self-rule and regional au-

tonomy.

Previously, the Tigers had demanded a separate state in the North and East of the island state.

Peiris said the two sides could cooperate on defining "extensive power-sharing to fulfil the aspirations of different segments of the people of our country in the context of one country."

Peiris also said that a former leader of Amnesty International, Ian Martin, would work as an adviser on human rights.

Earlier, the rebels assured the Colombo government that rebel-run police and courts were no threat to peace efforts.

— Reuters

Party crisis a temporary setback to peace process, says Hakeem

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 3. The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Rauff Hakeem, today termed the crisis in his party as a "temporary setback" to the peace process and charged that there was a "wider conspiracy" to destabilise both the Government and the efforts to solve the separatist conflict.

Mr. Hakeem, who flew in from Oslo, where talks are on between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), told a press conference here that a "variety of vested interests" were behind the "crisis that has the potential to lead to the toppling of the government" and "drag the country back to war".

The two-day crisis in the crucial constituent of the ruling United National Front began

with Mr. Hakeem suspending a dissident leader, A.L.M. Athaulah, on Sunday.

A day later, Mr. Athaulah 'removed' Mr. Hakeem from the party leadership, plunging the party into a split.

The Muslim factor is an important determinant of the peace process, given the volatile ethnic mix in the three eastern districts.

In terms of parliamentary politics as well, the SLMC has the ability to sway government formation. The sacking of Mr. Hakeem last year from the then People's Alliance administration led to the withdrawal of his support and the subsequent collapse of the earlier government.

Asserting his party leadership position, Mr. Hakeem today said that far from being confined to an inner-party matter

this was ^{S. Lanka} "a conspiracy to destabilise the Muslims and create a change in the balance of power in Parliament". However, he had not shut the doors on a dialogue and all attempts would be taken to create a "win-win situation". "We are mature enough to handle the situation with tact and foresight".

The "sustenance of the peace process is very important and the Muslim community has a greater responsibility to ensure that the momentum of the process is maintained", Mr. Hakeem, who was representing his community's interests in the talks, said. Refuting dissident charges of going soft on the Tigers, he said he was not keen on taking an "emotional roller-coaster" approach, and added that there were gains made for the Muslims in the two rounds held so far.

4 DEC 2002

Howard not spoiling for fight

ANDREA HOPKINS

Canberra, Dec. 3 (Reuters): Australian Prime Minister John Howard said today he was not spoiling for a fight when he pledged to take pre-emptive action in another country against terrorism, and denied his comments had hurt relations with Asia.

Howard stood by his remark on Sunday that he would be willing to take pre-emptive action if he believed militants in another country planned to attack, despite criticism from Asian neighbours that such a strike would be an act of war.

"I made those remarks very carefully, in a very low-key fashion, they were quite accurate, they were not directed at any of our friends... I don't resile from them in any way," Howard told a news conference.

Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand have all lashed out at the comments, with the Philippines saying they were bizarre and arrogant and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad saying he would view such a strike as an act of war.

Malaysia's *New Straits Times* ran a commentary today dubbing the Australian leader "Uncle Sam's foremost flunky".

But Howard denied the comments had caused offence.

"I don't believe that our relations have been damaged by those statements at all, I think they are known and understood for what they are, and that is a statement of the obvious," Howard said.

"They don't mean any belligerence towards our friends."

Overnight the Australian leader won support from the

White House in Washington, where President George W. Bush's administration unilaterally adopted a pre-emptive strike doctrine in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks.

"The President of course supports pre-emptive action," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer told reporters.

"September 11 changed everything, and nations must respond and change their doctrines to face new and different threats," he said, quoting Bush's view.

Analysts and some Asian leaders have recognised that Howard leads a nation where nerves are raw and emotions running high after the October Bali bombing that killed more than 180 people, about half of them Australians.

But reactions to the comments even in Australia have been broadly negative, with some warning that more tension in the region was the last thing Australia needed.

"Prime Minister John Howard would do well to catch up with the reality that Australia's security is intimately linked to having good relations with our Asian neighbours."

Klaas Woldring wrote to the editor of Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*.

The Australian national newspaper said in an editorial that, while the Prime Minister "was broadly correct" in acknowledging the need sometimes to take pre-emptive military action, he was "ill-advised in today's ticklish security environment to say it".

But others praised the Prime Minister for his stance.

"Howard's comments... shows that at least one world leader has shown some diligence and insight into the terrorist problem.

"We must be proactive if we are to win this new kind of war. And our neighbours need to wake up," an Owen Edwards said in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

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Downer hedges Howard call

Star/ ANN

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec. 3. — Mr John Howard did not suggest that his country was going to launch military action against its neighbours to stop terrorists from attacking his country, his foreign minister, Mr Alexander Downer, has clarified.

What the Prime Minister did was to restate a well-worn principle of international law that every country had a right to defend itself, he said in a radio interview aired by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on Sunday.

'No harm meant'

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec. 3. — There was no intention to discriminate against any participant at the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Sydney, which was attended by Ms Rafidah Aziz, a Malaysian minister, the Australian envoy here said. Ms Rafidah had on 29 November expressed anger with the Australian airport security for attempting to use guard dogs to sniff her luggage on arriving in Sydney to attend the meeting. — ANN

4/12
He blamed the misinterpretation of Mr Howard's statement on Australian opposition groups, saying that their "colourful rhetoric" was unnecessary.

The Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Mr AA Badawi, said developed countries should place more faith in the ability and commitment of countries like Malaysia in combating the threat of terrorism. He said Malaysia was against all forms of violence and had showed that commitment through its actions. "We have demonstrated our ability and our commitment, and have successfully taken the necessary action."

THE STATESMAN

4 DEC 2002

Howard's strike call draws flak

Asia News Network &
Associated Press

CANBERRA, Dec. 2. — Australia's neighbours today intensified their criticism of Prime Minister Mr John Howard's call for pre-emptive strikes against terrorists in Asia. Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand said their sovereignty would be violated if Australia deployed its military on their soil.

Mr Howard said yesterday he would order pre-emptive strikes if he knew that Australian citizens were in danger of attack. He called for changes to the UN Charter and international law to permit pre-emptive strikes against terrorists in other countries.

Mr Howard's opponents in the Australian parliament today accused him of war-mongering and angering Asian governments, but an unrepentant Prime Minister stood by his promise to take action when necessary.

In a related development, Australia has proposed an accord with the Philippines that may allow joint but still-unspecified anti-terrorist operations and training in the two countries, adds *Philippines Inquirer* from Manila.

Talks on the accord were a sign that ties between the two countries may be improving after Australia closed its embassy in Manila over an alleged terrorist threat.

The proposed accord re-

layed by Australia reflected Mr Howard's statements that he was prepared to act against terrorists in neighbouring countries.

The Philippines foreign secretary, Mr Blas Ople, yesterday said he and the Australian foreign minister, Mr Alexander Downer, were considering a bilateral anti-terrorist memorandum of understanding but did not say when it might be

signed or provide other details.

In Indonesia, the Vice-President, Mr Hamzah Haz, and the foreign minister, Mr Hassan Wirajuda, today criticised Mr Howard's call for possible pre-emptive strikes overseas to prevent a terrorist attack on Australia, adds the *Jakarta Post*.

“Mr Howard should not issue statements that would make another country uncomfortable,” Mr Hamzah said. “If a nation says that there are terrorists in another country, it is better to convey this to the head of state not by making statements like that.”

Mr Hassan said he believed Mr Howard's statement was part of a discourse and not a concrete plan of action. “But if you ask what is Indonesia's position on this discourse of Mr Howard, I say that such a discourse is unacceptable.” He said a pre-emptive strike in another country would breach the UN charter.



Mr John Howard

3 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

FIGHTING TERRORISM

Partnership In Central Asia A Good Sign

By DMITRY KOSYREV

2/12 55-8

In the summer of 2001 prior to terrorist acts of 11 September and prior to overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was considered to have become a collective response of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kirghizia and Uzbekistan to the terrorist threat at the junction of common borders. Defeat of the Taliban and emergence of American military bases in central Asia forced SCO enthusiasts to ask themselves the question: were they late? Was SCO not needed any longer?

Litmus test

Today the question is not debated and objectives of the ministers of the organisation who met in Moscow were more simple, namely: to "check time", to see if there are minor political problems obstructing the daily work of the organisation carried out simultaneously by a great number of departments.

Thus the mechanism of work is being developed concurrently by Prosecutor General's offices of six SCO participants, ministers of transport, economy, even culture and prominent entrepreneurs who gathered together at the recent investment symposium on power engineering in Shanghai. This effort to create a secure and prosperous central Asia supported by the Russian-Chinese partnership (and that's how the SCO formula looks like) is far from being exhaustive.

The litmus test for what is happening is the behaviour of representatives of Uzbekistan, the country which was the last to adhere to the SCO idea and the least enthusiastic at its constituent

The author is a political observer associated with RIA Novosti

summit in June last year in Saint Petersburg and also after it. It was enough to get acquainted with the behaviour of the official Uzbek propaganda joyfully fulminating against "centuries-old Russian colonialism" and becoming irritated on the occasion of a discussion

ment projects, discussion of which is being initiated in SCO. And Americans do not have even a blueprint of an organisation similar to the diversified organisation with multiple programmes and plans being formed in SCO. They only got general statements



of American military presence in the region. It seemed so that even after the SCO establishment on 7 June, Tashkent was prepared to throw its membership in the organisation into the furnace of the new Uzbek-American strategic friendship and affection. Well, presently Uzbekistan's behaviour is also different.

No blue print

To a greater extent, Americans themselves are to be blamed for that. Till the present moment they failed to propose to their new Central Asian friends anything similar to those economic invest-

and fixed amounts as payment for military bases.

At the same time, the standard part of those statements made by US guests on a visit to Central Asian capitals became "democratisation of local regimes".

Moreover, it is impossible to say that Americans really decided to make changes of Central Asian ruling regimes the objective of their regional policy. Talks about that are all too similar to general rhetoric to cover empty space in formulation of such regional policy.

The desire in general to preserve newly obtained military

bases in Central Asia together with general "presence" is available, but for what purpose? The Bush administration has not decided that yet and nobody knows when such a decision is going to be taken.

Opposing America

That is why many Central Asian power structures at the moment are, seemingly, of the opinion that it is necessary to work with all partners simultaneously, including fanning their competition. Two cats to catch mice are better than one, and the spirit of competition between them will negatively affect only mice. The matter is who really, Russia or China, wishes to oppose Americans in Central Asia.

Certainly, the SCO driving force is cooperation between Russia and China and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism from Afghanistan has remained very serious for the two states.

But Russia made its choice when it lifted its objections to American bases in the region more than a year ago. By the way, several years ago Russian ruling circles were of the opinion that the CIS mechanism was enough to protect southern borders from a terrorist threat. But life proved that the threat turned out to be more serious than it seemed earlier.

Many people in Moscow proceed from the notion that the threat is still so great that without further support granted by Russia, China and local governments neither Americans nor anybody else is capable of solely holding sway in the region even if they eventually wish so. At the same time, SCO may become the mechanism to assist the USA in participating in the common struggle against terrorists.

7 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

Australia push for strikes

Sydney, Dec. 1 (Reuters): Australia said today it was ready to take pre-emptive action against terrorism, adding that international law was no longer adequate to confront threats to its national security.

National leaders had no alternative but to use available means to stop an attack against their countries, whether that was from another state or from terrorism, Australian Prime Minister John Howard told a television station.

He did not say what type of action might need to be taken pre-emptively, and made no mention of military action.

Australia's sense of security owing to its geographical isolation in the Southern Hemisphere was shattered on October 12 when powerful bomb blasts blamed on suspected Islamic extremists tore through beach bars on neighbouring Indonesia's resort island of Bali.

Up to 90 of the 185 people killed were Australians and the attack has been dubbed Australia's September 11.

Speaking on the Nine Network, Howard said the most likely threat to any nation's security was non-state terrorism, and international law could no longer cope with the changed circumstances confronting the world.

Asked whether he would be prepared to act if he knew terrorists in a neighbouring country were planning to attack Australia, Howard said: "Oh yes, I think any Australian Prime Minister would."

"It stands to reason that if

you believe that somebody was going to launch an attack on your country and you had a capacity to stop it and there was no alternative other than to use that capacity, then of course you would have to use it," he said.

2 DEC 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Sinn Fein denies end in military activity

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

BELFAST, Nov. 30. — Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, today denied British newspaper reports that the IRA is preparing to end all paramilitary activity.

"No one in Ireland has heard anything about this story, and I think that's the best barometer of its validity," a senior Republican source said.

"Neither has anyone had any inkling that the IRA is about to make any moves like the ones suggested," he added. Northern Ireland's most powerful Roman Catholic armed group, the IRA, is believed to be nearing a decision to "decommission" — to destroy or put out of use — all its weapons, to end punishment beatings and stop surveillance operations, British papers reported today.

Even if the IRA does not formally disband, such a move would revive the province's crisis-ridden peace process.

Quoting sources close to peace talks, the papers said that Mr Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, is spearheading moves to persuade paramilitary leaders to remove the threat of violence for good.

The Times reported that both the Irish and British governments were believed to have set an unofficial deadline of the end of February for a substantial move from the IRA. British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair told the republican movement that it must renounce violence forever in his strongest warning to date on 17 October, a day after he suspended the local power-sharing government in North Ireland and imposed direct British rule in the wake of a political spy scandal.

THE STATESMAN

1 DEC 2002

Maoists vow to end attacks,^{Hi 87} hold talks^{Dec 2002}

^{12/4/02}
Kathmandu, Dec. 4 (Reuters): Maoist rebels in Nepal have appealed for talks with authorities to end a six-year insurgency, vowing to stop attacks on power, transport and communications links as well as on rival activists in order to pave the way.

The rebels, who claim inspiration from the revolutionary ideas of the late Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong, have been battling to overthrow the constitutional monarchy and set up a one-party republic in the world's only Hindu kingdom.

The government has not reacted to the offer, made in a statement e-mailed to Nepali newspapers late yesterday.

The message could not be independently verified — a minister contacted by Reuters refused to comment — but the rebels have issued statements before in a similar way. "Infrastructure directly related to the welfare of the people will not be sabotaged," the e-mail said in Nepali.

"The party will stop physical action against activists of other political parties to create a favourable atmosphere and we urge other political parties to direct their workers not to inform (the government) about the rebellion," it said.

"This is to stress the need for talks and dialogue to find a peaceful, positive and progressive political solution to the existing crisis in the country."

Interim Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand has said he is ready for talks with the rebels but insists they can only begin if the guerrillas make a formal proposal in a letter to the government. Politicians gave the offer a cautious welcome.

"The offer is a positive step if it is implemented honestly," said Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the mainstream Communist Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party.

Nepal told Reuters the rebels have killed more than 80 of his party's members so far.

In the latest violence in the kingdom, soldiers gunned down 14 guerrillas in clashes and seized weapons and explosives, the defence ministry said.

The rebels have attacked telecommunications towers, rural airports, bridges and government installations besides security posts and troops. They have also targeted workers of rival political parties saying they were government informers. The rebel statement made no mention of stopping attacks on government forces.

More than 7,200 people have been killed in the revolt that began in 1996. The violence has seriously hurt the impoverished nation's aid-dependent economy, crippling tourism and scaring off investors.

Efforts to end the revolt collapsed late last year when the rebels walked out of talks after the government refused to abolish the monarchy, a popular institution in the Hindu kingdom.

The rebels have since made several offers to resume talks.

THE TELEGRAPH

5 DEC 2002

Written statute for Bhutan soon

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, DEC. 6. The Kingdom of Bhutan is now close to having its own written constitution.

A 39-member drafting committee, commissioned by a Royal decree in September 2001, will submit its report to King Jigme Singye Wangchuk next week, according to the Bhutanese Ambassador to India, Lyonpo Dago Tshering.

Mr. Tshering, who was the Home Minister of Bhutan for over seven years, was here to inaugurate the Chennai chapter of the India-Bhutan Friendship Association.

The committee, comprising members from the National Assembly and eminent persons from different walks of life, would ensure a working constitution suitable to the current requirements,

said Mr. Tshering.

It is part of the continuing decentralisation process, which started in 1981 when the King introduced a programme of administrative and political decentralisation.

He also attributes the occasional dissenting voices against the monarchy to the disgruntled immigrants from Nepal, and says, "no country is free of disgruntled elements. Even a family has its share of feuds".

He said Bhutan was not in a hurry to exploit its forest and tourism potentials.

"Unless absolutely necessary, we do not exploit our forest wealth. And, we welcome only tourism of value not that of volume. Paying tourists are welcome, while back-packers are not," Mr. Tshering said.

7 DEC 2002

THE HINDU

Central & Latin

Crisis deepens in Venezuela

HO-15 7/12

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), DEC. 6. Venezuela's oil exports ground to a halt, negotiations stalled and protesters faced off on the streets as prospects dimmed for a peaceful resolution to a strike designed to unseat the President, Hugo Chavez.

After withstanding three days of the nationwide strike with few visible problems, the world's fifth-largest oil industry descended into chaos on Thursday. Captains anchored their tankers, tug boats stopped towing and dock crews stopped loading oil and natural gas.

Acknowledging it couldn't fill orders, Venezuela's state oil monopoly freed buyers and sellers from fulfilling their contracts, said Jorge Kamkoff, a vice-president of the company. Crude oil futures at the New York Mercantile Exchange rose as the crisis deepened.

The Energy Ministry admitted for the first time that oil loading was being delayed, but claimed all plants were operative. A top Venezuelan oil official met with rep-

resentatives of the U.S. embassy to reassure them about long-term supply.

Mr. Chavez vowed to use the military to protect the industry, which accounts for 75 percent of exports and half of the Government's income.

Both sides warned of the possibility of violence as Mr. Chavez supporters and strikers demonstrated in separate rallies in eastern Caracas. National guard troops blocked roads and bridges between the two demonstrations, preventing clashes.

Violence between the two sides killed 19 people during a similar strike on April 11. Dissident officers deposed Mr. Chavez the next day, but loyalists restored him two days later, after an interim Government abolished the Constitution, triggering a popular rebellion. Resentment over the April revolt still runs deep among Venezuela's polarised people. Peace talks led by Cesar Gaviria, Secretary General of the Organisation of American States, broke down on Wednesday. — AP



Opposition activists taking out a protest in Caracas on Thursday. — Reuters

7 DEC 2002

*C. S. Klein
Answer*

Venezuela dives deeper into crisis

10-11 8/12

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), DEC. 7. Gunmen opened fire at a plaza packed with opposition demonstrators, killing three people, wounding 28 and threatening to ignite more violence in a six-day-old general strike to unseat the President, Hugo Chavez.

Mr. Chavez appealed for calm and denied opposition claims that he was behind the attack, which occurred on Friday night moments after the opposition said it would extend the strike. Mr. Chavez asked the former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, who has tried to mediate in Venezuela, to help calm tensions.

Strikers want to force a referendum on Mr. Chavez's presidency. Many Venezuelans accuse the populist former paratrooper of ruining the economy, courting

communism and stirring class warfare in this South American nation. Mr. Chavez, who was briefly ousted by a coup in April, accuses the opposition of trying to provoke another coup.

Mr. Chavez's supporters and strikers both planned major marches on Saturday, raising fears of more violence. National Guard troops blocked off streets around the presidential palace.

Cesar Gaviria, Secretary General of the Organisation of American States, convened emergency talks between the two sides. But early on Saturday the Government representatives cancelled the talks because they said the meeting site wasn't safe, a source close to the negotiations said.

"It's necessary to search for an immediate way out, because we're falling very

quickly into a spiral of violence," said the dissident leader, Enrique Medina Gomez, an opposition leader.

The strike has paralysed Venezuela's oil industry, and on Friday night, all seven directors of the state-owned oil company offered to resign. They didn't say why, and it wasn't known whether the company president would accept the resignations.

The United States depends on Venezuela for more than 10 percent of its imports of crude oil. A prolonged shutdown — coupled with the threat of war in Iraq — could drive U.S. energy prices sharply higher.

Hundreds of people were listening to a speech on Friday night at the Plaza Francia, the opposition's main rallying point, when several bursts of gunfire were heard. — AP

CHF HINDU

8 DEC 2002

Venezuela troops take over oil delivery

10/12
110-14
Central & Latin America

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), DEC. 9. A general strike aimed at ousting the leftist President, Hugo Chavez, sparked panic buying across Venezuela as it entered its second week on Monday, pushing the National Guard to commandeer delivery trucks and force gas stations to open.

The indefinite strike has crippled the oil industry of the world's fifth-largest producer as wells, refineries, tanker ships, delivery centres and gas stations have stopped operating in a gradual shutdown that would take weeks to reverse.

Mr. Chavez sent soldiers to protect oil wells and refineries from possible sabotage by strikers last week. On Sunday, he sent National Guard troops to open gas stations in the capital and seized the trucks of striking delivery companies.

"They are failing to provide a public service, and that's a crime," Mr. Chavez said during a weekly television and radio programme, "Hello President."

"These businessmen are violating the law. ... It is a macabre plan we have to attack."

Lines of cars stretched for blocks in Caracas as panic buying at gas stations began. Troops stood by the pumps at some stations.

Outside Caracas, the National Guard seized at least three gasoline distribution centres that had closed for the strike. The Government hired civilians to drive tanker trucks — commandeered from their private owners — to gas stations.

The Energy Ministry said the private

property would be returned to its owners "as soon as activities are normalised."

Horacio Medina, a leader of the striking oil workers, said more than 30 per cent of gas stations in Venezuela's major cities had run out of fuel. "There's no gas, I'm earning nothing and the workers lose too, because they make most of their money from tips," said Efrain Salazar, whose station in eastern Caracas ran out on Sunday.

The Energy Minister, Rafael Ramirez, conceded there were problems in parts of the country, but blamed them on striking station owners and truckers and said the situation was improving.

Shoppers emptied store shelves, worried about political unrest and Mr. Chavez's threat to declare martial law if needed. Mr. Chavez said late on Saturday that a state of exception — Venezuela's equivalent of martial law — was "a possibility, depending on the evolution of the situation."

Talks between the Opposition and Government — suspended when the strike began on Dec. 2 — resumed on Saturday night but appeared to make little progress.

The Opposition initially was seeking a referendum on Mr. Chavez's four-year-old Government, but now is demanding his immediate resignation.

The strike has forged a deep divide between supporters of Mr. Chavez and those who want him toppled. It has stopped shipments of crude oil to the United States, which buys more than 10 per cent of its oil from Venezuela.

It has also sparked violence. Three people were killed and 28 wounded when gunmen opened fire at an Opposition rally. Six suspects in the shooting were brought before a judge on Sunday, and police held back incensed Opposition supporters outside.

Mourners cried and embraced the grieving parents of Keyla Guerra, an 18-year-old high school senior whose coffin was covered in flowers.

"Keyla is a martyr for the freedom of our country, and she is the symbol of our country's brave youth," said a family friend.

Opposition supporters blamed the attack on pro-Chavez thugs, although an investigation is continuing.

"How many more deaths do we have to sacrifice before (Chavez) quits and lets us live in peace?" a dissident Air Force Col. Antonio Jose Ortega said at the funeral.

Even Mr. Chavez's wife, Marisabel de Chavez, called on the President to listen to the demands of his people.

"President, please, in the name of your daughter, in the name of your family, in the name of the country, listen to the people," she said in a television interview, the couple's daughter sitting beside her. The couple is in the process of divorce.

Mr. Chavez said he would never step down.

"I swear they won't succeed," he said on his television programme. "I swear by God ... that they won't drive me from the presidency." — AP

Sinhala

WRIGGLE ROOM FOR THE LTTE

THE LEADER OF the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has very obviously tried to create wriggle room for his organisation by speaking simultaneously of a readiness to settle for regional autonomy and yet also of a preparedness to reinvigorate the drive for separation. In a broadcast, on the occasion that his organisation observes as Heroes' Day, Mr. Prabhakaran reiterated a line that the LTTE has been spinning out for a while that it would favourably consider a political framework that offered substantial regional autonomy and self-government within a united Sri Lanka. Mr. Prabhakaran also adopted an interpretation of the principle of self-determination that suits his current purposes by arguing that the dimensions of this concept does include regional self-rule and does not necessarily imply separation alone. However, since the Sri Lankan Government has been negotiating with the LTTE without laying down any markers as to the degree of autonomy it can eventually concede to the regions where the Tamils are in a majority — or in respect of any other region of the island for that matter — the LTTE leader appears to have allowed himself ample leeway to determine the quantum of self-government he will be satisfied with. Mr. Prabhakaran has also tried to prepare for a scenario where negotiations do collapse by suggesting that "Sinhala chauvinists" and not his organisation would have to bear the responsibility for such an outcome.

The ambiguity in Mr. Prabhakaran's address contains much potential for the ominous. Several Sinhala forces, including the main opposition parties, have been protesting against the approach of a Cabinet that has not defined the outer limits of the concessions that it will make in the course of negotiations and has thereby given the impression that it has no limits at all. There could surely arise a time when the Cabinet, acting on its own wisdom or under pressure from its constituents, decides that it can make no further concessions.

Mr. Prabhakaran's speech leaves wide open the possibility that he could, at some such point in time, revert to the option of seeking separation through an armed struggle. It does not appear unreasonable to view the LTTE leader's remarks about Sinhala chauvinists scuttling the peace effort as the outline of the brief for the case that he will make at that time. In a context where omissions can be as significant as the contents of a speech, specific note must be made of the several aspects of the availing situation that Mr. Prabhakaran did not allude to at all. Ignoring firm and persistent calls from the international community, the LTTE leader made no mention, whatsoever, of his willingness to abjure violence and terror or to protect and promote pluralism, democracy and human rights.

87 40-10 29/11

The LTTE leader perhaps believes that he has sufficiently satisfied international opinion by speaking in tones conciliatory of the Sri Lankan Cabinet and by indicating an inclination to settle for regional autonomy. Incidentally, his current interpretation of the concept of self-determination appears designed to assuage both the global forces that are opposed to a division of the island as well as his followers who have been fed this concept for so long. The U.S. administration and the Government of the United Kingdom had recently reiterated that they would not provide any aid for reconstruction and rehabilitation in northern and eastern Sri Lanka till the LTTE renounced terrorism and violence and ended its efforts at separation. Under the circumstances, Mr. Prabhakaran probably felt that he had no choice but to display a measure of flexibility. Responsible and knowledgeable, even if non-official, personalities in Sri Lanka have averred that the LTTE far from giving up arms has actually been adding to its arsenal in a situation where it is steadily consolidating its position in areas under its control. The blood-baths of the past could well be replicated if, or when, Mr. Prabhakaran decides that "Sinhala chauvinists have begun to scuttle the peace efforts."

29 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

Colombo sees paradigm shift in LTTE approach

By V.S. Sambandan

29/11

COLOMBO, NOV. 28. The Sri Lankan Government sees the latest stand by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), that it would consider "regional self-rule" as an alternative to a separate Tamil Eelam as a "paradigm shift" in the rebels' approach to conflict-resolution.

The move away "from a demand for a separate state, to one within one country" raised hopes of a negotiated peaceful settlement, the Cabinet spokesman, G. L. Peris, told a press conference. Responding positively to the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran's, annual Heroes' Day speech on Wednesday, he said "much of it was helpful and encouraging" to the present talks with the Tigers.

"There is a world of difference in the tenor and substance in Mr. Prabhakaran's speech compared with previous years."

The LTTE leader had said that he would consider "regional self-rule" as an alternative to Eelam, but retained the option of a separate state. Prof. Peiris, who is also the head of Colombo's team of negotiators, was confident enough to say that LTTE's option to secede was "a hypothetical situation".

"We know for sure that the (peace) process will not breakdown" as both Colombo and the Tigers were "seriously and sincerely committed" to the negotiating process. The

two sides will meet in Oslo between December 2 and December 5, for the third session of talks. "We are now trying to narrow down differences through talking".

The talks, he said are "on in the right direction to match the theories of the Government and the Tigers. The present situation had opened up a "window of opportunity" that was "unprecedented to push the peace process forward to reach a final solution".

The talks were "on in the right direction to match the theories of the Government and the LTTE" and the concepts put forward by the two sides were "not fundamentally antithetical". Though "there will remain

differences the purpose is to narrow them down", he added.

'India backs process'

Asked for his reaction on the low-key Indian representation at the Oslo donors' conference, Prof. Peiris said, "the extent and depth of Indian support for the peace process has never been in doubt".

India sent an official from its embassy in Oslo to the opening ceremony.

The Indian Government, he added, was "fully behind the peace process". Referring to the \$ 200 million concessionary credit line given by India, Prof. Peiris said, "They gave much more than what was achieved in Oslo."

29 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

Lanka govt hails LTTE chief's speech

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Nov. 28. — Making a positive appraisal of LTTE leader V Pirabhakaran's latest demand for regional self-rule as a possible alternative to total separation, Sri Lanka today said it meant a "paradigm shift" in the rebel group's thinking.

"We find much of the substance (of Pirabhakaran's annual address yesterday) helpful and encouraging," Cabinet spokesman and government negotiator Mr GL Peiris told reporters here. "They are now shifting away from the demand for a separate state to a solution within the country."

Playing down the guerrilla leader's threat to revive his campaign for independence, if his demand for self-rule based on "internal self-determination" was rejected, Mr Peiris said the speech was markedly different from the ones delivered in previous years.

He said the secessionist option was only related to a "hypothetical situation" of breakdown of peace talks. However, as the government itself was ready to offer substantial devolution to the Tamils, there was little chance of the present peace process failing, he said.

Mr Peiris said the positions of the government and the LTTE



V Pirabhakaran

were not antithetical to each other. "There are and there will remain differences, but the purpose is to narrow them down. Of course, we don't agree with all of it, there may be some deficiencies," he said, referring to the contents of Pirabhakaran's address that hailed the government's peace initiative and reiterated the LTTE's commitment to a negotiated political settlement.

Mr Peiris sought to defend the LTTE from criticism that it had failed to renounce violence and quoted remarks from LTTE negotiator Mr Anton Balasingham's remarks in Oslo to claim that the rebel group had turned away from the path of war and violence.

Prabakaran ready to consider regional self-rule

By V.S. Sambandan

119-12
28/11

COLOMBO, NOV. 27. The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V. Prabakaran, today spelt out "regional self-rule" as the alternative to Tamil Eelam, but made it clear that he had not abandoned the option of secession.

"We are prepared to consider favourably a political framework that offers substantial regional autonomy and self-government in our homeland on the basis of our right to internal self-determination. But if our people's right to self-determination is denied and our demand for regional self-rule is rejected we have no alternative other than to secede and form an independent state," Mr. Prabakaran said in his annual Heroes' Day speech.

The "objective of our struggle is based on the concept of self-determination as articulated in the U.N. Charter and other instruments", he said and added that "internal self-determination entitles a people to regional self-rule".

Today's statements gain relevance against the backdrop of clear international pressure on the Tigers to abandon the pursuit of separate Tamil Eelam and the use of terror and violence to achieve political objectives.

The LTTE's focus continued to remain on the position adopted in the 1980s that the conflict should be resolved on the basis of the Thimpu principles. This was reiterated

again in today's speech when he described these principles as "the fundamentals underlying our political struggle".

There was, however, no direct response in Mr. Prabakaran's speech to international concerns on use of terror and violence to resolve political problems, as well a call for renunciation of a separate Tamil Eelam and the need to ensure pluralism, democracy and human rights.

Describing the LTTE's engagement in the negotiating process as a "new challenge", Mr. Prabakaran said the propaganda by "Sinhala chauvinists" that the Tigers were "enemies of peace" was "falsified" by "our sincere and dedicated commitment to the peace process".

The LTTE had demonstrated its commitment to peace by maintaining "rigid discipline" despite "provocative attempts by certain elements of the armed forces and anti-peace forces to disrupt the peace process." Mr. Prabakaran attributed the failures of the earlier peace negotiations to "the hard-line attitude and deceitful political approaches of the previous Governments". The present Government, he said, is "attempting to resolve the problems of the Tamils with sincerity and courage".

Pat for Norway

Norway also came in for praise when the LTTE leader said that its "capable and skilful" facilitation had "also contributed to the steady progress" of the peace talks.

Endorsing the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe's approach to the negotiations, Mr. Prabakaran said, "the ideal approach is to move the talks forward, systematically, step by step, standing on a strong foundation of peace and building mutual confidence".

Expressing his "deepest desire" that the peace talks "should succeed", Mr. Prabakaran said - as on all previous occasions - that if "Sinhala chauvinistic forces, for their own petty political reasons scuttle this peace effort, which has raised high hopes and expectations and gained the support of the international community, the Tamil people will be compelled to pursue the path of secession and political independence".

Blaming "racism and racist oppression" as the "causative factors for rebellions and secessionist politics", the LTTE leader wanted the Sinhalese people to "identify and reject the racist forces if they desire permanent peace, ethnic harmony and economic prosperity".

The Sinhalese, he said, "should not oppose the Tamils' aspirations to manage their own affairs under a system of self-rule in their own homeland".

Laying the onus of a united Sri Lanka on the mainstream political parties, Mr. Prabakaran said it would be "the politics of the Sinhala nation that will eventually determine whether the Sinhalese could peacefully co-exist with the Tamils or to compel the Tamils to secede".

THE HINDU

28 NOV 2002

'Sri Lanka peace process a betrayal'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 26. Sri Lanka's Opposition parties today took to the streets to protest the ongoing peace process, which they termed as a "betrayal of the motherland" as it "paved the road to separation".

Personalities and issues related to the negotiations between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) came into focus during the protest rally by the National Movement to Prevent the Betrayal of the Motherland.

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Colombo's chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, and the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, figured in the slogans and placards. The protesters were drawn from various formations such as the National Bhikku Front and political parties, including the Left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, the constituents of the People's Alliance (PA), the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) and the recently-formed Muslim People's Alliance.

'Arrest Prabhakaran immediately', some placards proclaimed. The LTTE leader, who turned 48 today, was recently sentenced to 200 years rigorous imprisonment for allegedly masterminding the bombing of the Central Bank.

The two Ministers involved in the peace

process, Prof. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda, also came in for criticism. Reflecting the highly personalised nature of the opposition to the negotiations was another placard, which read: 'Tiger Peiris agrees to all demands of Balasingham' (the LTTE's chief negotiator). Apart from the Opposition concern that the Government is "giving away too much", this slogan brought out the present personality-centric politics in the island.

Prof. Peiris, a former Minister in the PA administration, is currently with the UNP and has become a regular target of verbal attacks by the Opposition. Mr. Wickremesinghe was, according to another placard, a "traitor" for "accompanying" Mr. Balasingham to Oslo, where a donors' conference was held on Monday.

These personal accusations apart, issues such as the withdrawal of security forces from the North-East, the opening of 'police stations' by the Tigers and the rights of non-LTTE political parties to function in the North-East were highlighted by the protesters. The common thread in this line of protest was the "betrayal of the North-East to the Tigers".

The sub-committees formed during the second session of talks in Thailand earlier this month also came under criticism.

'Abolish joint committees, don't betray North-East to the Tigers', 'Betraying North-East to Tiger terrorism is not peace', 'Secure the rights of non-LTTE parties to function in the North-East' said some of the placards. The speakers, who included Anura Bandaranaike and Mangala Samaraweera from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Wimal Weerawansa (JVP) and Dinesh Gunawardene (MEP), elaborated on these themes. The facilitator of the peace process, Norway, was criticised for "overstepping its role". The peace process was "leading the island towards two separate states".

On Monday, a Tamil MP, Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, had charged the PA and the JVP as being "spoilers" of the peace process and wanted the Government to go ahead with negotiations despite, what he termed, the Opposition "rhetoric".

In contrast to the protests in the capital, according to reports from the North-East, preparations were in full swing to mark tomorrow's Heroes' Day function, organised annually by the Tigers. Several activities, including lighting traditional lamps and inaugurating memorials for the LTTE fighters killed in combat, take place. This year's address by Mr. Prabhakaran is also keenly awaited in Colombo, as the ground conditions are different as compared to the past.

27 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

VV
Oslo meet
pledges aid to
Sri Lanka

26 " HD 12
OSLO, NOV. 25. The one-day international donors' meet, held here today, pledged political and financial support to the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are currently engaged in a peace process, generating renewed hopes for peace in the island nation.

As the mini donors' meet, being attended by more than 20 nations, progressed in this Norwegian capital, both the Sri Lankan delegation and the LTTE had a reason to smile as they were assured of all support in their efforts to resolve the 19-year old ethnic conflict. The United States, Britain, the European Union and several other countries made their financial commitments. However, the quantum of the assistance will be announced in the main donors' meet at Tokyo in March.

Though the actual amount of money for the reconstruction of the island nation's war-ravaged North-East has not been specified, an estimated \$500 million was needed for the purpose.

India has not sent any official delegation as it is not a principal donor. But the Indian diplomatic corps were present during the opening ceremony.

India's refusal to send a team to Oslo stems from its continued reluctance to sit at the same table as the LTTE, a banned outfit responsible for the killing of its former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, who are here to attend the meet, have already met and exchanged views.

This is for the first time during the past 19 years of conflict that Sri Lankan Government officials and Tamil Tiger rebels made a joint appearance in Norway, which is brokering peace between the two warring groups, to assure the international community that they were sincere in resolving the problem.

The conference comes a day after a high-level meeting between Mr. Wickremesinghe and Mr. Balasingham. — UNI

THE HINDU

26 NOV 2002

U.S., U.K. want LTTE to reject terror

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 24. As the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continues its quest for international legitimacy, the major participants of the donors' conference to be held on Monday have asserted that there would be no change in their policies on the banned organisation unless it demonstrated change.

Central to any move towards international acceptance of the Tigers will be their "complete renunciation" of terror, violence and a separate Tamil Eelam. In addition, there is added pressure on them to ensure that any solution to the conflict ensures space for democratic politics.

The U.S. envoy to Colombo, Ashley E. Wills, made it clear last week, before leaving for the Oslo conference, that the LTTE would continue to be listed as a foreign terrorist organisation by Washington. He rejected Opposition criticism that the participation of the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, in the meet was tantamount to "rewarding terrorism". The U.S., he emphasised, "will not share a table" with the Tigers and Washington's presence was to underline its support to help

restore peace on the island.

Asked what the U.S. was looking for as indications of a "lasting peace", Mr. Wills told a press conference that the LTTE would have to, among other things, publicly renounce violence and terror and "dis-pense, once and for all, with the idea of a separate Tamil Eelam". Moreover, emphasising the need to ensure plurality, he said another important marker was to ensure that "Sri Lanka and all its component parts are plural".

These observations have direct implications on the Tigers' stand that the north and the east of Sri Lanka are traditional homelands of the Tamils. The LTTE has waged its decades-long separatist conflict based on the concepts of "traditional homelands, nationality and the right to self-determination" of the Tamils.

The U.K., to be represented by its International Development Minister, Clare Short, has also said that its policy was unchanged. London maintains that the Tigers will have to "demonstrate a complete and convincing renunciation of terrorism". Like the U.S., Britain also does not see a contradiction between banning the Tigers and supporting the peace process. The aim of

the British law, which banned the LTTE, "is not to prevent a legitimate dialogue between officials and a proscribed organisation, for instance, to further a peace process". Its Foreign Office has said that "it is important that the U.K. supports all efforts towards successful talks".

Australia, Japan and the E.U. are the other countries that have promised participation in the Oslo meet. Japan, which is Sri Lanka's single largest donor, has also made it clear that there will have to be "progress on the ground" before its development purse is opened up.

Since the first session of the latest peace process, the LTTE has said it would consider a political solution with substantial regional autonomy and self-governance as an alternative to a separate Eelam. On the issue of violence and terror, it has maintained that it was not issuing death-threats. On democracy and human rights, its position is that its "ultimate aim" is to enter the democratic fold and that it would like to "accept and assimilate" other non-LTTE organisations. At the ground level as well, the LTTE has expanded its appurtenances of state through "police stations, law courts and taxation".

PEACE TALKS / OSLO ENVOY GIVES UNDERTAKING ON BRIEFING MPS

UNP, Norway try to win over Chandrika

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 17. Sri Lanka's ruling United National Party (UNP) and Norway, which is facilitating the latest peace talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), have started a rapprochement process to win the support of the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the main Opposition, the People's Alliance (PA), media reports said here today.

In a front-page report, the *Sunday Times* said Oslo's envoy, Jon Westborg, called on Ms. Kumaratunga and her senior adviser on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar, on Saturday "for consultation" after Friday's criticism over the manner in which the peace talks between the Government and the LTTE was unfolding.

During the meeting, Mr. Westborg had reportedly given an undertaking to consider "initiating regular briefings of the Opposition MPs on the conduct of the peace talks", the newspaper said.

Norway also came under sharp criticism by the PA on Friday. The Norwegians — who were invited to facilitate the talks when Mr. Kadirgamar was the Foreign Affairs Minister during the PA administration — were charged with no longer being "visibly impartial" and over-stepping their role as facilitator. The PA, which said that a solution for the decades-long separatist ethnic conflict should be found by the Sri Lankans themselves, pointed out that the "destiny" of the island was "too precious to be determined by the UNP and the LTTE under the supervision of the Government of Norway".

The PA had also called upon the Tigers to make a public declaration that it had renounced violence and that disarmament would be a part of the peace process.

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, had conferred with senior Ministers on the PA's criticism. A meeting between the President and the Prime Minister, who head sharply opposed political parties, was also being worked out after this month's donors' conference to be held in Oslo, the newspaper said, adding that the PA had been requested to identify the "contentious points".

Meanwhile, a senior Cabinet Minister, Milinda Moragoda, met Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Kadirgamar on Friday to keep them informed on the peace process, the Presidential secretariat said in a statement.

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1 8 NOV 2002

Ranil, Balasingham to review progress in peace process

110-12 By V.S. Sambandan S. Lanka

COLOMBO, NOV. 14. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the chief negotiator of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton S. Balasingham, are scheduled to meet in Oslo later this month to "discuss political matters" relating to the ongoing peace process.

The meeting is scheduled for November 25, during a donor's conference aimed at raising international financial support for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the battle-scarred Sri Lankan North-East. Mr. Wickremesinghe and Mr. Balasingham "will discuss the progress made so far in the peace process", the Cabinet spokesman and head of Colombo's team of negotiators, G.L. Peiris, told a press conference today.

The political discussions come immediately after Colombo and the Tigers agreed to form a sub-committee on political matters at the recently-concluded second round of talks in Thailand. The third round is scheduled to be held in Oslo between December 2 and 5.

This would be the first time that a Sri Lankan Premier will be meeting the LTTE's chief ideologue outside the island. During the early 1990s, the then President, the late Ranasinghe Premadasa, held peace talks with an LTTE delegation, led by Mr. Balasingham, in Colombo. Mr. Wickremesinghe, who, as a Minister in the Premadasa Cabinet, was member of the Government delegation led by the late A.C.S. Hameed. Those talks failed and a suicide bomber assassinated Premadasa during the 1993 'May Day' rally in Colombo.

The donor's conference, Prof. Peiris said, was aimed at "converting the international goodwill behind the island's peace process

into money". The funds raised at the Oslo conference, he said, would be used to finance crucial infrastructure requirements of the North-East such as roads, hospitals and sanitation. The U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, and the British Minister for Overseas Development, Claire Short, are expected to represent their countries.

The international community, Prof. Peiris said, was "uniformly supportive" of the ongoing peace process. Describing his recent visit to Australia as "encouraging", he said the financial support for rebuilding the North-East was not only confined to Governments, but the overseas private sector had also pledged backing for the peace process.

'Opposition won't be excluded'

Asked to comment on the recent proposal by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, to form a commission for ethnic reconciliation, Prof. Peiris said there was no question of excluding the Opposition from the peace process.

However, he said that in terms of the "definitive document" on bipartisan political co-operation — the Liam Fox Agreement initialled when the Opposition party, the People's Alliance, led by Ms. Kumaratunga was in power — the Opposition was being kept fully informed of the progress of the talks. The agreement, he said, did not provide for inclusion of the Opposition in the decision-making process.

Asserting that no solution would be thrust upon the country, Prof. Peiris said all decisions taken at the Thailand talks will be brought before Parliament, and then before the public at a referendum in accordance with the island's Constitution.

POSITIVE CHANGES

Peace In Sri Lanka Being Strengthened And Institutionalised

By PARMANAND

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The hitherto separatist and most violent guerrilla outfit, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and the United National Front government of Ranil Wickremesinghe have completed their second round of direct peace talks in Thailand's Nakorn Pathom amidst a simultaneous display of expectation and cynicism. Expectation is gaining momentum because the Tigers had never appeared so reasonable at any point in the past, nor had they entered into any peace talks with the government in Colombo so wholeheartedly.

Cynicism and pessimism remain a factor among the Sri Lankan hoi polloi and analysts in view of the fact that the LTTE had used the peace talks with the government in the past to reorganise and restrengthen themselves with a view to taking on the Sri Lankan state dominated by the Sinhalese elite.

International Community

No matter whatever the ground of optimism or pessimism, it should not be forgotten that in a span of 48 days (between 16 September and 3 November), the two sides have held talks for seven days. Quite encouragingly, the dates for the third, fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of talks have already been fixed. Besides, never had the international community been so deeply involved in the talks — directly or indirectly. Not only has Norway helped the two sides move in the positive direction so seriously. The direct or indirect interests of India, the USA and the UK are quite discernible. While, on the one hand, these states have been kept informed of developments by the Sri Lankan authorities, they have, in their own way, contributed substantially to making the peace talks a concrete reality.

The second round of peace talks held in Thailand between 31 October and 3 November was remarkable in as much as the two sides — more notably and surprisingly the LTTE — showed their commitment to genuine peace. After the first round of talks held in Thailand between 16 and 18 September, many had thought that the second round of talks would focus more specifically on the interim administration for the North-Eastern province in which the LTTE would become the sole political actor and arbiter.

That had, indeed, generated a great deal of fear and uncertainty in the minds of many well-meaning people — even among the Sri Lankan Tamils, who constitute about 12 per cent of the island's population. The Muslims, also known as the Moors, who

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constitute about eight per cent of Sri Lanka's population, and who are in a majority in many districts of the Eastern province, had quite expectedly felt more concerned. The concern had been expressed by the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress and by Rauf Nakeem, the SLMC leader in the Wickremesinghe ministry. A large number of Muslims had been driven away from their homes by the Tigers.

The interim administration did not assume any significance during the second round of talks. In truth, the LTTE appeared to be

parliamentary electoral politics. It is a different matter that subsequently the Tigers tried to achieve political power through the bullet and allegedly annihilated President Premadasa on 1 May 1993.

Interestingly, Professor Gamini Laxman Peiris, chief negotiator of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's government, welcomed Balasingham's statement in Thailand, saying that the Tigers are coming "to grips with the political realities and complexities". Peiris felt that the LTTE was engaged in a transformation into a political organi-



accepting the reality of competitive plurality even among Tamils. Time was when the LTTE was not prepared to accept any other Tamil political outfit as the interest-articulator and interest-aggregator of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Indeed, one of its unstated but quite palpable objectives was to annihilate the leadership of other Tamil militant or even moderate groups. If there was any exception, it was the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students which was considered the "B team" of the LTTE.

Political realities

The statement of the chief negotiator and the main political ideologue of the LTTE, Anton Balasingham, at Nakorn Pathom on 3 November that if the Tigers were "committed to enter the democratic mainstream, we will have to accept and assimilate with other groups" appears remarkable. Balasingham stated: "We will definitely allow other political groups and parties to participate in the democratic process in the North and the East".

During their talks with the President Ranasinghe Premadasa administration (1989-93), the Tigers had also formed a political party called the People's Front of the Liberation Tigers to join

reconciliation processes.

There will be a sub-committee on "immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs in the north and east". Bernard Goonatillake, Director-General of the government's peace secretariat, and SP Tamilchelvam, leader of the LTTE's political wing, will lead their respective teams. Earlier there were talks about a joint task force to rebuild the north and the east.

Also, there would be sub-committee on "de-escalation and normalisation" to look into the issues of high security zones. Austin Fernando, Sri Lankan government's defence secretary, and Colonel Karuna, the LTTE's eastern military wing leader, would head their teams on this sub-committee.

Stable peace

The fact that the LTTE is prepared to discuss with the Sri Lankan government all these issues minutely augurs well from the Sri Lankan state. Rauf Hakeem's overall importance should go a long way in assuaging the feeling of the Sri Lankan Muslims, who are spread all over the island, though their concentration in the east is notable. GL Peiris rightly said on 3 November that the two sides were not moving too fast. He said: "There is no recklessness. Neither are we dragging our feet".

The positive political developments have a positive impact on the island's economy. At the end of 2001, for the first time since 1950, Sri Lanka's economy was set to shrink with a growth rate of 0.6 per cent projected for the year against the original forecast of 4.5 per cent. Finance minister KN Choksy described it as "economic paralysis", blaming it on the gross mismanagement of the country's finances by the previous people's alliance government. Needless to say, however, with the stable peace in place since December 2001, and its further institutionalisation since February this year, the economic scene has changed substantially.

Investors feel encouraged to invest in the island. Various international aid agencies, including EU, have promised huge amounts of assistance. EU gives \$10m to the country in aid annually, and recently pledged \$3m to help people internally displaced owing to war. Bradman Weerakon, secretary to prime minister, said recently that the EU would consider renovating a train line in the war-torn east coast and expanding a current programme to help the fisheries industry among other projects.

One hopes that peace, stability, democracy, decentralisation, development and participation become features of the Sri Lankan polity in the future, and terrorism, killings and fears become the matters of history.

Chandrika moots all-party ethnic peace panel

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Nov. 12. — President Chandrika Kumaratunga today proposed a 'national commission for ethnic reconciliation and sustainable peace' that includes the LTTE. The President's suggestion is an apparent move to broaden Sri Lanka's peace process, now confined to the government and LTTE.

Addressing the nation after a brief ceremony to mark the eighth anniversary of her winning the

Presidency, Ms Kumaratunga said the commission should comprise representatives of the government, all parties in Parliament, major NGOs and the LTTE. "... A clear action plan must be formulated with the purpose of bringing military conflict to an end and finding a durable solution to the causes of the conflict," she said in an address that declared her intent to pursue the "re-democratisation and re-humanisation" of Sri Lanka.

Regretting the anti-Tamil riots that broke out nearly two decades ago, spawning the island nation's

ethnic conflict, she said: "The clear failure of the Sri Lanka state to protect its Tamil citizens in July 1983 is a watershed event in ethnic relations... It was a failure, which I deeply regret," Ms Kumaratunga said.

The President suggested that the Commission should be immediately set up and have among its main objectives the task of identifying "core issues" in the conflict and recommending negotiated solutions.

Significantly, Ms Kumaratunga said her own constitutional reform proposals of 1997 and the draft

2000 Constitution could form the basis for discussions.

The suggestion is unlikely to find favour either with the government or the LTTE, as it may mean giving up the present bilateral talks structure and introducing Opposition parties and non-LTTE Tamil groups into it.

The LTTE has dubbed parties like Kumaratunga's own People's Alliance and leftist JVM as anti-peace. And it claims to be the sole representative of the Tamils — a position that won't admit the entry of even pro-LTTE Tamil parties into the domain of negotiations.

13 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN

A visit to Sri Lanka

By Rajindar Sachar

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FOR TWO decades, Sri Lanka has suffered under a fratricidal war between the Tamils in the North and the Government in Colombo. A recent visit to the island-nation and interactions with a cross-section of the people including top functionaries of all political parties, the Buddhist clergy, civil society representatives, church leaders and NGOs give hope that events may be taking a turn for the better. This is the result of the peace process, the term used to describe the events taking place in Sri Lanka dating from the ceasefire declaration of December 2001 to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in February 2002, and the current Norway-facilitated negotiations between the Government in Colombo and the LTTE.

Though there are lingering doubts, everyone accepts that peace in some form is urgently needed in Sri Lanka to alleviate the human, social and economic costs of the war incurred by all sides. There is near-unanimity among all sections of the people, both in the North and the South, that the present peace should not be disturbed. This is the greatest factor after the MoU leading to the optimism that not only will peace continue, it will also bring about a permanent solution satisfactory to the Tamil people and, what is of significance, without in any manner violating the integrity and status of Sri Lanka.

A formal meeting with the top Buddhist leadership in Colombo was rewarding. Buddhist monks are known to have played a very crucial part in influencing the majority Sinhala community and the Government. In a refreshing exchange, the monks frankly admitted that denying Tamil the status of official language was a mistake and undoubtedly contributed to the unfortunate developments. Buddhist monks now accept that there can be no permanent solution without a large devolution of power and func-

tions to the North and the East but insist that it should not in any way affect the integrity of Sri Lanka, which proposition is overwhelmingly accepted by both sides.

Some sceptics seem to suggest that the Government is not genuinely interested in meeting the demands of the Tamils for sharing of power but is going through the motions to prolong the talks in the

international aid and restoration and rehabilitation in disturbed areas. This arrangement has the welcome development of having a Muslim representative from the eastern region being part of a task force along with Tamil and Sinhala representatives.

There is no denying that one of the delicate issues is the question of merger of the North and the East as

civil and political rights of the citizens guaranteed not only by the LTTE but also by the monitoring committee, more especially when the MoU acknowledges international law in accordance with which the parties have agreed to refrain from hostile acts against the civilian population.

The practical wisdom which determines the desire of the Government and the LTTE to continue talks is shown by the fact that the recent judgment of a Colombo court sentencing Mr. Prabakaran to a 200-year jail term has not derailed the talks. Rather, Mr. Balasingam has gone public by asserting that the sentence will not affect the peace talks. Similarly, Lakshman Kadirgamar, former Foreign Minister, said that notwithstanding the verdict the talks would continue.

Paradoxically, one of the roadblocks could be the petty politics being played by the UNP and the PA — political parties respectively of the Prime Minister and the President. They indulge in mutual accusations; one threatening to dissolve Parliament and the other moving constitutional amendments seeking to curtail the President's power, when both the parties know well that objective conditions do not permit either of the courses. This attitude, if continued, could damage the peace talks and only encourage anti-peace Sinhala chauvinists.

India is accepted by all shades of opinion as having an abiding interest in the peace prevailing in Sri Lanka. From all signals one got from various sources, India continues to be supportive of peace efforts. India needs to continue to recognise the sensitivity of the situation, because sometimes unnecessary motives are attributed to innocent acts. Thus, a normal commercial contract bagged by Indian Oil to supply oil at Trincomalee port, and for which it had been permitted to set up its oil storage tank, was portrayed as if India was being allowed to establish a naval presence.

There is near-unanimity among all sections of the people, both in the North and the South, that the present peace should not be disturbed.

pectation that time will weaken the hold of the LTTE — there are reports that there is now free movement and some of the cadres of the LTTE are leaving and, hence, it is argued, it will become weaker if later on the Government decides to hang up on it. I do not agree. It has to be remembered that the LTTE's strength was in the perception of injustice to the Tamil people and denial of their rightful participation in the governance of Sri Lanka. If the Government were ever to try to go back on its promises of being serious in conceding genuine Tamil demands, the consequences would be severe. But from our interaction with unbiased observers and close confidants of both sides, it was seen that this assessment about the Government's motives is not shared by any responsible section of the people. As a matter of fact, there is now a close camaraderie between Government officers and the LTTE cadre. Anton Balasingam agreeing to use a Government helicopter to meet V. Prabakaran before the second round of negotiations is cited as an example.

This assessment now finds corroboration from the reports of deliberations at the second round of talks in Thailand at which an agreement was reached between the Government and the LTTE on the broad parameters for the utilisation of

one region, which to the LTTE is non-negotiable. The Muslims who constitute a big section in the East are somewhat apprehensive about their rights if there is a merger. The result of this latest adjustment among these three sections would act as a boost to peace talks, and also give the necessary reassurance to the Muslims. The Muslims are basically traders and the LTTE has rightly or wrongly a grievance that they did not participate fully in its fight against the Government. This misunderstanding will further get cleared now that the economic package is to be shared equitably.

Some of the human rights activists, though no doubt welcoming the peace talks, emphasised that the MoU does not have a human rights content and that it is necessary that there must be a mechanism by which reports of violations are investigated by an independent body. That is why many feel it will be wrong to give exclusive control to the LTTE in the interim administration that may be formed in the near future. Even Sri Lankan Tamils and other parties sympathetic to the LTTE share the view that there must be some mechanism by which other Tamil organisations and NGOs working among children and women could be associated with the interim administration and the normal

12 NOV 2002

DE-ESCALATION PROCESS / 'CONSTRUCTIVE' START

Sri Lankan Defence officials meet LTTE commanders

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11/4

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 10. Top Sri Lankan Defence officials today met senior regional commanders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to kick start a de-escalation process as agreed upon at the recently-concluded second round of talks between Colombo and the rebels in Thailand.

According to Norwegian facilitators, the first meeting of the Sub-committee on De-Escalation and Normalisation (SDN) was held in a "cordial and constructive" manner today in the no-man's land, Omanthai, 265 km north of Colombo.

Today's meeting decided to open up eight entry points enabling fishermen in the northern Jaffna Peninsula to engage in round-the-clock fishing. Restoration of normality has been a key demand forwarded by the LTTE.

The mandate of the SDN, agreed during the second round of talks, is to examine ways and means to ensure resettlement, the return of private property and the resumption of economic activities in these areas, while accommodating the security concerns of each party.

According to the Norwegian Embassy, "the parties discussed and agreed upon procedural matters and identified issues" that would be resolved by the sub-committee.

The Sri Lankan Defence Secretary, Austin Fernando, and the LTTE's military commander for the eastern Batticaloa and Amparai districts, Karuna, led the two delegations.

Mr. Fernando was accompanied by Maj. Gen. Shantha Kottegoda, who was an adviser to Colombo's team in the second round of talks, and other senior officers from the Army, Navy and the Special Task Force.

In addition to 'Col.' Karuna (a.k.a V. Muralith-

aran), the LTTE team included the other regional military commanders, Pathuman, the military leader for Trincomalee, Theepan (Jaffna) and Jeyam (Vavuniya). The Tigers' regional political leaders, Kousalyan (Batticaloa-Amparai), Ezhilan (Vavuniya), Tilak (Trincomalee) and Elamparithi (Jaffna) were also present at today's meeting.

The next meeting of the SDN will be held on November 14, followed by three more meetings, which is expected to address specific regional matters and will be held in the respective areas. Issues such as resettlement of the internally displaced and those relating to the relocation of high-security zones are to be sorted out during these talks.

As these meetings will take on thorny issues, the manner in which they progress will be an important pointer to how the two sides are able to take the de-escalation efforts forward.

While the Tigers would ideally prefer a complete pullout of Government troops from the northeast, clearly that will be an unacceptable position for Colombo. Moreover, the steps to de-escalation are bound to meet political resistance in the south. The sensitive issue of security for the eastern

Muslims would also have to be addressed. For this, the second round of talks agreed upon a seven-step confidence-building measure as well as meetings between the Muslim political leadership and the rebels.

De-mining is also another issue that will have to be addressed in this sub-committee. Both the Sri Lanka Army and the LTTE have been engaged in de-mining operations in the northeast.

Today's meeting, according to sources, did not address issues relating to the high security zones, which is expected to be taken up later.

1 1 NOV 2002

THE HINDU

Govt-LTTE meet on military de-escalation

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Nov. 10. — In the first step towards implementing major decisions at the last round of peace talks in Thailand, the Sri Lankan government and LTTE officials today met at northern land in the north to discuss military de-escalation measures.

Sri Lanka's defence secretary Mr Austin Fernando led a government delegation, while the LTTE's eastern commander Karuna, a delegate at the last round of talks, headed the rebel side at the meeting of a military sub-committee near Omanthai, the last government-held spot in Vavuniya district.

Peace facilitator Norway's Ambassador in Colombo, Mr Jon Westborg, and head of the Scandinavian truce monitoring mission, Gen Trond

Furuhojvde, were also present, as the panel began preliminary discussions.

The main task of the committee is to relocate military positions in the north-east to pave the way for internally displaced civilians to return to their original homes.

A crucial issue will be the question of reducing the expanse of high security zones around military bases. The Tiger rebels and Tamil civilians want the security zones to be drastically cut if not wholly removed, as they are considered impediments to large-scale resettlement.

The LTTE has named its regional military and political leaders to be part of the committee, and is expected to include a representative of "Sea Tigers", its naval arm. The army has included two senior army officers of the rank of Major General and a naval Rear Admiral.

The panel on "De-escalation and Resettle-

ment" is one of the three sub-committees reporting to the two delegations at direct talks. Another panel on humanitarian and economic development will begin its work with a preliminary meeting on 18 November at the rebel-held town of Kijinochchi.

Mr Bernard Goonatilleke, a member of the government delegation and head of its Peace Secretariat, is the main government nominee on this sub-committee, while the LTTE side is led by its political wing leader Mr SP Thamilselvan.

This committee will solicit, receive and disburse external aid for humanitarian, economic and development projects in the former battle-hit areas of the north and east.

The third sub-committee, dealing with the task of formulating a political solution to the ethnic conflict, will go about its work by studying constitutional models in other countries.

1 1 NOV 2002

HD-9
10/11

Sri Lanka, LTTE ready for painful compromises, says Norwegian Minister ^{Q. India S. Lanka}

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, NOV. 9. The Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Petersen, has said the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are ready for "painful compromises" in the pursuit of peace and commended regional approaches to conflict management.

Mr. Petersen held talks with the Home Minister, L.K. Advani, and the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, today and the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, on Friday night.

Speaking at the India International Centre today, Mr. Petersen said Norway had "consulted closely" with India from the very start of its involvement in the Sri Lankan peace process. He called on Indian investors to seize the new opportunity and take their businesses to Sri Lanka. "I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the support and cooperation of Indian authorities," he said in his speech, titled 'Norway: A partner for peace'.

Giving a detailed account of the two rounds of peace talks, Mr. Petersen said, "The ceasefire agreement testifies to the wisdom of the step-by-step approach taken by the parties... Mistrust can only be overcome when the parties demonstrate to each other that they can be trusted in gradually and patiently implementing peace-building measures." Stating that the deadlines relating to the ceasefire had largely been met, he said that in the process, the parties had built sufficient confidence between themselves to

"embark on the next phase of the process — direct negotiations".

"While the parties have now entered into direct negotiations, they remain fully committed to upholding the ceasefire and building on its achievements. At the first two sessions of the talks, the parties have agreed to expand confidence-building measures. They have focused a great deal on the humanitarian and rehabilitation needs in the war-affected areas, and on the need for human security and inter-ethnic cooperation in the eastern part of the island. The parties demonstrate an impressive ability to address the needs on the ground while making progress on the longer-term issues."

Norway, he said, could only commend them for adopting such an approach. "Peace cannot be achieved around a table in Thailand alone. Peace has to be built from below while being negotiated from the top. And it must be built gradually. Some

are impatient and want things to move faster. This is understandable, but not necessarily to be recommended. What decades of tension and conflict have torn apart cannot be rebuilt in a matter of months. Therefore, the parties are responding to demands for more speed by calling for more patience. This approach requires courage and political leadership."

He announced that a political-level meeting of key Governments would take place in Oslo on November 25 to mobilise political support for the peace process and financial support for immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation action. "At the meeting, the international community will also be encouraged to increase investment in Sri Lanka and respond positively to new challenges in the south resulting from the peace process... I should think that Indian investors would be wise in seizing the opportunity and investing for the benefit of their

businesses and for the progress of peace."

Stating that the peace process had to address a series of complex political issues, Mr. Petersen said the "important progress" achieved in the two round of talks should not mislead anyone into believing that a solution is yet in sight. "We must be prepared for deadlocks and setbacks. But the very point of this process is that disagreements can and should be settled by peaceful means." Calling for a consolidation of the peace effort from civil society in Sri Lanka, he said this needed to be matched by international political and financial support to demonstrate that peace would bring tangible benefits to the long-suffering population. Pointing to Norway's long-standing and varied commitment to conflict resolution, he said this role had been made possible by the fact that Norway was a "small country with no colonial past and few vested interests".

He said Norway backed the candidatures of India, Japan and Germany for permanent seats in the United Nations Security Council. In addition, his country had suggested that Asia, Africa and Latin America be given one permanent and one non-permanent seat each.

Welcoming the unanimous support in the Security Council for the Iraq resolution, he hoped that Iraq would comply with the U.N.'s directives. "The U.N. Security Council is the only institution that can authorise the use of force on behalf of the international community," he added.

India invited for Oslo conference

By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 9. India is among the "key Governments" that have been invited to attend the conference in Oslo on November 25 to garner financial and political support for the peace process in Sri Lanka. According to sources, India was still in the process of considering the invitation. A decision was expected in the next few days, they added.

Other than India, the United Kingdom, the United States and several Scandinavian countries have been invited for the Oslo meeting. Clearly, the Norwegians, the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are aware that India has a critical role, even from the sidelines, in any long-term settlement of the conflict. The invitation extended to India is a recognition of that role.

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RELEGATING SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

WHILE THE DECLARATION by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that its ultimate aim was to join the democratic mainstream in the island republic might sound reasonable, what has to be noted upfront is that no pronouncement by this organisation can really be taken at face value so long as its true nature is not tested by the pulls and pressures of a serious process of give and take with the Sri Lankan Government. The LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government, who have just concluded the second round of direct talks, aided by Norwegian facilitators, are still skirting around the substantive issues that have to be addressed if a durable peace is to be established. Whereas the substantive issues ought to have actually been the main focus of the discussions, and thus provided the context, negotiations in respect of these matters have been relegated to the level of sub-committees. The chief negotiators on either side are represented on the sub-committees and a case can be made that smaller groups will be able to pay closer attention to different aspects of a very complex situation. Such an arrangement can also, however, lend itself to the sceptical assessment that the facade of a negotiating format is being maintained while the parties involved hope that the final result will be essentially shaped by developments on the ground. If the Sri Lankan Government does entertain any misplaced optimism on this count, it would do well to heed the warning by a senior leader of the political Opposition that the "good faith" of the LTTE has come under suspicion in the wake of reports of arms smuggling, extortion, abductions, insensitivity to the aspirations of other citizens and the flaunting of its independent regime.

The last point raised in the Opposition critique has acquired new salience after the conclusion of the second round of talks. Two of the three joint sub-committees — those which are to deal with the issues of Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East and of De-escalation and Normalisa-

tion — are to be constituted solely of representatives of the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. Innocuous as the purpose of these sub-committees might appear, the whole process of their establishment must be read in the context of a declaration made by the LTTE at the conclusion of the first round of talks that its control over territory in the North and East had already assumed the status of a permanent administration. This declaration was made at a stage when the issue of the interim administration of these territories had not come on to the agenda. Yet, even though the issue has still not been addressed, the Sri Lankan Government appears to have conceded that the LTTE will be a partner, equal in all respects, in the task of administering the re-settlement and rehabilitation of the people of these territories. Apart from the fact that there exists no mechanism to hold the LTTE accountable for the funds (to be supplied by international donors) for these purposes, an even more fundamental flaw is Colombo's silent acquiescence to the LTTE's sense of entitlement to the administration of these territories at a stage where there has been no discussion on the devolution of power to the different regions of Sri Lanka.

The decision to include a representative of the Muslim community in the sub-committee that will address political matters — while a positive development — will gain real content only if the LTTE abides by its stated understanding that it would, as a part of its entry into the mainstream, allow other political parties and groups to participate in the democratic processes in the North and East. But the mandate of this committee appears dilatory on the face of it as it is to embark on a wide-ranging and generic study of ethnic conflicts and their resolution instead of focussing on Sri Lanka's particularities. After two rounds of talks, the Sri Lankan Government should ponder whether its negotiations with the LTTE can progress towards a wholesome conclusion without a re-prioritisation of the agenda.

THE HINDU

7 NOV 1992

Tigers wish to turn a new leaf

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), NOV. 3. The second round of direct talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) concluded here today on a note of optimism with the Tigers agreeing to work in joint committees along with the Sri Lankan Government to sort out thorny political, military and development issues.

With today's agreements, the conflict resolution process has also taken the committee route; three sub-panels were formed to address sensitive issues such as rebuilding the North-East, relocating the high security zones and working towards an acceptable political model to end the conflict. These sub-committees will report to the main negotiators and have equal representation from the Tigers and the Government.

The sub-committee for political matters will be chaired by the chief negotiators, Anton Balasingham and G.L. Peiris. The LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvam, and the Director-General of the Government's Peace Secretariat, Bernard Goonatileke, will lead their respective teams in the sub-committee on 'Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and the

East'. The sub-committee on 'De-escalation and Normalisation', which will look into issues relating to the high-security zones, will have the Defence Secretary, Austin Fernando, and the LTTE's eastern military wing leader, Karuna, as heads of their respective teams.

Before the talks commenced, concerns were expressed on how a joint task force would be structured to rebuild the North-East. The sub-committee on 'Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs' was the solution that the talks came up with. The other pre-talks issue of relocating high-security zones was addressed through the 'Committee on De-escalation'. This committee will "examine ways and means to ensure resettlement, the return of private property and the resumption of economic activities in these areas, while accommodating the security concerns of each party".

The 'Sub-Committee on Political Matters' will be chaired by Prof. Peiris and Mr. Balasingham. The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Rauff Hakeem, and another member from the LTTE will be members of this committee. This panel will "commence work in connection with relevant political matters", a joint statement is-

sued by the Norwegian Government said. The parties in this panel will "jointly and separately" address in depth "relevant subjects such as other peace processes, political solutions to ethnic conflicts, models and systems of government, issues of post-conflict transition, co-ordination of international assistance and reconciliation processes".

In addition to these three committees, it was also decided that Mr. Hakeem would liaise with Col. Karuna on issues relating to the security of the eastern Muslims.

"It is the ultimate aim of the Tigers to join the democratic mainstream. No one should have any doubt about it," Mr. Balasingham told a press conference, which he addressed along with the head of Colombo's delegation, G.L. Peiris, and the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgessen.

"If we are committed to enter the democratic mainstream, we will have to accept and assimilate with other groups. We will definitely allow other political groups and parties to participate in the democratic process in the North and the East," Mr. Balasingham said to a question on whether the Tigers would permit other Tamil parties to participate in elections.

Prof. Peiris welcomed the announcement by Mr. Balasingham and said "the LTTE taking part in a media briefing like this indicates more than any words would do that they are engaged in a transformation into a political organisation. They are getting to grips with the political realities, complexities. The best example of that is what is happening in this very room."

During the Premadasa talks in the 1990s, the Tigers formed a political party, the People's Liberation Front of Tigers (PFLT), which continues to be registered as a political party. However, this party, which was headed by the late Mahatayya, has remained defunct ever since.

Mr. Helgessen expressed happiness that the peace process was progressing "remarkably well". There was a "determination by both parties to overcome difficulties," he said, adding that the talks were held in a "constructive" manner and its outcome had "exceeded expectations".

As the euphoria, which started after the first round of talks, continues, Mr. Helgessen also provided the much-required reality check. "What we have agreed is here on paper. It has to be implemented vigorously on the ground."

Oslo to host third round of talks

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), NOV. 3. The third round of talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will be held in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, between December 2 and 5.

This change in venue, according to Erik Solheim, special envoy for the peace process, was only for the next round, after which the talks will resume in Thailand. According to sources, the shift in the venue was made as the Kingdom of Thailand would be celebrating the King's birthday, which coincided with the dates agreed upon for the next round of talks.

Sources close to the peace process said the venue was shifted as the two sides were keen on sticking to the dates agreed upon and altering those would have sent the wrong signals.

Today's talks also decided upon the dates for the subsequent rounds. After the December round, the two sides would meet again between January 6 and 9, 2003. Meetings between February 7 and 10 and March 18 and 21 would follow this.

Karuna, Tamilchelvam in team

The LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasing-

ham, said that the outfit's eastern military commander, Karuna, and its political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvam, would be permanent members of the LTTE's negotiating team.

These two leaders, who were not in the first round, were incorporated this time for two reasons. Apart from criticism that the LTTE's earlier team did not have members from the Vanni, this round also took up issues relating to the east and the rehabilitation of the northeast. These two leaders now hold important responsibilities in the sub-committees constituted today.

No death threats

The LTTE said that it was not issuing death threats to persons opposed to it. On the status of those who were on the LTTE's hit-list after the rebel group's commitment to enter the democratic fold, Mr. Balasingham said "it is unfair to say that we are sending any death threat to anyone."

On the organisation's move towards entering the political mainstream, he said, "a process of political democratisation" was on in the North-East.

"The LTTE cadres go into Army-controlled areas and have set up offices and are carrying out political work in the North-East," he said.

Colombo, LTTE show genuine desire: envoy

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM, (THAILAND) NOV. 3. Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have shown their "genuine desire" to move towards a negotiated settlement, according to Oslo's Special Envoy, Erik Solheim.

"If reasons to pull out from the talks were needed, there were many. But they held on because they had a genuine desire to do so," Mr. Solheim told *The Hindu* just after the talks concluded this afternoon.

While parleys were on in the picturesque Rose Garden resort, 32 km from Bangkok, disturbing news from Sri Lanka was not lacking.

Clashes between Sinhalese and Muslims in Colombo, which led to a police curfew in parts of the city, provided a tense start to the talks. A day later, an ominous sign came when the Colombo High Court handed down a 200-year jail term for the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, for allegedly masterminding the bombing of the Central Bank in Colombo in 1996. And, just a day before the talks ended, an arms-seizure off the eastern shores of Sri Lanka completed the recipe for what the doctor would have ordered to scuttle the talks. The LTTE team registered a strong protest against the sentence on Mr. Prabhakaran, but then, the talks proceeded.

LTTE DROPS INTERIM ADMINISTRATION DEMAND

② Tigers keen to join political mainstream

PTI & AP

NAKHON PATHOM (Thailand), Nov. 3. — The LTTE today dropped the demand for an interim administration in its strongholds in northern and eastern Sri Lanka and said its ultimate aim is to enter "political mainstream".

Speaking at a joint press conference at the conclusion of four days of talks with the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE chief negotiator, Mr Anton Balasingham, said the political mainstream in Sri Lanka was "democracy" and the LTTE "will allow other political groups to participate in the north and east".

In what is seen as a major boost to bring peace in Sri Lanka, Mr Balasingham said the LTTE did not want to demand the setting up of an interim administration as it wanted to take up core issues as early as possible. (Autonomy or self-rule for Tamils in the north and east is considered one of the core issues.) He said the LTTE will "straightaway enter

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into the process of core issues so that we will not be bogged down to any particular framework... and if we feel the need for an interim administration, it



Norwegian deputy foreign minister Mr Vidar Helgesen (centre) with Sri Lankan minister Mr GL Peiris (left) and LTTE's negotiator Mr A Balasingham. In Nakhon Pathom on Sunday. — AFP

could be pursued then".

Mr Balasingham admitted for the first time that LTTE had recruited child soldiers during the two decades of war with the Sri Lankan forces, but said: "We do not recruit any underage persons following UN conventions... We

have been releasing quite a large number of young persons. They have been handed over to their parents. There are no child soldiers in the LTTE now."

The Sri Lankan Constitutional affairs minister, Mr GL Peiris, who led the government team, said the Tamil Tigers are "engaged in a transformation to a political organization". "The best example is what is happening here in this room today," Mr Peiris said as the LTTE announced one concession after another indicating that the warring parties have agreed on several key issues. Mr Peiris and Mr Balasingham suggested the rebel negotiator was likely to meet Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, at a donor nations conference in Norway on 25 November.

But cautioning against expecting "dramatic results", a Lankan delegate Mr Rauf Hakeem, said: "We're not even a quarter of the way to an interim settlement and even further away from a final settlement."

Another report on page 3

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THE STATESMAN

Colombo, LTTE form joint panels

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND) NOV. 2. Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today took the ongoing peace process a significant step forward by agreeing to adopt a joint approach to resolve sensitive military and political issues that kept the island trapped in decades of separatist conflict.

Joint committees by the Tigers and the Government will aim at finding an agreeable political format as well as address sensitive issues relating to de-escalation of the high security zones in battle-scarred north-eastern Sri Lanka.

Announcing these decisions at the end of today's deliberations, the head of Colombo's delegation, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, told journalists that the peace process was "moving forward in a very encouraging manner".

The four-member political panel will include Prof. Peiris, the head of the LTTE's delegation, Anton Balasingham, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Rauff Hakeem, and another member to be nominated by the Tigers, Prof. Peiris said.

This panel "will not reinvent the wheel but make a fresh start". Nothing will be excluded, Prof. Peiris said, when asked about the existing draft constitution, put together by the earlier People's Alliance regime.

At last month's opening round of talks, the LTTE spelt out 'substantial regional autonomy and self-governance' as an alternative to a separate state and wanted an acceptable model to be worked out.

The Tigers and the Government also agreed upon a 19-member panel, comprising top military commanders from both sides and a Norwegian representative, to discuss the sensitive issue of relocating high security zones (HSZ) in the northeast. Earlier this month, 'civilian protests' against the HSZs in the northeast threatened to snowball into a nasty law and order crisis. The first meeting of this committee is to be held on October 10, in Norman's land, Omanthai, 265 km north of Colombo.

With today's two agreements, Colombo and the Tigers have made four pacts during the second round of talks. During the first two days, they agreed to form a joint committee for the development and reconstruction of the northeast and a sev-

en-step confidence-building mechanism to allay the insecurities of the eastern Muslims.

As these agreements, which address immediate concerns, also have a bearing on the core issues of the conflict, this round is a step towards taking on contentious political and military issues.

Describing the agreement on military matters as "a positive development", Prof. Peiris, said "we are giving the highest priority to this committee". The Sri Lankan Defence Secretary, Austin Fernando, will head the Government's team in this joint panel.

"I am mentioning this to reflect the seriousness with which the Government is approaching this issue", he said.

Though subjects such as de-commissioning and demobili-

sation have not yet come up for negotiations, today's step to create a joint committee marks the commencement of a long process of de-militarising the conflict.

Asked by journalists if negotiations on these sensitive issues were moving too fast, Prof. Peiris said "there is no recklessness; no dragging of feet" and that the talks were evolving "step-by-step".

Today's simultaneous formation of the political and military joint committees reflects the seriousness of these two issues in Sri Lanka. De-escalation of the conflict has been a part of the island's political agenda since 1999, when the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, made it one of his points in that year's Presidential election, which he lost.

Talking peace at the 'Glass House'

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), NOV. 2. The venue for the second round of talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Rose Garden resort, 32 km west of Bangkok, is a long way from the battlefields of Sri Lanka. Seated across the table at 'Glass House' — the name of the banquet hall in which the talks are being held — the two sides have not thrown stones at each other. Instead they chose platitudes with the two chief negotiators — G.L. Peiris and Anton Balasingham — revealing their linguistic skills.

The verbal onslaught was launched by the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen. "Nothing is ready unless everything is ready," he told presspersons at the end of the first day of talks.

In Prof. Peiris' words there was "growing confidence" and discussions were held in "an atmosphere of friendship and understanding". "There

is no need for exaggerated or extravagant language, but the peace process is moving forward in a very encouraging manner," said the Cambridge-educated Prof. Peiris, a former professor of law and one-time Vice-Chancellor of the Colombo University.

As they heaped praises, the two sides looked for words to tell the world that all was well. The LTTE's chief negotiator, Mr. Balasingham, made fewer appearances before reporters here, but superlatives were not spared to describe the progress of talks and the growing camaraderie. "We are very optimistic... the peace process is making progress," he said, adding that the atmosphere at the talks is "very constructive, congenial and productive". In his words, there has been a "remarkable improvement" in Sri Lanka since 1998, when he was forced to take a clandestine sea route to a Southeast Asian nation for urgent medical attention. Now he sounded optimistic enough to say, "no one is thinking of war".

Colombo, LTTE reach agreement on joint task force for north-east

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), NOV. 1. The Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today arrived at a broad agreement on the "basic form" in which a joint task force would be established to address issues relating to the reconstruction of the north-east, marking an early breakthrough in the second round of direct talks which started here on Thursday.

The broad agreement provides for an eight-member sub-committee, comprising four representatives each from the Government and the Tigers, which would report to the negotiating team. Sri Lanka's member in the delegation, Rauff Hakeem, told journalists that of the four Government representatives, two would be Muslims, given the sensitivities of the eastern region where Muslims were in a majority in several areas. The head of Colombo's delegation, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, however, would not go into the details of the composition, but said the membership of the government team would reflect "equity".

The broad agreement, Prof. Peiris, said, would meet three important objectives of winning international confidence to invest in rebuilding the north-east, would be acceptable to both the Government and the Tigers and conform to the laws and procedures of Sri Lanka. The issue, he said, was "not wrapped up yet" and would be "revisited" during the deliberations later before a formal announcement was made on

November 3. As a measure to build confidence between the Tamils and the Muslims in the east, the Government and the LTTE also agreed on a seven-point plan to improve the eastern security situation. This includes provisions for "direct interaction" between the Tigers and the Special Task Force police manning the sensitive eastern regions.

Establishing a process of regular consultations between the LTTE leaders and Muslim political leaders and establishing community-level peace committees are also part of the confidence-building measures agreed

upon today. The joint task force was a mechanism that was put forward in the first round of talks held last month to enable restoration of normality in the battle-scarred north-eastern Sri Lanka. It aimed at securing international funding to help rebuild the region as well as to facilitate the return of internally displaced people.

There were some indications of a difference of opinion between the Tigers and the Government on whom the task force would report to, with the LTTE reportedly preferring a mechanism that did not bring it under state control. There were also

indications that the task force would be a seven-member body, with three each from the Government and the Tigers as well as a Norwegian facilitator. Prof. Peiris said there were "no rigidities" in the positions adopted by the two sides today and "given a spirit of goodwill, we can reconcile".

Muslim leader upbeat

Mr. Hakeem, who is under considerable political pressure in Sri Lanka, was confident that following his interactions with the LTTE's eastern military commander, Karuna, there would be an upturn in Tamil-Muslim relations.

Pointing out that the volatile east is a fertile ground now for radicalisation of Muslim politics, Mr. Hakeem said, "I have had lengthy discussions with Col. Karuna away from the negotiating table to help resolve the Muslims' concerns in the east."

"Tamils and Muslims will not give space for disgruntled elements to disrupt the peace process. The LTTE recognises its responsibility to dispel the insecurity among Muslims," he said. After the present round of talks concludes, Mr. Hakeem would be meeting the LTTE's leader, V. Prabhakaran, and important regional leaders, including Col. Karuna, to chalk out a formula by which the confidence of the two ethnicities would be won.

There are also plans to work out a mechanism through which the LTTE leaders would address Muslims and Muslim leaders would address the Tamils to firm up the agreements reached to ensure communal harmony.

Rapprochement with Muslims

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), NOV. 1. For the LTTE's eastern military wing leader, Karuna, his first overseas visit after decades of fighting the Sri Lankan Government was strictly a business trip for peace. "We are not here as tourists, but on work", he told journalists as the second day's talks ended.

Rapprochement with the eastern Muslims, who fear the LTTE, is high on priority for Col. Karuna's visit. Conceding that there has been a problem in ethnic relations, he said: "It is true that there have been differences in the past between Tamils and Muslims. The majoritarian governments that waged a war instigated the two communities against each other and watched them clash. Now this has changed. We are

heading for a phase of stability. The two communities have understood this and they desire to live in harmony. That is our desire as well". He said the Muslims in the northeast must enjoy all the rights that the LTTE fought and won for the Tamils.

On the recent eastern troubles, he said: "Some evil forces are overplaying the confusion in the east and attempting to derail the peace process. We are here mainly to sort out these issues. We want to make this peace last".

Asked how he saw the presence of his wartime adversary in the talks — Maj. Gen. Shantha Kottegoda, who led the Government troops against his forces — Col. Karuna broke into a rare smile. "We are not fighting now. We are friends. If the war starts again, we will see".

Pirabhakaran gets 200-yr jail term

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Oct. 31. — LTTE leader Velupillai Pirabhakaran was today sentenced to 200 years of imprisonment by a court here for the 1996 bombing in Sri Lanka's Central Bank, Colombo, in which 76 people were killed and several injured.

Colombo High Court judge Mr Sarath Ambepitiya found the LTTE chief guilty, along with three others who are also absconding, of conspiracy, and aiding and abetting the crime. They were sentenced on 51 counts. All the sentences will run concurrently. But LTTE intelligence chief Pottu Amman and three others were acquitted of all charges. Only two suspects were available for trial and both were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The verdict comes even while the government and the rebel group began their second round of talks in Thailand. Sri Lanka's criminal law permits the trial of suspects even in their absence.

A truck laden with explosives had rammed into the Central Bank building, close to the President's house, on 31 January 1996. The massive explosion killed 76 people and injured hundreds. It was among a series of blasts engineered by the Tamil Tiger rebels in 1996, a year which witnessed a loss of hundreds of lives in the ethnic conflict.

The Attorney-General had indicted 10 suspects, among whom only Pirabhakaran and Pottu Amman were prominent LTTE leaders. Sri Lanka's criminal law permits the trial of suspects even in their absence.

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LTTE, Lanka hold talks

Press Trust of India

NAKHON PATHOM (Thailand), Oct. 31. — Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government yesterday held talks here mainly to discuss setting up of a joint task force to rebuild the country and decide on issues like foreign aid and demining.

The four-day talks, their second in as many months, being held in Rose Garden Resort will discuss a blueprint for foreign aid, an appeal for which is likely to be issued jointly at Oslo, where Norway is hosting a mini-donors' meeting on 25 November.

Sri Lankan minister for constitutional affairs Mr GL Pereis is leading the government delegation with LTTE spokesman Mr Anton Balasingham heading the rebels.

"We are hopeful about the talks," economic affairs minister Mr Milinda Moragoda, one negotiator, said as leaders of the two sides shook hands for photographers at the resort's banquet hall.

The delegation, which comprises four members in each side, would be discussing the issues six hours a day before concluding parleys on Sunday with a joint press conference. For the first time, top military leaders from both sides have been included in the delegations. While Mr V Karuna, LTTE's top military leader represents the rebels, Major Gen. Shantha Kottegoda is the government's military representative.

Mr Karuna said a joint security committee to look into the situation in the northeast of the country.

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Colombo-LTTE talks focus on eastern Sri Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), OCT. 31. The second round of direct talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which started here today, focussed on issues relating to the disturbing security situation in eastern Sri Lanka. Indications are that there will be some hard negotiations during the next few days before the round closes on November 3. "Nothing is ready unless everything is ready," the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister told journalists as the day's talks concluded.

The head of the Colombo delegation, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, however, sounded optimistic. Terming the talks "constructive," he said "considerable progress" had been made and the two sides "arrived at decisions." But the points of agreement would not be made public till the round ended. Confidence-building measures for Muslims in the east had also been discussed.

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Rauff Hakeem, seated opposite the LTTE's eastern military commander, Karuna, said he had discussed the issues relating to the safety of Muslims in the east with the rebel military leader. Confirming that some agreements had been reached, Mr. Hakeem said the talks with Col. Karuna also included violations of the under-

standing reached with the LTTE leader, V. Prabakaran, earlier this year.

It was suggested that the SLMC and the LTTE discuss the issue in more detail. Indications were that the SLMC would nominate a person to carry forward the process.

Behind the eastern troubles in Sri Lanka lies decades of hostility between the Tamils and the Muslims, calling for a large presence of the Special Task Force to maintain law and order. The specific agreements that have been arrived at today have given a sense of confidence that the issues would be sorted out through negotiations, rather than strife and bloodshed. However, as Mr. Hakeem put it, the assurances would have to pass the test of ground-level implementation.

Another issue to be taken up during the talks was the formation of a joint task force (JTF) for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the northeast and the resettlement of the internally-displaced. No proposal has been officially announced yet, but indications are that there are three mechanisms under discussion.

One is to place the JTF under the Prime Minister's Office. Another is to bring it under the budgetary mechanism, and therefore, under parliamentary control. The third possible structure is to create a JTF Fund, which would be used for rehabilitation.

THE HINDU

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UNF welcomes Chandrika's call for reconciliation

By V.S. Sambandan

*S. Lanka
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COLOMBO, OCT. 25. The ruling party in Sri Lanka, United National Front, today welcomed the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's call for reconciliatory politics, but said that any compromise would have to be based on the mandate it won at the December 2001 polls for negotiating peace with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to solve the island's ethnic conflict.

"We welcome the support of any political party or group to implement the mandate we have received from the people," the Sri Lankan Cabinet spokesman, G. L. Peiris, told presspersons here.

Prof. Peiris' position comes in the backdrop of Ms. Kumaratunga's call for unity on Friday. Stating that she had won two mandates for the Presidency, Ms. Kumaratunga had urged the political forces to come together to carry forward the work she had started "eight years ago."

The call received a qualified welcome from political analysts for the same reason as that of Prof. Peiris. It is likely to see the beginning of the politics of rapprochement, where each party would like to be seen as ready to reconcile but on its own terms.

In a clear indication that the UNF was in no mood for a total compromise, Prof. Peiris said that it "must be clearly understood" that any support would

have to be to "implement the mandate this government received and not any other mandate."

The latest problem between Ms. Kumaratunga and the UNF has arisen from the two different mandates that the Sri Lankans gave within two years. In 1999, Ms. Kumaratunga was directly elected President for the second term. However, the party she leads, People's Alliance (PA) lost to Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNF in the 2001 polls, thereby forcing the two hostile parties into a cohabitation Government. The UNF's response today is an indication that the path to a complete reconciliation between the two parties will be a long one.

Moreover, the two parties sharply differ in their approach to conflict resolution. While the PA first started peace talks and then waged an all-out war against the Tigers after the latter broke the ceasefire, the UNF has taken the approach of managing the conflict and engaging the LTTE in negotiations.

Army officer to advise Colombo

A day after the Tigers announced that their eastern military commander, Karuna, would be in their team for the second round of Thailand talks, Colombo said that it would take a senior field officer, Maj. Gen. Shantha Kottegoda, to Thailand as an adviser. The officer's familiarity with both the northern

and eastern theatres of military operations is expected to give Colombo crucial support during the talks. Though issues such as disarming and decommissioning are not yet on the table, the recent trouble in eastern Sri Lanka is likely to be touched upon in the second round. The protests by civilians — reportedly backed by the LTTE — against high security zones in the northeast, have also added another dimension to the talks.

EC reviews Gujarat's poll preparedness

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 25. The Election Commission today held a high-level meeting to review the preparedness of the Gujarat Government to hold Assembly polls expected during the middle of December.

The meeting was presided over by the Chief Election Commissioner, J.M. Lyngdoh.

It was attended, among others, by the Gujarat Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Director General of Police.

The Commission held discussions on Thursday with the Union Home Ministry on the availability of Central forces during elections, likely to be held in two phases.

Lanka PM bids for stability

Agence France Presse

COLOMBO, Oct. 23. — Sri Lanka's ruling party today launched a fresh bid to regain its lost parliamentary majority as a court ruling effectively removed the prospect of snap polls.

Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party was in talks with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress to secure the support of the party's 12 MPs.

A power struggle within the SLMC had threatened the stability of the UNP

government which has a slender two-seat majority in the 225-member Assembly.

Nine members of the SLMC had staged a boycott of parliament, triggering a crisis for the government, but following talks two SLMC members re-entered the Assembly yesterday.

"There will be more talks with the SLMC to help them sort out their internal differences and ensure that they do not affect the government as a whole," a senior UNP member said.

The internal problems for the coalition government

were compounded yesterday with a Supreme Court ruling that blocked the Prime Minister's bid to reduce the powers of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The government had earlier used the threat of a snap poll to win over the support of Opposition dissidents, but the Supreme Court ruling made any new election impractical, political sources said. The court ruled that the government must hold a nationwide referendum if it wants to take away Ms Kumaratunga's power to sack parliament.

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SC strikes amendment curbing Chandrika's powers

S. Lanka ✓

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, OCT. 22. Sri Lanka's ruling United National Front today suffered a setback with the Supreme Court shooting down an amendment aimed at curbing the powers of the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, to dissolve Parliament.

In a unanimous 27-page ruling on the proposed 19th amendment, the court struck down a crucial clause that would have given immunity to cross-voters and said that if the Government wanted to curb the President's dissolution powers, it would have to win popular approval at a referendum, as the exercise was against the basic structure of the Constitution.

The seven-member Bench, which heard 24 petitions, ruled that in three of the four existing constitutional provisions, "the final say" in dissolving Parliament was vested with the President. The only way in which Parliament could "enforce a dissolution by the President" was "through the oblique means of rejecting the budget twice," it said.

The verdict, communicated to Parliament by the Speaker, puts a brake on the Government's attempts to restrain the President from exercising her constitutional power to dissolve the House a year after the last general elections. As a political move, the UNF had also hoped

to get Parliament to dissolve itself and call for fresh elections, as it wanted to seek a popular mandate whenever it was politically comfortable. By reiterating the primacy of the Executive President, the Supreme Court's pronouncement rules out these options for the UNF.

Despite a written assurance from Ms. Kumaratunga that she would not dissolve Parliament, the UNF introduced the Bill on September 19. The amendment said that a President, who was not a member of the ruling party, "shall not" dissolve Parliament after it completes a year, unless a resolution was passed by a two-thirds majority (including those not present).

The Supreme Court said this "moves in the opposite direc-

tion" of the Constitution. Dissolution was "a component of the executive power" of the President and "cannot be alienated in the sense of being transferred, relinquished or removed from where it lies."

The court struck down the immunity clause — the political backbone of the amendment because it encouraged the crucial cross-voting required by the UNF — as one that "suspends the operation of a part of the Constitution." It "cannot be validly enacted by Parliament" and "has to be deleted from the Bill." The Opposition was happy that this clause was struck down.

'Victory for democracy'

In their reaction, the Presi-

dent's office and the People's Alliance welcomed the verdict, while the UNF said it would consider the options ahead.

"The highest judicial body has studied attempts to tinker with the Constitution and deemed that you cannot chip away the powers bestowed on the President," a senior presidential aide said. The

Leader of the Opposition, Mahinda Rajapakse, termed it as a "defeat for the Government." However, the Constitutional Affairs Minister, G. L. Peiris, would not concede defeat. "It should not be seen as either a victory or defeat for any side. We will now explore the political options ahead."

Anura Bandaranaike, a senior PA leader, termed the verdict as a "big defeat for the Government" and said it was of "utmost importance" that the UNF co-operated with the PA and the President. Mr. Bandaranaike, Ms. Kumaratunga's brother, said that he did not expect elections in the near future adding that the President "will not dissolve Parliament" now.

Raja Collure, leader of the Communist Party, saw the verdict as a "defeat for the Government, which tried to artificially increase its majority from a simple to a two-thirds, and thereby weaken the Opposition." The Opposition Whip, Mangala Samaraweera, said it was a "victory for democracy".

'Send them to wildlife sanctuary'

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, OCT. 22. Sri Lanka's Parliamentary Affairs Minister, A.H.M. Azwer, today compared the noisy members of the Opposition to wild animals and urged the Speaker to pack them off to a wildlife sanctuary in south-eastern Sri Lanka.

"You should send these untamed animals to the Yala sanctuary," Mr. Azwer told the Speaker, when the Opposition MPs were shouting for the resignation of the Constitutional Affairs Minister, G.L. Peiris, who was not in Parliament when the SC ruling on the 19th amendment was read out. "There is a dearth of animals in Yala," Mr. Azwer said adding that the "Leader of the Opposition must be sent to the zoo."

S. K. S. 119-9

Chandrika, Ranil to confer on peace process

6/10

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, OCT. 5. Sri Lanka's President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, will hold regular meetings to review the progress of the peace process.

This decision was taken after the Minister of Economic Reforms, Milinda Moragoda, met Ms. Kumaratunga on Friday to brief her on last month's first round of direct talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Thailand.

The decision is seen as one of the efforts to keep the talks on track and work towards narrowing the sharp political rivalry

between Sri Lanka's two main parties — the ruling United National Party (UNP), led by Mr. Wickremesinghe and the Opposition People's Alliance (PA) led by Ms. Kumaratunga.

At these joint meetings the two leaders will be accompanied by Mr. Moragoda, the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapana, and the senior adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar.

In addition, the Norwegian envoy in Colombo, Jon Westborg, will brief Ms. Kumaratunga before and after each round of talks on a regular basis.

Friday's decision to hold these joint meetings comes at a

time when there is increasing pressure on Colombo to move towards the substantive issues in the negotiations with the Tigers.

Moreover, the UNP and the PA differ in their approaches on resolving the decades-long conflict. The UNP, which came to power on a mandate of talking to the Tigers wants to engage the LTTE in negotiations through a step-by-step approach and is preparing the nation for a long haul. The PA, in contrast, wants the core issues to be addressed at the earliest. Moreover, the two parties are also involved in a troublesome political cohabitation exercise.

6 OCT 2002

INDU

WHITHER SRI LANKA

Will The Peace Last?

By PARMANAND

At long last, the 3-day first round of talks between the Sri Lankan government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was held in Thailand. In August 1994, when Chandrika's People's Alliance came to power first at the ministerial level, it was quick to commence talks with the LTTE at the earliest: as such, talks began on 13 October 1994. Chandrika was yet to be elected President but the PA's mandate was treated as a mandate for peace.

In December 2001, when the United National Front of Ranil Wickremesinghe came to power at a ministerial level, it was in no hurry to begin talks with the LTTE, though dialogue was one of its objectives, and the electoral mandate was also treated as one for peace. Ranil Wickremesinghe's government waited patiently, doing its homework meticulously, and apprising the international community of developments on the domestic front.

"Obscenity"

Eleventh September helped Ranil immensely. Almost within a fortnight of his assumption of power as Prime Minister, the LTTE declared unilateral cease-fire. A great deal of pressure was being put on the LTTE. The Tigers were becoming impecunious. And the LTTE-ideologue, Anton Balasingham, was reportedly pressurising the organisation-supremo, Vellupillai Pirbhakaran, to arrive at some understanding with the government in Colombo, for the former was not going to live long because of deteriorating health. And Balasingham has for long been exercising unlimited influence over Pirbhakaran.

There was, indeed, no absence of reservations in various quarters about the peace talks. According to *The Economist*, these talks were like an "obscenity" to many islanders — especially those whose relatives were killed in suicide attacks or bombings or made homeless in their own country. On the other hand, according to the journal, to many Tiger "foot-soldiers", the talks yielding anything less than full independence would seem like "a sell-out".

The organised Buddhist monks, who have been exercising a great deal of influence over the Sinhala political elites for quite some time now, had very strongly opposed the government's decision to unban the LTTE before talks in Thailand. Likewise, the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna, an organisation devoted to the cause of Marxism and nationalism simultaneously, and having a significant presence in the 225-member unicameral parliament with 16

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

seats, had also opposed any move to lift the ban imposed on the Tigers in January 1998. Significantly, the JVP had thrown very serious challenges to the Sri Lankan state twice in the 1970s and the 1980s.

On their part, the Tigers had insisted that they would not participate in the peace talks without the ban being removed. President Kumaratunga had herself very consistently and persistently opposed the lifting of the ban. She had emphasised that even if the ban was to be removed, it should be done only after some progress was made in the peace

bothered about permanent peace, development and, above all, democracy in the South Asian island feels satisfied. Significantly, the universal adult franchise was introduced in Sri Lanka (1931) much earlier than any other South Asian state, including India.

The British colonial masters were able to trust their colonised subjects in the island so well that they allowed universal adult franchise only 3 years after they had done in their home country in 1928. Not less interestingly, the present constitutional structure of Sri Lanka introduced in 1978 by President JR Jayewardene — with



talks, and the Tigers laid down their arms.

Once Ranil Wickremesinghe had briefed the international community on the proposed peace talks, his defence minister Tilak Marapone began saying that the ban would be lifted 10 days ahead of the commencement of the proposed dialogue with the Tigers. In the event, the slated talks with the Tigers was shifted several times. But in a wellnigh historic development, the Sri Lankan cabinet — of course, in the absence of President Chandrika Kumaratunga — on 4 September, removed the ban on the LTTE, making it a legitimate political organisation in Sri Lanka.

Not that President Chandrika's presence at the cabinet on 4 September would have made any substantial difference in the ongoing political changes.

Bonhomie

In any case, a tug of war appears to be continuing between the President and the UNF cabinet. A move to snatch some of the President's significant constitutional powers — particularly the one to dissolve the house after the completion of one year — has already been initiated through the 19th constitutional amendment.

It is rather difficult to describe the outcome of the first round of talks very categorically. True, both sides have expressed satisfaction over the talks, but not everyone

so many democratic shortcomings — allows 18 years of age as the minimum eligibility both for voters and candidates for various elective bodies, including the unicameral Parliament.

The Norway-brokered peace talks, without doubt, generated a great deal of bonhomie. But it was not expected to work wonders — or even touch the core or substantial issues. The two sides agreed to hold more talks in quick succession and a time frame for that, too, was prepared. Non-briefing by Pirbhakaran in the LTTE delegation had created further limitations. But the government side, too, did not want to go too far and too fast. Under the given milieu, then, the two sides agreed to facilitate rehabilitation of the displaced people at the earliest, as also to take the business of reconstruction of the destroyed or damaged installations.

With a view to protecting the interest of the Muslims in the east, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Minister in the UNF government Rauf Hakeem would be meeting Pirbhakaran in the Wannu jungles soon. Incidentally, Hakeem was one of the four members of the government team. Earlier the LTTE had promised to rehabilitate the displaced Muslims in the eastern part of the North-Eastern Provincial Council. Some incidents in the recent past, though, have left quite a few of Muslims

feeling scared vis-a-vis the Tigers even though they are trying to reconcile to the existing and emerging reality.

True, the island has already experienced 9 months of unprecedented peace — particularly after the political-military scene that was created in July 1983. But this peace is not holding because the LTTE has surrendered to the Sri Lankan state: the Tigers have refused to disarm themselves till the final solution is arrived at. In fact, the exhibition of the modus operandi and modus vivendi of the LTTE police and judiciary by the international media leaves much to be desired. The Sri Lankan state seems to be reconciling to this reality day after day. Sri Lanka seems to be moving in the direction of a state within the state or two systems in one state for maintaining peace. If in the process, democracy becomes a victim in the north-east, it should not surprise any person who has been watching the Sri Lankan political scene carefully.

Good account

True, the US and the UK, along with other Western powers are pressurising the LTTE to make permanent peace a reality; but who knows whether the LTTE is waiting for the time to lapse and become strong enough to dictate more terms to the Sri Lankan state. By now it is obvious that despite all its resources the government in Colombo has not been able to defeat the Tigers convincingly.

Jayadeva Uyangoda, professor and head, department of political science at Colombo University is of the opinion that the "cumulative outcome of such an incremental approach to conflict management would be the institutionalisation of the LTTE's control and administration of the two provinces" followed by some significant re-organisation of the existing Sri Lankan state. Uyangoda is also of the opinion that Ranil Wickremesinghe is not likely to face the same extent of opposition by the Sinhalese youth, which his uncle and then President JR Jayewardene faced in 1987 while extending any concession to the Tamils.

India has given a very good account of itself in the whole episode. It could be said, to a very great extent, that what could not be achieved by the Indian Peace-keeping Force in the late 1980s has been achieved by its silence in the new millennium. There seems to be a scramble among various parties to keep India informed about every development.

It should, though, be as incumbent on India as on the international community to ensure that human rights and democracy are not sacrificed for tense peace in north-eastern Sri Lanka.

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2/10

Chandrika cautions against altering security zones

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, OCT. 2. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has cautioned the Wickremesinghe Government against drastically altering the existing high security zones in the northern and eastern regions of the island.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, she said: "I wish to caution you regarding the serious implications for national security resulting from any such arrangement to drastically alter the existing high security zones without giving due consideration to the security in the north and east".

Ms. Kumaratunga was referring to the decision taken at the direct talks between Colombo and the LTTE last month at the

Sattahip naval base, Thailand, to appoint a joint committee to review the security situation in the north and the east.

Ms. Kumaratunga, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, had expressed "unease at the unilateral decision taken by the Government and the LTTE without consulting her", a Presidential release said here today.

Though a powerful executive, Ms. Kumaratunga heads a cohabitation Government with her arch political rivals, the United National Party, led by Mr. Wickremesinghe.

Among the sensitive issues between Colombo and the Tigers is the presence of the Sri Lankan security forces in the north and the east. Over the decades of conflict, the security

forces had marked off high-security zones in the two regions. The Tigers have been calling for relocation of the zones, particularly those in the middle of villages or towns.

The zones are manned by the Army, Navy or the Special Task Force depending on the location. For instance, most of the zones in the northern Jaffna peninsula are manned by the Army, while those in Mannar, the islets off Jaffna and the eastern Trincomalee areas, by the Navy. The STF mans the zones in the east. A recent trend in the issue of relocating high-security zones is protests by students.

Ms. Kumaratunga's caution comes against concern in the east over the possible relocation of the zones, given the ethnic mix of Tamils and Muslims.

Where Prabakaran didn't do his homework

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 12. If it was the intention of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to boost the image of its leader, Velupillai Prabakaran, by presenting him to the world media, the all round verdict is that the strategy failed.

Mr. Prabakaran addressed the media for the first time in 12 years at a suburb of Killinochchi, a town in the LTTE-controlled northern Sri Lanka, on Wednesday. Contrary to the handful of local Tamil reporters who attended his last press conference on April 1, 1990, in Jaffna town, hundreds of international journalists spent more than 24 hours in the LTTE guest houses and camps in the town and in surrounding areas on April 10 and went through a 10-hour security drill before the conference began.

But more planning seemed to have gone into the screening of journalists than into the possible questions they would ask. The LTTE leader seemed ill-prepared for many questions and not at all at ease before the media. "He has not done his homework," exclaimed an astonished Western journalist as Mr. Prabakaran was tongue-tied when he was asked how he expected India to lift the ban on his organisation when he was still a wanted man for the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

His habit of lengthy consultations with his political adviser, Anton Balasingham, before replying to most of the questions, was completely at odds with his image as the all-powerful leader and master strategist of a ruthless guerilla group. Several times, Mr. Balasingham took it upon himself to reply, prompting a journalist to ask if he was speaking for himself or for Mr. Prabakaran. He interpreted questions into Tamil for the benefit of the LTTE leader and provided him with a sanitised translation of the word.

"My leader's voice"

The 62-year-old LTTE ideologue, who described himself as the "theoretician" and "chief negotiator" in the ongoing peace process with the Sri Lankan Government, replied that he and Mr. Prabakaran were the "same" and that he was the LTTE leader's 'voice.' The two dodged several questions, especially those relating to the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. The lengthy pauses as they went into consultations, only to say "no comments," were noticed also by those who watched the event on television, with many channels here and in India doing a near-live telecast of the proceedings. "Prabakaran had no clear answers to any of the questions.

He did not even seem to have the ability to think for himself," said Abbo Yusuf, deputy leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation,

one of the constituents of the pro-LTTE four-party Tamil National Alliance. "The replies were so vague that anyone can interpret it in the way they want." Mr. Yusuf, however, clarified that these were his views and not his party's.

A prominent Tamil leader could not help drawing a comparison between the suave non-militant Tamil leadership of the 1970s and the 1980s, and their ability to field any question from journalists, with Mr. Prabakaran's visible confusion before the media. A Tamil viewer phoned his MP to say that the LTTE leader had lost much of his aura after the press conference and come out of it a below-average politician.

An unsmiling Mr. Prabakaran arrived at the conference venue flanked by a posse of bodyguards, some of them in civvies, sporting Ray Ban shades and carrying no visible weapons, and others in fatigues holding guns on the ready. Journalists were warned not to create a "situation of panic" during the press conference as all the cadres were fully armed. One scribe wanted to know how anyone could believe the LTTE was a democratic, political organisation after all the secrecy surrounding the press conference. He also commented on the arrival of Mr. Prabakaran at the venue surrounded by "goons."

Over-hyped event

However, Colombo has given the event a positive spin. Despite the fact that no new political ground was broken at the over-hyped event, the Government sees hope in the LTTE reassertion that it would be ready to give up its demand for a separate state if offered self-rule with what Mr. Balasingham described as "internal self-determination." But the hardline Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna said Mr. Balasingham's statement that his leader was the President and Prime Minister of Tamil Eelam was a "slap in the face of those who lived in a dream world of so-called peace."

Whatever the interpretations given to the LTTE statements at the press meet, the journalists could not help noticing the preferential treatment given to the Westerners, who were put up at a more comfortable guest-house — also used by Norwegian mediators — while almost all the Sri Lankan and Indian journalists and a sprinkling of Western reporters roughed it out at a LTTE camp. The only form of entertainment was a continuous showing of LTTE war-video films.

And while Mr. Balasingham was a prominent figure in the last as well as the latest press conference, two notables who flanked Mr. Prabakaran in 1990 are no more in the Tiger ranks: Mahattya, former number 2 in the LTTE who was executed for alleged treason, and Yogaratnam Yogi, who has since disappeared into oblivion.

LTTE HINDU

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29/9
The landmark agreement finally gives Sri Lanka the chance to end 19 years of war. The historical antecedents of Jaffna are significant

LTTE AND PEACE

By SUSHILA RAMASWAMY

THE recently concluded talks between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan government after a gap of seven years is a landmark agreement, which may end the 19 year old war between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. The war has stunted economic growth and has killed roughly 65,000 people. The LTTE have given up its long-standing demand of full independence and separate statehood in the north and east of the island — the Tamil Eelam, and have agreed to self-determination and autonomy in hope that their homeland would be recognised.

The scaling down of LTTE's demand has to be seen in the context of developments since 11 September and can be attributed to diplomatic rather than military reasons. For the past two years or more the Tigers have been losing the sympathy of many countries with their aim of establishing a separate state. In February 2001, Britain shut down their office in London. Since 11 September the US and its allies have declared them as terrorists. Bank accounts totalling about \$4 billion are frozen and their source of funding is steadily dwindling. In light of these developments they needed to strike a deal with the Sri Lankan government that would restore some respectability to their organisation. This was facilitated by the change in leadership in Sri Lanka when the coalition of the United National Front led by Ranil Wickremesinghe swept to power in parliamentary elections in December 2001. Both sides began to observe a month-long ceasefire, beginning on 24 December as a prelude to the much hoped for peace talks. The government as a gesture of goodwill lifted the ban on goods destined for areas controlled by the LTTE. On 9 April, the road linking Colombo, the capital, to Jaffna, the Tamils' cultural centre in the North, was opened for the first time in 12 years. On 10 April Mr Prabhakaran emerged from his self imposed exile and held a press conference for the first time in a decade, giving sufficient indication of the LTTE's yearning for peace and its willingness to be part of democratic politics. He promised that other parties besides the LTTE also apologised to the Muslims who were expelled from Jaffna in 1990. The Sri

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Lankan people's yearning for peace and general acceptance of the controversial moves to end the civil war was apparent, when Wickremesinghe's party crushed the opposition People's Alliance in the local elections held on 20 March. This, for many was a referendum of government policies.

The historical antecedents of Jaffna are of crucial significance in comprehending the LTTE demand of Tamil Eelam, a

tea plantations. The Tamils were better placed than the average Sinhalese in the British colonial administration, much to the resentment of the Sinhalese.

The subdued ethnic hostility erupted with independence of the island in February 1948. The predominately Tamil populated areas expected to have the administrative control of their areas, which did not happen. On the contrary there was a steady erosion of Tamil

the Sinhalese and Tamils in 1983 with a demand for Tamil Eelam. The Tigers have their own police, banks and a voluntary tax system. They could consolidate mainly because the demands of moderate organisations like the Tamil United Liberation Front, whose general secretary, the late Appapillai Amrithalingam, was a Gandhian, were not conceded at all. The success of the LTTE was due to the myopic vision of the Sinhalese leadership that includes the Bandaranaiques, Jayawardhane, Premadasa and Kumaratunga, and their unwillingness to share power.

In 1989 the LTTE agreed to a ceasefire as the government prepared a plan for autonomy for Tamil areas but this, like other plans, failed to materialise. In 1995 the government decided to divide the island into autonomous regions but the Tigers fought on. The Sri Lankan troops captured Jaffna in 1996 but the Tigers kept up guerrilla warfare. Terror always produced counter-terror and it is the lack of foresight on the part of the Sinhalese majority that has led them to a no win situation vis-a-vis the Tigers. The explanation that the LTTE could rise and consolidate only by eliminating the moderate forces is true but one should realise that the obstinacy of the Sinhalese leadership drastically weakened the support base of moderate and liberal Tamils.

At present, in the altered situation, with the emergence of a more moderate LTTE and Prime Minister, along with the help of Norwegian facilitators committed to a dialogue and peaceful settlement of long standing disputes, there is greater optimism about resolving the problem. It is indeed a historic opportunity for the Sinhalese majority to practice genuine power sharing with the Tamil minority and usher in a prosperous and harmonious Sri Lanka. As far as India is concerned, Balasingham, the LTTE spokesman has described India as a supporter of this peace initiative. India on its part desires the end of terrorism and civil war in Sri Lanka but it is still to lift the ban on the LTTE, which perhaps is only possible if the LTTE hands over the culprits of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Such an act on the part of LTTE would elevate its status enabling it to shed its image as a guerrilla outfit and emerge as a responsible democratic organisation. The acid test of the LTTE leadership will be in its capacity and willingness to make this transition.

The obstinacy of the Sinhalese leadership drastically weakened the support base of moderate and liberal Tamils



homeland for Sinhalese Tamils. Before its occupation by Sri Lanka troops in 1995 Jaffna was the natural heartland for the Sinhalese Tamils. Ample archaeological evidence proves that the Tamils have lived there for a minimum of 2500 years. The Chola dynasty conquered the island in the 11th century. Records reveal that in the 13th century, a Tamil king dealt with Portuguese merchants. In 1505 another Tamil king was dethroned and murdered leading to the establishment of the Portuguese rule. Subsequently the Dutch and then the British rule were established. The British attached these territories to the Madras Presidency of India. In 1802 these became a separate colony under the crown. Foreign rule united the island for the first time since the 12th century, subdued the traditional hostility between the northern Tamils, mostly Hindus and the southern Sinhalese, mostly Buddhists.

The Sinhalese, 74 per cent of the population, consider themselves the Lion People and protectors of Buddhism. They are Aryans who migrated from Northern India some two thousand years ago. The Tamils, 18 per cent of the population are Dravidians and from southern India. Some two-thirds of Tamils are Ceylonese Tamils. The other third are Estate Tamils — extremely poor and descendants of migrants who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th century to work on

rights. In 1956 Solomon Bandaranaike came to power with an aggressively Sinhalese programme, making Sinhalese the official language and thus reflecting the emergence of a nationalist Sinhala educated professional class. When the Tamils protested, Prime Minister Bandaranaike offered to make Tamil an official language for the two Tamil minority regions. However, a series of riots mainly engineered by the Sinhala majority against the Tamil minority ended in his assassination. In 1957 the government proposed a Tamil state in a federal union abandoning the unitary structure which however was never fully implemented. In 1988 Buddhism, followed by 69 per cent, was proclaimed the state religion even though the island has 16 per cent Hindus, 8 per cent Muslims and 7 per cent Christians. For past few years there have been concerted efforts to drastically alter the population ratio by Sinhalese settlement in Tamil areas, similar to the Israeli settlement in Palestinian land. There is no single holiday honouring any of the religious festivals of the Tamils. Thus the Tamils have not been incorporated in any scheme of power sharing giving them a sense of participation and identity.

It is this visible and intolerable discrimination that gave rise to the LTTE, which began as a small organisation in 1972. Systematic war began between

✓ 'HOMELAND DOESN'T MEAN A SEPARATE STATE'

LTTE drops demand for independence

19/9

Associated Press

SATTAHIP (Thailand), Sept. 18. —The LTTE wrapped up a historic peace conference today demanding only self-determination, and not full independence, from Sri Lanka, the clearest sign yet that it was determined to negotiate an end to 19 years of bloody civil war.

However, the rebels said they won't lay down arms until full peace is achieved.

"We demand the recognition of our homeland. When we say homeland it doesn't mean separate state," Mr Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, told reporters after the first face-to-face peace talks in seven years.

The talks were brokered by Norway and hosted at a naval base in Thailand.

It was the Tigers' strongest declaration yet that they would settle for autonomy rather than a separate state as a culmination of their struggle.

"Saying that the LTTE is fighting for independence, has no relevance," Mr Balasingham said. "We operate with the concept of a homeland and self-determination." Failing that, "we have the right to fight for independence and statehood. I hope that situation may not arise," he said.

The Sri Lankan government's chief negotiator, Mr GL Peiris, who also addressed the news conference,

welcomed Mr Balasingham's comments.

"The government is certainly pleased about it," he said. The Tigers' aspirations "can be fulfilled within one



Sri Lankan chief negotiator Mr GL Peiris and Mr Anton Balasingham at Sattahip in Thailand. — AFP

country if we set about it in the proper way," he said.

Ending three days of talks, the two

sides announced major progress in peace making, and agreed to meet again in Thailand from 31 October to 3 November, 2 to 5 December and 6 to 9 January to discuss substantive issues.

Mr Balasingham said autonomy can be federal, confederal or regional, and a suitable model will have to be worked out during future talks.

He said, "There is no question of" the LTTE disarming "at this early stage of discussions."

The LTTE and the Sri Lankan government have standing armies and navies, he said, and "the question of decommissioning and disarming will not arise until we reach a permanent settlement that will satisfy the aspirations of the Tamil people."

Mr Peiris said he wasn't worried and understood the LTTE's position.

Mr Balasingham's comments on self-determination are seen as a major shift in the LTTE's position, who in the past had been ambiguous about what homeland meant.

A Norwegian statement said the two sides have also agreed to set up a panel to resettle some 1.6 million people displaced by one of Asia's longest-running conflicts and to work for permanent peace.

The joint committee will comprise senior representatives of both sides, including military personnel, the statement said.

ONE STATESMAN

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Onus on Govt. to keep talks with LTTE on track

S. Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, SEPT. 23. The end of the first round of direct talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) also marks the beginning of testing times for Sri Lanka's major political players.

With the Sattahip relation now on the ebb, political parties and analysts here have started taking a hard look at the outcome of the first round held at Thailand's naval headquarters — Sattahip Naval Base — between September 16 and 18.

What stands out from all the phrases used at Sattahip is the elaboration by the LTTE chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, that the rebels will settle for "regional autonomy and self-governance."

As a political analyst in Colombo pointed out, "this is the closest the Tigers have got to distancing themselves from separation."

One direct consequence of this posturing is that the LTTE, which is in a militarily advantageous position, has now fired the first political salvo as well.

By doing so, right at the start of a negotiating round, it has placed the political onus on the Government.

Broadest test

The broadest test will be the southern willingness for a move away from a unitary state. Some groundwork has been done during the past few years, especially since the draft constitution by the Chandrika Kumaratunga administration, which prepared the national mind for a "union of regions," with greater devolution of powers.

A broad understanding in the south that a solution will not be possible without devolution is a departure from the past. However, the Sri Lankan polity will now have to grapple with issues such as the extent of devolution and the power-sharing model.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) faces the test of keeping the talks on track and steering it in a manner that incorporates the demand from the Opposition Peoples' Alliance (PA) to include core issues and political questions of democracy and pluralism. For the PA, which set the foundations for the present negotiations — be it through the draft constitution, which changed the approach to conflict resolution, or the initial moves for the current peace process by inviting the Norwegians — the challenge is to see that its concerns

are included in the talks without being seen as a spoiler.

While it broadly welcomes the progress made, the PA is beginning to think that it is now time for serious business and that the real issues will have to be taken on board. "The road may be arduous, it need not necessarily be long," Lakshman Kadirgamar, senior adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs told *The Hindu*.

Muslim concerns

The most difficult challenge is for the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). Given the strong link between Muslim concerns and every issue in the negotiating process, the SLMC's leader, Rauff Hakeem, is in an unenviable position.

The fragile relationship between the Muslims and the LTTE requires delicate handling. In addition, Mr. Hakeem is also bound to face pressure from Muslim politics to gain the maximum for the community.

The public mind in Sri Lanka is being prepared for a long and difficult haul. With the talks off to a positive start, an assessment of the real progress will have to wait until the crucial issues of the conflict are addressed.

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Onus on Govt. to keep talks with LTTE on track

S. Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

Broadest test

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The ruling United National Party (UNP) faces the test of keeping the talks on track and steering it in a manner that incorporates the demand from the Opposition Peoples' Alliance (PA) to include core issues and political questions of democracy and pluralism. For the PA, which set the foundations for the present negotiations — be it through the draft constitution, which changed the approach to conflict resolution, or the initial moves for the current peace process by inviting the Norwegians — the challenge is to see that its concerns

are included in the talks without being seen as a spoiler.

While it broadly welcomes the progress made, the PA is beginning to think that it is now time for serious business and that the real issues will have to be taken on board. "The road may be arduous, it need not necessarily be long," Lakshman Kadirgamar, senior adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs told *The Hindu*.

Muslim concerns

The most difficult challenge is for the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). Given the strong link between Muslim concerns and every issue in the negotiating process, the SLMC's leader, Rauff Hakeem, is in an unenviable position.

The fragile relationship between the Muslims and the LTTE requires delicate handling. In addition, Mr. Hakeem is also bound to face pressure from Muslim politics to gain the maximum for the community.

The public mind in Sri Lanka is being prepared for a long and difficult haul. With the talks off to a positive start, an assessment of the real progress will have to wait until the crucial issues of the conflict are addressed.

2002

2003

THE HINDI

S. Lanka
HD-10
27/9

After the first round

By Jayadeva Uyangoda

As much as the LTTE has become flexible by retreating from the project of a separate state, the UNF Government will have to keep open the doors of Sri Lanka's state for the regional autonomous entity the Tigers represent.

THE FIRST round of direct talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE has produced some positive outcomes that will have a direct bearing on how the conflict resolution process will unfold in the months to come. As anticipated, no major issues of disagreement emerged. Neither was there a settlement accord as such, signed by the two sides. Those who designed this negotiation exercise — the process designers — were obviously careful to send out positive messages through the substance as well as symbolism of talks. At the negotiation table, there were no flags. Nor were there contentious or controversial statements. The negotiation agenda in this first round does not seem to have included any controversial theme either. The so-called 'core issues' were not on the agenda. At the press conference after the conclusion of talks, the two negotiating teams and their Norwegian interlocutors appeared relaxed, positive and committed to moving forward.

In the statements made at the opening ceremony of September 16 as well as at the press conference of September 18, it was Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, who made the politically most significant points. Mr. Balasingham's repeated assertion that the Tamil Tigers did not operate on the categories of a separate state is obviously the most noteworthy idea to have emerged from Thailand talks. Although this statement may not have surprised close watchers of LTTE politics, it represented a crucial development in the conflict transformation process in Sri Lanka. Mr. Balasingham's elaboration of the LTTE's commitment to autonomy and autonomy-based self-determination is the first official admission by the Tigers' leadership that the so-called 'sole representatives' of Sri Lankan Tamils have in fact reviewed and revised their original, maximalist goal. This transition from secession to autonomy is indeed an outcome of 20 years of a bloody war, combined with political-strategic sensitivity to radically new circumstances of global, regional and national politics.

It is worth noting that the LTTE's chief negotiator waited till the end of

the first round of official talks to make the autonomy announcement. Even that was in response to a question put to him by a journalist. It may be possible that during, or even much before, the official talks, the Tigers' delegation may have divulged this political 'secret' to the Colombo Government. However, Mr. Balasingham probably waited till the formal talks to take place to make this very important point public. With the autonomy announcement, the LTTE leadership has re-positioned itself vis-a-vis the Sri Lankan state in such a way that returning to the old secessionist goal would not be particularly viable. However, the trajectories of transforming the LTTE's proclamation of autonomy into a stable political commitment will be contingent on how the Colombo Government handles the future challenges of concretising the regional autonomy proposal. That indeed is a difficult process which requires substantial reforms of the existing Sri Lankan state.

The primacy of economic reconstruction in a process of peace is another significant point made by the two sides. It appears that both the United National Front Government and the LTTE have come to the conclusion that normalising life in the North and the East through economic reconstruction and the further development of the economy in the rest of the island are intertwined. Mr. Balasingham at the press conference hinted at an extremely interesting turn in Sri Lanka's North-South relations: the North needs the South to come out from destructive consequences of the war and the South needs the North to come out of its economic crisis. Both sides have linked peace to economic imperatives. This is where Sri Lanka's present peace process might look qualitatively different from previous attempts: the peace project is internationalised in a global economic

sense. It is no accident that Sri Lanka's Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, was meeting investors in New York when the Government and the LTTE were negotiating in Thailand. The Sri Lankan Ministers, G.L. Peiris and Moragoda, left Thailand on September 18 only to fly to New York to join the Prime Minister's campaign of 'invest in peace'. The signs are that, eventually, some of the LTTE leaders might also join with the Government team to seek global support for peace through economic reconstruction. But linking peace to the flows of global capital is not a hazard-free process, although rapid economic recovery is integrally connected to Sri Lanka's challenges of emerging from a protracted civil war.

It is quite interesting that both the Government and the LTTE delegations downplayed the importance of the idea of an interim administration. The pre-negotiation speculation in Colombo was that the talks would primarily focus on working out the modalities for a Tiger-controlled interim administration for the Northern and the Eastern provinces. There were probably two reasons why the interim administration issue was de-emphasised. First, the two sides probably avoided decisions that could have immediately generated controversy and resistance in the Sinhalese South. Second, as Mr. Balasingham himself asserted at the press conference, the LTTE is more interested in transforming its own system of administration into one entrusted with the task of reconstruction, rehabilitation and economic development. Political consolidation at home and recognition as well as legitimacy abroad seem to be at the top of LTTE's current priorities.

Some of Mr. Balasingham's remarks at the press conference also demonstrated the depth of the complexities that are to emerge in future

rounds of talks. The path to regional autonomy for the Northern and the Eastern provinces entails the task of incorporating in the existing state of Sri Lanka, the military, administrative and other structures set up by the LTTE. Although many observers are still reluctant to admit it, the LTTE has established in areas under their control structures, institutions and personnel of a quasi-state. Dissolving any of these structures would be totally out of the question. In fact, the LTTE's vision and strategy for regional autonomy presupposes linking their quasi-state to the Sri Lankan state. In that sense, disarming of the LTTE, or de-commissioning of its weapons, or dissolving its fighting units might not be negotiable issues. Similarly, the LTTE is most likely to seek a framework of accommodation for its administrative structures to be incorporated into the arrangements of power sharing with the Sri Lankan state. As much as the LTTE has become flexible by retreating from the project of a separate state, the UNF government will have to keep open the doors of Sri Lanka's state for the regional autonomous entity the Tigers represent.

It is very likely that the next few rounds of talks will mainly focus on the issues of reconstruction and economic development in Sri Lanka's conflict zones. The LTTE will obviously seek a direct role, in partnership and on a par with the Government, in the formulation and implementation of policies pertaining to those tasks. In the process, the LTTE will also get an opportunity to transform its structures of administration and control into institutions of autonomy from below. However, the question of the political and constitutional framework within which this incremental change can occur will, sooner than later, have to come to the centre of the negotiation agenda. That will actually be the real core issue around which the negotiation trajectories in future may revolve. This is where Sri Lanka is very likely to provide an attractive experiment in constitutionalising autonomy claims that are already laid out on the ground.

(The writer is Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo.)

27 SEP 2001

RECEIVED

Colombo, LTTE begin peace talks today

By V.S. Sambandan

SATTAHIP (THAILAND) SEPT. 15. There will be no flags or symbols on display when the Sri Lankan Government starts direct talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam here tomorrow. However, the first round itself is expected to be full of symbolism.

The three-day talks, scheduled to finish on September 18, will prioritise the agenda for further round of talks. To that extent, tomorrow's talks are akin to a groundbreaking ceremony — symbolic, with a limited approach to the more immediate issues that would have to be addressed.

After opening statements by G. L. Peiris, Sri Lankan Minister for Constitutional Affairs, and Anton S. Balasingham, LTTE's chief negotiator, closed-door discussions will take place at the Sattahip Naval Base here.

The concerns that are to be addressed include: rehabilitation of the north and east, resettlement of the internally displaced people, and security-related issues. Though these are seemingly easy subjects, compared to the harder political questions such as interim administration, they are interlinked with the larger issues.

Given the highly militarised nature of the decades-old conflict, there are serious military-related concerns, which will make this round of talks a challenging one. Two important questions will determine the manner in which the talks proceed — troop withdrawal and de-mining.

Presently, the Sri Lankan forces have a presence in the Jaffna Peninsula, and across the east. And the Tigers control vast areas in four Tamil-majority districts. Ideally, the Tigers would prefer a complete pullout



A Thai naval officer gestures to photographers at the Sattahip Naval base in Thailand where the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are starting talks on Monday.

Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

of the Sri Lankan forces. But it will be a hard-to-concede point for Colombo.

The issue of resettling the internally displaced is also directly linked to de-mining the war zone of the past two decades. Major installations in northern Sri Lanka have been heavily mined. So have been the forward defence lines that cut across civilian pockets. Given the fragile nature of the peace process, and a continued state of war-preparedness by the Tigers and the Government, there is natural reluctance on both sides to proceed with de-mining.

Against this backdrop, Colombo's position is that nothing much should be expected from this round of talks. Mr. Peiris, who heads the Colombo delegation, told *The Hindu* that the Government's approach to the talks was one of "cautious optimism." The long build-up, he

said, had been "positive."

Another crucial factor that will determine the course of talks is the Muslim factor. "There are implications for the Muslims in every issue that will figure in the discussions," the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Rauff Hakeem, said. A big change from the past is that Muslims have been included as a direct party to the negotiations. This, and several other symbolisms during the last nine months — the release of child soldiers by the Tigers, the opening up of communication lines to the rebel-held territories and a constant interaction between the Government and the LTTE representatives — have made the run-up to the talks positive.

However, as an official close to the negotiating process observed, tomorrow's talks is just a prelude to more such events before a lasting solution is found to the ethnic conflict.

16 SEP 2002

THE HINDU

Colombo-LTTE talks begin

By V.S. Sambandan

17/9

SATTAHIP (THAILAND), SEPT. 16. Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam started direct talks here today, with the latter making a strong claim for "a leading and pivotal" role in the administration and economic development of north-eastern Sri Lanka.

As expected, both the Government and the LTTE stuck to their known positions, but the talks, facilitated by the Norwegian Government, also provided a limited space for optimism. The two negotiating teams will meet for three days at the Sattahip Naval Base to thrash out issues relating to resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-ravaged northeast. While Colombo reinforced its commitment to a solution that the "unity and territorial integrity" of Sri Lanka — the leader of its delegation and Sri Lankan Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, said in his opening statement that it stood "unwaveringly for the amplest degree of devolution" within the "unity and territorial integrity" of Sri Lanka — the LTTE reiterated the Tamils' "right to self-determination."

Asserting that "the LTTE is the legitimate and authentic representative of the Tamil peo-



The Sri Lankan Minister for Constitutional Affairs, G. L. Peiris (right), and the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, at the Sattahip naval base on Monday. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

ple," Anton S. Balasingham, chief negotiator of the Tigers, said "it is crucial that the LTTE should play a leading and pivotal role in the administration as well as the economic development of the northeast." His claim of a leading role for the Tigers was based on the reasoning that "we have lived, fought and suffered with and for our people throughout the turbulent times of the war. We have a comprehensive knowledge of the socio-economic needs confronting the Tamil people. We have built an effective administrative structure for more than 10 years, which has sustained the social cohesion and law and

order." The LTTE has been fighting the Sri Lankan forces for two decades for a separate state of Tamil Eelam, a political demand made in 1976, comprising the north and east of Sri Lanka. However, it has stated that any viable alternative would be considered as long as it meets three core principles: recognition of Tamils as a distinct nationality, recognition of the northeast as a homeland, and the right to self-determination. The Tigers see the talks as a means through which they can get an interim administration for the northeast.

Facilitators cite Indian counsel: Page 12

17 SEP 2002

THE HINDU

Talks begin with hope...

Press Trust of India

S. Lanka
PATTAYA (Thailand), Sept. 16. — Sri Lankan and LTTE negotiators today began their landmark peace talks, with both sides expressing optimism about the outcome. The three-day peace talks, brokered by Norway, are being held at the high security Sattahip Naval base, about 160 km southeast of Bangkok.

Before leaving for the Naval base to begin their talks, LTTE chief negotiator Mr Anton Balasingham and Sri Lankan chief negotiator and constitutional affairs minister Mr G Peiris along with Norwegian state secretary Mr Vidar Helgesen spoke at the inaugural session held at the Ambassador Hotel at Pattaya.

"The task of building a permanent peace and reaching a final settlement to the ethnic conflict may be difficult, challenging and time consuming," Mr Balasingham said. "We are confident

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that with the able assistance of the Norwegian facilitators there is a possibility for the peace process to succeed."

The Sri Lankan minister said: "We stand for the ample degree of devolution ... (but) we are for unity and territorial integrity of the state."

Media hopeful: Sri Lanka's press welcomed the start of peace talks today in Thailand, saying it could help end the long-running bloodshed. "We fervently hope (the talks) will be a leap forward to free this land from the curse of the ethnic conflict that plagued it for several decades," the Independent Daily Mirror said, adds AFP from Colombo.
US to review LTTE ban: The USA will

... And prayers for peace

COLOMBO, Sept. 16. — Sri Lankans flocked to temples, mosques and churches today to pray for the success of the peace talks. "Today is a ... start to put a permanent end to this country's woes," said Ms Surangani Jayasundere before offering a basket of lotus flowers at the Gangarama Buddhist Temple. Hindus participated in a one-hour ceremony at the Kadiresen Temple to Ganesh. "We pray for blessings on members of both delegations and the return of peace and prosperity to our nation," said one of those attending the ceremony, Mr Jeyaraj Kumar. — AP

review its ban on the LTTE depending on the outcome of peace talks, the US ambassador to Thailand said, adds AFP from Bangkok. Mr Darryl Johnson said Washington supported the Norwegian-arranged talks, but its 1997 proscription of the Sri Lankan rebels would not be lifted soon. "We will discuss that in the context of the outcome of the peace talks... A process has begun and we hope it will succeed."

17 SEP 2001

THE STATESMAN

'Sri Lanka peace talks frank, constructive'

By V.S. Sambandan

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SATTAHIP (THAILAND) SEPT. 17. The Sri Lanka peace talks now taking place between Colombo and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the Sattahip Naval Base, was "frank and constructive" in the second day today, according to the Norwegian facilitators.

The two teams discussed issues relating to the "implementation of the ceasefire agreement, humanitarian challenges and further co-operation to improve economic development and normalisation," the Norwegian facilitators said today.

The Sri Lankan Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, told journalists here this evening that "substantial progress" was made in the first round of talks and had exceeded his own expectations.

Since Monday's commencement of talks, three closed-door sessions were held till this evening. The talks would end tomorrow as scheduled. Details of the proceedings have been kept under wraps, with the talks held inside the sprawling, high security naval base, headquarters of the Royal Thai Navy.

Going by all indications, none of the core issues was taken up for discussion in the first two days of the talks. Even before the talks com-

menced, Colombo had made it clear that it would avoid contentious issues and adopt a step-by-step approach to keep the talks on track as previous attempts at conflict-resolution fell apart over such core questions. This format has been adhered to during the first two days. Sources close to the peace process told *The Hindu* this evening that there were no expectations of any agreement over the core issues of the conflict.

Normalisation and de-mining

According to sources, issues such as normalisation, the need for greater support for de-mining of the battle-scarred northeast and steps to quicken rehabilitation and resettlement of the internally-displaced persons (IDPs) figured in the discussions so far.

As the issues of rehabilitation and resettlement of IDPs are interlinked with that of the de-mining in the northeast, one possible outcome of the Sattahip talks could be an appeal for greater international financial support for the de-mining efforts now on.

During his last month's whistle-stop visit to the Sri Lanka, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, visited the site of a de-mining operation in the Jaffna peninsula.

Hakeem to meet Prabhakaran: Page 12

Solution possible: Sri Lankan Minister

By V.S. Sambandan

SATTAHIP (THAILAND) SEPT. 18. The head of Colombo's delegation at the Sattahip talks, G. L. Peiris, is optimistic that a political settlement that can stand the test of time can be achieved as both the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had softened their stand over the past 15 years.

Speaking to *The Hindu* after the three-day talks here, Prof. Peiris was particularly encouraged by the LTTE's interpretation of "self-determination." Asked if Sri Lanka continued to view the Thimpu principles with the same suspicion as in 1985, when those principles were first outlined, he said, "in the last 15 years, a lot has happened. Parties have learnt a great deal from those painful experiences. There has been a softening of the position on both sides."

The LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, he pointed



The chief negotiator of the Sri Lankan Government, G.L. Peiris (left), and his LTTE counterpart, Anton Balasingham (right), listening to the chief facilitator and Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, at a press conference on the last day of the Sri Lankan peace talks at Sattahip, southern Thailand, on Wednesday. — AFP

out, had said "categorically" that "they were not thinking or working in terms of concepts such as separate state."

"We are prepared to consider the amplest form of devolution

of power within the framework of one country. I don't think there is much divergence and we certainly can, in the course of these talks, concretise our ideas and perceptions and

come up with the elements of a political solution that will also stand the test of time."

Emphasising that the negotiations would not be a zero-sum exercise, he said "we have to be sensitive to each other's problems and anxieties."

"We must not try to be clever and trick the other party, have something up your sleeve and take the other party by surprise."

Asked if he felt that the Tigers, who had rejected the earlier draft constitution, would accept it now, he said, "it is not a question of using a carbon copy." Moreover, "the basic problem is not engaging the Tigers. Now it is very different, because we are talking to the protagonist." The next round of talks will be held here between October 31 and November 2.

This will be followed by the third and the fourth round between December 2 and December 5, and January 6 and January 9, 2003.

S. Sambandan 110 Separation only if autonomy is denied: LTTE

By V.S. Sambandan 1991

SATTAHIP (THAILAND), SEPT. 18. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam said today that it was ready to accept "autonomy and self-governance" in northern and eastern Sri Lanka and asserted that separation was only "the last resort".

Terming as "irrelevant" the description that the Tigers were fighting for separation, the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, said autonomy and self-governance could be worked out "if both the parties agree to a particular political system or model".

The LTTE, he said, was operating along the principles of self-determination. "You must understand the current U.N. literature on self-determination. We operate through those principles. Saying that the LTTE is fighting for an independent state has no relevance because we operate on different categories and concepts."

Mr. Balasingham's elaboration on the LTTE's position during a press conference at the end of the three-day Sattahip talks brought the first round of negotiations to a positive end. Welcoming the position, the head of Colombo's delegation, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, said it would be possible to fulfil the LTTE's aspirations "within one country".

Asked whether the Tigers had given up their separatist demand, Mr. Balasingham said: "the LTTE does not operate in the concept of a separate state. We operate on concepts and categories entirely different

from what you assume to be a separate state. We operate on the concept of homeland and self-determination. Homeland does not mean separate state as such. It means a state where the Tamil and the Muslim people live. "When we use the concept of self-determination, the concept entails substantial autonomy or self-government in the historical areas where we live. That position can be worked out if both the parties agree to a particular political system or model." However, he made it clear that the Tigers had not renounced separation. "If our demand for regional autonomy and self-governance is rejected and if conditions of oppression continue, then, as a last resort, our people have no option other than to fight for political independence and statehood. That will be the last resort."

The sense of optimism was also evident from Prof. Peiris reply to a query. Asked to comment on the criticism that an interim administration would be a stepping-stone to a separate Tamil Eelam, he said: "we know that that is not the objective of the LTTE. They have categorically stated on this occasion that a separate state is not the aspiration now." The LTTE's quest for international recognition was also clear. Refuting charges that the Tigers wanted an interim administration as a step to an independent Eelam, Mr. Balasingham said: "we already have a permanent administration. What we are seeking is international legitimacy for an administrative structure where we can work with the Government of Sri Lanka".

More reports: Page 12

'India backs peace process'

By V.S. Sambandan

SATTAHIP, SEPT. 18. The chief negotiator of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton Balasingham, today said he was confident that India would be the first to welcome a resolution of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

"India is fully backing the peace process, to be very honest with you, we know (that) very well," he told *The Hindu* after the conclusion of talks. "The Norwegians as well as the Sri Lankan Government have been briefing India on every aspect of the peace process", he pointed out. "If an overall solution is reached and the affected communities are satisfied with a political system, where their rights are recognised, then I think the Government in India will be the first to welcome it. They do not want this conflict to continue. An ethnic war in the region is an element of instability in the whole region. Therefore, the resolution of the conflict will be welcomed by India," he said.

THE HINDU

19 SEP 2002

Encourage Colombo

Even the LTTE concedes terror and separatism are outdated

THE LTTE's clear articulation that it does not seek a separate Tamil state comes as a refreshing change from its earlier pursuit of terrorist violence for political ends. In fact, what is surprising is that it took the LTTE leadership so long to come to this position. Few, if any, parts of a sovereign state have managed to separate from the parent country through the use of terrorist violence, unless the metropolitan state itself had weakened to a degree that it could not longer hold together. Where the state has had the political will, economic strength and military capacity to fight the separatists, the result has been the ultimate defeat of separatist ideology and strategy. The price of such violence is, of course, paid by the innocents in whose name the separatists perpetuate violence. There is then an object lesson here for the Hurriyat and the jehadi groups in J&K, where separatist violence through terror has inflicted grievous wounds on the people on whose behalf they claim to act.

The prospects of peace in Sri Lanka have significantly improved with the change in LTTE's position. But violence has a habit of acquiring its own autonomy and momentum. Tremendous and sustained efforts would be needed by everyone to work for what is needed most: reconciliation, reconstruction of the country, while re-building trust. Two decades of violence and four decades of increasing ethnic polarisation have left

deep wounds that would require sensitive handling. While others can help, solutions to differences can come only from a change of mindset within Sri Lankan society with regard to co-operative majority-minority relations. But the more immediate task would be to keep the peace process moving without loss of momentum. It could be de-railed by hardliners that inevitably exist on both sides, and the vested interests that tend to perpetuate confrontation and violence.

India has always supported the integrity and stability of Sri Lanka. In fact, nearly 1,200 Indian jawans died fighting for this cause, even when elements in Colombo were providing assistance to the LTTE to fight the Indian army. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by LTTE extremists was another price the nation paid. Current developments, therefore, would remain of abiding interest to Indians, who would welcome an end to separatist violence at the earliest. What the LTTE should have known, and what Sri Lanka would need to look at carefully now, is the tremendous potential for economic development, especially in the northeastern regions of the country, which have suffered the most from the hostilities. New Delhi would do well to offer enhanced political support and economic assistance, as well as humanitarian aid, on a priority basis so that incentives for peace are further strengthened.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2002

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CRITICAL ISSUES UNADDRESSED

THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that it was ready to accept "autonomy and self-governance" in northern and eastern Sri Lanka and that it would consider separation only as a "last resort" needs to be assessed with caution. The announcement and the elaborations on the same by the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, leave too many questions unanswered. Most pertinently the two sides, assisted by the Norwegian facilitators, have not thus far got down to discussing the core issues especially in regard to the tricky question of the merger of the northern and eastern provinces. Neither have the two sides resolved the issue of an interim administration and its control or dwelt on the more sensitive point of disarming the LTTE cadres. While Mr. Balasingham has spoken of the Tamils and the Muslims living within the same state, the pronouncement seems premature when the LTTE has yet to hold exhaustive discussions with representatives from the Muslim side. In a context where the LTTE has not ruled out separation — whether as a last resort or otherwise — categorically, the talk about a "homeland" would appear to contain the seeds of a yet to be abandoned plan to divide the island.

The lack of clarity with regard to the details is of extreme significance since the LTTE has rejected all devolution packages in the past. Most notable among the packages that have been rejected by the LTTE in the past were the Devolution Proposals contained in the address delivered by the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, on August 3, 1995, which offered substantive autonomy. That package included proposals for re-demarcating the existing boundaries of the North-East province and the devolution of power to the regions so that the people in each could have control over major aspects of their lives, including personal security

and the administration of justice. If the LTTE was not prepared to accept that package which appeared to offer the most expansive framework of devolution it is difficult to appreciate what more the Sri Lankan Government can now offer to persuade this organisation to accept a settlement short of one that effectively divides the country. Doubts and misgivings on the score cannot be set aside in a historical context in which the LTTE has never put forward proposals of its own but has instead waited for the Sri Lankan Government to make an offer which they then use as the basis to hike up their demands.

Scepticism about the LTTE's intentions also arises from some ambiguity in Mr. Balasingham's comments on the organisation's search for international legitimacy. After assuming, with rather amazing effrontery, that the LTTE's control over territory has already assumed the status of a "permanent administration" over it (in a context where the interim arrangements have yet to be discussed), this organisation now seeks international recognition for this structure. While the Sri Lankan Government might well try the gambit of negotiating with the LTTE, the according of legitimacy to what has all along been a terrorist organisation is a matter that has to be seriously thought through. In this respect it must be pointed out that the Government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has allowed the focus on the LTTE as a terrorist outfit to get clouded. New Delhi cannot afford to let down its guard or forget the damage that the LTTE has caused to India as well as Sri Lanka. As Sri Lanka's neighbour, India does need to keep in close touch with the negotiations but New Delhi cannot on any account allow for its demand for the extradition of the LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran to be diluted or set aside for the momentary convenience of the establishment in Colombo.

20 SEP 2002

THE HINDU

Lanka PM hails LTTE stand

Associated Press

NEW YORK, Sept. 19. — Shortly after Tamil Tiger rebels and Sri Lankan government representatives wrapped up the first round of peace negotiations, the country's Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe welcomed the rebels' decision to step down from their demand for an independent state.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels, who have been fighting for an independent state in Sri Lanka's north and east, yesterday said that they were willing to settle for self-determination rather than independence, signaling the possibility of a political solution to a conflict that has claimed more than 64,000 lives.

"I am encouraged to hear that," Mr Wickremesinghe said, responding to questions during a public discussion about his country's progress toward peace yesterday.

“There can be self-determination for each area ... We can work with that and build on that,” he said.

Mr Wickremesinghe said that he expected the peace process to take between three to four years, adding that he hoped it will be quick. When permanent peace seems possible, Draconian pieces of legislation, used to detain rebel suspects for long periods, would be phased out and comprehensive laws guaranteeing civil rights would be introduced.

Mr Anton Balasingham, chief negotiator for the Tamil rebels, said today they were “pleased” with the progress made, AP reports from Bangkok.

He called on the Thai permanent secretary, Tej Bunnag, to express thanks to Thailand for hosting the talks. The Thai government is “very pleased that the talks have progressed very well, and we are also pleased,” Mr Balasingham told the Press at the foreign ministry.

Amendment tabled: Sri Lanka's ruling party today tabled a constitution amendment in Parliament aimed at preventing President Chandrika Kumaratunga from dissolving the House without its consent, adds PTI from Colombo.

Justice minister Mr WJM Loku-bandara tabled the 19th amendment, which will make it impossible for the President to dissolve Parliament without the support of two-thirds of its members, officials said. The new legislative measure is not expected to be taken up for consideration and passage until next month, but the Opposition People's Alliance is likely to challenge it in the Supreme Court before that.

The amendment is important for the ruling UNP and its allies as they have made it clear they cannot pursue their peace initiatives with the threat of arbitrary dissolution looming over them.

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THE STATESMAN

PEACE TOGETHER

Even cynics will admit that the peace process in Sri Lanka is moving forward, ever so slowly. The government of Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe has, against all odds and expectations, demonstrated remarkable imagination and conviction in ensuring that the process is not derailed. Peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have started in Thailand with Norwegian facilitation. The talks are being led by Mr G.L. Peris, a legal expert, on behalf of the Sri Lankan government, and Mr Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief strategist. There are also reports that Mr Rauff Hakeem, the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, will be meeting the LTTE supremo, Mr V. Prabhakaran, in the near future. This suggests that Muslims of the island-state will also become part of the process. It remains to be seen, however, if the LTTE too is capable of demonstrating the courage that could bring peace to the island state after 17 years of a bloody civil war, in which more than 60,000 people have been killed.

The talks are building on the earlier indefinite ceasefire agreement signed between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE which was a political breakthrough of immense significance. The agreement, which is based on the implicit recognition of the LTTE and Mr Prabhakaran as the "sole spokesman" of the Tamil people. While the full implementation of the ceasefire will be a huge step forward, the real challenge will be to ensure that the end of violence creates the conditions for durable peace. The dialogue that is being conducted in Thailand is an effort in this direction. Quite clearly, both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE seem to have compromised on the absolute positions that have traditionally defined their policy. The LTTE seems to have accepted that it will not be possible to achieve an independent, sovereign *eelam*. In turn, Colombo seems to have realized that peace cannot be achieved without making significant concessions, including substantial devolution of powers and the unification of the Tamil-majority northern and eastern parts of the island. The agreement has been widely welcomed internationally. Although it is clear that India has been working behind the scenes to secure the accord, it has resisted the temptation of an active public involvement. India's role was, however, recognized even during the talks in Thailand. The Norwegian facilitators noted the support that India had offered to the process, and it is clear that New Delhi has not just been kept informed, but its counsel and clearance have been obtained at each stage.

Sri Lanka has been known as a haven of peace, a land of lotus-eaters, blessed with ample natural resources, breathtaking scenery and fabulous beaches all round the enchanted isle. Its horrendous violence has had a long gestation period; over twenty years - wrecking havoc with the island's well being. It was Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike, father of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who for political considerations, unwisely changed the carefully calibrated policy of the British administration on language and sowed the seeds of a separate identity for the Tamils which has plagued the country ever since. The British had insisted on the doctrine of equal disadvantage - everyone must learn English, but in addition every Sinhalese had to learn Tamil and conversely every Tamil had to learn Sinhala. Bandaranaike changed this soon after he became prime minister in 1956. He made Sinhala the official language and instantly the Tamils felt they had been reduced to second-class citizens. The Sinhalese is a charming fellow fond of the good life, happy-go-lucky in his attitudes and ready with his laughter. The Tamil was more serious, more ambitious, more hardworking and resented his new status. The Tamil United Liberation Front was born and the demand for

The Sinhalese is a charming fellow fond of the good life... the Tamil is more serious, more ambitious, more hardworking

out his say-so the just concluded first round of talks between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE would not have taken place. For all practical purposes the LTTE have dropped their demand for Eelam. This is tremendous progress for which both sides deserve credit. It augurs well for the rounds to come.

In the run-up to these talks

Hope in Sri Lanka!

Eelam or full independence, surfaced. Ironically SWRD fell to a Buddhist monk in 1959; but tressing the argument that violent men do not need reason for their actions. The Sinhalese majority tried to force the Tamils to drop their demand for Eelam; it had the effect of replacing the Front by the more militant LTTE. And thereby hangs a tale.

Pirabhakaran, the shadowy leader of the LTTE is a Robin Hood figure to his followers and it is useful to remember that he once trained for the priesthood. He has displayed tremendous resilience in the ongoing civil war. But he is not a fool, nor is he interested in dying in the jungles as a fugitive. Also it is idle to expect him to join a queue for the unemployed in a united country. He has been ruthless as such people usually are, opposition is instantly suppressed; it follows that with-

out his say-so the just concluded first round of talks between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE would not have taken place. For all practical purposes the LTTE have dropped their demand for Eelam. This is tremendous progress for which both sides deserve credit. It augurs well for the rounds to come.

brokened by Norway, Chandrika Kumaratunga has been less than cooperative. She has made her opposition plain and threatened to take personal charge of the armed forces in opposition to the policy of the elected government and to dissolve Parliament at will. She is weak on two fronts. If she persists she will spark a constitutional crisis she cannot win. There is also an unmistakable climate for these talks as both sides realise that wisdom lies in coming together. The government of Ranil Wickremasinghe has removed the ban on the LTTE and the Tigers have responded by dropping the demand of Eelam. Public opinion is overwhelmingly with the government and Chandrika cannot be unaware of it, whatever noises she may make. She has already diminished herself by her attitude; it is to be hoped that she will not take it further. No praise is too great for this breakthrough in the very first round. It shows that preparations have been competent and there is a will to make progress. And in these matters, it is the political will that counts. The war has already claimed 64,000 casualties and great harm has been caused to the economy by the uncertainty over what the next day will bring.

Sri Lanka was one happy land until a socialist prime minister thoughtlessly injected a virus that divided the inhabitants

There can be no comparison with Kashmir. Sri Lanka was one happy land until a socialist prime minister thoughtlessly injected a virus that divided the inhabitants. It is not possible to set the clock back but it is certainly possible to make amends and rub out the feeling of discrimination by granting more powers to the provinces and assuring them that they are full citizens of the same country. What is now being attempted is to bring both sides together and the challenge is not insurmountable. A certain similarity exists between India and Kashmir on the question of devolution of some powers to the state. But the issue is domestic; it can have no application to relation to Pakistan. At the same time the kite flown by LK Advani is not without significance and it is perfectly logical. It visualises a confederation between India and Pakistan and it harks back to the mindless partition. Kashmir is not directly involved here. It is easy to see however that if the concept takes root it has the potential for the Kashmir question to virtually disappear.

While wishing these Sri Lanka/LTTE talks every success, this country will do well not to lose sight of the bigger picture.

Positive possibilities

By Jayadeva Uyangoda

The present ceasefire agreement and the no-war condition are most likely to be extended through the talks (between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE) in Thailand.

WHEN THE Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) begin official and direct talks in Thailand on September 16, there are expectations built up by the two sides that this time they really mean business. Detailed media reports about the formal, ceremonial opening of the talks to be held in a popular holiday resort in Thailand give the impression that the two parties to the negotiation and their facilitators and hosts are treating the event with a studied measure of confidence. Although the relaxed build-up to the talks may camouflage the intensely complex nature of issues that come before them to sort out, the message being sent out by the UNF Government and the Tigers is that the Thailand talks will produce results.

In Sri Lanka and elsewhere, the dominant mood about the talks appears to be one of guarded scepticism and measured pessimism. Outside the ranks of the UNF Government and the LTTE, no person would want to stick his neck out to suggest any constructive outcome from the talks. A group of undergraduate students who accosted me at Colombo University the other day posed a question that many in India too would readily ask: "Will this be another peace debacle?" Negativist forecasting of the negotiation trajectory is quite fashionable among even professional analysts in Sri Lanka and abroad.

I tried to explain that unlike on past occasions this time there were better signs and conditions favourable for a positive negotiation outcome to emerge. The two sides, I argued, were determined to continue their political dialogue while sustaining the ceasefire agreement, even though their respective reasons for that line of action are quite different. Thus, the present ceasefire agreement and the no-war condition are most likely to be extended through the talks in Thailand. I further pointed out that the two parties might even sign a series of agreements — not one, big agreement — incorporating their unified approach to conflict-handling in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the island. I concluded by saying that the cumulative outcome of such an incremental approach to conflict management

would be the institutionalisation of the LTTE's control and administration of the two provinces, followed by some significant re-organisation of Sri Lanka's existing state.

My students were taken aback by my last comment. Most Sinhalese and Muslims in Sri Lanka would react to that suggestion in exactly the same way. Judging by the editorial comments of the Indian press, I suppose many Sri Lanka watchers in India too would share that disbelief and anxiety. But, the emerging realities in Sri Lanka have the potential of turning the negotiation exercise into a programme of conflict de-escalation in the short run. Many who have watched the fine and subtle nuances of the UNF-LTTE political engagement during the past eight months appear to have missed the blunt point the two sides have been making: no return to war for some time to come. That message is perhaps the best guarantee for a measure of success in the long run too in the Thailand talks.

To elaborate the above point, an objective assessment of the current situation of the Sri Lankan peace process suggests that the talks on September 16 may not produce a grand settlement agreement between the two sides; neither would the parties be able to address, with any degree of finality, complex issues involved in the ethnic conflict or its future directions. However, the way the two sides have been approaching the negotiation exercise seems to suggest that they have reached a prior understanding for engagement through talks for a considerable period of time, may be a few years. In fact, a protracted no-war seems to be the most prudent path available to both the LTTE and the UNF Government. The agreements that the two sides are likely to sign in the months ahead will indeed give shape to institutionalising the LTTE's consolidation as a political and administrative entity as well. The coming talks are crucially important for the LTTE to establish

this parallel identity of political legitimacy. And it is unlikely to miss this last chance.

Meanwhile, the LTTE goes to the negotiation table with a not so credible history in negotiation. In fact, it is better known as being a negotiation wrecker. On three occasions in the past — in 1987, 1990 and 1995 — the LTTE took unilateral action to terminate the talks and political engagement in a distinctly violent manner. The LTTE also publicly executed two leaders who negotiated with the group — the then Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the then Sri Lankan President, Ranasinghe Premadasa. The current President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, survived an execution bid. The LTTE leadership will have to take new and greater steps to convince a sceptical world opinion that it really means negotiation to be an exercise in compromise-making, and not a funerary moment for Government leaders.

This is where analysts would closely scrutinise the opening statements made by Tiger negotiators at the Thailand talks. They will have to indicate in the first public statement at the opening ceremony that they will not resort to hard, positional bargaining — let alone war — but would rather be committed to transforming the talks into an engagement in principled, or problem-solving, negotiation. Quite interestingly, it is the Tigers, and not the UNF Government, who are called upon by world public opinion to prove their good faith in the negotiation process.

At some stage of the talks in Thailand, the issue of interim administration will come up for clarification, elaboration and finalisation. The indications now are that an interim process, centred on an interim administration, is most likely to take a concrete shape before the end of the year. As the UNF leaders seem to have understood it quite dispassionately, even a preliminary compromise with the LTTE would require allowing the LTTE to establish its political-admin-

istrative control over the Northern and Eastern provinces.

This is indeed a tricky issue which the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, will have to handle with great care and wisdom. In negotiations, he will be giving a formal, concrete and institutional shape to some inexorable aspects of post-Independence Sri Lanka's political change and transformation, as facilitated, and even dictated, by a two-decade long war. In the same way that J. R. Jayawardene had to create Provincial Councils in 1987, Mr. Wickremesinghe is now called upon to give some institutional form to a historical process of Sri Lanka's conflict resolution and state formation. He will merely be the unconscious tool of an unfolding history, a history that is bitter and unacceptable to the nationalist elite in Sri Lanka. But, the signs are that that emerging history might be kinder to Mr. Wickremesinghe. The militant Sinhalese nationalist opposition that Jayawardene had to face in 1987 is very unlikely to re-surface in 2002. The suave and non-ideological Mr. Wickremesinghe has also proved that he is a cleverer political and conflict manager than most of his predecessors.

But the interim administration is not an unproblematic panacea for the present stage of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. As much as it can facilitate the consolidation of a productive negotiation process, it also has the potential of undermining the very process which will create it. The interim process has to be integrally linked to a process of continuing dialogue and compromise. It has to be made transitional and transformative. The gains of the interim process should never be used for reinforcing positional bargaining. As negative experiences in interim processes elsewhere demonstrate, an interim solution in Sri Lanka should not become a new microcosm for the overall conflict; neither should it give new life to old suspicions and enmities. Continuing dialogue through international mediation, in a backdrop of protracted ceasefire, can hopefully ensure a constructive outcome of the negotiation process that will be inaugurated in Thailand on September 16.

(The writer is Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, University of Colombo.)

HD-12

Sri Lankans take out peace rally

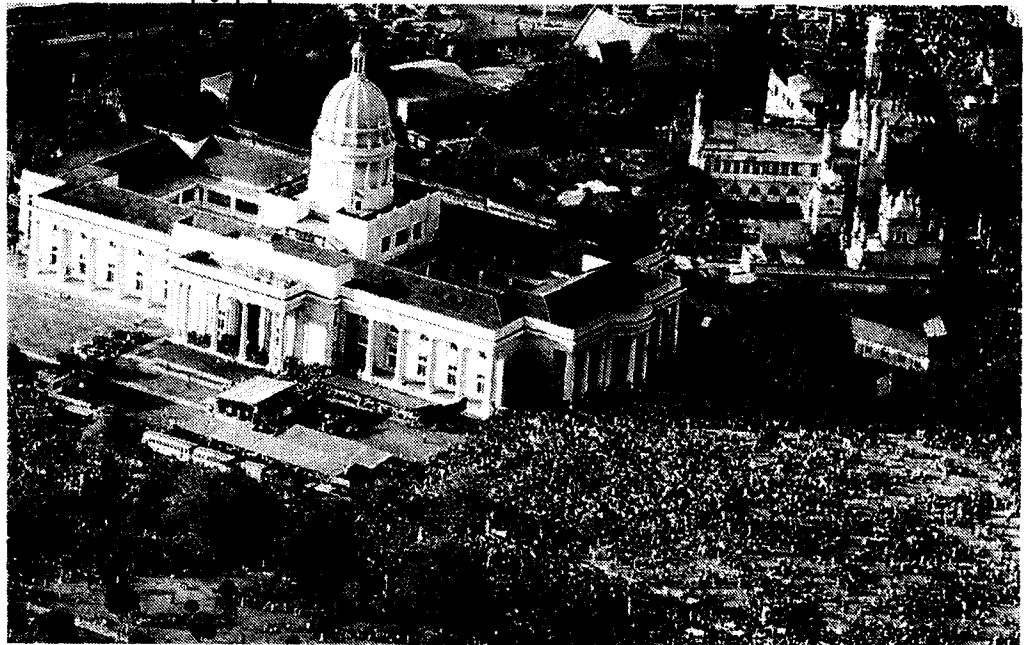
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By V.S.Sambandan

COLOMBO. SEPT. 9. Thousands of people from all over Sri Lanka gathered here today in a massive show of public backing for the ongoing peace process.

The "People's Strength" rally had a single common point. To impress upon the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, that the present peace process had the people's backing. Speakers from parties in the ruling United National Front (UNF) such as the Tamil National Alliance, workers' representatives and the war-disabled, stressed the point that the ongoing peace efforts should continue.

The rally comes close on the heels of de-proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Hardliners, including the left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Buddhist monks had taken out a procession against the move to de-proscribe the Tigers. However, the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapana, in keeping with a commitment given by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, de-proscribed the LTTE through a gazette notification on September 4. The rally was also a reflection of the feel-good factor that is now sweeping across the island, following the silencing of the guns of war earlier this year. A ceasefire agreement, signed independently by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, and the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, is



An aerial view of the congregation of people shouting slogans seeking peace and democracy in Sri Lanka at the Colombo Town Hall on Monday. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

in operation. Moreover, direct talks are scheduled to start between Colombo and the Tigers in Thailand in a week from now.

The "People's Strength" rally is also aimed at bringing pressure on the President, who is empowered to dissolve Parliament after it completes a year. The Wickremasinghe administration had proposed to move a constitutional amendment bill, which will bar

the President from dissolving the House after a year.

The Cabinet spokesperson, G.L. Peiris, who will be leading the Government's delegation in direct talks with the Tigers, has made the point that parliamentary stability was vital for the peace process to continue. The President's powers of dissolution, Prof. Peiris — who is also Minister of Constitutional Affairs — said was akin to "the

sword of Damocles", which was hanging over Parliament. The President has written to the Speaker that she would not dissolve Parliament as long as the Government enjoys a majority in the House. Unsatisfied, the UNF has decided to move the constitutional amendment later this month. The People's Alliance, led by Ms. Kumaratunga, has decided to oppose the amendment.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2002

SHORTSIGHTED STRATEGY

S. Lanka
19-10

A MISPLACED TRUST in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and its ruthless leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has led the Sri Lankan Cabinet to concede a key pre-condition set by this terrorist outfit that it be de-proscribed ahead of talks that will begin from September 16. Sri Lanka's Defence Minister, Tilak Marapone, declared yesterday that the ban on the LTTE had been lifted with immediate effect. The LTTE is engaged in a desperate search for legitimacy knowing full well that the current of international opinion runs strong in its abhorrence of terrorist organisations which rely solely on violence to promote their agendas. This organisation has done nothing to prove that it has irrevocably abandoned violence as an instrument of policy, or that it has irreversibly embarked on a democratic orientation or that it is ready to abide by a pluralistic and inclusive solution to Sri Lanka's social problems. To accord legitimacy to the LTTE before it is even prepared to consider redeeming itself in these matters could turn out to be a fatal mistake. The LTTE's track record, vis-a-vis Sri Lanka as well as India, leaves no doubt that it treats periods wherein it is accorded some legitimacy as an opportunity to strengthen itself prior to a re-launch of its campaign of violence. This terrorist organisation's intransigence could well be on display as soon as the talks commence in Thailand.

It would have been far more prudent for the Sri Lankan Cabinet to have followed the approach of the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, that the lifting of the ban on the LTTE should be considered, if at all, only after the talks had progressed to the extent that a positive outcome was in sight. Instead, and with unwarranted optimism, the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, has taken a grave risk in giving way to Mr. Pra-

bakaran's insistence that the talks mediated by Norway would not commence so long as the ban remained in place. It is to be hoped that Mr. Wickremesinghe and his Ministers will not be influenced any further by the relative, and probably deceptive calm, that the LTTE has observed over the past few months and succumb to Mr. Prabhakaran's other demand that the interim administration of the northern and eastern areas of Sri Lanka be handed over to his control as soon as the talks get underway. Spokespersons for the Cabinet have said that they will try and ensure the talks are structured in such a way that the interim administration issue is not dealt with preliminary to, and separate from, the core issues. While the LTTE has said — more by a way of a snub to Ms. Kumaratunga than anything else — that it too is prepared to consider the core issues along with the question of the interim administration, its track record leaves no scope for suspending suspicions on this score.

With opposition to the de-proscription plans mounting within the Sinhala community, Ms. Kumaratunga had hinted that "legal avenues" were available to strike down any decision on these lines. Developments on the judicial front cannot be entirely ruled out but do not appear very likely since the issue is more a political than legal one. The de-proscription of the LTTE occurred soon after Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe met on September 3 and since their discussions covered this issue as well it would appear that they had reconciled their differences in this respect. The reports suggest that Sri Lanka's President and Prime Minister have settled their other differences and it is to be hoped that the consensus arrived at in respect of future interaction with the LTTE is based on a hard-headed and realistic appreciation of the true nature of this terrorist outfit.

LTTE ban can be reimposed anytime: Peiris

S. Lanka
19-12

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By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, SEPT. 5. A midnight gazette notification by the Sri Lankan Defence Minister, Tilak Marapone, has rescinded the four-year ban on the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "with immediate effect".

"The de-proscription is now in force," the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, told a press conference today, adding that the ban could be reimposed "anytime" if required.

The President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, had said that the de-proscription should be linked to progress made in the talks. She told a delegation of hardliners protesting the move that "legal avenues" were available if the ban was lifted, but did not elaborate.

Asked today if the President could take any such measures, Prof. Peiris, who is also the Constitutional Affairs Minister, said, "She has no legal options whatsoever."

The de-proscription meets a key condition set by the Tigers to start direct talks with Colombo, scheduled to start in Thailand on September 16. The Tigers were banned on January 26, 1998, a day after they attacked the Dalada Maligawa (the Temple of the Tooth Relic), in Kandy, with an explosives-laden truck.

The domestic ban, Prof. Peiris said, "was largely symbolic" as it did not have any effect on the Tigers. However, he emphasised that despite the de-proscription "criminal and civil laws" would apply.

The Tigers were keen on de-proscription before the commencement of talks for two reasons. Parity in delegation-level

talks with Colombo is a more immediate one. In the longer term, the Tigers intend to use the de-proscription to get other countries that have either banned or designated them as terrorist organisations to revoke their positions.

However, there has been no such indication. To the contrary, India, which outlawed the Tigers for their involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, recently extended the ban. The British Government yesterday made it clear that for their ban to be revoked, the Tigers would have to give up violence. "Before the proscription of the

LTTE in the U.K. could be reconsidered by the British Government, the LTTE would have to demonstrate a complete and convincing renunciation of terrorism," a statement from the British Foreign Office said.

The de-proscription ended the second ban on the Tigers in Sri Lanka. They were first outlawed in 1978 by the J.R. Jayewardene Government through the 'Proscription of the LTTE and Other Similar Organisations Ordinance'.

Since 1978, when the Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiyappa, was shot dead, the LTTE has masterminded several assassinations and attacks on civilian installations. Their most potent weapons have been their suicide bombers, 241 of whom have lost their lives along with those of their victims either in assassinations or in vain bids and in other operations. The first and the latest major attacks on civilian targets were on air installations. In 1978, an Avro aircraft belonging to Air Ceylon was blasted by the Tigers at the Ratmalana airport, in Colombo, the day a new Constitution was introduced in Parliament. That Constitution, which has been blamed for much of the nation's woes, is still in force. A year ago, Sri Lanka's only international airport at Katunayake was attacked in an operation which set the island's airlines industry as well as its economy back by several years.

In addition to the long list of political victims — Rajiv Gandhi, President R. Premadasa, A. Amirthalingam, Sam Thambimuttu, Neelan Tiruchelvam, Sarojini Yogeswaran and Sivapalan to name a few — several militant leaders were taken out in fratricidal killings.

Colombo-LTTE talks in Thai naval base

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, SEPT. 5. The Sattap Naval Base in Thailand's Chonburi province has been announced as the venue for the first round of direct talks between Colombo and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The talks will commence on September 16 with a ceremonial opening. This will be followed by closed door discussions. The first round, which concludes on September 18, will focus on drawing up the priorities from the agenda for the talks. The talks are being facilitated by the Norwegian Government.

Ranil-Chandrika meet averts showdown

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, SEPT. 3. A Parliamentary showdown between Sri Lanka's two main political parties — the ruling United National Party (UNP) and the Opposition People's Alliance (PA) — has been averted following a two-hour "cordial" meeting between the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, today.

"A range of national issues, including the proposed 19th amendment, de-proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the coming talks in Thailand were discussed in which the senior adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar, was present," a presidential secretariat statement said.

The important discussion, it is learnt, was on the 19th amendment, through which the UNP administration plans to curb the powers of the President to dissolve Parliament after it completes a year. Instead of depriving the President of her dissolution powers completely, the likely outcome of today's meeting is that the proposed amendment will prevent the President from dissolving the House as long as the Government enjoys a majority.

According to existing provisions, there is nothing to prevent the President from

moves to de-proscribe the Tigers gained further momentum with thousands of people taking to the streets, led by the left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Slogan-raising, placard-carrying marchers condemned the present peace process as a "sell-out" and threatened further agitations to stop the Government from lifting the ban.

The JVP, which has opposed the powerful Executive Presidency, today said that at such a grave moment, the President should use the powers to prevent the ban being lifted.

Chandrika queries POWs swap

On the peace process currently underway, Ms. Kumaratunga, has asked Mr. Wickremesinghe for details of the prisoners to be released in exchange for security personnel held by the LTTE. The swap, which was to be held last weekend as part of the confidence-building measures, was put off with the Government citing legal procedures. However, Colombo has said that the plan was on track.

Ms. Kumaratunga has now sought details of the rebels to be released and pointed out that some of them were involved in assassination attempts as well as attacks on civilian installations.



Members of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and many other organisations in Sri Lanka taking out a massive rally in Colombo on Tuesday, to protest against the de-proscription of the Tigers, and the granting of an interim administration for their Eelam state.

— Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

dissolving Parliament after it completes one year. With that December 5 deadline nearing, there has been pressure on Ms. Kumaratunga, both within the Cabinet, which she heads, and in public fora.

Terminating the power of dissolution — a part of the 1978 Constitution introduced by the then UNP Government headed by the late J.R. Jayewardene — as a

party whip.

With indications of cross-voting, and the possible consequences it will have on the Parliamentary configuration, the island's politics was on a collision course. Today's meeting has averted, for the moment, that collision.

Protests intensify

The protests against the

Hardliners in Sri Lanka come out against de-proscription

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, SEPT. 2. Chauvinist opposition to the move to de-proscribe the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has come to the fore in Sri Lanka, with a group of Buddhist monks displaying public protest against the lifting of the ban.

Hundreds of monks, gathering under a newly-formed National Conference of Buddhist Monks, today took out a short procession protesting against the move to de-proscribe the Tigers.

This was followed by a resolution which said, "lifting the ban on the Tigers is not only illegal and a violation of democratic norms, but also an insult to the Buddhist community".

At a meeting, there was also a demand to the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, to "take over the Defence portfolio" and thwart the moves by her rival, the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, to lift the ban on the Tigers.

Yet another speaker criticised the Buddhist clergy leadership charging them of not taking a firm stand on the country's ethnic problem.

Today's protest comes two days after Ms. Kumaratunga told a delegation of hardliners — who had sharply criticised her constitutional reform proposals a few years ago — that she was opposed to lifting the ban before progress was made in the talks.

Yet another protest has been planned for tomorrow, under the auspices of the left-radical

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which has been opposed to the lifting of the ban.

With the Government and the Tigers having set a date in Thailand to start talks on September 16, the manner in which the protests are handled will be vital as the rebels have said that they would not negotiate unless the ban, imposed on them in 1998, was lifted.

The rebels were outlawed after attacking the Dalada Maligawa (the Temple of the Tooth Relic), considered to be one of the most sacred of the Buddhist shrines in the island.

Opposition from monks to attempts at conflict resolution dates back to the 1950s when the then Prime Minister, the late S.W.R.D.

Bandaranaike, abrogated a pact he had entered with the then leader of the Federal Party, the late S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, for greater powers to the Tamil majority north and east, after protests from Buddhist monks.

Their main fear has been that any move away from the unitary state would result in a partition of the island, where Sinhala-Buddhists constitute a majority.

Political observers opine that the influence wielded by monks is largely on account of political disunity between the two main political players — the ruling United National Party and the Opposition People's Alliance.



Thousands of Buddhist monks arriving at the Bandaranayake International Memorial Conference Hall in Colombo on Monday, for a national convention against lifting the ban on LTTE before the peace talks. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

Sri Lanka Muslim leader seeks meeting with Balasingham

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 31. The Sri Lanka Minister for Muslim Religious Affairs, Rauff Hakeem, has sought an appointment to meet the chief negotiator of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Anton Balasingham, in London this weekend, to "clarify issues" ahead of next month's talks between Colombo and the Tigers.

Speaking to the Foreign Correspondents Association of Sri Lanka on Friday, he said the "status of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, (which he leads) in the talks, should be clarified."

With Tamil-Muslim relationship, a crucial determinant of Sri Lanka's conflict-resolution process, going through a sensitive phase, the outcome of this meeting between Mr. Balasingham and Mr. Hakeem, who is expected to be a part of the Government's delegation, will be crucial for the Thailand talks.

The island's Muslims, Mr. Hakeem said, had welcomed the ceasefire agreement when it was signed in April as 'the most unfair peace is better than the most righteous war'.

However, "new issues have arisen" during the ceasefire agreement, which need to be clarified. "We have assured the

Muslims that as and when the talks get off, the SLMC will ensure that justice will be done," Mr. Hakeem said. Given the sensitive position the Muslims have in the country's ethnic balance, unless the issues were sorted out, they have the "potential to derail the whole process," the SLMC leader said.

The fresh predicament facing the Muslims is that the SLMC is still unsure of the position it would occupy in the talks. It is likely that the Tigers will press for the SLMC's participation only when Muslim issues are taken up, which would further strain the peace process.

Relations between the two Tamil-speaking minorities hit an all-time low when the Tigers ordered all Muslims to leave the north in 1990. However, the relations were set for an upturn this April, following an agreement between the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran and Mr. Hakeem.

However, this June's communal clashes in the east had brought the peace process under strain, but that has been managed, for the moment, by an assurance by the then LTTE's eastern special political leader, Karikalan, that the safety of the Muslims will be ensured by the rebels. This was followed by a

change in the eastern rebel political leadership, seen by some as sending a pro-Muslim signal.

Mr. Hakeem's proposed meeting with Mr. Balasingham also comes amid signals of a change within Muslim politics. The SLMC, founded by the late M.H.M. Ashraff, split after a leadership struggle between Mr. Hakeem and Ms. Ferial Ismail Ashraff. While Mr. Hakeem allied with the ruling United National Party, Ms. Ashraff has remained with the Opposition People's Alliance. The latest indications are that a coming together of these two leaders is also not ruled out as the Muslim community would like to ensure that its parliamentary strength is not truncated.

● **NEW YORK:** The international spiritual leader, Sri Chinmoy, honoured on Thursday the Indian-born film producer and director, Ismail Merchant, and the American actress, Mercedes Ruehl. Sri Chinmoy, who turned 71 on Tuesday last, lifted overhead with one arm the Academy Award winning stars separately and then together, one with each arm, as part of his unique 'Lifting up the world with oneness-heart' award.

THE HINDU

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LTTE, Govt. exchange prisoners

29/9

By V.S. Sambandan

OMANTHAI (SRI LANKA), SEPT. 28. Yet another confidence building measure was carried out today at this northern frontline, 270 km from Colombo, when the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) exchanged prisoners.

After spending years in captivity, 20 prisoners were reunited with their families in an act, which the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, termed as another step forward between the Colombo and the Tigers.

While 19 prisoners (seven soldiers and 11 suspected LTTE cadres) were exchanged just inside Tiger-held territory, two women LTTE cadres were released in Colombo. Top Government and LTTE officials, were present during the exchange. "It is yet another significant milestone to a negotiated settlement of what was at one time considered an intractable conflict", the Defence Secretary, Austin Fernando, said.

A senior member of the LTTE's political wing, Pulithevan, said with today's exchange of prisoners, the Tigers had released "all soldiers held captive" by them and urged the Government to expedite the freeing of those held under State custody.

The chiefs of Sri Lanka's Army, Navy and Air Force, senior LTTE political and administrative officials and the Tigers' northern forces commanders, were among those present.

The prisoners held by the Government were flown to Omantha from Colombo by helicopter for the exchange. Boyagoda, the captain of a ship attacked by the Tigers in 1994, was the senior-most officer to be released today. The prisoners' swap has been a long pending issue between the Government and the Tigers.

While steps were initiated during the earlier People's Alliance regime, it could not be completed. Since the ceasefire agreement came into force, the issue was again discussed. Later, Mr. Wickremesinghe, met the soldiers at his official Temple Trees residence in Colombo.

29 SEP 2003

THE HINDU

Govt.-LTTE to skirt irritants in first round

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 25. The Sri Lankan Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are expected to discuss issues relating to "return of normalcy" and avoid sensitive subjects of the conflict in the first round of talks in Thailand next month.

Following last week's announcement that the first round of direct talks will be held between September 16 and 18, the focus now is on spelling out the agenda for the talks, the lifting of the ban on the Tigers and the naming of the two negotiating teams.

In a front-paged report, the State-run Tamil daily, *Thinakaran*, said today that next month's opening round will concentrate on matters relating to restoration of normality in the north east, as set out by the ceasefire agreement signed by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, this February. In addition, the time-table for further talks are to be taken up for discussion, the newspaper said.

"Complicated subjects such as the interim administration, the core issues and devolution of power will be included in subsequent rounds of talks",

the report said. The Government has already made it clear that the talks would be structured in a manner that ensures that they do not get "derailed at any stage". Mr. Wickremesinghe also told his party members recently that the Government would adopt a "step-by-step approach to the talks".

Another task ahead for the Government before the talks is the lifting of the ban on the Tigers, which has been in place since the attack on the Dalada Maligawa in January 1998. The LTTE had set a condition that they would head for negotiations only if the ban was lifted. The Opposition People's Alliance, which proscribed the LTTE during their rule, has said that it was not against lifting the ban. However, protests came from another quarter recently — a section of the influential Buddhist clergy. Subsequently, the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapane, met the prelate, the Malwatte Mahanayake Thera, who had expressed reservations, and assured him that the lifting of the ban would have "no adverse impact" as the LTTE had now agreed to hold talks with the Government, the *Sunday Times* said. Mr. Marapane also "reassured the Maha-

nayake that none of the other countries, which had declared the LTTE a terrorist outfit, would lift the ban as a result of the de-proscription in Sri Lanka".

There is no formal announcement yet of the members of the LTTE's team of negotiators, which will be headed by its Chief Negotiator, Anton Balasingham. Last week there were reports that the team would include members from the political wing in Kilinochchi.

For the past two days, a new name, V. Rudrakumar, has started making the rounds.

An attorney based in the U.S., who appears for the Tigers, Mr. Rudrakumar is likely to join Mr. Balasingham and his wife, Adele, at the Thai talks.

The Government has already indicated that G.L. Peiris, Minister of Constitutional Affairs, would lead their team. According to current indications, it would also include Rauff Hakeem, Minister of Eastern Development and Muslim Religious Affairs, who is also the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Milinda Moragoda, Minister of Economic Development and Bernard Goonatilleke, Director General of the Government's Peace Secretariat.

26 AUG 2002

Move to curtail Kumaratunga's powers

COLOMBO, Aug. 22. — Sri Lankan government today unveiled new features in its proposed constitutional amendment to clip President Chandri Kumaratunga's powers, as the Cabinet hardened its stand against her by ignoring the directive that major constitutional matters should not be discussed in her absence.

Mrs Kumaratunga, away in England on a private visit, had sent a letter to the Cabinet that it should not take up any issue concerning changes to the Constitution until she returned, but this stung senior ministers who said she had no power to direct them.

"She did not say when she will return. The President has no power to direct the Cabinet on the

agenda, and the Cabinet has a duty to discuss issues of national importance." Constitutional Affairs minister Mr GL Peiris said.

Mr Peiris said the proposed 18th amendment, to be introduced in Parliament early in September, was then discussed fully. It would have a new feature providing for a "Committee on National Priorities" in Parliament to be appointed by the Speaker. This committee, drawn from all parties in proportion to their strength in the House, will make binding recommendations through the Prime Minister to the President on appointing ministers. The President cannot reject a recommendation made by the panel.

— PTI

23 AUG 2002

Armitage sees a 'glimmer of hope'

By V.S. Sambandan

JAFFNA/COLOMBO, AUG. 22. In a "visible manifestation" of the changing role of the United States in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, today went on a whistle-stop tour of the northern Jaffna Peninsula, met key political leaders in Colombo and termed the upcoming talks as a "glimmer of hope".

The visit, the first by Mr. Armitage as Deputy Secretary of State, was full of symbolism as it comes just ahead of the proposed direct talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, scheduled to start in Thailand next month.

Mr. Armitage saw the proposed talks as a "glimmer of hope" and said that what he saw in northern Sri Lanka was "a reminder that we should try to push as forcefully as we can for a peaceful solution".

Talking to presspersons tonight after meeting the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, he said while the U.S. had adopted a "hands-off" policy in the past, "we believe that things are changing now". The U.S., he said, was behind the "search for peace" through direct negotiations, which "hopefully" would start next month in Thailand.

His visit was to "re-energise" bilateral relations and there were deeper ties being developed in several areas, including defence and economy. While there was "a role for the U.S. to play", it



The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, with the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, in Colombo on Thursday. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

"cannot and should not take the place" of the leaders in Sri Lanka who had a direct stake.

Mr. Armitage called on Lakshman Kadigamar, senior adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs, who emphasised that an interim administration for the LTTE "must be deeply rooted in the Constitution".

Memories of Vietnam

Mr. Armitage, who flew to Jaffna on board a Sri Lankan Air Force aircraft immediately after his arrival in Colombo today,

told presspersons in the peninsula that the destruction reminded him of Vietnam.

Recalling that he had served in Vietnam for six years, he said what he saw in the northern peninsula reminded him of "nothing more than the villages in Vietnam. It is a keen reminder that enough is enough. Let us resolve differences peacefully rather than through shot and shell".

His tour included road travel through the devastated Chavakachcheri town, a stopover at Sarasalai, where demining was on

with U.S. assistance, a trip to the forward defence lines at Muhamalai and a meeting with the representatives of the Tamil community at the Bishop's residence in Jaffna.

Mr. Armitage was accompanied by the Sri Lankan Minister for Economic Reforms, Milinda Moragoda, the U.S. envoy in Colombo, Ashley Wills, Michelle J. Sison, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, the Bureau of South Asian Affairs, Washington, and other American and Sri Lankan officials.

'All efforts to bring peace in Sri Lanka welcome'

By K. Manikandan

KANCHEEPURAM, AUG. 23. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, today said his country welcomed efforts from all quarters to restore peace there, even as he expressed gratitude to India for its help in that direction.

He was responding to the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage's remarks that the U.S. was also behind the peace process after adopting a hands-off policy till now.

"I welcome efforts from all nations in bringing peace to Sri Lanka," Mr. Wickremasinghe said. Asked if the present situation would lead to long-lasting peace, he said that everyone desired that and it finally rested in the hands of the Sri Lankan people. On the sentiments of the Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu who wanted to return to their homeland only if there was an end to the conflict, he said his Government was taking steps in this regard.

While the stage had been set for the talks with the LTTE in Thailand, the final date was yet to be decided. Mr. Wickremasinghe was speaking to reporters after calling on the Kanchi Sanakaracharyas, Jayendra Saraswathi and Vijayendra



The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, and his wife, Maithree, stepping out after calling on the Acharyas of the Kanchi Mutt on Friday. — Photo: A Muralidharan

Saraswathi, here this afternoon.

He said he was on his way to Tirupati on a private visit. On his meeting with the Acharyas, he said he felt strengthened by the encouragement given by them to the peace process.

Mr. Wickremasinghe was accompanied by his wife and officials from the Sri Lankan Deputy High Commission.

He arrived in the town at 10.15 a.m. and rested for a while at the Circuit House in the Col-

lectorate before meeting the Acharyas.

Jayendra Saraswathi said the Sri Lankan Prime Minister was very much interested in improving the condition of the temples in his nation and that training programmes for priests were being conducted by the 'Math' regularly.

'Extradition demand will not hit peace efforts'

Our Tirupati Special Correspondent writes:

Mr. Wickremasinghe does not think that India's demand for the extradition of the LTTE chief, V. Prabhakaran, would affect the on-going peace talks. "I hope it will not affect the peace process", was his cryptic reply and he avoided any further questions on the sensitive issue at a brief press conference at Tirumala, abode of Lord Venkateswara. He also avoided questions on his reported differences with the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga.

After worshipping at the hill temple tomorrow, Mr. Wickremasinghe will leave for Hyderabad for a luncheon meeting with the Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu. "I am impressed with the working of your Chief Minister", he said.

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Colombo-LTTE talks in Sept. ✓

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 14. The Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would start "formal talks in Thailand between September 12 and 17, with Norwegian facilitation".

Announcing this at the end of a two-hour meeting in Oslo between the Sri Lankan Minister for Economic Affairs, Milinda Moragoda, and the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, the Norwegian Government said it will "issue a statement announcing the exact date for the meeting".

The meeting, the second between Mr. Moragoda, who is one of the Ministers directly involved in the peace process, and Mr. Balasingham, "also covered issues related to the implementation of the cease-

fire, resettlement of the internally-displaced persons and the release of detainees", a Norwegian Foreign Ministry statement said.

While tonight's announcement by Oslo breaks months of uncertainty over when the much-expected direct talks would start, the exact date has not yet been made public. Also, the agenda for the talks, which has still not been announced, is a politically sensitive issue in the island.

While the Tigers have taken the position that the Thai talks would have to discuss interim administration for the north and the east, there has been increasing pressure on the Government to place the core issues of the conflict on the agenda as well.

Termining the atmosphere of the meeting as "cordial and constructive", the statement said the Tigers had agreed to "in-

vestigate" reported incidents of child recruitment "and take necessary remedial measures".

Although expectations ran high for the past few months on the dates and agenda for the direct talks, today's announcement is the first time that both parties have made a commitment on the possible dates for commencement of talks.

The Sri Lankan Government had taken the position that it was more important to build a "solid foundation" before talks could start.

The Norwegian State Secretary, Vidar Heglesen, the special adviser, Eric Solheim, Oslo's envoy in Colombo, Jon Westborg, the adviser, Lisa Golden and the Head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), Trond Furuhoide, were among those present.

S. Karaka

4/1

'Colombo not in a hurry'

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11/9/81
By V. Jayanth 10/8

CHENNAI, AUG. 9. "We are in no hurry. We are prepared to wait for as long as it is necessary to begin the direct talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Tyronne Fernando said here today.

Asked in an interview how long the Government was will-



ing to wait for the talks in Thailand to commence, Mr. Fernando said "We will go

when everybody is ready for it. The longer we wait, the better it is for the peace process. Peace on the ground also gets solidified during that time".

Mr. Fernando rejected the perception that Colombo was "yielding" to all the LTTE's demands without getting anything in return. He said "We have got eight months of peace already. How can anyone say we have not got back anything. No one has been killed in bomb blasts. No lives have been lost either by the LTTE or the Government troops. There is normal movement of people between the north and south. The stock market has risen. The road blocks and barricades have gone. Less people are going to the hospitals and the children go to school in peace". "Is that not an achievement in itself?"

Details on Page 12

Peace momentum must be sustained, says Kadirgamar

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 8. As Sri Lanka gears up for another round of talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the senior adviser to the President on foreign affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar, holds the view that the present momentum should not be allowed to be "seriously upset" by the sharply-divided domestic political rivalry.

"This point of time is probably the best opportunity we have of making it go forward," Mr. Kadirgamar told *The Hindu* in an exclusive hour-long interview at his heavily-guarded residence here on Wednesday.

"I am reasonably confident that the process will move along, meaning, the LTTE will, at some stage, I am not prepared to guess when, decide to start a conversation." The main thing, he said, "was to maintain a momentum, which had been developed now, and not to allow it to be upset".

As a leader who is respected across the sharply-divided political spectrum, the former Foreign Affairs Minister is the key link between the main political opponents, the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

In this role as the one who enjoys the trust and confidence of the President and the Prime Minister, Mr. Kadirgamar, hopes to "try to build within this dialogue on cohabitation, at the domestic level, an island on which the peace efforts could be built and preserved". Expressing confidence that such an effort "was possible", Mr. Kadirgamar said that while all efforts were on to "work out a system of cohabitation" he would try his "utmost so that none of this is allowed to affect the peace process".

Asked how he viewed the current standoff between the President and the Prime Minister, Mr. Kadirgamar was emphatic that "the people's wisdom" should not be questioned. "Every effort

must be made to see to it that cohabitation is made to work. It is obviously not pleasant or easy because democratic politics in the Westminster style is confrontational, not consensual.

"The problem is made worse by the tension in the Cabinet. Now everybody is beginning to realise that this is an aimless and fruitless exercise. I feel quite confident that the Prime Minister thinks so. I do not see that the President is going to start provocative debates in Cabinet. On the other hand, it would be totally unreasonable, apart from being unconstitutional, to expect her to be a dummy figure as head of the Cabinet. The best concept of cohabitation is where the parties work together in the national interest".

On the possible scenarios ahead for the resolution of the conflict, Mr. Kadirgamar said: "the position is now fairly firmly established that there will be a unit created with a large degree of autonomy. But the relationship with the Centre will have to be maintained." This concept, he said, "was now gaining acceptance" as there was a certain "logical inevitability" about it.

A return to violence, he said, would depend on the LTTE. The Sri Lankan Government had "reached a point" where it would "only resort to war in self-defence".

Emphasising the considerable agreement reached between the two major political parties, the United National Party and the Opposition People's Alliance, on the need for a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict, Mr. Kadirgamar was of the view that the draft Constitution could form the starting point for adopting a common stand on the solution to it.

The two major parties, he pointed out, had nearly 95 per cent agreement on the issues, including the most sensitive one of the nature of the state. "I think this is definitely going to be a possible basis for an ultimate solution because that draft

constitution deals very extensively with devolution".

Lauding the Norwegians for their current role, Mr. Kadirgamar, who as Foreign Affairs Minister between 1994 and 2001, initiated the process, observed: "There is consensus as far as the two major parties are concerned on the desirability of a foreign facilitator. There could be more than one view with regard to whether the facilitator is doing his job properly or not. I would say without any hesitation that the Norwegians have been very helpful. I do not think that without the Norwegians we could have got as far as we have today, whatever may happen in the end of it."

The importance of getting the core issues on the agenda for the talks with the Tigers was because "the LTTE had established in a good part of the north and east a kind of an administration". He would, however, not call it a de facto state.

During the interregnum between the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces and the Government control over Jaffna, when the Tigers were fully "in occupation" of those areas, the Government writ did not run there, he pointed out. "In the last six to seven years, the Government is in control, certainly of the peninsula and large parts of the eastern province".

However, "there is a fair part still under the LTTE's control and its writ runs in those areas. Therefore, the question of interim administration is important. You cannot have an interim administration created in a way that is unrelated to the final issues".

These include "the structure of the State, the relationship of the interim administration to the Central Government and a host of other problems that impinge on the relationship between a northeast unit, shall we say, to use a neutral term, to the Centre".

The Government, he noted, "had now made it clear that the agenda for talks

should contain all the issues — the core issues that both sides want to put on the table and one of them will be interim administration. As far as the south is concerned, the bottom line is 'no separate sovereign State' There is unanimity on that".

In the mainstream politics of the south, he observed, "the position is now fairly firmly established that there will be a unit created with a large degree of autonomy. But the relationships with the Centre will have to be maintained".

The Indian request for the extradition of the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, Mr. Kadirgamar said, was pending before the Sri Lankan Government and India was taking "cognizance of the fact that there are negotiations going on in a friendly country".

Asked if India was not pressing for it, the former Foreign Minister said "at the moment they are not pressing for it. What they intend to do later is a matter for the Indian Government".

One of the highlights of his term as Foreign Minister was to get the LTTE banned across the world, for which he earned their wrath.

Asked how he reacted to that stance, Mr. Kadirgamar said: "I was at that time Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, not any particular group of people. I cannot accept that concept. The concerns of Sri Lanka were very much questions of fund-raising. The Government, and I as Foreign Minister, had to take a stand. I was simply doing my duty. I make no excuses for doing that".

"On the other hand", he pointed out, "I tried to make it as clear as I could that I did not believe that war was an ultimate solution. I took pains to emphasise that I hoped very much that the time would come when we could sit down and talk this thing through. If that is not understood by the LTTE, there is nothing I can do about that. All I say is, that was an honest approach by a person who was holding public office".

S. Lanka
HD 12

Chandrika-Ranil standoff likely

S/S

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 4. Sri Lanka's southern politics is in a state of flux, with all indications of a standoff between the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, in the weeks ahead.

There has been an intense political build-up in the media over the past weeks, with today's *The Sunday Leader*, which has been charged by the Opposition People's Alliance (PA), of leading the media campaign against Ms. Kumaratunga — reporting that a “constitutional coup” was in the offing, by which the President would sack the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and then form a Government of national reconciliation.

The newspaper also published a letter, which it said, was written by the President to the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapone, on the steps taken to ensure the security of the Muslims in the east, following last month's communal clashes.

The newspaper also published, what it said was the PA's game plan to confront various possible scenarios: a no-war, de-facto Eelam option, the peace discussion option, the Eelam War IV option and the general election option. The President, the newspaper reported “would have a crucial role to play in the coming weeks” as “all options will ultimately lead to anarchy and disintegration of Sri Lanka”.

The Prime Minister's United National Party (UNP), for its part, has reportedly decided to give “a 10-day ultimatum” to the President to “accept a constitutional amendment repealing her power to unilaterally

dissolve Parliament, or face general election,” the newspaper said in another front-page report.

The recent developments come against the backdrop of a constitutional framework that vests the President with vast powers. The President of Sri Lanka who wields extensive executive powers, is also the head of a political party. With the PA losing the December 2001 Parliamentary elections, Ms. Kumaratunga has had to wear the two sharply contrasting hats of President and leader of the party in Opposition.

The UNP, in contrast, had even earlier, made a distinction between its Prime Minister and political leader, thereby maintaining at least a formal distance between these two positions.

However, there has been a build-up by the Cabinet against the President, of what it says “matters of national interest”, aimed at bringing more pressure on Ms. Kumaratunga. By her own admission, the President is “one woman facing a hostile Cabinet”.

“This is the first time the cohabitation principle is really being tested,” a senior political source told *The Hindu*, emphasising that both the President and the Prime Minister had a shared responsibility to restore peace.

Moreover, given the direct link between the southern political rivalry and the build-up of Tamil militant politics over the past decades, several commentators have emphasised the need for a southern consensus for conflict resolution. Political observers see the present situation as a “very important phase” in Sri Lankan politics.

5 AUG 2002

Ranil hints at mid-term polls

P K Balachandran
Colombo August 2

SRI LANKAN Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has indicated that he might have to seek dissolution of Parliament considering his relations with President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The State-owned *Daily News* reported today that Wickremesinghe told his ministers if the President continues her confrontational attitude, he will have no option but to seek the dissolution of parliament and go in for fresh elections.

The shaky cohabitation arrangement between Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, who heads the United National Front (UNF), and Kumaratunga, who heads the Peoples' Alliance (PA), touched a new low last week when the President threatened to sack the entire cabinet if they kept levelling charges against her.

If an election is held as per the constitution after December, Sri Lankans will be going for a second parliamentary elections in a little over a year.

Elections in the next few



Ranil Wickremesinghe

months are expected to stall the peace process and delay talks with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) scheduled to begin sometime in September.

This is because the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government would not like to begin serious negotiations when there is polit-

ical instability and inadequate parliamentary support for the peace process.

The UNF Government's crucial proposal to amend the constitution to allow a "conscience vote" on the ethnic issue is not likely to get the required two-thirds majority in parliament because the President and the PA are afraid that a facility for cross voting may further weaken the party. The PA is yet to recover from the drubbing it got in the December 2001 parliamentary elections.

The Prime Minister, on the other hand, wants to go in for fresh polls also because he is confident of improving the United National Party's performance.

If the recent local body elections are any indication, the UNP will increase its tally in parliament from 109 to 132 while the PA is expected to climb down from 77 to 59. Interestingly, the President is also keen on a snap poll because it will allow her to purge the party and the PA parliamentary group of those not quite loyal to her and the Bandaranaike family.

118-12

Sri Lankan peace process gaining momentum: Ranil

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JULY 24. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe, says that the peace process in the island nation was gaining momentum and that the talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will be held as scheduled next month.

"The process is moving forward and that's what matters," he said in reply to a question on dates and time-frames at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre here. Mr. Wickremesinghe said the LTTE is waiting until some modalities are out of the way by August 2 as per the Memorandum of Understanding. "We have no problem with that," he remarked.

On the issue of support to the LTTE from Tamil Nadu, he said the support from the people in Tamil Nadu, especially along the coastal areas, was more of a moral nature; but after the assassination of the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, it became more a question of vocal support as opposed to arms or money. He said that in Tamil Nadu, it was "still a dominant political issue".

The visiting Prime Minister said all parties in his country had agreed to the lifting of the ban on the LTTE as something that had to be done prior to the

talks. He stressed the need to create a proper environment for the talks. At the same time, he argued that a political solution alone cannot bring about long-term peace without economic development.

Mr. Wickremesinghe dwelt on the causes of the ethnic crisis, both in his formal address and during the question and answer session. "A whole community was alienated by the injustices they felt and experienced. For two decades, the mainstream political parties were unable to resolve the issues affecting the Tamils. The Tamils tried a peaceful protest, which soon degenerated into violence.

With the underlying grievances being unattended, the stage was set for terrorist groups to emerge. Whatever the causes, the reality became the LTTE," he remarked.

He said that the pressure for a peaceful settlement was not politics-driven but came from the people; and the reason for optimism stemmed from a number of factors, the first of which being that the stakeholders in the peace process were "all citizens" of the country.

"Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and others are, in a sense, shareholders in this national enterprise: dividends will be declared for all except for a few merchants of death who will be the only losers. Our people's yearning for peace is deep," he said.

REF HINDI I

25 JUL 2002

Kumaratunga threatens to dismiss entire cabinet

Colombo: Locked in a fierce row with her critics in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's cabinet, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has threatened to dismiss the entire cabinet, a state-run newspaper said on Monday.

"I can send home not only commerce minister Ravi Karunanayake, but the entire cabinet, including the prime minister," the daily 'News' quoted the President speaking at a seminar organised by her Sri Lanka Freedom Party in Polonnaruwa on Sunday.

Ms Kumaratunga's remarks come close on the heels of Mr Wickremesinghe cold-shouldering her recent letter contending that Mr Karunanayake was unfit to be a minister after he allegedly accused her of bringing bombs concealed in her hand-bag to a cabinet meeting last week. The Prime Minister's position is that Mr Karunanayake had not made any such allegation and nobody could be removed from his cabinet without his approval.

Meanwhile, constitutional affairs minister G.L. Peiris also joined the controversy, accusing the President of seeking to obliterate the issue after Mr Karunanayake had



C. Kumaratunga



R. Wickremesinghe

raised a question on records that showed the police of having bought a 'spy hand-bag' last year.

The ministers allege that the intelligence wing had imported a surveillance kit in the form of a hand-bag fitted with a digital camcorder and concealed microphones. They want to know how the equipment is being used now. Mr Karunanayake is also part of a cabinet subcommittee probing an alleged scandal in the purchase of high security vehicles by the president's office at a cost of Rs 2.40 billion.

The government alleges that it has evidence of massive irregularities in the procurement of these supposedly custom-built armoured vehicles, and that it will make a case for impeaching the President.

However, the President's office has denied any irregularity, and said she was prepared to face any charge or impeachment proceedings. Mr Wickremesinghe, who has a majority in parliament, does not have the requisite two-third majority to remove the President by impeachment, but is reportedly planning a constitution amendment to clip her powers. PTI

Will it be a permanent divide?

By V.S. Sambandan

110-12
18/7

VALAICHCHENAI (SRI LANKA), JULY 17. A couple of years ago, when a bitter military conflict was raging, this eastern town 30 km from Batticaloa was buzzing with business. Now, when the guns are no longer blazing, a funeral silence has descended upon Valaichchenai. Burnt-out shops stand where vibrant trade took place till the end of June. Shopkeepers who would have been busy with their clientele, have nothing to do but look helpless. Armed soldiers are back, outnumbering traders huddled in groups along the street. The history of Valaichchenai changed on June 27 when it became the victim of communal violence, the first since a ceasefire between the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan Government. While there are various versions of what happened, an overwhelming feeling is that the visible political presence of the Tigers in the east had contributed to the flare-up. The fragility of peace in the eastern province is evident from the manner in which the present disturbances cascaded from its starting point at Mutur, in Trincomalee district, 80 km north of Valaichchenai.

Already irked by what the Muslims saw as the LTTE's reluctance to protect them and the "extortion on traders", a sudden call was given for a general closure on June 27. The violence that engulfed the town was quelled only after curfew was clamped that night.

A police officer saw the violence as one backed by the Tigers who "wanted the hartal to fail". Disagreeing, a Tamil resident says that unlike in the past the "Tamil youth were out on the streets as they did not have to fear arrests because the ceasefire was on".

Muslim traders were guarded and some, requesting not to be named, blamed the "forces backing the Tamils" for the violence



Sri Lankan army men near a shop burnt by the LTTE in Valaichchenai. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

and "the police and the army for not controlling the situation". The violence that swept Valaichchenai claimed 11 lives and destroyed property worth billions of rupees.

TRUBLED EAST — I

The question now on the minds of those in this hot spot is whether there will be a permanent divide between the two communities. Though the town had seen clashes in the past, "my fear now is whether both communities will think that they have had enough and decide to move completely away", said a concerned resident, requesting anonymity. However, Hyder Ali, a primary school teacher asserted: "we cannot be inimical to each other". "Yes, the Tamils will need us for trading their produce and we will

need their clientele," a merchant concurred.

"For the past 21 days, the town has not been functioning properly," points out Arulnathan, a Methodist priest. "They are unable to live together because there is fear and tension." Hanifa, a trader, is reluctant to place the blame entirely on either the Tamils or the Muslims. "Everyone is responsible." Another trader, requesting not to be named, is concerned about his long list of debtors.

"They do not even come this side. I can at least get my dues that run to more than Rs. two lakhs." Though an agreement between the security forces and the LTTE's political leadership has brought the situation under control, uncertainty prevails. "The Tigers should now implement what they have promised", a policeman said adding that unless the assurances are carried out at the ground level, "the distrust will continue".

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THE HINDU

JVP disrupts Parliament over trouble in east

By V.S. Sambandan

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COLOMBO, JULY 9. On a day when eastern Sri Lanka completely dominated the political agenda, the island country's Parliament was disrupted by the leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), who demanded a Government statement on last month's Tamil-Muslim clashes.

During the day, the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, also held two meetings with key Muslim leaders and assured them that steps would be taken to ensure the security of the Muslims living in the eastern part of the country.

While the pandemonium in Parliament ended with the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapane, agreeing to make a statement "in a day or two", the meetings between Mr. Wickremesinghe and the Muslim leaders resulted in assurances by the Government that the security of the Muslims would be ensured.

When the 225-member Parliament met for the first time since last month's Tamil-Muslim clashes, the Leader of the Opposition, Mahinda Rajapakse, attacked the Government for not checking the eastern escalation. As the east, with its ethnic mix, was unlike other parts of the island, "de-stabilising the east will cause instability in all other regions", he said.

Though the Opposition leader did not expect a reply, the JVP demanded one from a "responsible member of the Cabinet". Rauff Hakeem, Minister for Eastern Development and Muslim Religious Affairs, who expressed willingness to do so, could not proceed as the Speaker, M.J. Perera, ruled that Mr. Rajapakse

had not asked for a reply and moved on to the next point on the Order Paper.

Angry JVP MPs swarmed the well of the House, demanding a statement. As has been their practice in the past on sensitive issues, they carried placards condemning the "escalation in the east" and blamed it on the "Ranil-Tiger agreement".

Parliament was then suspended, and the Speaker met key political leaders. When the proceedings resumed, the JVP MP, Wimal Weerawansa, charged the Tigers with executing their "second ethnic cleansing".

"Now the Muslims have been attacked; next it will be the Sinhalese," he said, adding that the eastern troubles were a part of the LTTE's plans to "form its Eelam".

The Opposition MP, Anura Bandaranaike, demanded that the Government specify when it would make its statement and termed the eastern situation "a time-bomb waiting to explode".

Today's pandemonium in Parliament is an indication of the impact the Muslim factor can have on the conflict resolution process. Coming as it does during a fragile ceasefire and ahead of a key de-escalation deadline — the withdrawal of all Government troops from schools — the present upsurge, unless managed with political acumen, can disrupt the peace process.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which is a key ally of the ruling United National Party, has criticised parts of the ceasefire agreement as the Muslims in the east feel that it was loaded in the favour of the Tigers.

THE HINDU

12 JULY 2002

LTTE celebrates Black Tigers Day amid fragile peace

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JULY 5. Sri Lanka's north and east witnessed a splash of red and yellow as the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) celebrated the annual Black Tigers Day in a climate of fragile peace.

"Since dawn, the red and yellow Tiger flags have been flying all across Jaffna, on vehicles, Government buildings and schools," a Jaffna resident told *The Hindu*. Political sources in the east said the day was marked by the release of an audio cassette "to honour the Sea Black Tigers".

Widely rated the worst month for Sri Lanka, 'Black' July has been scarred by violence in the past. In July 1983, the island was torn apart by anti-Tamil riots following the killing of 13 Sri Lankan soldiers in a landmine attack by the then-

fledgling LTTE at Tinnevely, in the Jaffna peninsula. Four years later, 'Captain' Miller, the Tigers' first suicide bomber, rammed an explosives-laden truck into a Sri Lankan Army camp at Nellia-dy in the Jaffna peninsula on July 5, 1987.

Since 'Captain' Miller, 248 Black Tigers are reported to have been killed, either in assassinations, in attacks on army and civilian installations or in attempts that failed to take their targets or were foiled by security forces. Political and military sources express "cautious hope" that this July may not be scarred by the violence of the past. D. Sidhathan, leader of the People's Liberation Organisation for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), which is not a part of the LTTE-backed Tamil National Alliance, is of the opinion that since the ceasefire between the Tigers and the Government is holding "this July will be different".

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THE HINDU

SRI LANKA / PEACE TALKS MAY BE DELAYED

Govt. yet to implement truce agreement: LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 18. The senior-most Government official in charge of the Sri Lankan peace process flew to LTTE-held territory today for the second time in a bid to resolve differences between the two sides amid diminishing prospects for early peace talks.

Bernard Goonetilleke, who heads the Prime Minister's Peace Secretariat, travelled to LTTE-controlled northern Sri Lanka for a meeting with its political wing leader, S.P. Tamilselvan, to resolve differences between the two sides on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The LTTE maintains it will not agree to direct talks till the provisions of the truce agreement are fully implemented. An official of the Norwegian Government, which is facilitating the peace process, accompanied Mr. Goonetilleke.

One of the main LTTE complaints is that the armed forces had not vacated public buildings, schools and temples in the

northeast, though they should have begun doing so by the 30th day of the truce coming into effect.

A statement from the Peace Secretariat today said that following Mr. Goonetilleke's visit, the two sides had agreed on a joint team "of Government representatives, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission and other interested parties" to visit the buildings in question to ascertain the position. The two sides also discussed the still unresolved matter of public transport on the LTTE-controlled stretch of a recently reopened highway connecting northern Sri Lanka with the rest of the country.

"On the larger aspects of the peace process, views were exchanged on the deproscription of the LTTE, negotiations between the two parties and other confidence-building measures intended to further strengthen the confidence of the people in the peace efforts," the statement added.

The Government had an-

nounced that talks would be held by mid-May in Thailand. The date was later revised to June and then early July. But a London-dated report in the pro-LTTE Tamil daily, *Sudar Oli*, today said it would be "nothing less than a miracle" if the talks took place

according to the time-table the Government had in mind. Quoting sources "close to the LTTE", it denied reports that the two sides had finalised the agenda for talks.

The agenda is to be finalised on the basis of a questionnaire that Norway has distributed to both sides, and the newspaper emphatically asserted that the LTTE had not replied and would not do so till the Government fully implemented the ceasefire agreement. The LTTE's reassertion of its stand came amid reports that its pointman for the peace process, the London-based Anton Balasingham, had been refusing to meet the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, to discuss dates for

the talks. The LTTE has also expressed unhappiness at the Government's assertion that the two sides would discuss a final solution to the ethnic conflict that has been raging in Sri Lanka over the last two decades, in Thailand. It wants the talks to focus only on discussions for an interim administration run by it in the northeast.

Official sources said the Government had replied to the Norwegian questionnaire and was now awaiting the LTTE response. They said the Government had made it clear that while the interim administration would remain the focus of the Thailand talks, there was a need to "contextualise" it against a final solution. One of the suggestions from the Government has been that talks on a final solution should start as soon as the interim administration is formed.

It has also pointed out a need to discuss elections for the interim administration after a fixed period of letting the LTTE run it.

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POSITIVE MOVES

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Steps Towards Permanent Peace In Sri Lanka?

17/6
S. Lanka

By PARMANAND

Rarely had Sri Lanka enjoyed such a long spell of peace and tranquillity — December to the present — after the breaking out of the 1983 ethnic war. Never in the past had the two mainstream Sinhala political parties — the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party — shown such accommodation in talking to Tamils of the state on the question of devolution of political powers.

By a strange coincidence both political parties are enjoying political power without being in a coalition — the SLFP enjoying presidential power and the UNP holding prime ministerial power. The unity achieved between the Tamil political parties of all hues had also not been known at any point of time in the past.

Ideal scenario

It is against this backdrop that the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are slated to begin their talks at the end of June or the beginning of July. Though the two sides have interacted with each other a couple of times in the recent past through their representatives, formal talks were last held on 10 April 1995. That constituted the fourth and last round of talks between the Kumaratunga government and the LTTE — the first round of which had begun on 13 October 1994. The LTTE had returned to the battlefield on 19 April 1995; the Sri Lankan state had launched the "Operation Leap Forward" on 9 July 1995.

Even if it is the best possible scene under the given circumstances, thanks to the Norwegian mediators, an ideal scenario is yet to emerge. True, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has moved with a great deal of caution in holding talks with the LTTE — and has not de-proscribed the hitherto terrorist organisation. President Chandrika Kumaratunga is never tired of advising the former to discuss the "core issues" first.

Presidential spokesperson Harim Peiris said recently that a fluid situation prevailed regarding the proposal for face-to-face talks with the LTTE in Thailand. He emphasised that the peace process should quickly move towards talks to resolve the vexed ethnic problem once for all. On 30 May, Cabinet spokesperson GL Peiris said that the talks to be held in Thailand will focus on the host of issues and not just the LTTE demand for a north-eastern council. Peiris said that the Norwegians were particularly concerned about the agenda of talks. Peiris said that the government delegation had discussed

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the three main issues of de-proscription, dates and agenda for peace talks and cease fire violations with the Norwegian team. The Sri Lankan government also announced that it would consider lifting the ban on the LTTE provided it agreed for a mutually acceptable data for the peace talks.

and the quota system substantially alienated the Sri Lankan Tamils from the country's mainstream politics and polity. Not that the mainstream Sinhalese leadership was oblivious of the damage done. Damage rectification exercises were resorted to by various ruling Sinhalese leaders at various points of time. In Ap-



Had the two mainstream Sinhala political parties not been vying with each other by targeting the minority Tamils, the problem of the Eelam would not have surfaced. The "Sinhala Only" slogan, without doubt, paid rich dividend to the SLFP and the front that the party led. In the 1956 parliamentary polls, the hitherto ruling party, the UNP, was reduced to eight seats, whereas the SLFP won 51 seats. Continuing the politics of her late husband, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, during her prime ministership, brought forward significant constitutional and legislative changes that gave the majority Sinhalese (74 per cent) a sense of belonging and the minority Sri Lankan Tamils (12 per cent) a sense of alienation.

Sinhalese machinations

The 1972 Constitution — which was overwhelmingly her initiative — gave a predominant place to Buddhism on the island. For all practical purposes, it became the state religion. The politicisation of the mix of the Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion, accompanied by devices like "standardisation of marks"

ril 1960, an understanding between the SLFP leaders CP de Silva, Felix Dias Bandaranaike and AP Jaysuriya — approved by Sirimavo Bandaranaike — was reached, which could have mitigated some of the sufferings of the Tamils. In March 1965, the Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact — which subsequently became District Council Bill — was signed. On 29 July 1987, the Rajiv Gandhi-JR Jayewardene Accord was signed in Colombo. In November 1989 the 13th Constitutional Amendment was passed. On 3 August 1995, Chandrika Kumaratunga's Devolution Package was announced.

Most of these measures were cosmetic. The alienation of the Sri Lankan Tamils became a continuous phenomenon. The Sri Lankan Tamils of various hues formed the Tamil United Liberation Front; its conference in 1976 raised the demand for a separate Tamil Eelam. In the 1977 parliamentary polls, the TULF secured 17 seats and emerged as the second largest party in parliament — next only to the UNP.

However, the politics of moderation or parliamentary discussion on the part of

the Tamils did not succeed. Soon the TULF was made to lose all its seats on technical grounds. The Sri Lankan state under the leadership of the UNP and JR Jayewardene concentrated more and more powers in its hands.

While the Sri Lankan Parliament had no representative of the Tamils because of the government's machinations, the Jayewardene government went ahead with a referendum — the only one in the island's history — on 22 December 1982, which resulted in the six-year extension of the Parliament elected in 1977 with effect from August 1983. This development is said to be responsible, to a very great extent, for the real rise and growth of the LTTE and its terrorism.

Rigged elections

The ouster of the TULF MPs from Parliament convinced the Tamil youth that the Sri Lankan state was not prepared to redress the Tamils' grievances through parliamentary democracy. Sooner rather than later, it proved that it was among the strongest terrorist organisations of the world.

While every parliamentary poll between 1956 and 1977 resulted in the ouster of the incumbent government, the UNP continued to be in power between 1977 and 1994. This period witnessed two parliamentary polls and one referendum. Many an observer alleged that the elections after 1977 were rigged thoroughly by the UNP.

This led to further alienation of the youth in general and Tamils, in particular. It was not for nothing that during this period, the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna, a Sinhalese militant outfit, resurfaced. It is altogether a different matter that the JVP joined parliamentary politics much before the LTTE, and today with 16 seats in Parliament, it is maintaining friendly ties with the PA, which has 77 seats. Significantly, the JVP has been opposing the proposed government-LTTE talks.

It will be naive to assume that terrorism can be completely curbed without removing the causes and the circumstances under which this grows and sustains itself. The powers that be in Sri Lanka should not indulge in bringing forward devolutionary measures which offer less substantial powers to the people of the north and the east.

The Indian government has acted commendably during these developments. By not pursuing seriously the demand for extradition of LTTE supremo V Pirbhakaran, the Indian state has left all the actors of Sri Lankan politics free to establish permanent peace in concrete terms. It is for the parties concerned in Sri Lanka to move in that direction.

Impasse in peace process: LTTE

9/6

S. Lanka
ST-12

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JUNE 5. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has said that the Sri Lankan peace process is at an "impasse" and blamed the Government for it just as a donor meeting, billed as crucial for rebuilding the island's economy, got under way here today.

In an interview to the *Tamil Guardian* weekly, the LTTE's political adviser, Anton Balasingham, slammed Colombo for not implementing some of the provisions in the ceasefire agreement as quickly as the LTTE would like, and said it was acting under the "hawkish" influence of the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga. "We are disappointed over the lack of concern and inclination on the part of the Sri Lankan Government in the process of de-escalation and stabilisation of peace, which is seriously undermining the confidence of our people in the peace process," the London-based Mr. Balasingham told the publication.

His statements came as several countries and agencies of the United Nations, collectively known as the Sri Lanka Development Forum, began a two-day meeting at which it is hoped they will pledge financial assistance for the economic recovery of the country, including aid for the reconstruction and rehabilitation in the war-ravaged north-east.

The stability of the peace process would be one of the key criteria the donors will consider before they commit money. Japan is Sri Lanka's biggest donor country, followed by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

In its editorial, the same publication, known for its accurate reflection of the LTTE's views, accused the Sri Lankan Prime

Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, of "duplicity" for telling the international community during a tour of Europe last week that was all well with the peace process in order to attract financial aid, while the actuality was different. "Mr. Wickremesinghe would, of course, be expected to seek any financial assistance available for his shattered economy. But, from a Tamil perspective, it his willingness to dupe the international community with regards something as important as the state of the peace process that rings alarm bells," it said.

The ceasefire agreement promised the LTTE a withdrawal of armed forces from public buildings, schools and temples in the north-east.

Though the process has begun and the Government still has more than a month under the terms of the accord for a complete withdrawal, Mr. Balasingham has alleged "non-implementation" in this respect.

Holding Ms. Kumaratunga, also the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, responsible for the "non-cooperation" by the troops, Mr. Balasingham said the process could be "rejuvenated" only when this provision was implemented in full.

The military should also withdraw barriers and checkpoints in the urban centres of the north-east and remove all the restrictions on day and night fishing in the north-eastern waters, keeping them only in restricted areas around naval bases, he said.

But the main reason for the LTTE ire is that the Government no longer appears to be playing ball with it on the question of an interim administration for the north-east.

The Tigers want direct talks on this, but Mr. Wickremesinghe recently said that the

agenda for the talks would have to include "core" political issues as well, echoing the views of Ms. Kumaratunga, with whom his Government is in co-habitation.

The talks were first to be held in May and then in June, but with the widening gap in the perceptions of the two sides, there are no certain dates any more.

In an apparent bid to force the issue, the Government said it was prepared to consider the LTTE demand for its legalisation when it had firm dates for talks, but that has only provoked the LTTE further.

Mr. Balasingham described the Sri Lankan position on the interim administration and the ban as a shift away from Mr. Wickremesinghe's earlier promises and attributed it to Ms. Kumaratunga's intervention.

"We are deeply disappointed to note that Mr. Wickremesinghe is backtracking on the crucial issues of de-proscription and interim administration. President Kumaratunga may have prevailed upon Ranil to take a hardline attitude towards the LTTE," Mr. Balasingham said.

Ms. Kumaratunga's misguided strategy of imposing unacceptable pre-conditions had taken the country to the brink of economic disaster when her People's Alliance was in power, and had slowed down the peace process to an "impasse," he alleged.

Meanwhile, Mr. Wickremesinghe today met parliamentarians of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and is reported to have assured them that the Government would ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire by the given deadline of 160 days, and that the LTTE would be legalised before the peace talks.

Lanka unveils

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, MAY 30

OUTLINING a firm negotiation strategy, Sri Lanka on Thursday said it would consider removal of ban on the LTTE only if the latter agreed to a date for commencement of direct talks, and insist on inclusion of core issues in the peace talks agenda.

"The government is prepared to give its mind to the issue (of lifting the ban), but only in the context of a firm date for talks to commence. Some action can be taken when there is a clear date on which talks will begin," Cabinet spokesman G.L. Peiris told re-

porters here.

The Tigers have laid down description as a pre-condition for entering into face-to-face negotiations, which may take place in late June or early July in Thailand.

This is the first time that the government has clearly linked the LTTE's demand for pre-talks legitimisation with a date for talks.

Peiris said Norwegian peace facilitators were working on finalising dates and preparing an agenda for talks, and confirmed that the government wanted the entire gamut of issues relating to the resolution of the conflict to be included in the agenda.

"The entire range of issues should be included; of course, pri-

peace talks strategy

egy is to include "core issues" also on the agenda now itself, so that negotiations are not given up after an interim administration is established for the north and east.

Peiris said there were areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence, and that the discussions on dates for the talks and their agenda were an ongoing process.

"Government still expected the talks to take place late, in June or early July and several issues that stand in the way were being sorted out," Peiris said, adding "the issues figured during the long discussions that a Norwegian peace delegation had with the government earlier this week".



Tamil residents pay taxes to LTTE rebels. Reuters file

ority should be given to some issues, and within that range, we will select matters to be taken up early, and others that can be taken up at a later stage," he said. The government's negotiation strat-

Interim administration not for now: Chandrika

By Nirupama Subramanian

110-11 29/5 S. Lanka

COLOMBO, MAY 28. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has told Norway that an interim administration for the north-east was not advisable till a final political solution to the ethnic conflict had been worked out.

A statement from the President's Secretariat said Ms. Kumaratunga had made known this view to the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, when he called on her on Monday. Reiterating her continued support to the peace process, Ms. Kumaratunga told Mr. Helgesen that the agenda for the upcoming talks between the Government and the LTTE should include core political issues relating to the future of the northeast.

Ms. Kumaratunga said an interim administration should be discussed in the context of these issues and should not be imple-

mented till these were settled.

The President told Norway that any suggestions she might make on the agenda were intended to strengthen the process and its final outcome in the larger interests of the country. The former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, participated in the discussions.

Also present at the meeting were the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jon Westborg, and Eric Solheim, a prominent member of the facilitating team.

The Norwegian team was scheduled to meet the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, who is on an official visit to Europe, in London today.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, who addressed a joint press conference with the EU chief, Romano Prodi, in Brussels on Monday, said talks with the LTTE would take place in the last week of June.

THE HINDU

4 3 MAY 2002

LTTE, Colombo reiterate commitment to peace process

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 22. The Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE appeared to be making a concerted bid to weather a recent shaky patch in the ceasefire, with the two sides reiterating their commitment and support to the peace process at their first direct meeting in seven years on Tuesday.

In a move that was apparently a confidence-building exercise by the Government, Bernard Goonetilleke, the seniormost official in charge of the peace process, flew to LTTE-held Killinochchi yesterday for a meeting with the LTTE political wing leader, S.P. Thamilselvam.

The meeting followed a particularly bad period for the three-month old ceasefire during which the LTTE and the Government several times accused each other of violating the truce.

The LTTE had also expressed its unhappiness at what it described as the "slowing down" of the process and questioned whether peace talks, which the Government had said would be held in June in Thailand, could take place against such a background.

Officials described Tuesday's meeting as "constructive" and "cordial".

A statement from the Government Peace Secretariat, which Mr. Goonetilleke heads, said to-

day that the two sides discussed issues relating to the A 9 highway that runs through LTTE-controlled territory and which was reopened recently.

They also discussed the withdrawal of the armed forces from public buildings in the north-east including schools and temples.

The LTTE complaint that it was not being allowed by the Sri Lankan Navy to carry out political work in the islets off Jaffna was also discussed.

A Norwegian diplomat was present at the meeting as an observer. According to the statement, Mr. Thamilselvam even certified the victory of the ruling United National Front in the elections held to 17 local councils as "a clear demonstration" of the support to the policies initiated by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, to fast-track the peace process.

The statement also projected the LTTE demand that the Government show the "same enthusiasm" in carrying forward the peace process as it did when it was launched last December.

"Mr. Goonetilleke assured Mr. Thamilselvam that the Government would continue to do its utmost to achieve a lasting peace. Mr. Thamilselvam reciprocated by assuring continued support of the LTTE to the peace process," it stated.

23/5
HP-12

Govt, Tigers in direct talks

Colombo, May 21 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's top government official for the peace process flew north into rebel-held territory today for talks with Tamil Tiger leaders, the first such face-to-face meeting between the two sides in seven years.

The visit by Bernard Gunatillake, the head of the Peace Secretariat, the government's body for handling the peace process, was to try to resolve a dispute over bus services through the war zone as agreed to in a Norwegian-brokered truce.

"He went to Wannai and came back," an official said in Colombo. Wannai is in the north of the main island, just below the Jaffna peninsula.

"The helicopter came from Kilinochchi," a military official said, referring to the political base of the LTTE.

It was the first known direct meeting between a senior government official and the rebels, fighting since 1983 for a separate Tamil state in the north and east of the island, since the last peace talks ended in renewed bloodshed in 1995.

More than 64,000 people have died, hundreds of thousands have been turned into refugees and the island's economy seen a lid slammed on growth because of the fighting between the LTTE and majority Sinhalese government.

Gunatillake's one-day trip also comes as the government and LTTE are trying to hammer out an agenda for talks expected to be held at the end of next month in Thailand. Norway has been acting as a go-between to bring the two sides to the negotiating table, and a Norwegian em-

Top official flies to Wannai for first meeting in seven years

bassy official was also seen getting off the helicopter at the army base in Colombo.

"The Norwegian was there only as an observer," said one official. At least one other official from the Peace Secretariat also made the trip but it was not known what other matters were discussed besides the dispute

over the A-9 highway.

"It was mostly about A-9, but not only," one official said.

The government complained last month that the guerrillas had violated the truce signed in February by refusing to allow buses on the northern A-9 highway, which runs through a swathe of rebel territory.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who took power in December after his party won elections on a pro-peace platform, has called the peace process Sri Lanka's best chance for peace after four previous peace bids all ended in renewed bloodshed.

The raised hopes have already filtered down to the grassroots, with the UN reporting today that more than 71,000 Tamil refugees from the war have returned home this year.

7-14 Tigers' Crawl ^{MS}

The delaying of the peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suggests that there are more bridges to cross before the two sides can come to the negotiating table. This dragging of the process is in sharp contrast to the upbeat mood when the decks were being cleared for talks with the aid of the Norwegians. Once the ceasefire agreement was formalised between the LTTE and the government, there was a flurry of activity and the expectation was that events would move rapidly — that even if the Tigers could not be tamed, at least they could be made to talk. In fact, originally the government had announced talks in the second week of May. Now, prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has been quoted as saying that the date for talks would be fixed after May 24 which is the three-month deadline for implementation of most provisions in the ceasefire agreement. Now there are indications from the Tigers' camp that commencement of direct talks depends on the Sri Lankan government meeting every provision of the ceasefire pact and lifting the 1998 ban on the LTTE. In fact, the Tigers have gone so far as to convey that "negotiations are clearly not anticipated in the immediate future".

However, it remains to be seen whether this is a tactic to put off talks indefinitely or merely a pressure tactic to hasten the deproscription of the LTTE. Even prior to this development the LTTE had cautioned against forcing the pace of progress towards talks, though neither the Norwegian peace-brokers nor Colombo could be held back by this stance. Indeed, they felt vindicated when LTTE supremo V Prabhakaran came out of the jungles to face the international media. Even after that, if there was any uncertainty of delay or disruption, it pertained to the power struggle between president Chandrika Kumaratunga and prime minister Wickremesinghe and their divergent approaches to finding a solution to the conflict. Questions such as whether New Delhi would throw a spanner in the works because of the request for extradition of Mr Prabhakaran or because of the need for the LTTE negotiator to transit through India, were assumed to be not insurmountable hurdles. After all this, should the LTTE try to stall the talks, they might begin losing the mileage gained so far.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 MAY 2002

The return of normalcy to Sri Lanka is of deep interest to India

Architect of violence

J.N. DIXIT

S. Lanka
1-12

19/5

The press conference with the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, at Kilinochi in north-central Sri Lanka on April 10 is a watershed in the ongoing discussions for the restoration of normalcy in Sri Lanka. The extent of international media attention on the event confirms its importance. Prabhakaran has followed up his press conference by attending to another critical dimension for a possible solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. He has held detailed discussions with the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Rauff Hakeem, on April 13 and signed an agreement with it, assuring him of the LTTE's support for the security and welfare of Muslims in the eastern provinces of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amperai, also promising that he will facilitate the return of nearly 100,000 Muslims to Jaffna.

There are basic questions affecting Sri Lanka to which there are no clear answers yet. Is Prabhakaran willing to allow the central government in Sri Lanka to retain jurisdiction over defence and foreign affairs, affecting the proposed Tamil homeland? To what extent is the Sri Lankan government willing to delegate financial powers and authority to maintain law and order to the proposed Tamil government in the northeastern provinces? Is the establishment of the interim government in the northeast considered the first step by Prabhakaran towards achieving the objective of an independent Tamil state? Is Prabhakaran willing to give up his armed struggle? Events in late April indicate that this is not the case. He continues to import arms.

The return of normalcy and the restoration of stability in Sri Lanka through the resolution of the ethnic confrontation between the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese is a matter of deep interest to India, both in terms of India's security and internal unity (in the context of the emotional links between Tamil citizens of India in Tamil Nadu and the Tamils in Sri Lanka).

The twin motivations of Prabhakaran's press conference were, first, to gain legitimacy as a political leader, breaking out of the confines of international perceptions of him and of his organization as a terrorist phenomenon; and second, he wished to utilize the press conference to convey to the international community and to the Sri Lankan government the general terms of reference of his negotiating stance, if and when bilateral discussions start between him and Sri Lanka in Thailand.

The orientation of his policies as expressed during the press conference merit analytical description. First, he has made the LTTE's participation in the negotiations with the Sri Lankan government in Thailand conditional to the government lifting the ban on

the LTTE. He also stated that he would not personally participate in these negotiations if and when they take place. He has not withdrawn his demand for eelam, a separate independent state in Sri Lanka. He has demanded the right to self-determination and the delegation of power to the Sri Lankan Tamils and implied that his aim in the establishment of an interim government for the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka would be to make it the first

step towards achieving eelam. While confirming his adherence to a ceasefire, he has not agreed to give up arms. He made the extraordinary suggestion that India should resume an active role in finding a solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic problem. He was indifferent to the death of Rajiv Gandhi and obfuscatory about his responsibility and role in that violent conspiracy. His political stance as articulated by his adviser, Anton Balasingham, is that he is negotiating with the prime minister, Ranil Wickeremesinghe, not as a leader of a militant secessionist group but as *de facto* head of the political identity of eelam.



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Balasingham said during the press conference that Prabhakaran is both the prime minister and the president of eelam. The overall conclusion one reaches is that there is no basic change in the substantive negotiating position of the LTTE since it pulled back from the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement to resolve the ethnic problem in July 1987. Wickeremesinghe has been conciliatory in his reaction to the press conference, welcoming Prabhakaran's remarks as encouraging and positive.

The government of India has announced a three-point policy: India would be supportive of the negotia-

tions and the peace process; India would not mediate or play any direct role in these negotiations, and third, India had no intention of lifting the ban on the LTTE or the indictment of Prabhakaran as the leading figure in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination conspiracy.

What then should the Indian approach be towards the emerging negotiation scenario? India must welcome any initiative which can lead to a ra-

Neither Sri Lanka nor Prabhakaran has so far been willing to work purposefully towards mutually acceptable compromises

tional and just solution to the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka through peaceful processes, safeguarding Sri Lankan unity and responsive to the legitimate aspirations of Sri Lankan Tamils. Such a process should not legitimize terrorism and leaders of terrorist groups.

In this context, the ceasefire brokered between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government by Norwegian authorities is a positive development which could be the first step towards negotiations between the Tamils and the government, to forge solutions to the ethnic problem. India must keep in mind the fact that regardless of what Prabhakaran said in his press interview, there is no indication from his side that he will dilute his demand for

eelam, thus breaking away from Sri Lankan territory.

Equally, there is no signal from the government that it would fulfil the basic demands of Sri Lankan Tamils regarding the merger of the northern and eastern provinces as a Tamil homeland, nor are there any clear indications about devolution of powers to the proposed Tamil provincial authority. These are extremely thorny problems. We should, therefore, watch over the progress and details of the impending negotiations.

Neither the government nor the LTTE has been able to evolve and agree upon a set of solutions better than the one which the former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, negotiated in 1987 and to which both sides had agreed. It was unfortunate that both the LTTE and the government pulled back from their commitment on the 1987 agreement which resulted in the prolonged violence.

Prabhakaran's attempt to legitimize his political status in public opinion and with the international community, and to prevent his organization being labelled as a terrorist organization cannot obfuscate the fact that the LTTE is so, and Prabhakaran is the architect of its violent policies. The LTTE is designated as a terrorist organization by various governments. It is banned in India. Prabhakaran is a proclaimed offender in India's eyes, responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, who genuinely tried to find a just solution to the ethnic problem.

Whatever the expectations may be from the proposed negotiations between the LTTE and the government, our national experience over the last two decades has been that neither the Sri Lankan side nor Prabhakaran is so far willing to work purposefully towards mutually acceptable compromises. Nor is there any guarantee that Prabhakaran will keep to his commitments, given the history of his not fulfilling them more than once in the past. India must therefore view the forthcoming negotiations with caution and limited optimism.

If his declared objective of an eelam in Sri Lanka is still a point which he holds on to, it obviously threatens the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. If this is the context which cannot be ruled out, the negotiations at best would be a purely tactical exercise on the part of Prabhakaran and the government, and at worst it would become a cosmetic farce.

It is also disappointing that the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government has not been in touch with moderate Tamil political forces in Sri Lanka, enabling them to become a more active and effective factor in the forthcoming negotiations. Nor has the Vajpayee government, despite having discussions with the prime minister of Sri Lanka, been able to suggest to Sri Lanka that it must show a clear responsiveness to Tamil aspirations, if it wishes this fresh round of negotiations with the Tamils to succeed.

The author is former secretary of India

HEALTHY SIGNALS

But Constant Vigil Needed For Peace In Sri Lanka

By PARMANAND

Sri Lanka has been enjoying peace since December last year. Indeed, peace has become a rare phenomenon in the state since August 1983, when ethnic war saw some 65,000 people losing their lives. Johan Galtung, Professor of Peace, University of Hawaii, writes in *The Oxford Companion To Politics Of The World* (2001) that the term "peace" can be "interpreted narrowly as the absence of warfare, i.e., organised violence, between groups defined by country, nation (culture, ethnicity), race, class, or ideology".

Focusing on world peace, Galtung says: "International or external peace is the absence of external wars: inter-country, inter-state, or international (in the sense of intercultural)". Commenting on internal peace, the noted scholar observes: "Social or internal peace is the absence of internal wars: ethnic, racial, class, or ideological groups challenging the central government, or such groups challenging each other..."

Changed international milieu

Ever since its independence, Ceylon has been fortunate enough not to face any external or international war, like other South Asian states — India and Pakistan. But it was not so lucky on the domestic front and, especially since 1983, the island has witnessed almost all dimensions of internal war.

The ethnic war in Sri Lanka since 1983 had been led mainly by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The Sri Lankan Tamils — for whose empowerment and welfare the LTTE is claiming to be fighting — constitute about 13 per cent of the country's population. These Tamils mainly live in the northern and eastern parts of the country. The other group of Tamils in Sri Lanka is that of plantation Tamils, who are also called Indian Tamils. Economically, educationally and socially, they are behind the Sri Lankan Tamils. They constitute about six per cent of the island's population.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the LTTE not only kept fighting against the Sri Lankan state — of course with varying intensity — but also saw to it that other Tamil fighting groups like the Eelam People's Liberation Front, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, the People's Organisation of Tamil Eelam, the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students and the Eelam People's Democratic Party were either completely finished or marginalised. The LTTE is also said to be responsible for assassinating several important leaders of the Tamil United Liberation Front, most importantly its General Secretary, Appapillai Amirthalingam. Significantly,

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the TULF had secured 17 seats in a 166-member Sri Lankan parliament in 1977 on the slogan of more powers to the people of the north and the east.

The LTTE is, significantly, also held responsible for assassinating several Sinhalese leaders, including President Ranasinghe Premadasa — with whom it sympathised on social grounds, Minister of state for Defence, Ranjan Wijeratne, and presidential candidate of the UNP,

word stressing the importance of the LTTE as the sole articulator of the Sri Lankan Tamils. More often than not, the People's Alliance and particularly its leader, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, have been alleging clandestine relationships between the LTTE and the UNP. But it should not be forgotten that the LTTE had also helped the PA at several points, and between October 1994 and April 1995, four rounds of talks



Gamini Dissanayake. It is also held responsible for the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991.

If the LTTE has been insisting on peace and negotiations, it is not because it has suddenly developed love for peace or because it has been militarily weakened. After all, in July, it had proved its military power by heavily damaging the country's only international airport. The international milieu, though, changed significantly after 11 September. America's action, supported by the international community, in Afghanistan made the guerrilla organisation ponder on the implications of their well-known modus operandi and modus vivendi. The treatment meted out to the LTTE per se in the USA, Canada and the UK obviously made it sit up.

Flattering India

It was against this backdrop that the LTTE wants peace on the island. The 5 December parliamentary poll provided an opportunity to the Tigers. They established fruitful contacts with the United National Party, which had contested the December election under the banner of the United National Front. The Tamil political parties, except for the EPDP, fighting under the banner of the Tamil National Alliance, minced no

were held between the PA government and the LTTE.

Amidst all this, the role of the Norwegian facilitators came in handy. The peace process got strengthened and hastened. Sri Lankans of all hues are experiencing peace since December last year. It has been further strengthened after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on 22 February.

Ever since the LTTE's modus operandi surfaced in 1983, it has remained the most unpredictable variable in Sri Lanka's politics. Time was when the largest section of the Sri Lankan Tamils would consider this organisation to be its redeemer.

But it is no longer the case. The treatment meted out to parliamentary parties under the banner of the TNA by the LTTE on the eve of Pirabhakaran's famous 10 April press conference has left much to be desired. True, there is a silver lining in Pirabhakaran's promise to the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress regarding the rehabilitation of Muslims who had been driven away by the LTTE.

On the other hand, the University Teachers for Human Rights — which was at one point of time quite sympathetic towards the LTTE — has accused the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission of being "powerless" in executing Article 2 of the peace agreement, under which the par-

ties are supposed to, under international law, abstain from hostile acts against the civilians, which include intimidation, abduction, torture harassment and extortion. In truth, the UTHR has accused the SLMM of "bending" to the LTTE's will.

Even if unwittingly, India has become a significant factor in the ongoing debates and discussions. India, indeed, appears to be in an enviable position. In his 10 April press conference, LTTE supremo V Pirabhakaran described India as "regional superpower", as also "the fatherland" of the Sri Lankan Tamils. On the other hand, PA leader and island President Chandrika Kumaratunga, and UNF leader and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe seem to be vying with each other to keep India informed of various developments on the peace process front.

And, all this is happening when India seems to be in no mood to sign a Rajiv Gandhi - JR Jayewardene type peace accord. In truth, by showing little interest in the goings-on on the island, it has succeeded in creating interest of all significant parties in itself. It is no mean achievement — and without even asking for it! No less significantly, no matter what MDMK leader Vaiko has to say in India or what the TULF leader Nathan says in Sri Lanka, the Tigers seem to have few sympathisers in Tamil Nadu today.

Down but not out

Though Atal Behari Vajpayee has promised a sympathetic consideration to a request — if and when it comes — by the LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham for medical treatment in India, Miss Jayalalitha has rightly said that there are other places in the world for such treatment. By keeping a distance from the happenings in Sri Lanka, the South Asian core state has given a good account of itself. If this, by any chance, results in the increasing influence of other intrusive powers in the island, India will not be a loser. Norwegian facilitators know this well, and harp on India's importance.

The SLMM has stated that it has received 200 complaints on ceasefire violations. This should indicate that the LTTE may be down but not out. If others are watching it, too, is ensuring that it does not become very weak. Wickremesinghe is rightly stressing that he has got a mandate for peace. But so had Chandrika in 1994 — not only in the parliamentary but also in the presidential poll. True, Ranil is serious, but in no hurry, like Chandrika. He seems to have learnt from the past.

The Sri Lankan state is also doing everything to enlarge, modernise and strengthen its army and intelligence. At this point of time, it should be a good sign for the LTTE.

S Lanka

Bigger role sought for Chandrika in peace process

HD-12

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By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 3. After months of deliberation, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) today came out with a policy statement on the ongoing peace process, demanding a bigger role for its leader and the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The SLFP, which is the main constituent of the opposition People's Alliance (PA), also made it clear that it was against an interim administration in the northeast before a final solution to the ethnic conflict was arrived at.

The 12-page document, signed by Maithripala Sirisena, general secretary of the SLFP, said that the party supported a negotiated settlement and would not sabotage the peace process in the "destructive" way the now-ruling United National Party (UNP) had opposed its peace efforts. But it listed conditions that it wanted met in return for its continued cooperation. Chief among these was that the Government must give the President a bigger role in the process by recognising that she was the "head of state, head

of the executive and the Government, head of the Cabinet, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and the leader of the SLFP and the PA."

The statement came as the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, speaking at a function to mark the World Press Freedom Day, appealed for a move away from confrontational politics in the interests of building a pluralist society.

The SLFP asked the Government to practice what it preached by adopting a united approach to the peace process. "As the LTTE has pronounced time and again, for a sustainable solution to be found to the ethnic problem it is essential that there should be agreement between the two main parties and at least consultation with other parties," the statement pointed out. It asked for the setting-up of a standing committee under the joint leadership of the President and the Prime Minister to guide the peace process.

It also called for an immediate stop to "the harassment, suppression, intimidation and unjustified incarceration" of its workers and supporters by the

ruling party, which it claimed had been going on "unabated" since the December 2001 parliamentary election. With the Thailand peace talks expected to focus on the setting-up of an interim administration in northeast Sri Lanka, the SLFP wanted that the LTTE be persuaded to talk with the Government on "core issues for a lasting political settlement".

"We oppose talks on the formation of an interim administration before (a final settlement). An interim administration should be talked about and formed only after reaching a final settlement of the problems of the minorities," the statement emphasised. It warned against the setting up of a one-party rule by the LTTE in the northeast, saying this could create a de facto separate state. On the LTTE's insistence that it should be legalised before talks — a demand that the Government is believed to be considering — the SLFP said this should be done only after talks commenced and progressed satisfactorily.

But it stopped short of insisting that the ban must not be lifted.

THE HINDU

11 MAY 2004

Weapons seized from three LTTE boats

By Nirupama Subramanian

40-12
28/4

COLOMBO, APRIL 25. Rocket-launchers, machine guns and grenades were among the arms and ammunition found in three LTTE boats apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy off the eastern coast of Trincomalee on Wednesday. The Government, which has complained that the movement of these boats and their cargo constituted a ceasefire violation by the LTTE, is awaiting a verdict on the incident from the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), officials said.

One of the three boats was a logistics or supply boat, while the other two were attack craft. The boats were found carrying rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns, assault rifles, grenades, sniper weapons, mortars and several boxes of ammunition concealed under plastic sheeting. There were 40 LTTE cadres in the three boats including the leader of the LTTE sea wing, Thikkam. They offered no resistance to the Sri Lankan Navy, which stopped them eight nautical miles south of Trincomalee.

The incident, which took place as the ceasefire entered its third month, was the first time the February truce accord was tested at sea. When the agreement was being drafted, in the

light of the LTTE's continued weapons acquisition activities, the Government had wanted a specific clause that would give its Navy the right to intercept LTTE boats. Such a clause did not find place in the final agreement, but the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, gave an assurance that the Sri Lankan armed forces retained the right to protect the country's territorial integrity and the right to intercept illegal movement of arms by land or sea. As the first close call for the ceasefire was being played out in the high seas, Navy officials on the scene were in constant touch with the high command in Colombo and Defence Ministry officials throughout the two hours that it lasted. Later, the Navy handed over the boats, the passengers and the cargo to the ceasefire monitors based in Trincomalee. It is learnt that the SLMM arranged for the safe passage of the LTTE cadres to a point on the Batticaloa coast, further south. Officials said they were expecting a ruling by the SLMM on the incident on Friday.

Meanwhile, pressure is growing on the monitoring mission to act on civilian complaints against the LTTE, especially in the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Ampara. The SLMM recently said it had received only one complaint that could be

deemed a ceasefire violation. But a newly formed group, calling itself the Batticaloa-Ampara Civil Liberties Association (BACLA), has written to the SLMM and to the Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka complaining that the LTTE was continuing its extortion activities unabated in the region. "The LTTE says that the Tamil people who have not paid any money for several years because they were living in Government areas in the past must now pay their dues with penalties for not paying earlier," the complaint, which was reproduced in the daily *Island* today, said. According to BACLA, the LTTE, which earlier sent extortion notes from areas in Batticaloa controlled by it, was now sending its cadres directly to people's homes in Government areas to threaten them or issue summons.

Under the ceasefire agreement, the LTTE has been allowed to open a political office in the Government-controlled areas of Batticaloa and Ampara. According to BACLA, this has enabled LTTE cadres to move about freely and spread dread among civilians across the two districts. Unable to fight, people are striking deals with it to pay up. Those who refuse are abducted and held till their family members pay the ransom demanded.

200?

THE HINDU

Don't court LTTE, bargain hard: Chandrika to Ranil

P K Balachandran
Colombo, April 17

THE SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has asked the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government to negotiate "hard" with the LTTE and not "court" them or "flirt" with them as it seems to be doing now.

The Presidents' spokesman Harim Peiris said that in its dealings with the LTTE, the Government was ignoring several key issues which ought to be addressed. He said that Kumaratunga would soon write a confidential letter to Wickremesinghe "advising, guiding and counselling" him in this matter.

Giving examples of some glaring shortcomings in the Government's approach, Peiris said that it would be wrong to hand over the interim administration of the North-east province entirely to the LTTE. The administration should reflect the plurality of interests in the area, its multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. There should also be guarantees for the maintenance of democracy and human rights with a monitoring mechanism, given the fact that there had been violations of rights like extortion and child re-

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cruitment by the LTTE even after signing of the MoU with the Government. "The Government should meet the requirements of the Tamil people and not just the LTTE's," Peiris said.

The President was "fully committed" to the current peace process and was "hopeful" if not "optimistic" about its success of the peace process. But she was against any bid by the Government to turn any deal on an interim administration into a de facto permanent settlement.

According to her, the 1997 draft devolution package should be the starting point for talks, because the main Tamil political party, Tamil United Liberation Front, had supported it in Parliament.

On the Government's plan to lift the ban on the Tigers ahead of the talks in May-June, Peiris said that the President felt that while ideally the ban should be lifted only upon satisfactory progress in the talks, she would not be "dogmatic" on the issue. The Government could however link de-proscription to guarantees on the maintenance of human rights, she said.

Kumaratunga, who would be in New Delhi at the end of this week to deliver the first Madhavrao



CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGA

Scindia Memorial Lecture on "Democracy and Conflict Resolution", would be meeting President K R Narayanan, Prime Minister A B Vajpayee, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi and former Prime Minister I K Gujral.

Peiris said that he could not say what they would discuss, but political observers said that Kumaratunga would definitely use the opportunity to brief the Indian leadership on her concerns regarding the Wickremesinghe Government's handling of the peace process.

LTTE'S GOAL-II

Any Political Settlement Should Ensure Basic Human Rights

By SAM RAJAPPA

S. Rajappa
ST-A
16/4

The ceasefire agreement scripted by the Norwegians and effective from 24 February prohibits assassinations, abductions, suicide missions, and destruction of military and civilian property. It grants the LTTE cadres freedom of movement in areas of the North-East controlled by government forces. The agreement is silent on child conscription by LTTE. Tamil militant organisations opposed to the LTTE have been disarmed and deprived of their political rights which paves the way for a one-party dictatorship, not something the Tamils want. What is left of the non-militant Tamil United Liberation Front after its leaders, including Appapillai Amirthalingam, Yogeswaran, Neelan Thiruchelvam, among others, have been gunned down by the LTTE, and the front has accepted the hegemony of the militant group for fear of being liquidated.

Sitting ducks

The Eelam People's Democratic Party, having two members and the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam with one member in Parliament, have been reduced to the status of "Tamil paramilitary groups" by the agreement. Douglas Devananda, leader of the EPDP who survived two assassination attempts by the LTTE, was a minister in the People's Alliance government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. By stripping them of their weapons, these groups are sitting ducks for the LTTE.

Clause 1.8 of the agreement deprives these groups of their fundamental right to engage in democratic political activities. Instead, all powers regarding the Tamils vest in the banned LTTE, a fascist organisation. Pirabhakaran has dismissed them as mere mercenaries. From the time of the 1985 Thimpu talks between the Sri Lanka government and Tamil groups, including militants, held under the auspices of India, the LTTE has been maintaining that in order to find a lasting solution to the ethnic problem, Colombo should recognise the following four principles:

- i) Recognition of Tamils of Sri Lanka as a nation.
- ii) Recognition of an identified homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

iii) Recognition of the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation.

iv) Recognition of the right to citizenship and the fundamental rights of all Tamils who look upon Sri Lanka as their country.

In talks with the earlier UNP government of Premadasa in the early nineties or with Kumaratunga in the mid-nineties, the LTTE had not compromised on these principles. Even the Norway facilitated

higher body, meaning the government in Colombo. A power so devolved can always be taken back. And therein lies the crux of the problem.

A way out would be a federal constitution wherein the Tamils could share power with the Sinhalas as equal citizens. Centralised unitary states work well only in homogenous societies. In Sri Lanka, Tamils have lived from ancient times within relatively well-defined geographi-



talks about to begin in Thailand, the LTTE, while conceding that it was prepared to settle for a Tamil homeland within the framework of Sri Lanka, has not given any indication of its willingness to deviate from these principles.

Devolution and federalism

Devolution of power to the Tamil majority North-Eastern province within the confines of unitary Sri Lanka is not acceptable to the LTTE because devolution implies power devolving from a

cal boundaries in the north and east. They have an ancient heritage, a vibrant culture and a living language, tracing its origins to more than 2500 years back. Tamil and Sinhala were brought under one government for the first time by the British in 1833. After their departure in 1948, the Sinhala dominated governments in Colombo have given cause to the Tamils for dissatisfaction.

The conflict has already claimed the lives of more than 20,000 personnel of the Sri Lankan Armed forces. Tamils have suffered a loss of about 65,000

people in the last two decades. The LTTE has not succeeded in its objective of setting up a separate Eelam comprising the Northern and the Eastern provinces. Likewise, the armed forces have not been able to eliminate the LTTE. The Sri Lanka government had spent a total of Rs 500 billion on the war during the last 19 years. For the first time in three decades, the country's economy is set to show a zero or even a negative growth.

The people have given a clear mandate for peace and reconciliation to the UN and Prime Minister Wickramasinghe has promised to act decisively to bring the ethnic crisis to an end. But the Wickramasinghe government's recognition of the LTTE as the sole representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils does not augur well for the linguistic minority community. Pirabhakaran or his group has never contested a direct election so far. Its record in human rights is dismal. There is no scope for the slightest dissent within the organisation.

Indefensible discrimination

Mahathya, its top-most military commander, was summarily executed on the unsubstantiated charge of being in touch with Raw. Such is the terror practiced by the LTTE. Conscription of young boys and girls is still in vogue. Jaffna University, one time hotbed of LTTE activities, is mortally afraid of the Wickramasinghe government handing over the administration of the North-Eastern province to the militant group pending a final settlement.

Article 1.13 of the ceasefire agreement gives the LTTE "extensive freedom of movement for political work" in government-controlled areas in the province but other Tamil political parties are denied such freedom. In a democracy, such discrimination is indefensible. Any political settlement should ensure the basic human rights of not only the LTTE and its supporters but all the people residing in the North-Eastern province as in the other seven provinces of Sri Lanka.

Finally beware of Pirabhakaran. He is a fanatic and such men are dangerous.

(Concluded)

LTTE'S GOAL-I

Pirabhakaran Clarifies Stand On Eelam

By SAM RAJAPPA

*55-8
15/4
S. Lanka*

The much awaited press conference of the LTTE supremo, Velupillai Pirabhakaran, held in Killinochchi in Northern Sri Lanka on 10 April, does not suggest a change of heart. Accused number one in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case and declared a proclaimed offender by the Special Investigation Team of the CBI, and with an Interpol Red Corner alert against him, Pirabhakaran appeared in full glare of the world media, including a large contingent from India. India could not ask for his extradition simply because his safety has been guaranteed by the Sri Lanka government to facilitate talks. His ethnic cleansing of Jaffna peninsula by chasing out its 100,000-odd Muslims may have endeared him to the BJP government.

Nothing short of independence

America's "global war" on terrorism following the 11 September Al Qaeda suicide attacks in New York City and Washington DC, did have its impact on the LTTE. Its fund raising activities in the West suffered a sharp decline and supply of arms started drying up. It was under these circumstances that the people of Sri Lanka clutched at the peace agenda of the United National Party and voted it to power last December. Under Norwegian mediation, the LTTE declared an unilateral ceasefire as soon as the new government of Ranil Wickramasinghe took charge in Colombo and followed it up with a ceasefire agreement with the government on 22 February.

Talks on transferring power in the Northern and Eastern provinces to the LTTE as an interim arrangement, pending final settlement of the ethnic crisis, are scheduled to begin in Thailand in May. The Norwegians mediators had gone public that the LTTE was agreeable to a solution short of Eelam and within

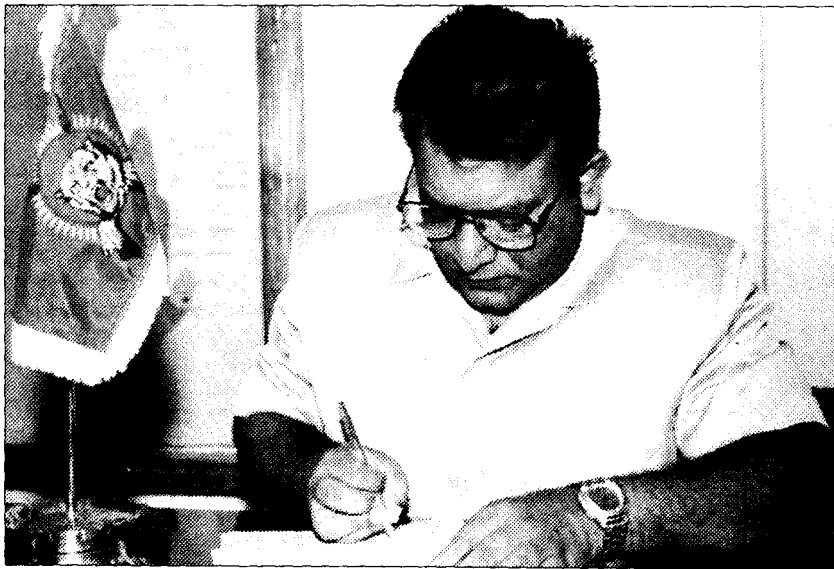
The author, a veteran journalist who retired from The Statesman, is based in Chennai.

the framework of united Sri Lanka. Pirabhakaran, however, made it clear at his press conference that he had not gone back on LTTE's demand for a separate Eelam and his cadres could kill him if he compromised.

LTTE has responsibilities

LTTE opted for the ceasefire agreement and continues to abide by it because it could not stand up to American President George Bush's global war on terrorism. The USA has no illusions

from a cessation of hostilities to a lasting peace. The US understands that both sides, not just the LTTE, have responsibilities under the terms of the ceasefire accord. In the current international context, however, in which terrorism is being condemned in more and more countries, the LTTE should be especially vigilant about observing the terms of the ceasefire accord. If it does not, it will increase its international isolation and do harm to the group it claims to represent, Sri Lanka's Tamils,



about the LTTE's commitment to peace. Its embassy in Colombo, which has been monitoring LTTE activities since the ceasefire came into effect, said in a statement: "We have credible information that the LTTE is engaged in activities that could jeopardise the indefinite ceasefire accord reached with the Sri Lanka government. Continued smuggling of weapons by the LTTE could undermine the trust needed to move

who earnestly want an end to the war". The statement also warned that unless the LTTE ended its reliance on terrorism and accepted that an independent Eelam was both unobtainable and unnecessary, and honoured democratic and human rights norms, the USA would respond positively.

There is hardly anything for the LTTE to discuss with the government to resolve the ethnic crisis. All subjects under the

sun affecting Tamils have already been discussed threadbare. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957 and the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1965, which provided some redress for Tamil grievances, were dishonoured due to Sinhala opposition, and the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1987 was sabotaged by the LTTE even though Pirabhakaran had given his consent to it at a meeting in New Delhi.

Unchanging objectives

While the agreement was not between the parties to the conflict, it gave Tamils their long-cherished goal of a "homeland" by merging the Northern and Eastern provinces, and its interim administration was offered to the LTTE on a platter. Returning to Jaffna, Pirabhakaran addressed a mammoth crowd of Tamils on the grounds of the Sudhumalai Amman Temple at which he declared: "My beloved and esteemed people of Tamil Eelam, today there has taken place a tremendous turn in our liberation struggle. This turn has come suddenly in a way that has stunned us, and as if it were beyond our power to influence events. Whether the consequences of this turn will be favourable to us, we have to wait and see.

I do not think that as a result of this agreement there will be a permanent solution to the problem of the Tamils. The time is not very far off when the monster of Sinhala racism will devour this agreement. I have unrelenting faith in the proposition that only a separate state of Tamil Eelam can offer a permanent solution to the problem of the Tamils. Let me make it clear to you here beyond any shadow of doubt that I will continue to fight for the objective of attaining Tamil Eelam. The forms of struggle may change, but the objective or goal of our struggle is not going to change".

(To be concluded)

Muslims strike deal with LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 14. Following the realisation that the LTTE is on its way to becoming the legitimate ruler of the north-east, the Muslims of the region have struck a deal with the group's leadership that ensures their safety and security under the coming dispensation.

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and senior Cabinet Minister, Rauff Hakeem, on Saturday announced that the LTTE had given him an undertaking that the harassment of Muslims would stop and invited back members of Sri Lanka's second largest minority.

The agreement was reached at an unprecedented meeting between Mr. Hakeem and the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, at Killinochchi in northern Sri Lanka on Saturday morning.

Implicit in the agreement is the acceptance by the Muslims of the de facto authority of the LTTE in the north-east, soon expected to be legitimised by the Sri Lankan Government through an interim administra-

tion. Describing Mr. Prabhakaran as "genuine and sincere", Mr. Hakeem said the preliminary confidence-building measures on "practical day-to-day matters" would enable the two sides to discuss the more "contentious" issues of power sharing in the proposed interim administration in the north-east later.

"I am sure from the mood and friendliness he was displaying that he meant business. The sincerity was very apparent in his attitude which was relaxed and reassuring," he told journalists after returning from the meeting by an Air Force helicopter.

Mr. Prabhakaran and Mr. Hakeem signed a joint agreement under which the two sides agreed on the SLMC's participation in the talks on the interim administration that are to be held in Thailand later this year.

"Our role in the interim administration will be discussed in Thailand and we will be a party to the negotiations," Mr. Hakeem said.

Under the agreement, the

LTTE has undertaken to stop extortions from Muslims in the east with immediate effect and promised to return paddy fields it forcibly took away from Muslims.

Mr. Hakeem said the two sides had agreed to appoint a joint committee to facilitate the return of 1,00,000 displaced Muslims who were expelled from Jaffna and the northern mainland by the LTTE 12 years ago. They are at present living in refugee camps in Puttalam. Refugees from 35 displaced villages in the east are also to return.

For Mr. Hakeem, the main victory is that the LTTE has endorsed his party as the representative of Muslims in the agreement, which should keep his rivals at bay, at least for the moment.

A day earlier, Mr. Prabhakaran met parliamentarians of the pro-LTTE four-party Tamil National Alliance (TNA). He was scheduled to meet two leaders of Sri Lanka's Indian origin estate Tamils today.

The meetings were all called by the LTTE and are assisting it

to consolidate its supremacy in the north-east prior to its taking over the north-east, as well as the leadership of the plantation Tamils in central Sri Lanka.

A statement issued by the TNA today said the ceasefire agreement between the LTTE and the Government, the proposed interim administration and a permanent political solution came up for "intensive discussion".

"The need for the LTTE and the alliance of Tamil parties to work unitedly was accepted by all participants," the statement added. Days before the meeting, the LTTE political adviser, Anton Balasingham, had said at a public meeting in the northern Sri Lanka that the Tamil parliamentarians would be given "guidance" on how to function.

Fourteen parliamentarians attended the meeting in Killinochchi. The veteran TULF leader, M. Sivasithamparam, who once narrowly escaped the LTTE bullets, did not go because of his ill health.

LTTE signs pact with Lanka Muslims

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, April 13. — LTTE leader V Pirabhakaran today signed a landmark pact with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), allowing the largest Muslim party in the island nation to be a participant in proposed talks with the government on resolving the ethnic conflict.

In the agreement with SLMC leader Mr Rauff Hakeem, the LTTE also agreed that nearly 100,000 Muslims expelled from the north by the Tigers a decade ago would be allowed to return to their original dwelling places.

The accord was hammered out at a three-hour meeting in the northern rebel-held town of Kilinochchi town, where the LTTE has its political headquarters, Mr Hakeem told reporters here this evening, immediately on his return.

"The meeting was cordial and productive. We agreed to a set of confidence-building measures, and to continue the dialogue between the LTTE and the SLMC to address basic political issues concerning us and to preserve our political and cultural rights and our identity," he said.

The upshot of the agreement is that Sri Lanka's Muslims, who constitute about eight per cent of the population and are predominantly Tamil-speaking, will be independently represented at the talks as a party, making it a tripartite negotiation structure that previously involved only the government and the LTTE.

Mr Hakeem said the question of Muslims being given due representation in the proposed interim administration for the north-east — which will be the focus of expected preliminary talks before June in Thailand —



V Pirabhakaran

would be considered at the negotiation stage.

Mr Hakeem, a Cabinet minister in the Wickremesinghe government, made it clear that he met Pirabhakaran at the latter's invitation as SLMC leader and not as a minister.

In another important confidence-building step, the LTTE agreed not to extort money from Muslims in the east — an issue that threatened to jeopardise the ongoing ceasefire last month.

Mr Hakeem said the LTTE also agreed to allow Muslims to redeem their cultivable land to resume their agricultural vocation — something they have been denied in the east for a long time.

The Prime Minister, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, has said he can discern a "change" in the LTTE and has already begun legal consultations on removing the ban on the rebel group. "There is a big metamorphosis compared with the time of LTTE's inception. The LTTE, which chased away Muslims from the north-east, saying it was their homeland, now accepts that the north-east belongs to the Muslims too," he said here yesterday, the state-run *Daily News* reported.

Mr Wickremesinghe also referred to the rebels inviting three Cabinet ministers for talks on Muslims and Indian-origin Tamils, saying it was a significant change from Pirabhakaran's position that he wouldn't talk with the government without the ban being lifted. However, seeking to remove hurdles in the way of opening preliminary talks with the LTTE by June in Thailand, the Prime Minister conferred with Attorney-General Mr KC Kamalasinghe last night on legal aspects of de-proscribing the LTTE, the *Sunday Times* said.

APR 14 2002
THE STATESMAN

Mystery man emerges

Door to peace open a crack in Sri Lanka

LTTE supremo and mystery man Velupillai Pirabhakaran's first press conference for more than a decade held no surprises. There is no expression of regret for masterminding the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi; nor is there, at least as of now, any dramatic announcement that suggests the guerrilla leader may be abandoning the maximalist demand for an independent Eelam. The manner in which he has sought Indian mediation in resolving the conflict with majority Sinhalas is interesting — he has appealed to India's status as the "regional superpower", hoping to massage egos in South Block. These are precisely the sort of aspirations, however, that got India into trouble in the first place, when Rajiv Gandhi let the IPKF loose in Sri Lanka's killing fields in 1987. Following 11 September and the growing anti-terror consensus among states, the LTTE is under pressure and hopes to use Indian recognition as the shortest route to respectability. This may strengthen its bargaining position in talks with the Sri Lankan government. To pressure New Delhi Pirabhakaran has also dealt the Tamil card — he has talked of India as the Tamils' "fatherland" and said that Tamil Eelam is the demand of all Tamil people, meaning Indian Tamils as well. Following the fiasco of New Delhi's earlier intervention Vajpayee has done well to reject the LTTE's demands.

On Rajiv Gandhi, Pirabhakaran has referred to his assassination as a "tragic incident", as if the LTTE had no role in catalysing it. The least he could have done, if he was hoping for Indian mediation in the civil war, is a formal apology or some evidence of contrition but none was forthcoming. On the main issue, some sort of autonomy deal for the Tamils, there is however evidence of some flexibility; it is possible that plumping for an independent Eelam is the opening gambit with hard bargaining to follow. Asked whether something like India's federal structure is a conceivable solution to the Tamil problem, Pirabhakaran indicated that it was not a matter the LTTE had made its mind up on yet, and that any decision could be part of the peace process, which suggests that he is not foreclosing options other than an independent homeland. That Sri Lankans are tired of the fighting and there is a genuine desire for peace in the country is attested by the "peace marathons" of runners, mostly majority Sinhalas, crossing over into rebel-held territory along what was till recently known as "the highway of death", as it is the stretch of road on which a lot of the fighting between the army and LTTE rebels had taken place. Both Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Pirabhakaran would do well to capitalise on this sentiment, and New Delhi's best option is to watch benignly from the sidelines.

THE STATESMAN

Prabakaran statements give hope: Ranil

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, APRIL 11. The Sri Lankan Government today saw hope in statements of the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabakaran, for ending the ethnic conflict without breaking up the island and promised a solution that would go beyond the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. "A political solution with internal self-determination while safeguarding territorial integrity was revealed at yesterday's press conference by the LTTE leader and Mr. Anton Balasingham. Taking the cue from this positive reaction, we must commit ourselves to trek the difficult path towards a permanent solution," the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, said today.

At Mr. Prabakaran's press conference in Killinochchi in northern Sri Lanka, his political adviser, Mr. Balasingham, said the LTTE would consider a solution that offered autonomy with the right to self-determination, a homeland and the recognition of a distinct Tamil nationality. Expanding on the right of self-determination, he said it did not automatically imply secession.

But if "internal self-determination" with self-rule did not work, and if the Sri Lankan Government continued to discriminate and repress the minority, then the LTTE would "in the last resort" use the right and opt for secession. "This points towards hope for a political solution within an undivided Sri Lanka," said Mr. Wickremesinghe, while speaking in Parliament today. The Prime Minister said the provincial councils introduced by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution following the Indo-Lanka Accord also sought to do the same, but were rejected by the Tigers then as "inadequate". "So what we should try to find is a political solution that goes beyond the Indo-Lanka Accord in an undivided Sri Lanka. Governing systems with internal self-determination are in operation in many parts of the

world," he said. The Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, reiterated this.

"The overall context of the press conference clearly demonstrates that the LTTE is willing to consider the right to self-determination and express it in a form that does not lead to separation," Mr. Peiris said. He repeated the Government position that it was willing to negotiate anything other than a separate state. "The very holding of the press conference itself is a shift from a military machine to a political party," he said.

But analysts who keep a close watch on the statements stressed by the LTTE leader and Mr. Balasingham said they could not be taken at face value in the light of past experience. "They are being very shrewd. They are saying they are willing to consider alternatives but at the same time giving themselves enough space to wriggle out of it," said a diplomat. Even those who saw a silver lining in Mr. Prabakaran's comments reacted cautiously.

"What we cannot assume rightaway is that they have renounced secession. What they are saying is that we might renounce it at the point at which we think there is an acceptable solution," said P. Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives. But, he said, it was crucial to pick up the gauntlet. "Whether it is bona fide or mala fide, they are willing to consider alternatives at this time, and the challenge is to yoke them into the process," Mr. Saravanamuttu said.

Mr. Prabakaran also said the LTTE would also give up the armed struggle and violence and suicide bombings only when a permanent solution was reached to the conflict. Despite the LTTE semantics, the press conference broke no new political ground.

The demands for the right to self-determination, for instance, was raised by Tamil groups in talks with the Sri Lankan Government at Thimpu way back in 1985, and have been rejected many times over by Colombo

as a gateway to secession. Instead, the running theme through the conference was the LTTE's commitment to an independent Tamil Eelam, with the onus on the Government to provide an "acceptable" alternative, and a determined bid to mend fences with India.

Mr. Balasingham described India as the "fatherland" of Sri Lankan Tamils, and said the LTTE was awaiting a positive response from New Delhi with regard to his request for being allowed to live in Chennai for the duration of the peace talks, in view of his delicate health and in order to assist logistics. Seemingly desperate to get into India's good books, the LTTE offered what is being perceived here by analysts as something short of an apology for the Rajiv Gandhi assassination by describing it as "tragic".

"It was almost like expressing sympathy for the victim of an accident that one sees on the road," said Dharmalingam Sithadathan, parliamentarian and leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).

Mr. Prabakaran was clearly perplexed when asked how he expected the LTTE to be legalised by New Delhi when he is still wanted for the assassination.

As he fumbled to answer the question, Mr. Balasingham came to his rescue and whispered into his ears, after which the LTTE leader said he would not comment on the issue since the clemency pleas of those sentenced to death in the case were still pending.

Mr. Balasingham later urged that the past should be forgotten, and emphasised that India was "crucial" for the resolution of the conflict.

"It is an attempt to keep India at bay and not to alienate the regional superpower. They know they will need the implicit support or cooperation of India, whether it is for an interim solution or a permanent one," said one diplomat.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2002

AN OUTRAGEOUS QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

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S. Shankh

THE SIMULATED CANDOUR of the terrorist-leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, does not at all enhance his credibility as a serious interlocutor for peace and a political settlement of the endemic ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka. At a press conference at Killinochchi in Sri Lanka on Wednesday, Mr. Prabhakaran sought to white-wash and erase from collective memory his sordid record as a terrorist, in the present context of a globalised mood against the politics of terror, and also hoodwink the international community about his actual political agenda at a different level. In the process, he remains as unconvincing as ever in his botched up quest for political legitimacy. Unavailing really is his latest attempt to appear reasonable and resolute. The explanation has much to do with the many fault lines in his small and insular political universe. In reaffirming that he cannot at this stage give up his demand for a separate and sovereign state of 'Eelam' in the long-term interests of Sri Lanka's minority Tamils, Mr. Prabhakaran has only succeeded in turning the spotlight towards his emphatic refusal to give up an armed struggle. However, the objective situation is that the so-called ideology and actual practices of his armed struggle can hardly ever be distinguished from political terrorism of the most heinous forms. Disingenuous in these circumstances is his insistence that terrorism must be so defined as to legitimise the ostensibly inevitable violence of a purported liberation struggle such as his. It is significant that he should now repeat this new refrain which he first voiced so as to appear different from those who masterminded the terrorist outrage in America last September. No amount of window-dressing by the LTTE will help.

The manner in which Mr. Prabhakaran fielded questions on his complicity in the assassination of India's former Prime Minister and political leader, Rajiv Gandhi, testifies to the LTTE lead-

er's total lack of remorse for the ghastly act. His unrepentant attitude is compounded by a complete absence of any denial of the LTTE's involvement in what he dismissively characterises as a "tragic" incident. It is high time that New Delhi took steps to seek Mr. Prabhakaran's extradition. On a separate yet somewhat related front, Mr. Prabhakaran is obviously desperate to influence the Sri Lankan Government to annul the proscription of the LTTE. If his demand is being portrayed as a pre-condition for the proposed talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan authorities under Norway's "facilitatory" auspices, the other side of the story reflects his eagerness to secure through these talks a definitive administrative control over the traditional Tamil areas of Sri Lanka pending a final settlement.

The absolute sterility of the LTTE's outdated and unrealistic worldview, anchored as it is to the stale Thimpu formulations emphasising self-determination as the key point negates any real scope for negotiating progress. Significant, too, are the LTTE's latest claims that it does not intend to turn its back on India, which has been described as a regional superpower, despite the partially explained emergence of Norway as a "facilitator". Now, it requires no clairvoyance to see that the substance of the LTTE's demand for 'Eelam' is mirrored in the organisation's renewed insistence on the recognition of the rights of Sri Lankan Tamils to a homeland of their own as also to the status of a nationality and the like. The question now is whether the LTTE has already begun to raise the political stakes in respect of any possible talks with Colombo through Norway's intercession. The LTTE's intransigence at Thimpu and on other occasions thereafter is a matter of authentic contemporary history. It is against such an overall background that the LTTE's latest profession of a desire to befriend India should be seen as no more than a false promise.

THE HINDU

11-10 Sighting the Tiger MA

Meanwhile, the other political Tiger, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has surfaced in Killinochchi after 12 long years, literally setting the big cat among the pigeons. And although it was a much-mellowed Prabhakaran who emerged from exile, he didn't go back on the Tamils' single biggest demand: The separate state of Eelam. Quite predictably, Prabhakaran inflamed passions across the Palk Straits, with the Congress party demanding that the supremo of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) be brought to justice for his complicity in the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 when the latter was leader of the Opposition. The Congress hardly needs to remind the government of the day that the LTTE is a terrorist organisation banned in India, the United States, Britain and several other countries and Prabhakaran is a proclaimed offender. However, his extradition — about which the Congress understandably feels strongly — is unlikely to be pursued seriously by the government of India, if only for the reason that it is politically impractical; and, moreover, because it is unlikely to be endorsed by the international community now suing for peace in Sri Lanka. That should not lead to any softening of New Delhi's stand that the LTTE is essentially a terrorist organisation. India must remain disengaged and reject outright any suggestion for mediating in the conflict or providing transit facility for the negotiators. To allow any opening for the LTTE to gain a toehold in India would fly in the face of New Delhi's avowed resolve to fight terrorism; it would knock the bottom out of India's case for Pakistan to hand over the 20 wanted terrorists, weaken the battle against separatists in Kashmir and invite the charge of being non-serious in putting down the Maoist insurgency in Nepal.

However, such a stand need not be pitted against the Norwegian-brokered peace process in Sri Lanka which has made remarkable progress since Ranil Wickremesinghe became prime minister. Nearly 65,000 people have been killed in the last 19 years of the Tamil-Sinhala conflict and there is a yearning for peace, which is reflected in Mr Wickremesinghe's initiatives. He, like the Norwegian interlocutors, has been mindful of Indian sensibilities and taken care to ensure that his conciliatory approach to the Tamils in a bid to end the civil war does not cause offence to New Delhi. Sooner, rather than later, it is certain that the Wickremesinghe government would lift the 1998 ban on the LTTE, for without this relaxation the Tamil representatives cannot begin the talks proposed to be held in Thailand next month. In Colombo's view, the concessions to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table may be negligible given the devastating cost the prolonged war has extracted. India too has paid a heavy price with Rajiv Gandhi's life and that of several others who perished in the fiasco that the Indian Peace Keeping Force mission turned out to be. The Indian experience with successive Sri Lankan governments, political parties and extremist forces of all hues in the last 20 years should serve as warning enough for India not to be dragged into the swamp again. The Tiger may not have roared, but it would be naive to expect him never again to flash his stripes.

'WE DO NOT WANT TO ALIENATE INDIA'

Time not ripe to give up Eelam goal: Prabakaran

S. Lanka

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By Nirupama Subramanian

KILLINOCHCHI, (NORTHERN SRI LANKA), APRIL 10. The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, claimed here today that he was sincere about peace and wanted a political solution with the Sri Lankan Government but reiterated his commitment to an "independent Tamil state" in no uncertain terms.

At his first media outing in more than a decade, he also expressed his desire to rebuild ties with India and said that for this both the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indians should put the past behind them.

The 47-year-old Tamil leader appeared at the venue of the press conference in his now standard blue-grey safari suit, surrounded by armed bodyguards, a little after 5.30 p.m.

He spoke in Tamil during the two-and-a-half hour press conference. His political adviser, Anton Balasingham, was by his side, providing the English translation as well as replies to several questions.

Over 200 journalists from all over the world had arrived here a day in advance for the event and went through a 10-hour security screening today before

being taken to the venue.

But expectations that the press conference could lead to a breakthrough in the on-going Norway-sponsored peace talks between Colombo and the LTTE were belied. Indeed, at one point of time visibly disappointed Western journalists wanted to know why the press conference had been called.

"I do not think that the necessity has arisen for us to renounce the goal of Tamil Eelam yet. The right condition has not arisen for the LTTE to abandon the policy of independent statehood," Mr. Prabakaran said.

In any case, the desire for a separate state was not the LTTE's alone but of the entire Tamil people, he added.

'De-proscribe LTTE'

The reclusive LTTE leader, who consulted Mr. Balasingham extensively before responding to most questions, said his organisation was going to Thailand for talks with the Sri Lankan Government only to discuss the establishment of an interim administration in the north-east. But Sri Lanka would have to first de-proscribe the organisation.

A final solution to the conflict would have to embody the fun-

damental LTTE demands of the right to a Tamil homeland, nationality and self-determination.

If the Sri Lankan Government was willing to offer self-rule and autonomy embodying these four principles and if the framework of such a solution was acceptable to the LTTE, it would respond positively, Mr. Prabakaran said.

He expressed satisfaction with the pace of the peace progress so far and complimented the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, for "the bold steps" he had taken to implement the goodwill measures in Northern Sri Lanka. Mr. Wickremesinghe was sincere about bringing a peaceful solution, he added. But, Mr. Prabakaran noted, the Sri Lankan Government was at the moment not in a position to offer an acceptable formula, which was why the LTTE had suggested an interim administration to give time to prepare its people for a permanent solution.

Responding to a question, he said his instructions to his cadre to kill him if he compromised on the goal of an independent state remained. It was apparent all through the conference that the LTTE is wooing India with a



The LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran (right), smiles while his chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, gestures during a press conference in Killinochchi, on Wednesday. — AFP

vengeance. "We want to establish friendly, positive and constructive relations with the Government of India. India's participation is crucial for the peace process. We do not want to alienate India. Without the support and sympathy of the people and the Government of India, this problem cannot be solved," he stated.

"We want to engage the Government of India. Our people love India and the people of India. We are culturally and ethnically linked to the Indian subcontinent. India is our fatherland. We look forward to establishing new and constructive relations with India."

India seeking details

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10. India is studying the statement made by Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran, on a peace initiative in the northern provinces of Sri Lanka.

The Government was seeking full details regarding his comments on ending the two-decade old violence in Jaffna area, official sources said today.

India had in the past rejected the mediation offer between the LTTE and the Sri Lanka Government on the ethnic issue. — UNI

'Rajiv killing tragic'

Mr. Prabakaran described the assassination of the late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, as a "tragic" incident but refused to answer any more questions on it. Mr. Balasingham said that it was some thing that had happened 10 years ago and that those who asked questions about it were living in the past. He said the LTTE leader could not comment on the assassination as the clemency pleas of the four who were sentenced to death in the case were pending in court. Mr. Prabakaran said:

'Get Prabakaran extradited'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI APRIL 10. The Congress today called on the Central Government to "initiate steps to extradite the LTTE chief, Prabakaran" for his complicity in the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

It also lamented that the Government had so far made no diplomatic or political effort to get Mr. Prabakaran extradited.

In a statement to the press, the Congress came down hard on the LTTE chief and his organisation. "It's a designated terrorist organisation and banned in India, while Prabakaran is a proclaimed offender responsible for the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi," it said.

The statement pointed out that today's press conference called by Prabakaran was an attempt to legitimise his political status with the international community. Branding the

LTTE as a "violent terrorist organisation", it maintained that attempts to obfuscate facts could not hide the truth that "the LTTE is a violent terrorist organisation and Prabakaran is the architect of its policies".

The party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, however, clarified that its demand for bringing Prabakaran to justice did not mean that his party was opposed to an international effort to bring about an agreement between the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE.

"We are not opposed to a meaningful effort by the international community to bring about peace and harmony in Sri Lanka," Mr. Reddy said.

He, however, reiterated that Prabakaran had committed a "capital crime" on Indian soil and hence he should be extradited. "There is an extradition treaty between the two countries," he pointed out.

Feared Tiger to bare claws

FROM SCOTT MCDONALD

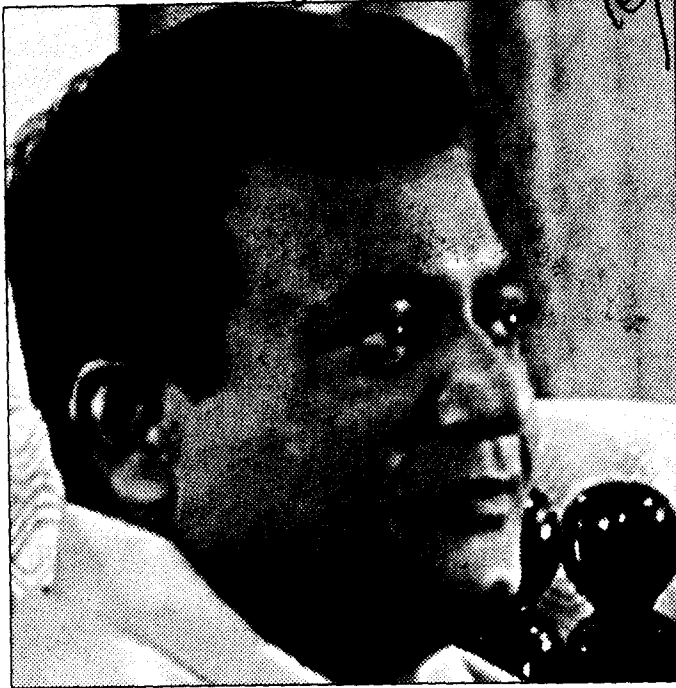
Kilinochchi (Sri Lanka), April 9 (Reuters): Can a tiger really change its stripes? That's the question every Sri Lankan wants answered.

But few expect the reclusive leader of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels to give too much away when he steps out of the jungle and into the public eye for the first time in over a decade tomorrow ahead of Norwegian-sponsored talks to end one of the world's longest-running separatist wars.

Velupillai Prabhakaran, whose fanatical supporters have been blamed for the murder of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and other high-profile suicide bombings, will address a news conference in the run-up to the May talks in Thailand. "This is a game of poker so don't expect him to play his ace in the first hand," said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, head of the Colombo-based Centre for Policy Alternatives.

The May talks between the Tigers and Sri Lanka government aim to end a conflict that began in 1983 and has killed about 64,000 people. The Tigers have been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east of the island. Prabhakaran's LTTE are outlawed in half-a-dozen countries including the US and Britain, largely due to the feared Black Tiger suicide squad who are blamed for hundreds of attacks.

He has given no clue as to what he will say but Sri Lankans, particularly the sceptical Sinhalese majority, will be watching to see if he will renounce his campaign for a sepa-



A file picture of Velupillai Prabhakaran. (Reuters)

rate state. "That is what we'll all be watching," one Western diplomat said in Colombo on the eve of the news conference at this jungle town 280 km north of Colombo, which is likely to be shown live on national television.

Prabhakaran has not faced the media at a public event since a 1987 Indian-brokered peace accord, one of four failed attempts to end the fighting.

The fifth peace bid, brokered by Norway, faltered under the previous Sri Lankan government. Since winning last year's elections, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has promised to negotiate anything but Eelam — the name of the independent Tamil homeland.

Analysts say Prabhakaran, who once told his followers to shoot him if he strayed from the path to Eelam, is unlikely to make any immediate concession over his cherished goal of a separate state.

"What we will most likely see is a reiteration of Prabhakaran's policy that they will seek Eelam if no viable alternative is presented," Saravanamuttu said.

The news conference will provide Prabhakaran with an opportunity to demonstrate he is serious about peace and is trying to move away from his warrior image, having turned a tenacious outfit of barefoot soldiers into one of the world's toughest guerrilla armies — complete with its own naval force.

Marathon for peace on death road

Omanthai (Sri Lanka), April 9 (Reuters): Led by saffron-robed Buddhist monks and a truck adorned with pictures of doves, a peace marathon crossed into rebel-held territory in Sri Lanka today in support of a Norwegian-brokered peace bid.

The marathon started in Colombo and will end in northern Jaffna peninsula tomorrow, tracing a route known a few years ago as "the highway of death".

Many of the runners were majority Sinhalese eager to send a message to a Tamil minority for whom the rebel Tigers want an independent state in the north and east.

"We have had an amazing response from the people along the way," said senior superintendent of police Lucky Peiris, who organised the marathon.

"We could have had thousands of people run but the logistics would have been too difficult," said Peiris.

When he crossed into the rebel-controlled Wannu region, Peiris became the most senior police officer in 20 years to visit the area.

He was accompanied by 17 cyclists with flowers on their bicycles and 69 runners dressed in white including one carrying what Peiris called "the peace torch".

They were followed by a stream of buses and trucks filled with supporters.

S Lanka
10/1

Killinochchi all abuzz

10/1

By Nirupama Subramanian

KILLINOCHCHI (NORTHERN SRI LANKA), APRIL 9. The top civilian administrator here says he has been struggling for the last three months to get a home connection. There are no communication facilities here. They are just about getting the post office started. There is no hospital, and there has been no electricity since 1990.

Located 60 km. north of Vavuniya in the heart of LTTE-controlled Vanni mainland, this town is now playing host to an estimated 400 journalists here for a news conference tomorrow with Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tigers.

The event has assumed enormous significance as it is the reclusive leader's first appearance before the media since 1990, and comes against the backdrop of a fresh attempt by the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to end the island's ethnic conflict.

The rapid pace of the initiative has generated hopes of early peace among the people of this town, who have been

the worst hit in the battles between the Government and the LTTE for control of the town located at a strategic point on Sri Lanka's A9 highway.

Four times since 1990 it has changed hands. The last big battle here was in 1998, when the LTTE wrested control of the town in a massive attack, killing and wounding hundreds of soldiers and forcing the Army to withdraw to Elephant Pass.

"The people of Killinochchi have been tested to their limits", said the district government agent, E. Ayathurai.

After taking control, the LTTE managed to clear Army minefields in parts of the district to enable those who had been displaced by the fighting to return and resettle here. Over 40,000 mines were removed by the LTTE with nothing more than garden rakes and other rudimentary implements, Mr. Ayathurai said.

In the last two years, an estimated 12,000 people have returned to areas in Killinochchi certified by the LTTE as safe from mines but the scars of war are still visible all around. There is hardly any construction here

that has not been damaged or destroyed by shells.

Till last year, the Government did not make available reconstruction aids to the area because it was in the hands of the rebels. The economic embargo was eased only this January when the peace process was put on the fast track by the newly-elected Government.

"The situation has improved a lot after the restrictions were removed. If the process fails, it could go back to what it was" Mr. Ayathurai said, adding the people did not want that to happen. They could not bear it any more. This will certainly act as indirect pressure on the LTTE to make the process work," he said.

On Monday, the stretch of A9 highway from here to Jaffna was reopened under the terms of the February truce accord between the Government and the LTTE, providing the first land route between the mainland and the peninsula in 12 years.

Though there is no public transport yet on the route, the move is expected to greatly ease travel to and from the pen-

insula and is seen as an important symbol of the joint effort by both sides to restore normality to civilian lives in northern Sri Lanka.

"For the first time, the travel people believe that the Government is sincere about bringing peace. This is the first time that the Government has placed trust in the LTTE and that has given hopes to our people" said Tirukulasingham Thangapalan, the news editor of Voice of Tigers, the clandestine radio station operated by the LTTE.

Mr. Thangapalan said if there were any doubts about the LTTE's sincerity, Mr. Prabhakaran would remove them on Wednesday at the much-awaited news conference.

For reasons of Mr. Prabhakaran's security, the venue and time of the event have not been notified yet to the gathering of journalists, only told by LTTE organisers to be ready for it any time after 9 a.m. tomorrow.

Till then, the LTTE is playing the good host, providing food and shelter to the hundreds of journalists who have besieged northern Sri Lanka.

...the devil and the deep sea.

Clouds over Colombo G11-10

Even as Sri Lankan prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is forging ahead to end the 19-year-old Tamil-Sinhala conflict, he seems to be getting increasingly embroiled in a tussle with president Chandrika Kumaratunga. In contrast to the optimism arising out of the truce formalised with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the disconcerting escalation of his undeclared war against Ms Kumaratunga for political supremacy. As a result, the progress of the Norwegian-brokered peace process so far — which has succeeded in making LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran schedule his first public appearance since 1987 at a press conference on April 10 — may be stymied if Ms Kumaratunga decides to queer the pitch. On almost every issue, beginning with cabinet formation and constitutional appointments to the Norway-backed peace bid, Ms Kumaratunga of the People's Alliance has been at loggerheads with the government of Mr Wickremesinghe, who controls parliament. Mr Wickremesinghe has, to his credit, persisted with his conciliatory course towards the LTTE and earned commendable international support for his initiatives. He has gone so far as to say that he is willing to consider anything short of a separate Tamil state and shown that his government is willing to pay an extraordinary price to keep the LTTE engaged and deny them any excuse for walking out of the process. The economic embargo on territories controlled by the LTTE was lifted three months ago. The ceasefire agreement provided the legitimacy the LTTE needed to extend their political activities to government-controlled areas in the north-east. Mr Wickremesinghe has given enough indication to suggest that the ban on the LTTE might be lifted, or at least that it will not be sustained as an obstacle to peace talks.

However, he runs the risk of provoking Ms Kumaratunga, if she is pushed beyond a point in the ongoing power struggle, and that may well undo much that Mr Wickremesinghe has been able to achieve. As an executive president, she still wields enormous power over the military, the government (which she can dismiss) and parliament (that she can suspend). Unless Mr Wickremesinghe moves an impeachment motion which would stay her hand till it is voted upon, she can also dissolve the recently elected parliament after it completes one year in December 2002. The prime minister — who has taken advantage of the popular mood to prevail on the president — is now intent upon carrying the battle further through constitutional changes to shackle her. The announcement that the government plans to move a law allowing MPs to vote according to their conscience on "important national issues" — such as ending the civil war — is the first step towards disarming Ms Kumaratunga of her presidential and parliamentary clout. This will have the effect of making People's Alliance MPs vote with the treasury benches and provide the required two-thirds majority for an amendment. Once that is done, it would be a cakewalk for Mr Wickremesinghe to increase his majority in the house for other statute amendments. Should Ms Kumaratunga decide to fight back, it cannot be without repercussions for the peace process. That is a setback to be avoided at all costs.

LTTE apology clears the way ^{Sri Lanka} for crucial talks ^{with} Muslims ^{of}

By Christine Jayasinghe

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's two main minority communities, the Tamils and the Muslims, are set for landmark political talks after Tamil Tiger rebels apologised for their earlier policy of ethnic cleansing.



The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in a major shift in policy, admitted that it was a "political blunder" to have chased out minority Muslims from the northern peninsula of Jaffna in 1990. "The change of heart on the part of the LTTE is very welcome," said Rauff Hakeem, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). "We are willing to engage in a sincere dialogue with the LTTE."

The LTTE's dramatic apology came as Muslims in the eastern regions grew restive, accusing the LTTE of continuing to harass members of the community in violation of a Norwegian-brokered truce.

Any settlement to Sri Lanka's long-running Tamil separatist conflict requires the approval of

Muslims who are the main minority in the war-ravaged north-eastern regions, which is being claimed as a separate Tamil state by the LTTE. The Tamil Tigers gave the estimated 100,000 Muslims in Jaffna 24 hours to get out in 1990. Most of them still live as refugees in the northwest of the island.

Hakeem said all previous attempts to politically end the bloodshed in the island failed because the Muslim factor was ignored, but he hoped they would be consulted this time.

The Muslim party in a statement Saturday announced that Hakeem had been invited for a round of talks with the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, next week to resolve their differences.

The historic invitation was extended through the Norwegian peace brokers, the SLMC said, adding the party was pleased to accept it and enter a process of constructive dialogue. Earlier this week, Hakeem met with Norwegian envoy Jon Westborg and the Norwegian head of the truce monitoring committee, Trond Furuhoide, to express his concern regarding the plight of Muslims.

The Muslims have complained

that after the February 23 truce, the rebels have intensified extortion, abductions and harassment against Muslims who are in the majority in some parts of the eastern province.

The developments came as the LTTE's Balasingham admitted for the first time that the rebels were wrong to have chased out hundreds of thousands of Muslims from Jaffna.

Balasingham admitted that the ethnic cleansing policy could not be justified, the Tamilnet.com website quoted him as saying at a public meeting in the rebel-held Mullaitivu region Wednesday.

"Let us forget and forgive the mistakes in the past," Balasingham said. Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran was ready to meet with Muslim leaders, Balasingham said. Sri Lanka's Tamils make up 12.6 per cent of the country's 18.66 million population and the Muslims 7.5 per cent.

"We do recognise the unique cultural identity of the Muslim community. Linguistically, economically and territorially the Muslims and the Tamils are inextricably inter-related and therefore have to co-exist as brothers in the north-east," Balasingham said. (IANS)

Giving peace a chance

Sri Lanka Sri Lankan peace talks in Thailand

Velupillai Pirabhakaran is to give a press conference next month which will tell us a bit more about his thinking on the present peace process in Sri Lanka. One of his lieutenants has made a statement to the effect that the Tamils must be offered a political structure equivalent to Eelam for them to give up on the idea. One doesn't know what to make of this. However, much progress has been achieved by prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in the form a nationwide consensus that peace is necessary. His party swept the recent local body polls, a victory he attributes, correctly, to public endorsement of his government's position on the Tamil issue, while the Tamils themselves gave him an enthusiastic welcome in Jaffna when he became the first Sri Lankan head of government to visit in 20 years. The JVP remains vociferously opposed to the whole idea, while President Kumaratunga sulks. She continues to suspect the LTTE of its usual perfidy. The situation this time is different — the LTTE are no longer in control of Jaffna and the military balance between the Sri Lankan army and the rebel outfit is more even.

The Americans have lent their support to the peace process and US undersecretary of state, Christine Rocca, was in Jaffna along with Wickremesinghe. One doesn't know whether American military guarantees are involved, but the Americans have been harsh on the LTTE on the two issues of juvenile conscription and extortion. One doesn't know either whether the US will assist the Sri Lankan government in cracking down on the LTTE's sources of arms and money, in case it reneges on its part of the peace contract, but it cannot be ruled out in the present atmosphere, hostile to terrorism. The LTTE, for their part, may have decided to behave themselves, primarily because of gentle Norwegian persuasion that a state created through terror will have little chance of surviving in the present international set-up. The ceasefire is holding with the LTTE opening offices in government held areas in the north and the east and the disarming of rival Tamil groups continuing apace. The LTTE, however, is demanding that the ban on the organisation be lifted before talks, scheduled to be held in Thailand, begin. Wickremesinghe, however, seems to want to wait and see how the talks go before taking a decision. He wants to know what Pirabhakaran is asking for, which is fair enough. If the talks in Thailand don't work out, it might go back to square one very quickly. Which is why it is necessary for the Norwegians and everybody else to keep the idea of talking and, therefore, of peace and exploit the war-weariness of the Tamils of the north and the east for success.

LTTE violates truce agreement: Army ✓

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA
COLOMBO, APRIL 1

S. Lanka 96-5 2/6

THE Sri Lankan Army has accused the Tamil Tigers of violating the ceasefire agreement by forcibly entering into the government-controlled areas in Eastern Valaichchenai region on March 30.

"A group of 200-300 heavily armed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres, dressed in camouflaged uniforms have entered the government-held areas via Meeyankulam on the Polonnaruwa-Valaichchenai main supply route in the eastern province," said a senior Lankan military official. This is the first major complaint of truce violation committed by the LTTE.

Although the military officials and troops deployed at the Meeyankulam checkpoint tried to prevent them from crossing, the group leader of the LTTE, identifying himself as Weerasingham in the rank of lieutenant colonel, did not respond to their requests and entered with his group.

The majority of these LTTE members appeared to be newly-trained cadres in the age group of 12 to 16 years. "The conversation between LTTE members and troops revealed that they were going to attend a function at Kathiraveli, another village in the eastern province, and would be back after 48 hours.

"The matter was immediately brought to the notice of international ceasefire monitoring committee that, in turn, has promised to take it up with the LTTE's high command," he said.

Earlier, reports from the LTTE-controlled Wannu said rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran had given orders to his area leaders to strictly adhere to the terms and conditions of the truce pact and severely punish those who violate them.

Meanwhile, about eight LTTE men were scheduled to enter government-controlled Vavuniya district today from Wannu, through Omanthai entry point, to begin their 'political work'.

1996 APR 1 10 45 AM

Colombo to discuss transfer of power to north-east

HD-13
11/4

S. Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 31. As the Norwegian-backed peace process in Sri Lanka moves towards the crucial stage of "talks about talks," Colombo is preparing to discuss handing over power to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the north-east as a precursor to the final solution to the ethnic conflict. Officials said an interim administration for the north-east would be one of the issues at the preliminary talks expected to take place in May.

The Sri Lankan Government expects the interim administration to be a temporary solution till a final settlement, through devolution of power within a united Sri Lanka, is reached. The LTTE is likely to run this administration or play the dominant role in it. One newspaper said today that setting up an interim administration was a LTTE precondition for further talks but officials pointed out that it was an election promise by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Joseph Parajasingham of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance said in Parliament last week that Mr. Wickremesinghe had agreed in principle to the setting up of an interim government in the north-east. It is not known yet what the powers of the interim administration will be and whether it will be along

the lines of the provincial councils that exist in other regions of Sri Lanka under the 13th Amendment of 1987, rejected by the LTTE then as inadequate. It is also unclear how much power will be shared with Muslims, who form a significant percentage of the population in eastern Sri Lanka and have been getting restive at being marginalised in the process so far. There is also a Sinhalese minority in the east.

The preliminary discussions would focus on the extent of transparency, public accountability and democratic pluralism with which the LTTE is prepared to run this interim government, officials said. Thailand has been announced as the venue for the peace talks, first in seven years, between the two sides that have fought bitterly and to the point of exhaustion since 1995. Mr. Wickremesinghe has said he is prepared to consider anything short of a separate state.

The new Government has already demonstrated its willingness to consider any LTTE demand as the necessary price for rebuilding Sri Lanka's war-torn economy. Keeping the LTTE engaged and at the negotiating table is necessary for it to prevent the country from descending into the war and economic chaos that plagued it for the better part of the last decade. So far, the Wickremesinghe

Government has conceded most of the LTTE pre-conditions for talks, which were turned down by the earlier People's Alliance Government and thus became huge stumbling blocks in the peace process.

This time, the strategy seems to be conciliatory and not to give the LTTE any excuse for walking out. It is three months since Colombo lifted the economic embargoes on territories controlled by the LTTE, fulfilling one of the major conditions early on in the process. Mr. Wickremesinghe has also indicated that he would not allow the ban on the LTTE to come in the way of peace talks, and the next few weeks might see a formal removal of the 1998 proscription of the group. In fact, the ceasefire agreement has conferred a *de facto* legitimacy on the Tigers by permitting them to move freely and engage in political work in the Government-controlled areas of the north-east. Another concession was permitting Anton Balasingham, confidante and political adviser to the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, to return from London directly to the LTTE-controlled territory in northern Sri Lanka, without using any official port of entry.

The present Sri Lankan Government also left the choice of venue for the peace talks to the LTTE. It was the Tigers who

chose Thailand after India studiously ignored their proposal for the talks to be held in one of its southern states. The LTTE is said to have chosen Thailand because it is a familiar terrain of many of its top members. The coastal town of Phuket is known to have been used by the LTTE for shipping its weapons. And Thailand was Mr. Balasingham's first port of call after his clandestine exit by sea from northern Sri Lanka in 1999.

Colombo had no objection to Thailand as its relations with Bangkok are good, especially after the latter acted promptly to crack down on the LTTE activities on its soil whenever there was a complaint from Colombo. It is hoped that the venue might actually make it difficult for the LTTE to continue procuring weapons through South-East Asia, as Governments in the region would be more alert to such activities in the background of the peace talks.

Officials said the LTTE might use the opportunity to "out" or legitimise some of its more shadowy operatives like its main arms procurer, Kumaran Pathmanabha, on whom there is an Interpol warrant, and who is known to have lived in Thailand for some time. But the Sri Lankan Government would be more than willing to view this as a sign of the LTTE's sincerity about peace talks, the officials said.

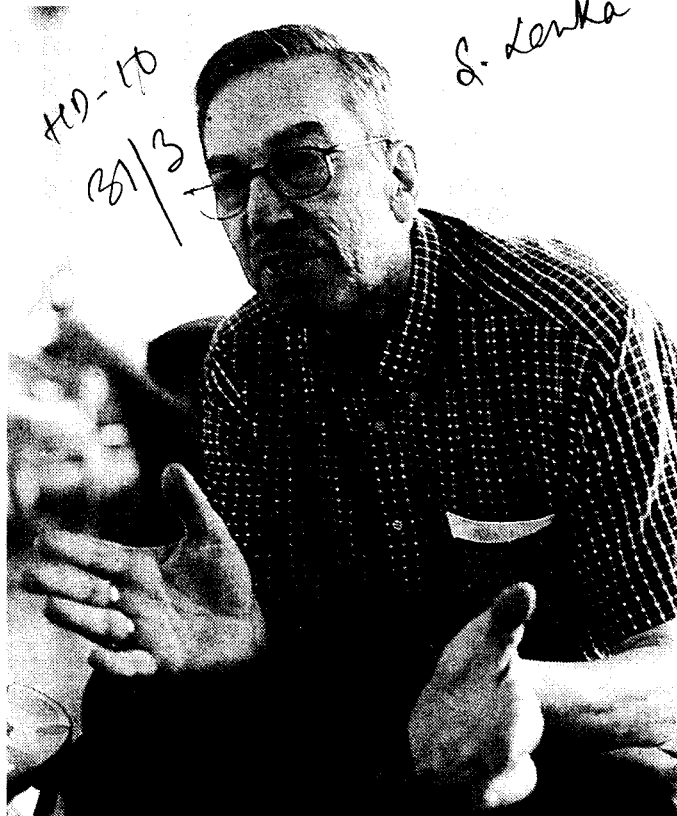
'Govt., LTTE conduct encouraging'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 30. The Norwegian-led ceasefire monitoring mission in Sri Lanka says it is encouraged by the conduct of both the Government and the LTTE in the five-week period since the two began observing a truce and sees it as an indication that both sides are serious about finding peace.

Trond Furuhovde, head of the monitoring mission and former general of the Royal Norwegian Army, told *The Hindu* in an interview that he had received no complaints yet from the Sri Lankan Government or the LTTE about violations of the truce agreement. "This is very special. They have, in fact, been very flexible (about each other's obligations in implementing the truce agreement) and this is also a signal that they certainly will do their best to fulfil the agreement." If either side complained about non-implementation of any of terms of the truce agreement by the other, he would put the security of the population above the timetable. For instance, in the opening of the main highway linking Jaffna to the mainland, Gen. Furuhovde said he would first satisfy himself that the road had been completely de-mined before holding either side to the deadline set in the truce.

Though the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) has not been called to defuse any flare-ups so far, there has been a daily dose of small incidents. Earlier this week, an angry mob attacked soldiers who tried to question and photograph LTTE cadres who had entered a Government-controlled area in the eastern district of Batticaloa and smashed their cameras. The head of the SLMM said they were aware of the incident and other similar ones, but had not received any formal complaint from the army. Gen. Furuhovde said this showed willingness on both sides to accept that such incidents were not intentional violations of the truce agreement but arose perhaps due to



The chief of the Norwegian peace monitoring mission in Sri Lanka, Trond Furuhovde. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

ignorance about its details. "This is why it is important that there is information about the process from the top way down to the last person, and every single person, also in the population, are part of this process. Everybody has to take into consideration the consequences," he said.

The chief monitor said it was crucial that both sides educate their forces and the ordinary people about the terms of the ceasefire. "I am optimistic. We have to be prepared that things will happen during the process. However, I believe it is moving well," he said. The SLMM consists of 23 international monitors — Norwegians, Swedes and Finns — seven of whom will be based at the headquarters, presently in the capital, but likely to be moved closer to the north-

east soon. One representative, who will liaise with the LTTE, is to be stationed in the rebel-stronghold of Killinochchi. Monitoring committees, comprising two nominees each of the Government and the LTTE and one international delegate, will be stationed in six districts of the north-east. With peace talks expected to begin in May, the task of the SLMM is being seen as crucial. But the SLMM has not got going fully as yet.

Responding to growing concern that after more than a month of the ceasefire, the monitors were yet not all in place or functioning, Gen. Furuhovde said the SLMM was still bogged down in the procurement of logistics such as communication equipment, vehicles and premises to house the district monitoring commit-

tees. "We are eager to go out but we can't do that with two empty hands," he said. But he expects his team to get off the ground within a week. At the moment, monitors have been deployed only in Trincomalee and Vavuniya. The general, who served as the commander of the U.N. forces in south Lebanon, said one of the main challenges for the monitors would be to distinguish between ceasefire violations and ordinary crime, or law and order situations.

The SLMM had received six complaints from civilians in Batticaloa, but all of them were criminal cases which did not fall under the jurisdiction of the monitors, he said. Gen. Furuhovde said a ceasefire violation would be one that could lead to a "serious reaction on both sides, militarily and politically". Asked what scope there was in this situation for ordinary civilians to be heard if they had complaints against either of the two sides, the chief monitor said complaints by individuals would also be investigated and redressed if found to be ceasefire violations. "The people can go directly to the monitors with their complaints. We will be out in the villages, we will be visible and available to everyone," he said.

The ceasefire agreement was to improve the life of the people and if it did not achieve that, the purpose was lost, the chief monitor said. When a ceasefire violation was brought to the notice of the SLMM, the monitors would act on the complaint by taking it up with the party concerned, he said. "I do not have the powers to make either party stop the violation, but both sides seem to be interested in listening," said Gen. Furuhovde. He refused to comment on the concerns of the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, that by leaving the interpretation of the ceasefire agreement to the head of the monitoring mission who was a foreigner, the Government had compromised on the sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

611-8 A Fragile Peace *S. Sankar*

The return of Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, to Sri Lanka after years in exile marks a major step in that country's search for peace after a wrenching 19-year-long civil war. Mr Balasingham's arrival comes at an especially crucial juncture when the government has announced that it will begin direct talks with the Tigers in May. As both sides seek to build on recent gains, a number of factors is likely to help move the peace process forward. The ceasefire appears to have more or less held for the last five months, while the lifting of the economic blockade in the LTTE-controlled northern areas of the island has reduced the levels of mistrust. Furthermore, the growing feeling of war weariness on both sides of the political divide and mounting problems on the economic front have made it difficult for the government as well as the LTTE to ignore the calls from their grass-roots' backers for peace. From the standpoint of the LTTE, commencing a dialogue with the government has become imperative following the changed global situation in the post-September 11 period, which has made it especially hard for the Tigers to secure tangible financial and diplomatic support for continuing their arms struggle. For Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, keeping up the momentum for peace promises to yield a rich dividend. After all, the search for reconciliation has been largely initiated by him and any substantial progress in the peace process will enable him to strengthen his domestic position vis-a-vis his arch rival, President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

However, the success of the ongoing political efforts can scarcely be taken for granted. This is because a number of hurdles still remain to be overcome before negotiations on the core issues can begin. These relate to lifting the ban on the LTTE, putting in place additional confidence-building measures, the precise role to be played by Norway as a facilitator and the format and agenda for the substantive talks. More crucial to the outcome of future discussions will be the attitude that the Tigers adopt in the coming months. The present flexibility of the LTTE notwithstanding, it is debatable whether its current stand signifies a basic shift in its position and that of its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Some fear that it could well turn out to be a tactical move dictated by changed international realities and aimed at buying time to enable it to regroup its forces for future operations. On the government's side as well, the process of negotiations could face some snags. A great deal will undoubtedly hinge on the dynamics of the equation between Mr Wickremesinghe and Ms Kumaratunga. For the time being, Ms Kumaratunga appears to have given him considerable leeway to pursue the peace process in the manner which he deems fit. This could change, however, especially if the negotiations do not achieve significant headway in the near future. On balance, therefore, although the prospects for peace in Sri Lanka seem brighter than they have been in years, all but the most foolhardy will be swept away by undue optimism.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

30 MAR 2002

Thailand to host LTTE peace talks

S. Lanka Amit Baruah
HD-13073

SINGAPORE, MARCH 29. Thailand will be the venue for peace talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The decision came after a meeting between the Thai Foreign Minister, Surakiat Sathirathai, and the visiting Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vida Helgesen. The talks, according to Mr. Surakiat, would commence within the next month. "We are not involved in the dialogue process. The timing depends on Norway and Sri Lanka. We have nothing to do with that. But the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister told me the talks would be held next month," Mr. Surakiat was quoted as saying in Bangkok.

"The Government of Thailand has, on the request of the Government of Norway, accepted to provide the venue for negotiations between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE," Mr. Helgesen said.

THE HINDU

30 MAR 2002

Prabhakaran begins talks

Colombo, March 26 (AFP): LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran today opened talks with Norwegian peace brokers in a bid to clear the way for crucial political negotiations with the government, officials and rebel radio said.

Prabhakaran was in talks with the Norwegian ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jon Westborg, and Oslo's peace envoy to the island, Erik Solheim, rebel radio said.

The key talks began a day after the chief negotiator of the LTTE, Anton Balasingham, made a dramatic return home from London ending three years of self-imposed exile.

"There were informal talks yesterday itself and the formal discussions are taking place today," the radio broadcast said.

Balasingham had wanted a face-to-face meeting with Prabhakaran before sitting down to formal political talks with the Sri Lankan government in a bid to end decades of bloodshed that have claimed over 60,000 lives.

Balasingham, 64, and his Australian-born wife Adele Ann flew in on a sea-plane directly to a rebel-held area of the island's north instead of transiting through Sri Lanka's only international airport in the capital.

As diplomatic moves escalated to bring the two sides to the table, both were ready to open a key highway by early April to link the war-ravaged northern peninsula of Jaffna

with the rest of the island, officials said. Government sources said the Tigers were prepared to open nearly a 100 km stretch of the A-9 highway that runs through territory they hold.

The arrival of Balasingham, has boosted anticipation that his meetings with Prabhakaran and the Norwegians would help lead soon to direct peace talks.

The pro-LTTE Tamilnet website said the two would meet Solheim and Westborg "to discuss matters related to the permanent ceasefire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government". Balasingham's visit would have been unthinkable before the rebels and government signed a ceasefire agreement last month.

The Norwegians, asked by the government and Tigers to act as a go-between to try to end nearly two decades of fighting, helped arrange the trip so Balasingham and Prabhakaran could prepare for peace talks with the government.

Sri Lanka allowed the trip to try to push ahead a peace process that has gathered steam since the election of a new government in December.

Direct negotiations — the first serious talks between the two sides in seven years — are expected within several months.

Balasingham suffers from a serious kidney ailment and needs regular medical attention — a factor involved in deciding the venue of the talks, expected to begin this summer.

HD-12
25/3

Balasingham arrives today for talks with Prabakaran

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 24. The arrival of the senior member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton Balasingham, from London on Monday has heightened expectations of an acceleration in the ongoing Norwegian-backed peace process in Sri Lanka. Mr. Balasingham is returning to hold consultations with the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabakaran, on the peace process.

Described as the LTTE's theoretician, Mr. Balasingham left the group's northern Sri Lankan headquarters in Mullaithivu clandestinely for medical treatment abroad for a kidney problem more than three years ago. He has been based in London since then.

Mr. Balasingham, said to be one of the most trusted of Mr. Prabakaran's aides, is to travel directly to northern Sri Lanka by airtaxi from the Maldives, where he breaks journey today, newspapers reported today.

Reports said Erik Solheim, a key member of the Norwegian facilitating team, and the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jon Westborg, would be in Male, Maldivian capital, to meet Mr. Balasingham today.

The Sri Lankan Air Force and Air Traffic Control are to assist in safe passage for the seaplane that will take Mr. Balasingham and his

Australian-born wife, Adele Ann, from the Maldives to northern Sri Lanka on Monday.

Mr. Balasingham was quoted by the *Sunday Leader* as saying that he was returning for crucial discussions with Mr. Prabakaran and that he also hoped to be involved in preliminary talks with the Sri Lankan Government.

He announced that Mr. Prabakaran was planning to hold his first press conference in 10 years before mid-April "to clear the air and take the peace process forward".

The truce between the LTTE and the Government marked 30 days on Sunday.

As required under the ceasefire agreement, today was the deadline for members of Tamil political parties that the LTTE considers to be its rivals and which had been given arms for protection against the Tigers, to give back their weapons to the Government.

Reiterating their commitment to finding a negotiated solution to the ethnic conflict and their assurance not to stand in the way of the truce agreement, both the EPDP and the PLOTE today ceremonially handed over their arms to the army commanders in Jaffna and Vavuniya, witnessed by international and local monitors.

The leader of the PLOTE

and parliamentarian, Dharmalingam Sithadthan, recalled in a statement that two days after the party had renounced militancy and surrendered its weapons to enter the democratic mainstream of Sri Lankan politics in 1987, one of its top leaders had been killed by the LTTE. Mr. Sithadthan said it was this that had forced the PLOTE to carry arms once again for self-protection, and expressed the hope that such a need would not arise again.

Opening of land route

The other task set by the ceasefire is the opening of a land route between the Jaffna peninsula and the mainland.

No date for this is set in the ceasefire agreement, which only specifies that both sides would finalise modalities for the reopening of the road, seen as a key area of normalisation of living conditions in northern Sri Lanka, on the 30th day of the truce. The Foreign Minister, Tyrone Fernando, told journalists earlier this week that the road — the A 9 highway — would be reopened by the second week of April. While the highway has enormous symbolic value as the link between the Tamil and the Sinhala Sri Lanka, its reopening would be of greater practical use to Tamil civilians who need to travel to or from Jaffna, as it is the only land route between the peninsula and the mainland.

Till it reopens, Jaffna can be accessed only by air or sea. Most of the 310-km highway which extends from Kandy, its southern point of origin, to Jaffna town, is open except for a small but vital stretch from Killinochchi in the LTTE-controlled northern Sri Lankan mainland to Eluthumaduval in the army-controlled peninsula.

At Muhamalai on this closed-up stretch on the neck of the peninsula is where the LTTE and the military eyeball each other across their respective forward defence lines.

All that separates the two is a few yards of no man's land, but dismantling the heavily-mined defences to reopen the highway has been taking longer than originally projected. The LTTE has said it is ready to throw open its side of the road at any time, and defence officials who recently visited the area said they could see from the military lines LTTE cadres engaged in road repairs.

On the Government side, the only indication is a freshly-painted road sign at Muhamalai with arrows pointing towards Jaffna and Kandy, but defence officials are optimistic that they might be ready by April 9, the tentative date for the reopening.

The Asian Development Bank has said it might also pitch in with money to get the road functioning as quickly as possible.

LTTE's top negotiator makes dramatic return to Lanka

By Christine Jayasinghe

COLOMBO: Anton Balasingham, chief negotiator for Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels, made a dramatic return to the island on Monday, flying in a seaplane and landing on a lake in a rebel-held territory in the north.

Three years after leaving the island clandestinely, Balasingham, escorted by Norwegian diplomats, landed in the northern Wanni region. He will meet LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran at his rebel headquarters. Balasingham was initially due to fly through Colombo but officials said providing security for one of the rebel groups' top men would be a high-risk job.

Balasingham and his wife Adele Ann were flown in on a Twin Otter seaplane owned by the Maldivian Airtaxi company, modified for the three-hour journey over the Indian Ocean to the Iranamadu Lake.

They arrived in the Maldives capital, Male, on Sunday from London and stayed overnight at a hotel under tight security provided by the Male government.



A. Balasingham



V. Prabhakaran

Official sources said Norwegian ambassador in Colombo Jon Westborg and Oslo diplomat Eric Solheim left Colombo early on Monday for the north to be at hand when Balasingham arrived.

They travelled in an air force helicopter to rebel-held Kilinochchi, officials said. Balasingham's meet-

ing with Prabhakaran, the first in three years, is expected to propel the Oslo-sponsored peace initiative towards direct peace talks between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The LTTE's decades-long war for a separate state came to a halt with last month's signing of a truce with the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Over 60,000 people on both sides have died in the fighting. The landmark ceasefire is to be monitored by an international monitoring committee.

Media reports said that Balasingham is expected to be accommodated at a newly constructed house in Wanni where he will stay for about six weeks. Balasingham was quoted as saying that it was imperative that he had a face-to-face meeting with Prabhakaran ahead of discussions with the Norwegians on when talks will be held and its agenda. (IANS)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11-13-2003

Don't force the pace, LTTE warns Ranil

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 22. The LTTE perceives the visit to Jaffna by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, as a move to force the pace of the peace process and has warned that such attempts could undermine the ongoing initiative to resolve the ethnic conflict.

Commenting on the visit, the London-based pro-LTTE *Tamil Guardian* said the enthusiastic welcome Mr. Wickremesinghe received in Jaffna should not be mistaken for an acceptance by the Tamil people of his legitimate authority. The editorial warned that any attempt to tackle the issues underlying the conflict before removing the conditions of war as well as the threat of a return to war would be "foolhardy".

"A period of prolonged tranquillity is, therefore, necessary. The Norwegian initiative's success depends not only on neutralising chauvinistic resistance but also guarding against undue efforts to force its pace," it said. It argued that the warm reception to Mr. Wickremesinghe in Jaffna was due to the fact that the LTTE had "endorsed" his government and criticised a senior Minister for saying the Prime Minister's visit to Jaffna was a demonstration of the unity of Sri Lanka. "The rapturous welcome extended to Prime Minister Wickremesinghe by the people of Jaffna has spurred optimism among some southern observers that the bitter ethnic war that has been raging for the past few decades can be easily consigned to the history books. Nothing can be farther from the truth," the

weekly stated.

It took Mr. Wickremesinghe to task for spending "much of his time" in Jaffna with troops stationed in the peninsula.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Tyrone Fernando, on Thursday said "talks on talks" with the LTTE would begin "in the next few months" to be followed by talks on substantive issues by the middle of the year.

At a meeting with the Foreign Correspondents' Association here, Mr. Fernando said the ruling United National Front's victory in the local government elections had silenced those voicing opposition to the peace process. The UNF won 217 councils out of 222 to which elections were held, while the opposition People's Alliance could manage only four and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, which actively campaigned against the ceasefire agreement reached between the Government and the LTTE, took control of one.

Mr. Fernando said the people had given Mr. Wickremesinghe a "double mandate" for his peace agenda, first by voting in the UNF in the 2001 parliamentary election and again this week in the local government elections.

The Foreign Minister said the strength of the peace process was obvious from the fact that the ceasefire agreement had held for a month without a single breach. "The monitors have no work to do. They are jobless," he said.

Mr. Fernando said Sri Lanka was negotiating for a venue outside the country for peace talks with the LTTE, but declined to

reveal any more details. There has been speculation in the Sri Lankan media that the talks could be held in Thailand, the Maldives or Singapore.

Citing security reasons, the LTTE has ruled out Sri Lanka as a possible venue. The LTTE favours south India for its proximity to its northern Sri Lanka headquarters, which it says would enable easy movement and consultations with the top leadership for those of its members participating in the talks. It also wanted the London-based Anton Balasingham, a senior member who is expected to be its chief negotiator, to be based in Chennai, so that he could be close to medical facilities for his renal condition.

Sri Lankan newspapers said Mr. Balasingham was expected here next Monday, more than three years after he left northern Sri Lanka clandestinely for medical treatment in London.

The Foreign Minister said Mr. Balasingham was welcome to return but made it clear that he was coming for consultations on the ongoing peace process with the LTTE leadership and not for talks with the Government. "Certainly he is free to come here. But he will not be talking to us. He will be talking to his own people," Mr. Fernando said.

Mr. Balasingham will travel to Sri Lanka from London via the Maldives. One report said he would travel by sea directly to northern Sri Lanka from the Maldives, while another said he would go to the LTTE stronghold through Colombo, under Norwegian escort.

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23 MAR 2002

29-10

A POLITICAL SIGNAL IN SRI LANKA?

23/3

THE LANDSLIDE VICTORY registered by the United National Party in Sri Lanka's latest local body elections has, in a sense, reinforced the political standing of the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, at this critical point in the island-republic's search for a settlement of its endemic ethnic crisis. For Mr. Wickremesinghe, who seems eager to opt for what is being described as a fast-track peace process at the national level, the updated people's verdict in the grassroots arena is certainly a reassuring signal. Yet, the bottom line in respect of local polls is that the people's verdict will have at least as much to do with micro-level issues as any national questions that might be of prime concern in the overall political discourse of the moment. Viewed in this perspective, the Prime Minister should temper his celebratory mood with a note of realism. On balance, his party's stunning success marks a virtual reaffirmation of his triumph in the parliamentary elections last December. More importantly, the new poll outcome is a political sequel to Mr. Wickremesinghe's decisive initiative for a truce and a settlement with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Also relevant to the present situation is the fact that the peace process, involving Mr. Wickremesinghe and the LTTE, has served as the looming political backdrop, if not the really defining issue, during the campaign for the latest local body elections. In all, therefore, Mr. Wickremesinghe can rightly feel encouraged by the latest poll numbers. In fact, any setback to his party in this exercise in grassroots democracy would have most certainly been seen as a negative vote on his ongoing peace initiative despite the limited political scope of local-level polls.

It is against such public debate in a highly participatory democracy like Sri Lanka's that the emerging political trends in that country must

now be evaluated. The Prime Minister's critics at home have been quick to point out that there is nothing wondrously important about a political outfit being able to win local polls soon after its success in parliamentary elections or a presidential contest. Another argument in focus now is that the voter turnout during the latest polls is not high enough to warrant any claims of a phenomenal mandate for the peace process. The objective reality, though, is that the Prime Minister can now hope to hold his own with a greater sense of political conviction than before as the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, quizzes him about the finer aspects of his dealings with the LTTE in conjunction with Norway as the external facilitator.

Shorn of the niceties of the running confrontation between Ms. Kumaratunga as the executive President and Mr. Wickremesinghe as the proactive Prime Minister over the peace process, their tussle really is for the mystique of political authority as the country's sole leader. As Sri Lanka cannot afford a deeply divisive search for peace and a negotiated settlement of the basic ethnic conflict, the Prime Minister will do well to act in concert with the President without treating her as a diminished political force in the wake of these local elections. While Ms. Kumaratunga herself had valiantly tried to solve Sri Lanka's constitutional and ethnic riddles, the future of the current peace process is linked to factors that go beyond the cross-currents within the majoritarian spectrum of Sinhala politics. First, a measure of public opinion within the minority circle of Tamils will be known when the local polls, now postponed, are held in their areas of influence. The second factor of significance is the manner in which the U.S. has become supportive of Norway's facilitatory endeavour. Washington seems to be watching the LTTE closely lest it should exploit any perceived inconsistencies in the U.S. "war on terror".

THE HINDU

23 MAR 2002

The goodwill between the govt and LTTE is the best bet for the peace process to succeed in Sri Lanka, says **JEHAN PERERA**

The road to peace passes through Jaffna

SRI Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's visit to Jaffna last week was historic, coming as it did a full 20 years after his uncle J.R. Jayewardene went there as President in 1982. Thereafter, Jaffna became virtually out of bounds for government leaders.

The anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 is generally taken as the year in which the war for Tamil separation got out of control. A lack of governmental commitment to the wellbeing of the people of the north coupled with fear of assassinations by the LTTE kept the top governmental leadership away from the northern capital.

In an acknowledgment of the risk and the role of the Sri Lankan armed forces in keeping Jaffna under government control, Wickremesinghe was perpetually escorted by a strong contingent of armed forces personnel during his two-day stay in Jaffna. But it was not their presence alone that would have given him a sense of security. Six years ago, the LTTE assassinated the Jaffna army commander. They simultaneously almost killed a cabinet minister who was visiting Jaffna.

There is no doubt that the prime minister's visit to Jaffna had the goodwill of the LTTE. Therefore it cannot, and must not, be seen as the government scoring a political victory over the LTTE.

What is most hopeful and promising about the present peace process is the implicit cooperation between the government and LTTE and the sense of realism that is apparent within the top governmental leadership. Although sections of the mass media tried to make out that the prime minister's visit to Jaffna was a personal triumph, there is no indication that Wickremesinghe himself felt that way.

While in Jaffna, the prime minister made no emotional or heart-catching speeches. He was matter of fact, with the army and the people. Wherever he spoke, the people responded graciously, highlighting a feature of the Sri Lankan



புலவர் வேறுள்ள இனி நடக்க
Reuters

nation barring a small number of miserable exceptions who try and overlook the unhappy past when a positive initiative is being made.

However, winning the hearts and minds of the proud people of Jaffna is going to be an uphill task for any governmental leader. The wounds of war are much too raw. The town of Chavakachcheri lies in ruins, its schools, temples, houses and commercial establishments brought down just two years ago by governmental leaders who felt compelled to destroy the town to preserve Sri Lankan rule over it.

After nearly two decades of war, the only leader who can win the affection of the Tamil people will be one who empathises with and acknowledges their claim to self determination in their areas of traditional habitation. At the same time, opponents of the peace process have been arguing that the ceasefire agreement paves the way for the strengthening of the LTTE and the eventual division of the country. The message that the prime minister would have wished to convey to his electoral base was that the peace process was about re-uniting the country, and not about dividing it.

The visit of US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca to Jaffna along with a US special forces brigade commander at the very time that the prime minister was making his visit could not have been a coincidence. It sent a strong signal to sceptics and supporters both in the north and south that Sri Lanka has become an important arena for a US peace building effort.

While in Sri Lanka, Rocca said, "This is where Sri Lanka can show that

South Asia can solve its ethnic problems." The show of US support is of particular importance in view of the widespread Sinhalese perception that the government may have gone too far in opening up the roads and country to the LTTE. This apprehension even among moderate Sinhalese would be assuaged by the US reassurance that it is watching. The government's hand will be strengthened in pushing forward with the peace process and taking risks.

Just prior to the synchronised visits to Jaffna, the US ambassador in Colombo, Ashley Wills, made a very strong public statement chiding the LTTE for its continued human rights abuses, particularly those targeting the Muslims in the east. In his statement he referred to "increased LTTE recruitment in Sri Lanka's north and east, including of children, as well as kidnapping and extortion, especially of Muslims." Although Tamil politicians and media reacted negatively to the US allegations, the immediate response of the LTTE itself was much milder. The LTTE's chief negotiator Dr Anton Balasingham pledged that the LTTE was committed to the peace process. He also said that LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was concerned about the allegations and would take action against any LTTE violations of the ceasefire agreement. Dr Balasingham added that the LTTE would also invite Amnesty International to send a delegation to LTTE-controlled areas to ascertain the truth for themselves.

These are perhaps promising signs that the LTTE is making the transition to a political organisation, and one that is prepared to deal with the rest of the world on the basis of give and take, and accountability on the basis of international norms of human rights.

(The writer is Director, Media and Research, at the Colombo-based National Peace Council)



There is no doubt that the prime minister's Jaffna visit had the LTTE's goodwill. It can't and must not be seen as the govt scoring a political victory over the LTTE. What is most promising is the implicit cooperation between the two. While in Jaffna, Wickremesinghe made no emotional speeches and most people responded positively

Tamil Tigers flout MoU in Lanka's eastern districts

P K Balachandran
Trincomalee, March 21

THE LTTE calls the shots in two of the most populous districts of Eastern Sri Lanka — Batticalao and Trincomalee. The Sri Lankan state machinery and the institutions of civil society bow to the wishes of the Tigers, who freely move about in great numbers, despite the stipulations of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Sri Lankan Government.

While the Government servants kowtow to the LTTE, the police look on helplessly. The armed forces are under orders not to precipitate any ugly incident and destroy the delicate peace process.

In Kokkadicholai, which in popular parlance is the "real" headquarters of Batticalao district, the LTTE's deputy leader Karikalan decides who will get Government contracts whether in the cleared or uncleared areas. As one was waiting for an interview with him last week, there was a group of civil contractors waiting to see him. It is said that the local Government officials have no option but to put their stamp of approval on the Tiger satrap's recommendations. The officials know the cost of disobedience as in the past a Government agent in Batticalao had been killed and a divisional secretary at Vakaraï kidnapped for being 'difficult'.

For the "Pongu Tamil" or "Tamil Upsurge" rally at Trincomalee and Batticalao, the Government departments had no option but to meet the demands of the LTTE. Government, as well

as private vehicles transported participants free of charge from every nook and corner of the two districts. Traders, school principals, university authorities and three wheeler drivers were all commandeered to bring participants. Work was allocated to various groups of citizens and obedience was instant.

Tiger movement was visible to the naked eye. Over 200 of them were seen in the Batticalao rally, with Ramanan and the woman Tiger Banuka being prominent. In Trincomalee, Devan was among those who participated. At least one Tiger propagandist was in uniform haranguing people to join the rally in Trincomalee.

Again, despite the MoU, collection or extortion from traders and professionals continues unabated.

UNP sweeps local polls

Sri Lanka's ruling party was today set for a landslide victory in local council elections building on its parliamentary success three months ago, early trends showed. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) bagged 118 of the 120 councils where results were declared following yesterday's elections.

The Opposition People's Alliance (PA) of President Chandrika Kumaratunga managed to get only two out of the 120 councils announced by early today. It was a humiliating defeat for Kumaratunga because her party lost in her home constituency of Attanagalle, where she had personally campaigned.

Violence mars Lanka local govt polls

Agencies

COLOMBO, March 20. — At least three people were killed and several injured in poll-day violence in different parts of Sri Lanka as the country went to elect representatives for 222 local councils today.

Official sources said here about 50 per cent voter turnout had been recorded by noon.

An official of the independent Centre for Monitoring Election Violence said all three killings had taken place after midnight.

The first killing took place in Rattota in the Central province, while the second and the third killings were in Chilaw and Kurunagala respectively in the North-Western province, CMEV spokesperson Sunila Abayasekera said.

"All three victims are the members of the ruling United National Party and were killed due to intra-party struggle. Our own monitors are sending reports of a large number of incidents of poll-related violence such as intimidation, impersonation and even firing from Central Province, Uva province, North-Central Province and North-Western provinces. In some areas the police were reported to have been inactive," he added.

The main Opposition People's Alliance said these were the worst-ever local government polls the country had faced in the past several years. Party leader and President Chandrika Kumaratunga was in her Anamaduwa electorate in the Gampaha district to "observe the situation". A spokesman for the People's Alliance said that in many cases the violence had hit those areas, which were relatively calm until yesterday.

"In several places our polling agents have been threatened by the ruling UNF members and supporters. Most of them were found carrying firearms, but the police have done nothing to prevent them in places like Anuradhapura, Kalpitiya and Puttlam. This was why the President wanted the government to deploy the armed forces in the problematic areas, but her request was refused. We are highly doubtful that this would be a free and fair election," the spokesman added.

Elections for 20 local bodies including Colombo city have been postponed with the polls in the North-East, scheduled for 25 March, also likely to be postponed due to political pressures from the Tamil National Alliance. The Wickremesinghe-led UNF government is expecting a sweeping victory in the local polls in a bid to prove that it has the people's mandate to implement the Norway-brokered truce agreement with the LTTE and to go ahead with his peace plan to solve the long drawn ethnic crisis.

A government ammunition dump went up in flames in northern Sri Lanka today in the second such incident in 12 days, officials said.

The temporary ammunition dump of an infantry unit in the northern town of Vavuniya, 254 km from Colombo, caught fire triggering several explosions but causing no casualties, officials said.

THE STATESMAN

21 MAR 2002

Ranil's Jaffna visit reassures Sinhalese

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 19. With his landmark visit to Jaffna last week, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, has earned the goodwill of the Tamils but, more importantly, it has helped him reassure the majority Sinhala community that the peace process is not intended to divide the country.

The Norwegian-backed peace process has been attacked by Mr. Wickremesinghe's political opponents in the Sinhala-dominated southern Sri Lanka as a conspiracy to partition the country and hand over the north-east to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

By undertaking the visit, the first by a Government leader in 20 years to the war-scarred peninsula, a former stronghold of the LTTE which has been at the centre of its demands for a separate state, Mr. Wickremesinghe appeared to be hitting out at the conspiracy-theorists.

Describing the visit as "bridging the north-south divide", the Daily Mirror said it was historic because it signified "the beginning of a process to restore the country's unity and integrity".

As Mr. Wickremesinghe pressed the flesh around the Tamil heartland, letting people mill around him, whipping off his shirt to enter Jaffna's most famous Hindu temple and speaking to school children, he appeared to be reasserting the fact that he was the Prime Minister as much of the north as of

the south. The de facto state that the LTTE ran from the peninsula between 1990 and 1995 seemed a distant memory as people hailed Mr. Wickremesinghe as the "saviour" while he went walkabout among the ruins of Chavakachcheri, one of the areas worst-hit by the war.

The territorial integrity of Jaffna with the rest of Sri Lanka was driven home further when the Prime Minister and the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca, chose the peninsula as the venue for their meeting during the latter's three-day visit to Sri Lanka.

The U.S. last week came out

NEWS ANALYSIS

against the LTTE, asking it to give up terrorism, respect human rights and democratic norms and accept that an independent state was "unnecessary and unattainable".

Against this background, the Wickremesinghe-Rocca meeting at the Palaly military base was symbolic of the support that the U.S. has extended for a political solution to the conflict within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

Since the revival of the peace process last December, Mr. Wickremesinghe and his Government have been at pains to project the U.S.-led international community as the force that will keep the LTTE reined in and engaged in the peace process.

Ms. Rocca's visit to Jaffna has greatly assisted Mr. Wickremes-

inghe in calming down fears of an imminent division of the country in the minds of the majority community.

Of significance to the peace process would be the LTTE's reaction to both Mr. Wickremesinghe's visit to Jaffna and his meeting there with the U.S. official.

The LTTE has indirectly expressed its unhappiness with the U.S. for publicly warning it, even though its direct response to last week's statement was a cautious reiteration of its commitment to the peace process.

In the past, the LTTE has also been deeply suspicious of Sri Lankan leaders who have attempted to upstage it in what it regards as its own territory. In this instance, not only has Mr. Wickremesinghe's visit to Jaffna challenged the LTTE's claim over the peninsula and its people, he has also teamed up with Ms. Rocca in a display of solidarity with the U.S., which the Tigers perceive as hostile to their interests.

However, analysts in the Sri Lankan media have suggested that Mr. Wickremesinghe could not have made the high-risk visit to Jaffna without first getting a go-ahead from the LTTE. They see this as a sign of consensus, between the LTTE and the Government, a positive signal that the two are working on the same wavelength, and a backing by the LTTE for Mr. Wickremesinghe's peace agenda.

The future of the peace process could depend on this being the correct interpretation.

THE HINDU

20 MAR 2002

LTTE chief orders crackdown on truce violators

COLOMBO: Under fire from the United States and human rights groups for alleged violations of the ongoing truce with the Sri Lankan government, LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran has ordered a crackdown on violators, a report said on Sunday. "He is worried about allegations of anti-Muslim activity, child conscription, extortion and abduction, and wants to take action, if any LTTE member is found guilty," LTTE political adviser Anton Balasingham said in an interview to the *Sunday Leader* weekly newspaper.

The LTTE has already denied a charge by the U.S. that it is engaged in activities that endanger the indefinite ceasefire that began last month after Prabhakaran and Prime Minister Ramil Wickremesinghe signed a pact.

Mr Balasingham was quoted by the newspaper as saying that even though most of the charges were untrue and concocted by vested interests seeking to blacken the LTTE and disrupt the peace process, Mr Prabhakaran was taking no chances and had ordered a probe. He said the leadership had sent an independent fact-finding mission to eastern Sri Lanka to ascertain the 'true state' of Tamil-Muslim relations in the wake of charges that Tiger cadres were involved in abduction and extortion of Muslim businessmen.

"Mr Prabhakaran is keen to ensure the success of the peace process. He has sent out a strict directive to regional and area leaders and commanders that if anyone is found guilty of ceasefire offences, severe action will be taken

against them," LTTE's chief negotiator said.

Meanwhile, Mr Balasingham will return to the country next month ending his self-imposed exile in London to hold consultations with Mr Prabhakaran and prepare for preliminary talks with the government. "It is imperative that I participate in consultations with Mr Prabhakaran before direct talks commence. I also hope to be involved in the initial phase of negotiations, characterised as 'talks about talks'," Mr Balasingham said in his interview.

Mr Balasingham, 64, is a British citizen and resides in London. He is believed to have left the LTTE-controlled northern Vanni region in 1998 for medical treatment abroad. (PTI)

US emissary in Lanka to give peace a push

■ Christina Rocca flew in to meet PM in Jaffna and went on a tour of the peninsula

K. VENKATARAMAN
JAFFNA, MARCH 15

US ASSISTANT Secretary of State (South Asia) Christina Rocca flew in to meet Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in a military air base in the northern Jaffna peninsula today, in a visit seen as a strong affirmation of US backing to the island nation's peace process.

Rocca arrived by an American military aircraft at the Palaly air base this afternoon, while Wickremesinghe was in the midst of a two-day tour of the northern region to raise mass support for his peace initiative.

"Our message has already been delivered. We strongly support the peace process," she said, as soon as her US Marines aircraft landed at Palaly. "We hope both sides will come to an agreement soon."



Sri Lanka PM Ranil Wickremesinghe and US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca in Jaffna on Thursday. Photo: AP

16/3 She met Wickremesinghe in the company of officials for a closed-door discussion at Palaly, before they left for a tour of parts of the peninsula, including the battle-ravaged town of Chavakacheri and for other meetings with local officials and politicians. Rocca is on a visit of the South Asian region, and her trip to Sri Lanka comes in the wake of signs that Washington is seeking to play a forceful role in strengthening the peace process being facilitated by Norway between the government and the LTTE.

By travelling to Jaffna to meet Wickremesinghe, the US official is apparently signifying the importance that her country accords to maintaining Sri Lanka's unity at a time when the stage is almost set for peace negotiations on a substantive solution to the ethnic problem.

Rocca's visit comes four days after the US issued a strongly-worded statement warning the LTTE against activities that endangered the terms of their truce with the government.

The US had cautioned that the Tigers risked "international isolation" if they persisted with arms smuggling, recruitment of child soldiers and abduction of civilians. The US statement also asked the rebels to get

S. Anura 95-8 down to the business of direct negotiations and give up their demand for a separate Tamil eelam, and find a solution within a united Sri Lanka. The LTTE immediately denied charges of truce violations and affirmed its commitment both to the ceasefire and to a negotiated settlement.

Wickremesinghe, during his two-day tour of the peninsula, has addressed troops, prayed at Buddhist and Hindu shrines for peace and met officials and civilians in a bid to understand their problems. On the first visit by any Sri Lankan national leader to the Jaffna peninsula in over a decade, he also committed himself to early reopening of a key highway that connects southern Sri Lanka with the impoverished northern Vanni region and the Jaffna peninsula.

Addressing Hindu devotees at a temple at Nainatheevu, also known as Nagadeepa, a remote island off the peninsula today, he sought mass support for his peace moves, promising the people prosperity in return. "This island is a symbol of the unity of our country," he said, referring to the presence of an ancient Buddhist shrine in the isle, where the population is entirely Tamil, close to the Hindu temple. "It is a symbol of our common culture," he said.

Lankan PM arrives in Jaffna on historic visit to woo Tamils

JAFFNA: Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe began a historic tour of the northern Jaffna peninsula on Thursday, hoping a cease fire with the Tamil rebels would hold and he said that he wanted to improve the lot for the minority Tamils.

Mr Wickremesinghe is the first Sinhalese leader to visit the embattled minority Tamil-dominated peninsula since the 1982 tour by late Ranasinghe Premadasa when he was premier.

"It is significant to be back here," Mr Wickremesinghe told reporters on his arrival. "We have signed a ceasefire agreement and there is popular support for it both here and in the (majority Sinhalese) south. We are trying to make it work and go for talks."

Large crowds gathered outside the airbase to watch his arrival. The prime minister, who was due to address troops stationed in the north and hold meeting with civilians, said he had a message for the Tamil community: "We want to make their life better, whether they are here, east, south or west."

Mr Wickremesinghe was flown to Palaly airbase in an air force C-130 transport aircraft and is to stay overnight in the peninsula. After a brief stop at the airbase, he was taken by helicopter to Jaffna town.

Jaffna, considered the fountainhead of Tamil separatism, was till 1995 the bastion of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that ran a de facto state there till they were ousted by gov-

ernment troops.

Mr Wickremesinghe's visit comes exactly three weeks after he signed a truce agreement, brokered by Norway, with the LTTE, which will stop all military offensives and rebel activity.

The indefinite truce will see the two warring parties edge closer to opening negotiations to end the decades long separatist conflict which has claimed over 60,000 lives and left thousands homeless. The prime minister has been hailed by Sri Lankans for lifting an economic embargo that saw goods flowing freely to Tiger-held areas and for easing travel restrictions between the north and the south since his election in December.

His trip to the north will coincide with a visit to the peninsula by U.S. assistant secretary of state for South Asia Christina Rocca on Thursday. The first top-level Bush administration official to arrive here, Rocca is expected to underscore Washington's growing interest in the country, particularly in ensuring the fragile ceasefire arrangement is kept intact.

The U.S. on Monday severely rebuked the LTTE for contravening the truce by allowing extortion, kidnapping and weapons smuggling to continue despite the ceasefire. The LTTE denied the charges but said if any of its cadres were found culpable they would be punished. The ceasefire is to be monitored by a group of Scandinavians picked by Oslo. The committee is yet to begin functioning with logistical arrangements still underway. (IANS)



Wickremesinghe

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 MAR 2002

HD-12

Ranil begins Jaffna visit *S. Lanka*

By Nirupama Subramanian

JAFFNA, MARCH 14. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, began a symbolic two-day visit to the island's war-ravaged peninsula with a promise of equality to the Tamil people and an appeal to soldiers to uphold the ceasefire with the LTTE.

Mr. Wickremesinghe's visit, the first by a government leader to this region since 1982, has injected fresh optimism into the Norwegian-facilitated peace process and raised expectations of an early settlement to the 20-year-old armed ethnic conflict.

"It is a significant visit. I am the first Prime Minister to come here (in many years). I want to tell the people of Jaffna that we want to make their life much better and whether it is north or south (of Sri Lanka), their life will be the same," he said as he stepped down from a Sri Lankan Air Force C-130 Hercules at Palaly airfield this morning.

The Prime Minister, who was accompanied by the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapana, said the ceasefire had received people's support from all parts of the country, and that both sides were now trying to make it work.

Later, addressing troops of the three services and the police force, Mr. Wickremesinghe made a strong appeal not to violate the terms of the truce accord reached last month with the LTTE.

"There is distrust and suspicion on all sides given past experiences, but everyone wants peace. You have suffered much in order to defend the territorial integrity of the country, but that suffering has ended with the ceasefire. Now you must ensure the agreement is implemented on the ground."

Mr. Wickremesinghe was flown by an Air Force helicopter to forward defence posi-

tions at Nagarkovil and Muhamalai, located on the neck of the peninsula. It was from there that the military had launched a disastrous operation last April against the LTTE, which not only killed more than 500 persons on both the sides, but also caused a serious setback to the peace process that was being pursued by the People's Alliance Government then with Norwegian assistance.

Lying a few miles north of Elephant Pass, captured by the LTTE in April 2000, the area saw intense fighting in the months that followed and appeared devastated.

"He must witness the damage that has been caused himself. Some areas are completely destroyed. Only seeing is believing," said V. Anandasangaree, the MP representing Jaffna from the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance.

Mr. Anandasangaree, who is also the senior vice-president of the Tamil United Liberation Front, said Mr. Wickremesinghe's priority should be to rebuild Jaffna.

The Prime Minister's visit was important for the goodwill it would create among the Tamil people. "Year by year, if all the leaders had come here regularly, the isolation felt by the Tamil people would not have grown," he said.

Mr. Wickremesinghe's arrival in the main Jaffna town later in the afternoon brought people out of their homes. Hundreds lined the streets to greet him. He met district officials and Tamil leaders.

An immediate expectation arising from Mr. Wickremesinghe's visit is the re-opening of a land route from the peninsula to the mainland. In order to do this, the military has to open out its forward defence line at Muhamalai.

Under the terms of the truce agreement, the route has to be re-opened by March 22, the 30th day following the start of the truce.

But military officials expressed doubt about being able to meet that deadline.

Ranil mobbed outside Nallur temple

By Nirupama Subramanian

JAFFNA, MARCH 14. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, removed his shirt to pray at the peninsula's most famous Hindu temple and let himself be mobbed by the crowds outside.

Bowing to the Jaffna custom, Mr. Wickremesinghe, a practising Buddhist, took off his shirt to enter the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple, where he offered special prayers. Hundreds of people were waiting for him outside and they swarmed around him when he emerged after the prayers.

Mr. Wickremesinghe then made an impromptu speech, appealing to the people of the peninsula to help find a permanent solution to the conflict that has destroyed their land and ravaged their lives. "We have a ceasefire now. I need your help to convert that into a permanent peace," he said.

He also visited to the Bishop of Jaffna, Thomas Sauvenderanayagam.

Congratulating the Prime Minister for his courage in deciding to visit the peninsula, Rev. Sauvenderanayagam said the ceasefire had enabled the people here to breathe again. Thanks to you and the leader of the LTTE, since last December the guns are silent. We do not hear the sounds of rockets and cannon. We can sleep in peace at night," he said. Conceding that the task before Mr. Wickremesinghe was formidable, the bishop promised him all support. "The people of Jaffna have only one burning desire: peace. We want peace, a just and lasting solution so that all can live as brother and sister, so that we can build a strong and united Sri Lanka," he said.

THE HINDU

15 MAR 2001

Ranil to break 20-yr taboo, visit Jaffna

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
COLOMBO, MARCH 13

SRI Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is scheduled to visit the embattled northern peninsula of Jaffna, the first trip to the area by the country's premier in 20 years.

The last PM to visit Jaffna was Ranasinghe Premadasa when he opened a model village housing scheme there in 1982. Wickremesinghe is scheduled to address government troops and civilians tomorrow and stay overnight in Jaffna, the cultural capital of the island's Tamil minority.

Sri Lankan forces took control of Jaffna in December 1995 after driving out the rebel LTTE who ran a de facto separate state for nearly five years. Wickremesinghe came to power in elections in December promising to revive the island's stagnant peace process.

On February 23, he entered into a formal ceasefire with the LTTE, who have been fighting for an independent homeland for the Tamil minority in the North and East of the island, which was arranged by peace-broker Norway.

A senior US Marines commanding officer is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka on Friday and will

travel to the island's embattled northern and eastern regions, officials said. Brigadier General Timothy Ghormley, commanding general of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, will visit Jaffna and the eastern China Bay areas.

The US embassy here said it was the first time that a Marines officer of such high rank was visiting Sri Lanka. US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca too would visit the Jaffna peninsula when she arrives tomorrow.



A file photo of Sri Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with wife Maithree

NDIAN EXPRESS

14 MAR 2002

Honour truce terms, U.S. tells LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 11. Amid mounting concern over reports of human rights violations and smuggling of weapons by the LTTE in north-east Sri Lanka, the United States today asked the group to respect the terms of the ceasefire accord or risk further international isolation.

"We have heard credible reports that the LTTE are engaged in activities that could jeopardise the recent indefinite ceasefire accord reached with the Sri Lankan Government," a sternly-worded statement from the U.S. embassy said here today.

The statement should come as a shot in the arm for the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government not just for the pressure it puts on the LTTE, but also to enable it to calm down opponents of the peace process, and reassure them that if it goes wrong, the international community will provide a safety net.

The U.S. statement referred to reports of recruitment of children and kidnapping and extortion, especially of Muslims, by the group in the north-east, and of LTTE "re-supply operations" since the ceasefire.

"Continued smuggling of weapons by the LTTE could undermine the trust needed to move from a cessation of hostilities to a lasting peace," it pointed out.

Noting that incidents of recruitment and extortion had decreased in recent days, the statement expressed the hope that the trend would continue.

"The U.S. understands that both sides, not just the LTTE, have responsibilities under the terms of the ceasefire accord. In the current international context, however, in which terrorism is being condemned in more and more countries, the LTTE should be especially vigilant about observing the terms of the ceasefire accord. If it does not, it will increase its in-

ternational isolation and do harm to the group it claims to represent, Sri Lanka's Tamils, who earnestly want an end to the war," the statement warned.

On the other hand, the statement went on to say, if the LTTE ended its reliance of terrorism, and accepted that an independent state is "both unattainable and unnecessary", and honoured democratic and human rights norms, the U.S. would respond positively.

It asked the LTTE to take advantage of the ceasefire accord and work with Norway, the facilitator of the peace process, to negotiate a permanent settlement to the conflict.

The statement comes on the

heels of a letter to the Sinhala hardline newspaper, *Island*, by the U.S. Ambassador, Ashley Wills, explaining his Government's position on the LTTE, in response to a demand by the daily for a clarification on the issue.

The U.S. has been accused by sections of the Sri Lankan media of double-speak on the issue of terrorism.

Defending the U.S. position for talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, Mr. Wills explained that his Government had no illusions about the LTTE, but that the U.S. supported the stand of successive Sri Lankan Governments for talks with the LTTE, and believed this was "wise".

LTTE denies U.S. charge

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MARCH 11. In a quick reply to a U.S. statement of concern today at reported violations of human rights by the LTTE in north-east Sri Lanka, the group has denied the charge and expressed "dismay" that it came at a time when international observers were preparing to observe the truce that began last month.

"We wish to assure the U.S. Government that the LTTE is sincerely and seriously committed to peace and to a peace process aimed at a negotiated political settlement," the London-based senior member of the LTTE, Anton Balasingham, said in a statement seen on TamilNet, a pro-LTTE website.

Mr. Balasingham, who rejected similar concern expressed by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, as an attempt to "sabotage" the peace process by "deliberately distorting facts to slander the LTTE", was more cautious in his response to the U.S.

Questioning the credibility of the reports on which the U.S. had based its charge, Mr. Balasingham said there were strict instructions to its cadres not to violate the ceasefire.

"Members found guilty of violating the ceasefire will be severely punished," he added.

There were "elements and forces" at work in the north-east engaging in criminal activities in a bid to subvert the peace process.

"We are surprised and dismayed that the U.S. embassy has thought it a proper protocol to issue a critical statement on ceasefire violations at this critical time when an international team of monitors are assuming responsibilities to supervise the agreement," Mr. Balasingham said.

The LTTE was encouraged by the fact that the U.S. was interested in peace and stability in Sri Lanka and had asked both the Government and the LTTE to respect the terms of the ceasefire accord, he added.

Eelam or no Eelam?

55-4 That is the question in Sri Lanka 11/3

Out of all the terms of the truce brokered by the Norwegians between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, there are two likely to cause a fracture in the ruling establishment: the use of the expression line of control and the fact that the facilitators will effectively arbitrate the truce by taking key operational decisions. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who threatened, at one point of time, to cancel the truce, is now bickering with prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe over what she considers, with some justification, as an abdication of sovereignty to the Norwegians. In some situations, it may be a good thing to have a neutral party monitoring a ceasefire, in a way that both find impartial and fair. But Kumaratunga is obviously worried about the margin of manoeuvre that would prevent the Sri Lankan Army from acting upon its own assessment of the situation. The concern is valid to the extent that the LTTE, an unregulated and lawless force, is left free to walk out of the arrangement anytime it chooses. However, Pirabhakaran signed the truce with alacrity before Wickremesinghe, probably to present him with a *fait accompli*. If anything should go wrong, and with the LTTE chances of things going wrong are always high, Wickremesinghe's head will be on the block.

The ceasefire makes some important ^{S. Lanka} concessions to the LTTE: its cadres can move into government-held areas without arms; it and its leader are recognised as the sole representative of the Tamil people and all other Tamil groups are to be disarmed. In return, the LTTE promises not to assassinate or suicide bomb — a promise, in any case, implied under the pacific term of ceasefire — and open the Kandy-Jaffna mainland road. No wonder, Pirabhakaran was in a hurry to sign it. The analogy with Kashmir is not apposite; there is no equivalent, in Kashmir, to the LTTE, a tightly organised guerrilla organisation capable not only of holding out but winning battles against the Army. All that can be said is that the ceasefire will provide some immediate relief. Beyond that, it is anybody's guess. Pirabhakaran hasn't said he is renouncing Eelam.

DR. S. L. S. S. S.

11/3/2002

HPD-12

Fear stalks Batticaloa

S. Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

BATTICALOA, FEB. 26. Sri Lanka is euphoric about the ceasefire between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but to this eastern town, it has brought no peace of mind.

The LTTE controls large swathes of territory in the region and walks in and out of the Government-controlled areas with ease because there is no well-defined "line of control".

Last December, when both sides began an informal ceasefire, the LTTE began recruiting teenagers from the district, taking away underage children forcibly, and also intensified its "tax" collection. Now, with a formal ceasefire in place, there is fear and uncertainty at the prospect of the LTTE being allowed to roam freely in all areas within a few weeks, as specified under the agreement. "We have mixed feelings about the ceasefire," one man, whose business partner fled town after the LTTE asked him to pay up Rs. 15 lakhs, said diplomatically.

Before the truce, people complained about military checkpoints. Now, for the first time in several years, people are able to move around freely even at night, but ironically, they are asking where the security forces have disappeared. "If the army would only check people's bags, at least we can give the LTTE the excuse that we cannot carry the money to them as we would be

defected by soldiers," one man, who has been issued several demand notes, said somewhat desperately.

The LTTE tax collectors seem to have every detail about the income of their targets: salaries, bank balances, assets, liabilities. Those singled out have to visit the LTTE office in nearby Kokadicholai. They can bring down the amount they have to pay by bargaining. Refusal to pay usually brings imprisonment till the person is worn down into accepting his fate.

A government official took voluntary retirement from her

AFTER THE TRUCE ACCORD -II

job last December, four years ahead of time, in order to move out of the area where she was posted to escape harassment from the "tax squad" of the LTTE. Now she fears they will be able to get to her only too easily and punish her. A clause in the ceasefire agreement for the protection of civilians from extortion, abduction, intimidation and other harassment has brought no comfort to her. The Tigers have abducted several "tax offenders" until they pay up.

Fears are rising that when they are allowed into the town, the LTTE will step up recruitment, which people said had eased off in the first few days of the cease-

fire. Over the last three months, the LTTE is believed to have recruited as many as 200 teenagers, including underage children, mainly from areas under its control, demanding one child from each family. Several families that fled to Government-controlled areas to escape the conscription now dread being found by the LTTE and punished. Children who were daring enough to escape from LTTE camps and are still getting over the trauma, are panicking that their captors might return.

The Hindu spoke to several such children. One of them, an 18-year-old boy, said he was leaving for a Sinhalese village outside the north-east where the LTTE could not find him. The LTTE had taken his mother captive after his escape. The boy hoped they would release her once they realised he had gone for good.

A 15-year-old boy, who was taken away by two LTTE cadres, as he came out of classes escaped on a bicycle from a camp where he was kept for three days. After two hours of frantic pedalling, he managed to reach a main road where he flagged down the first vehicle he saw. The occupants took him to the nearest police station and he was re-united with his family a few hours later. Now the boy is scared at the thought of stepping out again.

It is an open secret here that a recently-elected Member of Parliament attempted suicide by consuming poison when his son was taken away by the LTTE, and had to be hospitalised for three days. But that did not bring his child back.

Even those who are otherwise ardent supporters of the LTTE say they are ashamed at its conduct over the last few months. "The LTTE has undoubtedly created a lot of resentment with its activities," said one eminent townsman who has close contact with the area leader of the Tigers, Sivagnyanam Karikalan.

But there are also those who justify the recruitment and "collection" of money as necessary to strengthen the LTTE.

Sri Lankan talks do not guarantee peace

By Jai Taraporevala
Times News Network

MUMBAI: Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has expressed guarded optimism about the prospects for indirect procedural discussions that will take place between the government and the LTTE in the coming weeks. There are certain factors which are likely to help the process of implementing the agreement on the extension of the indefinite ceasefire and the commencement of substantive negotiations in the near future.

After all, given the changed international scenario in the post-September 11 period and the improved fighting capability of the Sri Lankan army as a result of recent purchases of sophisticated

weapons, the Tigers will remain under pressure to pursue the diplomatic option. Mr Wickremesinghe's motivations to pursue the search for peace partly stem from the reduction in the level of mistrust that exists between the government and the Tigers. Besides, any progress in the negotiations will enable him to strengthen his political position vis-a-vis his arch-rival, President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

A sense of war weariness on both sides of the political divide in Sri Lanka, confidence in the role of Norway as a facilitator and the step-by-step approach to peace which has been favoured by the government and the LTTE rather than the strategy of directly addressing the

central issues are some of the other factors which should smoothen the process of negotiations.

Even so, the success of the ongoing peace process is by no means assured. Significant hurdles remain to be overcome before the core questions can be tackled. These include lifting the ban on the Tigers, setting into place additional confidence-building measures and a format and agenda for the substantive talks.

More important, it is debatable whether the flexibility shown by the LTTE signifies a basic shift in its stand or turns out to be a tactical move necessitated by current international realities and aimed at biding time in order to regroup its forces. In any case, the substantive

issues are, by their very nature, highly contentious as they relate to such aspects as the shape of a future devolution package for the provinces, the powers of the security forces and the fate of the land settlements in the east of the island.

In addition, any discussion on the terms of a merger between the northern and eastern regions has been made more complicated by the demographic shift which has taken place in the last decade. Except in Batticaloa, the other eastern districts of Amparai and Trincomalee have witnessed a perceptible percentage decline in the Tamil population during this period. Thus, although the prospects for peace appear hopeful, nothing can be taken for granted.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 MAR 2002

Monitors arrive to supervise Sri Lankan truce

By Nirupama Subramanian

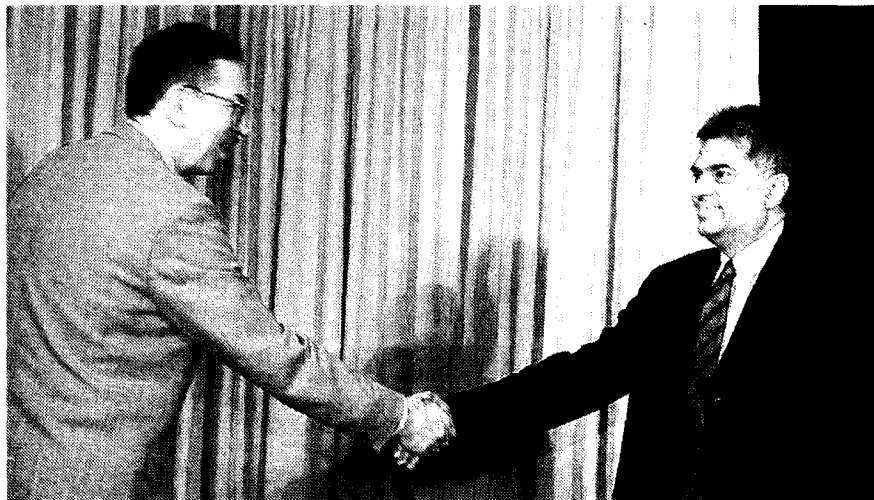
COLOMBO, MARCH 2. A team of international monitors, led by a retired Major General arrived here today to supervise the truce between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) amid a simmering row over their role and that of Norway in the peace process. Maj. Gen. Trond Furuhovde, formerly of the Norwegian Army, will lead a team of 16 representatives drawn from the Scandinavian countries to monitor the ceasefire that began on February 23.

Gen. Furuhovde told reporters after a meeting with the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, that he expects the Norwegian monitors to be in place by March 6. Monitors will also arrive from Finland, Sweden and Denmark in the next few days. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), as it will be known, would operate through monitoring committees in six districts of the northeast — Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai.

According to the government, two other districts, Killinochchi and Mullaitivu, will not have monitors as they are in the LTTE-controlled areas and therefore, not in the conflict zone. Each of the monitoring committees will comprise five members, two of whom will be nominated by the government, two by the LTTE and headed by an international monitor appointed by the SLMM. Each of the committees will report to Gen. Furuhovde, who will be based here, and will report to the Norwegian Government. The powers to interpret the ceasefire agreement rest with the head of the SLMM, a provision that has raised questions from the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the head of the Government and also the leader of the People's Alliance, Sri Lanka's main opposition party.

Ms. Kumaratunga has expressed particular concern over the fact that the ceasefire agreement formalises the territory controlled by the LTTE and the government by demarcating a line of control. The final arbitrator on a dispute relating to this LoC is the head of the SLMM. "This is the first time in the history of post-independence Sri Lanka that a foreign government is being authorised to draw demarcation lines on the soil of Sri Lanka. The submission of such matters to the binding authority of a single individual appointed by a foreign government appears to be wholly inconsistent with the sovereignty of the people of Sri Lanka," Ms. Kumaratunga pointed out in a detailed letter on Thursday.

The President has asked for an amendment or modification of the role of the SLMM as the interpreter of the ceasefire agreement. She has also expressed surprise that the role of Norway had changed from that of the facilitator in the peace process to mediator or arbitrator in the resolution of disputes that would arise between the two sides. "I was not aware that the nature of the Norwegian Government's mandate had changed to such an extent as to make it incompatible with the sovereign status of



The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, greets the head of the Norwegian peace monitors, Trond Furuhovde, at the Temple Trees in Colombo on Saturday. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

Sri Lanka," she noted. Ms. Kumaratunga has complained that the agreement was shown to her only after it had been signed by the LTTE leader.

The right-wing Sihala Urumaya, that has taken the ceasefire agreement to court on the ground that it was shown to the President only after one party, the LTTE, had already signed it, held a protest march against it today. At a public meeting on Thursday, the JVP burnt a copy of the ceasefire agreement and said the lines of control demarcated by a foreign government would become the international boundaries of an LTTE-declared independent Tamil state.

With local government elections scheduled for March 20, it is expected that opposition parties will use the ceasefire agreement as a platform against the United National Front. On a demand by the JVP, Parliament will debate the agreement on Monday and Tuesday.

Ms. Kumaratunga has also raised other concerns about the agreement. One of these is that there is no unambiguous provision in the agreement giving the Navy the right to intercept LTTE boats at sea. Ms. Kumaratunga said that a statement by Mr. Wickremesinghe that the armed forces retained this right was outside the agreement and therefore, had no legal validity. The President also expressed concern that the ceasefire agreement had not fixed a time-frame or date for negotiations between the two sides. "I believe it is important to include in the agreement a date for the commencement of talks, so that it would be clear that the ceasefire is not an end in itself: that it is not an arrangement that is intended to continue indefinitely without a political solution being reached," she said.

Pointing to the provision in the agreement that unarmed LTTE would be allowed to move freely in government-controlled areas of the northeast from the 90th day of the ceasefire for "political work", the President said that this would pose a threat to the security of those areas.

Ms. Kumaratunga also asked why the government had not ensured the right of non-LTTE independent Tamil political parties to carry out political work in areas controlled by the Tigers. Critics have cast Ms. Kumaratunga in the role of a spoiler, seeking revenge on Mr. Wickremesinghe, for withdrawing his party's support for constitutional reforms aimed at ending the ethnic conflict just as it was about to be tabled in Parliament by the PA Government in August 2000. But Ms. Kumaratunga, in her letter to Mr. Wickremesinghe, has said her commitment to peace "remains firm and constant" and that she "wholly" approved of the concept of a mutual ceasefire.

SC decision on school curriculum hailed

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2. The Students' Federation of India (SFI) has hailed the Supreme Court's interim order staying the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education "that aims to saffronise education to push through the Sangh Parivar's hidden agenda".

Describing the order as a setback to the NDA Government in general and the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Murli Manohar Joshi, in particular, an SFI statement noted that the interim order of the Supreme Court "vindicates the stand taken by the secular and democratic forces earlier on this issue". Of the view that Dr. Joshi has "no moral claim to office" in the wake of the interim order, the SFI central executive committee has once again accused the Government of avoiding the constitution of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) for fear of the overwhelming opinion of the academic community — who in the main make up CABE — against the agenda to communalise education.

Negotiations in Sri Lanka

By Jayadeva Uyangoda

The lesson Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremesinghe should never forget is: with a non-cooperative parliamentary Opposition, no ruling party can handle the ethnic conflict.

FD-12
1/3

SRI LANKA's new negotiation process, launched only weeks ago, appears to run the risk of being undermined by an uncooperative parliamentary Opposition coalition of the People's Alliance and the radically nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. The PA-JVP leaders wasted no time in denouncing the agreement between the United National Front Government and the LTTE, within a few hours of the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, signing it in Vavuniya. Ironically, the opposition to the peace initiative is led by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, who for many years worked towards a negotiated settlement of the same ethnic question. Personal and party rivalries appear to be at the heart of Ms. Kumaratunga's move. Many people may view it as hastily conceived, unfortunate and even simply opportunistic.

Ms. Kumaratunga's opposition to the truce agreement was initially couched in procedural terms. Her point is that although she is the head of the state, head of the Cabinet and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, she has not been adequately consulted or briefed about the agreement or the timetable of its signing. Her point, if true, is a serious one. In Sri Lanka's Constitution, the Prime Minister is subservient to the President. The Prime Minister's powers and authority are not constitutionally defined. Under the present arrangement of a PA President and a UNF Government, the President's powers have not yet been explicitly delegated to the Prime Minister. Ms. Kumaratunga implies that Mr. Wickremesinghe has violated the Constitution by signing the ceasefire agreement with foreign mediation. In a bid to reassert her presidential authority, Ms. Kumaratunga told a local-government election rally that in one letter to the Army Commander she could nullify the UNF-LTTE truce. Although she is unlikely to take such a step that might plunge the country into chaos and instability, Ms. Kumaratunga's adversarial behaviour towards the peace initiative

demonstrates the degree to which the Sinhalese ruling class is divided on narrow, partisan grounds.

In Sri Lanka's ethnic question, a sorry history appears to repeat itself whenever attempts at resolution are made. The main protagonists of this tragic drama have been men and women from two political families who ruled, and continue to rule, post-colonial Sri Lanka — the Senanayake-Jayewardene clan and the Bandaranaike family. They have for nearly 50 years managed, quite successfully, to obstruct all attempts to resolve the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic question through all stages of its evolution.

But, Ms. Kumaratunga may not want to be the spoiler this time. The most charitable explanation of her denunciation of the truce agreement is that since the local government elections are round the corner, she is trying to define the PA's campaign platform in Sri Lanka's tradition of narrow oppositionist politics. Another explanation is that the President has not been adequately consulted by the UNP on the agreement. This is probably true. Although Mr. Wickremesinghe may have briefed the President about the agreement, it appears he has not taken her into full confidence. It is also possible that the draft was not discussed extensively by the Cabinet. The UNP's style of managing controversial policy issues appears to be one of limited consultation and signing an agreement before resistance is crystallised. This is obviously different from the PA's style of extensive consultation that, though inadvertently, left no space for consensus.

Meanwhile, it needs to be said that the PA leadership does not seem to have quite understood the dynamics of the present stage of Government-LTTE negotiations. Ms. Kumaratunga

and her advisers should realise that there are many paths of negotiation with the LTTE. The UNP's strategy of avoiding contentious, constitutional issues at the beginning and prioritising ceasefire is not necessarily a bad strategy, although the PA may have opted for a different course of action. The UNP also appears to think that locking the LTTE in a process of de-escalation would enable both the Government and the LTTE to find common ground. This time, the common ground seems to be economic development, not constitutional reform. A careful reading of the LTTE's behaviour during the past one year may demonstrate that there is now a discernible shift in its strategy — moving away from politically costly military campaign to an economic developmentalist path.

Indeed, the Opposition parties appear to fear a scenario of the state moving from high-intensity war to de-escalation and negotiation. This has made them incapable of recognising the likely shift of the conflict — conflict transformation — in case of a ceasefire, however imperfect the terms of the truce may appear. It is hardly possible for any Government to work out the perfect terms of a truce under perfect procedural rules. What should matter now is a meaningful political engagement between the state and the rebels, though the outcome is not yet clear. In any peace process in protracted conflicts, the path of negotiation and peace tends to be unclear and the outcome uncertain. The existence of broad political support for the process as well as the outcome can hopefully sustain efforts towards peace.

Can Sri Lanka once again afford to lose a chance for conflict transformation through ceasefire and political

engagement? Obviously 'no'. Opportunities for peace initiatives don't come by every day, or even every year. The last occasion was in 1994. This is why civil society and the Left forces will have to forge a programme of intervention to rescue the peace process and insulate it from a possible UNP-PA power struggle. Meanwhile, the alliance with the JVP made last year has pushed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), main partner in the PA, back to its nationalist ideology and strategies of the 1980s. There is no alternative leadership within the SLFP that can turn it back into its 1994-1995 platform. Meanwhile, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the PA's Left partner, has urged Ms. Kumaratunga not to sabotage the UNF-LTTE negotiation process. Civil society groups active on the peace front are making preparations for public mobilisation for peace. A sustained civil society initiative for peace and democracy, coupled with an extended ceasefire as well as negotiations between the Government and the LTTE with tangible results, would be able to take the sting away from a possible Sinhala nationalist resistance. At the same time, the international community should prevail on both the UNP and the PA to work in cooperation.

Perhaps, it is still not too late for Mr. Wickremesinghe to create a mechanism for working together with the PA leadership on the peace and negotiation front. A Government-Opposition Consultative Committee that should include among others the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition would be an option worth trying out. There is hardly any reason why Mr. Wickremesinghe should go through the same painful learning process that Ms. Kumaratunga experienced a few years ago. The lesson both leaders should never forget is: with a non-cooperative parliamentary Opposition, no ruling party can handle the ethnic conflict.

(The writer is Head, Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo.)

1 MAR 2002

Chandrika threatens to cancel truce with Tigers

Colombo, Feb. 26 (Reuters): Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has threatened to cancel a landmark ceasefire agreement signed with Tamil Tiger rebels if she disagrees with some of its clauses, a local newspaper reported today.

Kumaratunga, who has

sweeping powers to sack the government and suspend parliament, has already been highly critical of her arch-rival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, saying he kept her in the dark about the Norwegian-brokered truce.

"I can stop Ranil Wick-

remesinghe's agreement with one letter to the army commander," Kumaratunga was quoted by the *Daily Mirror* newspaper as saying about the agreement that was signed with the LTTE on Friday. "There are several suspicious clauses in the agreement with the LTTE. I have appointed

a committee to study the agreement and the report would be out in a day or two. Then I will take necessary action," she said.

The paper said she was speaking at a local government meeting just north of Colombo. Kumaratunga's spokesman was out of Colombo today and could

not be contacted but an aide confirmed Kumaratunga spoke at a local government election rally yesterday. The government retorted by saying: "The executive presidential prerogative with regard to war and peace has nothing to do with an internal matter like this."

Sri Lanka: A milestone and many minefields

The MOU signed between the Sri Lankan government and LTTE is historic — and laden with pitfalls, says **JEHAN PERERA**

THE Norwegian-drafted Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE might indeed be historic. Nevertheless, there are some serious problems that will have to be encountered in the days to come. The main feature of the MOU signed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is an indefinite ceasefire agreement which calls for two weeks notice being given by either party prior to termination of the ceasefire. This clause is likely to assuage apprehensions regarding the possibility of a surprise attack by either side.

In the past, it has always been the LTTE that ended ceasefires with such surprise attacks. On this occasion, with the Norwegians and indeed the entire diplomatic community in Sri Lanka keenly watching the peace process, the chances of a repeat performance are considerably reduced.

On the other hand, there are grave apprehensions on what the LTTE up to. Just a few days before signing of the agreement, there was a major clash at sea between the naval and sea tiger boats. The LTTE's version was that the navy had fired upon sea tigers training at sea. The government's version was different.

Observing a flotilla of sea Tiger boats, and mindful of allegations that the LTTE was bringing in military supplies by sea during the period of ceasefire, the naval vessels had approached the LTTE ones only to be fired upon. Despite this experience, the MOU fails to address this problem of the LTTE re-supplies by sea and presents a potential flashpoint.

The government's position is that the MOU permits Lankan armed forces to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country without engaging in offensive military operations against the LTTE.

Apprehending unauthorised vessels entering Sri Lankan territorial waters, by this reasoning, would be self-defence and not offensive. But it can be expected that the LTTE's reasoning will be different.

A second problematic area in the MOU is the inability of the government to obtain the support of the opposition. Although the government seems to believe it has, perhaps it has not tried hard enough, given the nature of the problem and the stakes.

President Chandrika Ku-



maratunga said that she would issue a detailed comment on the MOU and its shortcomings. Although Wickremesinghe invited Kumaratunga to co-sign the MOU with him, she refused to do so. Her grounds: she had been unaware of the contents of the agreement until after the LTTE leader had already signed it.

This is a negative signal. The President is apparently caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, her instincts as a combative politician are to not wish the government to succeed where she so badly failed, and gain credit for restoring peace to the country.

On the other hand, Kumaratunga is also acutely aware that the Lankans are supportive of a peace process that would genuinely lead to a resolution of the conflict. The present time is too early for any conclusive re-

jection of the peace process as one that will not lead to a permanent peace.

THE two-fold pull on the president can be seen in reports that she is to engage in talks with the Janatha Vimuktasi Peramuna (JVP) regarding formulating a common position vis-a-vis the MOU.

Right from the beginning of the Norwegian-facilitated peace process, the JVP has been opposing it. Notwithstanding the fact that the MOU consolidates the ceasefire, the JVP has been engaging in a massive, critical poster campaign against paving the ground for handing over the north-east, and the Sinhalese and Muslims in it, to the LTTE.

But lacking the mass base of Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA), the JVP has not yet been able to mobilise the masses in opposition to the peace process. Therefore, any alliance with the PA in opposing the MOU at the forthcoming local government elections scheduled for March 20 would be a great

opportunity to the JVP.

The third problematic aspect the MOU has to deal with is regarding the Muslim community in the east. Using the opportunities provided by the ceasefire over the past two months to enter into government-controlled territory, the LTTE has been extorting millions of rupees from the Muslims, even kidnapping them. It has thus succeeded in creating a rift between itself and the Muslim community that constitutes at least one-third of the population in the east.

This is likely to complicate future political negotiations regarding devolution. The Muslim community is likely to balk at being put under the rule of those who have so badly been mistreating them.

The LTTE's conduct in the east is a matter that the MOU seeks to address — though indirectly — by stating in general terms that abduction, extortion and harassment of the civilian population is not permitted.

It further states in its preamble that the Muslim population is one of the groups that are not directly a party to the conflict, but which is also suffering the consequences. It goes on to say that the provisions of the MOU regarding the security of civilians and their property apply to all inhabitants.

This is a matter civic organisations and the international community need to take up. The real test will lie when the conflicting parties sit down to work out the power-sharing arrangement. It is going to be a long haul. One only wishes that all the parties concerned really want to bring peace and conduct themselves accordingly.

(A reputed Colombo-based commentator, **Jehan Perera** is Media Director of the National Peace Council.)

Lanka's long road to peace

July 1985: Govt officials meet Tamil leaders including officials of LTTE in the Bhutanese capital Thimpu, but fail to reach a deal

July 29, 1987: Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Junius Jayawardene sign a peace accord creating a system of regional councils to give Tamils in the North-east limited autonomy. Sinhalese mobs riot in Colombo in protest

July 30: 1,700 Indian troops arrive to enforce the pact

August 5: LTTE joins other rebel groups in surrendering weapons to Indian Army but later reneges on the accord and begins three years of

battle

Dec 19, 1988: Ranasinghe Premadasa elected president after promising to send back Indian troops and begin talking to the LTTE

April 12, 1989: Govt declares ceasefire; offers peace package to LTTE, including amnesty

July 29: India begins withdrawing troops

Feb 23, 1990: Premadasa begins talks with LTTE put up at government expense in Colombo Hilton amid allegations the government was giving the LTTE arms to fight Indian Army

March 13: Last Indian troops leave

June 11: 'Hilton Honeymoon' ends when talks fail as LTTE overruns police stations in eastern Lanka

May 1, 1993: Premadasa killed by an LTTE suicide bomber

Aug 16, 1994: Opposition People's Alliance comes to power promising peace talks

Jan 8, 1995: Government and rebels agree on cessation of hostilities

April 19: Truce ends; rebels blow up two navy vessels in Trincomalee, killing 12 sailors.

March 26, 1997: President Chandrika Kumaratunga unveils draft constitution giving autonomy to regions, including one controlled by Tamils

Jan 4, 2004: Norway announces initiative to end the conflict

May 22: Delegation including Erik Solheim, Norway's special envoy for peace, begins talks with Lankan leaders. Meetings take place as rebels push to recapture Jaffna, which they lost to troops in 1995

Aug 8: Protests by Sinhalese nation-

alists force Kumaratunga to withdraw constitution plans from Parliament

Nov 1: Solheim meets Prabhakaran in LTTE-held territory

Nov 27: Prabhakaran is "ready" for unconditional talks; wants truce and end to govt embargo on rebel-controlled territory. Govt rejects both

Dec 22: Rebels declare month-long unilateral truce from Christmas Eve. Govt refuses to match ceasefire

April 24: Rebels allow truce to expire after extending it for four months

July 24: LTTE attacks Lanka's only international airport

Dec 5: United National Party-led govt elected on pro-peace platform

Dec 24: Unilateral ceasefires in place

Feb 22 - Govt, LTTE sign Norwegian-brokered agreement for indefinite ceasefire. (REUTERS)

Talks about talks, next step: Ranil

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 24. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose Government began a landmark truce with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on Saturday, said today "talks about talks" was the next item on his peace agenda, followed by direct negotiations on a political settlement to the island's conflict. "We signed the ceasefire to create an atmosphere free of violence, free of conflict, so that talks can begin. We have dealt with the humanitarian issues and now we have a ceasefire. The next step is to have talks about talks and then begin negotiations," Mr. Wickremesinghe said at a news conference today.

This is the first time since April 1995, when the LTTE withdrew from a ceasefire and peace talks with the then Government through an attack on the Trincomallee harbour, that the two sides are observing a unilateral truce. The Prime Minister ac-

knowledged that the road ahead was difficult, said he would take it "step by step", and expressed confidence that finally, the goal of peace would be reached.

He asked the international community, which had pressed Sri Lanka to begin talks with the LTTE, to ensure that the group would come to the negotiating table and begin discussions on a solution that would be acceptable to all Sri Lankans. Mr. Wickremesinghe said he would place no conditions or restrictions that might prevent the LTTE from participating in negotiations, except that there would be no division of the country as a solution to the two decade-old armed separatist conflict.

"We cannot be too rigid with regard to talks. We should first get the LTTE to the table. I am not saying 'no' to anything except a separate state," he said, adding that he was proceeding on the assumption that the LTTE would have scaled down its goal of an independent Eelam in the light of the international situation after September 11.

Mr. Wickremesinghe said he believed the two sides to be broadly agreed on devolution as a means to resolve the conflict but predicted the main stumbling blocks in the process would arise during talks.

"Now we have to engage each other on substantive issues. That is where the main issues, the problems may come. We must know where we stand, what the gaps are. Let them put what they have on the agenda, and we will put what we have," he said.

Defending the Norway-brokered truce agreement from Opposition accusations that it was a sell-out to the LTTE, Mr. Wickremesinghe denied that the Government had made any "concessions". "We have taken into account the reality on the ground and devised rules to govern that reality," he said. International ceasefire monitors from Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway will arrive in the country on Monday. They will function in teams with Sri Lankan monitors and report to Norway, the facilitator of the peace process.

NEW CONCERNS OF TRUST AND TRUCE

AN ELABORATE EXERCISE is now under way in Sri Lanka at evolving a durable 'ceasefire' between the Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However, it will be entirely out of sync with reality to foresee at this stage any dramatic dawn of a new era of tolerant coexistence and peace-promotive cooperation between the two adversaries. An agreement between them, brokered by Norway in its capacity as the acknowledged facilitator, has been signed by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, without the two being able and willing to meet for this common purpose. In fact, the controversial political circumstances of this event suggest the need for utmost caution rather than any celebration of hopes that the prolonged ethnic conflict may now become manageable and amenable to a quick political solution. At a glance, the latest document does of course cover issues ranging from the modalities of the 'truce' itself to a procedure for monitoring it and the gradual restoration of normality as also some confidence-building measures to advance the overall objective. As a matter of logistical niceties, the accord actually consists of two separate letters addressed to the Norwegian Foreign Minister from the Sri Lankan Prime Minister and the LTTE chief. The agreement is seen by them as a device to stabilise an existing 'truce' of sorts between the two Sri Lankan parties and to render it more meaningful over a longer but unspecified time-frame. A commitment by Colombo and the LTTE to search for a negotiated settlement, in the specific context of the 'ceasefire', is the icing on the cake, as the parties (including the facilitator) seem eager to portray.

Viewed in this perspective, the necessary cautionary note has nothing very much to do with the question whether or not the proverbial devil is in the details of this new accord between Colombo and the LTTE. It is also evident that con-

siderable spadework has been done to raise a 'structure' for the intended truce verification and for the purposes of creating normality in the conflict-hit areas (virtually the entire territory of Sri Lanka). Both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE have also clearly sought to safeguard their flanks even while being sufficiently conciliatory for each other's comfort at this stage. Given the magnitude of this externally-facilitated project which has been explicitly consented to by both Colombo and the LTTE, the latest 'truce' is intrinsically different from any previous experiments at accommodation between these two Sri Lankan entities. Yet, the fact remains that the success or failure of this new endeavour will depend on how the LTTE and Colombo can, if at all, bridge their fundamental differences in an atmosphere of trust. There is no sign yet that the notoriously terroristic LTTE might be willing to give up its dream of a separate fascist state.

More immediately, the new agreement has caused a political rupture within the Sri Lankan establishment. The country's executive President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, feels frustrated and alienated by the manner in which the Prime Minister is said to have taken this proactive initiative without duly consulting her. The President's objections relate to the specifics of some unidentified provisions of the present accord. Ms. Kumaratunga can certainly boast of a track record of espousing the cause of Sri Lanka's minority Tamils and Muslims in a refreshingly courageous and visionary manner. Now, the question in this regard is not how Mr. Wickremesinghe can dissipate the President's reported political anger. The Prime Minister must not only take the President into confidence but he should also be seen to do so instead of appearing to regard her as a spent political force. Norway, too, should take abundant care to ensure that it does not cause fissures within the Sri Lankan establishment while facilitating its access to the LTTE. The road ahead can be quite tricky.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2002

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A welcome accord

25/2

On the long and uncertain road to peace in Sri Lanka

THE landmark agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE is welcome because it could vector them further and faster on the road to peace in the war-torn country. Both parties clearly commit themselves to uphold the integrity and unity of Sri Lanka as a sovereign state. This was the goal for which 1,200 men of the Indian Army had laid down their lives more than a decade ago. The central message of the accord is that the separatist violent movement that has been ravaging the country for two decades has agreed to function within the framework of the integrity of the state. The accord emphasises that multi-ethnic society and state must function through peaceful consultative processes to meet the legitimate aspirations of different groups and not through violence. One hopes the Kashmiri separatists would draw the right lessons of the futility of violence for political and ideological reasons in a liberal democracy.

Of course, the ceasefire accord does not by itself guarantee that peace will descend on Sri Lanka. Peace requires adequate mutual trust and the fulfilment of legitimate aspirations of all sections of the society. Above all, it would require the consultative process to keep moving forward through mutual accommodation. But narrow power politics and vested interests on either side could still derail the process. All parties have their hardliners and new islands of opposition to the accord could grow if adequate

care is not taken by either side to make it a success. Continuing progress on the provisions of the accord is one way to ensure its final success. It is necessary to note that the ceasefire is not an end in itself but the means to an end that would lead to political settlement that addresses ethnic aspirations and the imperatives of peace and development.

There are many issues that will have to be addressed on the way to a final settlement. The accord is silent on the issue of provision of weapons and equipment to the LTTE from outside although the spirit of the agreement would require that this must stand suspended. It also does not provide any indication of the nature and process of the search for a political settlement. The cessation of fighting and its success would no doubt provide a conducive environment in which further progress could be planned. But the dissonance between the President and the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka on the terms of the agreement does raise many questions, if not concerns. After all, this is not the first time an accord has been concluded. The LTTE must realise that a global war against terrorism has been going on since September 11, and all violent movements must pause and rethink their means and ends. This may well be the last opportunity for the Tigers to come to a reasonable settlement provided the government is sincere about equitable settlement to accommodate legitimate aspirations of all the Tamil groups.

No MoU watch in LTTE areas

P K Balachandran
Colombo, February 23

IN A major concession to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan Government has agreed not to monitor the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts which are exclusively held by the LTTE.

Significantly, it is from Mullaitivu district that the Tigers' supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran has been conducting his operations.

The full text of the MoU published today reveals that the Scandinavian staffed Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) will have a presence in all districts of the war-affected North-eastern province except Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi. These two districts will have no local district-level monitoring committees either.

The Government has also agreed to disarm the anti-LTTE and pro-government Tamil groups. Their cadres could be absorbed in the Sri Lankan army but they would be posted outside the North-east. This neutralises

groups like the Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP) and Peoples' Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) which have been of help to the army and a thorn for the LTTE.

While unarmed LTTE cadres can enter Government-controlled areas to do political work within the next three months of signing, there is no reciprocal right for political workers from the Government-held areas wanting to work in the LTTE controlled areas.

However, the Government has obtained a promise that the LTTE will not carry out assassinations and other terrorist strikes in return for an embargo on operations by the army's deep penetration groups targeting LTTE leaders.

The LTTE has also given an undertaking that it will not abduct, extort and harass civilians. There will be an unlimited flow of civilian goods between the rebel and the Government held areas, but there will be a ban on military material and restrictions on strategic material like cement, diesel, petrol and iron rods going into the LTTE held areas.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

24 FEB 2002

Chandrika in battle mode as truce begins

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 23. As the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) began a mutual truce today, the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, was preparing for a battle with the Government over the ceasefire agreement.

Within minutes of the truce announcement on Friday, an angry Ms. Kumaratunga lambasted the Government for not consulting her or the Cabinet and Parliament before sealing the pact, and said she was concerned about specific clauses in the agreement.

Ms. Kumaratunga is the head of Government which is run by the UNF, a coalition of parties opposed to her People's Alliance (PA). She holds powers under the Constitution to sack the Government.

However, the Government today denied the President's charge that the Cabinet had not been consulted and said it was ready to debate the agreement in Parliament.

The statement, signed by the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, said the Cabinet had discussed the proposed ceasefire agreement on February 20 and February 21 and had endorsed its provisions in "unambiguous terms".

Significantly, it made no denial of the President's other complaint that she had not been consulted, noting only that she was "unfortunately" not present at the first Cabinet meeting.

Though the Government has repeatedly claimed on earlier occasions that the President was being consulted on the ceasefire, it is learnt that Ms. Kumaratunga is of the view she was presented a fait accompli by the Government and Norway, the official facilitator of the peace process.

Sources close to the President said Ms. Kumaratunga believed that Norway rushed the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, into signing the agreement by getting the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, to sign it before the final document was shown to

her. Soon after the pact was announced on Friday, Ms. Kumaratunga called a meeting of all leaders of Opposition parties in Parliament, including her own PA, to plot her next move.

Accordingly, the parties, which include the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), are expected to release separate statements on the ceasefire agreement early next week.

The sources said Ms. Kumaratunga had deputed the former Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, to consult legal experts on the fault-lines of the agreement, and the PA statement is likely to point them out.

Sections of the PA, smarting under the party's recent defeat by the UNF, want the President to go in for the Government's jugular on the issue of the ceasefire.

The President herself believes she can punch holes through the agreement on several counts, including the absence of any specific clause permitting the Navy to intercept suspicious vessels at sea to prevent the LTTE from smuggling in weapons during the ceasefire.

Ms. Kumaratunga raised this and other concerns at a meeting with Mr. Wickremesinghe on Thursday, a day before the ceasefire announcement.

Sources said she pointed out that Killinochchi and Mullaithivu, two districts under the LTTE control in the northern mainland, would not be covered by the ceasefire monitoring mission.

Under the agreement, the missions are to be stationed at Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amaparai.

Ms. Kumaratunga also raised questions about the propriety of Norway demarcating a military "line of control" between the two sides in the ceasefire document.

She expressed concern about the clause pertaining to the disarming of "Tamil paramilitary groups" by the Government within

30 days of the ceasefire coming into effect.

TULF welcomes truce *S. Lanka*

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, has described the mutual truce between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, which took effect today, as a "first step" that would render negotiations for a settlement "more likely to succeed".

The main Tamil political party, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), welcomed the truce. It is a "relief" to the war-weary people of the northeast, according to the TULF leader, M. Sivasathamparam.

He hoped that the truce would pave way for a political resolution of the aspirations of the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka.

However, the People's Alliance and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) are gearing to oppose the truce agreement.

The Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jon Westborg, met the former Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, today seeking to placate the frayed PA tempers.

The anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), which is directly affected by a clause in the agreement that the Government would disarm the Tamil paramilitary groups within 30 days of the truce coming into effect, said it was studying the document and would make a statement soon.

The People's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (PLOT), which will be directly affected by the clause, rejected the definition of "paramilitary".

"We are a registered political party, not a paramilitary group. Some of our cadres carry arms to protect us, because in the past we have had problems with the LTTE," said Dharmalingam Sithadthan, Member of Parliament and leader of the PLOT.

The PLOT would readily hand in its weapons, but thereafter, the Government had to guarantee the security of its members, he added.

THE HINDU

24 FEB 2002

IT DOESN'T HAVE MY APPROVAL: CHANDRIKA

Sri Lanka Govt., LTTE sign ceasefire accord

By Nirupama Subramanian

VAVUNIYA, FEB. 22. The Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are set to begin an indefinite and mutually-agreed ceasefire from Saturday midnight for the first time since 1994, with both sides signing letters accepting the terms of the Norway-brokered truce.

But the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is in political co-habitation with the United National Front Government, immediately registered a strong protest, expressing concern over some provisions in the pact.

In a sternly-worded statement in Colombo, Ms. Kumaratunga said the agreement did not have her approval, and accused the Government of violating the consensual politics of co-habitation by "ignoring procedures to obtain her consent".

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, handed in the Government's letter of acceptance to the Norwegian envoy, Jon Westborg, in this northern town today in a blaze of flashbulbs. Both flew in here in the morning for the event.

As stipulated in the agreement, the acceptance letters were signed by Mr. Wickremesinghe and the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Mr. Westborg was flown by the Sri Lanka Air Force to Killinochchi on Thursday to collect the LTTE's acceptance letter, which was handed over to him by the political wing leader, S.P. Thamilselvan.

At a press conference here after the handing over of the letter, Mr. Wickremesinghe said he had discussed the agreement with Ms. Kumaratunga on Thursday night, but declined to reveal if she had given her consent to it.

A statement from the President was more telling.

"The procedures followed with regard to the Memorandum of Understanding, ignoring Constitutional provisions to obtain Presidential approval, as well as not informing the Cabinet of Ministers and Parliament, are considered improper and undemocratic and also violative of practices required by the consensual politics of co-habitation," a statement from her office said.

Careful to reiterate her support for the peace

process, Ms. Kumaratunga, however, said that she had expressed concern to the Prime Minister on specific clauses.

But Mr. Wickremesinghe said the agreement in no way compromised national security and that the Sri Lankan armed forces retained the right to protect the territorial integrity of the country.

Sri Lanka is to issue a separate statement later tonight to reiterate that it retained the right to intercept the illegal movement of arms by the LTTE. Mr. Wickremesinghe said all three forces — the army, the air force and the navy — would have this right.

The ceasefire agreement does not contain a specific provision on this, but includes a provision stating the right of the Sri Lankan armed forces to perform their "legitimate task of safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka without engaging in offensive operations against the LTTE".

But officials said the additional statement was being made to clarify the Government's position and pre-empt protests that the Government had not insisted on a specific clause in the agreement.

Norway, the official facilitator for the process, made the first official announcement of the ceasefire in Oslo this afternoon minutes after Mr. Wickremesinghe gave in his acceptance letter. The Norwegian Prime Minister, Kjell Bondevik, made a statement about the truce and released details of the document in Oslo.

India hails pact

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 22. India today welcomed the MoU between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE as it could initiate a "substantive dialogue" between the two sides.

A statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said this MoU could lead to a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict that would meet the aspirations of "all sections" of the Sri Lankan society. India, the statement added, remains committed to Sri Lanka's "unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity." New Delhi continues to back the peace process.

THE HINDU

23 FEB 2002

Efforts to find a negotiated settlement in Sri Lanka

The following are the excerpts from the agreement:

Preamble

The overall objective of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (hereinafter referred to as the GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (hereinafter referred to as the LTTE) is to find a negotiated solution to the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The GOSL and the LTTE (hereinafter referred to as the Parties) recognise the importance of bringing an end to the hostilities and improving the living conditions for all inhabitants affected by the conflict.

Bringing an end to the hostilities is also seen by the Parties as a means of establishing a positive atmosphere in which further steps towards negotiations on a lasting solution can be taken. The Parties further recognise that groups that are not directly party to the conflict are also suffering the consequences of it.

This is particularly the case as regards the Muslim population.

Therefore, the provisions of this Agreement regarding the security of civilians and their property apply to all inhabitants, with reference to the above, the Parties have agreed to enter into a ceasefire, refrain from conduct that could undermine the good intentions or violate the spirit of this Agreement and implement confidence-building measures as indicated in the articles below.

Article 1

Modalities of a ceasefire:

The Parties have agreed to implement a ceasefire between their armed forces as follows:

A jointly agreed ceasefire between the GOSL and the LTTE shall enter into force on such date as is notified by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs hereinafter referred to as D-day.

Military operations

Neither Party shall engage in any offensive military operation. This requires the total cessation of all military action and includes, but is

not limited to, such acts as:

a) The firing of direct and indirect weapons, armed raids, ambushes, assassinations, abductions, destruction of civilian or military property, sabotage, suicide missions and activities by deep penetration units;

b) Aerial bombardment

c) Offensive naval operations.

The Sri Lankan armed forces shall continue to perform their legitimate task of safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka without engaging in offensive operations against the LTTE.

Separation of forces

Where forward defence localities have been established, the GOSL's armed forces and the LTTE's fighting formations shall hold their ground positions, maintaining a zone of separation of minimum of 600 metres. However, each Party reserves the right of movement within 100 metres of its own defence localities, keeping an absolute minimum distance of 400 metres between them. Where existing positions are closer than 400 metres, no such right of movement applies and the Parties agree to ensure the maximum possible distance between their personnel.

Freedom of movement

The Parties' forces shall initially stay in the areas under their respective control...

Fifty unarmed LTTE members shall, as of D-day + 30, for the purpose of political work, be permitted freedom of movement in the areas of the North and the East dominated by the GOSL. Additional 100 unarmed LTTE members shall be permitted freedom of movement as of D-day + 60. As of D-day + 90, all unarmed LTTE members shall be permitted freedom of movement in the North and the East. The LTTE members shall carry identity papers. The right of the GOSL to deny entry to specified military areas applies.

Article 2

Measures to restore normalcy:

The Parties shall undertake the following confidence-building measures with the aim of

restoring normalcy for all inhabitants of Sri Lanka. The Parties shall in accordance with international law abstain from hostile acts against the civilian population, including such acts as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment.

The Parties shall refrain from engaging in activities or propagating ideas that could offend cultural or religious sensitivities. Places of worship (temples, churches, mosques and other holy sites, etc.) currently held by the forces of either of the Parties shall be vacated by D-day + 30 and made accessible to the public. Places of worship which are situated in "high security zones" shall be vacated by all armed personnel and maintained in good order by civilian workers, even when they are not made accessible to the public.

Beginning on the date on which this Agreement enters into force, school buildings occupied by either Party shall be vacated and returned to their intended use. This activity shall be completed by D-day + 160 at the latest.

The Parties agree to ensure the unimpeded flow of non-military goods to and from the LTTE-dominated areas with the exception of certain items... regularly review the matter with the aim of gradually removing any remaining restrictions on non-military goods.

In order to facilitate the flow of goods and the movement of civilians, the Parties agree to establish checkpoints on their line of control...

The Parties shall take steps to ensure that the Trincomalee-Habarana road remains open on a 24-hour basis for passenger traffic with effect from D-day + 10.

The Parties shall facilitate the extension of the rail service on the Batticaloa line to Welikanda. Repairs and maintenance shall be carried out by the GOSL in order to extend the service up to Batticaloa. The Parties shall open the Kandy-Jaffna road (A 9) to non-military traffic of goods and passengers. Specific modalities shall be worked out by the Parties with the assistance of the Royal Norwegian Government by D-day + 30 at the latest.

A gradual easing of the fishing restrictions

shall take place starting from D-day. As of D-day + 90, all restrictions on day and night fishing shall be removed, subject to the following exceptions: (i) fishing will not be permitted within an area of 1 nautical mile on either side along the coast and 2 nautical miles seawards from all security forces camps on the coast; (ii) fishing will not be permitted in harbours or approaches to harbours, bays and estuaries along the coast.

The Parties agree that search operations and arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act shall not take place. Arrests shall be conducted under due process of law in accordance with the Criminal Procedure Code.

The Parties agree to provide family members of detainees access to the detainees within D-day + 30.

Article 3

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission: The Parties have agreed to set up an international monitoring mission to enquire into any instance of violation of the terms and conditions of this Agreement. Both Parties shall fully cooperate to rectify any matter of conflict caused by their respective sides. The mission shall conduct international verification through on-site monitoring of the fulfilment of the commitments entered into in this Agreement as follows: The name of the monitoring mission shall be the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (hereinafter referred to as the SLMM).

Subject to acceptance by the Parties, the Royal Norwegian Government (hereinafter referred to as the RNG) shall appoint the Head of the SLMM (hereinafter referred to as the HoM), who shall be the final authority regarding interpretation of this Agreement. The SLMM shall liaise with the Parties and report to the RNG. The HoM shall decide the date for the commencement of the SLMM's operations.

The SLMM shall be composed of representatives from Nordic countries.

The SLMM shall establish a headquarters in such place as the HoM finds appropriate. An office shall be established in Colombo and in Vanni in order to liaise with the GOSL and the

LTTE, respectively. The SLMM will maintain a presence in the districts of Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai.

A local monitoring committee shall be established in Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai.

The committees shall serve the SLMM in an advisory capacity and discuss issues relating to the implementation of this Agreement in their respective districts, with a view to establishing a common understanding of such issues. In particular, they will seek to resolve any dispute concerning the implementation of this Agreement at the lowest possible level.

The Parties shall be responsible for the appropriate protection of and security arrangements for all SLMM members. The Parties agree to ensure the freedom of movement of the SLMM members in performing their tasks.

The members of the SLMM shall be given immediate access to areas where violations of the Agreement are alleged to have taken place.

It shall be the responsibility of the SLMM to take immediate action on any complaints made by either Party to the Agreement, and to enquire into and assist the Parties in the settlement of any dispute that might arise in connection with such complaints.

Article 4

Entry into force, Amendments and Termination of the Agreement:

Each Party shall notify its consent to be bound by this Agreement through a letter to the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs signed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on behalf of the GOSL and by leader Velupillai Prabhakaran on behalf of the LTTE, respectively. The Agreement shall be initialled by each Party and enclosed in the above-mentioned letter.

The Agreement shall enter into force on such date as is notified by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

This Agreement shall remain in force until notice of termination is given by either Party to the RNG. Such notice shall be given 14 days in advance of the effective date of termination.

Norway clinches Lanka truce

AFP & AP

S Lanka STI

COLOMBO, Feb. 21. — Norway clinched an open-ended ceasefire in Sri Lanka today hours after the LTTE and government forces fought a fierce sea battle that killed at least three sailors, sources said. The Ranil Wickremesinghe government gave its consent to a document prepared by Norway after talks with officials as well as the LTTE, diplomatic sources said.

The Tigers, too, have given their nod to the cessation of hostilities pact which will come into effect after Norway announces that it has received the agreement of both parties. LTTE's London-based chief negotiator, Mr Anton Balasigham, confirmed that the two sides had agreed to the truce which is expected to take effect from Sunday.

The ceasefire is the first bilateral truce in seven

22/2

years. In 1995, a ceasefire ended after 100 days when the Tigers attacked two navy gunboats. Unlike in 1995, this truce will be monitored by Scandinavians, while both sides are required to give two week's notice if they want to pull out (in the earlier deal it was three days).

Mr Wickremesinghe announced last week that he expected initial talks with the Tigers to open by March or April. The defence minister said today's sea battle erupted when the navy spotted seven or eight boats of the LTTE and challenged them.

Mr Tilak Marapone told Parliament that the Tigers attacked the navy, while troops retaliated using Israeli-built Kfir jets and Mi-24 helicopter gunships. The battle was the first major clash between the two sides since the government began reciprocating a unilateral truce declared by the LTTE on Christmas Eve.

THE STATESMAN

1995 FEB 21

HP-1
27/2

Pact at hand in Sri Lanka

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 21. A battle between the Sri Lankan Navy and the LTTE erupted off the island's northeastern coast today as the Government said the two sides were close to signing a mutual ceasefire agreement by Saturday.

Two navy personnel, including an officer, were killed and at least four wounded in the sea battle, which began at 9.30 a.m. after a naval patrol spotted a Sea Tiger flotilla, 25 km north-east of Mullaithivu.

It was the first serious flare-up between the Government forces and the LTTE who are at present observing a truce, unilaterally declared by each side.

But the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, said the incident would not affect the signing of a proposed mutual ceasefire agreement, which he said was expected to happen within "the next 48 hours".

"As of now, it is on track. There is reasonable expectation

that the document will be signed within the next two days," he said.

The document is expected to be signed by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Mr. Peiris said "almost all" problems between the two sides with respect to the agreement had been resolved.

The President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, was consulted at every stage of the drafting of the agreement and was an integral part of the process, he said.

Ms. Kumaratunga had expressed reservations that a draft agreement leaked to the media had no provisions safeguarding civilians living in the northeast against LTTE atrocities such as child conscription, extortion, abduction and revenge killings.

The senior Minister, who is directly involved in the Norwegian-facilitated peace initiative, said one incident alone — like today's sea battle — could not destroy the process.

"Nowhere in the world do you get a problem-free ceasefire. You would always expect situations of the kind that happened today. Any ceasefire agreement will have to contain provisions to deal with these situations in a manner to prevent them from escalating," he said.

The battle between the Navy and the Sea Tigers lasted over an hour. Navy sources said there were 15 boats in the Sea Tiger flotilla. Eight of these were log boats used by the LTTE to transport supplies, and they were approaching the Sri Lankan northeast coast escorted by speed boats when they were spotted by naval and air force patrols.

Defence Ministry sources said the patrol opened fire on the flotilla after going through the proper procedure laid down for engagement at sea. Besides losing two men, the Navy also suffered damage to one its fast attack craft in the battle.

The sources said the operation was called off after the

LTTE boats managed to get close to the coastline, as it would have necessitated following them and exposing their own boats to the LTTE fire from the land.

One of the sticking points in drafting the ceasefire agreement was the Government's insistence that its Navy would have the right to intercept LTTE boats at sea. This is the fifth time the LTTE has been spotted making a logistic run by sea since calling a truce, reciprocated by the Government, last December 24.

Only once last month did the Navy fire on the boats, but pulled out before the fighting escalated.

Earlier this week, the Defence Minister, Tilak Marapana, downplayed the series of incidents and said there was no evidence that the boats belonged to the LTTE, and argued that they could have even been fishing boats.

Another report on Page 12

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20 FEB 2002

Chandrika for probe into army unit raid

Press Trust of India

Shankar SF-3 15/2

COLOMBO, Feb. 14. — Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga today demanded an inquiry by the interior minister into the recent exposure of the existence of a secret army unit in a police raid that led to what she called a compromise of national security.

In a letter to interior minister Mr John Amaratunga, she asked him to probe why the police raided legitimate premises of the elite "deep penetration unit" at Athuragiriya near here that demoralised the armed forces and might prove costly to the country's security.

"This is indicative of the President's lack of satisfaction over the progress made so far on the issue of probing the lapses that led to this," presidential spokesman Mr Harim Peiris said, when asked why Kumaratunga was demanding a probe more than a month since the raid. "Some time was given to the minister in charge to take appropriate action, but she is not satisfied with the progress," he said.

The presidential missive comes amidst palpable tension between sections of the police and the army after the incident, which exposed the existence of the long range reconnaissance patrol, a unit that specialises in penetrating into LTTE territory to target Tiger leaders.

The LTTE has blamed the unit for the deaths of its senior leader Shankar and other important functionaries like Gangai Amaran and Nizam. It also accused the army of trying to kill its political wing leader Mr SP Thamilselvan to scuttle peace moves.

A police officer probing an election day massacre of Muslims claimed that he had a tip that a prime suspect was hiding in Athuragiriya. He found thermobaric weapons among a cache of arms and took them into custody on the suspicion that it was a safehouse for a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe.

He arrested six armymen who had no documents to prove that they lawfully possessed the weapons and detained them under the Pota.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

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A middle ground?

50-A A durable truce in Sri Lanka 126/2 ✓

The issue immediately confronting the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government is formalizing the ceasefire, extended up to 24 February, into a durable truce. The problem, foreseen as one, is that President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe don't agree on how to proceed. Lakshman Kadirgamar, former foreign minister, instrumental in getting the LTTE banned abroad, has said that the Tamil outfit should open the route between Jaffna and the mainland and stop all attacks on political and civilian targets, in reciprocation of the conciliatory gestures made by the government. Kumaratunga had warned that the LTTE used every peace process to secure advantages for itself. That is already happening. The fishermen, whose boats have been used to transport men and ammunition, want all restrictions lifted, while the LTTE wants the embargo on Wannai and the ban on itself to go completely. It also wants free movement of its cadres in the North and the East, with their arms. In other words, it wants the status it had when it ruled Jaffna, almost as a sovereign power. That is hardly possible, since Kumaratunga's one achievement in Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis is to have ended the LTTE's domination in the North and the East by reducing it to a clandestine guerrilla outfit. This is what has induced a sense of compromise in Pirabhakaran and his men and made Wickremesinghe's initiative possible. The government is right in asking for reciprocity, as a token of sincerity, while the ban issue concerns the international community in general, and not Sri Lanka alone.

One doesn't know whether this foreplay will lead to a more protracted encounter across a table. Depends on what the LTTE thinks it will get out of this and how much the Sri Lankan government, divided between Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe, is willing to give. One conjecture is that it will want some recognition of its status as the sole Tamil interlocutor for the government, a bit like the Hurriyat in Kashmir, except that the LTTE is stronger than the Hurriyat. That also implies a decisive role in any future dispensation in the Tamil areas. Discussions will focus on these two areas.

RECEIVED

13 FEB 2002

Oslo denies presenting formal Lanka truce proposal

Associated Press

COLOMBO, Feb. 11. — The Norwegian government today said it has not presented the Sri Lankan government or separatist rebels with a formal proposal to end an 18-year civil war, despite reports that an peace agreement was in sight.

Norway is trying to broker a lasting peace between the government and rebels from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who are fighting to divide the island along ethnic lines. The war has killed more than 64,500 people since 1983.

"The Norwegian government would like to make it clear that no formal proposal so far has been presented to the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," said a Norwegian government statement issued by Oslo's embassy in Colombo.

The embassy issued the statement after several Colombo newspapers said yesterday Norway had presented the two parties with a draft peace agreement calling for a permanent ceasefire.

The agreement said Norway would appoint representatives from Scandinavian countries as part of an international monitoring mission to inquire into any violations of the accord.

The Norwegian statement, however, said the Sri Lankan government and Oslo were working out details of a long-lasting cease-fire "Various drafts of different character have been subject to discussions by the parties," the statement said.

THE STATEMENT

12 FEB 2002

Lanka draft ceasefire pact a success

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

S. Lanka

ST-11

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COLOMBO, Feb. 9. — The Norwegian peace delegation, led by deputy foreign minister Mr Vidar Helgesen, left here today, after completing the draft ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE, according to diplomatic sources here.

The delegation held last minute discussions with ministers Mr GL Peiris and Mr Milinda Moragoda, who are

heading the special peace secretariat, under the supervision of Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe.

During its two-day hectic deliberations with senior leaders of the government, the delegation also met President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"We wrapped up the deliberations with a note of success and hope," Mr Peiris said without divulging any details. Meanwhile, Mannar Bishop Rev.

Fr. Rayappu Joseph appealed to politicians and extremist forces to stop disturbing the ongoing peace process.

"Please do not politicise the current peace process to achieve narrow political goals as this last chance of peace is a matter of life and death for the people of Sri Lanka," he said.

He also claimed the people of the north-east were happy things were changing for the better.

NTMENT

Lanka draft MoU soft on Tigers' child recruits

P K Balachandran
Colombo, February 9

THE DRAFT memorandum of understanding (MoU) now being discussed by the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE through the Norwegians, expressly bans the staging of terrorist attacks and assassinations by the LTTE.

But it is silent on the critical issue of banning the smuggling of arms and recruitment of kids by the LTTE.

Though the Sri Lankan Government's chief negotiator Prof G L Peries said on Friday that his discussions with the Norwegian facilitators headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen ended on a "note of success and hope", diplomatic sources said the signing of the MoU was some way off still.

It has to be discussed again with the LTTE's chief negotia-

tor Anton Balasingham in London.

Political sources say the government, egged by the armed forces, could press for a ban on the smuggling of arms by the LTTE and the grant of the right to take naval and aerial action to thwart any move to land arms.

But Tamil circles say the LTTE might not make an issue of it if that will hold up the signing of the MoU.

According to the reliable Tamil publication "Sudar Oli" weekly, the LTTE really faces no shortage of arms, having landed and captured enough to last "two generations".

What the LTTE needs desperately is manpower and this is conceded by "Sudar Oli" also. Given the adverse international publicity given to the recruitment of kids in recent times and Colombo's complaint to the Norwegians, sources say

child recruitment has come down.

This being so, the Government may not press on the term. And the LTTE may not make an issue of it, if the Government insists on including it in the MoU.

At any rate, child recruitment could be brought under the ban on harassment and abduction in the MoU.

The draft specifies the composition and strength of the monitoring panels. Each of the six district level committees will be headed by a Scandinavian and will include representatives of the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE.

The MoU also talks of opening the Vavuniya-Kilinochchi Main Supply Route (MSR), which passes through LTTE-controlled Wannai to civilian traffic in a month and to Sri Lankan military traffic in two months.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 FEB 2002

Lanka talks LTTE kid recruits

AGENCIES
COLOMBO, FEBRUARY 7

SRI LANKA has taken up the issue of alleged conscription of children by the LTTE with the rebels through Norwegian peace facilitators, a Cabinet spokesman said on Thursday.

"Yes, it has been raised with the LTTE. We have been taking up such matters through the Norwegians, whenever they are brought to our notice," Prof G.L. Peiris said here.

Peiris was answering a question on the government's apparent lack of response to reports of LTTE's forced enlistment of youngsters when even President Chandrika Kumaratunga had voiced her concern.

"There is a deep concern about humanitarian issues and civil rights," Peiris said. The LTTE has denied the charge and claimed that only enlistment of adult volunteers for military and administrative duties was going on.

The minister denied suggestions the government was going all out to please the Tigers and the proposed truce agreement would prove to be a one-sided document granting too many concessions to the rebels.

Peiris, Industrial Development and Constitutional Affairs Minister and one of the ministers designated to handle the peace process, emphasised humanitarian and security considerations would form crucial components in the proposed ceasefire agreement.

"Please suspend your judgement until the agreement is ready. You will see that the final document is reciprocal and not one-sided," he said, adding both sides showed sound under-

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

standing of each other's problems.

Norwegian officials arrived in the island country today to facilitate the talks as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe got ready for a visit to the US for talks with President George W. Bush, a report said here on Thursday.

Wickremesinghe will discuss the Norwegian-backed peace process with the US President, whose administration has strongly supported Oslo's attempts to broker an end to the island's separatist war, the *Daily Mirror* newspaper said.

Nepal simplifies visa process for tourists

■ KATHMANDU: Nepal has introduced a number of incentives, including simplifying visa procedures and partial and total exemption of royalty on 60 mountain peaks, to revive its tourism industry hit hard by the six-year-long insurgency.

The Maoist insurgency followed by declaration of emergency has badly hit the tourism sector, the mainstay of the country's foreign exchange earnings. In January, 13,576 foreign tourists, including 4,017 Indians, visited Nepal by air. This was 47.59 per cent less than that in the corresponding period the previous year.

To arrest the slide, Nepal has decided to mark 2002-03 as "Destination Nepal Year". The government has decided to waive up to 75 per cent royalty on 40 different mountain peaks, according to Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. Security too has been beefed up, especially in areas frequented by tourists, including Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitawan.

LTTE & Govt on verge of signing MoU

P K Balachandran S. Lanka
Colombo, February 7

THE SRI Lankan Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are showing a great understanding of each other's concerns and this gives rise to the hope that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be inked before February 24, the day on which the current ceasefire expires, cabinet spokesman Prof G L Peries told newsmen here today.

The Norwegian facilitating team headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen arrived in Colombo today to meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, Defence Minister Thilak Marapone, the head of the Government's peace secretariat Milinda Moragoda and the three service chiefs. The team had earlier had talks with the LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham, in London.

Prof Peiris said that both the Government and the LTTE now have an understanding of their security concerns and are willing to give and take on these matters. One of the concerns of the LTTE is the presence in the war-torn Northeastern Province of armed anti-LTTE

groups like the Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP).

Peiris hinted that the Government might agree to disarm these groups. The Government, on its part, wants the LTTE to desist from using the truce to procure weapons from abroad through the sea. It is likely that the LTTE will agree not to object to routine aerial and naval surveillance by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Government wants the LTTE to agree to a moratorium of political assassinations and terrorist attacks on civilian and economic targets in south Sri Lanka, especially the capital city of Colombo. In all likelihood, the LTTE may agree to this.

At the humanitarian level, the Government on Wednesday further relaxed the restrictions on fishing in the Jaffna peninsula. As a result, the LTTE has called off the agitation sponsored by it. The Government had raised the issue of the LTTE's recruiting kids for its army, Prof Peiris said. *Hindustan Times* learns that as a result of this and adverse press publicity, the LTTE has toned down its recruitment drive.

LTTE cadres won't be taken in Lankan army

The cadres of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will not be absorbed in the Sri Lankan armed forces, once peace is restored, as suggested by the Sri Lankan Army Commander, Gen. Lionel Balagalle recently. "This is not government policy," cabinet spokesman, Prof G L Peiris told newsmen here today.

Chandrika distorting facts, says LTTE

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 6. The LTTE representative in London, Anton Balasingham, has refuted charges of child conscription by the group, but said the Tigers were recruiting youth to its political and administrative wings, and "volunteers" to the military wing.

Reacting to a statement by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, expressing concern at reports of continuing child recruitment by the Tigers, Mr. Balasingham accused her of trying to undermine the peace process by "deliberately distorting facts to slander the LTTE".

"Amid substantial progress with regard to formulating a mutual ceasefire between the two sides, (the President) is now seeking to create new apprehensions and controversy by casting aspersions on (the LTTE's) bona fides," Mr. Balasingham told the website, TamilNet.

But, he said, the LTTE was actively recruiting young men and women above 17 years of age to expand the movement's political and administrative wings.

He said the LTTE's military section was recruiting "volunteers" to the military wing

"to ensure the prevailing balance of forces is not altered disadvantageously" with the Sri Lankan military continuing its recruitment drive.

"This recruitment by both sides at present does not in any way undermine the spirit of the unilateral cessation of hostilities being observed by the LTTE and the Sri Lanka armed forces," he is reported to have said.

In a report last week, the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), a Tamil rights group, detailed instances of child recruitment, extortions, kidnappings and killings by the LTTE since the declaration of a truce last Christmas. The rights group asked Norway, which is facilitating a peace process between the LTTE and the government, to ensure that the Tigers did not abuse the rights of civilians in north-east Sri Lanka.

A Norwegian delegation met Mr. Balasingham in London on Tuesday. Norway is presently trying to hammer out a mutual cease-fire agreement between the LTTE and the government to replace the current truce that both sides are observing.

Meanwhile, preparations have begun for the reopening of more checkpoints into LTTE-controlled northern Sri Lanka to ease the pressure on the Piramanalankulam check-point near Vavuniya, which is at present the only route available for civilian traffic and food convoys, which have increased after the government eased restrictions on these last month.

The government and the LTTE today began demining operations in the "no man's land" between their respective checkpoints at Omanthai, 10 kms. north of Vavuniya on the A 9 highway, the quickest way into the Vanni.

The International Committee of the Red Cross was facilitating a communication between the two sides during the operation, its spokesman, Arjuna Ranawana, said. A similar operation would begin on Thursday at Uyilankulam, on the Vavuniya-Mannar road, he said.

"The army has maintained records for the minefields it has laid in the area, and we are doing the de-mining based on these records," said Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne, the military spokesman.

CHANDRIKA

- 7 FEB 2002

A limited peace agenda

By Jayadeva Uyangoda

S. Lanka

All indications are that the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE are unlikely to move into discussing political or constitutional issues. Their primary focus will be on de-escalation.

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11 ✓

WHILE SRI LANKA'S newly-elected United National Front (UNF) Government is preparing to celebrate the nation's 54th Independence Day on February 4, the political management of the protracted armed conflict appears to be at the top of its agenda. The informal, and unilaterally declared, ceasefire between the Government and the LTTE has now entered its second month. Reports indicate that the two sides are likely to sign a formal ceasefire agreement, the terms of which are being worked out by Norwegian mediators. However, concrete evidence is yet to emerge to suggest when and where the much-anticipated 'peace talks' would begin. In case negotiations are not forthcoming in the weeks ahead, the peace process may run the risk of losing momentum.

Most serious among the obstacles to early direct talks between the Government and the LTTE is the question of the LTTE's de-proscription. The LTTE is banned as a terrorist entity under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act. The LTTE argues that de-proscription is necessary for it to come to the table; that it will not talk to the Government as long as it is treated as an illegal, or criminal entity. Although the Ranil Wickremesinghe administration earlier appeared willing to lift the ban, strong resistance from the Opposition parties and the powerful Buddhist clergy has compelled it to find an alternative. Hence, talks about a temporary suspension of the ban.

The question of the LTTE's de-proscription runs deeper into the complexities of peace negotiations. For the LTTE, the ban has placed the movement in a state of inequality — a sort of structural asymmetry vis-a-vis the Government at negotiations. The LTTE's position is that it would participate in the talks as an equal of the Government, and not as a mere terrorist or guerilla group. This parity in status is a crucial precondition for the LTTE leadership to convince itself that the negotiation is a politically meaningful exercise. It is a belief emanat-

ing from the position that the LTTE represents the political aspirations of a nation with a right to sovereignty. For the LTTE, the Tamils are not an ethnic minority but a nation. As the LTTE leaders have been very careful to say during the past so many years, the Sri Lankan conflict is not about a minority problem or an ethnic question, but a national question parties to which are two nations, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The LTTE's recent strategy of forcing most of the Tamil parties and groups to form one political unit, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), and then act as its political mouthpiece, needs to be understood in this context.

This time around, the Sinhalese nationalist opposition to the Government's political engagement with the LTTE is also centered on this question of de-proscription. As its spokespersons have recently argued, not incorrectly, de-proscription would grant the LTTE the status of parity with the Government. Some politically savvy Sinhalese nationalists argue that they are not opposed to Government-LTTE talks as such but are against removing the ban as a pre-condition. This argument also reveals a deep-seated ideological position held by Sinhalese nationalists of all hues: since Tamils are not equals with the Sinhalese, why share political power with an inferior, unequal minority?

Perhaps, the present United National Party (UNP) leadership understands this dilemma well and the Prime Minister is now trying to work around it in a most interesting manner that may or may not produce positive results. Mr. Wickremesinghe's inaugural policy statement in Parliament, presented two weeks ago, focussed extensively on the proposed

negotiation and its complexities. But he was careful not to describe the problem as an ethnic question. To him, what he had to handle was the 'North-East war'. And it had to be resolved due to two main reasons: economic compulsions and the pressure of the international community. If we take this statement as a guide, there is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka for the UNF Government to resolve. Rather, there is a 'war' to be terminated, or managed.

All indications are that the UNF Government and the LTTE are most unlikely to move into discussing political or constitutional issues. Their primary focus will be on de-escalation. After all, this is the so-called 'realist' approach to peace. This reveals a fascinating convergence of approaches between the Government and the LTTE on 'peace'. They seem to have a shared understanding of peace: de-escalation of war. In theoretical jargon, we may describe this as 'negative peace'. Which means the absence of war. It is basically a conflict management, pragmatic approach that falls far short of 'positive peace', meaning the eradication of conditions that produced, and may re-produce, the conflict. Positive peace entails more than negotiations between the two adversaries. It involves redressing the structural causes of the conflict, reforming the state and political structures, community reconciliation and peace building, democratisation, returning to normal politics, human rights, re-integration of communities and many more reconstructive measures. It seems that both the UNF Government and the LTTE are not interested in any of these transformatory objectives. Against such a backdrop, the present round of 'peace talks' may not pro-

duce anything beyond de-escalation. For both sides, containment of war has become a politically desirable goal. Facing a disastrous economic collapse with a negative growth rate, the UNF Government finds itself unable to finance the high intensity war, which is the legacy of the previous PA Government's mishandling of the ethnic conflict. For the LTTE, in the context of the global 'war' against terrorism, political engagement with the Government for some time to come is a basic compulsion. So, there is every reason for the present ceasefire to be formalised and extended for an indefinite period. But, prospects for a negotiated 'settlement' do not seem to be as strong.

But, for those who seek lasting peace in Sri Lanka through ethnic conflict resolution, a limited peace process has positive consequences. One is that the Government and the LTTE have opened up a political front and want to stay in it for some time. Then, there is the international community to make the two sides accountable. If the present ceasefire extends for some time to come, it may generate new dynamics. Normalisation of civilian life, the return of the refugees and the displaced, reconstruction and re-integration of the communities, people-to-people contacts — all these are possibilities. These can make conflict resolution preferable to conflict management of the pragmatic kind.

As international experience and Sri Lanka's own past clearly demonstrates, lasting peace is too serious a matter to be left to the two adversarial elites alone. A peace initiative requires multiple and parallel processes that can complement the negative peace pursued in track one. This is where civil society has a direct role to play in creating a sustainable peace process. This is also exactly where Sri Lanka's peace constituencies need to re-assess their own thinking, strategies and interventions.

(The writer is the Head, Department of Political Studies and Public Policy, University of Colombo.)

4 FEB 2002

Chandrika cries foul over 'plot'

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S. Kanna

P K Balachandran
Colombo, February 2

SRI LANKAN President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who survived an attempt on her life in 1999, has claimed that there is an "organised campaign" to weaken her security and expose her to danger by "demoralising" her trusted bodyguards and denigrating the President's office.

In a press release on Friday, the President said a section of the private media and certain individuals were systematically painting her as a "murderer" and the Presidential Security Division (PSD), as a "gang of murderers" involved in "every act of terror in the country".

These "false" allegations "were an attack on the office of Presidency created by the Constitution which is the supreme law of the land", she said. They were a "ploy to demoralise" the PSD, on which she depended for her security both within and outside the country. She pointed out that it was the PSD, which saved her when terrorists tried to kill her on December 18, 1999, just before the last Presidential elections. The President's public protest was prompted by a recent court order to arrest the PSD director, SP Nihal Karunaratne, for allegedly



Chandrika Kumaratunga

threatening to kill the officer-in-charge of the Hanguranketha police station in Kandy district during the December 2001 parliamentary polls.

When there was a move by the present Government to make changes in the PSD by transferring Karunaratne and even wind up the PSD and replace it with a structure over which the Prime Minister will have more control, Kumaratunga cried wolf.

In an interview to *Daily Mirror*, she stressed the importance of having trusted bodyguards by recalling that Indira Gandhi was killed by her own bodyguards.

The President has already taken up the matter with the Prime Minister in a meeting with him on Thursday, adds PTI.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 FEB 2002

'Monitors needed for effective implementation of ceasefire'

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JAN. 30. Sri Lanka said today that monitors were required for the effective implementation of a proposed ceasefire and the matter was being considered by Norway, which is facilitating the peace process between the Government and the LTTE.

"If the ceasefire has to be systematic and complete, there has to be an effective mechanism for monitoring," said G.L. Peiris, cabinet spokesperson.

It was still being debated whether the monitors would be international, Sri Lankan or a mix of both, Mr. Peiris said at a news conference today.

Both sides were trying to hammer out a ceasefire agreement that could be put in place by February 24, when the present truce being unilaterally observed by both sides ends.

The Minister said the endeavour was to have a ceasefire that would not be time-bound. "We would not like to determine the time at which it is to end.

We would ideally like a permanent cessation of hostilities and the commencement of talks against this background."

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He expressed the hope that the momentum created by such a truce would make it difficult for the parties to abandon it. "Once people savour for themselves the culture of peace, it will become irreversible," he said, adding that people had already started getting used to the "new way of life" created by the absence of war from the present truce.

But for some people, especially in the north-east, the absence of war has not yet translated into peace of mind. In the last few days, there have been incidents where civilians have had unpleasant encounters with the LTTE, prompting, in at least one case, an SOS to the military.

The incidents have underlined that a ceasefire must not be restricted only to combatants but should also be extended to the protection of the rights of civilians on all sides.

The Defence Ministry said fishermen in the north-western coastal area of Puttalam had requested intensified Navy patrolling after being waylaid while out at sea by armed men, suspected to be LTTE cadres, in a fibre-glass dinghy on January 28.

The fishermen who were in 10

boats, were taken to a hamlet north of Puttalam, and were asked to pay Rs. 5000 for each boat.

As none of them were carrying such a big sum, they were released but asked to return with the money and were told that the LTTE would issue receipts.

The fishermen were told that they should carry these receipts and produce them if they were asked for money again by the LTTE.

At Valachenai in Batticaloa, the arrival of soldiers broke up a gathering being addressed by LTTE cadres in a private house. The four cadres left on seeing the soldiers.

The Defence Ministry said those attending the meeting reported that the LTTE had announced it was going to collect taxes from the people from February 1.

The cadres had also asked each family to give one child to the LTTE.

In yet another incident in Vavuniya, armed LTTE cadres were seen talking to shopkeepers in Pawakkulam area. The Defence Ministry said they were collecting taxes from the traders.

Ceasefire before 24 Feb: LTTE leader

Agencies

COLOMBO, Jan. 29. — A ceasefire agreement could be signed between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil rebels before next month when the existing unilateral cessation of hostilities expires, a top Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam functionary has said.

LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham, who met a Norwegian delegation led by deputy foreign minister Mr Vidar Helgesen yesterday, told the Tamilnet website that the cease-fire agreement could be signed by both sides before 24 February, when the existing unilateral cessation of hostilities are due to expire.

A Sri Lankan magistrate today ordered the arrest of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's top bodyguard in connection with an alleged plot to kill one of the leader's main political opponents.

The magistrate in the central town of Kandy, CV Rajapakse, ordered that Mr Nihal Karunaratne, the director of the elite Presidential Security Division, be arrested and produced before court.

Mr Karunaratne had allegedly threatened to kill another police officer investigating a plan to assassinate a top politician, SB Dissanayake, in November.

The Tamil rebels have said that substantial progress had been made in the ongoing peace initiatives facilitated by the Norwegian government to formalise and finalise a stable and structured ceasefire between the Lankan armed forces and the LTTE.

Mr Balasingham has described the discussions with the Norwegian delegation as "cordial and constructive". Both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have submitted proposals to Oslo on the formalization of a permanent mutual ceasefire. The Norwegian delegation included Mr Erik Solheim, the special adviser to the foreign ministry, Mr Kjirste Tromsdal, an official of the foreign ministry and Mr Jon Westborg, Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

The delegation is expected to visit Colombo this weekend to continue its shuttle diplomacy to bring the warring parties together.

THE STATESMAN

30 JAN 2002

Oslo for truce panel with Delhi approval

By D.B.S. Jeyaraj

S. Lanka
TORONTO, JAN. 29. Norway has proposed the setting up of a high-level committee, comprising international and local representatives approved by India, to monitor the envisaged permanent ceasefire between the Sri Lankan armed forces and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. It is hoped that the Oslo drafted "memorandum of understanding" governing the ceasefire would be signed by both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE before February 24.

Informed Tamil sources said significant progress had been achieved by Norway in laying the groundwork for establishing a permanent ceasefire between both parties in the Sri Lankan conflict following a crucial three-hour meeting held in London on January 28.

A Norwegian delegation con-

sisting of the Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, the Ambassador to Colombo, Jon Westborg, the Special Foreign Ministry adviser, Erik Solheim, and Foreign Ministry official, Krjiste Tromsdal, met the LTTE's chief negotiator and political adviser, Anton Balasingham, and ironed out details concerning the draft MoU for a ceasefire.

The Norwegians are now focussing on harmonising the present situation and getting both parties to agree to a joint ceasefire that would be "structured and stable."

Both sides are at present adhering to parallel cessation of hostilities declared unilaterally and maintained separately. The ceasefire extended on a monthly basis will lapse on February 24.

The sources, however, said the parties concerned were optimistic of signing the MoU before February 24 and bringing a "durable

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and permanent" ceasefire into force.

Although not finalised yet, it is learnt that Oslo is mootng a time-bound ceasefire of at least one year initially.

The draft MoU would incorporate provisions relating to a permanent ceasefire, such as a control framework, codes of conduct for mechanisms to monitor the ceasefire and an outline regarding the modalities for preliminary negotiations, the sources said.

Concrete proposals

During discussions concrete proposals such as segregated areas of control for both sides in a post-ceasefire scenario, the setting up of "neutral" zones separating both sides physically, clear rules of passage to govern movement of personnel by either side to the other and rules of conduct for both sides to follow dur-

ing ceasefire have been evolved.

A vital mechanism to monitor the ceasefire will be the appointment of an overseeing committee comprising foreign and local representatives.

Given the geo-political sensitivity of this aspect India will be consulted by Norway before the monitoring committee is set up.

It is learnt that India's approval of foreign participants will be obtained before the monitoring committee is constituted.

Norway, Sri Lanka and the LTTE are all agreed that the monitoring committee should be acceptable to India.

Mr. Helgesen is scheduled to visit Colombo for further discussions on the ceasefire draft.

It is expected that he will visit New Delhi also to both inform India of the developments and finalise appointing the monitoring committee.

NEWS / FOCUS ON EXPENSES

THE HINDU

30 JAN 2002

THE TRUCE POLITICS IN SRI LANKA

A RELATIVE EASE marks the manner in which Sri Lanka is reported to have extended its own ceasefire in the military operations against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Although official Colombo's action is a sequel to the LTTE's earlier decision to extend its truce, the two sides tend to portray their initiatives as being essentially unilateral or independent gestures. As a result, the latest peace-promotive sequence may not signify the emergence of any new ground reality of mutual trust in the externally facilitated dealings between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan authorities. Outwardly, however, the unfolding politics of truce in Sri Lanka seem to signal that the LTTE and the new Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, are trying to build a certain comfort level in their ongoing interactions through Norway as the proxy power. The LTTE, which first announced a "unilateral" ceasefire for a month from last year's Christmas Eve, has now indicated its willingness to refrain from any activities against Sri Lanka's military forces for another month, up until February 24 this year. It is in this context that Colombo, too, has now decided to extend its own independent truce by a similar duration in its ongoing war against the terrorism-prone LTTE. A definitive feature of such apparent politics of responsiveness is that both Colombo and the LTTE continue to communicate their intentions only through Norway. This epitomises the intended premium on indirect diplomacy. Norway, on its part, seems to rely on its diplomatic experience of having created some space for negotiations between two entrenched antagonists in West Asia during the early stages of a peace process, which has nevertheless run off course today for a variety of reasons.

In the present Sri Lankan context, both Mr. Wickremesinghe and the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, appear to be seriously engaged in

creating a virtual peace process through Norway's good offices as a designated facilitator. The distance that Colombo and the LTTE must cover before the virtual process can become absolutely real is not a matter of pure conjecture. It is significant in this context that Oslo, not official Colombo itself, is reported to have made the announcement about Sri Lanka's intention of extending its ceasefire in the present circumstances. Overall, though, Mr. Wickremesinghe appears determined to gain time to try and formalise a long-term ceasefire for the explicit purpose of resolving Sri Lanka's political-ethnic problem by engaging the LTTE in serious talks as one of the parties concerned. It is too early to conceptualise the final solution as some definitive Magna Carta of political rights and obligations as applicable to the minorities and the majority community.

Mr. Wickremesinghe's sense of urgency, reflected in his move to consider lifting Colombo's ban on the LTTE, is traceable to his desire to succeed whereas his political adversary and Sri Lanka's executive President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, had not been able to despite her willingness to chart out a truly visionary path in addressing the legitimate concerns of the minorities. The present international climate of anti-terror politics, too, is an encouraging factor in Mr. Wickremesinghe's calculus. In fact, if the LTTE is trying to appear reasonable at this stage, the reason has much to do with its tactical policy of wanting to trim its sails to the anti-terror winds on the international stage. That explains why the LTTE would like the official ban on it to go in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. However, given these realities, Sri Lanka's national interest will be best served by some meaningful cooperation between its Prime Minister and the President. Ms. Kumaratunga seems to have cautioned Mr. Wickremesinghe against moving forward without securing adequate "guarantees" from the LTTE.

THE HINDU

28 JAN 2002

Lankans split over lifting of ban on LTTE

By Farah Mihar Ahmed
Times News Network

COLOMBO: Sri Lankans may be united in their desire for peace but are divided over the issue of lifting ban on the LTTE.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, delivering his policy statement on Tuesday, dug deeper into the conscience of the people saying the ban had to be reviewed in order to keep international support with the government. His candid speech, which displayed a strong sense of commitment, earned him a thumbs-up but also stirred up more concern on de-proscribing the rebels.

Local editorials on Wednesday shouted out that peace is a two-way process and lifting of the ban should come after progress was made with negotiations. The daily *Island* newspaper also cited the example of countries like India that negotiated with terrorist groups while they were still banned.

The opposition backed peace initiatives taken by the new government but advised caution on issues like lifting the ban on the LTTE. Former foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said his party welcomed the free flow of goods and people to and from rebel held areas in the North and the East. He warned the government not take any precipitate action on the de-

proscription issue. Tamil political parties and peace groups have called for the lifting of the ban saying the rebels must be recognised before talks start but some activists argue that contentious issues like this should not be discussed at this stage because of its potential to jeopardise the process.



Ranil Wickremasinghe

The government received a major boost on Monday as a senior Buddhist prelate was widely quoted in the media as saying he supported lifting the ban. The statement was expected to have largely influenced the majority Sinhalese community who are currently sceptical of the any such move.

And if all the anti-lifting-ban propaganda was not enough, the *Island* newspaper came up with an interesting argument saying the issue was an international one because the UN, following the September 11 attacks, passed a resolution calling on all member states to enact laws to curb global terrorism.

"Now it (Sri Lanka) is bound by international law not to arbitrarily lift the proscription of the organisation without providing proof that it is no longer a global terror network," the paper said. The government is still left with the burden of having to take an unpopular decision, which if results in peace could make them more popular than ever.

Lanka dangles talks bait



Mr Wickremasinghe: 'Government may relax ban on LTTE'

Agencies

COLOMBO, Jan. 22. —Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe today said his government would consider relaxing the ban on the Tamil Tiger rebels provided the LTTE is sincere in peace talks and local changes do not have any bearing on the international ban on the outfit.

The favourable international opinion built up against terrorism must be considered, he said, adding that "after formalising the basic agreement, the talks should be held within a definite time frame between the government and the LTTE".

The PM mentioned the government may relax the economic

embargo on Wannu. The LTTE has released 10 Sri Lankan PoWs, three soldiers in rebel custody for eight years and sailors from vessels captured in 1997-98, at Mallavi in the rebel-held northern Vanni region.

The LTTE said the PoWs released as a humanitarian and goodwill gesture were treated with dignity and compassion in custody and wanted similar treatment to Tamil prisoners incarcerated in jails in the south.

The LTTE has in the past declined to make public the exact number of prisoners in its custody, maintaining that the figure is very small and known to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The families of hun-

dreds of soldiers declared missing in action believe they are still alive in LTTE prisons.

In another development Mahayanake Thera of the Asgiriya Chapter, Kandy, an influential Buddhist prelate in Sri Lanka, has said the government can relax the ban on the LTTE if the militant group is prepared for negotiations without any preconditions and favoured grant of autonomy to Tamil-majority areas in a united Sri Lanka.

In remarks that came as a shot in the arm for the UNP-led government, the Mahasangha would also not oppose granting autonomy to the Tamil people of the north to some extent to run their own affairs in a united country.

Fresh violence in

THE STATESMAN

Lankan PM warned against lifting of ban on LTTE

COLOMBO: As the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE move towards a preliminary agreement on a lasting truce, the Ranil Wickremesinghe regime is under fire from detractors for seeming to appease the rebels with a host of confidence-building measures.

Political parties and commentators have warned the United National Front government against conceding the demand for lifting the ban on the tigers and lowering security preparedness, reminding Mr Wickremesinghe of the LTTE's past record of walking out of peace talks.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has expressed her support to the peace moves and is not directly involved in the process now, has also cautioned the government. "I strongly believe any further concessions should be given to the LTTE only after they come to the negotiating table."

"Lifting the ban before that will be dangerous and end up in nought," she said in a recent interview. "I believe the ban is a very important advantage the government can use," she said, asking it not to exhaust its strong points before talks.

However, the murmurs of protest is not likely to slow down the peace efforts, as Mr Wickremesinghe has asked opposition parties and detractors not to try to deflect the government from its 'chosen path'. He acknowledged the path was fraught with difficulties, but said he would still have to pursue it.

The new government has announced a reciprocal cessation of hostilities after the rebels unilaterally called for a a month-long ceasefire from christmas.

It has also allowed unhindered transport of goods into rebel-held territory, and eased restrictions on civilian movement and fishing.

However, LTTE political wing chief S.P. Thamilselvan was not effusive in welcoming the preliminary peace-related measures. He merely said the government's moves so far were good, but hinted that more needed to be done to normalise life in the northern Vanni region.

When Colombo-based newsmen met him at Mallavi a few days ago, he insisted that the government should confer legitimacy on the militant group by removing the ban on it before it could be expected to join direct negotiations.

The Marxist Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) distributed leaflets in Colombo last week opposing any move to concede the demand, while two other parties — the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party — both constituents of the erstwhile ruling People's Alliance have warned the government against deproscribing a deadly terrorist group.

Noted commentator Susantha Goonatilake said the LTTE may be using the ceasefire to send out suicide bombers and explosives to Colombo. However, the government is pressing ahead with the peace process 'step by step'. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Lanka seeks more pledges

FROM SCOTT MCDONALD

Colombo, Jan. 17 (Reuters): Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga said today the government of political rival Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe should get more guarantees from Tamil Tiger separatists before sitting down to peace talks.

But Kumaratunga, whose party was voted out of government after failing in its own peace bid last year, said she was not standing in the way of talks that could follow a truce put in place by Wickremesinghe since his election last month.

She also said in an interview with Reuters she expected more

international pressure on the LTTE because of the September 11 attacks on the United States.

"I have not made any obstacles," said Kumaratunga, who was elected in a separate presidential vote and has vast powers under the constitution.

"I have told the Prime Minister of certain concerns I have... They should have more guarantees from the LTTE," she said, adding her bid to reach the negotiating table last year failed because the Tigers kept asking for more concessions.

"They put one condition, you agree to that condition, then they put another and you agree to that, then they put a third one," she said.

Kumaratunga was speaking one day after the Tigers said they wanted a ban on the group lifted before any peace talks with the government, a condition that helped sink last year's bid to end nearly two decades of ethnic strife.

The apparent setback came after Wickremesinghe moved quickly to put a truce in place and ease an economic embargo on rebel-held areas since he won parliamentary elections last month.

An estimated 64,000 people have died since 1983 when the Tigers started fighting to set up a separate Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The lifting of the ban was one

of the demands made last year by the Tigers along with the truce and lifting of the embargo, although the LTTE has played it down since Wickremesinghe's United National Party won the December 5 election, campaigning heavily on a pro-peace mandate.

Constitutional affairs minister G.L. Peiris has said there is no official request to lift the ban and that the matter would be considered later.

The one-month ceasefire, the first in seven years to be observed by both sides, is due to end on January 24, and although it is widely expected to be extended Kumaratunga said she had not been told yet if it will be.

18 JAN 2002

10 2002

Moving closer

But who will host Sri Lankan peace talks?

The Sri Lanka peace process appears to have hit its first roadblock, regarding where negotiations with the LTTE are to be conducted. The government suggests Madhu in the LTTE-controlled area of Wannu, but other options have been floated: Norwegian facilitators propose their own capital, Oslo, while chief LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham indicates a preference for Chennai. Balasingham apparently requires constant medical attention which will not be available in Madhu, as well as geographical proximity to LTTE supremo Velupillai Pirabhakaran who is holed up in Wannu. But Chennai would be stirring a hornet's nest from India's point of view, where the LTTE is a banned organisation responsible for assassinating one of its prime ministers. With the LTTE in touch with the ISI and the Al Qaeda, and New Delhi currently in the midst of its own anti-terrorism effort, Balasingham and his cohorts can hardly be the most welcome visitors.

Oslo seems a better prospect, both because of the higher international profile the peace talks will receive in this case, as well as Oslo's distinguished tradition in hosting peace negotiations — the 1993 accord between Israelis and Palestinians was negotiated here, as well as agreements between the Guatemalan military and leftist rebels. Before negotiations can proceed, however, it is necessary to formalise the current ceasefire agreement, which the LTTE declared on Christmas Eve and will run out on January 24. But it is an indication that a peace deal on Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis has greater prospects under the Ranil Wickremesinghe led administration than under the previous People's Alliance administration led by Chandrika Kumaratunga, that the government promptly took up the ceasefire offer by the Tigers to declare a ceasefire of its own, and that it has to a significant degree lifted restrictions on flow of goods to LTTE-held areas in Wannu. Kumaratunga, by contrast, had rebuffed the LTTE the last time it declared a ceasefire; her People's Alliance had also become dependent on the hardline JVP for political survival. The United National Front led by Wickremesinghe campaigned on a platform of peace and won. With the international crackdown on terrorism, the LTTE too is running out of steam, making this as propitious a time as any for bringing to an end a two decades old conflict that has cost 64,000 lives so far.

THE STATESMAN

17 JAN 2002

Lanka lifts curbs

S. Lanka 51-6 167 on LTTE belt

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Jan. 15. — Sri Lanka today lifted seven-year-old restrictions on movement of essential goods to the LTTE-controlled northern Vanni region. In a significant step to woo the Tamil minority population, The Sri Lankan government despatched 30 truck loads of supplies.

With this, the UNP-led regime of Prime Minister, Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe, has initiated action on an election promise to Tamils to create normality in the North before opening talks with the LTTE.

After announcing a reciprocal cessation of hostilities late last month in response to the LTTE's unilateral one-month ceasefire, the government also decided to remove all but a few restrictions such as firearms, explosive substances, electronic remote-control equipment, binoculars and small batteries.

Rehabilitation, reconstruction and refugees minister, Mr Jayalath Jayawardena, who was present along with the interior minister, Mr John Amaratunga in Vavuniya today, said 120 truck loads of supplies would be sent every week, with 30 trucks plying on four days. Officials said 11 trucks went to Kilinochchi, 13 to Mullaitivu, four to Madhu and Pandivirichan in the Mannar area and two to Nedunkerni, all areas reeling under severe shortage of resources for years. The relaxation of economic restrictions is considered a major step in the peace process that has gathered momentum with the observance of a mutually-agreed temporary truce for the first time since 1995.

The government is in favour of making the movement of goods a permanent feature rather than a one-time measure. All the senior ministers have held extensive discussions with the Vavuniya government agent on both the quantity of supplies required and the mechanism for their proper distribution.

A Norwegian delegation is working on a draft agreement between the LTTE and the government.

THE HINDU

16 JAN 2002

Cloud on Lanka talks

S. Lanka

SI-9 12/1

Agencies

COLOMBO, Jan. 13. — While the newly elected Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe, favoured Madhu in the LTTE-dominated area of Wanni as the venue for the preliminary round of peace-talks with the Tamil Tigers, the LTTE spokesman, Mr Anton Balasingham, was quoted in the web site, *TamilNet.com* as saying: "Southern India is the most practical location... given the necessity for secure consultation on sensitive matters, regular face-to-face discussions must be practical".

However, the *Sunday Times* here reported, the Norwegian facilitators had indicated that they would like the preliminary talks to be held in their capital,

Oslo, a move intended to give the peace-talks the widest international attention.

Earlier this week, government spokesman Mr GL Peiris, had said that the peace-process hadn't come to the stage to address substantial issues such as de-proscription, venue and date, as was being speculated by the media.

"We're still at the confidence-building stage and concentrating on humanitarian issues. The approach of the government is slow and steady," he said.

The Norwegian peace delegation, upon completing the first round of talks with the LTTE and the government, had said on Friday that the discussions had shown "more confidence" between the parties.



Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe:
Future tense

Head of the delegation and deputy foreign minister, Mr

Vidar Helgesen, said Norway was convinced that there were opportunities to move further towards negotiations.

He added that the process would be challenging and both the parties would face difficulties.

Both Colombo and LTTE wanted to formalise a ceasefire agreement by accommodating a coherent and complete arrangement in one document to continue the existing cessation of hostilities.

The present ceasefire with the LTTE is effective till 24 January and the future of the peace talks depends how the two sides continue their relation. The Norwegian facilitators are exploring the possibilities to meet this demand as soon as possible.

LTTE's thinking was first

aired through a report in an Indian daily that said that Mr Balasingham should preferably be based in Chennai during the peace process to attend to his medical needs, being at the same time in a position to fly down to northern Vanni for personal consultations with the LTTE supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Meanwhile in a , ten people, including a 10-year-old child, were killed and over 200 passengers injured when a Colombo-bound train from Kandy jumped the track.

The accident occurred at Rambukkana, 70 km north-east of Colombo, at around 7.30 a.m. local time.

The injured were admitted to hospital. The government has set up an investigation into the accident.

THE STATESMAN

14 JAN 2000

HD-17 13/1

Staying engaged *S. Lanka*

A COMMENTATOR described it as Sri Lanka's "peace process No. 5". After three failed attempts and a fourth deadlocked initiative to bring about a lasting solution to the island's ethnic conflict between 1987 and 2001, the Government of Ranil Wickremesinghe has set the ball rolling for yet another process for talks with the LTTE aimed at finding a political settlement.

Following its December 5 election victory, the United National Front (UNF) Government has been quick on announcements with regard to the peace process. Norway was invited to resume its facilitation of peace talks and a delegation arrived on January 10 after a meeting with Anton Balasingham, LTTE representative in London, on January 4.

From Tuesday, essential supplies and civilians will be permitted to move with few restrictions across the lines that separate LTTE-held areas from those under the Government in the north, thus meeting a

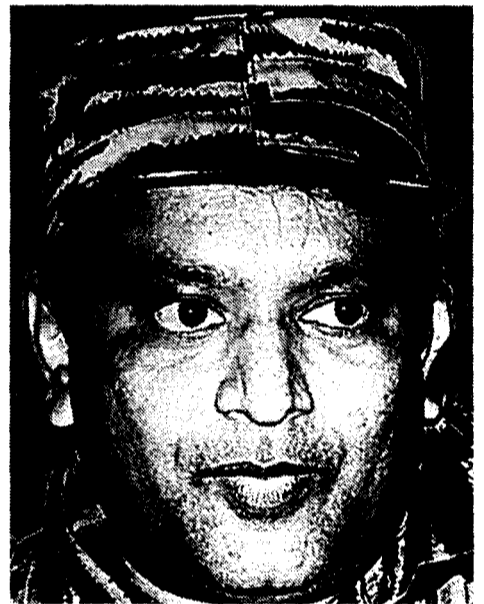
The immediate priority for the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE will be to somehow keep the ceasefire going, says Nirupama Subramanian.

future. The Government has nothing to offer, while for the LTTE, the mere fact of discussing a political solution would mean a commitment on its part to an alternative that is less than Eelam. That is a commitment the LTTE is not ready to make.

But for both sides, there is a pressing need to remain engaged in the peace process. For the Government, it would help attract local and foreign investment back to repair the economy, which is in a state of paralysis after

final settlement. The People's Alliance Government is seen as having made a strategic mistake by putting all its cards on the table, setting out its proposals for devolution in a one-shot package as the final solution to the conflict. It split the Sinhalese and once it was rejected by the LTTE, there was no meeting ground between the two sides, and the only option left was to go to war. Though there are no contours yet to this proposed interim solution, Mr. Wickremesinghe talked of an "interim administration" for northeast Sri Lanka during his election campaign. More and more influential voices are now being heard in favour of giving the LTTE a prominent role in running such an administration.

An interim solution would not necessitate any final commitments by either the Government or the LTTE, and could continue indefinitely, its proponents argue, especially as it would give the Tigers *de facto* control of



Chandrika Kumaratunga, Ranil Wickremesinghe and V. Prabhakaran... the principal players.

long-standing pre-condition set by the Tigers for talks.

And the two sides are working through the Norwegians to convert the truce unilaterally declared from December 24 into a structured ceasefire that will last indefinitely, and not just for a month. The Prime Minister has announced the setting up of a cell comprising the Constitutional Affairs Minister, G. L. Peiris, and the Economic Reforms Minister, Milinda Moragoda, to work on a political solution.

There is speculation that peace talks could begin as early as March with the LTTE floating the stunningly audacious idea that the negotiations be held in India.

Mr. Wickremesinghe has said that in taking steps that address the day-to-day needs of the Tamil people, his Government was ensuring that the talks would not get bogged down on these issues as in the past, so that the two sides can get down to the brass-tack political matters as soon as they sit at the table.

Rapid progress though all this indicates, it may not be to the advantage of either side to begin discussing a political solution immediately or even in the foreseeable

registering negative growth last year. For the LTTE, being seen as talking would in itself give it some international respectability.

A breakdown in the process is in the interests of neither. The Government is not likely to press for discussions on "core issues", nor will the LTTE bring up matters such as the removal of Sri Lanka's ban on it. The LTTE now even has the luxury of being represented in Parliament through the Tamil National Alliance, which can raise such issues on its behalf and keep them alive without threatening the peace process.

Both sides are fully aware that the alternative to being in the peace process is war, not a viable option for the Government given the parlous state of the economy, or for the LTTE in the current international climate.

Thus, the immediate priority for both would be to somehow keep the ceasefire going beyond the declared one-month period. It is likely that the main focus of the peace process would be to put in place a structured ceasefire within a mutually agreed framework, in place of the present truce being unilaterally observed by both sides.

In the Sri Lankan capital, the buzzword now is an "interim solution" rather than a

the Jaffna peninsula. Opposition to this from the Sinhala majority is not expected to be unmanageable, if done before Mr. Wickremesinghe's honeymoon with the voters ends. The UNF could even claim a mandate for it as large numbers voted for the party knowing this might happen.

In any case, it is all in the presentation, observers say. During the last peace talks in 1994-95, there was a proposal for a task force on reconstruction and rehabilitation for the northeast in which the LTTE was to play a key role. The talks broke down before the task force could take off, but this suggests a kind of "interim solution" that could be implemented without raising too many Sinhala hackles.

The scenario unfolding now is in keeping with Mr. Wickremesinghe's image as a politician who might be better at conflict management rather than conflict resolution. It may leave those looking for a full and final settlement to the ethnic conflict a trifle disappointed, but if the Government and the LTTE continue with the cleverness they are now demonstrating in wanting to remain engaged, peace process No. 5 could run and run.

9.12.2001
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Mr. Simi

Stay away from pugmarks

S. Lanka

IT MAY be one of the very few points on which the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE appeared to be in agreement even before they sat together to start negotiations to end the ethnic tangle. In separate statements, both have suggested that India should play some kind of a mediatory role in the talks proposed to be held between the two sides. Shortly after he assumed charge, Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe expressed his keenness that India should assume such a role. The issue also came up during the talks that Mr Wickramasinghe had with Indian leaders in the course of his New Delhi visit in December. But India has rightly maintained that while it is broadly supportive of any moves to resolve the crisis, it did not see any role for itself in the negotiations.

The LTTE's moves in the matter have been more complex. Perhaps expecting India to jump at the idea, they started with setting preconditions for an Indian role. Subsequently, these were dropped while they came up with the proposal that the negotiations with the Sri Lankan government be held in Chennai. There was also the idea that LTTE chief spokesperson Anton Balasingham be allowed to stay in Chennai for medical treat-

ment. Implicit in the suggestion was that they would like to open their office in the city like the one they once used to have.

The Tamil Tigers were seeking to achieve several goals through this move. First, an acceptance of their suggestion would imply that the ban on the LTTE following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination would be dropped along with the charges pending against the LTTE supremo in the Indian courts. It stands to reason that Colombo, too, would have to lift its ban against the LTTE so as to facilitate the negotiation process. In effect, what the LTTE was seeking is rehabilitation in India, which would also help their international profile.

However, it should be an eye-opener for the LTTE that even before New Delhi had considered the suggestion, several leading leaders and parties in Tamil Nadu rejected the idea. Apart from a deep sense of hurt, disillusionment and betrayal because of the LTTE's past conduct, there is another point that cannot be lost sight of. As in the case of Kashmir, New Delhi's position remains that the conflict between the two warring parties in Sri Lanka is a matter of internal accommodation within a federal structure. Third countries are best left alone.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 JAN 2002

Colombo distances itself from LTTE plan

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JAN. 10. A team from Oslo arrived here for discussions with the Government on the peace process, as Sri Lanka today publicly distanced itself from an LTTE proposal to hold peace talks in India, dismissing newspaper reports on the issue as "speculative" and saying it was too early in the process to start thinking of a venue.

"There has been a great deal of speculation in the press over the last two days, both here and in India, as to the venue for the peace talks. The speculation is premature. We have not yet reached a stage where substantial issues are being contemplated," the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, said today.

Mr. Peiris was reacting to reports that the LTTE wanted peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government to be held in South India, with the LTTE's Anton Balasingham based in Chennai.

The proposal is said to have been made to the Norwegian delegation that met Mr. Balasingham in London last week.

The senior Minister, who is a key figure in the peace process, said the thrust of the Norwegian-facilitated initiative was at the



The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe (right), greets Erik Solheim of the Norway peace delegation in Colombo on Thursday as the Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, looks on. — Photo: Sriyantha Walpola

moment to consolidate the confidence-building measures already undertaken by the Government.

The Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, arrived this morning with the Special Adviser to the Foreign Ministry, Erik Solheim, for discussions with the Sri Lankan Government on the

peace process. The team was scheduled to meet the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, other members of the Government and representatives of Tamil and Muslim parties.

Mr. Peiris said the purpose of the visit was "an exchange of

views" between Norway and the Sri Lankan Government on the developments in the peace process, including the facilitation team's meeting with Mr. Balasingham in London.

"The visit of the Norwegians will administer a very strong stimulus to the incipient peace process," Mr. Peiris said at a news conference today.

He said Oslo would help convert the present truce being unilaterally observed by the Government and the LTTE into a mutual ceasefire.

On Wednesday, Mr. Wickremesinghe held a meeting with the three service chiefs to assess the ground situation after nearly three weeks of the truce.

The Government was ensuring that all arrangements were in place for the smooth implementation of the decision to allow unrestricted movement of essential supplies to LTTE-held areas, Mr. Peiris said.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), Douglas Devananda, accused the LTTE of pursuing a "hidden agenda" in suggesting that the peace talks should be held in India.

Colombo silent, TULF backs LTTE proposal

By Nirupama Subramanian

S. Lanka
COLOMBO, JAN. 8. Though there was no official reaction from Sri Lanka to a request by the LTTE that its London representative, Anton Balasingham, be permitted to live in Chennai, and for peace talks with the Wickremesinghe Government to be held in a southern Indian State, a leading Tamil party said New Delhi must consider the request favourably.

When contacted, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Tyrone Fernando, declined to comment on the LTTE proposal.

"We don't know anything about it yet, so why speculate? The Norwegians are coming here in a day or two. Let us take it from there," Mr. Fernando said.

A Norwegian team headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, will arrive in Sri Lanka on Wednesday. The delegation will include Erik Solheim, who played a prominent role in Oslo's efforts in bringing the two sides to the table till he was sidelined by the previous Government.

The delegation met Mr. Balasingham in London last Friday. He is said to have asked Norway to convey to India a request to allow him to move to Chennai from London with Sri Lanka's consent for the peace process.

The LTTE also wants the Indian Government to allow peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government to be held in Chennai or Bangalore.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) said India should consider Mr. Balasingham's request favourably in the interests of the peace

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process in Sri Lanka. "Although technically there is a ban on the LTTE in India, they should not enforce it strictly in this case as a small help to the peace process. This is more of a humanitarian gesture because of Mr. Balasingham's ill-health," said the TULF leader, M. Sivasithamparam, who narrowly escaped

Lanka during peace talks, as he might not accept such assistance from Colombo for his own security.

Meanwhile, at a parliamentary group meeting of the United National Front (UNF) at the reopening of Parliament today, Mr. Wickremesinghe said Norway would soon draw up a formal document outlining a mutual ceasefire between the Government and the LTTE in order to structure the truce that is presently being observed by the two sides unilaterally.

As a sign of a growing rift between the People's Alliance (PA) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the leader of the Opposition, Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, today warned the Government in Parliament to guard against forces that were trying to disrupt the peace process.

The JVP has begun a campaign against the UNF Government's truce with the LTTE and the Norwegian return to facilitation in the peace process. The Norwegian delegation is expected to meet the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on Thursday, as well as the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The team is expected to hold discussions with Ministers, G.L. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda, who have been specially assigned by the Prime Minister to handle the political aspect of the peace process.

Assisting in the discussions on the Sri Lankan side will be several high-level officials including Bernard Goonetilleke, an experienced diplomat, who heads a new secretariat in the Prime Minister's Office to deal with the peace process.

India refuses to comment

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. India today refused to comment on the reported suggestions made by the LTTE to allow its political advisor, Anton Balasingham and his wife to 'stay' in Chennai for the smooth conduct of peace talks with the Sri Lankan Government.

Asked about India's reaction on the LTTE's demand as appeared in a section of the press, an External Affairs Ministry spokesperson said "I have no comments on such press reports". — UNI

being killed by the Tigers in 1990.

Two other TULF leaders, A. Amirthalingam and V. Yogeswaran, were assassinated in that attack, which the LTTE carried out while talking peace with the then President, Premadasa. Now the party fully backs the LTTE as the only representative of the Tamils for peace talks with the Government.

Mr. Sivasithamparam said that Mr. Balasingham's proposal would work if India would also provide the LTTE ideologue transport to shuttle between Chennai and northern Sri

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Britain slammed for allowing ^{to Lanka} Norway-LTTE meet

COLOMBO: Britain has been slammed for allowing Norwegian peace brokers to meet a top Sri Lankan Tamil rebel leader in London despite its ban on his guerrilla group.

"How a legally proscribed organisation is able to hold talks with representatives of a foreign government in the glare of international publicity cannot be reasoned out even by stretching the interpretation of British laws on terrorism to the utmost," *The Island* daily said on Friday.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said earlier this week that three Norwegian diplomats, including deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgeson, would meet its chief negotiator Anton Balasingham in London on Friday for talks aimed at ending

Sri Lanka's protracted ethnic conflict.

"In one move, the LTTE has struck a significant blow against its proscription as an international terrorist organisation by Western powers," the newspaper said in an editorial.

Condemning London's "wishy-washy attitude" towards the LTTE, the newspaper also questioned Norway's motivation saying Oslo "has shown itself to be very partial to the LTTE." "Already the government and the LTTE have agreed to talk, is there any need for a facilitator to begin talks?" the editorial asked.

The newspaper, reflecting the opinion of diehard hawks, charged that the LTTE was planning to drag on internationally backed

negotiations while building up its fighting forces and armory.

Britain named the LTTE as a foreign terrorist organisation in February 2001 after intense lobbying by Colombo to have the separatist group banned but has pushed for talks to end the separatist war with a political settlement.

London was the first to welcome the month-long Christmas truce offered by the rebels with foreign minister Jack Straw calling it "an excellent opportunity" to end years of fighting that has claimed the lives of over 60,000 troops and civilians.

He said Britain was standing by to help its former colony in any way it could.

Balasingham, a British passport holder,

has been a long-time resident in London and held pre-peace talks discussions with Norwegian special peace envoy Erik Solheim last year as well.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who won the December general election promising peace, last month invited Norway to revive its bid, begun in 1999, to open peace talks between Colombo and the rebel organisation.

The LTTE, in turn, called a ceasefire from December 25 that was reciprocated by the government. Colombo also said it would lift an economic embargo on northern areas held by the rebels and allow food, medicines and other essentials to flow freely from January 15. (IANS)

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A measure to 'invigorate' the peace process

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, JAN. 2. Sri Lanka today announced a decision to lift restrictions on supply of a large number of goods to the areas controlled by the LTTE.

A Defence Ministry press release said "all categories of goods (with the exception of 10 items), will be permitted access into (the Vanni) area with effect from January 15, 2002".

This step was being taken "with a view to uplifting the quality of life for the people of the Vanni area, and thereby bringing about an atmosphere conducive to invigorating the peace process in a spirit of goodwill and understanding..."

Of the 10 excluded items, the supply of four — diesel, petrol, cement and iron rods — will be restricted, while that of the rest will be banned. Military permission will be required to transport these items across the lines.

The banned items are: unlicensed arms and ammunition, unlicensed explosives, remote-controlled devices, barbed wire, binoculars and telescopes, and penlight batteries.

The 10 items figured also in a list of 21 items that Sri Lanka had banned for the LTTE areas in November 1994. Under the new rules, the remaining 11 items can now be taken freely. These include motor vehicle spare parts, urea fertilizer, camphor, oxygen welding equipment and fabric similar to that used for military uniforms.

Government and security force officials in Vavuniya, where the main crossing point between the two sides is located, are now considering proposals to increase the supply of food items into the LTTE-held areas.

So far, the Government has been sending in 23 trucks of food on three days of the week. The proposal is to increase this to 30 trucks on four days of the week.

The crossing point is located at Pirmanalankulam on the Vavuniya-Mannar road, and is at present, open for civilians twice a week, and for food trucks thrice a week.

Military officials said they were examining the feasibility of allowing civilian traffic through this checkpoint on three days of the week and food convoys on four

days. There was also a possibility that the military and the LTTE might agree on opening the A9, the main land route to the LTTE-held areas.

The A9 has remained closed to civilian traffic and food convoys ever since the Government launched its biggest military operation so far to capture the highway to provide a land-link from Vavuniya to the Jaffna peninsula.

But the military was unable to achieve the objective of the operation in the face of fierce resistance from the LTTE, and it was called off after 18 months in December 1998.

Military officials said re-opening the road would require extensive de-mining and repair operations on the small stretch that is controlled by the army. The LTTE has its own defences on the stretch that it controls.

They also said a proposal to relax the "pass" system for civilians in Vavuniya town was under consideration.

Under this system, people residing in or visiting Vavuniya had to obtain almost visa-like passes, putting them to great difficulties.

Officials said, for security reasons, it might not be possible to do away with it completely, but it could be liberalised.

Meanwhile, the month-long truce declared by the LTTE and the Government continues without any violations and is now in its second week.

Sydney faces fire threat again

SYDNEY, JAN. 2. Sydney braced itself for a grim day of heat and strong winds today, a day after the bush-fire crisis encroached on the suburbs of Australia's biggest city for the first time. Thousands of firefighters have battled around 100 fires across New South Wales (NSW) state since Christmas Day, but were stretched further yesterday when a new blaze erupted in Sydney's leafy northern suburbs, threatening hundreds of homes.

The NSW rural fire service commissioner, Mr. Phil Koperberg, said his crews, bolstered by firefighters from around Australia, were expecting more tough conditions around the state. — Reuters

Sri Lanka eases embargo on rebel-held areas

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Reuters

COLOMBO, Jan. 2. — Sri Lanka today announced a significant easing of the seven-year-old economic embargo on the rebel-held Wanni areas in the country's north, meeting a key condition for talks with the Tamil Tiger separatists.

"The government has decided that all categories of goods, with exception of the following, will be permitted access into this area with effect from 15 January," said a defence ministry statement, listing only 10 banned items including explosives.

Hopes of ending 18 years of constant fighting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are at their highest in years, with both sides observing a month-long truce since Christmas Eve.

The rebels, fighting for a separate minority Tamil state in Sri Lanka's North and East, have laid down truce and the lifting of the economic sanctions as essential pre-conditions for talks.

LTTE have also sought lifting of a Sri Lankan government ban on their organisation, but that demand has been played down since last month's Parliamentary election won by the pro-peace United National Party (UNP).

The defence ministry said the embargo was being eased "with a view to uplifting the quality of life for the people...and thereby bringing about an

atmosphere conducive to invigorating the peace process".

The ministry left the ban in place on six items, arms/ammunition, unlicensed explosives, remote controlled devices, barbed wire, binoculars/telescopes, and penlight batteries.

Four more items, including fuel and cement, are subject to stringent controls and will be rationed, the statement said.

The embargo had prevented more than 20 items, including fertiliser and oxygen, from entering the huge swathe of rebel-held territory, home to an estimated 400,000 Tamils.

The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr Ranil Wickremasinghe's UNP campaigned on a pledge to open talks with the rebels and won a convincing mandate that ended the seven-year rule of the more hardline People's Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Mr Wickremasinghe has since moved to revive a Norwegian-brokered peace bid, which was stalled last year amid haggling over conditions for talks.

The truce, first announced by the LTTE and then matched by the government, is the first comprehensive ceasefire in seven years.

The conflict has claimed more than 64,000 lives and little progress has been made on the substance of the dispute, despite four previous attempts at negotiations.

THE STATESMAN

- 3 JAN 2002

Wait and Watch

Sri Lankan prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's emergence as a powerful counterpoint to president Chandrika Kumaratunga and his perceived equation with India has activated Tamil parties and groups to ask for New Delhi's "help and assistance" in resolving the island's ethnic war. There were open appeals made by representatives of Tamil parties soon after the election, even before Mr Wickremesinghe was sworn in as prime minister. The revival of calls for a larger and more activist Indian role has assumed particular emphasis after Mr Wickremesinghe's recent visit to Delhi. He has been a regular visitor to India over the years, interacting with the government, the political class, businessmen and other influential sections. He is also reputed to enjoy a rapport with prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Therefore, regardless of what New Delhi does towards resolving the 18-year-old Tamil separatist war which has claimed nearly 65,000 lives, its actions and signals are bound to set off ripples. The effect of this would be not only on the process for Colombo's resumption of talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) but also on domestic politics in both countries. Mr Wickremesinghe has been shrewd enough to suggest that his initiatives for reviving the process towards talks with the Tamils — such as reciprocating the truce declared by the LTTE — have been taken in consultation with Ms Kumaratunga. However, this does not mean that in Colombo there is a genuine bipartisan consensus on the roadmap for reaching the negotiating table.

In such a situation, New Delhi should be extremely wary of being drawn into any kind of direct engagement at any level because it would have a bearing not only on the Tamil-Sinhala conflict but also on the struggle for supremacy underway between Mr Wickremesinghe and Ms Kumaratunga. This is quite apart from providing another opportunity to the Dravidian parties to revive their sideshow in Tamil Nadu. The Congress party — which lost Rajiv Gandhi to Tiger terrorism — can also be expected to put the government on the mat if it assumes a higher profile in favour of Sri Lankan Tamils. This could also be politically inconvenient when New Delhi is overactive in trying to set the global agenda for "rooting out terrorism". It is important to stress these as restraining factors that should prevail on New Delhi because of the excessive post-election optimism in Colombo about achieving a breakthrough on the Tamil issue. Such optimism is premature, firstly, because of the power struggle between the prime minister and president, each of whom is waiting for an opportune moment to upstage the other. Secondly, the record of the LTTE in aborting earlier efforts at negotiations illustrates the need for being cautious as well as circumspect in any approach. The elected Tamil representatives who are clamouring for India to take a hand in the conflict are today, unlike in the 1980s, nothing more than the parliamentary arm of the LTTE with little choice but to carry out Mr Pirabakaran's dictates. This being the situation, New Delhi would do well to adopt a wait and watch position without encouraging the hopes of any one party involved in the conflict, for in the final reckoning no solution would be implementable without New Delhi's approval.

C. S.

Lanka relaxes economic embargo on Tiger areas

Colombo, January 2

SRI LANKA on Wednesday announced a significant easing of an economic embargo on rebel-held areas in the country's north, meeting a key condition for talks with Tamil Tiger separatists.

"The Government has decided that all categories of goods, with exception of the following, will be permitted access into this area with effect from January 15," said a defence ministry statement, listing only 10 banned items including explosives.

Hopes of ending 18 years of fighting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are at their highest in years with both sides observing a month-long truce from Christmas Eve.

The rebels, fighting for a separate minority Tamil State in Sri Lanka's north and east, have laid down a truce and the lifting of

the economic embargo as pre-conditions for talks.

They have also sought a lifting of a Sri Lankan Government ban on their outfit, but that demand has been played down since last month's parliamentary election won by the pro-peace United National Party (UNP).

The Defence Ministry said the embargo was being eased "with a view to uplifting the quality of life for the people...and thereby bringing about an atmosphere conducive to invigorating the peace process."

The ministry left the ban in place on six items, including arms, explosives and binoculars.

Four more items, including fuel and cement, are subject to stringent controls and will be rationed, the statement said.

The embargo had prevented more than 20 items, including fertiliser and oxygen, from entering the huge swathe of rebel-held

territory, home to an estimated 400,000 Tamils.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNP campaigned on a pledge to open talks with the rebels and won a convincing mandate that ended the seven-year rule of the more hardline People's Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Wickremesinghe has since moved to revive a Norwegian-brokered peace bid which stalled last year amid haggling over conditions for talks.

The truce, first announced by the LTTE and then matched by the government, is the first comprehensive cease-fire in seven years.

The conflict has claimed more than 64,000 lives and little progress has been made on the substance of the dispute despite four previous attempts at negotiations.

Reuters

SRI LANKA'S FUTURE

Daunting Task Before Ranil Wickremesinghe

By PARMANAND

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The United National Party leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe, was sworn in as Sri Lanka's 17th — the seventh under the executive presidency since 1978 — Prime Minister on 9 December, but he succeeded in getting a ministry sworn in only on 12 December. And yet he could not succeed in forming a national government or a government of national consensus, as he had been harping on. At best, he succeeded in forming a ministry of the United National Front, comprising the UNP, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the Ceylon Workers' Congress.

In any case, a ministry of 63 from the house of 225 — where the UNF has a strength of 114 seats — raises more questions, and provides fewer answers. Twenty-eight per cent of the total strength of the house and about 51 per cent of the strength of the ruling side have been accommodated in the ministry. A number of members from the earlier ruling front — the People's Alliance — had defected to the UNF on election eve, and very many of them have been given berths in the ministry.

Many present-day PA members have also reportedly shown their willingness to join the ministry regardless of other consequences. All this indicates that political stability might not be that easy.

The new ministry — which, indeed, cannot be called the Wickremesinghe ministry, thanks to the existing constitutional provisions, which establish the palpable supremacy of the President — had a tragic beginning. The ministry's oath-taking was preceded by a bloody reminder of the 17-year-old ethnic conflict from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. At least nine security personnel and one civilian were killed and 27 others injured, when the LTTE carried two separate attacks before midnight on 11 December.

Optimism

The LTTE, which surfaced in 1977, has been persistently fighting for the cause of the Tamil Eelam since 1983 and, in a civil war-like situation, some 65,000 people have been killed thus far. When the PA led by Chandrika B Kumaratunga came to power in 1994 — after having lost power in 1977 — much optimism was generated about a solution to the protracted ethnic problem and demand for decentralisation of powers. Indeed, during the parliamentary poll of August 1994, and the presidential election of November 1994, Chandrika had refused to call the LTTE a terrorist organisation, and showed a great deal of sympathy for them. Her late husband Vijaya Kumaratunga (assassinated 1988), a matinee idol, had, as a leader of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshya, even established contact with the LTTE supremo, Vellupillai Pirbhakaran, and tried to understand the

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latter's viewpoints on the island's politics.

One of the first acts of the PA government was to hold peace talks with the LTTE, generating a great deal of optimism among the Sri Lankans of all hues. Between 13 October 1994 and 10 April 1995, four rounds of talks were held between the representatives of the government and the LTTE. The talks finally failed and on 19 April 1995, the LTTE returned to the battlefield.

On 9 July 1995, the PA government began its offensive against the LTTE,



calling it Operation Leap Forward. The Tigers responded by launching the counter-offensive, Tiger Leap, on 15 July 1995. Amidst all this, President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced a devolution package of historic importance on 3 August 1995.

However, as time passed, the PA government's intentions about decentralisation of powers and dismantling of the executive presidency, became more and more suspect. Not that the mainstream opposition led by the UNP was blameless.

Portfolios

It is against this backdrop that one has to envisage the role of the new ministry and the LTTE in establishing peace in the strife-torn state. By handing over the portfolios of defence and finance, as demanded by Ranil, Chandrika has moved very deftly. She would, of course, continue to head the newly-established Presidential Security Division under the new dispensation.

While over the years the LTTE has quite visibly shown a tremendous increase in its fighting power and prowess, it is this time able to show unprecedented support inside the Sri Lankan Parliament. The Tamil National Alliance — comprising the Tamil United National Front, a section of the Eelam People's Liberation Front, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, and the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress — had fought the 5 December election stressing that it considered the LTTE the sole spokesman of

The TULF had, then, vehemently opposed the activities of the LTTE. This volte-face of the TULF is more due to the existing nitty-gritty of the island's politics rather than the Damocle's sword hanging over their members' heads.

It is against this background that not only Sri Lankans but the whole world would be watching carefully the new government's attitude to the LTTE.

The LTTE and peace talks are not the only problems for the new Prime Minister. Ranil has succeeded in persuading Chandrika to give up the finance portfolio, but to improve the island's deteriorating economic health remains a daunting task for him. KN Chosky, an eminent lawyer and senior UNP member, has been allocated the finance portfolio.

Sri Lanka's export-oriented garment and tea industries are floundering. Garment manufacturers have warned that they will not be able to pay salaries if the existing situation continues. Tea houses have expressed the fear that their produce would become uncompetitive in the world market.

Hotels

Some hotels — the country's fourth largest foreign currency earner — are planning to close because of lack of tourists. Sri Lanka depends heavily on imports of food and essential goods — even potatoes and onions are imported. It was the first economy in the region to liberalise in 1977. Despite the shocks of war, the economy grew at a respectable average rate of 4.7 per cent between 1980 and 1999. However, things have deteriorated in the new millennium. Treasury secretary PB Jayasundera said on 21 August that the revised GDP growth rate for 2001 taking into account the current situation in the country, compounded by a bad year for agriculture, high oil prices and the effects of global recession was about three per cent — that is down from 4.5 per cent forecast.

To make matters worse, unemployment among both Sinhalese and Tamil young people, has been a primary cause of Sri Lanka's bloodshed. Young men or women from the country's villages join one army or the other for lack of anything else to do.

The Sri Lankan electorate certainly wishes to see peace established in the island, and it has given a clear mandate to the UNF. But the mandate is not strong enough to withdraw the one given to the PA in the presidential election of December 1999. The SLFP-led PA has secured only 77 seats — 30 less than it had won in the last parliamentary poll — but it has not been forced into the miserable position of 1977, when the SLFP could win only eight seats. It is time for the government and the opposition to rise to the occasion and make the island state peaceful and prosperous. The onepmanship within the Sinhalese leadership has already done enough damage.

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LTTE yet to respond to Govt. moves

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By Nirupama Subramanian S. Lanka

COLOMBO, JAN. 1. After declaring a one-month ceasefire and challenging the Sri Lankan Government to match it, the LTTE is being mysteriously silent on the rapid Government moves to create conditions for peace talks, including a reciprocation of the truce.

Norway, which was formally asked by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, to continue its facilitation of peace talks, has said it would not resume its role unless asked by both the sides. But there seems to be no signal to Oslo yet from the LTTE to once again take up its role as facilitator.

The LTTE is also quiet on other unilateral announcements by the Government, including the decision to lift the restrictions on the free movement of essential goods to the areas under the LTTE's control.

There has also been no response from the LTTE to the Government's decision to match the ceasefire with a month-long cessation of hostilities.

The silence has puzzled observers, especially in the light of the LTTE statements that though it was ready to come forward for a peaceful settlement, the lack of response from the previous People's Alliance (PA) Government had prevented this from happening.

The Government has changed now, and it has announced its decision to create conditions for talks by easing the life of civilians in the war zones, a demand put forth by the LTTE to the previous PA Government.

A gazette notification is expected from the Government on Wednesday regarding the lifting of restrictions on the movement of supplies to the LTTE-controlled areas, and is likely to be implemented by the middle of this month.

It is the new Government's hope that by taking these steps the peace talks, when they do take place, will be focussed on substantive political issues, and do not get bogged down in "day-to-day" issues like the 1994-95 negotiations.

Mr. Wickremesinghe has said that the talks could begin in March once the measures implemented this month begin to take effect, but there has been no affirmation of this by the LTTE yet.

THE HINDU

1995

Change in Colombo

Cohabitation Times in Temptation Isle

By SHASTRI RAMACHANDARAN

IN South Asia, a woman at the helm of affairs is by now a 'regular' scene. Sri Lanka blazed a pioneering trail when Sirimao Bandaranaike, mother of Chandrika Kumaratunga, became the world's first woman prime minister. Despite this and other radical departures, 'cohabitation' is a new phenomenon. As the first such experiment gets underway in the island republic, there is much interest in how such a partnership will perform and what it will deliver.

The recent elections have thrown up an extraordinary situation, with implications for the island's political order, the crisis-ridden economy, the protracted ethnic conflict and India, as an interested neighbour. Of course, the neighbour's interest is not so much because of the attractive personalities involved as because of the uneasy togetherness.

For the first time since the executive presidency was introduced in Sri Lanka through the 1978 constitution by J R Jayewardene, the occupant of that powerful office has to co-exist with a parliament dominated by the opposition. The manner in which president Chandrika Kumaratunga has had to give in at every stage to the victorious Ranil Wickremesinghe of the opposition United National Party — from swearing him and his team into office to surrender of key portfolios including defence — suggests a return, in effect, to prime ministerial governance. Such primacy of the prime minister, for the first time since the late 1970s when Sri Lanka went into presidential mould, poses a new and unforeseen challenge to the executive president as head of government.

Under the constitution, it is the president's cabinet. But effectively, Mr Wickremesinghe appears to have secured a grip on the administration. He also made a splash in New Delhi — the most important foreign capital for Colombo. His initial moves have impressed influential sections of the international community about his intentions to revive the process for talks with separatist Tamil rebels and deliver antidotes for the stricken economy. Equally important, he has raised hopes among the Tamils although the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is guarded against any public display of optimism about ending the 18-year conflict.

The key to resolving the conflict, and creating conditions for economic recovery, depend not only on the truce declared both by the LTTE and Colombo. It also depends on

the apparent 'truce' between Ms Kumaratunga and Mr Wickremesinghe developing into a friction-free partnership for a common agenda. Although Ms Kumaratunga of the defeated People's Alliance appears to have conceded the right of way to Mr Wickremesinghe, a struggle for supremacy cannot be ruled out. The verbal hostilities that marked the election campaign — such as allegations of a secret pact between the UNP and the LTTE and a UNP prime minister being unacceptable to Ms Kumaratunga — and the feeble post-poll attempts by Ms Kumaratunga to assert her authority over the armed forces indicate that the president and PM are still unreconciled to each other's position.

The shift in popular mood may have stayed Ms Kumaratunga's counter-moves for the time being. But she has enormous powers which she may exercise if Mr Wickremesinghe falters. The constitution empowers her to dissolve parliament after a year. On the other

join battle. Should that happen then tackling the economic crisis and separatist war may well get put off till the next turn in the political tide.

Such a development would unleash a free-for-all with extremist Tamil and Sinhala forces exploiting the power struggle to hold parliamentary politics to ransom. Unlike at any other time since the ethnic war broke out, these forces have won unprecedented mainstream support and acceptability: Indeed the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is but the parliamentary wing of the LTTE which has been designated a "terrorist organisation".

The extra-parliamentary LTTE has got the Tamil MPs on a tight leash. The TNA won the elections by campaigning for the acceptance of the LTTE as the sole representatives of the Tamil people. Having won the election on that platform, they are being reminded daily that they should do the bidding of the LTTE or be prepared to be "garlanded" — like Rajiv Gandhi was. At the other end, there is the growing legitimacy of the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), the radical Sinhala party which first came to international attention with the 1971 insurrection. The JVP has won 16 seats, one more than the TNA, but increased its vote-share from six to over nine per cent.

Even if events bear out the optimism over revival of efforts for talks, it will be a long haul given the extreme brutality and ruthlessness with which both Colombo and Tamil rebels have fought a war claiming over 65,000 lives in 18 years. The history of grievances, revenge, retribution and repression is too burdensome to admit of early reconciliation; and the previous failures to break out of the militarised mould in favour of negotiations testify to the awesome obstacles to be overcome.

In this context, the revival of calls for India to assume a larger and more active role should be heard but not responded to, yet. For now, New Delhi should remain the interested observer it has been since Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. New Delhi must resist the temptation as well as Sri Lankan and international pressures to be cast as a tilting factor in that island's politics either between the warring Tamils and Sinhals or the president and the prime minister. Eventually, no solution can become acceptable without New Delhi's nod, no matter what the formula and where it comes from. This overriding, but implicit, veto power should be New Delhi's trump card.

IN BRIEF

- For the first time, a powerful president has to co-exist with an opposition-dominated parliament
- Peace in the island hinges on the success of cohabitation
- New Delhi must not see Sri Lanka as temptation island

hand, to pre-empt presidential activism, the majority UNP could move an impeachment motion against Ms Kumaratunga. Regardless of whether it is carried or not, it could be a Damocles' sword to restrain her from dissolving parliament.

As this tussle plays out, every attempt will be made both by the UNP and the PA to undermine each other in parliament. Mr Wickremesinghe's call for a "national government" was a carrot calculated to split Ms Kumaratunga's Alliance. The offer has been spurned but it has stirred the ambitions of many in the PA evidenced by the emergence of a ginger group of MPs who support "national reconciliation", and, less explicitly, are eager to cross-over given the right incentives. The anti-defection law is hardly a deterrent given the cumbersome process for disqualifying defectors. As of now, Mr Wickremesinghe is ahead in the game and Ms Kumaratunga is constrained to wait for an opportune moment to

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