

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2003

HD-10

EVOLVING BIPARTISAN APPROACH

S. Lanka 2/12

THE SRI LANKAN President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's offer of a Joint Peace Council (JPC) and the creation of the post of "Minister assisting Defence" mark yet another step in the evolving consensual approach to the peace process in the island. Ms. Kumaratunga's proposals come in the wake of a studied approach to end the political and constitutional logjam that followed her sudden moves to prorogue Parliament and take over three key portfolios — Defence, Finance and Media. Coming on the heels of a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, the President's latest offer has to be viewed against the backdrop of a constitutional crisis averted and a peace process deadlocked. President Kumaratunga's phased moves to get the Prime Minister, his Government and Parliament to function normally and carry forward the peace process should be welcomed. The Prime Minister should, shedding all narrow considerations, decide on a course of cooperation. If the President has chosen to keep the Defence portfolio herself and suggest a JPC to formulate an overall framework for the peace process, this is in legitimate exercise of her executive powers under the Constitution. It also reflects the Opposition's perception that the Government has yielded too much ground to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and been less than vigilant about security in strategic places, including Trincomalee.

A strikingly constructive feature of the President's plan is the proposal that the "Prime Minister will be in charge of the peace negotiations [and] would, from time to time and when requested by the JPC, keep it informed of the progress and take guidance [from it] on matters of policy." This will be a return to good practice, when the Prime Minister initiated the talks with the LTTE and kept the President informed of the progress. If the initial approach to political cohabitation between a constitutionally all-power-

ful Executive President and a democratically elected Prime Minister belonging to another political party had continued, the recent political crisis could have been averted. Ms. Kumaratunga must be complimented for showing a sensitivity rare in such cases; she knows that Mr. Wickremesinghe retains his majority in Parliament and the people want the peace process to succeed. She must ensure the implementation of whatever practical arrangement is put in place through a bipartisan consensus. The choice of the "Minister assisting in Defence" should not be allowed to remain a hurdle considering that the Sri Lankan Supreme Court has clearly ruled that the President has absolute executive powers over Defence.

Finally, Ms. Kumaratunga's constructive proposals must be seen in the context of the LTTE chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran's "Heroes' Day" speech, in which he has warned that the Tamil Tigers would have "no alternative but to secede if the Sinhala chauvinistic ruling elites continue to oppose reconciliation." If the current developments lead to a consensual approach to the peace process, that could effectively thwart the LTTE's efforts to drive a wedge between the President and the main Opposition party on the one hand and the Prime Minister and the ruling party on the other. With an enlarging list of foreign statesmen visiting rebel-held Killinochchi and calling on Mr. Prabhakaran — the European Union's External Affairs Commissioner, Chris Patten, being the latest — there will be pressure on the LTTE to adhere to the ceasefire and get back to the talks. The international community continues to back the peace process and views the standoff between the President and the Prime Minister as a setback that can be overcome. A course correction for cohabitation and the peace process will be decidedly in the interests of the Sri Lankan people. In this process, India has its own part to play as Sri Lanka's friend and closest neighbour.

THE HINDU

DEC
21 2004

55-9
16/12

Time to step in

WHAT should India do in the context of the crisis in Sri Lanka?" This has become an all-encompassing question for India's polity. Rightly so, because the ongoing situation in the emerald isle is none too salubrious and this might have significant consequences for India. The current scenario is the result of a face-off between the nation's two power centres - namely, the President and the Prime Minister - and Sri Lanka's citizens are extremely worried about the fallout of this. It is almost two years that a ceasefire is holding between the LTTE and Colombo and no one, least of all the people, want a recrudescence of the fighting that has claimed some 70,000 lives so far.

Can India take some measures to ensure that the ongoing calm does not come to an unceremonious end? There is no gainsaying that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Norway's special emissary, Erik Solheim, have done a splendid job to date. The region as well as the rest of the world desire that this should continue till a permanent solution to Sri Lanka's two-decades old problem is found. Surely India can act as a catalyst in this by joining the peace process?

New Delhi enjoys the rare privilege of being a confidante to both President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremasinghe. Both have kept New Delhi posted on all happenings since they know that India's good wishes are extremely important in the long run. It is in the region's interest that India should step in and become a collateral with Norway for activating the stalled talks between the LTTE and Colombo.

Three actions need to be initiated by New Delhi. First, India must drop its demand for Villupillai Pirabhakaran's head for his alleged role in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. On the one hand, India has all along been supporting the formal as well as informal talks where the LTTE supremo's international

If India is to ease the Lanka crisis, it needs to stop demanding Pirabhakaran's head, reiterate the truths of the Sattahip meet and urge dialogue between the warring parties, writes JK DUTT



Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe chats with President Chandrika Kumaratunga. — AFP

mainstay, Anton Balasingham, has led his team, yet, on the other, India wants Pirabhakaran to be handed over! This apart, some of our political parties are so intensely against the LTTE that they take recourse to jailing any one who speaks for that organisation.

It is more of a political oxymoron that our leaders are exercising presumably for vote bank purposes. Pursuing this position will only make us seem dubious in the eyes of the world. We, therefore, need to realise that if Colombo itself recognises Pirabhakaran, why should we play spoilsport? Playing double-shuffle will only demean our intentions of wanting peace in Sri Lanka.

Second, India has to brush up on conflict resolution techniques. The charter placed by

the LTTE at the talks can be paralleled with the periodic list of demands that trade unions place before management. The unions ask for the moon as starters and the management gradually brings this down to earth, ultimately settling it at treetop level! The LTTE seems to have adopted a similar tactic and this appears to have triggered the face-off in Colombo. Kumaratunga has interpreted the LTTE's demand for Elam as one for independence for which she blames Wickremasinghe's generosity. India should step in and point out the truth: at the historic September 2002 talks at Sattahip in Thailand, "independence" was replaced with "autonomy". Balasingham is worth quoting in this regard: "We operate with the concept of a homeland rather than a

separate state." Thus, the Sri Lankan President's accusation smacks of one-upmanship over her rival. Thus, India should, in conjunction with Norway, convince Colombo that such misinterpretations create unnecessary blocks.

And third, New Delhi should advise the LTTE that the best way of annulling the contretemps between Sri Lanka's two power nodes is to seek resumption of talks at the earliest instead of waiting and watching. If so deemed, India and Norway can request the United Nations to undertake the aegis of the talks with the aim of preempting any retrograde activity that might befall Sri Lanka if the deadlock continues.

Additionally, India should focus on inducting stability into

the island nation as an overriding priority. The donor conferences that have been held this year have had a promising outcome. A substantial quantum of funds, technology and logistic input have been slotted for the development pipeline for the crucial Jaffna-Trincomalee stretch. Any sabotage of this vital life-giving dose to Sri Lanka will be an incalculable set back. This must never be allowed to happen and this is something India has to assure. Just because Wickremasinghe was denied some important government portfolios by Kumaratunga - a matter since been reconciled - it is no reason why talks should get stalled. In fact, conflict resolution methodology today strongly opines that once talks commence, they should continue non-stop no matter how much time it takes. The biggest detractor to successful talks is taking breaks from them. Nowhere has this been more tragically proved than in West Asia.

India should tactfully emphasise on the main points agreed upon at Sattahip as these form a worthwhile platform from where further progress could be secured by both the LTTE and Colombo. Most pertinent, Sattahip is the key for continuity, a fact comparable with New Delhi's recognition of Bangkok as India's ice-breaker vis-a-vis the influential NSCN(I-M) faction. Successful resolution of the long drawn conflict with the erstwhile Bodo Liberation Tigers is another feather in our cap that surely warrants kudos.

India is fast emerging as a prominent power player. And the USA and the European Union have also expressly said so. India has to display its craftsmanship in International Relations and the starting point for this should be the Sri Lanka case. However, in order to excel, India must first discard its political dogma and inculcate a spirit of 21st century dynamism and objectivity amongst its leadership, the kind of spirit that was evident at Cancun.

(The author is a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the Indian Army.)

Chandrika not to give up Defence portfolio

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 9. The Office of the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today said that the President would not give up the Defence portfolio, which was taken over by her last month.

"The retention of Defence under the purview of the President is a constitutional necessity. It is inalienable", the Presidential spokesman, Harim Peiris said, adding there was "absolutely no question" of the portfolio being given up.

The President had, on November 4, taken over the Defence, Interior and Mass Communication portfolios, exercising her constitutional powers. Ms. Kumaratunga's position was also strengthened by a Supreme Court ruling that Defence was inalienable from the Presidency under the Constitution. The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, subsequently abdicated responsibility for the peace process, citing lack of authority over the sensitive Defence portfolio.

The peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), stalled since the unilateral pullout by the rebels this April, were put on hold by the Norwegian facilitators, citing "lack of clarity" on the political front. On the issue of political clarity, the spokesman said the Constitution spelt it out "chapter and verse". Under the Constitution, the President is vested with executive pow-

ers as head of state, head of Government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Crucial meet

The observations by the Presidential spokesman come against the backdrop of a plan being worked out by a joint committee headed by the Secretaries to the President and the Prime Minister, for the two leaders to work together on issues of national importance. The committee has been asked to submit its report by December 15. Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe are scheduled to meet on Wednesday to discuss ways of working together.

The President recently mooted the formation of a joint peace council, co-chaired by her and Mr. Wickremesinghe, to oversee all aspects of the peace process and the creation of the post of a Minister Assisting Defence. This proposal was described as "not meeting the basic criteria" by the UNF, which wants "effective control" over the peace process.

On the talks between the President's party, People's Alliance and the hardline Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) for an electoral pact, the spokesman said the negotiations were "ongoing" and that "any further details will be given by the general secretaries" of the two political parties. Asked if there was a possibility of a snap poll, he declined to comment.

THE HINDU

DEC
10 2004

Tamil MPs hold talks with LTTE

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 9. Parliamentarians from the four-party Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which backs the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), today discussed the current political situation in southern Sri Lanka with the rebels' political wing leader, S. P. Tamilchelvan.

All the TNA MPs, except the president of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), V. Anandasangaree, were reportedly present at the meeting. The TULF's general-secretary, R. Sampanthan, led the TNA delegation.

The TNA — comprising the TULF, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), a faction of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF-Suresh) and the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) — has a total of 15 MPs in Sri Lanka's 225-member Parliament. The TULF is divided over the issue of accepting the LTTE as the sole representatives of the Tamils.

THE HINDU

DEC
10 2004

S. Lanka
14.12.12

Chandrika, Ranil review efforts to work together

6/12

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 5. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, today held a one-hour meeting here to "review the progress" of the ongoing efforts to chalk out a way in which the two leaders could work together on issues of national importance.

The meeting, described by Presidential Secretariat sources as "very cordial," was the first after Ms. Kumaratunga's proposals for a Joint Peace Council co-chaired by the two leaders and the creation of the post of a Minister Assisting Defence were made public.

This evening's meeting took place against the backdrop of an ongoing political impasse since November 4 when the President, exercising her constitutional powers, took over the Ministries of Defence, Interior and Mass Communication. The President's position was also bolstered by a Supreme Court determination last month that she had "overriding powers" over a Defence Minister. Under the Sri Lankan Constitution, the Executive President is head of state, head of government as well as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. As the head of Cabinet, she is also in-charge of Ministerial allocations. After the November 4 Cabinet changes,

the Ranil Wickremesinghe administration has taken the position that it would not be responsible for the peace process, as it did not have authority over the sensitive issue of Defence.

Subsequently, the two leaders appointed a joint committee, headed by their secretaries, to find a way out for them to work together on "issues of national importance."

The two sides did not make a joint statement after this evening's meeting, but according to sources close to the President, they had instructed the top officials to continue with the efforts to work out a solution by December 15.

Chandrika, Ranil to meet today

By V.S. Sambandan

5/12
110-16
S. Chandrika

COLOMBO, DEC. 4. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, are to meet tomorrow as part of a series of meetings to find a way out of the current political impasse.

At a press conference today,

the Cabinet spokesperson, G.L. Peiris, said that the Prime Minister "would not" demand the return of the portfolios of Defence, Interior and Mass Communications, which were constitutionally taken over by the President on November 4.

The emphasis, he said, was on chalking out a mechanism

through which Mr. Wickremesinghe would have "effective control" over the peace process.

The President's proposals last week, to share the Defence Ministry portfolio, Prof. Peiris said, "does not meet the basic criteria" of the Wickremesinghe administration having an "effective control over the peace process".

THE HINDU

5 DEC 2004

11-10-12
3/12

TULF in turmoil

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 2. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a political party known for its moderate stance, is currently caught in an internal tussle over the "sole representative" status accorded to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

While a majority of the party's 38-member central committee, including the senior vice-president, Joseph Pararajasingham, and the general secretary, R. Sampanthan, want the LTTE to be recognised as the sole representative of the Tamils, the TULF president, V. Anandasangaree, does not agree. As the wrangle over the issue continues, Tamil political observers feel that the "LTTE will be the biggest winner" as a result of the party's internal spat.

"There is no split in the party," both Mr. Anandasangaree and Mr. Pararajasingham told *The Hindu*. However, the similarity of view ends there. Those who recognise the new LTTE status say that Mr. Anandasangaree had "lost the confidence of the party" and should step down. Mr. Anandasangaree, emphatic that he will not bow down to the "stooges of the LTTE", said "they are taking the body and soul of the party to the LTTE. They deserve sympathy not anger." The LTTE, he said, "wants me out somehow or the other." Those who want the LTTE to be the sole representatives of the Tamils "can honourably say that they are joining the LTTE", rather than "betray the founding principles" of the party.

Mr. Pararajasingham said the TULF was a constituent of the four-party Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which won the last election on a pro-LTTE platform, and had, therefore, to recognise the rebels as the sole representatives. The TNA, he said, had "now become a part and parcel" of contemporary politics; he said. Moreover, the LTTE was now talking with the Government and, hence, should be accepted as the sole representative.

Two attempts to remove Mr. Anandasangaree from the president's post were not carried through at the central committee. Its last meeting, held here, ended in a fracas and both sides came with conflicting versions. The next meeting has been scheduled for December 14, in the eastern Amparai district, where the LTTE has a direct presence. With Mr. Anandasangaree and his supporters unable to go to Amparai, the meeting is likely to be chaired by Mr. Pararajasingham. Barring Mr. Anandasangaree, six other TULF MPs and 25 of the 38 members in the central committee want the LTTE to be called the "sole representative of the Tamils." However, political observers feel that this line-up is based on fear. "They have taken this position as they would have to retain their parliamentary seats and are threatened. This cannot be seen as a democratic division."

THE HINDU

DEC

3-2004

Prabhakaran: Back to the old game

By V. Suryanarayan

Owing to the pressure of circumstances or for tactical reasons, Prabhakaran may adopt different courses at different times but the ultimate objective is an independent state of Tamil Eelam.

FOLLOWING THE old dictum that the best way of defence is offence, Velupillai Prabhakaran, in his Heroes Day speech, has sharply reacted to the criticisms of the international community that the recent proposals submitted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the establishment of an Interim Administrative Council in the Northeast constitute the basis for a separate state. He has denied the allegation that the LTTE is strengthening itself militarily and preparing for war. He has characterised the power struggle between the President and the Prime Minister as an expression of Sinhala racism, which would lead to a denial of Tamil rights. What is more, the LTTE supremo has held out the warning that if oppression continues, Tamils will have no alternative but to secede and form an independent state, invoking the right to self-determination.

'Heroes Day' (November 27) provides an annual opportunity for Prabhakaran to take stock of the political situation and spell out the short term and long term objectives of the Tigers. The day is celebrated on a grand scale in the Tamil areas; it is an occasion to remember and pay tribute to the guerrillas who laid down their lives in the cause of Tamil Eelam. 'Lt'. Shankar, the first guerrilla to die in combat, sacrificed his life on November 27, 1982. A close associate of Prabhakaran from his early days, Shankar was seriously injured in an encounter with the Sri Lankan army when a bullet tore through his stomach. Since there were no adequate medical facilities in Jaffna, Shankar was brought to Tamil Nadu by sea. He remained conscious until he was able to speak to Prabhakaran and then succumbed to his injuries.

The widespread observance of Heroes Day is intended to remind the faithful in Sri Lanka and abroad about the acts of daring and heroism of guerrillas who transcend fear of death. The Tamil people are exhorted to rededicate themselves to fulfil the unfinished agenda of the struggle, namely the attainment of independent Tamil Eelam. The Tigers are experts in making selective use of Tamil history. No wonder Prabhakaran chose the Tiger as the symbol, for it was the royal emblem of the mighty Chola rulers, under whose leadership Tamil glory spread to South and Southeast Asia. What is more, it is the cult of self-sacrifice and martyrdom that has transformed the Tigers into one of the most ruthless terrorist organisations in the world today. The celebration of Martyrs' Week, the ele-

vation of *Karun Puligal* (Black Tigers) who died in suicide missions to a supernatural status; the use of terms like *Veera Vanakkam* (Homage to the Heroes) and *Veera Maranam* (Martyrdom) have their own inexorable logic. In most LTTE publications, a sole objective finds prominent place — *Pulikalin Thakam, Tamil Attayakam* or "The Tigers thirst for the Motherland of Tamil Eelam."

Such a dogmatic stance makes it extremely difficult for the LTTE to consider any settlement within a united Sri Lanka, for any deviation will be seen as 'betraying' the 'sacrifice' of 17,500 Heroes. Owing to the pressure of circumstances or for tactical reasons, Prabhakaran may adopt different courses at different times — including a unilateral declaration, or negotiation of a ceasefire and participation in peace negotiations — but the ultimate objective is an independent state of Tamil Eelam. Pushed to the wall by New Delhi following the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987, Prabhakaran made a symbolic gesture of surrender of arms. At the same time, in his *Sudumalai Amman Kovil* speech, he articulated his deep conviction: "The methods of war may change. But the aim of our war will not change."

In his 2003 Heroes Day speech, Prabhakaran has underlined the "factual reality" of Sri Lanka today. Large parts of the North-East are already under the "effective administration" of the Tigers. In other words, there is already a *de facto* Tamil Eelam. What the Tigers hope to accomplish when an Interim Self-Governing Authority is in place is to achieve total control over the eight districts of the North-East. Interestingly, the terms federal or confederal do not find any mention in the LTTE proposals. Nor does Prabhakaran concede the unity, integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka over the whole island. On the contrary, acceptance of the proposals will confer on the Tigers the much-needed international legitimacy as the 'sole representative' of the Tamils. The boundaries of the 'Tamil homeland' will be clearly demarcated and, what is more, the Interim Self-Governing Authority will have the powers to negotiate and receive foreign aid. Some

Indian observers have aptly characterised the LTTE objective as "one state, two nations". Prabhakaran's references to "critical reviews" from the "Indian media world and from the Indian political analysts" are interesting.

The LTTE supremo's assertion that the Tigers are not reinforcing their military prowess does not tally with ground realities. He considers these allegations as part of the President's attempt to "tarnish the credibility" of the Tigers and to "disrupt the peace process". However, Prabhakaran has conceded that the Tigers have been recruiting on a "small scale", since they need "manpower" for "administrative structures". The 20-month-long ceasefire in fact has tilted the military balance in favour of the Tigers. This has obliged Colombo to seek military cooperation arrangements with India, the United States and other external powers. The Sri Lankan journalist, Iqbal Athas, has documented the growing strength of the Tigers. At the time of signing the ceasefire, the LTTE's armed cadre strength stood at 9,390 but today it is about 19,750. Some 30 per cent of the new recruits are child soldiers. The Tigers have constructed 19 new camps in the districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee. They get regular supplies of military hardware by sea. The Government, on the contrary, is hamstrung by the provisions of the ceasefire agreement. Since there is an emphasis on developmental needs over defence requirements, the procurement of military hardware has remained frozen for a few months.

A few weeks ago, Chandrika Kumaratunga alleged that the Army was left only with nine days of ammunition. However, Colombo was able to retrieve the situation with emergency assistance from India. A recruitment drive by the Government for strengthening the armed forces has fallen far short of targets. Desertions continue, adversely affecting the morale of the armed forces. At the same time, the LTTE continues with its policy of annihilating intelligence operatives and political opponents. The demand for conferring *de facto* naval status on the Sea Tigers and the proposal that the ISGA should have

control over, and access to, marine resources have serious security implications for the region. Which federal unit in the world has the right to maintain armed forces and control of the sea? Prabhakaran's claim that "we want peace and we want to resolve our problems through peaceful means" cannot hide the true character of the LTTE.

The internationalisation of the ethnic conflict and the increasing interest displayed by the international community is slowly but steadily turning the tide against the Tigers. Prabhakaran has characterised the exclusion of the LTTE from the Donors Conference held in Washington in April 2003 as an attempt to "marginalise" the Tigers. He said the Tigers were "disappointed and saddened" by such humiliation. The "strategic ploy" of Colombo to build up an "international safety net" has caused grave concern in Tiger minds. Apparently referring to statements made by India and the European Union on peace negotiations, Prabhakaran has complained that some countries "have even stipulated parameters within which the Tamil national question has to be settled." The international community increasingly feels that the interim administration should be an integral part of the final settlement; it should be within the framework of a united federal Sri Lanka; it should safeguard the interests and aspirations of all ethnic groups; and Prabhakaran should abjure the path of violence and start respecting human rights and democratic values.

The tragedy of Sri Lanka is that the strained relations between the President and the Prime Minister are casting their long shadow over the peace process. Prabhakaran, with a certain amount of justification, has maintained that the power struggle "has shaken the very foundation of the state structure." Over the last fifty years, competitive Sinhala politics had been the main obstacle in the path of a resolution of the ethnic conflict. Continuing differences between the President and the Prime Minister will only benefit Prabhakaran, for he can plausibly claim that in the bitter power struggle Tamils are the main losers. Sri Lanka can ill afford the present political crisis. The writing on the wall reads: those who do not learn from history will be compelled to relive it.

(Prof. V. Suryanarayan is former Director, Centre for South and South-east Asia Studies, University of Madras, Chennai.)

Chandrika's proposals to end stalemate hailed

By R.K. Radhakrishnan

CHENNAI, NOV. 30. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader, Rauff Hakeem, on Saturday welcomed the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's proposals to end the stalemate and said that it was a "good start to begin a bipartisan approach to the peace process which was lacking" so far.

"With the sudden takeover of the Ministries, the President perhaps precipitated some crisis. But we have to look at the brighter side. People expect some good to come out of this [the proposals],

particularly we, the minorities who have suffered as a result of bickering in the south between the two main parties. Our best wishes are with both of them (Ms. Kumaratunga and the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe) to arrive at some consensus since it is very apparent that unless both these major parties take it (the



Sri Lankan Minister for Port and Shipping, Rauff Hakeem.

peace process) out of the contentious political agenda, there is no future for Sri Lanka," he told *The Hindu* here.

Mr. Hakeem, whose party holds the balance of power in the Sri Lankan Parliament, felt that Norway would come back to mediate between the Government and the LTTE. "I only feel Norway's suspension

of their involvement was purely tactical. The President's attitude has gone through a lot of changes during the past two weeks and so has the Prime Minister's. All of this augurs well to work out a bipartisan approach, which is a crying need of the hour," he said. He said people had "repeatedly given a mandate" to Ms. Kumaratunga and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, to pursue peace.

Mr. Hakeem said the LTTE's stand of an appropriate time to include Muslims in the peace talks was not correct. "In my opinion the

appropriate time was at the very beginning of the peace talks itself. From the second round onwards. It did not happen.

I participated despite the fact that it affected my credibility with my people. That sacrifice I made in the hope that the LTTE and the Government were sincere in

their professed commitment to accommodate the Muslim dimension when the political talks would begin," he said.

It was important that the structure of the talks itself was altered to accommodate a separate Muslim delegation. This, he reminded, was the promise made by the LTTE, the Government and even the International Community.

But the LTTE "continued" to be "very intransigent" when it came to the question of Muslim representation in the talks. "It is not a question of simply ensuring minority rights in an LTTE dominated council.

It is a question of autonomy for the Muslims. That issue has to be addressed by the LTTE, the Government and the International Community," he said.

The Muslims had consistently garnered 50 per cent votes in the East. Hence, the community, which had such popularity both in the

provinces and at the Centre, could not be ignored when it wanted to be considered as an equal partner, he said.

Mr. Hakeem is here to study the Indian model of devolution.

A team of seven constitutional experts from Sri Lanka will be in New Delhi for five days and study the various Indian federal models in Jammu and Kashmir, the north-eastern States, West Bengal and the Union Territories.

"We may not copy the same thing. But we would try and include some of these features in our counter proposals. We are trying to devise a way in which non-contiguous territories could be brought together under a single administration in order to make effective devolution work.

That would mean that we will still want to share power with Tamils in certain respects," he said.

...ued to an intelligence

5/10/03

Ranil rejects Chandrika's offer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, Nov. 29. — The Sri Lankan government today rejected a power-sharing offer made by its President in a bid to end their bitter stand-off that has undermined the fragile peace process.

Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe's party said a document leaked from President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's office yesterday purporting to contain her formula to end the political impasse was a violation of the confidentiality of a panel appointed last week to work out a cohabitation arrangement.

Sources close to the Prime Minister said he was not aware of Mrs Kumaratunga's offer con-

ained in a seven-page document setting out re-demarcation of defence responsibility and transferring some of the powers to a "minister assisting defence."

The President had asked the Prime Minister to name a minister of his choice to take over defence functions that directly impact on the Norwegian-backed peace process.

The move was seen as Mrs Kumaratunga agreeing to virtually hand back the defence ministry in all but name to the Wickremesinghe government, though it would be linked to a "peace advisory committee." Political sources saw the suggestion as a face-saving exercise that could help both sides shed their differences.

Chandrika climbs down, offers defence to Ranil

Colombo, November 28

SRI LANKAN President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Friday moved to ease her stand-off with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe by asking him to name a defence minister of his choice to carry on with the peace process, officials said.

The President asked Prime Minister Wickremesinghe to name a minister of his choice to take over defence functions that directly impact on the Norwegian-backed peace process, sources close to both sides said.

The move is seen as Kumaratunga agreeing to virtually hand back the defence ministry in all but name to the government of Wickremesinghe, though it would be linked to a "peace advisory committee".



Chandrika Kumaratunga

Political sources said the move was a face-saving exercise that could help both sides shed their differences and get back to running the country.

Norway suspended its peace brokering role two weeks ago saying they were not sure who was in charge

after Kumaratunga sacked three ministers, including the defence minister on November 4, starting off a major power struggle.

Kumaratunga's compromise offer was made on Friday to a four-member committee of officials trying to bridge differences between the two leaders, the sources said. She was also inviting all political parties to back the move for a "government of cooperation" after the premier turned down her offer of a national unity government.

Under the new offer, Kumaratunga is proposing that there should be no criticism of the four main areas they will focus — the peace process, strengthening democratic institutions, good governance and building infrastructure.

PTI

Chandrika for joint peace council

By V.S. Sambardan

COLOMBO, NOV. 28. In a move towards a consensual approach to conflict resolution, the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today mooted the formation of a Joint Peace Council (JPC) to be co-chaired by her and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, to "oversee and manage" the peace process.

On the resumption of negotiations, Ms. Kumaratunga proposed that Colombo's present team, restart "initial peace talks" after which a National Peace Negotiating Delegation has been suggested to hold "main talks" with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The "overall framework under which the Government's proposals are to be submitted to the LTTE, along with the negotiating guidelines," are to be "cleared by the JPC before formal negotiations begin".

In a seven-page proposal to Mr. Wickremesinghe, the President also suggested the creation of the post of a "Minister assisting Defence", to be nominated by the Prime Minister who can "work cordially with the President".

Ms. Kumaratunga's proposals, details of which were made available to *The Hindu*, are aimed at "a common consensus" among political parties to "achieve a peacefully negotiated, lasting peace that is both inclusive of the aspirations of all citizens of Sri Lanka within a united country".

The proposed JPC will be assisted by an Advisory Council on Peace (ACP) comprising representatives of all political parties, clergy, professional and other national groups, and it provides for "various technical committees to examine various aspects of the peace process".

Welcoming the JPC suggestion, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Professor of Political Science, Colombo University, said: "the move to co-chair the peace process is a

recognition of the seriousness of the current situation. They should have built such an institutional mechanism much earlier".

Defence portfolio

The President also made it clear that she "will be in charge" of the Defence portfolio and through the Defence Secretary "will provide the necessary support, facilities and all other required assistance to the JPC and its constituent units in the furtherance of the peace process".

On the issue of who would be responsible for the peace process, Ms. Kumaratunga's proposals say that "the Prime Minister will be in charge of the peace negotiations" and "would from time to time and when requested by the JPC, keep it informed of the progress" and "take guidance" from it on "matters of policy". The Minister assisting Defence would also coordinate between the President and the Prime Minister "on all matters common between the peace process and related security issues".

While Ms. Kumaratunga would hold "overriding powers" in Defence, "the security functions that are directly connected to the maintenance of the ceasefire agreement and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission would be gazetted by the President under the Minister assisting Defence", the proposals said.

The facilitators, Norway would be "invited to resume their work" and "asked to make arrangements to resume peace talks with the LTTE". While the "present working arrangements" with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission "will continue", a "detailed terms of reference and guidelines" would be formulated "for the smooth operation".

The President also proposed that a Muslim delegation "will respond" to the LTTE's counter proposals, which "will be made available" to her by the Prime Minister.

S. Jankar
119 14

Peace process severely damaged: Prabakaran

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 27. The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, V. Prabakaran, today denied charges that the recent counter-proposals were a stepping stone to separation but maintained that the LTTE "would have no alternative other than to secede" if "Sinhala ruling elites" continued to "oppose reconciliation."

The LTTE's proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority, he said, "do not constitute a framework for a permanent, final settlement." In his annual Heroes' Day speech, delivered over the Voice of Tigers radio in rebel-held Kilinochchi, Mr. Prabakaran said the peace process had been "severely damaged" by the "sudden intervention" of the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga.

As a consequence, the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe's "regime has become paralysed without power," he said.

Presenting the LTTE's case for the global community, Mr. Prabakaran maintained that the LTTE had "renounced violence" and was "making every effort through non-violent means to promote peace and reconciliation."

The "international community," he said, "is fully aware of

this." The speech, made against the backdrop of calls by the international community that the LTTE should renounce separation, however, retains the LTTE decades-long position that there would be "no alternative" to separation if the "Sinhala chauvinistic ruling elite continues to deny the rights of our people."

The end-phrase of any rebel speech, that the "thirst of the Tigers is Tamil Eelam" and the standard "urge" to the "Sinhala political leadership not to create objective conditions that would drive" the LTTE "to seek" separation as an "ultimate option" also reflected the unchanged position of the Tigers. Blaming the Sri Lankan political divide he said the Tigers "cannot allow" the "systematic destruction" of the Tamils "in the web of Sinhala chauvinism."

Referring to the "opposition" to the LTTE's counter-proposals by "Sinhala racist forces," the "critical reviews" by the "Indian media and political analysts" and the "vehement critique" by the former Foreign Affairs Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, the LTTE chief said, "what was shocking and disappointing" was that Ms. Kumaratunga had taken over "three crucial Ministries" a few days after the draft proposals were released.

"Whatever reasons" the President "attributes to her actions, it has now become a universal truth that she took this serious action as an immediate response to our draft proposals," he said.

'Factual reality'

The "allegations" that the rebel counter-proposals "aim to create an independent Tamil state or that they contain stepping stones for separation" were "not true," Mr. Prabakaran said.

Conceding that that the proposals "call for substantial self-governing authority without which resettlement and rehabilitation programmes could not be undertaken," the LTTE chief was equally emphatic in mentioning that "large areas of the northeast are under our effective jurisdiction and efficiently administered" by the rebels. "I wish to point out that this is the factual reality," he said.

The "draft framework," he said was "a concrete structure to find just and reasonable solutions" to "harsh oppressive conditions" that "prevail in the northeast with continuous military occupation and persecution by the armed forces."

The counter-proposals were described as containing "progressive, constructive and original elements."

40-10
25/11

A POSITIVE TURN IN SRI LANKA

SRI LANKA HAS had a government of co-habitation for nearly two years but so far it has been that only in name. President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe have been openly hostile to each other while the parties they lead, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party, have been pitted in unrelenting confrontation. In recent weeks, this has paralysed governance, most importantly the Norway-facilitated peace process with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. So the announcement by the United National Front Government that it wants to give President Kumaratunga a larger role in the peace process and the declaration by the People's Alliance that the President is prepared to bury the past and work with the UNF are heartening. When Sri Lanka voted in the UNF in 2001, it did so fully aware that the President, whose term in office ends in 2005, belonged to the opposing party. Evidently, a large number of voters believed that forced co-habitation was the only chance for consensual governance. Now there is an opportunity for that electoral wish to come true.

However, there is nothing to celebrate yet. Sri Lanka has been at this pass before, most recently in August 2001 when President Kumaratunga's PA Government floated the idea of a "constructive agreement" with the Opposition on governance soon after losing its majority in Parliament. For a while it seemed as if the idea might become reality. Representatives of the PA and the UNP met to discuss power sharing but the exercise collapsed over disagreement on basic issues such as control of the Cabinet by an Opposition Prime Minister and which party had a claim on the office of Vice-President. As for the need for political consensus on the peace process, there

exists from 1997 the British-brokered Liam Fox agreement. Under this pact, the PA and the UNP agreed that whichever was in power, it would not take decisions in any peace negotiations with the LTTE without consulting the other, and that the party in opposition would do nothing to undermine such peace negotiations. So it is now tempting to say: "Been there, seen that." Two aspects of the current effort at reconciliation suggest trouble. One is President Kumaratunga's deadline of December 15 for the rapprochement. It is not clear what better options she has after that date to avoid confrontation. The other is the differing terminology the two sides have been using — the PA wants a government of "national reconciliation" while the UNF wants a "national consensus" on important issues.

Still it would be cynical to dismiss the latest developments as tactical plays by Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe to tide over their present difficulties as they search for other self-centred alternatives. Clearly, the reason they are now talking the language of cooperation is the immense pressure on them, both within the country and internationally, to find a way out of the present political impasse — and their shared commitment to a negotiated political settlement of the ethnic conflict. It is entirely possible that the two have reached that point called "hurting stalemate" and therefore will make a genuine attempt to develop a *modus vivendi*. But first, they must resist succumbing to the extremist sections of their parties that have a stake in confrontation. A coherent and firm response to the LTTE, which recently called for *de facto* separation from Sri Lanka as an "interim" solution to the conflict, should not become hostage to narrow rivalries between parties, not to mention personal animosity between leaders.

India's role seen as vital for success of Sri Lankan talks

By Manoj Joshi
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Norwegian mediator Erik Solheim says that talks between the Sri Lankan government and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will not succeed "without the active support of India".

Speaking at a luncheon meeting on Tuesday at the residence of Swaraj Kaushal, MP, Mr Solheim said he discussed the issue with Indian leaders and that the Indian government was kept informed of every stage of the Norwegian



Chandrika
Kumaratunga

Ranil
Wickremasinghe

mediation.

Mr Solheim emphatically denied reports that the Norwegians had withdrawn from the process, though he did confirm that it had been put on hold till the Sri Lankan crisis over the powers of the President and the Prime Minister was resolved.

Though emergency has been lifted, President Chandrika Kumaratunge has declared that she would control the national defence portfolio, even as she expects Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe to continue with the peace talks, a situation that is not acceptable to the latter. However, the Norwegian official made it clear that he was not involved in any way in resolving this issue.

Clarifying the Norwegian role, Mr Solheim said he was merely a facilitator for the talks between "whoever called the shots in Sri Lanka and the LTTE commander Prabhakaran". But he said he was aware of the complexity of the task ahead and was prepared for a long haul in tackling it.

Introducing the Norwegian diplomat, Mr Kaushal termed his efforts as "praiseworthy" but pointed out that India could not look on lightly at the prospect of the LTTE controlling the territorial waters around the Tamil areas, as envisaged by the LTTE proposal of last month. He pointed out that the outfit was a banned organisation in India and was likely to remain so in the foreseeable future.

Mr Solheim's response was that while India was not involved in this phase of the negotiations, it would have to come in at some point and he did not see any prospect of lasting peace till issues of concern to India were also addressed.

Among those who attended the meeting were defence minister George Fernandes and minister of state for home affairs I.D. Swami.

SRI LANKAN TURMOIL-I

51-8
2/1/11

Concern Over Proposal For Self-Governing Authority

By PARMANAND

Politics in the South Asian island state of Sri Lanka is rarely dull. But the developments since 4 November have thrown it into political turmoil, adding further excitement. Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, by declaring a state of "short-term" emergency on 5 November, exercising the executive powers vested in her under the predominantly presidential constitution of 1978, has shown that she does not any longer wish to lie low or look the other way.

Mandate

Earlier, on 4 November, President Kumaratunga, had divested three ministers — Tilak Marapana, John Amaratunga and Imtiyas Barkeer Markar — of the ruling United National Front of their portfolios of defence, interior and mass communication. These portfolios, according to the President, are of the utmost importance in maintaining the island's security and sovereignty. These ministers were involved in official peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The President also suspended Parliament for two weeks. It was slated to meet to pass the annual budget. The President herself took over these three portfolios.

The presidential action, significantly, was taken when Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was away in the USA on an official visit and was awaiting a meeting with President George W Bush in the White House. Reacting immediately to the presidential steps, Wickremesinghe asserted in Washington that his ruling UNF still enjoyed an absolute majority in Parliament. Indeed, his UNF had obtained a clear mandate in the December 2001 parliamentary polls. Significantly, Wickremesinghe added that such things

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

have been happening in Sri Lankan politics for the past 25 years.

The UNF had replaced the People's Alliance led by President Kumaratunga at the prime



ministerial and ministerial levels. But Kumaratunga had received an overwhelming second, and constitutionally last, six-year mandate in the popularly and directly held presidential election of December 1999. In other words, in the Sri Lankan context, both Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe have their mandates. The victory of the UNF in 2001 was, from the outset, viewed as a mandate for establishing peace in the war-torn state, known as Ceylon till 1972.

Lawful

Incidentally, the PA, too, had received an overwhelming mandate for peace in 1994 both in the parliamentary and presidential polls. While Chandrika Kumaratunga had assumed the presidency, her mother, the late Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1916), had occupied the prime ministerial office — an unparalleled phenomenon indeed! Quite significantly, Sirimavo was the first

woman Prime Minister of the world and had held that office during 1960-65 and 1970-77 too.

No less importantly, President Chandrika has the rare distinction of being a politician both of

group. In any case, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court lost no time in describing the presidential step as lawful. On 5 November, a five-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by the chief justice unanimously ruled that the plenary executive power was "vested and reposed with the President". It also held that the defence minister had to function subject to the "plenary executive power of the President".

Scathing criticism

The timing of the action, too, could not be called inappropriate or irrelevant inasmuch as it was taken after the submission of the proposals by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for devolution of powers in the island. The proposal focusing on what has been termed the "Interim Self-Governing Authority" for the North-Eastern province is the first-ever paper — which has also come to be described as a "counter-proposal". The LTTE had submitted that paper on 1 November.

The ISGA proposal had in no time created a great deal of concern and anxiety among political actors and political analysts of all hues. While the Wickremesinghe administration had responded by saying that it would like to discuss things with the Tigers and would like the suspended peace talks resumed, the SLFP had scathingly criticised the proposal in its 14-page paper. No mainstream political party or international actor had, indeed, come in support of the ISGA proposal.

The ISGA proposal has been viewed by many an analyst as a device to create a separate state for the Sri Lankan Tamils under the well-nigh sole leadership of the LTTE. The ISGA proposal, if implemented in full, would reduce the Sri Lankan state to a showpiece in the Tamil areas, i.e., the North-Eastern province.

(To be concluded)

✓

SRI LANKA / 'PRESIDENT'S PARTY HAS A GREATER ROLE TO PLAY'

UNF, PA agree to work towards consensus

27/11
By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 21. Sri Lanka's political turmoil today showed signs of abating with the two main parties — the ruling United National Front (UNF) and the Opposition People's Alliance (PA) — agreeing on the need to work towards a consensus on issues of national importance.

"What has happened has happened," the Opposition spokesman, Sarath Amunugama, told reporters here this morning. "If we are going to co-habit, we have to forget earlier differences," he said, referring to the stands adopted in the past by the PA, headed by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the UNF, headed by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe. Dr. Amunugama also said that the President had indicated a deadline of December 15 for a consensus to be reached, but did not elaborate.

The Opposition's stand comes as an immediate response to Thursday's call by the ruling UNF that the two parties work together on "main issues" particularly the peace process with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the economy.

Calling for a "new approach" and a "new culture" the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, told journalists on Thursday that the ruling party wanted a "role for the Opposition".

Emphasising the importance of a southern consensus, Prof. Peiris had said there was the need to "go beyond" the Liam Fox agreement — an initiative by the former British Minister that the ruling party would

keep the Opposition informed of the progress of peace negotiations and the Opposition would maintain confidence.

Prof. Peiris had said the Opposition should be more than kept informed and be "involved in the decision-making process." The Government, he had said, wanted to "put behind us" the past differences as "part of history" and "move on". Recalling that there was a "substantial degree of convergence" between the two parties, he said "there seems to be a political will on both sides" and that they should "not let it slip away". In a clear change from the position adopted by the UNF during the early phase of the latest negotiations with the LTTE, Prof. Peiris said the President's party had a "greater role to play".

The move by the two main parties towards each other is also against the backdrop of prolonged negotiations between the PA and the radical, hardline Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna to forge an electoral pact. Fundamental differences persist between the PA and the JVP on the crucial issue of greater devolution of powers, as a solution to the decades-long separatist conflict.

MoU not ruled out

Calling for clarity in the relationship between the two parties, Prof. Peiris, who is the Constitutional Affairs Minister and the Chief Government negotiator for the peace process had said a memorandum of understanding was "not ruled out". An MoU on the way in which the two parties would resolve issues of national importance, specifi-

cally economy and peace, was "an option the Government is considering," he had said.

The observations by the Government and Opposition spokesmen are against the backdrop of a Committee of Officials appointed jointly by the President and the Prime Minister to chalk out ways of working together on issues of national importance.

French model

At the core of the recent political standoff is Mr. Wickremesinghe's loss of control over the Defence portfolio after the President, Ms. Kumaratunga, took control over the Ministry on November 4. The Cabinet demand the restoration of the *status quo ante* and said the Prime Minister would not take responsibility for the peace process, as he did not have control over the Defence Ministry.

When asked if the Prime Minister was again taking responsibility for the peace process, Prof. Peiris, said that he would not be able to do so unless he had complete authority.

Efforts were on to resolve the standoff in a "fair, balanced and sustainable manner", Prof. Peiris said, adding that efforts were on to study the French model of power-sharing, particularly in Defence. According to unconfirmed reports one of the options being considered is that while the President holds the Defence portfolio, a Deputy Defence Minister could be appointed from the UNF. During the PA rule, Ms. Kumaratunga held the Defence portfolio and appointed a Deputy Defence Minister.

Ranil offers Chandrika role in talks

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Nov. 20. — Adopting a conciliatory approach, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe today offered his arch rival President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunga a broader role in the peace process with Tamil rebels in a bid to resolve the ongoing power struggle that has crippled the country for the past two weeks.

Reversing its policy of excluding the President and her party from the peace process, the Wickremesinghe government is prepared to forget past and involve Ms Kumaratunga and her People's Alliance party in the decision-making, government spokesman Mr GL Peiris told reporters here. "Vituperative politics should be a part of history... There should be a role for Her Excellency and her party in the decision-making process. There is a clamour for it in the country." Terming the development as "good", a spokesman for the President's office said the office was awaiting a full transcript of Mr Peiris' news conference. "The President has all along been saying that she is willing to work together," Mr Janadasa Peiris said. "She has also emphasised the need to let peace process go on."

Government spokesman Mr Peiris said the idea was not to form a national government but to establish national consensus on dealing with the economy and the peace process.

He said a four-member committee appointed this week to arrange modalities for the President and

Prime Minister to work together would be providing suggestions to improve the cohabitation arrangement. He said it had not decided yet exactly how the responsibility would be shared.

The government had earlier said it should exclusively handle the peace bid and Mr Wickremesinghe withdrew from leading the initiative after Ms Kumaratunga took over the three key portfolios of defence, Interior and Information. She also suspended parliament for two weeks till yesterday.

"The country has gone through a period of political convulsions," the government spokesman said. "Now is the time to restore calm, stability and serenity." Peiris said their "change of heart is natural".

He said: "The objective at that time was different. We were talking about the establishment of a ceasefire. That is now in place and the all the benefits we have today are derived from that ceasefire agreement signed between the Prime Minister and the leader of the LTTE."

He said as the two sides discuss core political issues, there would be a role for the opposition whose support was essential to rewrite the constitution to accommodate the demands of the rebels.

"We are working toward identifying the best manner to meet our objectives. There seems political will on both sides to put the strains behind," he added.

At their second of two rounds of crisis talks on Tuesday, Ms Kumaratunga and Mr Wickremesinghe also set up a committee to work together on key national issues.

PM party seeks MoU on peace

The Island/ANN

COLOMBO, Nov. 20. — The UNF government is seeking a Memorandum of Understanding with the People's Alliance pertaining to a range of crucial issues, including the peace process and the economy.

The proposed MoU is to be based on an agreement brokered by former British minister Mr Liam Fox. The Liam Fox agreement between the PA and the then Opposition UNP was reached during the previous PA administration. "This is to be revived," cabinet spokesman Minister G.L. Peiris told a press briefing at Parliament complex yesterday.

He said that the UNF government was ready to share responsibility for the peace process and the economy.

Prof. Peiris said Mr Mano Tittawela and Mr WJS Karunaratne representing the President and Mr Bradman Weerakoon

and Mr Malik Samara-wickrema representing the Prime Minister, had met yesterday and would meet today to pursue this goal in earnest and a sense of urgency. "We are seeking a practical way forward with the two main issues incorporated in an MoU in the national interest. The MoU is an option which cannot be ruled out." The economy and the peace process were mutually and closely linked to each other and a measure of agreement between the two parties was an essential ingredient for an amicable resolution in the two spheres, he said.

A great deal has been achieved to-date in the consolidation of the Ceasefire and now they have entered a different phase in search of a permanent and sustainable peace. Nevertheless, for the consideration of the Interim Administration proposals of the LTTE, there has to be a 'Southern Consensus' between the UNF and the PA he said.

*Sri Lanka
HR-6
19/11*

Why Colombo sits uneasy

IT IS ironic how, occasionally, the solution can become the problem. The Sri Lankan Constitution is a classic example of this conundrum. It would be over-simplistic to ascribe the recent crisis in Sri Lanka to any single cause. Given the tragic violence suffered by the island State, the social, ethnic and political divisions affecting its population, the enormous personality clashes between the president and the prime minister and the thin parliamentary majority enjoyed by the PM's party (the UNP), one may marvel as to why it took so long for a constitutional clash to occur.

But any search for a single or predominant cause must hold the origin and structure of the Sri Lankan Constitution guilty. On February 4, 1948, Sri Lanka became an independent country and, as a former British colony, inherited its pre-independence Constitution and a Westminster model of Parliament. On May 22, 1972, a new Republican Constitution was adopted whereby the president was the nominal executive and the legislature was the supreme instrument of State power.

This position was changed on September 7, 1978, when the current Republican Constitution came into effect. A significant feature of the new Constitution was the introduction of the executive presidential system. Inspired by the French and American models of government, the rationale behind the change in the 1978 Constitution was to provide for an effective executive that was independent of the legislature's control. Therefore, the 1978 Constitution provided for an executive president who was directly elected by the people in a separate election.

The Sri Lankan executive president is a constitutional head of both State and government, as well as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president can also summon, prorogue and dissolve Parliament and may continue in power notwithstanding the dissolution of Parliament. The president is the head of the cabinet and may hold more than one portfolio. Parliament, on the other hand, is the supreme legislative authority and has the power to enact laws, including amendments to the Constitution. Though Parliament can remove the president by an impeachment motion, the process is complicated and cumbersome.

Even this short summary is enough to highlight the fundamental flaws of this structure. First, it deliberately creates dual centres of power — the president and the prime minister — and although the former's powers are vast and clearly superior, the latter is no figurehead or constitutional cypher. The elementary principle of good governance — that two sources of sovereign power, like two swords, cannot coexist in the same scabbard — was clearly forgotten by the creators of the 1978 Constitution.

Second, while the major inarticulate

premise of the constitutional document is the existence of the same political party at both the presidential and the prime ministerial level, there is nothing which ensures that this will necessarily happen each time. Good luck and coincidence produced this synchronicity of political parties at both levels from 1978 till 2001. The first time the dichotomy was emphasised was in 2001. Since then, Sri Lanka has been a nation waiting for a constitutional crisis to happen.

Third, the principal blame for this 'executive presidency' model must lie with its innovator, former President J.R. Jayewardene (JRJ) and with his advisors like Professor A.J. Wilson. JRJ first mooted the idea way back in 1966 as deputy leader of the UNP. Projected as the need for the executive to be free from the shackles of parliamentary control, everyone seems to have forgotten the possibility of a president at war with a hostile majority in the legislature seemingly determined to thwart presidential decisions.

Fourth, it is interesting that while some 33 third world countries (but none in the developed world barring the US) have adopted the executive presidential model, most have suffered coups, martial law, dictatorships and suspension of the Constitution. In contrast, two-thirds of the third world countries which have adopted parliamentary executive systems on the British model have had greater success and stability and have avoided breakdowns of the constitutional system.

The Sri Lankan system cannot be likened to the US one because of the duality inherent in the twin offices of the president and the prime minister. Its closest analogue is the French model which appears to have been JRJ's favourite. France's volatile history spawned many Constitutions and the Fifth Republic model was inspired by Charles de Gaulle to take care of this historical instability. But the Gaullist Constitution has not been properly tested because the Gaullists continued to command a majority in Parliament for a long time.

Finally, the remarkable prescience and foresight of the veteran minister and commentator, N.M. Perera, had predicted down to the last comma and full stop everything about JRJ's 1978 Constitution in 1979 itself. Recognising that the five-sixths majority which the UNP obtained at the 1977 general election was an untoward event, Perera observed: "It is inconceivable that the next general election will produce the lopsided configuration that we witness today. It is more than likely that the political complexion of the next Parliament would be different from that flaunted by the UNP and its leader, the president of the Republic. How will he function with a hostile majority in Parliament which can well refuse to carry out his policy?"

Panel formed to resolve Lanka power-sharing feud

19/11 T-3 S. Karunan

Colombo, Nov. 18 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's President and Prime Minister appointed a committee today to resolve their feud over sharing power, but no early end was in sight to the dispute that has frozen a peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels.

The decision came at a 90-minute meeting between President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who sacked three cabinet ministers in early November, and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, their offices said in a statement.

"A committee of officials was appointed to work out the details of future working arrangements under which the President and Prime Minister could work together on these important national issues," the statement said. But it added that the feuding pair, who are elected separately but must work together in an awkward dual-headed government, would not meet again for two weeks.

It gave no further details of what had been said or of the committee's mandate. The country has been in a constitutional crisis since Kumaratunga sacked the ministers and temporarily suspended parliament.

Efforts to end 20 years of war have been on hold since Kumaratunga's power grab, which she said was done because the Prime Minister was conceding too much to the rebels. She then called for a "national unity government" made up of all parties.

Wickremesinghe turned that down and demanded that the President, who has wide consti-



A Buddhist monk walks into a temple in Colombo. (Reuters)

tutional powers over the army and heads the cabinet, reinstate the sacked ministers or take over the peace process.

Some political analysts have said the political fight could end in general elections if there is no compromise, but others said the appointment of the committee was a positive step. "It gives both of them time to work out a solution that meets their needs," said Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council.

"It may spell the way for some sort of compromise," he said.

The meeting at Kumaratunga's official residence came one day before parliament — where Wickremesinghe's government has a slim majority — was due to resume work with the presentation of the 2004 budget, which was to have taken place one week ago.

Cabinet spokesman G.L. Peiris repeated yesterday Wickremesinghe's rejection of a national government, but said the Prime Minister was willing to form a consensus among political parties — including the Pres-

ident's — on issues related to the peace process. Peiris provided no details on how such a consensus might be reached.

Both sides are under pressure to compromise. Norway, which brokered a February 2002 truce that has given the island its best chance yet to end a war that has killed 64,000, said it would suspend its role until their differences were resolved.

Kumaratunga has repeatedly said that the military would honour the ceasefire. So have the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, fighting since 1983 for a separate state for minority Tamils.

Tiger negotiator

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers said today their most senior negotiator would return to the job after several months off, an indication the rebels were serious about peace despite a political crisis in the government.

The surprise announcement by the Tigers, made through a pro-rebel website, comes as President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe are working to resolve their power struggle that has put the peace process on hold.

59-3 PANEL FORMED ON NATIONAL ISSUES

Lanka talks inch ahead ^{19/11}

Agencies

COLOMBO, Nov. 18. — A ray of hope could be seen in the troubled island country today amidst the continuing power struggle between the President and the Prime Minister. Ms Chandrika Kumaratunga and Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe today held crucial talks, their second since the political crisis erupted two weeks ago, and named a panel of officials to work out a cohabitation arrangement on "national issues".

"The President and the Prime Minister met today at the President's House and discussed in depth several issues on which they could work together," said a joint statement issued after their 90-minute meeting here. It said a "committee of officials was appointed to work out the details of future working arrangements under which the two could work together on important national issues." It was also decided that the two leaders "would meet again in two weeks to move the process forward," the statement said without mentioning the troubled peace process.

The meeting between the two rival leaders came a day before the Parliam-

SLFP alliance with JVP

COLOMBO, Nov. 18. — President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunga's political party today said it has formed an alliance with the country's powerful Marxist-Trotskyite party, boosting the President's support in a standoff with the island's Prime Minister.

Sri Lanka Freedom Party spokesman Sarath Amunugama said here the party has joined with the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or People's Liberation Front. The development could mean that Ms Kumaratunga may soon call an election to end the standoff with Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose party holds a slim 2-seat majority in the 225-seat legislature. The island's political crisis began when Ms Kumaratunga sacked three Cabinet ministers, suspended Parliament and briefly imposed emergency rule on 4 November, accusing Mr Wickremesinghe of threatening Sri Lanka's integrity by conceding too much to the rebel LTTE. — AP

ent was due to be recalled after Ms Kumaratunga suspended it for two weeks. The Wickremesinghe govern-

S. Lanka
ment had been hoping to unveil its budget for next year on 12 November, but the suspension of Parliament derailed those plans.

Ms Kumaratunga's spokesman Sarath Amunugama said they expected the budget to go ahead despite speculation that Parliament could be dissolved to clear the way for a snap election. "Though there are lot of reports about a state of panic, the legislature will continue," Mr Amunugama said. "The budget will be presented."

Mr Amunugama said they expected the government to increase public servants' salaries, a key demand of Ms Kumaratunga. Her Sri Lanka Freedom Party will also take credit for concessions to the people, he said.

Norwegian mediators put on hold their peace efforts with the rebel Tamil Tigers last week saying they needed "clarity" as to who was in charge in Colombo. Diplomatic sources based in this city said there was no clarity as to whether President Ms Kumaratunga would go in for a snap election or not because there were two strong schools of thought on an early election within her own party.

THE STATESMAN

1 10 11/83

President Muslim card irks Tigers

SEEMAGUHA

Colombo, Nov. 17: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are determined to ensure that President Chandrika Kumaratunga does not use the Muslim card to "disrupt" the peace talks.

Even though, at present, the talks are in limbo, the Tigers have already started to campaign against the Muslim presence at the negotiating table. The Muslims have been demanding that they be included in the talks as they form a large part of the population in the eastern province.

"Sitting as equal partners at the negotiating table is not necessary for the Muslims as long as they are consulted and their opinion is taken," said R. Sampanthan, secretary general of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) which is now a part of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance.

Echoing the LTTE's sentiment, the Sampanthan said: "The Sinhalese, especially the President, can use the Muslim delegation as a disruptive force to scuttle whatever the government does not want to give the Tamils."

However, Sampanthan, who is a member of parliament from Trincomalee admitted that "no solution to the northeast problem can be worked out unless Muslim concerns are addressed and constitutional guarantees are provided to them in the final settlement."

The Tamil-speaking Muslims constitute nearly 33 per cent of the population in the eastern province.

Before the ethnic conflict began, the Muslims had lived peacefully with the Tamils and shared a common language with them.

It was only after the emergence of the LTTE as a militant outfit, which wanted full control of the northern and eastern provinces, that the Muslims began to bear the brunt of the Tamil Tigers' ruthlessness.

As some sections of the Muslim community were used by the United National Party president J.R. Jayawardene's government against the Tamil militants, relations between the Tamils and the Muslims deteriorated.

In the eighties, when Israeli Mossad officers were setting up an intelligence network in Sri Lanka, Muslims were recruited

for the job as they spoke the same language as the Tamils.

At that time, the LTTE carried out a number of massacres in both Sinhalese and Muslim villages of the eastern province to ensure that the area would be populated by a Tamil majority.

The LTTE plan was to merge the Tamil-strong eastern province with the northern for a consolidated Tamil homeland.

The Muslims are apprehensive of living under the LTTE-dominated northern and eastern provinces. They believe their rights may not be respected.

However, the Muslims, in their bid for more rights, cannot put up a united political front. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) with its twelve members in Parliament are at the moment hopelessly divided. A number of them led by Rauf Hakim have joined the United National Front led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Feril Ashraf, who took over the party reins after her husband died, has pledged her allegiance to Kumaratunga.

However, both Hakim and Ashraf are united in their demand that the fate of the Lanka Muslims has to be decided in the coming talks.

Ranil govt rejects unity plan

Colombo, Nov. 17 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's government rejected a call for a national unity coalition today, but said it hoped to hold talks with the President this week to resolve a political crisis and allow peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels to resume.

The bid to end 20 years of war has been in turmoil since President Chandrika Kumaratunga sacked the defence, interior and media ministers and suspended parliament early this month.

"The Prime Minister says he is available to meet tomorrow or on Thursday. As of this moment he has not received a response, but he stands ready," cabinet spokesman G.L. Peiris said.

Kumaratunga has called for a "national unity government", but Peiris rejected the idea. "We do not think any problem is solved by simply creating a few more ministries and distributing them across the board," he said.

INTERIM EELAM

Kumaratunga Scuttles LTTE Proposals

By SAM RAJAPPA

S. Kumar
5/18
17/11

The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, by dismissing Defence Minister Tilak Marapana, Interior Minister John Amaratunga and Information Minister Imthiaz Bakeer Markar, and taking over their portfolios, proroguing Parliament and imposing internal emergency, has pre-empted the ruling United National Front MPs' move to impeach the Chief Justice, Sarath N Silva, who is heading a Constitution Bench hearing a petition seeking clarification whether the President, as supreme commander of the armed forces, has powers to override those of the Defence Minister.

Breaking away

The uneasy coexistence of Kumaratunga, leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party heading the main opposition People's Alliance, with the government of Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the United National Party who heads the ruling United National Front, has reached the point of no return. Advancing parliamentary election, due only in 2006, seems the only way out of the emerging impasse. But the sudden developments have pushed the proposals put forward by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the first by the rebel group, to resolve the country's ethnic strife and two decades old civil war, into the background.

The LTTE declared a unilateral ceasefire on 25 December 2001, and signed a peace agreement, brokered by Norway with the UNF government on 23 February 2002. In the six rounds of negotiations with the Sri Lankan government that followed, the rebel group agreed to work towards a federal constitution during the fourth round held in Oslo in the first week of December last.

However, the proposals the LTTE submitted on 31 October ignore federalism and are beyond the scope of the Constitution. That the existing Constitution of Sri Lanka needs change to accommodate the aspirations of the island nation's Tamils is acknowledged by both the SLFP and the UNP, the two main Sinhala parties. What the SLFP proposes the UNP disposes and what the UNP proposes the SLFP disposes, keeping the communal cauldron boiling. Kumaratunga, in a marked departure from the earlier approach, presented a draft constitution providing wide-ranging powers to provinces in 2000 which she said was her expression of determination to ensure a just

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

solution acceptable to all. The UNP, which was in the opposition then, burnt copies of the draft in the chamber of Parliament. And that was the end of the PA government's peace initiative.

Though the SLFP and the UNP want a solution within the Constitution that respected the unity and integrity of the country, the LTTE proposals seek to

rounds.

The Wickremasinghe government's immediate reaction was one of disbelief as the LTTE proposals differed fundamentally from what it had proposed in July, but maintained that the way forward was through direct discussions. GL Peiris, chief negotiator, said, "the government's approach to these talks is one of a principled negotiation directed



establish an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) with plenary (meaning absolute) powers for the governance of the North-East of Sri Lanka comprising the districts of Amparai, Batticaloa and Trincomalee of the Eastern province and Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Jaffna and Mannar districts of the Northern province. It has all the ingredients of a separate Tamil Eelam barring the name, with little linkage to Colombo. The area constitutes roughly a third of Sri Lankan territory and two-thirds of its sea coast.

Absolute majority

The powers envisaged in Section 9 of the ISGA include raising revenue including imposition of taxes, levies and duties, law and order, control over land, resettlement of refugees and displaced people, reconstruction and development, upgrading of existing services and facilities, judiciary, and all powers and functions in relation to regional administration now exercised by the Government of Sri Lanka. Only the subjects of foreign policy and currency are left out. The LTTE would have absolute majority in the ISGA. The proposals make a total incursion into Sri Lanka's sovereignty. If there is any silver lining in the rebels' scheme of things, it is their willingness to resume negotiations with Colombo which they broke off unilaterally last April after completing six

towards the establishment of common ground in respect of significantly divergent positions." It was the government's policy of peace at any cost that prevented it from rejecting them outright. The PA's position, as explained by Lakshman Kadirgamar, President Kumaratunga's adviser on foreign policy, was: "We can in no way consider the LTTE's proposals. It is totally unacceptable."

On the surface, at least two points are common between the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987 and the ISGA: the unit of devolution of powers, namely, the North-East, and the absolute majority for the LTTE in the interim government. After signing the historic document, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi informed Parliament: "The agreement meets the basic aspirations which animated the Tamils' struggle, namely, the desire to be recognised as a distinct ethnic entity; political autonomy for managing their future; and appropriate devolution of governmental power to meet this objective, the recognition of the Northern and the Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka as areas of historical habitation of the Tamils".

The entire people of the North-East welcomed the accord mainly due to its potential to end the prolonged ethnic violence and insensate killings of innocent people, besides ushering in an autonomous province

for them within an unified Sri Lanka. The LTTE, after agreeing to co-operate with the implementation of the agreement, reneged saying, "our liberation movement is firmly committed to the struggle for self-determination and we have unshakable conviction that an independent Eelam would be the only and final solution to our national question".

LTTE retains arms

The LTTE proposals have direct bearing on India on at least two counts. Section 18 says "ISGA shall have control over the marine and offshore resources of the adjacent seas and the power to regulate access thereto". At present India shares a maritime boundary with Sri Lanka in the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait. If the ISGA exercises power to regulate access to these waterways, Indian fishing, merchant and naval vessels would lose their right of movement. Equally worrying for India is section 21 dealing with agreements and contracts. It says, "existing agreements will continue, but the Sri Lankan government shall ensure that all monies due under such agreements are paid to the ISGA". It may be recalled that Indian Oil Corporation had taken on lease the World War II oil tank farm in Trincomalee harbour from the Sri Lankan government owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. IOC would have to pay the LTTE the lease dues that accrue to CPC. Since the LTTE is a banned organisation in India, any payment made to it would attract Section 6 of the POTA and the IOC officials could be exposed to arrest by the Jayalalitha government in Tamil Nadu!

Section 10 of the proposals provide for separate institutions for the administration of justice in the North-East. The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka will have no jurisdiction over the territory. Otherwise, Velupillai Pirabakaran, the LTTE supreme, will have to start serving the 200-year jail term confirmed by the Supreme Court. In the event of any dispute between the ISGA and the Sri Lanka government, the parties shall approach the international court of justice. By this proviso, the LTTE equates itself to a sovereign state.

Any settlement of the ethnic problem which did not include decommissioning of weapons by the LTTE would not lead to lasting peace. Decommissioning implies cadres returning to civilian life. It does not mean giving LTTE arms to the government but to a neutral party followed by international guarantees. The proposals make no mention of the LTTE arsenal.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2003

S. Lanka
14.10.10
15/11

HASTY RETREAT

WHEN NORWAY FIRST began to facilitate a peace process between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), its representatives continually warned against expectations of quick results. They said that there would be several ups and downs, that these should be treated as part of the process, and that they were prepared for the long haul. So it is surprising that the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, should now announce the suspension of his Government's participation in the peace process till "clarity is re-established" on the question of who in the Sri Lankan Government is in charge of the peace process. The decision comes in the wake of last week's full-fledged confrontation between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe during which Ms. Kumaratunga, exercising her constitutional powers, took charge of three ministerial portfolios, most importantly the Defence Ministry. While Ms. Kumaratunga has made it abundantly clear that she will not obstruct the peace process in any way, Mr. Wickremesinghe maintains he cannot carry on the process without control of the Defence Ministry. A meeting between the two leaders a few days ago brought no resolution. Significantly, Mr. Helgesen made the announcement withholding Norway's facilitation a day after his meeting with the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

What does this mean? Norway's decision to "go home and wait" till Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe sort it out between themselves is remarkably similar to the LTTE position that it needs to be clear on who in the Sri Lankan Government it can continue the peace process with. Facilitation, Norway knows well from its West Asian experience, is not for the weak-hearted. One interpretation of Norway's action

is that it is a strategy to pressure the two sides of the divided Sri Lankan polity to come together. If that is the case, two interesting questions arise: why did Norway not use similar tactics to force the LTTE back to the negotiating table last April when it suspended participation in the peace talks? Why did Norway not use such tactics to ensure that Prime Minister Wickremesinghe did not marginalise President Kumaratunga in the pursuit of peace? After all, she initiated this peace process. The decision to nominate Norway as the facilitator because of its acceptability to both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE was also hers. But Norway went along with the effective sidelining of President Kumaratunga post-December 2001.

Motives aside, the stepping back by Norway demonstrates the limitations of third party facilitation or mediation in any attempt to bring peace to Sri Lanka. India discovered that some years ago but not before paying dearly for its involvement. For peace to return to Sri Lanka, the main stakeholders — all the people of Sri Lanka, irrespective of their ethnicity or political affiliation — must feel ownership of the process. Every attempt to bring peace has thus far been divisive in some way and for this the Sri Lankan political leadership has to take a major share of the blame. In a sense, bringing the divided political establishment together must form part of any peace process between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. Norway must have known this when it decided to take up the role of facilitator but many of its actions, particularly its perceived lack of impartiality and even a pro-LTTE tilt, served to accentuate the polarisation. In walking off saying it was never its mandate to "facilitate between the political parties in the south," Norway will sharpen those divisions even more.

15 NOV 2003

THE HINDU

15 NOV 2003

Sri Lanka's executive presidency

By V. Jayanth

15/11
119-10

SRI LANKA'S Executive Presidency, bequeathed to the island nation by the late J.R. Jayewardene through the 1978 Constitution, has once again come into sharp focus with the latest political crisis in the country. Riding on the back of a brute majority in Parliament, then Prime Minister Jayewardene amended the Republican Constitution of 1972 and introduced an Executive Presidency in Sri Lanka, concentrating all powers in the elected Head of State and Government — a legacy that remains.

Even 12 years before that controversial constitution was adopted, Jayewardene had, in a 1966 speech to the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science, spelt out his vision for stability and economic progress in Sri Lanka. He said: "If the system of democratic government has failed in some aspects, we should not hesitate to think of changes and amendments in that system where necessary."

Advocating a presidential system on the U.S. or French model where "the Executive is chosen directly by the people and is not dependent on the legislature during the period of its existence, for a specified number of years," he noted, "Such an executive is a strong executive, seated in power for a fixed number of years, not subject to the whims and fancies of an elected legislature; not afraid to take correct but unpopular decisions because of censure from its parliamentary party. This seems to me a very necessary requirement in a developing country faced with grave problems such as we are faced with today."

When in 1971-72, the House of Representatives, under a Sri Lanka Freedom Party-led coalition Government, sat as a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Republican Constitution to replace the Soulbury Constitution introduced in 1946-48, Jayewardene moved an amendment on July 2, 1971, to state "The Executive power of the State shall be vested in the President of the Republic, who shall exercise it in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution..." But that was rejected.

When the country emerged from a dark period of emergency and recession in 1977 for another general election, Jayewardene as leader of the United National Party (UNP) made the Executive Presidency a key issue in the election manifesto.

The UNP said: "Executive power will be vested in a President elected from time to time by the people... The constitution will also preserve the parliamentary system we are used to... The Prime Minister will

The President is a fixed executive, not removable while in office, except for specific reasons outlined in the Constitution, and not dependent on any majority in Parliament.

be chosen by the President from the party that commands a majority in Parliament and the Ministers of the cabinet will be elected Members of Parliament."

After winning the election, Jayewardene moved with lightning speed to effect the radical reforms to the Constitution. He set up a small legal team to draft the Constitution. In September-October 1977, the National State Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment establishing a presidential system of government. This was done within two months of the general election and on October 20, the Assembly adopted a resolution empowering the Speaker to appoint a Select Committee and Chairman to consider revision of the Constitution. On February 4, 1978, Jayewardene was sworn in the country's first Executive President and before long a new Constitution was in place, through what the then Opposition considered were backdoor means — through a Select Committee.

The 1972 Constitution was designed as a departure from the Westminster model formulated for the island in 1946-48. But the 1978 Constitution was a mix of some of Sri Lanka's previous constitutions and features of the American, French and British systems of government. Writing on the new Constitution, commentator A.J. Wilson said: "There is little doubt that the framers of the constitution had in view the example of the Fifth French Republic when they planned on the powers and position of the elected President... What Jayewardene was after was a stable Executive, which would not be easily swayed by pressures from within the legislature or outside. The outcome in the end was a President who in many ways can, in certain circumstances, be more powerful than his French counterparts."

The striking feature is that the President is a fixed executive, not removable while in office, except for specific reasons outlined in the Constitution, and not dependent on any majority in Parliament. Speaking at a University of Sri Lanka convocation in May 1978, Jayewardene said: "I am the first elected Executive President, Head of the State, Head of the Government. It is an office of power and thus of responsibility. Since many others will succeed me I wish

during my term of office, to create precedents that are worthy of following. First, I will always act through the cabinet and parliament, preserving the parliamentary system as it existed, without diminution of their powers."

The Constitution, as it stands today, has a separate chapter on 'The Executive' — The President of the Republic. Article 30 (1) states: "There shall be a President of the Republic of Sri Lanka, who is the Head of the State, the Head of the Executive and of the Government, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces." The President shall be elected by the people and shall hold office for a term of six years.

Article 31 (2) stipulates: "No person who has been twice elected to the office of President by the People shall be qualified thereafter to be elected to such office by the People." The office of the President shall become vacant (a) upon his death; (b) if he resigns his office by a writing under his hand to the Speaker; (c) if he ceases to be a citizen of Sri Lanka; (d) if the person elected as President wilfully fails to assume office within one month from the date of commencement of his term of office; (e) if he is removed from office as provided in the next succeeding paragraph or; (f) if the Supreme Court in the exercise of its powers under Article 130 (a) determines that his election as President was void and does not determine that any other person was duly elected as President.

Article 38 (2) also provides: "Any member of Parliament may, by a writing addressed to the Speaker, give notice of a resolution alleging that the President is permanently incapable of discharging the functions of his office by reason of mental or physical infirmity or that the President has been guilty of: (i) intentional violation of the Constitution; (ii) treason; (iii) bribery; (iv) misconduct or corruption involving the abuse of the powers of his office; or (v) any offence under any law, involving moral turpitude, and setting out full particulars of the allegation or allegations made and seeking an inquiry and report thereon by the Supreme Court."

The Constitution also lays down that no notice of such resolution shall be entertained by the Speaker or placed on the Order Paper of Par-

liament unless it complies with the provisions of Article 38(2) (a) and (i) such notice of resolution is signed by not less than two-thirds of the whole number of Members of Parliament, or (ii) such notice of resolution is signed by not less than one-half of the whole number of Members of Parliament and the Speaker is satisfied that such allegation or allegations merit inquiry and report by the Supreme Court.

Article 38 (c) goes on to state: "Where such resolution is passed by not less than two-thirds of the whole number of members (including those not present) voting in its favour, the allegation or allegations contained in such resolution shall be referred by the Speaker to the Supreme Court for inquiry and report."

That is why the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court become central in the whole question of impeachment of the President or his or her removal from office. And in the current controversy in Sri Lanka over the precipitate action of the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the information she had was that there was a collection of signatures to initiate impeachment proceedings against the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court even as he was about to deliver a significant judgment on the President's powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. This, it was felt, could be followed by another motion to impeach the President herself. Once that process is initiated, she cannot prorogue or dissolve Parliament.

And that is the next issue. Having prorogued Parliament for two weeks, Ms. Kumaratunga will now have to decide about convening the House or dissolving it. The Constitution has placed a restriction — that the President shall not dissolve Parliament until the expiration of a period of one year from the date of such General Election, unless Parliament by resolution requests the President to dissolve it.

Since this Parliament is unlikely to adopt such a resolution, Ms. Kumaratunga may go in for dissolution and fresh elections, unless her People's Alliance is able to muster a majority in the House, by engineering defections.

The irony of the unfolding drama in the island is that when Mr. Kumaratunga won her first election as President in 1994, she vowed to bring in a new Constitution and scrap the Executive Presidency. But that did not happen. Any elected Head of State and Government will only find it convenient to remain the Executive President with all the powers and no threat from Parliament.

Norway withholds role in Sri Lankan peace process

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 14. The Norwegian Government today withheld further participation in Sri Lanka's peace process till political "clarity is re-established", putting the island-nation's latest peace bid formally on hold.

"Our options here are now exhausted. We will go home and wait," the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, told journalists here, concluding a four-day visit.

Though the "peace process is in good shape", it was unclear as to who had political authority "on behalf of the Government" over it. "Until such clarity is re-established, there is no space

for further efforts by the Norwegian Government to assist the parties," Mr. Helgesen said in the first public pronouncement by the facilitators since the political standoff started 10 days ago. Since his arrival here on November 10, Mr. Helgesen met the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, twice, the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, thrice and the chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V. Prabhakaran, once.

On the political standoff, Mr. Helgesen said it was "not within Norway's mandate to facilitate between political parties in the south". Though "all parties have confirmed" that the "ceasefire

agreement (signed in February 2002) is being respected" the stalemate had led to "a very serious situation, not because the peace process is fragile, but because it might be made fragile".

"The single impediment" for the resumption of talks, according to Mr. Helgesen — who chaired the six rounds of direct talks between Colombo and the LTTE between September 2002 and April 2004 — "is the political crisis in the south". Though there was "overwhelming public support for the peace process", Norway emphasised that "the ceasefire will be much more difficult to sustain in a political vacuum".

A visibly tired Mr. Helgesen, who took a flurry of questions from journalists, categorically stated that Norway would "not facilitate between the political parties in the south".

The present political standoff has sent "mixed signals" to the Norwegian facilitators, who were invited by Ms. Kumaratunga's People's Alliance Government and were continued with by the Wickremesinghe Government.

Editorial on Page 10

THE HINDU

15 NOV 2003

Ranil calls checkmate!

Dr. ... *Sr 6 15/11*
Decks are stacked against Chandrika

The Sri Lanka President, Chandrika Kumaratunga has been on a slippery slope ever since she threw caution to the winds, by divesting three senior ministers of portfolios crucial to the conduct of negotiations with the Tamil Tigers, imposed an Emergency and prorogued Parliament to frustrate the presentation of the annual budget at a time that the IMF and the World Bank had just completed their negotiations, only to revoke the Emergency in two days time and gave enough other signs that she had not thought through her actions. Her performance on television to justify her decisions was singularly unimpressive.

Her invitation to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe for talks to form an all-party government seemed to have let a particularly black and vicious cat out of the bag. She was in effect hitting the government on the one hand and trying to get them to grant her a favour at the same time. Having delivered a body blow she was offering to take it all back if Ranil and the UNP would accommodate a few of her nominees in the government. Nothing could be better calculated to sabotage the peace process which she claims to support. By the same token nothing could have been better calculated to stiffen the back of the UNP. Ranil retorted with two well thought out moves on the chess board. He offered her control of the peace negotiations with the LTTE, if she had reservations over his handling and at the same time promised her his full support. The peace negotiations were entering a crucial phase and if they went wrong he could deftly pass the blame to her. On the question of sharing power with her despite his clear mandate, he made it clear that the proposal was a non-starter. As an alternative he offered her fresh elections knowing that the dice already loaded against her would be even more lopsided in another appeal to the electorate.

Ranil, by contrast has not put a foot wrong in this whole business. An election in which Chandrika's recent behaviour will be an issue, is bound to favour the UNP and the trend in his favour will only be emphasised. It could accelerate the trend towards marginalizing the President's party, the SLFP.

Pirabhakaran's measured response to the Norwegians could have brought Chandrika no joy. He has in effect signalled that he is willing to wait, not indefinitely, to restart the peace process but the political scene in Colombo must crystallize first. This is not unreasonable. He is looking beyond the distasteful jockeying for position in Colombo.

It is not easy to see what realistic options Chandrika retains now. Ranil has called checkmate and it will be difficult for the President to escape. So far the LTTE has shown understanding of the situation. They can afford to wait; the Norwegian facilitators have also had talks with the Prime Minister and President. They can be relied upon to impress on the President the gravity of the situation facing the country which she has created. Whatever happens the baneful effect of the President's recent actions will haunt the country for a long time to come.

Norway suspends role in Sri Lanka peace drive

Colombo: Norway said on Friday it would suspend its efforts to end Sri Lanka's three decades of ethnic bloodshed until the President and Prime Minister resolved their power struggle. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, a frequent critic of Norway's diplomacy who triggered the political crisis last week, immediately insisted that the peace process with the Tamil rebels should continue.

Norwegian deputy prime minister Vidar Helgesen, who stayed an extra day here for talks with the key players, said Oslo needed clarity on which Sri Lankan leader was in charge. "Until such clarity is re-established, there is no space for further efforts by the Norwegian government to assist the parties," Mr Helgesen told reporters after three days of meetings. "This is one single impediment Norway can do nothing about," he said. "So we will go home and wait."

The Norwegians said the premier, who revived the peace bid after he defeated Ms Kumaratunga's party in parliamentary polls in December 2001, was effectively out of the picture after being

Peace talks should continue: Chandrika

Colombo: President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Friday demanded that talks with



C. Kumaratunga Tamil Tigers be continued although peace broker Norway suspended their efforts in the wake of bitter power struggle in the island nation. As the acting defence minister, Ms Kumaratunga ordered armed forces to extend their fullest cooperation to the Scandinavians monitoring the ceasefire, her spokesman told reporters here. PTI

undercut by Ms Kumaratunga. "He would not be able to take decisions and make compromises at the table. So effectively, he has said that he is out of the peace process," Mr Helgesen said.

"There is not a stable peace in Sri Lanka today," Mr Helgesen said. "I think, however, that the parties have committed to maintain the ceasefire. We need to make clear that the ceasefire will be much more difficult to sustain in a political vacuum," he said. "If progress in the political negotiations is made impossible, the ceasefire will become increasingly fragile."

Ms Kumaratunga invited Norway in 1999 to help broker peace but she since has accused Oslo of being too soft on the rebels, whose three-decade campaign to set up a homeland for the Tamil minority has claimed more than 60,000 lives. AFP

Norway puts peace role on hold

SEEMA GUHA

Colombo, Nov. 14: Norway today added a new dimension to the Sri Lankan crisis by announcing it would put its role as peace broker on hold till President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe resolved the political impasse which has paralysed the peace process.

"The resumption of peace talks is seriously impeded by the political crisis in the south. This has disturbed the peace process and caused serious concerns in the international community," Vidar Helgesen, deputy foreign minister of Norway and the chief negotiator of the peace process, said at the end of his three-day visit to the island.

He said that the lack of clarity as to who was in charge of the peace process was a serious hindrance to the resumption of talks. After the President took over the defence portfolio from the Wickremesinghe government, the Prime Minister asked the President to take over the negotiations as it was not possible to hold talks without the control of the security forces.

"Until such clarity is re-established, there is no space for further efforts by the Norwegian government to assist the two parties," Helgesen said.

He warned the political leaders of the dangers ahead: "We call this a very serious situation. Not because the peace process is fragile, but because it may be



Norwegian deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen (left) with the ambassador to Sri Lanka, Hans Brattskar, in Colombo. (Reuters)

come brittle. We need to make it clear that the ceasefire will be much more difficult to sustain in a political vacuum. If progress in the negotiations is made impossible, the ceasefire will become increasingly more fragile," Helgesen said.

Norway's decision rattled Kumaratunga. Within a few hours of the Norwegian statement announced by Helgesen, Ku-

maratunga's office went into overdrive in an effort to halt speculations about her commitment to the peace process. For the moment with the President under pressure, Wickremesinghe is having a hearty laugh after asking her to take over the talks.

In a two-page statement released by the President's office, Kumaratunga assured the nation that she was not out to scut-

tle the peace process and respected the terms of the ceasefire agreement with the Tamil Tigers.

She made it a point to assure the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that nothing would change because she had now personally taken over the defence portfolio.

"It was made clear that the ceasefire agreement would be respected and an assurance was

also given that the freedom of movement for the LTTE cadre, in areas held by the government, would also be respected. On Kumaratunga's instructions, the Sri Lankan armed forces are cooperating fully with the personnel monitoring the ceasefire, a statement released by the President's office said.

Kumaratunga's prompt action in soothing LTTE chief Vellupillai Prabhakaran's concerns of security for his cadre is an effort to send the message to both the Lankan people and the international community that she is not going to derail the peace efforts.

However, Kumaratunga made it clear that "last week's developments over the reshuffling of the three portfolios are entirely in keeping with the Lankan constitution."

In fact, the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court has made it clear that the functions of the defence forces should be held only by the President of the country," the statement said.

The two sides are trying to work out a national government which will negotiate unitedly with the LTTE. It is still uncertain whether the bitter political rivals can put their personal interests on hold.

Even if a national government is formed, it will be with a limited purpose.

However, Sri Lankans believe that neither side will compromise and that the island is heading for elections early next year.

for No 15-2 15/11

15 NOV 2003

Madison

LTTE pledges to honour truce agreement

Kilinochchi: Tamil Tiger rebels said on Thursday they were committed to a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire, allaying fears that a power struggle between Sri Lanka's president and prime minister would plunge the tropical island back into war.



V. Prabhakaran

Thamilselvan, the Tiger's political wing leader, as saying the February 2002 truce that halted two decades of fighting will be honoured. The statement came after two Norwegian peace envoys met Sri Lanka's reclusive rebel leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, in this northern rebel town on Thursday. The Tamil Net website also said "the leader of the LTTE, sought the guarantee from the Norwegians that the Sri Lankan government would contin-

ue with its commitment to the ceasefire agreement."

It quoted Mr Thamilselvan as telling the Norwegians "there should be political stability in Colombo for the peace talks to continue." Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen and special envoy Erik Solheim met Prabhakaran behind closed-doors in Kilinochchi as Tiger guerrillas kept guard. The Norwegians, who have played a crucial role in efforts to end Sri Lanka's bloody

19-year civil war, met President Chandrika Kumaratunga in Colombo on Wednesday.

Ms Kumaratunga last week wrested control of the ministries of defence, interior and media from her rival Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, claiming he had made too many concessions to the Tamil rebels. The president also suspended parliament and briefly declared emergency rule, triggering fear that fighting would resume. ^{AP}

Lanka rivals work on formula

SEEMAGUHA

Colombo, Nov. 13: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have asked the Norwegian mediators to guarantee that the Sri Lankan government would continue its commitment to the ceasefire which has kept the peace in the

island since February 2002.

In a meeting with Norwegian deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen at the LTTE's Killinochi stronghold today, the Tamil Tiger chief, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, said he also wanted safeguards for his "political activists" operating in areas con-

trolled by the Sri Lankan army in the Tamil-dominated northern and eastern provinces.

Prabhakaran made it clear that the Tigers were committed to the peace process. However, differences between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had derailed the peace talks.

"Prabhakaran told the Norwegian delegation that unity regarding the peace process should emerge among the leaders of the south. The LTTE should have a clear idea with whom it had to continue the peace talks.

"The crisis and confusion in the south has undermined the trust the Tamil people had in the peace process," the leader of the LTTE's political wing and the chief negotiator for the Tigers, Tamilchelvan, was quoted as saying in the official Tamil Tiger website.

The LTTE has now put the ball firmly in the Sri Lankan government's court. Their message seems to have sunk in as the two leaders are now seriously trying to resolve their differences.

Even though no concrete result emerged from yesterday's two-and-a-half-hour meeting between Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe, there was an agreement to continue the talks at a second meeting. Aides from both camps are now trying to work out a formula acceptable to Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe.

The initial framework of the proposed agreement suggests that the President retain the defence portfolio while returning the information and interior ministries back to the cabinet.

It was also suggested that some of Kumaratunga's People's Alliance members would join the government which will continue to be headed by Wickremesinghe. The two sides would draw up a common agenda to work with within a given

framework for a year or two.

Wickremesinghe's United National Front would have a deputy defence minister running the day-to-day affairs of the ministry.

A senior aide to the Prime Minister said this was essential for the ceasefire to hold in the north and the east.

Unless the soldiers are convinced that the government and the President are united over the peace process, it would be impossible to prevent minor incidents flaring up into full-fledged confrontations between the LTTE cadre and the Sri Lankan army.

There is no guarantee that Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe will finally find a solution. But both leaders are under pressure to bury their differences by the US, India, UK, France and the Nordic countries.

Stalemate continues despite Chandrika-Ranil meet

S. Lanka
11/12

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 12. Sri Lanka's weeklong political stalemate continues despite a "cordial and friendly" meeting between the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, today.

The meeting, described by Presidential aides as "icebreaking", started as scheduled at 11.30 a.m. in Ms. Kumaratunga's official residence and lasted two-and-a-half hours.

"After an exchange of views on events leading to the present situation, the President and the Prime Minister decided to move forward and continue the dialogue with all parties concerned," the statement said, adding that a further meeting between them had been planned "in the course of next week", a joint statement signed by the Secretaries of the two leaders said. Significantly, neither the President nor the Prime Minister was accompanied by political leaders at today's meeting.

W.J.S. Karunaratne, Secretary to the President, Bradman Weerakoon, Secretary to the Prime Minister, and Mano Tittawella, Senior Adviser to the President and Senior Director-General of the President's Office, were present during the meeting.

The details of the meeting were not made public. According to sources, the meeting "went over the past events" including the impact of the change in Defence portfolio on the peace proc-

ess. The political parties headed by the two leaders — Ms. Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Mr. Wickremesinghe's United National Front (UNF) — have not shown signs of a climbdown from their postures since the November 4 standoff.

The SLFP has said it is within the powers of the President to take over the Ministries of Defence, Interior and Mass Communication. But the UNF said the move had caused "fundamental changes" to the peace process and the Wickremesinghe administration would not be able to carry it forward unless control over the three Ministries was restored.

The SLFP today defended Ms. Kumaratunga's actions as "fully constitutional and legal". The party spokesman, Sarath Amunugama, told journalists that Ms. Kumaratunga would not be able to assign the Defence portfolio to anyone else, "even if she wanted to" as the Supreme Court had determined that it was "inalienable" from the President.

As the political standoff continues, another general election is seen by some as a possible outcome. As only the President is empowered to dissolve Parliament and call elections, one of the factors that would determine the future course of events is the progress in the efforts by the SLFP and the left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) to strike an electoral pact.

Chandrika meets Norwegian Minister: Page 1'

Ranil agrees to talks, no question of mending ties

SEEMAGUHA

Colombo, Nov. 11: Sri Lanka's political crisis is all set to be a long-drawn, bitter confrontation with both President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe fighting for the survival of their political careers.

The Prime Minister today decided to take up Kumaratunga's offer to meet her for talks on forming a national government to unitedly negotiate with the LTTE. Even though Wickremesinghe announced that the crucial meeting with his arch rival would be held tomorrow at 11.30 in the morning, he sought to push his own agenda which had nothing to do with the President's invitation for talks.

The Prime Minister's confidants have made it clear that the meeting will not be an attempt to patchup the strained ties.

"We want to discuss remedial action. Regrettable as it may seem, the main task is the fragility of the peace process and how to salvage it," G.L. Peiris, former member of Kumaratunga's inner circle who switched sides before the last parliamentary elections, said today.

The talks are doomed to fail considering that both sides have taken up rigid positions. Those

S. Lanka



A file picture of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (left) and President Chandrika Kumaratunga. (Reuters)

who know Kumaratunga say she would be the last person to back down and return the portfolios she seized from the government. Wickremesinghe and his cabinet colleagues will be satisfied with nothing less than retraction from the President.

"The Prime Minister has made it clear that what he will discuss with the President is the state of the peace process and not her offer of a national government," justice minister W.J.M. Lokubandara said on behalf of his leader.

Most political leaders believe that both sides will continue to posture for attention and let the crisis drag on till the President dissolves Parliament and calls elections.

Wickremesinghe and his party colleagues are confident that they will be victorious in any election on the basis of their peace initiative with the Tamil Tigers and project the President as the spoiler.

Some radicals in Wickremesinghe's United National Party are urging the Prime Minister to push Kumaratunga into a corner and force her to announce elections.

However, other sections in the party are not too sure how the President's move to seize the defence, interior and information portfolios will finally help her in the long run.

In urban areas like Colombo, where people believe that the ceasefire with the Tigers has

brought investment back to the island, Kumaratunga's actions have been extremely unpopular.

The growth rate shot up to 5.6 per cent in the first six months of 2003 and is projected to be at least 6 per cent by the end of the financial year.

All this has been jeopardised by the political turmoil which may result in the Tigers once again taking up their guns.

However, in the south, the heartland of the Sinhala Buddhist majority, the view is different.

There is anxiety among the Sinhalese about Wickremesinghe giving too much to the LTTE.

Kumaratunga's associates have already started negotiating with the JVP, a hardline Sinhala nationalist party with broad appeal in the south, for an alliance ahead of elections.

The Prime Minister's party would benefit if the JVP joined the Peoples Conference. However, JVP leaders said in case of elections, they would join hands with Kumaratunga's party to oppose the government "selling out to the LTTE."

On the other hand, the Tigers could help the United National Party allies by ensuring that the Wickremesinghe team wins the 20-25-odd seats from the northern and eastern provinces.

Ranil to meet Chandrika today

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 11. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, is scheduled to meet the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, tomorrow in what will be their first face-to-face in the week-long political standoff.

Announcing Mr. Wickremesinghe's decision to accept Ms. Kumaratunga's invitation sent on Monday, the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, said the meeting would be an attempt to "minimise damage" and chalk out "practical ways" of "nurturing and continuing" with an "already fragile peace process". Mr. Wickremesinghe would look at "practical ways of salvaging the peace process" and emphasise that there was "no need for changes" as he enjoyed a "strong and absolute majority" in the 225-member Parliament, Prof. Peiris said. The island nation plunged into political turmoil on November 4 after Ms. Kumaratunga's constitutional takeover of three Cabinet portfolios — Defence, Interior and Mass Communication. Mr. Wickremesinghe's Cabinet has demanded restoration of the pre-November 4 situation.

Though Mr. Wickremesinghe's administration said that it was "not embarking on a confrontation course," there are no signs of reconciliation, with Prof. Peiris coming down heavily on Ms. Kumaratunga's November 4 move. "It was a thin-

ly-veiled attempt at power-grabbing. Nothing else. There was no security threat," he said.

Prof. Peiris termed Ms. Kumaratunga's constitutional moves as making "fundamental changes" to the peace process, which "has been damaged" and "put in jeopardy". Ms. Kumaratunga must take "remedial action", he said.

The meeting will be watched for possible compromises between the two arch political rivals, but there are no indications of a climbdown by the Prime Minister's United National Front (UNF) as yet. Though Prof. Peiris said the issue involved was "not the return of the portfolios, but the stability of the peace process", it does not dilute the Cabinet's demand.

With Ms. Kumaratunga's position being strengthened by a recent Supreme Court determination that she held plenary powers over a Defence Minister, one possible scenario is that she could appoint a Deputy Defence Minister, with the clear signal that her decisions will prevail. During the earlier People's Alliance Government, she held the Defence portfolio, but for all practical purposes, a Deputy Defence Minister ran the Ministry.

Reconvene Parliament: UNF

The UNF today wrote to the Speaker demanding that he re-convene Parliament before November 19, the date when the President's prorogation of the House expires.

wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

No intrusive diplomacy

THE world has been startled by the sudden eruption of crisis in Sri Lanka. At a time when Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was on a visit to the USA, President Kumaratunga asserted her power by divesting his ministers of key security portfolios, which she took in her own custody, and declaring a state of emergency to give herself greatly expanded authority.

Fortunately, the emergency was short-lived and has since been rescinded but the implications continue to rumble. In Sri Lanka itself, there may have been less surprise than elsewhere, for it has long been witness to the uneasy cohabitation between these leaders. Recently, matters seemed to be coming to a head with increasingly bold efforts from the Wickremesinghe camp to trammel the President's authority. Being a strong-willed leader – as indeed is her rival – she may have felt she had to hit back or go under. In a move reminiscent of Nawaz Sharif's unsuccessful attempt to oust Musharraf when the latter was out of the country – ironically, in Sri Lanka – Mrs Kumaratunga struck during the Prime Minister's absence. For a while it looked as if uncontrollable strife may result, but tensions have somewhat abated and matters appear calmer now.

The peace process in Sri Lanka is seen as the focus of the top-level differences. This Norway-backed effort has been going on for quite some time, during which, in the main, a ceasefire has held and the unbelievably fierce conflict between the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE has been in abeyance. A wary dialogue has slowly proceeded. President Kumaratunga has made no secret of her misgivings about the process, seeing in the prolonged truce a breathing space that can permit Tamil insurgents to re-equip and regroup. However, she has kept in the background while the Prime Minister has driven the peace process along. There is an obvious fragility to it when the two prime leaders, each with a popular mandate, do not fully see eye-to-eye. While there is considerable international concern about the effect of the political crisis on the talks, the immediate problem seems to stem less from talks-related issues – both have found the latest LTTE proposals unacceptable – than from personal differences between the two leaders. They are scions of two great political families with fervent belief in their right to rule. Differences of ideology between them, though real, seem to count for less than differences of personality: These differences obscure the larger crisis of war and peace within Sri Lanka, and further complicate already complex issues by chaining together crises, one within the other.

Disruptive events in Sri Lanka have their impact in nearby India, so much so that in an earlier crisis, India felt impelled to intervene directly. But that only cost much blood and treasure. India itself was subject to lethal guerrilla assault, tragically losing to a suicide attack a former Prime Minister who seemed on the way back to power. These events have not faded and political leaders in Tamil Nadu, in particular, are all too aware of the potential of Sri Lankan events to disturb India's equanimity. Some important voices have demanded that India should keep away, others have recalled our demand for the extradition of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran and have suggested that indirect assistance may be offered to Kumaratunga to deal with him. Others see the need at this juncture to support Wickremesinghe, as he is more closely identified with the peace process. It is thus a divisive issue in India too.

There will be no temptation for India to be unduly active in this crisis, not even our ever-present anxieties about the entry of an unfriendly presence into our vicinity. The sharp sensitivity we showed in past years to any third party being lodged close to us in Sri Lanka has been modified as perceptions of external threat have evolved. Yet strategic questions like the significance of the excellent natural harbour of Trincomalee cannot be disregarded. This is the finest anchorage between Singapore and the Cape, hence a constant factor in Indian Ocean affairs, where India finds itself inexorably drawn. But these are longer term issues: so far as the current crisis is concerned, India can do little beyond trying to calm things down. India has developed good lines of communication with both the leaders, and neither is inclined to disregard legitimate Indian interests and concerns. There is thus no occasion for intrusive diplomacy from New Delhi, whose hope must be that Sri Lanka's cohabitation process will be but back on the rails and pursued with adequate commitment on both sides.

Most important is to shield the peace process from these disturbances. Progress has been made in addressing one of the most bitter and brutal disputes anywhere. In this, the Norwegian role is crucial, and has given rise to the thought that a comparable third party role in Indo-Pak matters may be similarly useful. Yet one also has to see the complications, as well as the impossibility of getting anywhere without domestic consensus. We have seen at home how a promising initiative can come unstuck in the absence of sufficient consensus. The prior task, then, must be to establish consensus in the complex task of talking to insurgent groups, and then maintaining it through the vicissitudes of a prolonged negotiation.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)

THE STATES

33

CHANDRIKA WANTS TO MEET RANIL

Lanka govt puts off LTTE talks

SF-2
11/11/2

Associated Press

COLOMBO, Nov. 10. — Hopes of ending Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict were dealt a major setback today, as the government announced that face-to-face peace talks with the LTTE have been indefinitely postponed.

But President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is locked in a power struggle with her political rival, Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, over the peace process, said she would like to meet him to discuss a proposal to form a unity government together.

Also today, the government said it was ready for a snap poll as a means of ending the crisis. "The government is ready for polls any time..." constitutional affairs minister Mr GL Peiris



Mr Wickremesinghe: Fighting in defence of peace.

told reporters here.

Justifying the postponement of the peace process, Mr Peiris said the government would need to resolve who would be responsible for the peace process before talks with the LTTE could resume. His announcement was made hours before Norwegian envoys were expected to arrive in Colombo in a bid to revive the peace talks, suspended in April. "It's realistic to recognise that the events of the past four days have cumulatively placed the peace process at some risk," Mr Peiris said. "We have to sort out basic issues first before we plunge into talks with the LTTE."

Mr Peiris said Mr Wickremesinghe's administration would support Mrs Kumaratunga if she wanted to take responsibility for the peace process. Shortly after the government announcement on the abeyance in the peace process, the President sent a single page letter to the Prime Minister — the first direct communication between them since the crisis began.

In her letter, Mrs Kumaratunga said she "would like to meet" the Prime Minister and representatives of his party to discuss her unity government proposal. The President suggested Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday as possible days for the meeting.

Chandrika invites Ranil for talks

S Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 10. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today invited the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, to discuss her recent proposal to form a national government.

"In view of the current political situation in the country and my proposal last week to form a government of reconstruction and reconciliation, I would like to meet you in order to discuss your view on this matter," Ms. Kumaratunga said in her letter to Mr. Wickremesinghe — the first formal communication between the two during a week-long standoff.

Ms. Kumaratunga offered Mr. Wickremesinghe a choice of three days — Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday — for the meeting and suggested that he could "consider bringing a small delegation" of senior members of his party for the parleys.

According to Presidential secretariat sources, Ms. Kumaratunga will also hold meetings with other parliamentary parties during the week.

The President's invitation to Mr. Wickremesinghe was sent hours after the Cabinet wanted the President to either "assume full control" of the peace process, or restore three Ministerial portfolios taken over by her last Tuesday, sparking the political standoff.

The Cabinet termed the November 4 decision of the President to take control over the

Ministries of Defence, Interior and Mass Communication and prorogue Parliament a "surprising sequence of events, which is bound to place a fragile process in potential jeopardy".

Ms. Kumaratunga's assertion of constitutional powers on November 4 was followed by a show of strength by the ruling United National Party on November 7 when it organised a

rousing reception to Mr. Wickremesinghe, who returned from an official visit to the United States.

Maintaining that the Ministries be restored, the Cabinet today unanimously pushed the case for restoration of its full control over governance.

The Cabinet did not directly respond to the President's call for a national government, but

reiterating yesterday's demand for complete control over governance, it said as "proposals pertaining to cohabitation" had the "basic objective" of protecting and promoting the peace process, "fundamental issues in respect of responsibility for the process must be resolved at the threshold before other issues are resolved".

Facilitators arrive

Though the peace process to the backseat by the current political spat, two key facilitators, Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, and Special Envoy, Erik Solheim, are scheduled to arrive here later tonight.

They are scheduled to meet Ms. Kumaratunga, Mr. Wickremesinghe, Tamil political leaders and representatives of civil society in Colombo. The two will also travel to rebel-held Kinnochchi before concluding their visit on Thursday. Before the political standoff began, the facilitators had been requested to work out dates for preliminary discussions between the Government and the LTTE.

UNF pushes for fresh election

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 10. Confident and keen on reinforcing its 2001 parliamentary mandate, Sri Lanka's United National Front Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, today pushed its case for a fresh parliamentary election.

Asserting that "this was as good time as any" to face the polls, the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, told reporters here today: "We have absolutely no doubt that the people will endorse what we have been doing and we have no problems going before the people."

The UNF administration, with 114 seats in the 225-member House, says it has the "unqualified support" of 130 MPs.

As Sri Lanka's proportionate representation

system makes it difficult for any single party to get an absolute majority, a fresh poll is unlikely to give any formation the two-thirds majority required to amend the island's unitary constitution. Moreover, under the Constitution, the power to call elections is vested in the Executive President, who is the head of state, head of Government, head of Cabinet and Commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Uncertainty over the life of Parliament has hung like a Sword of Damocles over the UNF administration since December 2002, when it completed one year in office, thereby lifting the only constitutional restraint on the President to dissolve the House. Since then, Mr. Wickremesinghe and his administration have been emphatic that they are ready to face polls.

Ranil tells Chandrika to take over negotiations

5/11
10/11
Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Nov. 9. — Seeking to turn the tables on Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has been critical of his handling of the peace process with the LTTE, Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe today offered her to take control of the talks.

Observing that he does not have control over all aspects of the Norwegian-brokered peace process backed by the international community, as his government had been divested of the key portfolios of defence, internal security and media, Mr Wickremesinghe said he could no longer lead the peace bid.

"The government's view is that because the Prime Minister does not have control over all aspects of the peace process... he can't handle it any further," the government's chief peace negotiator, Mr GL Peiris, said. He said the Prime Minister met envoys of the USA, Japan, Norway and the European Union — the co-chairs of the international drive to raise financial aid for the peace bid — to express his concern.

Mr Wickremesinghe asked them to



IN BETTER TIMES: Mr Wickremesinghe with Mrs Kumaratunga. — A file photograph

"explore the possibility of the President taking over the process herself," Mr Peiris told reporters here.

Last week Mrs Kumaratunga abruptly took charge of defence, internal security and media by dismissing the ministers and suspended parliament till 19 November, but on Friday said it would reconvene on that day to allow the government to present its annual budget.

Sacked minister hits back: Sri Lanka's sacked defence minister acknowledged today that an LTTE camp near Trincomalee posed a threat to the eastern port, but denied he had been lax in his duties as claimed by Mrs Kumaratunga, adds AFP.

THE STATESMAN

10 NOV 2003

10 NOV 2003

'Let the President handle peace talks'

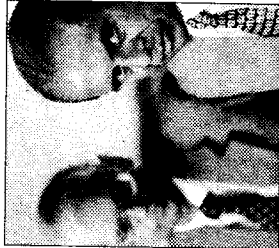
AGENCIES
COLOMBO, NOVEMBER 9

THE Sri Lankan government, in a power struggle with the island's President, said on Sunday it may ask her to take over a peace process with Tamil rebels if she does not reverse a decision to sack three ministers.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga fired the Defence, Media and Interior ministers, and suspended Parliament until November 19 last week, but said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe could continue pursuing peace with the Tamil Tigers. But Cabinet spokesman G.L. Peiris told a news conference on Sunday the Prime Minister must be in overall charge if he was to pursue the peace process, if not, the President should take over.

No constitutional crisis: Chandrika

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga denied that the dissolving of key portfolios of three Cabinet ministers and the suspension of Parliament by her last week had led to any constitutional crisis.



Peiris with sacked Defence minister Tilak Marapana. Reuters

"The PM has the mandate and he must have control over all aspects," Peiris said. "If the institutions of Defence and media are not in control of the Prime Minister, he cannot have responsibility for the peace process," he said.

Kumaratunga has accused the government of giving away

too much to the Tamil Tigers in the peace talks. She said she was acting in the country's interests when she sacked the ministers and suspended Parliament. But her move has thrown the country into political turmoil and analysts say it threatens the peace process initiated by Wickremesinghe's

government with the LTTE nearly two years ago.

Wickremesinghe asked them to "explore the possibility of the President taking over the process herself," Peiris said.

Wickremesinghe called it "the last chance for peace" that the country has to end a bloody war that has taken over 60,000

lives in decades of fighting. The government is demanding the return of the three key portfolios that Kumaratunga is now handling, saying it cannot be the "driving force" of the peace bid with the LTTE.

The Prime Minister rushed back from the US on Friday where he had been when Kumaratunga decided to strike and said his priority was to keep the fragile peace bid on track.

He said he was assured by President George W. Bush and other foreign leaders that they would support him in his efforts to keep the Norway-backed peace bid from failing.

On Friday, Kumaratunga called upon the Prime Minister to join her in a unity government — an idea that has surfaced repeatedly over the past decade but has never succeeded because of deep policy and personal differences be-

tween the main parties. "The PM will be called upon to continue the peace process, while I shall take responsibility for the defence of the nation with the participation of the PM," she said.

But the government seems to have called her bluff by offering to let her take over the peace process. "The government's view is if Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is not entrusted with all responsibilities then it would be desirable for the President to take over the peace process," Peiris said.

He said the government would support Kumaratunga if that happened.

The political crisis has been looming since Wickremesinghe won parliamentary elections in late 2001, campaigning on a platform of peace talks with the LTTE, defying Kumaratunga's party.

S. Lakshmi

10/11

S. Lanka
RD-11
10/11

Chandrika calls for political unity to solve conflict

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 9. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today said the Constitutional steps taken by her to take over Defence, Interior and Mass Communications portfolios were in the "larger interest of the entire nation", and called for political unity to solve decades-long separatist conflict.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, Ms. Kumaratunga also said the counter-proposals submitted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "can come only within the constitution of a separate state".

Refuting charges that she had exercised her Constitutional powers to strike political gains or to scuttle the peace process initiated by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "If I had wanted to sabotage, I should have done it a 100 times in the last two years".

However, as she had told Mr. Wickremesinghe that she would "not sabotage" his peace process, Ms. Kumaratunga said she "waited and watched for a long time" before taking over the portfolios of the Defence, Interior and Mass Communication on November 4. The President said she could not have kept



watching the situation "without being treacherous to the nation".

"I think it will be very unfair to say that I did this to get power, as some people are saying, or to sabotage the peace process".

Asked for her view if there were any parts of the LTTE's counter proposals that could be discussed at all, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "My principle, some people in my party don't agree with me, but my principle, very frankly, is that even the most unacceptable position of your adversary can be a basis to be-

gin discussions".

However, she said, "that does not mean that we can accept or pretend to accept the proposals". The LTTE's counter-proposals, "as they are, unless they are willing to amend them during negotiations, cannot come within the constitution of any country in the world because it is asking for another state. They can only come within the constitution of a separate state", the President said.

Emphasising the importance of a coming together of political parties, Ms. Kumaratunga said

"whatever one may think of one another, have to get together if we have to resolve this issue".

Asked about the fundamental contradictions on devolution of powers in the proposed alliance between her party and the Left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "If we come to an alliance it will be based on some agreement, whatever may be written down in documents, that the devolution process will go on, if we come into government some day". On what she considered the starting point to break the present constitutional lock and move ahead in the island's peace process, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "I still feel the 1997 (draft constitution) proposals were the best and we could go back to them". Those proposals — more than the 2000 draft constitution, which she described as a "watered down" version of the 1997 draft because of "the strict insistence of the then Opposition United National Party" — was "much better" than the present Government's proposals, she said. The Tamil United Liberation Front, she pointed out, was "very happy about the 1997 proposals", but had walked out from the diluted 2000 Draft Constitution.

THE HINDU

10 NOV 2003

Ranil Govt. says it is no longer in a position to deal with peace process

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 9. The Sri Lankan Government today said it was "not in a position to deal with the peace process" and held the view that the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, could "be asked to carry on with the peace process."

In an announcement that extends the island's recent political standoff on the peace process, the Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, today said the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, would tell the main international backers of the peace process that he would not be able to continue with his attempt to find peace with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as it would "not be possible to accept responsibility" without having control over the Defence and Media portfolios.

The Prime Minister would brief Norway, the U.S., Japan, and the E.U. who were the main international backers of the peace process as well as India on his position, Prof. Peiris said.

Today's stand reflects an 'all-or-nothing' approach adopted

by the Cabinet on the peace process, in its political standoff against the President, Ms. Kumaratunga.

On November 4, the Presi-

dent, exercising her constitutional powers, took over the portfolios of Defence, Interior and Mass Communication and prorogued Parliament till No-

vember 19. The move, Prof. Peiris said, had led to "some degree of truncation and emasculation" and would have a bearing on the conduct of the peace process.

Meanwhile, the former Defence Minister, Tilak Marapana, denied charges by the President that he had compromised the island's security during the peace process.

Neither he, nor the Government "has ever taken" any important Defence decision "without first consulting and discussing the issues involved with the President", Mr. Marapana, who now retains the Transport portfolio said.

Not scuttling peace process: Chandrika

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 9. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, refuted charges that she had exercised her Constitutional powers to strike political gains or to scuttle the peace process initiated by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"If I had wanted to sabotage, I should have done it a 100 times in the last two years," Ms. Kumaratunga told *The Hindu* in an interview.

Details on Page 11

10 NOV 2003

10 NOV 2003

Ranil backers reject call for coalition govt

ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLOMBO, Nov. 8. — Supporters of Sri Lanka's Prime Minister today rejected an appeal by his longtime rival, the country's President, to form a coalition government, saying her recent grab for power had to be reversed before any decisions were made.

Justice minister Mr WJM Lokubandara did not completely dismiss the appeal by President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, a fierce rival of Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, but said the situation had to first return to normal.

"It is not normal to use force and then call for a coalition government," he said, speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister's supporters in the Cabinet. "If we are to consider this, let us all go back to our previous positions." A power struggle erupted on Tuesday between Mr Wickremesinghe and Mrs Kumaratunga, throwing the island nation into political crisis and threatening peace efforts with Tamil Tiger rebels.

Angered by the Prime Minister's more bullish approach to the peace talks, Mrs Kumaratunga fired three powerful Cabinet ministers, ordered parliament suspended for two weeks and briefly declared a state of Emergency.

In an address to the nation late yester-

day, the President accused the Prime Minister of putting the country "in grave danger" in the peace talks.

After repeatedly criticising Mr Wickremesinghe, she concluded her speech by calling for a coalition government, though its likelihood appeared slim because of the mutual hostility between her and the Prime Minister.

Despite the power struggle, officials said today that an upcoming visit by Norwegian peace brokers remained on track.

Norway's deputy foreign minister Mr Vidar Helgesen and special envoy Mr Erik Solheim were still expected in Sri Lanka 10 to 12 November, officials said. They are trying to arrange a meeting between the government and the Tigers to encourage the resumption of full-fledged peace talks, which broke off in April.

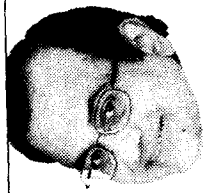
"From our side we are ready," Mr Bradmon Weerakoon, the Prime Minister's secretary, said.

Norwegian embassy spokesman Mr Tomas Stangeland confirmed there had been no change in plans. The Norwegians are to travel to Kilinochchi, the capital of LTTE-controlled Sri Lanka, on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, European monitors overseeing the ceasefire between the government and the rebels said the truce was holding.

Lanka: That sinking feeling

POLITICALLY CORRECT
CHIDAMBARAM



Rajiv Gandhi's intentions and ambitions of Jayawardene and Prabhakaran were irreconcilable. A historic opportunity was lost.

After many years, and after many lives were lost, matters appeared to improve in Sri Lanka. Jayawardene was gone. Chandrika Kumaratunga, daughter of Presi-

to signal a new dawn.

It is a quirk of fate that Kumaratunga and Wickramasinghe are cast in roles that are antagonistic to each other. When her party (the SLFP) was in the opposition for many years, Kumaratunga and her mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike were opposed to the headline of Presi-

perpetual state of strife since 1983. It is not necessary to recall the tortuous course of the LTTE-led struggle during the last 20 years. At one point of time — 1986 to be precise — India almost succeeded in brokering a settlement between the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE and other Tamil parties. Two people wrecked a possible settlement. One was President Jayawardene. If there was a wily political fox, it was Jayawardene. He earned the trust of Rajiv Gandhi and persuaded the latter to sign an Accord with Sri Lanka — and send Indian troops to enforce that Accord. History will judge the wisdom of that decision. The other key player was Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader. He felt betrayed by the Accord; he was also supremely confident that he could win the armed struggle against the Sri Lankan government.

Both Jayawardene and Prabhakaran were wrong. Jayawardene exploited Rajiv Gandhi's essential goodness and friendship, Prabhakaran gravely misread the result: Sri Lanka is in a per-

The long train of injuries heaped on the Tamil-speaking population is an undeniable fact of history. The Tamils had enjoyed a pre-eminence in many walks of life, especially the civil services. The resentment among the Sinhala-speaking population was exploited by the political leaders and the Buddhist clergy. The result: Sri Lanka is in a per-

search for a peaceful settlement. Politics, unfortunately, has driven them apart. Nevertheless, Norway continued with its efforts. The government placed its proposals on the table and invited the LTTE to place its counter proposals. Another moment in history — like 1986 — seemed to present itself. On November 1, 2003, the LTTE unveiled its proposals and, like in 1986, the historic opportunity was lost.

Has the LTTE really given up

LTTE's proposals are a blow to PM Ranil's peace efforts. But as the world watches Chandrika and Ranil resolve the crisis, we must pause to reflect on the plight of the hapless Tamils



its demand for a separate Eelam? I doubt it. In its proposals, the LTTE has described the area of its influence as the "NorthEast" — without a hyphen — which would comprise eight districts of Sri Lanka. The LTTE is right in demanding an interim government "until a final negotiated settlement is reached and imple-

ment Jayawardene (and his UNP) and pleaded for a reconciliation with the Tamils. When Wickramasinghe became leader of the UNP and leader of the opposition, he re-wrote his party's plank and advocated a settlement with the LTTE. Kumaratunga and Wickramasinghe should have been allies in the

the Bandaranaikes, was returned to power. And then Ranil Wickramasinghe's UNP won a parliamentary majority and he became Prime Minister. Norway seized the opportunity, and has so far played a stellar role as mediator. When the LTTE announced that it was willing to give up its demand for a separate Eelam, it appeared

be no legislature) and other organs of the State like the Election Commission and the Auditor General. If it also acquires plenary police powers and power to control access to the seas (and the LTTE maintains its Army and the Sea Tigers) the NorthEast would, for all practical purposes, be the Eelam of Prabhakaran's dreams.

The proposals assert the "right to self-determination of peoples," they express a desire to bring lasting peace to the island of Sri Lanka, but there is no mention of a united and sovereign State of Sri Lanka. It is natural that many people in Sri Lanka see the proposals as a re-assertion of the demand for Eelam.

The LTTE proposals are a blow to the peace making efforts of Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. President Chandrika Kumaratunga — whose political fortunes appear to be on the decline — struck swiftly. She made a clumsy attempt to seize control, but within days the rash steps that she took are unravelling. As the world watches these two players resolve a constitutional crisis, we must pause to reflect on the plight of the hapless Tamils. Fifteen years later, Prabhakaran is not greayer or wiser. So, India has another troubled neighbour, the possibility of another civil war across the sea-border and the near-certainty of its consequences spilling over into India.

Write to pc@expressindia.com

mented." The LTTE is also right in demanding a majority for itself in the interim government. But the LTTE has gone much beyond the requirements of an interim government, and has made proposals which cast a grave shadow over its real intentions: For example, the LTTE demands: ● An independent Election Commission, appointed by the interim government, to conduct "free and fair" elections in the NorthEast at the end of five years ● Separate institutions for the administration of justice in the NorthEast

- The power to borrow "internally and externally" and the power to receive aid directly and to conduct external trade
- A separate Auditor General
- Control over the seas and power to regulate access thereto
- An international tribunal to settle disputes between the government of Sri Lanka and the interim government for the NorthEast

The proposals appear to be silent (or vague) on the police power of the interim government. Clause 9, however, spells out the jurisdiction of the interim government and seeks "plenary powers" for the governance of the NorthEast including powers in relation to "law and order and over land."

The implication of these proposals is clear. The NorthEast, at least during the interim period of five years, will be a separate State with the LTTE enjoying supreme power over the executive and the judiciary (there will

110-10
5/11

There was no emergency, says President's office

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 7. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga tonight called for a "grand alliance" of all "national and patriotic forces" to form a "government of national reconstruction and reconciliation".

In a television address to the nation tonight, she said she was ready to commence discussions "with leaders of all parties in Parliament with the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe and the leaders of his party" for such a move.

Tonight's speech was the second made by the President after Tuesday's move to constitutionally take over the Ministries of Defence, Interior and Mass Communication and to prorogue Parliament.

Reiterating her commitment to peace, she said "it was not a sheepskin put on for grabbing power". The Wickremesinghe administration's promise of peace made two years ago, she said, was "becoming elusive", she said. The LTTE's counter proposals, Ms. Kumaratunga said, had not addressed the core issues as they had "not given up a separate state" and had "not even hinted" at disarming themselves.

Earlier in the day, the President's office described the emergency a "non-event" as Ms. Kumaratunga had not signed the proclamation required to make it a law. Confirming that the emergency regulations with "revisions" were "sent to the State Printer", on Wednesday, the President's office said: "this had led to the belief that a state of emergency had been declared. A state of emergency becomes law only after the President signs a proclamation. The President did not sign such a proclamation".

On Thursday, the Cabinet of Ministers said the "state of emergency" had conveyed to the western world the impression that "Sri Lanka is no longer safe". The President's office, which did not deny reports of emergency on Thursday, said



The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, being welcomed at the airport in Katunayake on Friday, on his return from the United States. — AFP

today that "the recent changes effected to Cabinet portfolios necessitated the formality of certain gazette notifications" and that the "emergency regulations were also re-examined and revised".

"Several obnoxious clauses in the emergency regulations, when they were last in force, needed to be expunged." These revisions, "were effected to the emergency regulations, only to be put into effect in an eventuality, and for the security apparatus to be in a state of preparedness", the President's office said.

This morning, Mr. Wickremesinghe, who was in Washington when the political standoff started, arrived in Sri Lanka to a rousing reception organised by supporters of the ruling United National Party (UNP) pledging to put the "peace process back on track". The Prime Minister did not make any direct reference to the Presidential actions since Thursday, but called them "fundamental alterations" which "puts the whole peace

process at risk".

"I have to create an environment in which the peace process can go forward. Sri Lanka cannot be found to be at fault in stopping the peace process", he said, adding he would start discussions with the main international donors as well as Norway and India.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, who met Cabinet ministers and MPs this evening, also wanted the immediate reconvening of Parliament and focus on putting the "peace process back on track".

On the proroguing of Parliament, the Prime Minister, bolstered with the support expressed by 128 MPs in the 225-member House, said: "we have to ensure that the parliament is resumed immediately so that the peace process can continue". In addition, the Budget, which planned pay hikes and economic benefits to the people, also had to be passed, he said. Later this evening, the party's Deputy leader said a meeting of Parliamentary party

leaders would be called to formally request a reconvening of Parliament.

In a show of strength, thousands of UNF supporters gathered near the airport to welcome the Prime Minister this morning and at several points along the 30 km stretch from the international airport. The road was decked in green, the colour of the United National Party (UNP), headed by Mr. Wickremesinghe. As the crowds cheered the party leaders on, a music band kept the enthusiasm going.

Emphasising his 2001 Parliamentary victory, the Prime Minister said he would "safeguard" it and "not move away from the people's mandate".

On his visit to the U.S., Mr. Wickremesinghe said President George Bush had placed confidence in his leadership and pledged support to the peace process.

The LTTE, he said, was "getting ready" to discuss the counter-proposals and that he would "not betray the peace process".

Chandrika takes control of media

Colombo: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Thursday announced she was taking over state-run radio, television and newspapers amid a deepening political crisis, but said she would allow media freedom.

Ms Kumaratunga, who sacked the information minister together with the ministers of defence and interior on Tuesday, said that she had reconstituted the boards of management of four state-owned media institutions with her nominees. "The President has ensured the media full freedom of expression," her office said in a statement. "The first obligation of these media institutions will be to inform the country the facts and events without prejudice or conscious partisanship."

The statement was the first official acknowledgement by the President that she was now running the largest news network in the country. "The news and information disseminated will not violate the laws of the land, offend common canons of decency and imperil social well-being or place national security in jeopardy," the statement said.

The country's largest circulating English daily, the *Daily News*, was brought under Ms Kumaratunga's new management, but the paper on



AT LOGGERHEADS: A file picture of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Thursday made no mention of her imposition of a state of emergency. Instead, the daily led its front page with a court decision concerning the president's powers relating to the defence of the country, under the headline: 'President supreme in Sri Lanka's defence'.

The beleaguered government on Thursday fought to regain ground even as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe rushed back from the US to grapple with his political foe Ms Kumaratunga, after securing Washington's support to the peace process with Tamil Tigers.

Government spokesman G.L. Peiris said the cabinet wanted Ms Kumaratunga to reinstate the ministers of defence,

internal security and information after her shock dismissal on Tuesday plunged the country into political uncertainty.

He said they also demanded the reconvening of parliament which Ms Kumaratunga ordered suspended till November 19, effectively prohibiting the government from presenting the annual budget on November 12.

"The cabinet expressed its firm opinion that any change of portfolios and subjects should not be made by the President without prior consultation with the PM according to the written instructions of the attorney general," he said.

US President George W. Bush during a meeting with Mr Wickremesinghe at the White House on Wednesday expressed strong support for the PM's leadership and his commitment to peace.

"We discussed the peace process in Sri Lanka and I told the President (Bush) that I have the majority in parliament," Mr Wickremesinghe told reporters after the meeting. Agencies

MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

Crisis in Lanka
Live updates
visit www.timesofindia.com

Lanka Landslide

A bitter power struggle is at the heart of the crisis in Colombo

For democracy in South Asia, it is crisis time once again. In Sri Lanka, president Chandrika Kumaratunga has precipitated a dangerous constitutional impasse by striking at the heart of prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's popularly elected government. In an extraordinary series of moves, she has sacked three key ministers in the UNP government, suspended parliament, called out the army and declared a state of 'short-term' emergency. In keeping with the cloak-and-dagger nature of the unfolding political drama, Ms Kumaratunga's "coup" was staged at a time when the prime minister was away on a state visit to the US, ironically to solicit support for the peace process. In the recent past, the Lankan president had voiced increasing impatience with the peace negotiations, charging Mr Wickremesinghe with ceding far too much ground to the Tigers. Ms Kumaratunga has claimed that her actions are aimed at "preventing a further deterioration of the security situation" in the island nation. But given the long history of friction between the two leaders, not many would be inclined to agree with such an assessment. Clearly, a major reason for the showdown lies in Lanka's system of political dyarchy — an institutional arrangement, cutting across many South Asian states, which allows for more than one centre of legitimate constitutional authority, inevitably giving rise to a fraught and unstable environment.

In the Sri Lankan case, the president resorted to a pre-emptive strike in the backdrop of moves by ruling party members to impeach the chief justice, and thus circumvent her constitutional authority. Beyond the power struggle, there is another important facet to the Lankan situation, namely, the Eelam question. While Ms Kumaratunga has declared her continuing commitment to the ceasefire, it is clear that the president is not averse to exploiting the fears of the majority Sinhala community for political ends. Yet, Mr Wickremesinghe's peace strategy, based on extending the greatest possible political autonomy to the Tigers within the framework of a unified Sri Lanka, remains the only reasonable basis for a negotiated settlement to the Tamil question. While the problem of secessionist movements cannot be resolved through the creation of yet more states, staying with the old statist paradigm of majoritarian will, absolute sovereignty and extreme cartographic anxiety is even less helpful. What is required is a new political imagination which goes beyond the antiquated logic of nation-states. In one word, no independence but unlimited devolution. And that's as true of the Tamil question in Lanka as it is of the separatist movement in Kashmir.

Sri Lanka 11/9/03

Sri Lankan Cabinet wants Ministers' portfolios restored

7/11

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 6. Sri Lanka's political standoff continued for the third day today with the Cabinet asking the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, to restore to the Ministers the three sensitive portfolios taken over by her and "immediately reconvene" Parliament and Ms. Kumaratunga assuring the nation that the steps were "in the greater interest" of the nation's "sovereignty and security".

The President's office said the United National Front Government, headed by the Prime

Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, "will continue negotiations" with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

"The President is committed to the continuity of the ceasefire agreement and to keep open the channel of communication with the LTTE and to a negotiated settlement within a united country," a Presidential Secretariat statement said. "The UNF Government will continue to negotiate with the LTTE and will be guided and supported in its quest for a negotiated settlement of the decades-long separatist crisis," it said.

A sense of uncertainty has descended on the peace process after President Kumaratunga took over the Defence, Interior and Mass Communication portfolios on Tuesday.

The Cabinet, which is awaiting the Prime Minister's return from the U.S. tomorrow, criticised the emergency orders as "short-sighted and directed by narrow political considerations" and wanted all the orders passed by the President in the last two days reversed.

The Cabinet, which met yesterday, also expressed its "firm opinion" that "any change in

the portfolios and subjects should not be made by the President without prior consultation with the Prime Minister, as per the written advice of the Attorney-General". It "disapproved" of the President's action when the Prime Minister was away and said such steps would have "detrimental effects on the peace process and the economy".

Peace and normality prevailed in the island nation in the last two days. Ms. Kumaratunga assured industry leaders that her decision was taken "after careful thought", to ensure "national security and thereby increasing investor confidence".

According to reports from northern Sri Lanka, the LTTE has commenced a phased withdrawal of its cadres from the Government-controlled north and east over the last two days. Stating that it was watching the situation and that a decision "would be taken by its leadership", the rebels have not commented on the political developments.

Another report on Page 11

Chandrika calls up Vajpayee

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, informed the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, that India was "anxious" about the recent political developments in the island nation. India's concern about the Sri Lankan situation was conveyed to Ms. Kumaratunga when she telephoned Mr. Vajpayee this evening, official sources said here.

During the 20-minute conversation, Mr. Vajpayee said a constitutional crisis should be averted, the peace process need to continue and an acceptable solution to the current problems emerge through "internal political dialogue."

According to sources, Ms. Kumaratunga briefed him about the latest developments in the island nation.

"She expressed her support for a continuation of the peace process."

THE HINDU

7 NOV 2003

7 NOV 2003

Chandrika declares emergency

Insists LTTE truce will hold

TIMES NEWS NETWORK
AND AGENCIES

Colombo\New Delhi: Sri Lanka's political crisis deepened on Wednesday as President Chandrika Kumaratunga declared a state of emergency while more than half of the country's parliamentarians pledged their support to the President's rival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Quoting from a letter signed by 124 of the country's 225 members of parliament, labour minister Mahinda Samarasinghe told reporters that they had full faith in the Prime Minister. The MPs also rejected Tuesday's firing of the ministers of defence, police and the media by Ms Kumaratunga.

The broad support for the PM could make it politically difficult for Ms Kumaratunga to use her executive powers to dismiss Mr Wickremesinghe. How the showdown could play out remains unclear.

The state of emergency—which allows the military to enter homes without search warrants, arrest people without reason and hold them for lengthy periods—is certain to infuriate the Tamil Tiger rebels, who have fought a two-decade war for independence for the country's Tamil people but who have held to a cease-fire with the government for

more than 18 months.

But officials insist the President, who is commander of the armed forces and has wide executive powers, will not restart the bloody 20-year civil war and will honour the shaky cease-fire with the LTTE. Lakshman Kadirgama, a top aide to Ms Kumaratunga, said, "The President has absolutely no intention whatsoever of resuming hostilities."

Despite his statement, rebel fighters in several regions were put on alert by LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran.

Norway, the official mediator in the peace process, said it was following the developments in Sri Lanka closely but refrained from commenting on Ms Kumaratunga's decision to declare a state of emergency.

In New Delhi, external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha said on Wednesday that India hoped the events would not lead to a constitutional crisis and would not affect the peace process. "We hope the Lankan leadership will be able to sort out the issues that have arisen through dialogue among themselves," he said.

MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

Crisis in Lanka
Live Updates

visit www.timesofindia.com

The divided island

Sri Lanka should know that it won't be able to handle security challenges without consensus

MANY would maintain that, surprising as it was, Tuesday's potential constitutional crisis in Sri Lanka was in the making for some time. Tensions were building up on many counts and on many fronts, especially after the peace talks were suspended in April last. But the LTTE's counter-proposals of October 31 were clearly the final straw on the back of Sri Lanka's constitutional camel, already troubled by the opposing stands of the two main political parties on the strategy to be adopted in dealing with an issue so vital for the future of the country. It is sad that in spite of two decades of violent polarisation in an intrinsically plural and democratic Sri Lanka, the divide between the two major political parties, if anything, appears to have deepened. But the trigger, obviously, has been the LTTE's proposals which are nothing more than a thinly disguised agenda for the creation of a separate sovereign state for itself.

Even a cursory study of the October 31 proposals of the LTTE indicates that the Tamil Tigers have followed their favourite strategy of putting forward extremist demands and keep enough leeway for its hardliners to take charge when things actually start to move toward some sort of resolution. It seems that, contrary to what might have been expected after the breakdown of the peace talks last April, the LTTE has not put forward a workable

proposition on which dialogue could restart. At the same time, the details of the present proposal would indicate that the LTTE would want to see negotiations breakdown in the face of its over-reaching demands, while it continues to consolidate its position to achieve long-term objectives. There have been reports of the Tigers expanding their rule in the north and establishing positions around Trincomalee bay in the east.

The problem is not merely one involving the extremist goals and tactics of the LTTE, but the divisions between Sri Lanka's dominant political parties. No country can handle serious challenges to its security and sovereignty without a bipartisan consensus on the goals and methods of dealing with them. A fractious polity is just what the LTTE has always tried to take advantage of in the past and has been a major factor in complicating the situation. The two political parties must come together in dealing with the fundamental challenges to the security and survival of a plural state. India has always stood for these and sacrificed the lives of nearly 1,200 of its soldiers to ensure that the integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka is sustained and strengthened. The present crisis would have served a great cause if it helps rekindle a bipartisan consensus to deal with the grave challenges that the country so obviously faces.

Court upholds President's 'plenary executive power'

By V.S. Sambandan

S. Lanka
11
COLOMBO, NOV. 5. The Sri Lankan Supreme Court today said the Defence Minister has to function subject to the "plenary executive power of the President". A five-member Bench, headed by the Chief Justice, unanimously ruled that the plenary executive power was "vested and reposed with the President". The determination assumes significance, as one of the questions about the working of the cohabitation Government was whether the powers of the Defence Minister was subordinate to those of the President.

Conventionally, Sri Lankan Executive Presidents have held the Defence portfolio, but after the 2001 Parliamentary elections, the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, gave that portfolio to Tilak Marapone, a Minister of the United National Front. Over the past 18 months, Ms. Kumaratunga had raised concerns over the security situation and said the Government was turning a blind eye to the LTTE activities.

On Tuesday, Ms. Kumaratunga, exercising her constitutional powers, took control of three Ministries including Defence and Interior.

In addition to plenary powers, the court's determination was sought if amendments by the Defence Minister to existing regulations on retirement had "interfered" with the President's powers.

On this question, the Supreme Court in its 14-page determination said the Defence Minister had "no legal authority to amend the existing regulations under the Army, Navy and Air Force Acts" and that the changes made were "*ultra vires*, invalid and of no force or avail in law".

Sri Lanka: uncertainty over issues of governance

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 5. By asserting her constitutional powers, the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has jolted the ruling United National Front (UNF) into re-evaluating the status of the island's first real cohabitation government. Tuesday's rapid developments are likely to cast a spell of uncertainty on issues of governance. They could culminate in a forced cohabitation, a changed Parliamentary configuration or, in the extreme scenario, yet another general election.

In its own way, Ms. Kumaratunga's actions are the culmination of a political showdown in the making, since the UNF won a Parliamentary majority in the 2001 elections. Sri Lanka's 1978 Constitution vests all executive powers on the directly elected President.

From the signing of last year's ceasefire agreement to Tuesday's Presidential move, there has been consistent, if controlled, friction between the President and the Prime Minister, spanning both constitutional and political arenas. The practical ex-

clusion of Ms. Kumaratunga from the latest peace process was a contentious issue.

Subsequently, the inadequate media coverage to her reservations on the manner in which the peace process was handled and attempts to chip away the powers of the Executive President set the stage for the flexing of the Constitutional muscle.

Fearing dissolution since it completed one year in office, the Prime Minister, Ranil

With a slender one-seat majority in Parliament, the UNF, with 114 MPs, depends largely on the support given to it by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Included in this Front are members from the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (15), the Ceylon Workers Congress (3), the Up Country People's Front (2) and one more MP. The Opposition People's Alliance with 77 MPs, is the second largest party, followed by the left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), with 16 MPs.

Sri Lanka's elections, based on Proportional Representation and the List System, make ruling parties dependent on minority parties. In the weeks to follow, the stand taken by the Tamil and Muslim political parties would be crucial for the numbers game.

The prospects of elections are broadly directed by moves to forge an alliance between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the JVP.

As these two hold contrasting views on the peace process, the way out of an election the island can ill-afford would be a forced but sincere attempt at cohabitation.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Wickremesinghe's administration has been trying many political manoeuvres, climaxing in the move to impeach the Chief Justice. This sparked the move to prorogue Parliament.

In the present context, changing the Parliamentary configuration would be difficult. A forced cohabitation, therefore, is the next option. The manner in which the next phase of the island's cohabitation politics moves would depend on how Mr. Wickremesinghe responds after his return from the U.S.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2003

SRI LANKA IN CRISIS AGAIN

SRI LANKA'S TWO-year-old cohabitation experiment now stands at the edge of collapse. The responsibility for precipitating the crisis lies not with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has alleged, but with his Government's adventurist move to impeach, first, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and, then, the President herself. In dismissing three senior Ministers of Mr. Wickremesinghe's United National Front Government, including the Defence Minister, in proroguing Parliament for two weeks, and in bringing on an Emergency, President Kumaratunga was reacting in the main to an offensive launched by the UNF to get her out of the way against the grim backdrop of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam unfurling proposals for a *de facto* separate state.

Since the beginning of their uneasy partnership in December 2001, the UNF Government has been trying to divest Ms. Kumaratunga of the executive role granted to her office by the 1978 Constitution and to turn her into a lame duck President. Ms. Kumaratunga's position as commander-in-chief of the armed forces has been especially contentious as it has given her leeway to intervene in the Norway-assisted peace process with the LTTE much more than Mr. Wickremesinghe, or for that matter the LTTE, wants. Several times, the President has raised objections to the conduct of the LTTE during the ceasefire where the UNF Government has been prepared to overlook such conduct. On Tuesday, in response to two sensitive questions referred to it by the President under its consultative jurisdiction, the Supreme Court gave an opinion affirming the President's "plenary executive power" in matters relating to defence. The UNF had planned to pre-empt this opinion by initiating a move to impeach the Chief Justice who was considered close to the President. By proroguing Parliament, President Kumaratunga has blocked that move, and by taking control of

three Ministries, she has asserted the executive powers that are constitutionally hers. Were these moves too hasty or were they unavoidable? They have certainly pitted Ms. Kumaratunga in open confrontation with the UNF Government. From here on, cohabitation no longer seems a viable option. In fact, there appears to be no serious option except the dissolution of Parliament and a third election in four years. With the public mood all for the negative peace that the UNF-engineered ceasefire has ushered in and at the same time appreciative of the President's wariness of the LTTE, another election may not result in any substantive change in Sri Lanka's political landscape. It will only muddy the waters further.

All in all, the present situation is a mess Sri Lanka could have done without at this stage. Both President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe have had a rare, if unwitting, meeting of minds on the proposals presented by the LTTE for an interim administration. Both have found the proposals unacceptable but have said the way forward is through negotiations. Under other circumstances, such convergence of views might have enabled the two sides to present a united response to the LTTE. The present disarray is the Sri Lankan Tamil stereotype of Sinhala politicians come true. It will give the LTTE an opportunity to make yet another case for the secession of North-East Sri Lanka by arguing that the divisions among Sinhalese politicians run so deep that they will never come to an agreement on the resolution of the Tamil question. When Sri Lanka voted in the UNF in 2001, there were two ways of looking at the mandate. One was to see it as a vote against Ms. Kumaratunga's governance. The other was to see it as a verdict to force both sides of the divided polity to work together. Sri Lanka's salvation still lies in the second interpretation. Neither President Kumaratunga nor the UNF Government should hesitate to roll back their actions of the last few days, if there is even a ghost of a chance.

CEASEFIRE ACCORD STANDS: KADIRGAMAR

Chandrika declares 'short-term' emergency

By V.S. Sambandan *S. Lanka*

110
COLOMBO, NOV. 5. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today issued orders for a "short-term" emergency in the island to "maintain essential services". She also reiterated her commitment to the peace process and said she had no intention to "resume or provoke the resumption of violence".

A day after it lost three Ministerial portfolios, the ruling United National Front (UNF) said it enjoyed the confidence of a majority 124 MPs in the 225-member Parliament, and would not resort to any unconstitutional move. It said it would go ahead with its budget-making process. The "arbitrary" move by the President — though entirely constitutional — "infringed" the "fundamental criteria" of democracy.

The Presidential Secretariat scotched the speculation that prevailed during the day that the President had taken over the Finance portfolio as having "absolutely no truth".

Earlier in the day, the President met the service commanders, and passed orders for a short-term emergency. The move, according to the Presidential Secretariat, was aimed more at maintaining normality. "The emergency will be for a short-term" and is "purely to maintain essential services, if required," Defence and Presidential Secretariat sources told *The Hindu*.

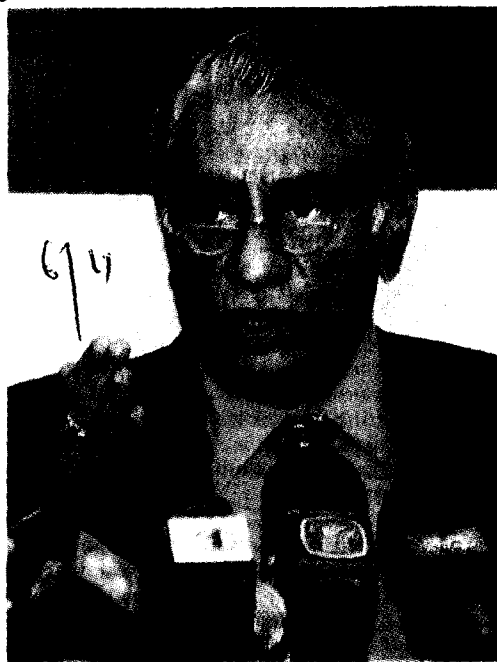
The period would also be used to "take stock of the security situation," the sources said. A gazette notification, specifying the period of emergency, is expected tomorrow. Ms. Kumaratunga's constitutional position was further strengthened, with a five-member Supreme Court Bench unanimously determining that the "plenary Executive power including the defence of Sri Lanka is vested and reposed with the President".

The President's Senior Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar, said the President had "specifically asked" him to state that "the ceasefire agreement stands and will stand. There is no question about it". Also, the President had "no intention of resuming or provoking the resumption of violence".

Unity 'non-negotiable'

On the peace process and the negotiations with the LTTE, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, headed by Ms. Kumaratunga, said that "some of the provisions" in the LTTE's counter-proposals "may be talked about". But the "sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unity of Sri Lanka is not negotiable", Mr. Kadirgamar said.

Elaborating on the SLFP's critique of the LTTE's counter-proposals, Mr. Kadirgamar said the rebels' demand for plenary powers in the northeast would lead to an "erosion of powers" of the Sri Lankan Government. While the preamble



The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's Senior Adviser, Lakshman Kadirgamar, makes a point during a press conference in Colombo on Wednesday. — AFP

of the proposals revealed the LTTE mindset, if its demand of the "immediate vacation" of the armed forces from the northeast was met, the "whole of the NorthEast will crumble", he said.

The LTTE's demand on marine and offshore resources would bring the role of the Sri Lankan Navy "to naught" and give the LTTE control over two-thirds of the island's coast, extending up to the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Later this evening, in a show of unity, UNF Ministers addressed a press conference, in which they said the ruling party was "firmly in control" of Parliament.

The Presidential move, the Chief Government Negotiator, G.L. Peiris said, came at a time when the peace process had "reached a particularly delicate and significant stage".

The Finance Minister, K.N. Choksy, said the move on the eve of the presentation of the budget had hit investors' confidence. The economy had performed well during the last two years, with increases in growth rates, a decline in inflation and appreciation of the Sri Lankan rupee. The Cabinet Ministers also said they would send the letter of support, signed by 124 MPs to the Speaker and the President.

Editorial on Page 10;
More reports on Page 11

Urgent corrective action: Chandrika

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 4. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today described her move to take over three Ministerial portfolios as an "urgent corrective action" and reiterated her commitment to peace.

"I remain willing to discuss with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) a just and balanced solution of the national problem, within the parameters of unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty," Ms. Kumaratunga told the nation tonight.

"I wish to assure the minorities of the country, especially the Tamil and Muslim communities that their concerns will be given due and serious consideration in trying to reach a negotiated settlement," Ms. Kumaratunga said.

Sri Lanka's directly elected Executive President is also the head of state, head of government, head of Cabinet and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) headed by Ms. Kumaratunga is the island's main political party and was in power between 1994 and 2001.

The "disturbing developments of the past few months" and the "the ineffective steps taken by the administration to ensure national security" led her to "take the view that firm and steadfast action is necessary to remedy this situation", she said.

The Ministries of Interior and Defence, have an "immediate impact" on the security situation, Ms. Kumaratunga pointed out, adding that she would ensure the media "full freedom of expression".

Ms. Kumaratunga won her second and final term of office as President in 1999. But the SLFP lost the 2001 Parliamentary polls to the United National Front, propelling two sharply opposed political parties into a bitter cohabitation government. The UNF, headed by the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, won the polls on the peace

plank, and started negotiations with the LTTE last year. The talks broke down this April and later, the LTTE came out with its counter-proposals — the first in 30 years — on October 31. Mr. Wickremesinghe is also seen as the UNP's next Presidential candidate.

Describing the move as "not an effort against any party or individual but done only in the exercise of the duties and responsibilities bestowed on me under the Constitution in the overall national interest," Ms. Kumaratunga said she would

ensure "full media freedom".

On the peace process, Ms. Kumaratunga said she intended to continue with her efforts "to arrive at a negotiated settlement" that would "satisfy the aspirations of all the communities" and that she remained "committed to the preservation of a pluralist, democratic society throughout Sri Lanka".

Ms. Kumaratunga, credited with changing the governmental approach to conflict resolution from war to peace, presented a draft constitution providing

wide-ranging powers to the regions in 2000. That draft was opposed by the UNP, which was then in the Opposition. The draft constitution, she said, was "an expression of my determination to ensure that a just solution acceptable to all was brought about". But it "was reviled and burnt in the chamber of Parliament by members of the main opposition party", she recalled. The President also appealed for calm and said she would "not tolerate revenge and lawlessness from whatever quarter it may come".

It's precipitating a crisis: Ranil

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, NOV. 4. The visiting Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe, today accused the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, of precipitating a national crisis "in an attempt to subvert the mandate" given to his Government by the people in December 2001 — one that had been reinforced by the local authority elections of last March.

The Sri Lankan Prime Minister's office issued a statement in Colombo — and made available here — in which Mr. Wickremesinghe called on the people, the armed forces, the police and public service "to remain calm and vigilant in the face of this deliberate attempt of endangering the peace process which we will together overcome".

Mr. Wickremesinghe is on a high profile visit to the United States and will be meeting the U.S. President, George W. Bush, at the White House on Wednesday morning. After his meeting with Mr. Bush, the Sri Lankan leader is to briefly



interact with the media where he is expected to talk about not only his interactions with the American President but also the current political and constitutional crisis in his country.

Senior officials here said there was no change in Mr. Wickremesinghe's schedule. Besides meeting Mr. Bush, he will confer with many senior officials of the Republican administration, leading members of Congress and specialists at think tanks. He has already met the Deputy Secretary of State, Richard

Armitage, and is due to see the U.S. Trade Representative later this afternoon. Mr. Wickremesinghe, in his statement, himself emphasised that he would stick to his schedule in the U.S. "which is part of the ongoing process of consolidating the peace, unity and economic prosperity of all our people".

"...your Government will not allow this desperate and irresponsible attempt to undermine the peace process and economic prosperity of the people to succeed," he said stressing that his Government would not be deviated from the mandate it had been given.

Mr. Wickremesinghe argued that the actions of the President were aimed at plunging the country into "chaos and anarchy".

"It is blatantly obvious that these opportunistic actions are aimed to deprive the people of the economic and social benefits which they are on the verge of reaping as a result of the solid foundations" laid by the Government over the last two years, he said.

SLFP for talks on core issues

THE HINDU

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 4. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party today expressed "grave concern" over the proposals released by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam but said it was for "immediate" resumption of talks that should address the "core issues of the conflict".

In a 14-page statement, the SLFP, headed by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, said the proposals for an interim self-governing authority (ISGA) laid "the legal foundation for a future, separate, sovereign state". The proposals, it said, "clearly affect the sovereignty of the Republic of Sri Lanka and violate its Constitution".

On the need for resumption of talks, Sri Lanka's main Opposition party, which presented a draft constitution in 2000 to provide for greater powers to the regions, said it "would like to see the immediate commencement of talks involving all parties concerned on the core issues which need to be addressed if the resolution of the conflict is to be brought to finality".

The SLFP criticised the rebels' proposals on both conceptual and legal grounds, on the basic point that the sovereignty of the island-nation was undermined.

The preamble of the LTTE's counter-proposals, the SLFP said, laid the ground for

self-determination and "revealed" the rebels' "mindset". The preamble made the rebels "case for a self-governing authority, which could ultimately become a separate state".

The LTTE, the party said, was "getting ready for the day when it could argue that as "negotiations are unsuccessful", it would have "no alternative but to go for a separate state". The SLFP also criticised the proposals for not adhering to democracy and pluralism in the northeast. "Democracy cannot be enjoyed by the people of the South and be denied to the people of the North and East," it said.

The LTTE's proposals had "hugely significant statements and omissions" that "affect sovereignty" and "violate the Constitution".

'Right to secede' THE HINDU
The provision on elections, the SLFP said, was "an extremely important indication of the LTTE's ultimate objective" as it "conceals the power or right to secede".

In its clause-by-clause criticism, the party said the executive power of the President would also be "seriously eroded" as the ISGA demanded "plenary powers" for governance.

No mention was made about Parliament,

the Supreme Court and other institutions, while the phrase Government of Sri Lanka was used only when it had to give something to the ISGA, the critique said, noting that these were pointers to "the complete marginalisation" of the state.

There was also an imminent "serious erosion" of the Government's role in security with the demand that "all occupied land in the northeast be immediately vacated"; while the demand for control over marine resources, was "highly dangerous to the sovereignty of the State". The coastline of the northeast, it pointed out, amounted to nearly two-thirds of the island's shores.

While the composition of the ISGA was for an LTTE majority, the dispute settlement process, with the involvement of the International Court of Justice, "virtually confer the status of a sovereign entity", the SLFP said. The SLFP, which lauded the stand taken by the international community on human rights, democracy and pluralism and "welcomed and supported" the joint statement issued in New Delhi after a meeting of the two Prime Ministers last month, urged the global community to "remain strongly committed to the salutary principles" laid down in the Tokyo declaration and "not to depart from them in the name of peace at any cost".

5 NOV 2003

HPD-1
5/11

Chandrika takes over *S. Lanka* defence, two other portfolios

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, NOV. 4. Sri Lanka today entered a phase of political uncertainty after the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, exercising her Constitutional powers, took over three Ministerial portfolios and prorogued Parliament.

In a bid to dispel uncertainty over the peace process, President Kumaratunga reiterated her commitment to peace and assured the minority communities, in an address to the nation tonight, that their concerns would not be cast aside while negotiating a lasting settlement to the protracted ethnic crisis.

The President said she was "willing to discuss with the LTTE, a just and balanced solution within the parameters of the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka".

Earlier in the day, citing "national interest", Ms. Kumaratunga removed three Ministers from key portfolios of Defence, Interior and Mass Communication, but allowed them to continue with other

responsibilities.

The President has, over the past months, accused the ruling United National Front (UNF) of "turning a blind eye" to the LTTE's "smuggling of weapons" and of manipulating the state media.

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, now in Washington, described the move as "opportunistic" and one that "precipitated a national crisis". The LTTE, which submitted its counter-proposals on October 31, said it was "carefully monitoring and studying the developments" and that its "leadership will decide what to do".

While the removal of the Ministerial portfolios reflected months of cohabitation struggle in governance, Parliament was prorogued against the backdrop of moves by ruling party MPs to impeach the Chief Justice, Sarath N. Silva, who is heading a Bench hearing on a petition seeking clarifications whether the President's powers overrode those of the Defence Minister. Against this backdrop, the Pres-



ident has pre-empted what was seen as a move to circumvent her Constitutional authority.

Conventionally, Sri Lanka's Executive Presidents, who are Constitutional heads of State and Government and Commanders-in-chief of the armed forces, have held the Defence portfolio, till Mr. Wickremesinghe's UNF won the 2001 general election and won Parliamentary majority, creating the first real cohabitation Government.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, in a statement, said the President's

move was "an attempt to subvert the mandate for peace" and called upon the security forces, the public services and the people to "remain calm and vigilant".

Later in the day, security forces were put on alert and the Army took positions in and around key installations. "This is a precautionary measure. We will assist police to maintain law and order and essential services, if the need arises," senior Army sources told *The Hindu*.

The decision to dismiss the Ministers was "taken after careful consideration, in order to prevent further deterioration of the security situation", the President's office said in a statement. The "reasons for taking this action in the national interest" were stated in the letters of removal sent to the Ministers, the President's office said.

Today's development marks the lowest point in Sri Lanka's bitter cohabitation politics and comes after the LTTE presented its proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority for the Northeast (ISGA).

Earlier in the day, the main Opposition, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), criticised the demand for an ISGA as one that was "unconstitutional" and would amount to conferring "virtual sovereignty" for an LTTE-majority run northeast. The party said it "would like to see the immediate commencement of talks involving all parties concerned on the core issues".

With today's developments, the latest peace process, initiated by the Wickremesinghe administration, enters a phase of further uncertainty, as the Prime Minister would not be in full political control.

"The real question now is what the President will do with the Wickremesinghe administration's negotiation process," political scientist Jayadeva Jayagoda told *The Hindu*.

Tamil defence analysts see today's developments, along with the SLFP's rejection of the LTTE's counter-proposals, as possibly "precipitating war", in the absence of the "moderating influence" of a UNF-controlled Defence Ministry. According to unconfirmed reports, the LTTE has called back its cadres who were in Government-held areas in the north and east.

Precipitating a crisis, says Ranil: Page 11

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2003

NOTHING FEDERAL ABOUT THIS

NOW THE WORLD knows what the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam really wants. The 20-month ceasefire in Sri Lanka has generated a lot of hype, and some hope, that the LTTE was willing to settle for some kind of federal solution within a united Sri Lanka. The proposals for an "Interim Self-Governing Authority for the North-East of the Island of Sri Lanka" passed on to the Sri Lankan Government through Norway's Ambassador make one thing plain. Federalism, the essence of which is the division of legislative, executive and judicial power between the Centre and the States or Provinces, is the last thing the Tigers have on their mind. The proposals, through which the LTTE seeks "plenary" control of the region in all aspects of governance, are a blueprint for a separate state. The document envisages no role for the Sri Lankan Government except in the appointment of its representatives to the so-called Authority, which will be controlled by the LTTE. Everything else in the document proposes governance separate and different from that existing in the rest of Sri Lanka. While disguising a demand for the recognition of a separate navy in clever words, the document makes no reference to the LTTE's plans for its own military. It is self-evident that no federal state has two standing armed forces.

These proposals cannot be acceptable to a sovereign state that is seeking to resolve a long-standing conflict without breaking up its boundaries. But in a sense, the LTTE is only seeking to legitimise what it already has, or to be more precise, what the Sri Lankan Government has granted it *de facto* since the February 2001 ceasefire. The Ranil Wickremesinghe Government's cautious response to the document — that "it differs in fundamental respects" from its own proposals but that "the Government is convinced that the way forward lies through discus-

sion of the issues arising from both sets of proposals" — expresses Sri Lanka's dilemma. While war is not an option it would like to contemplate, peace means talking to a self-aggrandising armed group that will yield no quarter. The Government sees no alternative to engaging the LTTE at the table and keeping faith in the fiction that it can chip away at its 'maximalist' position through prolonged negotiations. The LTTE proposal for a five-year term for the interim government is ostensibly to give the Government and the Tigers reasonable time to arrive at a "final settlement". The Government must go into negotiations in the knowledge that were it to accept the LTTE's interim proposals, a final settlement cannot be less than what it would have already granted — a *de facto* separate state under the Tigers' politico-military hegemony.

Through the years, LTTE strategy has been to maximise the divisions in the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan political establishment. The proposals for an interim self-governing authority are clearly meant to deepen the rift between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who represent the two opposed camps. The proposal for a five-year term pending a final settlement has been made in the confidence that a final settlement, based on these interim proposals, will never come given this sharp polarisation. In fact, the LTTE would like nothing better than to see Sri Lankan governance based on a fragile cohabitation collapse over the interim proposals, so that it can walk out of talks with a "We told you so!". It is up to Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and President Kumaratunga to see that this does not happen. Now that the LTTE has put down its demands in black and white, there must be clarity, coherence and firmness in the Sri Lankan political response.

Lanka peace hope

Jaffna, Nov. 2 (Reuters): Tired of a 20-year ethnic war that killed 64,000 people, Sri Lankans today welcomed a watershed power-sharing proposal by Tamil Tiger rebels that could revive stalled peace talks.

The proposal for a self-governing authority in the north and east was the first time the rebels put in writing an extensive roadmap to end the island's conflict, though some among the majority Sinhalese community rejected it. "It is a landmark proposal that Tamils everywhere have waited for," said S. Mohanadas, the vice chancellor of the University of Jaffna in the north of the island.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said yesterday an Interim Self-Governing Authority should have wide powers to tax, police, rebuild and use land in the war-battered north and east.

The government said the proposal could be taken up at peace talks despite the wide disparity between the rebel proposal and the wish for the central government to retain some control over policing, finances and land use. "They (the government) will need a strong stomach for tough bargaining in the months ahead," the editorial of the *Sunday Times* newspaper said.

Some saw the authority, with a majority of LTTE appointees, as a stepping stone for the rebels to create a separate state.

"We reject it. It should not be taken up for discussions," said Tilvin Silva, the general secretary of the Marxist People's Liberation Front, said in Colombo.

Implications of the LTTE proposals

S. Lanka 110-10 29/11
By Iqbal Athas

The demands for an Interim Self-Governing Authority made by the eight-page document are clearly outside Sri Lanka's Constitution and laws.

TIGER REBEL leader Velupillai Prabhakaran wants to rule Sri Lanka's North-East, two-thirds of the island nation's landmass, and four-fifths of the sea-coast for five years. What will follow next if no settlement is reached by then — whether there will be a stalemate, a war, or a state of Eelam, a new southern neighbour for India — remains a matter for conjecture.

But that in effect is the essence of the much-awaited proposals from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). "It is essential that any interim governing authority [must] have plenary power" to "accomplish the immediate return, resettlement, and rehabilitation of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees, and in order to reconstruct the North-East's economic, educational, and cultural infrastructure." This is what the organisation's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, told Norway's Ambassador Hans Brattskar after handing over the proposals in rebel-held Kilinochchi.

The demands for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) made by the eight-page document are clearly outside Sri Lanka's Constitution and laws. The arrangements demanded will be without any Government control. Yet the rebels want funds from the Government, including those accruing from the North-East. The use of these funds will be subject to audit by an Auditor General to be appointed by the rebels. The LTTE's demands shocked even leaders of the ruling United National Front Government although its Chief Negotiator, G.L. Peiris, declared that "the way forward lies through direct discussion." He explained that the rebel position "outlines the LTTE's vision regarding the framework for a political solution to the conflict" and that "disparities between the positions of the parties are evident."

The Government statement on Saturday officially acknowledged receipt of the proposals. Prof. Peiris received them the previous night from Ambassador Brattskar. The statement also referred to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's talks in New Delhi with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It noted that a Joint Statement at the end of the official visit "made a definitive statement about the parameters within which a negotiated political solution should be arrived at."

In reality, the LTTE demands have gone far, far beyond those definitive statements. India declared that an "interim arrangement should be an

integral part of the final settlement and should be in the framework of the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka." The rebel demands are not an integral part of a final settlement. They do endanger the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and consequently pose security concerns to India too. The rebels want the armed forces immediately to vacate land in the North and East and allow civilian owners "unfettered access." They also want compensation paid to these civilians for past dispossession. Conceding this demand in the northern Jaffna peninsula would make both the Palaly airbase, the only air link to the rest of the country, and the ports of Karainagar and Kankesanthurai vulnerable. Similarly, in Vavuniya, it will make the airstrip and a large military base totally vulnerable. The north-eastern China Bay airbase in Trincomalee would also be placed in a precarious position.

The LTTE wants control for ISGA over the marine and offshore resources of the adjacent seas (of the North-East) and the "power to regulate access thereto." This includes the Palk Straits where, at present, India and Sri Lanka share a maritime boundary. This demand raises serious questions over sovereignty. The "power to regulate access" will debar the Sri Lankan Navy its sovereign right of movement in the seas over which the LTTE is seeking control. How will it then protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka? The marine and offshore resources in the Palk Straits in particular are at present shared by fishermen from Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. Would this not therefore pose threats to Indian interests? On the other side, this very "power to regulate access" makes way for the sea-going arm of the rebels, the Sea Tigers, to gain both legitimacy and dominance in the seas off the North-East. That includes the Palk Straits. Such a development would see the emergence of a third navy in the region, besides that of India and Sri Lanka.

The LTTE wants an "absolute majority" for its nominees in the ISGA. This runs counter to India's position of supporting a "negotiated settlement acceptable to all sections of Sri Lankan society." Already, Rauf Hakeem, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim

Congress (SLMC), a constituent of the Government and the only Muslim member at the peace talks, has declared this to be "unacceptable," adding, "they do not reflect the aspirations of the Muslim people."

The LTTE proposals make no reference to Sri Lanka's Parliament or judiciary. Disputes over the agreement, if not resolved by Norwegian facilitators, are to be directed for arbitration to a tribunal with two representatives from each side. It will be headed by a chairperson agreed upon by the two sides. Under the proposals, the parties "shall" ask the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to appoint a chairperson in the event of a dispute over the appointment. Commenting on this in an editorial, *The Sunday Times* has noted that the ICJ is a body that deals only between sovereign states and that the LTTE demands equation with a sovereign entity. The editorial, which raised doubts about whether the proposals were "simply the stepping stone for Eelam," stated "the Government must take the rap for permitting the LTTE to make these grandiose claims." It added that it was the Wickremesinghe Government that "allowed things to fester during the period of the ceasefire from February last year... to date. They allowed banks, courts, taxation, IGPs, Chief Justices as they did the military build-ups, while they ignored the Muslim resentment." There is no role in the LTTE's proposals even for the nation's highest legal institution, the Supreme Court. Under the Constitution, Sri Lankans who have complaints about human rights infringements have recourse to this court. But the ISGA is to set up its own Human Rights Commission. Senior military officials in Colombo fear this may see many of their colleagues being tried for violations whilst serving in the North-East.

Barely 24 hours after the proposals became public, there was a flurry of activity. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who asked her senior party-men on Saturday night to avoid making comments until they were fully studied, was locked in intense discussion with leaders of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Months ago, moves for a joint front between her People's Alliance and the JVP broke down. Leaders of both sides be-

gan trading allegations against each other. Now the rebel proposals have triggered fresh talks for a common front. President Kumaratunga's People's Alliance will formally announce its official stance on the LTTE proposals on Monday. On Saturday night, Defence Secretary Austin Fernando directed Army Commander Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle, also Chief of Defence Staff, to confer with his colleagues in the Navy and the Air Force. They have been called upon to formulate an immediate report on what impact the LTTE proposals will have on national security interests.

Some questions over Indian investment and economic interests also arise from the proposals. Take for example the World War II vintage oil tank farm in Trincomalee, part of which has been leased out by the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC). The LTTE proposals say that "existing agreements will continue, but the Government of Sri Lanka shall ensure that all proceeds under such agreements are paid to ISGA. Any changes to such existing agreements should be made with the concurrence of the ISGA." This would mean that for the leasing arrangement in Trincomalee, the IOC would have to pay the LTTE-controlled ISGA instead of the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC).

Talks over these proposals are not expected until January next year. On Tuesday, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe meets George W. Bush at the White House. He will brief the U.S. President on the peace process, including the rebel proposals, and seek his support. He is to assure the U.S. President of a token Sri Lankan commitment of Army doctors and engineers to help Mr. Bush's efforts to restore normalcy in Iraq.

The clause dealing with elections in the LTTE proposals carries a strong message: "if no final settlement has been reached and implemented by the end of the said period of five years," an "Independent Commission appointed by the ISGA, shall conduct free and fair elections." What follows the elections has not been spelt out. But has not the LTTE armed itself for a future course of action? If no settlement is reached, can the rebels point to this fact and declare that they have chosen to go their own way? Through its preamble to the proposals and the demands it has made, the LTTE has made clear to the Sri Lankan Government and the international community what it stands for. It also appears to have made clear what it can do if these demands are not accepted.

LTTE demands full control over North-East

By V.S. Sambandan

KILINOCHCHI (SRI LANKA), NOV. 1. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today demanded an "Interim Self-Governing Authority for the North East (ISGA)," with a majority stake for itself and full control over regional administration "until a final settlement is reached and implemented."

Setting a five-year deadline for "a final settlement," the LTTE said that "if no settlement is reached and implemented" by then, the interim body's "independent election commission" would "conduct free and fair elections in accordance with international democratic principles under international observation" to choose the members of the ISGA. In the first phase, the LTTE, the Government and the Muslims in the northeast would nominate the members.

The Sri Lankan Government, which described the LTTE's offer as one that "differs in fundamental respects" from the one that it submitted to the Tigers on July 17. It said it would request facilitator Norway to arrange an "initial meeting" in the coming weeks to "pave way for the resumption of talks" early next year.

The LTTE's demands, which will have far-reaching consequences for the structure of Sri Lanka's unitary state, include "all powers and functions in relation to

regional administration exercised by the Government in and for the northeast" including revenue, law and order, land and marine resources. In addition to these sensitive issues, the LTTE has sought control over finances with powers over domestic and international borrowings and to "engage in or regulate internal and external trade."

The organisation's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, termed the eight-page proposals — the first made by the Tigers in decades of separatist fighting — as "reasonable, rational and practical."

Ready for negotiations

"We are prepared to negotiate with the Government," he said, adding that the Tigers had asked facilitators, Norway, to arrange for a meeting with the Government "at a mutually convenient time." The LTTE did not fix any timeframe for the resumption of talks, as these were "always detrimental," but wanted them "at the earliest" so that it could "clarify" its position.

Striking a note of optimism, Mr. Tamilchelvan said: "We believe the Government and the international community will accept the proposals in full." Though the two sides have indicated willingness for an early resumption of talks, serious differences persist on the Government's offer and the LTTE's

counter-proposals.

Wide-ranging powers

Colombo had proposed an LTTE majority interim administration, but specifically excluded control over police, land, security and revenue when it made an offer to the LTTE for a provisional administrative structure.

In sharp contrast, the LTTE wants the ISGA to have "plenary powers for the governance of the Northeast," including

Fundamental differences; text of proposals. Page 10

raising revenues and levying taxes.

The LTTE has addressed the sensitive issue of de-militarising the North-East by asking for powers over "resettlement of occupied lands." The peace talks had broken down last April after serious differences between Colombo and the Tigers on this issue, as the LTTE wanted the Army moved out of the northern High Security Zones "to facilitate resettlement of the internally displaced people."

The LTTE counter-proposals — which deal with human rights, secularism, prohibition against discrimination, prevention of bribery, protection of all communities, separation of powers, finance, district committees, administra-

tion, land, marine and natural resources and settlement of disputes — are likely to raise serious questions in a highly sensitive polity as they touch upon the core issues to the conflict. Moreover, any move away from the unitary Constitution would be difficult.

"A new Government structure is required," Mr. Tamilchelvan said, reiterating the rebel position that a solution would have to be worked outside the island's unitary Constitution.

Asked if the counter-offer was a stepping-stone to a separate Eelam, he said that "a careful study, not a perusal," would show that they were "ready to consider a viable option to gain basic freedoms for the Tamils." Asked if the LTTE was giving up its demand for a separate state, Mr. Tamilchelvan, however, said that was for the "people to decide" and would depend on how satisfied they were with the manner in which the ISGA functioned. "The LTTE does not have the right to say we have given up or are continuing with the demand."

On the possibility of opposition to the counter-proposals in the backdrop of rivalry between the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, he said: "We do not want to comment on southern politics. It is a historic truth that the Opposition has always deterred a solution. The President is a continuation of that past."

A historic document: LTTE

By V.S. Sambandan

KILINOCHCHI (SRI LANKA), OCT. 31. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today submitted its counter-proposals for an interim administrative structure for Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority northeast.

"It is no doubt a historic document. It will serve as a foundation for taking forward the political process to a peaceful resolution of the conflict," the LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, told *The Hindu*, after submitting the proposals.

"We will talk based on our proposals," Mr. Tamilchelvan said, when asked if they were negotiable.

The document outlining the LTTE demands was handed over to the Norwegian facilitators at five past noon in the organisation's peace secretariat here. In the past, the rebels had rejected offers by Colombo as "inadequate", but did not list their demands.

The offer, Mr. Tamilchelvan said, "was an attempt to gain temporary relief for the sufferings and distress faced by our people".

"The Tamil people", he said, "will get a temporary respite only if the Government accepts our proposals. Only then can we

Peiris, on his return to the island's capital this evening.

The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, left Sri Lanka for Washington on Thursday night. He is scheduled to meet the U.S. President, George Bush.

The proposals are likely to include a demand for full political control over the northeast, including those specifically excluded by the Government in the July 17 offer for a Provisional Administrative Structure with a majority stake for the LTTE to run the northeast.

On May 22, Mr. Tamilchelvan had emphasised the need to work outside Sri Lanka's unitary Constitution to find an "acceptable solution". During its consultations with constitutional experts in Sri Lanka and abroad, the LTTE had sought opinion on the possibility of invoking the 'Doctrine of Necessity' — an axiom under which an existing Constitution could be replaced.

Before submitting the proposals, the LTTE held a series of talks with representatives from some Tamil political parties. "Whether the Sinhala nation accepts them or rejects them, it will be a victory for the Tamils," M.K. Sivajilingam, an MP from the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, told *The Hindu* here this afternoon.



The chief Government negotiator, G.L. Peiris, going through the LTTE's counter-proposals in Colombo on Friday as the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Hans Bratskar, looks on. — Photo: Sriyantha Waipola

rebuild the living conditions of our people."

"It is an event of great importance," Hans Bratskar, the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, told journalists after receiving the LTTE's offer. "This is the property of the LTTE," he said, declining to share either Government negotiator, G.L.

Lanka peace brokers to review role

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Oct. 29. — Nordic nations said they will re-assess their role in Sri Lanka as President Chandrika Kumaratunga refused to budge from her demand for removal of the head of the chief Scandinavian truce monitor.

In a statement issued through the Norwegian embassy here, Norwegian foreign minister Mr Jan Petersen said they had recalled truce monitoring chief, Major General Trygve Tellefsen, for consultations on the latest crisis.

He said Norway will consult with Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden about their contributing observers to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission following Ms Kumaratunga's complaint that Maj. Gen. Tellefsen jeopardised Sri Lanka's national security.

Ms Kumaratunga demanded that the chief monitor be removed claiming he favoured the rebels by telling them of a navy plan to raid a rebel ship suspected of smuggling arms. The alleged warning, she said helped the

ship avoid capture.

Norway "will consult closely with the governments which participate in the SLMM in order to jointly assess the situation and the implications for the presence of the international monitors in Sri Lanka," the statement said. It, however, added that the SLMM will continue to monitor the ceasefire between government forces and the LTTE pending Oslo's own inquiry.

"In order to ensure a continued process of smooth monitoring of the ceasefire agreement, a speedy replacement of Maj. Gen. Tellefsen as head of the SLMM is all that is required," President Kumaratunga's office said on Monday.

Mr Petersen in a letter to the Lankan President said both her cohabitation government and the Tamil rebels will be consulted as parties to the ceasefire agreement before a final decision on Maj. Gen. Tellefsen is taken.

"The government of Norway remains committed to facilitating the peace process in Sri Lanka at the request of both parties," Mr Petersen said.



President Kumaratunga's demand for removal of the head of the chief Scandinavian truce monitor has forced the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission to reassess the contribution of truce monitors to the country.

Rights abuse: A probe by Sri Lanka's Human Rights watchdog into the disappearance of over 300 people in northern Sri Lanka has identified 44 military officers who were allegedly responsible for excesses, a member of the panel said. The panel appointed by Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission which probed 327 cases of disappearance between 1990 and 1998 said they gave the names of the 44 men to army chief Lionel Balagalle. Panel member Mr MCM Iqbal said they were also faulting the LTTE, especially for the treatment of Muslims.

LTTE date for truce terms

COLOMBO, Oct. 22. —
The LTTE on next Friday will hand over a long-awaited power-sharing plan hoped to kickstart fresh peace talks with the Sri Lankan government. "We have contacted the Norwegians and will hand over the proposal next Friday," rebel spokesman Daya Master said today.

The rebels' proposal outlining their demand for political and financial powers to run Tamil affairs in the island's northeast is seen as a signal of their willingness to resume talks.

SP Thamilselvan, the rebel political chief, will meet with mainstream Tamil political parties this week to brief them on the proposal, he said. — AP

S. Ashraff

LTTE and Muslims

40-10
21/10

By Nirupama Subramanian

At the heart of the problem is the LTTE's view of itself as the absolute ruler of the north-east.

IN OCTOBER 1990, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ordered the 100,000 Muslims then living in Jaffna to leave. The Muslims vacated their ancestral homes and lands and fled south to mainland Sri Lanka in less time than the 48-hour notice the Tigers gave them. Earlier that year, the Tigers killed over 100 men in a simultaneous attack on two mosques in eastern Sri Lanka. The incidents drove a wedge between Tamils and Muslims. The Muslims — who are linguistically Tamil — decided to strengthen a separate religion-based political identity rather than continue to affiliate themselves with Hindu and Christian Tamils on the basis of language.

Since then, they have grown as a political force in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) helped form and topple governments in Colombo. But despite the mutual distrust between Muslims and Tamils that arose from the LTTE's actions, the two communities managed to live in tenuous peace in the east, where Muslims are most numerous. Since the February 2002 ceasefire between the Government and the LTTE, that peace has become increasingly fragile. Muslims have discovered their political gains in Colombo count for little with the Tigers, now the de facto rulers of the north-east. They form the biggest minority in the Tamil-dominated region, but the Tigers, who have been permitted to run it pretty much independently of the Sri Lankan Government, are treating them the same way as Sinhala politicians treated Tamils.

The Tigers have been picking on Muslims in the east, harassing farmers, fishermen and traders from the community, extorting money from them, occupying their lands and kidnapping individuals for ransom. Even before the ceasefire, Muslims were particular targets of the Tigers. After the ceasefire, the incidents have become more frequent. The University Teachers' Human Rights (UTHR), a Sri Lankan rights group that focusses on the situation in the north-east, says in a recent report that 26 Muslims have died since the ceasefire. Two are missing. There have been at least five curfew situations. Earlier, Muslims could turn to the army or the Government for protection. Now, with the Government's *laissez faire* attitude towards the Ti-

gers, they feel stripped of that safety net.

The little fishing town of Mutur in Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka presents a clear picture of the current dynamic between the Tigers and Muslims. Trincomalee district has an even mix of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. Mutur, a one-hour boat ride from Trincomalee town across the waters of a wide bay, is home to 60,000 people, some 33,000 are Muslim, 22,000 Tamils and a thousand Sinhalese. Most of the Muslims are settled in the main town. Most of the Tamils live in the areas around it. After the ceasefire, Mutur was the scene of two major clashes between the two communities. The first incident came within months of the ceasefire. A concrete cross outside Mutur town was vandalised. Tamils, led by the Tigers, and Muslims clashed over the desecration. There were incidents of stone-throwing. Houses were damaged, a mosque was desecrated. The LTTE's office at Mutur, which had just then been opened under the terms of the ceasefire accord, came in for some stone-throwing. The violence spread to Valaichenai in Batticaloa where it assumed more serious proportions with fully armed Tamils fighting Muslims, resulting in deaths and injuries to many.

The tensions from that flare-up simmered till April this year when two Muslim youth from a fishing hamlet near Mutur disappeared after putting out to sea. Their families learnt that the two were being held by the Tigers in Sambur, an LTTE-controlled area. They visited Sambur every day to plead with the Tigers for the boys' release. Two weeks later, after the mother of one committed suicide triggering off riots in Mutur, the Tigers denied the boys were in their custody. By then, three people had died, houses and other property burnt and destroyed, and the divide between Mutur's Muslims and Tamils complete.

Denying their involvement in all these incidents, the Tigers allege a "third force" is inciting trouble between Tamils and Muslims to disrupt the peace process. But in a region where the Tigers have made it clear they brook no rivals and ruthlessly

kill anyone who challenges their authority, the allegation of a third force is egregious. Had there been such a force, the Tigers would have produced the evidence by now instead of merely making allegations. Or they would have swiftly eliminated it.

The Muslims are clear they have issues only with the Tigers and not with the Tamil people. They suspect the Tigers' eventual plan is to drive out their entire community from the east as they did in Jaffna. But they cannot do it as crudely. Instead, they are making it increasingly difficult for Muslims to continue living in the east by targeting their economy. Muslims control much of the trade and business in the east.

Why are the Tigers doing this? At the heart of the problem is the LTTE's view of itself as the absolute ruler of the north-east, which may be acceptable to Tamils but not to the Muslims. See this against the changing ethnic composition of the east: in 1981, when the last full census was conducted in Sri Lanka, Tamils were 43 per cent of the population in the eastern province, that is in Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara, while Muslims formed 33 per cent. The estimate now is that Muslims form nearly 40 per cent of the population, while Tamils are about 33 per cent. The changed proportions, the reasons for which are well-documented, have raised a question mark over the cherished Tamil notion that the north-east, from Jaffna to Ampara, forms a unified Tamil homeland.

In the mid-1990s, the SLMC pushed for a sub-regional council carved out of three Muslim majority enclaves in the east to be included in a new constitution that President Chandrika Kumaratunga was drafting with the aim of devolving powers to Tamils in the north-east. Or, the Muslims argued, keep the north and east as two separate provinces. Muslims fear that in a unified north-east they will drop to a mere 17 per cent of the region's population, putting them at the mercy of the majority Tamil population of the region. The late leader of the SLMC, M.H.M. Ashraff, agreed to drop the demand only after Ms. Kumaratunga had written in safeguards for Muslim rights and provisions for power-sharing be-

tween Tamils and Muslims in the draft 2000 Constitution that was later abandoned by the Government.

The present leadership of the SLMC is too beset by its own insecurities to help its embattled constituents in the east. In the first flush of the ceasefire, Rauff Hakeem, who has led the SLMC since Mr. Ashraff's death in 2000, rushed to meet the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, and signed a "memorandum of understanding" that the Tigers would not harass Muslims, would not impose "taxes" on them and would return the lands they had taken from Muslim farmers. The LTTE did not honour its commitments. Instead of cementing Mr. Hakeem's leadership of the Muslims, the Hakeem-Prabhakaran meeting became an endorsement of the LTTE's control over Muslims.

Now the Government of Ranil Wickremesinghe is preparing to legitimise the de facto rule of the Tigers over the north-east through an "interim administration". The Government proposals for the interim administration include representation for the Muslims. The Tigers are yet to respond to these proposals. In any case, the Tigers will hold the reins of any administrative set-up in the north-east. Hardline Sinhalese see in the present situation an opportunity to deny the Tamil claim of north-east Sri Lanka as a homeland, exacerbating tensions between Muslims and Tamils.

Meanwhile, the attitude of the Tigers has given rise to an eye for an eye atmosphere in Mutur. A Tamil youth disappeared after the killings of two Muslim boys in Trincomalee town in August. The UTHR report points to rising vigilantism among Mutur Muslims. Community leaders deny rumours they are arming themselves. They say they are trying to channel Muslim anger through democratic routes. But they also warn that if the LTTE continues to treat them badly, Muslim youth might begin to think that the only way to claim their rights from the Tamils is through militancy, just as the LTTE took to arms to win Tamil rights from the Sinhalese. The Sri Lankan Government must heed this warning. It cannot pretend this is an issue between Muslims and Tamils and therefore not its problem. Ultimately, the Government has to take responsibility for all its people, regardless of ethnicity.

THE HINDU

21 OCT 2004

The LTTE and the 'KP Factor'

By Iqbal Athas

*S. Shankh
19-10 15/10*

WHAT IS easily the most critical phase in Sri Lanka's near two-decade-old separatist war will unfold in the coming weeks: that is when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) spells out its demands to end the bloody ethnic conflict. It will be the first time in the history of its "armed struggle" that the organisation will put forward "counter-proposals" — a response to the Government's offer of a provisional interim administration for the North-East. Whatever character such demands may assume, there is no doubt they will have both political and security implications not only for Sri Lanka, but, equally importantly, for neighbouring India.

After five rounds of peace talks since the ceasefire agreement of February 22, 2002, the Tiger rebels pulled out — in April 2003. Their demand is for an interim administration with "full powers". The Government responded with two different sets of proposals, one after the other, only to find them rejected. The offer of a provisional interim administration sans police, security, land and revenue followed. Although it does not meet "Tamil aspirations", the LTTE said it would consider the offer without rejecting it outright. Hence the "counter-proposals". The Tigers have made it unequivocally clear that the future of the ceasefire will depend on the Government's response.

From his secure hideout in the jungles of Mullaitivu, the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, seems to be as adept politically as he is militarily. He is keeping both Government and Opposition leaders in awe and suspense in the run-up to the catalogue of demands in the making. It is not that he is making them nervous only about what he will ask for. Exacerbating that tension are the puzzling secret demands and preparations he is making. Both aspects are worrying not only the local intelligence community but also to their friendly counterparts.

One such demand, a most obliging Sri Lankan Government found, could not be made without rupturing relations with India. Norwegian peace facilitators, who were in Colombo last month, wished to know whether the Government had any objections to the inclusion of Shanmugam Kumaran Tharmalingam as a member of the rebel delegation at future peace talks. The Norwegians had checked, through their own channels; the man had not come to their adverse notice.

At first glance, the name, like the names of most other rebels, seemed harmless. But 48-year-old Tharmalingam was no ordinary rebel cadre. In fact, that was just one of more than 23 names by which he was known. Per-

The LTTE has made it unequivocally clear that the future of the ceasefire will depend on Colombo's response to its counter-proposals.

haps that was how the Norwegians learnt he had not come to their adverse notice. The man is better known as Kumaran Pathmanathan or simply "KP".

He heads the notorious KP Department, the procurement arm of the LTTE. He is the man responsible for equipping the rebels with a modern day arsenal to fight a high intensity war. He procured state-of-the-art military hardware, paid for them through secret bank accounts, and ensured they were shipped. He is elusive. His actions are secretive. He is known to keep direct contact only with Mr. Prabhakaran. Some of the world's best-known intelligence agencies, such as America's CIA and Britain's MI 5, have been on his trail. More often than not, local intelligence agencies on his trail have lost track as he hopped from one country to another. He was known to frequent Thailand.

It was a cursory check that revealed the facts. The Interpol Headquarters in Lyons, France had issued a Red Notice — so called on account of the red-flagged corner — containing a description, complete with photograph and other details. The red notice said "Tharmalingam is alleged to have been involved in the murder of Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May 1991 in Tamil Nadu, India."

Theories abound on why Mr. Prabhakaran made the request. Quite simply, getting on the list of peace negotiators would mean KP would be off the list of the world's most wanted men. With Sri Lanka's approval, the Norwegian facilitators would have made sure of that.

If that demand has not been accepted, evidence of further preparations for a weapons build-up has surfaced. This week Sri Lanka's national intelligence agency, the Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DII), appealed to friendly foreign intelligence agencies for help to obtain details of a rebel arms ship, Agasthi. This followed reports that a rebel cadre bit a cyanide capsule and committed suicide on board when authorities intercepted the vessel in an Indonesian port. Reports reaching the DII spoke of rebels paying heavy bribes to secure the release of both the dead body and the vessel.

The move saw the Sri Lankan Navy in the North-Eastern port city of Trincomalee being placed on full alert. Its only India-built Advanced Off-shore Patrol Vessel (AOPV) is scouring the deep seas while a newly acquired U.S.-built Beechcraft, fully equipped

with modern radar, is conducting air patrols.

The Tigers are going in for more state-of-the-art weaponry including surface-to-air, surface-to-surface-missiles and micro-light aircraft for an air wing, according to Sri Lankan intelligence sources, as part of planned efforts to strengthen their military machine. This is during the near 20-month-old ceasefire. Since the ceasefire agreement was signed, regional rebel leaders have been personally tasked to accomplish recruitment targets. This includes enlistment of "Eelappadai" (an Eelam civilian militia) where a salary of Rs 3,000 per month is paid. According to intelligence sources, the total rebel strength, which stood at 9,390 before the ceasefire, has risen to 19,750. This includes the civilian militia.

At least 30 per cent of the cadres are child soldiers, according to these sources. On October 9, the rebels held a highly publicised ceremony in Kili-nochchi to announce the release of 49 boys and girls. They were to go to a rehabilitation camp jointly run by the rebels and UNICEF. The move, ahead of the release of the LTTE "counter proposals," was undoubtedly an image-building exercise. But four days later, both UNICEF and the Norwegian peace monitors accused the rebels of continuing child abductions. There were 22 cases documented from the eastern Batticaloa district.

During the ceasefire, the ruling United National Front was keen to undo what its political predecessors did by trying to lease out the sprawling World War II Oil Tanks in Trincomalee to a U. S. firm — a move that angered late Indian Premier Indira Gandhi and led to the birth of Tamil militancy. The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, which saw Indian peacekeeping troops in Sri Lanka, forbade the lease of these tanks without New Delhi's imprimatur. Nearly a third of these 100 giant tanks, each with a capacity of a million gallons, were leased out to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).

The *Sunday Times* newspaper in Colombo revealed how the rebels had opened up new camps, re-occupied ones they abandoned, and were changing the security balance in the area. The virtual siege threatened not only Sri Lanka's but also India's security interests, the newspaper said. The opposition People's Alliance seized the issue and cautioned leaders in New Delhi. This week Defence Minister, Tilak Marapana, admitted that

the Tigers "have gradually crept in and established a stronger foothold." He told Parliament that this "all important factor" had been taken into "consideration" and "strategies structured" to meet any eventuality.

Mounting security concerns arising from rebel preparations and actions have jolted the Government into action. Despite the ceasefire, increased allocations are being made in next month's budget for defence. Hurried procurements are being made largely from Russia, China and Israel to update equipment for Army, Navy and Air Force.

While readying the armed forces, the Government appears to have opened up another front. A draft law, formulated for the third time, to deprive President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who is Commander-in-Chief, of her powers over defence and security is to be moved in Parliament. The Government argues that these laws are based on "defence reforms". A Committee tasked to undertake the exercise has run into controversy since its only military member is a former Army Commander who retired long before the outbreak of the separatist war. There have also been complaints from the military its ranks have not been consulted. Evidently, the Government wants to ensure it has control over the country's defence establishment should security concerns increase due to difficult demands from the LTTE. But President Kumaratunga's lawyers are preparing to move the Supreme Court to challenge its constitutionality.

In a move to send a strong signal to the Government that she is still the Commander-in-Chief, President Kumaratunga this week extended the term of office of the Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle, until June 30, 2004. She also named the Army Chief, due to retire at the end of the year, the Chief of Defence Staff. This is the first time a senior-most serving commander has been appointed to this position.

He will, as in the United States and India, have legal powers to give orders not only to the Army but also to the Navy and Air Force. For the Government, battles loom on two fronts, one the LTTE front and the other the President Kumaratunga front. It seems likely that the first salvo will come not from the rebels but from the President. Either way, there appears to be little choice for Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

(The writer, a specialist on Sri Lankan military and security matters, is Consultant Editor and Defence Correspondent, *The Sunday Times*, Colombo, and Correspondent for CNN, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, and *The Sunday Times*, London.)

We don't know what LTTE wants: Chandrika

By P.S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, OCT. 14. Identifying the Al-Qaeda and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as "the world's two most dangerous and ruthlessly efficient terrorist organisations", the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, told the World Economic Forum (WEF) here today that they "operate in South Asia" after being "born and nurtured" in that region.

Addressing a special session on 'the prospects for sustained peace and economic growth in South Asia' at the WEF's East Asia Economic Summit, she said that "every one of the seven states of this (South Asian) region, excepting the Maldives, faces challenges from armed militant groups." The Governments in South Asia "bear the responsibility of finding solutions to conflicts" that gave rise to militancy.

The security-related "focus on South Asia" was chosen as a special theme at the summit here in the specific context of the incremental economic interactions between the East Asian countries and India. The WEF and the Confederation of Indian Industry organised a working breakfast on India and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as "partners for progress".

Pointing to her country's free trade agreement (FTA) with New Delhi, Ms. Kumaratunga said Sri Lanka could act, too, as a gateway for market access to India. Without mentioning either India or Pakistan by name, she identified the political problems between them as a factor behind the slow pace of economic cooperation among the member-states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. On the security front, too, Ms. Kumaratunga did not

name Pakistan while characterising the Al-Qaeda as a terrorist outfit that was "born and nurtured" in South Asia.

Later, in a conversation with a select group of international journalists, Ms. Kumaratunga said a Sri Lanka-Pakistan FTA "is on the cards". Asked whether Sri Lanka had encountered India's sensitivities on this score, she said "we didn't have any objections or obstacles, as you call them, from the Indian side."

Fielding questions on various aspects of Sri Lanka's internal conflict and political situation, she said: "We still don't know what they (the LTTE) want... The leader has removed his main negotiator and replaced him with more hardline militant leaders of his party... they want an interim administration, which is what worries us, without any commitment to finally arrive at a negotiated settlement of the ethnic problem."

MOMENT OF TRUTH-II

5/8
2/2/99

Sri Lankan Tamils Should Use Opportunity To End Conflict

By SAM RAJAPPA

No political problem in contemporary history has been discussed for so long as the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka. From 1958 to the present series of talks, all aspects of the problem have been discussed and there is hardly room for further talks. In the past when the government of the day reached an agreement with the Tamils, the opposition party sabotaged it.

War of attrition

For the first time since the country became independent in 1948, both the major political parties — the Sri Lankan Freedom Party represented by Executive President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe of the United National Party are sharing power. The Tamils should use this opportunity to put an end to the vexatious conflict which has already claimed more than 80,000 lives in a war of attrition.

A federal constitution built upon the one left behind by the British colonial rulers might have avoided the crisis. Ethno-religious chauvinism and populist politics followed by the majority Sinhalese have made "federalism" suspect in Sri Lanka. Yet it was the Kandyan Sinhalese who sought a separate state first in a federal set-up in their submission to the Donoughmore Commission before independence.

The United Kingdom, a unitary state, has shown the world in the recent past how regional aspirations can be met without sacrificing its unity and territorial integrity. The Wales Act in 1998 established a National Assembly for Wales with 60 elected members and a council of ministers as in Indian states. The Welsh Assembly has considerable power to develop and implement policy on a wide range of subjects including agriculture, ancient monuments and historic buildings, culture, economic development, education and training, environment, health and health services, highways, housing, industry, local government, social services,

sport and leisure, tourism, town and country planning, transport and roads, and Welsh language.

If Sri Lankan Tamils want a parliament of their own instead of a legislative council, they could opt for the Scottish model which would give them even

enable the Tamils to develop the North-eastern province and protect their language and culture without compromising the unity of Sri Lanka.

For that, the LTTE should be prepared to face an election and cannot insist on Colombo hand-



more power than the Welsh Assembly. The Scotland Act of 1998 provided for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament which was opened by the Queen on 1 July 1999 and took up its full powers on that date. It has power to even raise or lower the basic rate of income tax within certain prescribed limits, different from the prevailing rate in England. Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security are the only subjects on which the Scottish Parliament has no power to legislate.

Scottish model

The Donoughmore Reforms of 1933 which introduced universal adult franchise and replaced communal representation by regional representation sowed the seeds of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. On a one-man-one-vote basis, the Sinhalese majority was always in a position to dominate the government in Colombo and the Tamil minority was excluded from the decision making process. The Scottish model would

ing them over power on a platter. Tamils in the North-east are already groaning under the fascist dictatorship of the LTTE. At his only media conference in the last decade, Pirabhakaran had said that the Tamils were free to shoot him if he settled for anything less than a separate, independent Tamil Eelam. Whatever Balasingham, its chief negotiator at the six round of talks, had agreed on is not being accepted. This is a breach of faith. A de facto Eelam is already in place, thanks to the "peace-at-any-cost" policy of the Wickremasinghe government. Making it de jure, even if outside the Constitution as demanded by the LTTE, would spell the doom of democratic polity in the Tamil region.

In the Vanni region already under its control, the LTTE has set up a parallel government with all the trappings of an independent state. It has its own army and navy, police, judiciary, transport corporation, tax collecting machinery and even a central financial institution called Eelam

Bank. Though it printed its own currency some years ago, it has not been put into circulation. When some opposition members wanted to know what steps were taken by the Sri Lankan Central Bank in Colombo on the Eelam Bank, Finance Minister KC Choksy informed Parliament there were 55 authorised commercial bank branches in the North and 68 in the East and there was no reason why people should go to "illegal and unauthorised" banking system in the territory controlled by the LTTE.

LTTE whims

Opinion among the Sri Lankan Tamil intelligentsia has turned against the LTTE. Dr Muthukrishna Saravanathan of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo has accused foreign donors, who have pledged \$4.5 billion for rebuilding the war ravaged North-eastern province, of bending over backwards to accommodate the whims of the LTTE which is "unrepresentative". Due to objections raised by the LTTE, the multilateral agencies which prepared the document for the recent Tokyo conference of donor nations have left out "Needs Assessment on Governance". The needs of the people were sacrificed in order to appease the LTTE, Dr Saravanathan said. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank stressed the importance of needs assessment report on post-conflict Afghanistan only last year.

Qualified people are hesitant to work in the North-east even after 18 months of cease-fire. Sound governance is a prerequisite for reconstruction. Wickremasinghe's government cannot escape responsibility for treating the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamils. As long as Pirabhakaran remains at the helm of the LTTE, there would appear to be no solution possible short of conceding a separate Tamil Eelam.

(Concluded)

MOMENT OF TRUTH-I

S. Karuna SRS 2009

LTTE's Proposal On 29 September

By SAM RAJAPPA

It will be a moment of truth for the Sri Lanka government of Ranil Wickremasinghe when the LTTE submits counter-proposals on an interim-administration for the Northeastern province on 29 September.

Pirabhakaran, the LTTE supremo has described the six rounds of talks between the Sri Lankan government and his group since the peace agreement of February 2002 as a waste of time. He has cynically dismissed the process as a dialogue between Anton Balasingham, once the ideologue of the LTTE but completely sidelined now, and GL Peiris, Sri Lanka's minister for Constitutional Affairs, and even claimed that he neither bothered to find out what transpired between the two nor cared what they discussed.

Battle hardened chiefs

If ill-health was the reason for keeping Balasingham out, as claimed by LTTE, why was his spouse Adel, who was the official rapporteur of the six rounds of talks, kept out of the Paris meeting where the counter-proposal was drafted?

Balasingham is not a hardcore terrorist. The team handpicked by Pirabhakaran, to scuttle the commitments made by Balasingham and draw up LTTE's counter-proposal, was chosen from those who had come up through its fighting units. SP Tamilchelvan, who headed the

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

team, was made political commissar of the LTTE after he was disabled in battle. Others in the 10-member team included Karuna, commander of its Eastern corps, and S Pulidevan,

Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, divided. The LTTE has no intention to resume talks except on terms that fits its roadmap for carving out an independent Tamil Eelam.



general secretary of LTTE's peace secretariat. VT Tamilmaran, a lecturer in law at Colombo University, was to assist the team with legal jargon.

Rest and regroup

Pirabhakaran's briefing to the drafting team, according to impeccable sources, was to come out with a document outside the purview of the Sri Lankan Constitution and contain elements to keep the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and

The Wickremasinghe government has been lulled into believing that the LTTE has turned a new leaf and is as keen as the ruling United National Party to arrive at a peaceful solution to the ethnic problem. The current unilateral ceasefire by the LTTE soon after the UNP came to power in 2001 and the MoU it signed with the government in February 2002 ensured the longest spell of peace the island has witnessed since 1983, and brought much needed

relief.

Unlike the Sri Lankan armed forces, confined to barracks in the North-eastern province, Pirabhakaran utilised the time to rest and regroup his war-weary cadres, induct new recruits, particularly children abducted from schools and homes, and equip them with modern sophisticated weapons.

The LTTE now boasts of a well-trained army of 25,000, ready to strike at short notice. Pirabhakaran's only worry is India's reaction, should he decide to resume the Eelam war.

Suicide boats

India has reason to be concerned about renewed militarisation of the LTTE. Indian Oil Corporation has leased the old oil farm, a facility created by the British during World War II in the Trincomalee harbour area, and developed it into a modern storage facility for petroleum products.

The LTTE has doubled the number of military bases in the area since the signing of the MoU in clear violation of its terms. A 122 mm artillery piece with a range of 17 km. has been acquired recently. Its maritime activities have also increased in recent months.

Apart from regular gunboats, the Sea Tigers have a fleet of "suicide boats". Training of suicide squads is going on in the backwaters of the Mahaveli Ganga and the nearby LTTE naval base.

(To be concluded)

Uncertain prospects

S. Lanka
J.N. DIXIT
r. 10 169

The senior advisor on foreign and security affairs to the president of Sri Lanka and former foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, was in New Delhi in the middle of July to deliver the Prem Bhatia Memorial Lecture. His subject was the international and regional situation, post-Iraq war. General reports were that he was concerned with the difficult military and political situation affecting the tenuous peace process brokered by the Norwegians in Sri Lanka. Kadirgamar had an exchange of views with the national security advisor, Brajesh Mishra, the foreign minister, Yashwant Sinha, the foreign secretary, Kanwal Sibal, and the deputy prime minister, L.K. Advani. He also met K. Natwar Singh, chairman of the foreign affairs department of the All India Congress Committee.

Bilateral talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have been stalemated over the last three or four months because of various procedural and political reasons. The political reasons are: first, the delay by the Sri Lankan authorities in sending proposals for the interim governance of the northern and eastern provinces, details of the subjects which would be delegated to the Tamil authority in the northeastern provinces. Then, when the proposals were sent, the LTTE did not find them satisfactory. The LTTE are in the process of submitting alternative proposals to the Sri Lankan government for the first time since 1987.

The second political reason is the differences of opinion between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE about the location of each other's troops and camps and the redeployment of military forces. The Sri Lankan government is concerned that the LTTE is violating the ceasefire agreement by setting up new camps particularly in the Trincomallee region. Jaffna in any case is militarily and geo-strategically dominated by the LTTE cadre with the exception of the Fort and the Palaley air base. The LTTE has not only strengthened its existing military bases in Trincomallee, but it has also set up 13 to 14 new bases despite the memorandum of understanding on the ceasefire stipulating that no new military bases will be set up by either side.

These 13 or 14 bases are in addition to the LTTE strengthening another 14 bases in the same region. The location of these new LTTE bases is such that

these flank the Sri Lankan army's military positions and can become launching pads endangering the Trincomallee port itself. The third political problem is the profound division of opinion in Sri Lankan political parties and Sri Lankan public opinion about the proposals for a compromise with the LTTE.

There have been changes in the power structure within the LTTE also. Anton Balasingham, according to most recent reports, stands marginalized from the main process of negotiations. Velupillai Prabhakaran has nominated his political advisor, Tamilchelvam, to be the leading figure in internal discussions within the LTTE as well as with Sinhalese delegations. Tamilchelvam is being assisted by Karuna, the head of the LTTE's military cadre in the eastern province. Balasingham apparently was not in favour of the very tough anti-government stand taken by Prabhakaran by pulling back from bilateral discussions three months ago. Tamilchelvam and Karuna replacing him manifest the hardening of the negotiating position of the LTTE.

The LTTE held an internal meeting in Paris in mid-August to prepare counter-proposals to the suggestions made by the prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe. In any case, Wickremesinghe's proposals were off the mark in terms of acceptability by the LTTE or even other Tamil groups because his proposals did not say anything about delegating authority to the northeastern provincial interim government on management of land, law and order and some of the more sensitive financial subjects.

The LTTE's counter-proposals are likely to demand delegation of authority not only on these but also on additional subjects including part of the defence arrangements of the Tamil areas. There is likely to be a qualitative gap between the LTTE's demands and the offers made by the Sri Lankan government. The Buddhist clergy, the president, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and her party are deeply concerned about excessive compromise with the LTTE because they apprehend the division of Sri Lanka and creation of the Eelam through this covert process of political osmosis.

Meanwhile, the ground situation in terms of military capacities is in a flux and decidedly to the advantage of the LTTE. While the Sri Lankan armed forces remain engaged in their routine security duties, and in maintaining

basic security requirements in the tactical areas of responsibility, the LTTE has decidedly utilized the ceasefire to strengthen itself in terms of personnel as well as supplies. The LTTE now has a sufficient number of longer-range weapons, including mortar and 120 millimetre artillery guns. The LTTE has converted their temporary transit bases and routes in Jaffna in the east into permanent military bases. The LTTE's maritime activities around the

selves, to acquire more military supplies and to deploy its cadre in new positions with better equipment, which puts the Sri Lankan armed forces more or less on the defensive.

The Sri Lankan armed forces cannot take any counter-action or preemptive operations against the LTTE activities because of the ceasefire. The officers cadre of the Sri Lankan army are incrementally worried about the more recent military developments.



coast of northern and eastern Sri Lanka have been on the increase under the protection of their navy known as Sea Tigers.

These maritime activities include the transporting of cadre and materials disguised as fishermen and civilians. According to Sri Lankan government sources, LTTE infiltrators and reconnaissance teams are utilizing their freedom of movement to improve and expand their intelligence operations against the Sri Lankan government. The LTTE is also now in possession of what are known as suicide boats. The LTTE's total strength, leaving aside the strength of 2,000-3,000 in Jaffna, in Trincomallee is now about 1550 cadres. The Sea Tigers have three attack gunboats and six suicide craft ready for operation in the eastern sector. The LTTE also has micro-light aircraft which can be utilized for suicide attacks on Sri Lankan military bases.

On all counts, the LTTE has utilized the Norwegian brokered ceasefire to enhance its cadre and regroup them-

✓

‘ The president and her party are deeply concerned about excessive compromise with the LTTE ’

The political and military wing of the LTTE is confident. It is dealing with the Sri Lankan armed forces on a more or less equal footing. Prabhakaran is on record saying, at the end of July, that if talks fail, the LTTE has the ability to revert to the military option.

Despite the existence of other Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka, and some of them, like the Eelam People's Democratic Party, being represented in parliament, the LTTE has been recognized by the Sri Lankan government as the main representative of Sri Lankan Tamils, a status which, by implication, has been internationally recognized because of the

Norwegian exercise of accepting the LTTE as the main negotiators from the Tamils' side. This was political realism, but it has legitimized the LTTE's claims of representation regarding Sri Lankan Tamils.

The question arises as to why the LTTE participated in the Norwegian peace initiative and why it is continuing its participation in the negotiations despite its known strengths and uncompromising negotiating position on certain Tamil issues. The main reason is the LTTE having been on the list of terrorist organizations designated by the United States of America. After September 11, 2001, the LTTE's position became incrementally vulnerable because of this categorization. External support to the organization from the Tamil diaspora in west Europe, North America and the Asia Pacific region was also affected by stringent punitive stipulations against organizations and entities supporting terrorist organizations, particularly those designated as such by the US government. So it is logical for the LTTE to take every step to eliminate its description as terrorist organization and to gain legitimacy as a political entity. But this objective will not make the LTTE compromise on some of its basic demands sustained for nearly three decades.

The macro-level objective of the LTTE remains the creation of a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka over a period of time. Whether this would be decisive to the security of Sri Lanka or the ethno-cultural unity of India is a legitimate question. The answer obviously has to be negative because the centrifugal forces generated by such an event can have cascading ramifications on subcontinental south Asia. The Sri Lankan government has the support of a majority of countries in the world to sustain its unity and territorial integrity. The only rider being that the Sri Lankan government offers a compromise to Sri Lankan Tamils which should be responsive to their political, cultural and economic aspirations.

An additional relevant factor is that the world is not likely to endorse the LTTE's political and constitutional demands, which may border on the creation of a separate Tamil state. India should remain supportive of the peace process subject to these realities. India should also strengthen the Sri Lankan government in political and logistical terms so that the Sri Lankan government also negotiates from a position of strength with the LTTE in the coming weeks.

The author is former foreign secretary of India

Tough task ahead, says Ranil

By V.S. Sambandam

COLOMBO, AUG. 30. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, expects a very tough task ahead with more deadlocks to cross and even a temporary breakdown in the talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Emphasising the importance of a new outlook to the ongoing peace process, Mr. Wickremesinghe reportedly said the country should never give up its efforts to achieve a lasting peace, according to the state-run *Daily News*.

The Prime Minister's reported observations, made at a religious ceremony on Friday, were apparently aimed at both lowering public expectations of an early resolution to the decades-long separatist crisis as well as preparing the ground for the more intense phase of the process, stalled since the LTTE's unilateral pullout on April 21.

We are witnessing the beginning of a new chapter," Mr. Wickremesinghe was reported as saying, pointing out that the LTTE has asked the assistance of Tamil experts living in the country, instead of depending on London-based guidance for the future talks. The LTTE, the report said, had hinted that future talks, perhaps may be steered by its political wing leader, S. P. Tamilchelvan.

It may be recalled that the London-based chief LTTE negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, was not in the LTTE's team — led by Mr. Tamilchelvan — which met in Paris to prepare its counter-proposals to the Government's offer of a Provisional Administrative Structure for the northeast. The LTTE has not given details of the Paris meeting, but has already linked the resumption of talks to the Government's acceptance of its counter-proposals.

Mr. Wickremesinghe expected the counter proposals to be tough and emphasised the need for negotiating to arrive at a solution that is acceptable to all communities in the country, the newspaper reported.

Another round

According to LTTE sources, the high-level LTTE legal team, which concluded its internal meeting in Paris on Thursday, is likely to hold further international consultations shortly in a European country.

The next phase of consultations will take place before the counter proposals are given to the Government and will be held after the team, which went to Paris, meets the rebel leader, V. Prabhakaran.

While the Paris meeting involved legal experts, drawn largely from expatriate Sri Lankan Tamils, the next round is likely to involve foreign constitutional experts, the sources said.

According to present indications, the rebel team for the international consultation is likely to be unchanged from the one that went to Paris.

TNA protests

The four-party pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) on Thursday warned that attempts to de-merge the northern and eastern provinces would strike fatally at the very roots of the current peace process, rendering the whole process, meaningless and redundant.

A recent statement by the Presidential spokesman that Chandrika Kumaratunga would consider all options on the issue of the northeast de-merger, R. Sampanthan, secretary-general, Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), said, reinforces in the minds of the Tamil people the grave doubts they have always held in regard to the sincerity of Sinhala political leadership to evolve a just and acceptable political solution to the Tamil question, and convinces the Tamil people the need to stand together in this hour of peril and fearlessly face this threat.

A five-page statement signed by the TULF, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (Suresh wing) urged the President to desist from taking this perilous course.

Sri Lanka to step up security in the east

By V.S. Sambandan 22/8

COLOMBO, AUG. 21. The Sri Lankan Government today said that it would step up security in the troubled eastern districts with additional recruitment to police forces and deployment of armed forces.

Since last week's killing of four Muslims in two separate incidents by "unidentified gunmen", the east has remained tense with hartals in Muslim-majority areas. In addition to the killings, the reported abduction by two Muslim youths has complicated the situation.

"There is a problem. There is a hiatus there," Colombo's chief negotiator and Constitutional Affairs Minister, G.L. Peiris, told a press conference here, adding there was a need for additional forces.

The Sri Lankan Muslim Congress

(SLMC), a constituent of the ruling United National Front, has blamed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the killings and wanted stepped up security.

Stating that he was "not in a position to judge who was responsible" for the killings, Prof. Peiris said that "whoever is responsible, law and order has to be maintained". A joint meeting among the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) the LTTE and the SLMC is to be held, he said, adding the Government "will take action".

In response to an SLMC demand, the Government on Tuesday decided to recruit 550 policemen "with immediate effect". This has raised concerns among the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance parties of a possible imbalance in the ethnic ratio. The recruitment is to take place in the eastern region, which has a strong presence of the

island's three main ethnicities — Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

The eastern troubles take place at a time when a top-level LTTE team is holding internal talks in Paris to prepare a response to the Government's offer of a Provisional Administrative Structure.

The offer, made on July 17, provides for an LTTE-majority interim administration for the northeast, with powers over development-related subjects, but excludes police, security, land and revenue.

The Tigers, describing the offer as "failing to meet the expectations of the Tamils", said a counter-proposal would be presented.

The LTTE, which unilaterally pulled out of talks on April 21, has linked resumption of negotiations to Colombo's acceptance of its counter-proposals.

ONE FIND

22 AUG 2003

SRI LANKA'S FUTURE-II

5.8 2007

Tamils Must Be Involved In Governance

By PARMANAND

Many in Sri Lanka see the seeds of the state dismemberment in the ethnic empowerment of the Tamils and the devolution of powers to the North-Eastern province. The Buddhist monks of various hues — having a place of influence in the Sri Lankan society and even state — and the Janatha Vimukti Perumana, the nationalist and the Marxist party of the Sinhalese have always exhibited their opposition to giving any reasonable power to the Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lankan politics has naturally been in a Catch-22 situation for a very long time.

'Renounce terrorism'

Thanks to the growing hatred worldwide for strategies of terrorism and the efforts made by Norwegian diplomats, the LTTE is lying low for the time being. Some say its financial state had also deteriorated. The LTTE, though, has faced situation like this in the past as well. This time, the USA appeared more determined in warning it against terrorist activities. Speaking in Washington on 15 April, US deputy secretary of state Mr Richard Armitage said the LTTE had to "unequivocally renounce terrorism in word and deed". He said that while the US could see a future for the LTTE, it was left to the Tigers to show they were worthy of "legitimacy".

India has been kept informed of various developments by Sri Lankan political segments of all hues. Even Norway has not lagged behind. But having learnt from the mistakes of the past, India has constantly and consistently

maintained a low and vigilant profile. Immediately after assuming his seat in the South Block, external affairs minister Mr Yashwant Sinha chose Sri Lanka among the first few coun-

tries to visit. This was aimed at strengthening relations with India's immediate neighbours. This enthusiasm or goodwill, though, was never allowed to indicate that India wanted to play any role in Sri Lanka's peace process or for that matter the island's domestic politics.



tries to visit. This was aimed at strengthening relations with India's immediate neighbours.

This enthusiasm or goodwill, though, was never allowed to indicate that India wanted to play any role in Sri Lanka's peace process or for that matter the island's domestic politics.

Asset to India

It is, nevertheless, significant that a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka is going to be an asset to India inasmuch as the latter's trade with the former is on the increase. A free trade zone bet-

ween the two South Asian states has become a concrete reality. Even though India has no predilections for the LTTE, it is not, in any manner or degree, been trying to hinder the peace process or talks.

The economy of Sri Lanka has obviously improved tremendously. Strangely, it never collapsed even when the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state were warring. Today, the expenditure on defence has been drastically reduced. Tourists have been arriving in very large numbers. Inflation rate has gone down very significantly. International donors appear immensely interested in extending financial cooperation for the island's reconstruction — and in particular for that of the North-Eastern province.

To facilitate growth and implement economic reforms after the two decades of civil war, the IMF has approved a \$567 million credit for the island nation to support the government's programme through 2006. Last year, Canada, which has a sizable Sri Lankan community, pledged \$1.3 million in immediate financial aid to help the Sri Lankan peace process and said it was ready to consider giving more money next year.

Difficult task

Britain committed over 15 million pounds in development assistance for Sri Lanka during 2003-04. The World Bank approved in April \$800 million in loan and grants to help Sri Lanka's fledgling peace process and revive the island's war-battered economy.

Needless to stress, peace in Sri Lanka needs to be durable, meaningful and institutionalised. There seems to be little chance of this without making the Sri Lankan Tamils involved in the country's governance without discrimination. In particular, they need to feel much more involved in the politics and polity of North-Eastern province. The Sri Lankan state has been seen wanting in political will ever since the Bandaramaole-Chevanayakam pact was signed on 26 July 1957. One hopes the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe would succeed where others failed, even though the task is full of difficulties and hindrances.

(Concluded)

opened this morning

Deadline set for LTTE to dismantle camp

S. Lanka 11-10
2007

Colombo: Scandinavian truce monitors on Sunday asked the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to dismantle by this week a newly-established camp or reconsider the role of the independent ceasefire observers.

The Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said it was unhappy that the Tigers were not abiding by its ruling two weeks ago asking the rebels to dismantle a newly-established camp in the district of Trincomalee.

"We want the LTTE to remove the Wan Ela camp by the end of the week," SLMM deputy head of mission Hargrup Haukland said while brushing aside an LTTE-inspired protest in the region against the ruling. "If they don't, they have to reconsider the power they have given us to make rulings on the ceasefire.

"It is the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE that have given us a mandate to make rulings, and if the LTTE is not willing to accept our rulings they must sit down with the government and reconsider our future"

Last week, a vehicle of the SLMM was attacked in the district of Batticaloa by Tamil mobs sympathetic to the Tigers. "There was an unruly mob and they pelted stones at our vehicle and smashed a windscreen," SLMM spokeswoman Agnes Bragadottir said. "Monitors in the vehicle were unhurt," she added.

However, the incident underscored the growing tension between the SLMM and the LTTE despite SLMM chief Triggve Teleffsen's meeting with LTTE's political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan to discuss uneasy relations between them. PTI

Stamps

LTTE to send 'counter proposals'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JULY 28. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) last night termed Colombo's latest Provisional Administrative Council offer as one that "fails to meet expectations" but maintained that it was "keeping the doors to peace wide open" and that it would send its "counter proposals".

In the LTTE's first official reaction to Colombo's offer made on July 17, its political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, linked the resumption of peace talks to the Government's acceptance of its counter proposals, "which could satisfy the expectations and reflect the interests" of the Tamil people, a report in the TamilNet website said.

Mr. Tamilchelvan, who is currently visiting LTTE-held areas in eastern Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts, reportedly made this response when addressing "more than 5,000 troops of the LTTE's southern forces" at a rebel military base complex at Tharavai, 40 km out-

side the Batticaloa town on Sunday, the report said.

The LTTE, Mr. Tamilchelvan reportedly said, was "keenly studying the proposal for an interim administrative structure, though it fails to meet expectations of the Tamil people".

The July 17 discussion paper on an LTTE-majority interim administration for the northeast does not give the Tigers powers over police, security, land and revenue and restricts the role envisaged for the interim council to development and rehabilitation. Since their unilateral snapping of talks on April 21, the Tigers rejected two offers and demanded a "politico-administrative" interim body.

Terming Colombo's latest proposals as one that "has several shortcomings", Mr. Tamilchelvan said the LTTE leadership was "studying" them "in consultation with its legal and constitutional experts".

The LTTE, Mr. Tamilchelvan said, would "be glad if the government comes forward to solve the Tamil people's problem through peaceful means, un-

derstanding our stand". Term- ing its present situation a "singular opportunity" for the "Sinhala polity" to achieve "per- manent peace", Mr. Tamilchel- van also made the point that the Tigers were "able to negotiate peace" because they were "mili- tarily powerful".

Refuting what he termed "a campaign among Sinhalese" that the LTTE was "modernising and expanding" its armed forces "to prepare for war", Mr. Tamilchelvan, a former Jaffna LTTE military commander, said these were to "sustain" the re- bels' "strength to protect" its "own people".

Moreover, the Tigers also needed "power to make pro- gress in the peace talks and to face a war if one is thrust on us," he said.

Colombo optimistic

Meanwhile, in Colombo, the Sri Lankan Government re- mained hopeful of an early re- sumption of dialogue.

At a press conference here, Colombo's chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, said while in the past

"there was a cavalier argument" behind the Tigers' rejection of the two earlier offers; now "all indications are that the LTTE is considering" the latest offer "in earnest".

Brushing aside a recent polit- ical controversy, Prof. Peiris said the rebels were not offered policing and revenue powers. Last Friday, the Opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) had said that the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, was sent a proposal that differed from the one sent to the Tigers as the latter specifically exclud- ed policing, security, land and revenue.

Prof. Peiris today said the Government's original discus- sion paper, and given to the President, clearly stated that the offer for a provisional adminis- trative structure was "within pa- rameters agreed upon by the parties".

The specific phrase excluding the policing and revenue pow- ers in the offer to the Tigers was added on the "advise" of the former Norwegian envoy, Jon Westborg, Prof. Peiris said.

Remembering 1983

By V. Suryanarayan

THE ENCOUNTER is still vivid in my memory. A couple of years ago, on a Sunday morning, I met two Sri Lankan Tamil girls in the Pilliar Kovil in Kandy. Eyes closed, they were praying before the Lord. There was something strange about them. They were dressed in skirts and T-shirts; there was no pottu on their forehead, and there were no flowers adorning their hair. When they got up, we started talking. Learning of my background and the fact that I was a Visiting Professor in the Peradeniya University, the girls started speaking freely. They belonged to Jaffna and were registered for M. Phil degrees in the Science faculty. They had their education in the Tamil medium and did not know the Sinhalese language. They did not want to be identified as Tamils and, therefore, they had discarded their traditional Tamil dress. I was deeply pained. A proud community like the Sri Lankan Tamils has been compelled to discard its symbols of identity in order to live in Sinhalese areas. It was an offshoot of the sense of fear and alienation that had engulfed the Tamils following the genocide of July 1983.

The 'riots', which began on the night of July 24, 1983, saw Sri Lanka go up in flames by early August. The Government maintained that the violence was a spontaneous backlash of the killing of 13 soldiers in Jaffna by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). No one believed the propaganda, for it was clear that there was planning behind the 'spontaneous' counter-violence. Paul Sieghart, the Chairman of the British section of the International Commission of Jurists, wrote in his report on the tragedy: "Clearly this was not a spontaneous upsurge of communal hatred among the Sinhala people. It was a series of deliberate acts, executed in accordance with a concerted plan, conceived and organised well in advance." What, however, must not be missed is the silver lining: many Sinhalese risked their lives to save their Tamil friends from the marauding mobs.

Carrying voters' lists and addresses of Tamil houses, the rioters ran amok in Wellawatte, Dehiwela and Bambalapatiya. Factories and industrial establishments owned by the Tamils were reduced to ashes. Still worse, the complicity of the authorities became evident in the massacre of the Tamil prisoners in the high security Welikade prison on July 25 and 27. The murdered included two political prisoners, Jegan and Kuttimani.

The 'riots', which began on the night of July 24, 1983, saw Sri Lanka go up in flames... the prolonged conflict has brutalised society.

Sinhalese prisoners, convicted for murder, rape and burglary, were hand picked by the officials for the deadly job. They were served alcohol and let loose on Tamil prisoners. According to survivors' accounts, the bodies were piled up in front of a Buddha the statue in the jail courtyard and were set ablaze.

The riots, which began in Colombo, spread to Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya and Trincomalee, areas where Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils were concentrated. Within Colombo alone, nearly 100,000 Tamils were displaced. The Government admitted to a death toll of 250, but reliable non-governmental sources estimated it at 2,000. There was hardly any Tamil family in Colombo that escaped death, destruction or displacement.

The communal holocaust was an awful turning point in Sri Lanka's recent history. During the last two turbulent decades, the savage 'low intensity' conflict, which has converted Sri Lanka into one of the most notorious killing fields in the world, has taken a toll of nearly 65,000 lives and has displaced 800,000 people. What is more, the prolonged conflict has brutalised Sri Lankan society. With the benefit of hindsight, observers point out certain significant errors of judgment and misguided policies pursued by key *dramatis personae*. Such an exercise has to be undertaken so that all concerned can learn from the mistakes of the past.

The first big mistake was the failure of the Sri Lankan political leadership, especially the then President, J.R. Jayewardene, to rise to the occasion. JR, as he was known, could have easily entered into serious discussions with the moderate Tamil leadership soon after his landslide victory in the parliamentary election held in 1977. The United National Party (UNP) manifesto had spelt out, in a fair manner, the accumulated grievances of the Tamils. Unfortunately, JR failed to take the initiative, as a result of which the militants began to sideline Tamil moderates. Within the UNP, Sinhala chauvinists led by Cyril Mathew began to emerge as a strong pressure group. When Sri Lanka's day of reckoning came in the last week of July 1983, Jayewardene not only failed to offer any words of sympathy for the Tamil victims; he more

or less justified the violence unleashed by the lumpen sections of the Sinhalese. He did not act as an impartial, non-sectarian head of state. During the last days, JR admitted his failure to take decisive action for the resolution of the national question, and began to refer, in informal conversations, to the 1983 violence as "genocidal." In retrospect, the Indian involvement also contributed to the exacerbation of the ethnic conflict. It paved the way for the emergence of the LTTE as a Frankenstein monster. The number of Tamil militants — both armed and unarmed — at the end of July 1983 was around 300. The Indian Government's policy of mediating in the ethnic conflict while, at the same time, arming the Tamil militants was an unwise move of calamitous proportions. What is more, the competitive nature of Tamil Nadu politics, with the two Dravidian parties vying with each other to support the Tamil cause, resulted in the State becoming a sanctuary for Sri Lankan Tamil guerrillas. The unfortunate experience of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in the North and the East of the island between 1987 and 1990 has been analysed in several accounts; nearly 1200 Indian soldiers sacrificed their lives and a much larger number suffered injuries of various kinds. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a suicide squad of the LTTE in May 1991 swung the pendulum to the other extreme. There is a sense of revulsion against Velupillai Prabhakaran and the ideology of the LTTE throughout the country, but much more so in Tamil Nadu. As a consequence, New Delhi adopted a 'hands off' policy towards the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

President Ranasinghe Premadasa's policy towards the LTTE was far worse than anything that came before. At a time when, owing to the sustained military pressure of the IPKF, the Tigers were bottled up in the jungles of Vavuniya, Premadasa provided considerable money and arms to Prabhakaran. When the IPKF left the shores of Sri Lanka, the Tigers moved in without a fight to take more-or-less full control of the North and the East. But the honeymoon could not last long. The negotiations were a non-starter and the President himself became a victim of the cult of

violence perfected by the LTTE. In retrospect both the Indian and Sri Lankan Governments, through unwise policies designed for short-term gain, contributed to the strengthening of the Tigers. Like Banquo's ghost, these realities will continue to haunt us for a quite a while.

During this period, Indian commentators made drastic alterations in their assessment of Prabhakaran as a political leader. In the days following July 1983, academics and journalists alike tended to rationalise the violence of the Tamil militants as a natural response of the victim to state violence. However, after the LTTE's massacre of innocent Sinhala civilians in Anuradhapura, the Indian perception of Prabhakaran began to change slowly. The growing intolerance of the Tigers, the systematic annihilation of political opponents, the ethnic cleansing in the Jaffna Peninsula, the attack on Dalada Maligawa and the forcible conscription of children into the LTTE's 'baby brigade' — these and many other Pol Potist crimes have convinced most Indian observers that the gun was not only the source of power and glory, but also the instrument of terror and fear. As a result, Sri Lanka watchers in India today make a clear distinction between what the LTTE stands for and the just demands and genuine aspirations of the Tamils.

Rohini Hensman graphically describes the agony and suffering undergone by the ordinary people. She narrates the story of Anna's family — the wife was a Sinhalese and the husband a Tamil. In 1983, their home in Dehiwela was attacked and all their belongings were burnt. After spending a few months in a refugee camp, the family moved to Batticaloa and began to rebuild its life. Taking the members of the family to be Sinhalese, the LTTE attacked them — and the family was compelled to take shelter again in a refugee camp. Anna's mother remarked: "The problem is that neither the armed forces nor the Tigers are the least bit concerned about people... They are fighting for their own reasons... In Colombo, they wanted to kill us, because we were Tamil; in Batticaloa they wanted to kill us because I speak Sinhala and they thought I was Sinhalese. There is no freedom anywhere in this country. What we need is peace, not Eelam." That sums up the main lesson of 1983.

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

19.10
1977

OMINOUS SIGNS IN SRI LANKA

S Lanka

WAR CLOUDS APPEAR to be gathering over Sri Lanka, with the recent actions and behaviour of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) portending no good for anyone. While the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government is trying its best to keep the 15-month-old ceasefire and the still nascent peace process alive, the LTTE seems to be waiting for an opportunity to break the peace and resume its armed struggle for secession. From their boycott of the Tokyo donors' conference, the Tamil Tigers have been creating one problem after another for an already beleaguered regime. Whether it is insistence on a non-statutory interim administration with all powers or demanding the demarcation of a sea boundary, the LTTE has been asking for the sky. Its latest war cry stems from a visit to Israel by the Sri Lankan Defence Minister, Tilak Marapone. In the midst of its own persistent efforts to smuggle in weapons by sea and its continued killing of political rivals, the LTTE wants to protest 'arms shopping' by a democratically elected, sovereign government.

Apparently, the Tamil Tigers are pressing for three key concessions, which impinge on national security: the rehabilitation of refugees and displaced persons in the 'High Security Zones' in the Jaffna Peninsula; the demarcation of 'territory' on the seas to enhance the capability and reach of the Sea Tigers; and renewed control over Jaffna, the seat and symbol of power in the 'Tamil homeland.' On the issue of the High Security Zones, the Sri Lankan Government sought the professional assistance of a retired Indian Army officer, Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar, who has studied the ground realities and given his expert assessment and advice. Given the LTTE's track record, no Government will be in a position to lower its guard especially in high security areas in the name of humanitarian measures. Any such move, without reciprocal actions like de-

commissioning of the LTTE's weapons and other reassuring steps, will amount to compromising security. Similarly, there can be no legitimation of the Sea Tigers as a sort of third navy in the Palk Straits. There may be apprehensions in official quarters that if these demands are not conceded, the LTTE may go for an operation to seize Jaffna through a military strike or a 'Trojan horse' type of cadre infiltration. It was to provide a platform for its power play that the LTTE pushed for an interim administration and access to the funds pledged by the donors for rehabilitation.

The LTTE must realise that this may well be its last opportunity to negotiate a political settlement on the Tamil question. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has demonstrated time and again his willingness to walk that extra mile to achieve peace, despite the serious limitations the 'politics of cohabitation' imposes on his regime under the Sri Lankan Constitution. Having drawn sound lessons from her own experience with the LTTE, President Chandrika Kumaratunga is closely monitoring the developments, moderating the full powers vested in an executive President with a sober and constructive approach. Having voluntarily chosen the path of peace, Mr. Wickremesinghe cannot pull back on account of the LTTE's intransigence and warlike preparations. But he must not be caught unprepared. The LTTE must be made to realise that the international community is now in an uncompromising mood when it comes to armed extremism and terrorism. If it should decide to launch an offensive, it will have to take on not just the Sri Lankan military, but also the wrath of the international community. This may be the only restraining influence on the LTTE, which has successfully neutralised the moderate Tamil parties. With the signs ominous, the challenge before Sri Lanka as a society is to avoid yet another time of troubles.

Indian Tamils to get Lanka citizenship

Sri Lanka

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, July 11. — The Sri Lankan government has decided to grant citizenship to 168,141 people of Indian origin who opted, but failed to return to their native country.

Officials said the Lankan Cabinet two days ago approved a plan to grant citizenship to 84,141 people who had obtained Indian passports to return home, but could not travel for various reasons since 1983.

Another 84,000 people of Indian origin born in Sri Lanka after year 1964 will also qualify for Sri Lankan citizenship, officials said.

New Delhi and Colombo had agreed to send back hundreds of thousands of people of Indian origin back to India, but the island's escalated ethnic conflict since 1983 had stopped a ferry that took back batch-

es of Indians. They had been brought to Sri Lanka at the end of the 19th century as indentured labour by British colonial rulers to work in tea and coffee plantations.

Sri Lanka today has a distinct ethnic community of "Tamils of recent Indian Origin" and they retain their own identity independent of Sri Lanka's indigenous Tamils.

Tamils of Indian origin form about 5.5 percent of the 18.6 million population and are concentrated in the island's central region while Sri Lankan Tamils constitute about 12.5 percent.

Batticaloa security tightened: Military and police tightened security in Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka today after intelligence reports suggested that armed LTTE rebels may have infiltrated the area, adds AP.

LTTE violated U.N. law of the sea: monitoring mission

79-10
29/6

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JUNE 28. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) today ruled that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) broke the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) earlier this month, and absolved the island's navy of breaching a ceasefire agreement in force between Colombo and the Tigers since February last year.

In its verdict on the June 14 sinking of an LTTE tanker, MT Shoshin, suspected to be "smuggling arms" off eastern Sri Lanka, the SLMM said that the Tigers had violated the UNCLOS "by not flying an appropriate flag and official, visible identification".

Pointing out that the Navy had the "right to inspect the LTTE tanker" under U.N. laws, the monitors said it "does not consider that the Sri Lanka Navy violated the ceasefire agreement by intercepting" the rebel vessel. As there was "no impartial evidence" because "neither party" had informed it "in due time" about the incident, the SLMM-based these two main decisions on the interpretation of the UNCLOS in relation to the ceasefire agreement.

Today's ruling is against the backdrop of conflicting versions by Colombo and the Tigers on the run-up to the June 14 incident, in which the LTTE vessel was reported sunk after an engagement with the Navy. While Colombo said the incident took place within its territorial waters — 175 nautical miles (MN) off eastern Mullaittivu — the Tigers insisted that the location was "in international waters — 225NM from the same base point. The two also differed over the vessel's consignment, with the Navy saying it had "credible information" that it was carrying "war-like material" and the LTTE maintaining that it was loaded with "diesel".

The ceasefire agreement, signed last year separately by the Sri Lanka Premier, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, demarcates Government and rebel-held territories on land, based on the then prevailing forward defence lines, drawn after Army advances during the years of fighting. As no such delineation was made on the seas, the Navy had the full control over the waters. The CFA makes it clear that the armed forces "shall continue to perform their legitimate task", but "without engaging in offensive operations against the LTTE".

Against this backdrop, the SLMM said the Navy "has the authority to perform its legitimate tasks at sea" according to the island's laws, the CFA and the UNCLOS. Dismissing the Tigers' version

that its vessel "was flying two flags" — an LTTE one and another "specific" one for "international waters," the SLMM ruled that under the UNCLOS, "a ship can only sail under a flag of state".

The other rebel contention that the incident took place on international waters was also rejected on the ground that if it was so, then the provisions of the UNCLOS would apply.

"No impartial evidence"

On the conflicting versions of the run-up to the sinking, the SLMM giving the views of both the Navy and the Tigers, said: "there were no impartial evidences on the scene when the incident took place". The exact location remains unclear, with the Captain of the Navy ship, SLNS Nandimithra, which was involved in the attack, stating that the recorded electronic logs were "reset" when the ship commenced a new patrol.

In its recommendations, the SLMM wanted naval vessels with electronic logs to "save the data recorded during an incident" and "not erase" them before inspection by the SLMM.

The monitors also wanted Colombo and the Tigers to "reach an agreement" on measures to prevent such incidents "as soon as possible".

The SLMM also said it found "no evidence" on the LTTE's complaint that 12 of its crew members were "captured" by the Navy.

Two other recommendations were that the two sides "should inform the SLMM immediately" when such incidents are possible and that the Tigers should "instruct its merchant sailors to adhere to the UNCLOS".

Shilpa Shetty questioned

MUMBAI, JUNE 28. Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty's statement was today recorded by a special team of Surat police in connection with alleged threats issued by her parents to Gujarat-based saree tycoon Pankaj Agarwal to recover money.

The four-member team, which arrived here on Friday, also recorded the statements of several witnesses.

The team visited the Versova residence of the Shettys in northwest Mumbai to record her statement. Shilpa, who was away for shooting, arrived here this afternoon. While the visiting police officials declined to provide details of Shilpa's statement, senior inspector B.V. Ramani, when contacted in Surat, confirmed that the actress was questioned.— UNI

29 JUN 2003

THE HINDI

MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2003

Sri Lanka
IMPERILLING THE CEASEFIRE HO-10 16/76

THE FEARS EXPRESSED over the perilous folly of trusting the Tamil Tigers are coming true in Sri Lanka. The peace negotiations between the Government headed by Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, stalled in the seventh round, are in very real danger of being torpedoed by the covert and overt activities of the rebel group. The talks, which began in September last year, ran into serious trouble when the Tigers were caught violating the terms of the permanent ceasefire in force. The incident on February 7 when the militants staged a suicide bombing of a cargo of arms upon exposure by the international monitoring committee in the high seas cast a long shadow on the negotiations and forced the early suspension of the fifth round in Berlin. The Tigers entered a mode of belligerence and denial following another incident on March 10 when a second boat was sunk by the Sri Lankan Navy, though they did attend the next round of talks in Tokyo held within a fortnight. On April 21, the Tigers stalled the seventh round scheduled for the end of April over the issue of high security zones and free movement within them. Last week, raising untenable objections and unacceptable demands true to its style of functioning, the LTTE boycotted a major international donors' conference despite the vigorous and persistent efforts of the host country, Japan. On Saturday, the negotiation process hit another mine.

Saturday's incident in which an LTTE boat was sunk by the Sri Lankan Navy exposes the rebels and unmask their real intentions, imperilling the more than a year old ceasefire in the island republic. It is symptomatic of the principal uncertainty that has beset the negotiations from the very beginning: are the Tigers serious about their pursuit of a settlement within the framework of the country's Constitution or have they merely agreed to the talks as a tactic for

regrouping and strengthening their position in the pursuit of their goal? Their stalling tactics, clandestine activities and fascist intolerance as evidenced by the assassination of an opponent come at a critical time when the next steps by the Government and the LTTE would determine whether or not the country breaks out of its violent past and grasps the hand proffered by the international community at the Tokyo conference. The donor countries went beyond expectations and promised massive assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction, particularly in the devastated Tamil areas in the north and the east of Sri Lanka. To the chagrin of the LTTE, the donors also made it known that there were to be no free lunches. The conference set a road map and bound both sides to a schedule indicating that "disbursement of assistance will keep pace with satisfactory progress in the peace process". It put the onus on both sides, "with adequate safeguards to secure the interests of all" communities.

The promise of aid on an unprecedented scale and the warm sentiments expressed at the Tokyo conference underline the international community's hope for an end to Sri Lanka's two-decade-old civil war. Success in this "will demonstrate that the world community is capable of acting peacefully to pre-empt human suffering", the American Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, told the conference. As the Wickremesinghe Government comes to terms with the ground realities, the LTTE has again demonstrated its unreliability as a partner by demanding a virtual veto over the funds disbursement through a captive administrative mechanism. The Government, which has given much ground to the Tigers in its effort to prolong the ceasefire and score some political points over the Executive President, may have few options in the face of the treachery and brinkmanship of the LTTE. The prospects appear gloomy.

THE HINDU

16 JUN 2003

Sri Lanka offers statute change to woo back Tigers

Tokyo, June 9 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's Prime Minister launched a major effort to revive peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels today, saying he was willing to alter the constitution to meet their demand for a regional interim administration.

Speaking as donors pledged more than \$2 billion for the country at the start of an aid conference in Tokyo, Ranil Wickremesinghe said once a political solution to end the 20-year conflict had been reached, his government would call a referendum to endorse changes to Sri Lanka's constitution.

"We will introduce constitutional reforms when we have negotiated a final political solution, which we are fully committed to take to the people of Sri Lanka through a referendum for the ultimate decision," he told the conference, itself seen as a crucial step towards cementing the fragile peace process.

The rebels, who walked out of peace talks in April citing the slow pace of rebuilding the Tamil-majority northeast and refused to attend the two-day Tokyo meeting, gave no clear response today to the government's offer.

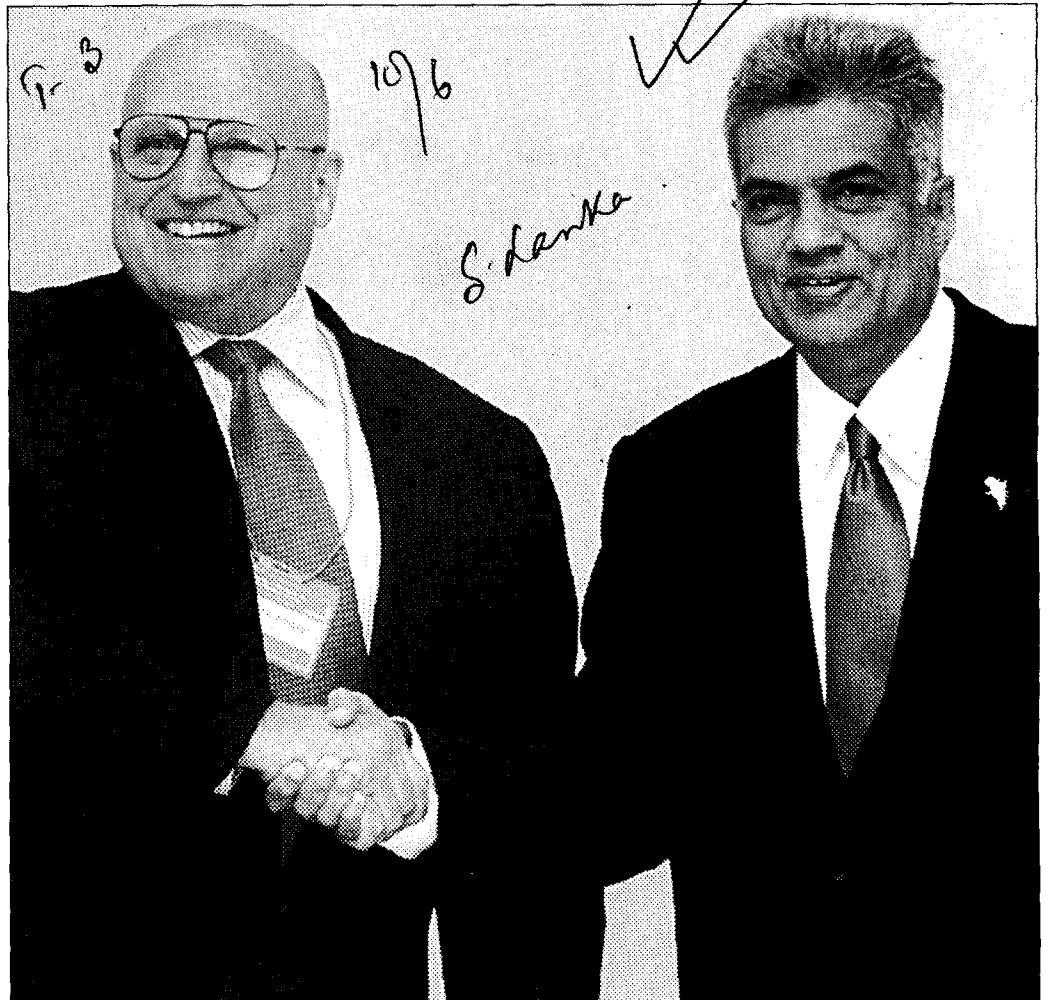
"We will need to look at the speeches and what was said," said an official close to the rebels in London.

The rebels had said they would consider resuming talks if the government agreed to an interim authority, which it had previously rejected as unconstitutional.

The rebels are demanding the authority because they want a bigger say in how aid is used.

Wickremesinghe offered to form a "provisional administrative structure" in the northeast in which the Tigers would have a "significant role", although he did not specifically address the demands of the rebels for their return to talks.

His optimism contrasted with comments from US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage, who joined others in urging the Tigers to return to the ne-



US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage (left) with Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at the aid conference in Tokyo on Monday. (AFP)

gotiating table and voiced scepticism over their ability to give up violence.

"(The group that) pioneered the practice of turning its sons and daughters into human bombs is going to have to work hard to build trust and convince the world that it is capable of playing a legitimate role in the political life of Sri Lanka," he said, referring to the Tigers' use of suicide bombers.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are listed as a terrorist group by Washington and Armitage said there was no question of changing that unless peace talks resumed.

Donors from 50 countries and institutions are expected to pledge more than \$3 billion over three years that will be tied to the bid to permanently end the war that has killed 64,000.

That includes progress on human rights, gender concerns, resettlement of displaced Tamils and "effective measures to stop underage recruitment", said a draft of the final declaration to be issued tomorrow.

"Demonstrated commitment by both the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to further the peace process will be necessary for the implementation of substantial international assis-

tance to the conflict-affected areas," it said.

The Asian Development Bank matched Japan's pledge of \$1 billion, and the EU chipped in with 250 million euros (\$292 million) over three years, also conditional on the peace process.

Wickremesinghe said the provisional administrative structure would have to be "efficient, transparent and accountable".

"It was clear that the structures we had put in place were too cumbersome and too distant from the people to be acceptable or to react quickly enough," Wickremesinghe said.

WS

Efforts to defuse stalemate in Sri Lanka

40 12 575

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 4. Sri Lanka is set for a phase of intense diplomatic efforts to break the de-escalation deadlock between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and bring the Tigers back to the negotiating table.

The Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, Tokyo's special envoy, Yasushi Akashi, and Oslo's special envoy, Erik Solheim, are behind the efforts to resuscitate the process.

The LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, is expected to fly in from London tomorrow, after which meetings are likely to be held with the LTTE leader, V. Prabakaran, to find a way out of the impasse.

Mr. Akashi and Mr. Helgesen met Indian leaders before arriving in Sri Lanka in a bid to defuse the stalemate, triggered by a unilateral rebel suspension of talks on April 21 citing tardy implementation of the agreements reached during six rounds of talks held so far.

Extensive meetings today between the visiting leaders and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and other members of Colombo's peace delegation marked the commencement of the latest efforts. Though optimists hope for a positive LTTE statement later this week, after the peace

envoys meet the rebel leadership, there are no indications of a rebel climb-down yet.

On May 1, the Tigers escalated brinkmanship by rejecting the latest Government offer to de-escalate Jaffna by relocating troops from two main hotels and at least 45 houses to the southern entrance of the city. The army's fear is that further relocation would mean loss of state-control over Jaffna — the centre-piece of the separatist conflict.

A section of political observers feel the LTTE "has a case as the visible military presence in Jaffna has not reduced despite the 14-month long ceasefire". Opponents of the Tigers disagree and demand the continued presence of the army till a political settlement is reached.

Defence analysts do not see the LTTE climbing down in a hurry. "They will not be happy with anything less than getting the Army out of Palaly airbase", the only air-link to northern Sri Lanka, said a former Tamil militant. Despite present postures, he does not rule out a return to war.

"There won't be war, only if the army agrees to pullout from the peninsula," he said.

'Disenchantment with LTTE'

Popular opinion is also seen as a factor directing the latest impasse. Pointing out that crowds for LTTE events "are thinning

out" since last February's ceasefire, Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP), said: "People are getting disenchanted with the LTTE. Their sole representative status is now seriously questioned".

The EPDP, an opponent of the Tigers, does not want de-escalation till a final political solution is reached. "High Security Zones were a fallout of the war, which itself was an outcome of the lack of a political agreement. Without a permanent solution, we cannot agree to the Army withdrawing from Jaffna," Mr. Devananda told *The Hindu*.

The EPDP sees the possibility of the LTTE heading for the Tokyo donors' conference "because of pressure".

The broad feeling here is that the Tigers would attend as "money, needed for development, is involved". However, the larger question is if the Tigers will compromise on de-escalation in Jaffna for development cash inflows.

"I don't think you can buy out Prabakaran," a former Tamil militant said, opposed to the Tigers, said.

"The Government and the international community may be able to delay things with their latest efforts, but nothing more. They may go to Tokyo just to buy time and make an impression on the international community," he said.



Cong. assails 'trishul diksha'



Handwritten notes and scribbles at the bottom of the page.

S. de Silva
H0-12

LTTE shows signs of impatience

BA 9 ✓

By V.S. Sambandan

PALLAI (SRI LANKA) APRIL 29. Showing signs of impatience with negotiations, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) displayed its military hardware on Monday and took the latest impasse on the peace process to "its people," asking them "to decide" if a solution could be reached through talks.

Lamenting that the last 14 months of ceasefire had "not reduced civilian hardship," the head of the Sea Tigers, Soosai, told civilians in the rebel-held northern Sri Lanka: "it is your responsibility to decide if we should find a solution through talks."

Though no mention of a parting from the negotiation process was made, the message behind 'Col' Soosai's remarks was quite evident, when he asked the audience to ponder and decide "whether your problems will be solved through discussions."

In a growl of impatience, he said, "we have told the Government several times. There has been no action." Neither had the Government "taken up the issues," nor were "they in a position to take them up," he said, adding "under these circumstances you will have to decide if we have to talk and find a solution to your problems." The unmet demands of the LTTE

includes the re-location of the northern High Security Zones and the acceptance of the Sea Tigers as a "de-facto naval unit."

The disappointment that the Sea Tigers was not given this recognition was evident.

Outlining the civilian problems in fishing and farming, he added: "if this is your plight, even we, the Sea Tigers, face the same difficulties."

Recalling the loss of the LTTE's merchant ship on March 10 and the earlier suicide explosion of a rebel trawler, he said: "the Sri Lanka Navy which could not face us in battles, has killed 14 Sea Tigers during the ceasefire."

That the LTTE was straining at the end of the military leash also came out in 'Col' Soosai's speech when he said: "we are keeping our hands tied for your sake."

Asserting that the Sea Tigers was the "backbone of the LTTE's struggle," the head of the Sea Tigers said, "it will remain the naval force of the Tamils, till a permanent solution is reached" and called upon "youngsters to join to make it a powerful force again."

The militaristic mood of the rebels was on display at a sprawling ground here, some 360 km from Colombo. They were observing the third anniversary of the capture of Elephant Pass military complex.

APR 29 1987
11:45 AM

QONIR ERI
QONIR ERI

5 JUN 2003

S. H. 19-12
✓
Central issue not addressed: LTTE

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JUNE 4. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today said the Sri Lankan premier, Ranil Wickremesinghe, had "failed to address the central issue" raised by it — an interim administration outside the island's unitary constitution — and said it was "not convinced" with Colombo's efforts. Shutting the door on Mr. Wickremesinghe's offer to provide clarifications on his development-oriented structure (DoS) for the northeast the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, said serious differences "in perception" existed between the rebel demands and Colombo's proposal.

With today's rejection by the LTTE, Sri Lanka's peace process is on the brink, as Colombo cannot provide an interim administration without inviting constitutional trouble from the politically-opposed President, who has wide-ranging dissolution powers and

has already warned of sacking the Wickremesinghe administration if the island's sovereignty was compromised.

Replying to Mr. Wickremesinghe's offer, Mr. Balasingham said the Tigers were "disappointed" that the premier had "not given a clear and precise response" to their "proposal" for an interim administration outside the Constitution, "but indicated negatively" that he "could not act against" the laws of the land. Dismissing the DoS as "unsatisfactory", the LTTE said that while what its leadership proposed was "a politico-administrative structure for the northeast with wider participation of the LTTE", the Government "offered a council with a structure and mechanism for the development of the region".

About the same time, Mr. Balasingham's reply was made public, Colombo's chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, remained hopeful that the problems were "not insurmountable". The prob-

lems, Prof. Peiris said, were over "words and phrases" as the Government was not opposed to an interim administration, but wanted the mechanism to be discussed in the talks.

The LTTE, for its part, says it would resume negotiations only if it was to discuss an offer for an interim administration as proposed by its leadership. In tone and in language, the LTTE's replies have got steadily stronger since April 21. When calling off the negotiations, the Tigers said it was "for the time being" and cited tardy progress in meeting the agreements reached. This was later elaborated as creating "an interval" to enable Colombo implement its decisions.

Later, on May 21, the LTTE made the point that its demand was for an interim administration as proposed by its leader, V. Prabakaran, to the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Petersen, on May 15. No details of the Prabakaran's proposals are known, but the LTTE's political wing

leader, S.P. Tamichelvan, described them as "tangible, workable, practical and conceptually new". Today, Mr. Balasingham said while the LTTE's "original proposal" when talks started last September "was for an interim administrative structure" it had "metamorphosed into different forms with different functions and powers". Tracing the various mechanisms considered or put in place — the Joint Task Force, the subcommittee on immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs, and the Northeast Development and Reconstruction Council — Mr. Balasingham said: "this is not the end of this strange evolutionary history of your Government's committees and structures".

On the premier's latest offer, the LTTE's chief negotiator said: "we could only speculate as to how many rounds of negotiations the parties have to undergo to arrive at a final formulation of this new bureaucratic institution".

S. Senarathne
19-12
B/T

Colombo willing to 'offer clarifications'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JUNE 2. The Sri Lankan Government today said it was willing to "offer clarifications" to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on its latest proposals for a development-oriented structure (DoS).

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, in a reply to a letter from the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, made the offer for explanation of possible areas of doubt in the proposal which was dismissed by the Tigers on May 30 as "inadequate".

The details of the Mr. Wickremesinghe's reply have not been made public yet, but according to sources, the Government has said that "it may be beneficial" to have "some discussions by officials" by way of "explanation" of the proposals made earlier this month.

The suggestion, at a time when the 15-month-old peace process is already on the brink with the Tigers demanding an interim administration outside Sri Lanka's unitary Constitution, forms part of the attempts since April to get the Tigers back to the negotiating table.

The efforts intensified during May with visits by special envoys from Tokyo and Oslo - Yasushi Akashi and Erik Solheim - as well as the Norwegian Foreign Minister and his Deputy - Jan Petersen and Vidar Helgesen - in a bid to convince the Tigers on the importance of attending next week's donors' conference in Japan. However, the LTTE has not showed signs of diluting its stand.

Meanwhile, *The Island* today reported that Mr. Wickremesinghe had informed the Tigers that the interim structure would have to be within the Sri Lankan statute.

The possibility of an adverse judicial verdict on any structure outside the Constitution has clearly weighed on this affirmation, particularly after the apex court shot down an earlier amendment proposed by the Wickremesinghe administration to curtail Presidential powers to dissolve Parliament.

Mr. Wickremesinghe is part of an uneasy cohabitation Government headed by the constitutionally powerful, but politically opposed President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who recently warned that she would sack the Prime Minister if he offered an interim administration outside the statute before the Tigers promise to renounce terrorism and work towards a negotiated political settlement.

Today's offer for clarification comes just ahead of the Tokyo donors' conference where several countries and multilateral organisations are scheduled to participate in the conference, expected to receive pledges for \$3 billions to reconstruct war-torn and debt-ridden Sri Lanka.

According to all indications, the Tokyo conference would be held as scheduled even if the Tigers were to stay away, but officials concede that much of the sheen would then be lost.

On May 21, a month after the Tigers unilaterally suspended talks, the rebels had asked Colombo for an interim administration in the north and east, with a majority stake for itself to carry out relief and reconstruction activities.

While Colombo and the Tigers held six rounds of talks since September last, the LTTE snapped parleys on April 21. Terming it a "temporary suspension", the LTTE said it was giving time to Colombo to implement agreements reached during the talks.

The LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvam, followed up Mr. Balasingham's formal demand for an interim administration saying that the structure sought would have to be outside the Sri Lankan Constitution.

The Tigers want Colombo to embark upon a "new thinking" to provide an interim administration as proposed by its leader, V. Prabakaran, in a meeting with Mr. Petersen, on May 15. No details are known of the Prabakaran proposals, which Mr. Tamilchelvan termed "tangible, workable, practical and conceptually new."

S. Lanka
19-11
31/5

LTTE rejects Wickremesinghe offer

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 30. Hardening its position, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today rejected an offer of a "development-oriented structure" as an "unacceptable" alternative to its demand for an interim administration for the northeast and expressed annoyance that it was "treated shabbily" by major "regional" and "international" players.

In a detailed reply to the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe's offer earlier this week, the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, said the Government had not addressed its demand for an interim administration. "What is sought and what is delivered are two different sets of structures," he said.

The four-page letter, reproduced in the TamilNet website was firm and clear about the LTTE's demand: an interim administrative structure as envisaged by its leadership.

The latest LTTE position ties up any further progress in the peace process to the Government's willingness and ability to give an interim administration outside the unitary Sri Lankan Constitution.

The unchanged worldview of the Tigers — particularly the U.S., which wants it to renounce terrorism, and India, which stays away from any international meeting in which the LTTE is a participant — provides the external backdrop for the rebels unilaterally suspending talks on April 21.

Given Mr. Wickremesinghe's position in a bitter co-habitation Government head-

ed by the constitutionally powerful, but politically opposed President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, it would be near-impossible for him to meet the demands without inviting the wrath of the President, who last week said she would sack the Government if it acted against Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

The LTTE wants "an innovative interim administrative structure, vested with adequate authority and legal status" in which they have "greater participation in both decision-making and delivery of the tasks of rebuilding the war damaged economy and restoring normalcy in the Tamil-speaking homeland".

The LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, made this demand when he met the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Petersen in rebel-held Killinochchi earlier this month. The Tigers had not spelt out the powers, functions and mechanisms of the interim administrative model demanded by Mr. Prabhakaran.

In his reply, Mr. Balasingham said the Tigers had "entrusted" that task to the Wickremesinghe administration "with the hope that you will act with courage and creativity" as he had "an overwhelming mandate from the Sinhala masses to establish an interim administrative structure for the northeast".

However, he said, the Tigers were "surprised" and "dismayed" that the Government "did not address the critical issue of setting up an interim administrative structure as suggested by the LTTE leadership". Dismissing the development-oriented structure as one with "extremely

limited administrative powers" and in which "the participatory role of the LTTE is not clearly defined, or rather, left deliberately ambiguous", he said the Government had "effectively rejected" the LTTE's proposal "without specifying any reasons".

Criticising Colombo for taking "refuge" under the Constitution, he said the Government's offer would create an "apex bureaucracy linked to several other inefficient and defunct state agencies". Not concealing annoyance at the treatment meted out to them as "terrorists", the Tigers said "the continuous hard-line attitude" by "powerful international governments" against the Tigers "under their proscription laws casts a negative impact on promoting peace and ethnic reconciliation".

The LTTE, Mr. Balasingham said, had been "very flexible, accommodative and conciliatory" during the talks, had "offered major political concessions" from its "entrenched positions" and "maintained peace under extreme provocations" despite "main international and regional players" continuing to treat the LTTE "shabbily as a proscribed entity with a terrorist label to be excluded from international forums".

The rebels also expressed concern over "the growing involvement of formidable international forces" from which Colombo was "soliciting not only aid" but was also setting-up a "grand international safety net to bring undue pressure on the freedom of our people to determine their political status and destiny".

31 MAY 2002

SRI LANKA / THREAT TO SACK RANIL GOVT.

HD-10 25/5

Chandrika rules out interim council

N-5

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 24. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has ruled out giving the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) an interim council outside the Constitution and warned that she would sack the Ranil Wickremesinghe administration if it did so before the Tigers agree to decommission arms and accept a political settlement.

"A highly-organised ruthless terrorist group cannot be given an interim council, merging two large provinces of the country, where they would be the exclusive rulers without their having given one promise to the country", Ms. Kumaratunga told the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Sri Lanka on Friday — her first major interaction with the media since the December 2001 change of Government.

The promises that Ms. Kumaratunga wanted the LTTE to make before an interim council could be granted include its willingness "to give up terrorism, lay down arms if the solution is given, give up their call for a separate state and go in for a democratic negotiated settlement. Without knowing that, we cannot give them an interim council, which will be a *de facto* Eelam anyway," she said.

The President's position is against the backdrop of an LTTE demand for an interim administration outside the Constitution,

if it is to participate in next month's Tokyo donors' conference and resume negotiations, suspended by it unilaterally last month.

Many see this as the Tigers shifting goalposts during negotiations. The LTTE however, is emphatic that it is a long-time demand and was accepted by the United National Party (UNP) before it won the 2001 Parliamentary elections. Stiff southern political opposition — which is already critical of the UNP for "giving too much to the Tigers" — also makes this a near impossibility.

Asked when she would exercise her wide-ranging constitutional powers, including dissolution of Parliament, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "I hope that moment will not arise" and that the UNP administration "will act responsibly". Emphatic that she "will not act for narrow political gains", Ms. Kumaratunga said: "I will only act if I feel the wide national interest of this country is affected".

On the LTTE's latest demand that the interim council be given outside the Constitution she said: "How dare they suggest to the sovereign government that it goes outside its own Constitution?"

"If anyone thinks that the Government would consider such demand, then they must be mad. You have a lot of mad people around at the moment," Ms. Kumaratunga, who heads an uneasy cohabitation Govern-

ment, said.

Slamming the truce monitors for proposing that the Sea Tigers be recognised as a *de facto* naval unit she said: "either the Government must be mad or the people who say it must be.

"Even the most federal of federal states will not permit any other armies other than those of the central government within its territorial limits".

On the LTTE's position that the Government must go the extra mile to meet its demand, the President said "we are willing to amend" the Constitution "100 times, but there are certain ways in which to do it". She summed up the latest LTTE's demand as one in which it wanted "an interim council they way we (the Tigers) are asking for it, not the way you are trying to give it and to hell with the talks".

On the international safety net, which the UNP Government sees as a major factor in the latest peace bid, the former Foreign Affairs Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, said: "No body has told anybody about what this net means" and wanted the nation to be informed.

"There is a total blanket over the meaning of international safety net", Mr. Kadirgamar said, adding it could be "a peg on which you can hang vague assurances", and was "not fair by the people".

25 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Chandrika set to pull rug from under Ranil govt

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, May 19. — Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga's party, People's Alliance, is all set to strike a deal with the main Marxist party in a bid to topple the cohabitation government, even as the country is embroiled in a major constitutional crisis.

The Marxist JVP (People's Liberation Front) announced today that they have finalised an MoU with People's Alliance.

"We had a discussion at the President's house yesterday and we have reached a finality on most of the matters relating to the MoU," Mr Weerawansa, JVP spokesman, said here today. He said his party would ratify the deal on Friday. Mrs Kumaratunga's party, the main opposition in Parliament, will ratify the deal on 27 May.

The 89 seats of People's Alliance and 16 of the JVP will make them a formidable force, but still short of the 113 seats needed to take power in the 225-member Assembly.

Mr Weerawansa declined to give details of the agreement, but political sources said the alliance was aimed at going for a snap election after ousting Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe's government through a Presidential decree.

The President, on 9 May, took over the development Lotteries Board which was under the economic reforms minister and the Prime Minister said the move was illegal. However, the question of who has ultimate power is yet to be settled.

These developments have raised many eyebrows in political quarters. Mrs Kumaratunga had accused the JVP of assassinating her actor-turned-politician husband Vijay in February 1988. The President and the JVP also don't see eye to eye on the country's peace process either. Mrs Kumaratunga is for autonomy for minority Tamils and supports Norway's involvement as peace broker, unlike JVP.

20 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

Efforts to defuse stalemate in Sri Lanka

Handwritten: 100/12/89

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MAY 4. Sri Lanka is set for a phase of intense diplomatic efforts to break the de-escalation deadlock between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and bring the Tigers back to the negotiating table.

The Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, Tokyo's special envoy, Yasushi Akashi, and Oslo's special envoy, Erik Solheim, are behind the efforts to resuscitate the process.

The LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, is expected to fly in from London tomorrow, after which meetings are likely to be held with the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, to find a way out of the impasse.

Mr. Akashi and Mr. Helgesen met Indian leaders before arriving in Sri Lanka in a bid to defuse the stalemate, triggered by a unilateral rebel suspension of talks on April 21 citing tardy implementation of the agreements reached during six rounds of talks held so far.

Extensive meetings today between the visiting leaders and the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and other members of Colombo's peace delegation marked the commencement of the latest efforts. Though optimists hope for a positive LTTE statement later this week after the peace

envoys meet the rebel leadership, there are no indications of a rebel climb-down yet.

On May 1, the Tigers escalated brinkmanship by rejecting the latest Government offer to de-escalate Jaffna by relocating troops from two main hotels and at least 45 houses to the southern entrance of the city. The army's fear is that further relocation would mean loss of state-control over Jaffna — the centre-piece of the separatist conflict.

A section of political observers feel the LTTE "has a case as the visible military presence in Jaffna has not reduced despite the 14-month long ceasefire". Opponents of the Tigers disagree and demand the continued presence of the army till a political settlement is reached.

Defence analysts do not see the LTTE climbing down in a hurry. "They will not be happy with anything less than getting the Army out of Palaly airbase", the only air link to northern Sri Lanka, said a former Tamil militant. Despite present postures, he does not rule out a return to war.

"There won't be war, only if the army agrees to pullout from the peninsula," he said.

'Disenchantment with LTTE'

Popular opinion is also seen as a factor directing the latest impasse. Pointing out that crowds for LTTE events "are thinning

out" since last February's ceasefire, Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP), said: "People are getting disenchanted with the LTTE. Their sole representative status is now seriously questioned".

The EPDP, an opponent of the Tigers, does not want de-escalation till a final political solution is reached. "High Security Zones were a fallout of the war, which itself was an outcome of the lack of a political agreement. Without a permanent solution, we cannot agree to the Army withdrawing from Jaffna," Mr. Devananda told *The Hindu*.

The EPDP sees the possibility of the LTTE heading for the Tokyo donors' conference "because of pressure".

The broad feeling here is that the Tigers would attend as "money, needed for development, is involved". However, the larger question is if the Tigers will compromise on de-escalation in Jaffna for development cash inflows.

"I don't think you can buy out Prabhakaran," a former Tamil militant said, opposed to the Tigers, said.

"The Government and the international community may be able to delay things with their latest efforts, but nothing more. They may go to Tokyo just to buy time and make an impression on the international community," he said.

LTTE shows signs of impatience

Sri Lanka
110-12

BA A ✓

By V.S. Sambandan

PALLAI (SRI LANKA) APRIL 29. Showing signs of impatience with negotiations, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) displayed its military hardware on Monday and took the latest impasse on the peace process to "its people," asking them "to decide" if a solution could be reached through talks.

Lamenting that the last 14 months of ceasefire had "not reduced civilian hardship," the head of the Sea Tigers, Soosai, told civilians in the rebel-held northern Sri Lanka: "it is your responsibility to decide if we should find a solution through talks."

head of
liven a
banks
the May
vision,
service
ation
n an
ace,
y
sted
old
ce

Though no mention of a parting from the negotiation process was made, the message behind 'Col' Soosai's remarks was quite evident, when he asked the audience to ponder and decide "whether your problems will be solved through discussions."

In a growl of impatience, he said, "we have told the Government several times. There has been no action." Neither had the Government "taken up the issues," nor were "they in a position to take them up," he said, adding "under these circumstances you will have to decide if we have to talk and find a solution to your problems." The unmet demands of the LTTE

includes the re-location of the northern High Security Zones and the acceptance of the Sea Tigers as a "de-facto naval unit."

The disappointment that the Sea Tigers was not given this recognition was evident.

Outlining the civilian problems in fishing and farming, he added: "if this is your plight, even we, the Sea Tigers, face the same difficulties."

Recalling the loss of the LTTE's merchant ship on March 10 and the earlier suicide explosion of a rebel trawler, he said: "the Sri Lanka Navy which could not face us in battles, has killed 14 Sea Tigers during the ceasefire."

That the LTTE was straining at the end of the military leash also came out in 'Col' Soosai's speech when he said: "we are keeping our hands tied for your sake."

Asserting that the Sea Tigers was the "backbone of the LTTE's struggle," the head of the Sea Tigers said, "it will remain the naval force of the Tamils, till a permanent solution is reached" and called upon "youngsters to join to make it a powerful force again."

The militaristic mood of the rebels was on display at a sprawling ground here, some 360 km from Colombo. They were observing the third anniversary of the capture of Elephant Pass military complex.

SI
a
N
st
tl
se
b
a
it
N
p

NI
P
ve
le
ic
L
n
tt

S
P
al
er
se
P
ti
ri
k
d
p

3 0 APR 2003

SEE HINDU

2 5 APR 2003

LTTE pursuing violent, separatist agenda: U.S.

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 24. Exerting pressure on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to renounce separatism and return to the negotiating table, the United States today slammed it for "prolonging the conflict" by "pursuing a violent, separatist agenda". Countering the LTTE at its basics, the U.S. envoy to Sri Lanka, Ashley Wills, said: "The LTTE's weapons and armed cadre are not protecting Tamil rights; they are prolonging this conflict and delaying the day when Tamils can live in truly peaceful conditions."

The Tigers have always claimed that they are the "sole representatives of the island's Tamils and that "military strength" was their main "bargaining power" in the negotiations. Mr. Wills' assertion today directly challenges these claims.

The "blame" for the present situation, Mr. Wills was quoted by the Embassy as telling a Western news agency, "does not fall exclusively on the side of the Government as the LTTE's statement suggested". The LTTE also had to "bear heavy responsibility for numerous

breaches of the ceasefire", he said. The envoy wanted the Tigers to "reflect carefully on their own transgressions" and termed as "ludicrous" their position that poverty in southern Sri Lanka was "self-inflicted".

Conceding that "successive governments" in the south had "made many mistakes", Mr. Wills said: "if blame is being distributed fairly, the LTTE deserves a great deal as well". Moreover, the LTTE's "pursuit of an extreme, separatist agenda by violent means has cost Sri Lanka's lives and 20 years of peaceful development", he said.

Reiterating the U.S. position that the LTTE should renounce terrorism and violence, Mr. Wills said "the truly courageous thing" for the LTTE to do was to "give up violence and even the threat of violence and push for permanent peace now". The U.S., he said, "can see a legitimate political role for the LTTE, provided it renounces terrorism and violence". The U.S. "continues to believe that the way out of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is through negotiations facilitated by the Government of Norway", the release said. Maintaining her tough

position on military issues, the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today ruled out de-militarisation of the Jaffna Peninsula until a permanent solution was reached with the LTTE. "As long as the LTTE is armed and does not give up violence, the northern High Security Zones (HSZ) will not be removed."

The rebels wanted "re-location of the HSZs" and unilaterally suspended talks on Monday demanding implementation of agreements reached during the last six rounds of talks. "No army of a sovereign Government can pull its troops out", the *Sudar Oli* newspaper quoted her as saying. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Government continued to put on a brave face to the unilateral rebel action. "It is certainly not the end of the peace process," Colombo's chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, told reporters today, expressing the hope that "resumption of dialogue will take place sooner than later".

Asked about the Government's reaction to the LTTE's charges, Prof. Peiris said: "it is not helpful to indulge in imputation of blame". There was "no question of breach of trust" he said, adding "the door has not been slammed shut".

SECRET

THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2003

S. Lanka
H9-10

LTTE'S BRINKMANSHIP

29/1

THERE IS INCREASING evidence to confirm widespread apprehensions, not just in India, that the LTTE may be using the current, year-long ceasefire and its negotiations with the Sri Lankan Government as instruments to consolidate its position and that its repeated avowal of faith in the search for a peaceful solution is nothing more than a facade. The impatience of the terrorist organisation was evident during the last round of the talks in Berlin when its clandestine militarist activities stood exposed and it immediately ratcheted up the heat and brought things to a breaking point. It was not yet time then to push matters beyond the brink. Now, with hardly a week to go for the resumption of the next round, the LTTE has returned to its old game, injecting uncertainty and doubt again into the whole peace process. Still smarting over its failure to pressure and intimidate its way into a conference early last week in Washington that held preliminary discussions on the level of economic assistance needed by the war ravaged island-nation, the LTTE has announced that it is suspending the negotiations with the Government "for the time being", that it will not be participating in an important donors' conference in Tokyo two months hence, and that it is giving up what it calls its "soft approach".

Clearly, with international opinion crystallising against terrorism of any brand, the LTTE is getting increasingly isolated. There can be no other explanation for its resort to brinkmanship and blackmail at the present crucial juncture when the Sri Lankan Government headed by Ranil Wickremesinghe, its partner in the peace process, has shown remarkable readiness to accommodate its views. The most apt comment on the LTTE announcement has come from Norway's special envoy, Erik Solheim, who has said he was not surprised by the decision. As a facilitator with a ringside seat, he must be deemed to be reflecting the true state of the

seven rounds of the negotiations when he said there were enough indications of such a possibility of LTTE action to suspend the parleys. Mr. Solheim could as well have pointed attention to all the other indicators on the intentions of the terrorist outfit, including its assertion early in the negotiations that its military strength provided it with the bargaining power. By refusing to reduce its combat potential, the LTTE gave at the very outset enough indications that it could fully revive its militarism if it was disappointed with the developments on the political front. The resort to threats now must sound the right warnings to the interlocutors on the Government side: to place unquestioning trust in the LTTE might prove unwise in the longer term. Its desperate reference to the issue of resettlement of internally displaced civilians again reflects its unsuccessful campaign to have the northern High Security Zone thrown open. The issue is intricately linked to the reduction of military potential on either side and the LTTE's demand has acquired a shrillness thanks to the impending discussions in Colombo on the basis of a report prepared by an Indian military expert working in his personal capacity. The Sri Lankan military has expressed the fear that the LTTE might try to infiltrate its cadre if the HSZ is opened to civilians.

The time has come to call the LTTE's bluff. The only response to the LTTE should be a firm refusal to yield to blackmail, in the clear knowledge that the Tigers have few options in a global setting where views against terrorism have hardened in the wake of the September 11, 2001, outrage. For the response to be strong and productive, it is imperative that the island's President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Government headed by Mr. Wickremesinghe of the opposition United National Party close ranks in the face of the machinations of the common enemy of peace.

LTTE suspends talks

By V.S. Sambandan

S. Lanka

COLOMBO, APRIL 21. The LTTE today announced the suspension of negotiations with the Sri

Lankan Government "for the time being", plunging its latest six-month-long direct talks with Colombo into yet another phase of uncertainty.

Raising the known rebel tactic of brinkmanship to higher levels, the Tigers declared that they were not participating in the June donors' conference in Japan, but kept the door ajar by remaining silent on the more immediate seventh round of peace talks scheduled between April 29 and May 2 in Thailand.

In a letter to the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, the chief rebel negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, demanded the "immediate resettlement" of the displaced civilians in Jaffna, an issue that has rocked the peace process since January.

The LTTE charged the Sri Lankan Government with "grave breach of good faith." Expressing

"regret" over their decision, Mr. Balasingham reiterated the LTTE's "commitment to seek a negotiated political solution to the ethnic question".

The attempt to swing international opinion was apparent in Mr. Balasingham's four-page letter to Mr. Wickremesinghe. The exclusion of the Tigers at the April 14 Washington peace support seminar was termed as an attempt to "marginalise" the organisation in the international community.

For Norway's special envoy for the Sri Lankan peace process, Erik Solheim, the LTTE's decision to suspend negotiations has not come as a surprise.

Declining to comment on the manner in which further rounds of the peace talks, would move, Mr. Solheim said that he was "not surprised"

by their decision as indications of such a possibility were evident going by the progress of the negotiations and the LTTE's demands.

Plea to India: Page 12

LTTE threatens to keep off Tokyo meet

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 12. In its strongest criticism of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today charged his administration with "impotence" and threatened to "review" its decision to participate in the Tokyo donors' conference.

The criticism came in the form of a statement from the LTTE's political headquarters in Kilinochchi to "protest against the exclusion" of the outfit's "accredited representatives" from the Washington conference to be held on April 14 in preparation for the donors' conference in June. The meetings are seen as crucial events since talks started last September.

Sri Lanka's fragile peace process is bound to get more difficult after today's statement by the Tigers on the twin issues of exclusion from the Washington conference and the efficacy of the administration it is talking with.

The Tigers accused Colombo of "gross violation of the pledges" that the Government and the LTTE "should work together and approach the international community in partnership" by opting to "marginalise our organisation", the statement, published in the TamilNet website said.

Terming the "deliberate exclusion" a "grave breach of good faith", the rebels said

they were "deeply disappointed" with the Government and facilitators, Norway, who "failed to ensure the LTTE's participation in this crucial preparatory aid conference by not selecting an appropriate venue".

The LTTE has been kept out of the Washington conference, convened by the U.S., as it is listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. As the Tigers were kept out, India decided to send a two-member team to the meeting. The exclusion from Washington, the Tigers said, severely undermined their "trust and confidence in the Government's intentions".

The LTTE reserved its strongest words for issues with military implications. The Tigers, who lost military control over the Jaffna peninsula in 1996, have demanded de-escalation of the Sri Lankan military in the north. This resulted in a stalemate, with the crucial sub-committee on de-escalation and normalisation (SDN) now defunct.

The LTTE said: "The irreconcilable attitude of the Sri Lanka military hierarchy and the impotence of Ranil Wickremesinghe's administration have made all programmes of resettling and rehabilitating hundreds of thousands of Tamil refugees and IDPs unrealisable."

Charge against military

This January, after it unilaterally pulled out of the SDN, the LTTE accused the mil-

itary of adopting an "intransigent and paranoid" approach, but refrained from accusing the Wickremesinghe administration. If at all, it was soft on Mr. Wickremesinghe and reserved its condemnation for the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, who also heads the armed forces.

However, the LTTE today questioned the "very efficacy" of the negotiating process, as "decisions and agreements" reached at the peace talks were "not being implemented, eroding the confidence of the Tamil people".

What has hurt the Tigers the most is that their exclusion from the Washington meeting directly challenges their claim as the sole representatives of the island's Tamils — a claim not accepted by other Tamil political parties. This was reflected in the LTTE's statement: "It is only fair and just that the authentic representatives of the Tamil people should have been invited to this major international conference to articulate the interests and aspirations of our people."

Leaving the door ajar, while pushing its brinkmanship approach further, the LTTE wanted the "full implementation of the normalisation aspects" of last year's ceasefire agreement as well as implementation of agreements pertaining to resettlement of refugees and IDPs reached in the six rounds of talks held by both parties.

13 APR 2003

1 2 APR 2003

'Many Sri Lankan soldiers under LTTE captivity'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 11. In a startling account of an "escape from a prison run by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)", a member of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) today alleged that a number of Sri Lankan "soldiers and policemen" were held captive by the Tigers "in an underground bunker" in rebel-held northern Sri Lanka.

Narrating his version of detention and escape, Chelliah Paraman, said he was held captive by the Tigers before he

broke out with the help of another detainee. He claimed that "army, police and navy personnel were kept handcuffed in the underground cell" in which he was confined for two days.

The EPDP member's statement questioned the assertion made by the LTTE last year that they held no "prisoners of war". Over 1,000 soldiers are said to be still missing, but the LTTE says it had released all prisoners by last year and had even cremated the bodies of combatants that were not accepted by the Government.

The 23-year-old Paraman's

troubles started with a visit from Government-held Jaffna to rebel-held Kilinochchi on March 31 to see his sister. "As I did not know the place, I was making enquiries, when someone pointed me out to the Tigers as a member of the EPDP," Paraman said. Taken at "gunpoint" to a detention centre in Kilinochchi, he was questioned by the LTTE on a range of topics, including the movements of the EPDP leader, Douglas Devananda.

The EPDP, a militant outfit-turned-parliamentary party, is a fierce opponent of the LTTE

and Mr. Devananda escaped several attempts on his life, the latest of which was in June 1998. From Kilinochchi, Paraman said he was "blindfolded and taken in a vehicle for about three hours" and pushed into an "underground cell" for "two days" after which he was shifted to solitary confinement in a cell above the bunker. It was there he learnt of the presence of the Sri Lankan security forces personnel.

"Guards were asleep"

Paraman's story of his escape raised several eyebrows at the

press conference. According to Paraman, "a member of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) was also detained in another cell". Just before dawn (on April 6), the PLOTE member, who escaped from his cell using a small saw, turned his benefactor.

"He broke the padlock to my cell and took me out of captivity. Two LTTE guards were sleeping when we made our escape," he said.

The EPDP did not reveal the details of the PLOTE member citing "security reasons".

THE HINDU

1 2 APR 2003

'LTTE has set up a ^{de facto} State'

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has said that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has established a "de facto separate State" in the north of her country and in parts of the east since entering into peace talks with the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government.

In an exclusive interview to *The Hindu* on Thursday, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "The LTTE has increased its cadres from 6,000 to 16,000 during the one year of peace. They are training them apace, they have got caught bringing in large quantities of arms."

Hinting that she might even use her powers as Executive President if she felt that the national interest was seriously threatened, Ms. Kumaratunga had no hesitation blaming her political opponents, United National Party (UNP), for permitting the Tigers to do as they chose.

"Because if you don't know where you want to go, if you don't know what are the limits you are going to discuss within,



Chandrika Kumaratunga

then whatever the other party (LTTE) asks, you say ah, yes, it's very nice, because all you want is peace at any cost..."

On India and its role in the "peace matter", Ms. Kumaratunga, who held talks through Wednesday and Thursday with the country's political leadership, said she wanted New Delhi to continue "their support and whatever assistance they can give us in the peace process".

Calling for a "proactive role"

politically, she made it clear that she did not mean militarily; aware of the deep scars caused by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) experience back in the late 1980s.

Pointing to the extensive presence of facilitators-turned-mediators-turned-advisers, Ms. Kumaratunga said: "In the final count, India is the one country that would be justifiably interested in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka's future in this (peace) matter, for reasons that are known... the historical reasons, the geographic proximity, the linkages, economic and everything else."

The Government of India is also very strongly of the view that whatever solution is reached should be within the framework of one Sri Lanka. They are also of the view that some kind of extensive devolution is the solution — kind of federal or some such solution as I proposed to the country some time ago."

Would the Tigers, like in 1995, torpedo the peace process by a possible military attack? "At the moment, they may not need it because they have got much more in one year of peace

than they were able to get in 18 years of war."

As I was saying, the LTTE has decided that they will slowly, but surely, while the so-called peace process is going on, establish themselves and strengthen the de facto Eelam situation...", she said.

Will she use her emergency powers to dismiss the Wickremesinghe Government? "I hope I will not be called upon to do that. But if I have to, well, then I have to fulfil the duties and responsibilities that the people of Sri Lanka have given me."

Would she also play the game of oneupmanship, which the UNP played against her back in 1994-95 as far as achieving peace was concerned? "No, I won't. As I told the Prime Minister (Ranil Wickremesinghe) right in the beginning when he came into power, I will not sabotage his peace process like the way he sabotaged mine. I told him to his face. I told him: ask for our assistance, we will give you of our eight years of experience of handling the issue. But they didn't want it, so that's a different matter."

Interview details: Page 12

Greater inclusiveness in Sri Lankan talks mooted

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 5. The Nobel laureate, John Hume, co-winner of the peace prize for conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, on Thursday said the Sri Lankan peace process "is in an advanced stage" and called for greater inclusiveness in the negotiations.

"I think the process is in an advanced stage because you have a ceasefire lasting a full year and a commitment from the parties to keep in dialogue to reach the agreement."

Mr. Hume, who is on a visit to the island on the invitation of the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, said that inclusiveness was required in the peace process. "All the democratically-elected parties should be at the table. That's democracy," he told a press conference. He would not endorse the view that only the Government or a majority party should hold talks. Such an electoral victory was "only for governing a country" he said, adding that as the "purpose" — conflict resolution, was about achieving "a system of governance" it was necessary to have "all parties around the table".

Citing the experience of the Northern Ireland peace process, he said all the parties, which differed from each other, were at the talks.

Mr. Hume met the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Mr.

Wickremesinghe and leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the rebel-held Kilinochchi.

His observation comes at a time when the peace negotiations are headed towards the seventh round later this month. Calls for inclusiveness were made in the past by various sections of civil society.

When talks started last September, Ms. Kumaratunga had mooted the idea of a Presidential nominee at the talks. This was turned down by the Government because "it had got a mandate from the people to hold talks with the Tigers". Mentioning his city, Derry in Northern Ireland, as an example of political "team spirit", Mr. Hume said the two main parties shared the Mayoral position every other year. "We use politics to solve the problems of the people, not to gain victory over somebody else". The underlying factor for conflict resolution, he said, was to "respect differences" and "we should not fight about it". Conflict resolution, he said should not be viewed as a "victory" for any particular section.

Mr. Hume was "very confident" that the Good Friday agreement would be fully implemented.

Condemning the violence, Mr. Hume said: "When people are divided, violence has no role to play. Violence only divides people".

6 APR 2003

THE HINDU

Balasingham slated to meet Prabakaran on March 2

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, FEB. 24. The chief negotiator for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton S. Balasingham, is scheduled to arrive in Sri Lanka on March 2 for a meeting with his leader, V. Prabakaran, before the next round of talks to be held in Japan.

Mr. Balasingham's arrival, at the island's only international airport on the outskirts of Colombo, comes at a time when the direct talks between the Government and the LTTE have hit a hurdle on the issue of de-escalation in the Jaffna peninsula, and cracks within the pro-LTTE Tamil parliamentary political parties are starting to show.

The delayed meeting between Mr. Balasingham and Mr. Prabakaran is seen as among the reasons for the last round of talks to be reduced to two days and shifted to the German capital, Berlin, from the earlier venue in Thailand. Mr. Balasingham, a British national, lives in London and suffers from a kidney ailment, while Mr. Prabakaran has confined himself to the rebel-held northern Sri Lanka.

Apart from being categorised the "prime accused" and

"proclaimed offender" by Indian courts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, Mr. Prabakaran has been convicted, in absentia, by Sri Lankan courts for a 100-year jail term for his alleged involvement in the Central Bank bombing.

For the first time since the talks started last September, the two sides publicly differed on their negotiating positions in January on the subject of the military reducing its forces in the Jaffna peninsula. The issue of de-escalation came centre-stage way back last November, when Mr. Prabakaran referred to it in his annual "heroes' day" speech.

The issue, however, did not figure in public in the December talks, which coincided with the date when the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, became constitutionally empowered to dissolve Parliament. On December 5, the same day from when the constitutional restriction on Ms. Kumaratunga was lifted, the two sides agreed to "explore federal models" for a solution within a united Sri Lanka.

However, differences came out in the run-up to the January talks, during which the LTTE announced its pull-out from the crucial sub-committee on de-escalation and normalisation

(SDN). International opinion is playing a crucial role in keeping the peace process going.

The Ranil Wickremesinghe administration, by involving major global players, has effectively internationalised the conflict resolution process. The financial imperatives of the peace process — Sri Lanka's debts amount to 107 per cent of its GDP and the internationally-conscripted LTTE faces a squeeze on its global funds — are currently weighing heavily on the negotiators.

Mr. Balasingham's visit also comes at a time when the island's Tamil politics is showing signs of yet another cracking up. All is not well with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which came together before the 2001 elections and backed the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamils at the talks. The latest cause for discontent is the indefinite postponement of the re-opening of the Jaffna Public Library. While the parliamentary parties were largely in favour of its re-opening, the LTTE reportedly wanted at least a section of it to be maintained as a memorial of the past.

The LTTE, which was against the re-opening, had its way, forcing a climb-down by sections that were not in favour of toeing the LTTE line.

25 FEB 2003

THE HINDU

Stop recruiting child soldiers, Chandrika appeals to LTTE

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, FEB. 3. The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, today appealed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to stop recruiting child soldiers and sought a guarantee from the peace negotiators that the core issues of the conflict would be taken up "without delay."

She made the appeal as part of her message to the nation on the eve of the 55th Independence Day celebrations.

"I wish to make a special appeal to the LTTE: please do not recruit children for armed conflict. Children are the most precious treasure of any community any country; indeed of the world."

On the achievements and failures of Sri Lanka since Independence in 1948, Ms. Kumaratunga said while the nation could "lay claim to a

noble heritage of over 2500 years, it failed to build on our strengths and evolve into a modern, independent and pluralistic nation." This failure during the past years had "metamorphosed existing conflicts into a violent armed conflict." This year's Independence Day celebrations come at a time when the Government is engaged in its sixth attempt to find peace through negotiations.

"If we are to achieve success this time, it is essential that the root causes of terrorism are addressed and solutions found," Ms. Kumaratunga said, emphasising that the solutions found "must have the acceptance of all our peoples and the rights of all Sri Lankans must be protected.

The solution must be sought within a democratic framework, enshrining the

indivisibility of the State and the sovereignty of the people. We need a strong guarantee from all sections engaged in the peace talks that they will discuss the core issues without delay."

Though the Government "has fulfilled its promises related to the peace process, the other party has not cooperated fully on this issue," Ms. Kumaratunga, who heads a cohabitation government with her political opponents, said.

Referring to reports of child recruitment and other human rights violations, she said: "the heritage and culture of a community of people can be carried forward only if their children lead a normal childhood, in freedom. Every opportunity must be theirs, for blossoming forth unhindered, with all their fundamental rights guaranteed and with adequate education."

FEB 2003

Row over Indian's role in Lanka peace

PK Balachandran
Colombo, January 21

THE ROLE of retired Indian Army General Satish Nambiar in the Sri Lankan peace process has generated much heat. Tamil and Sinhala hardliners have expressed reservations about his role as a consultant of the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government on the highly explosive issue of the dismantling of the army's High Security Zones (HSZs) in Jaffna peninsula.

Although the LTTE had

agreed to the Sri Lankan Government's request that discussions on the HSZs wait till Gen Nambiar submits his report, a pro-LTTE daily *Thinakural* has said the Indian General's recommendations are likely to go against the LTTE, which wants the HSZs to be dismantled completely.

Thinakural even said Nambiar would want the army to withdraw some concessions, which it had offered to the Tigers. Pro-LTTE Tamils think the Government has brought in the

retired Indian General only because he would turn in a report favourable to it. They see a hidden Colombo-New Delhi axis against the LTTE.

The Sinhala hardliners, however, have other objections. According to hardline daily *The Island*, the Government had taken needless risk by asking a non-Sri Lankan to submit an independent report and wondered what the Government proposed to do if Gen Nambiar took a line softer than the Sri Lankan army.

In an edit page piece in

The Island on Tuesday, Lankan foreign affairs expert, Jayanath Rajapakse, said Nambiar's role was but a manifestation of a secret Washington-New Delhi-LTTE-Colombo axis, which envisaged the dismantling of the HSZs for the benefit of the LTTE.

Dismissing India's assertion that Nambiar had undertaken the assignment in his private capacity, Rajapakse said it was inconceivable that even a retired person would take up an assignment of this sort without South Block's nod.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 JAN 2003

S. Lanka
49-10

AN INCAUTIOUS APPROACH

18/11

THE SRI LANKAN President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, probably does not intend to immediately implement her threat to dismiss the country's Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, but the underlying concerns that have prompted her to raise the possibility of such action have to be taken note of. What merits attention is not so much the President's accusation that the Prime Minister has transgressed constitutional proprieties by failing to keep her adequately informed about the status of the negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but rather the underlying charge that Mr. Wickremesinghe is being incautious in his approach to these negotiations. Ms. Kumaratunga's misgivings in this regard were articulated earlier in the week by her Senior Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar, who had characterised the negotiation as one in which the LTTE dictated the terms while the Government was willing to pay any price for peace. Such an assessment cannot be dismissed as partisan or lopsided since the Government's negotiating team did appear to have been unduly accommodative of the LTTE's approach during the fourth round of talks earlier this month, including its trenchant refusal to contemplate any diminution of its military strength. It was strange to see the Government's chief negotiator agreeing with the LTTE that Ms. Kumaratunga's suggestion — that the Black Tiger suicide squads be disbanded as a gesture of sincerity — should be addressed only when a permanent political settlement was on the verge of being accomplished. Neither did the Government side appear to be as concerned as it should have been when the LTTE unilaterally suspended its participation in the sub-committee for de-escalation and normalisation and fired off a rhetorical tirade against the Sri Lankan military commander in the Jaffna area.

The Sri Lankan Cabinet's willingness to give the benefit of the doubt to the LTTE in military matters is not understandable in the face of this organisation's blatant assertion that its armed strength adds substantial content to its rele-

vance. The LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, has asserted that the organisation's military strength provided it with bargaining power and rejected outright any negotiations directed at a reduction of its combat potential — either the disarmament of its cadres or a decommissioning of its weapons — till a final political settlement has been reached. Given the many complexities that have to be sorted out before a political settlement is arrived at, this statement is tantamount to a declaration that the LTTE will remain a predominantly military entity for a long time to come. A cursory glance at the LTTE's bloodthirsty record provides adequate proof that this would be a wholly unwelcome prospect. Since the LTTE has not entirely abandoned its maximalist demands, this assertion could also be interpreted as a threat that its militarism could be fully revived if it is disappointed with the developments on the political front. It was fortunate that Colombo's representatives at the last round of talks did not succumb to the LTTE's high pressure efforts to have the northern High Security Zone (HSZ) thrown open for the resettlement of internally displaced persons. It is the assessment of the Sri Lankan military — an assessment supported by the Presidential office — that any dilution of the HSZs would lead to the penetration of these areas by LTTE cadres.

Less contentious issues — such as the resettlement of internally displaced persons in areas outside the HSZs and the evolving of a common approach on human rights issues — are to be taken up before the negotiators revert to the discussion of the highly sensitive political and military aspects of the situation. A report to be prepared by an Indian military expert, working in a private capacity, could form the basis for negotiations when the future of the HSZs is discussed once again. But Colombo's representatives at the talks would do well to heed the warning of their own armed forces, and of an international team monitoring military affairs, that the dismantling of the HSZs must be linked to the diminution of the LTTE's military potential.

THE HINDU

8 JAN 2000

Japan to host donors' meet for Sri Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JAN. 17. Japan, Sri Lanka's single largest donor, will host an international donors conference in early June to raise funds to give financial muscle to the Sri Lankan peace process but stick to its policy of dealing only with the Government to assist island-wide development projects.

The exact dates for the conference, scheduled to be held in Tokyo, are to be announced in a few days, but diplomatic sources told *The Hindu* that it will be "after the G8 Summit" to be held in France between June 1 and 3.

Two sets of dates have been proposed — between June 10 and 11 and June 15-16.

The Cabinet spokesman, G.L. Peiris, told journalists yesterday that the conference would be held in mid-June, but according to latest indications the conference is likely to be held earlier.

The proposed Tokyo donors' conference is a pointer to the increasing role of Japan in the ongoing peace process between Colombo and

the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Its special envoy for the peace process, Yasushi Akashi, is also the principal adviser to the sub-committee on immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs in the north and east (SIRHN), which held its third meeting in rebel-held Kilinochchi on Thursday.

Japan will also play host to the sixth session of the monthly direct talks between Colombo and the Tigers between March 18 and 21.

While a joint fund, with the World Bank as the custodian, has been conceived as a mechanism to channel the funds, the U.S. and Japan have made it clear that their assistance will be of a bilateral nature and would be for development projects all over the country — the war-ravaged north, as well as the economically-hit south.

The decision by most countries to take the bilateral route, rather than through the joint fund of the SIRHN, reflects the continued reluctance by major powers to deal with the LTTE, which is de-proscribed in several

countries. Apart from India, which has banned the LTTE, the U.S., the U.K,

Canada and Australia, have varying degrees of proscription on the Tigers, which has hit their fund-raising capabilities. Though Japan has not banned the Tigers, its finances would also be routed through the Sri Lankan Government.

As several countries have banned the Tigers, Japan is also "observing the voices" of other major global players in the run-up to the talks.

It has also called upon the Tigers, who prefer the funds to be directed through the joint fund to "show flexibility" in their approach.

The financial imperatives of the peace process played a major, though silent role in averting a collapse in the fourth session of the direct talks held last week in Thailand.

During the November 25 Oslo conference, which was termed a mini donors conference, a sum of \$ 70 million was pledged as assistance.

The major participants in

that meet, particularly the U.S., had

wanted the LTTE to abandon the concept of a separate state and renounce the resort to violence as a means to find a political solution.

The Tigers, however, have refused. While they have agreed "to explore" a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka, they have also retained the choice of separation "as the last resort".

The LTTE has ruled out disarming until a permanent solution is reached.

Lanka rivals agree to disagree over security

SCOTT MCDONALD

Nakorn Pathom (Thailand), Jan. 9 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's government and Tamil tiger rebels agreed to disagree on a security dispute today but announced plans to speed up humanitarian work in a bid to end two decades of ethnic war.

The four days of talks at a resort on the edge of Bangkok did not produce any breakthroughs as the earlier three rounds did, but Norwegian mediators said the session had been important because the two sides were able to progress despite the dispute.

"The pragmatic spirit in which they solved the problems was remarkable," said Vidar Helgesen, the deputy foreign minister of Norway, which helped bring the government and the rebels to the negotiating table.

He said the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE had agreed there was a "need to ensure the implementation of urgent humanitarian priorities".

The Tigers have been fighting since 1983 for a separate state

in the north and east of Sri Lanka for minority Tamils, who they say are discriminated against by the island's majority Sinhalese.

But in earlier talks the rebels dropped the demand for a separate state and agreed with the government to discuss setting up a federal system that would give them regional autonomy.

Helgesen said the two sides agreed to an "Action Plan for an Accelerated Resettlement Programme for the Jaffna district" that would be done in two parts.

The first, for which recommendations are to be in place by mid-February, will focus on resettling people outside sprawling military security zones on the northern Jaffna peninsula.

The second phase, for which no timeframe was given, will focus on resettlement inside the security zones.

The contentious security issue centred on demands by the Sri Lankan army that the Tiger rebels begin disarming in return for allowing displaced Tamils to return to their homes inside the zones.

The Tigers say disarming now was not possible, and pulled out of a committee set up to look at de-escalation in protest.

"The parties did not reach agreement on the continuation of the work of the sub-committee," Helgesen said.

In addition to killing 64,000 people, the war has left more than one million people internally displaced and Helgesen said there were worries political progress in the talks was moving ahead of work on the ground.

"Political progress must be underpinned by tangible improvements in the daily lives of people," he said.

The two sides also picked the World Bank to oversee a fund raised from international donors that will pay for the rehabilitation work. Helgesen said a human rights adviser would meet both parties at the next round of talks in February. Because of the fighting, there are a huge number of single-parent families in northern Sri Lanka.

Four more rounds of talks are planned by the end of June, Helgesen said.

10 JAN 2003

Colombo, LTTE disagree on panel's role

By V.S. Sambandan

*S. Lanka
HD-15*

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), JAN. 8. Public disagreement between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) surfaced for the first time in the latest peace process here today, with a continued deadlock between Colombo and the Tigers over the future of a panel to discuss the sensitive issue of de-militarisation and normalisation in the north-east.

"There is a difference of opinion between the Government and the Tigers on the sub-committee for de-escalation and normalisation (SDN)", Colombo's chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, told journalists today.

On Tuesday, the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham said the SDN was suspended and the Tigers would not participate in its next meeting, scheduled for January 14. The deadlock remained unresolved at the end of the day, with the LTTE firm on its position that it considered the SDN suspended.

"It is not a mutually agreed upon position," Prof. Peiris said, adding that the Government would "assert its own position when circumstances require from time to time". Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary, Austin Fernando, and the LTTE's military commander for two eastern districts, V. Muralitharan (a.k.a. 'Col'. Karuna) head the SDN. Despite contentious issues and ominous signs during earlier monthly talks, such as the 200-year death sentence on the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, just before the second session commenced, the two sides had maintained common public positions. This time, however, the LTTE has taken serious objection to it being called "terrorists" by the Jaffna army commander, in a proposal which linked reset-

tlement of the internally displaced persons to disarming and de-commissioning of the LTTE.

The SDN is the most sensitive operational mechanism in the present peace process as it touches upon the key issues of the LTTE's military structure. The Tigers, who see their armed presence as the "bargaining power" in talks with the Government, have maintained that issues such as de-commissioning can be considered after a permanent solution is reached.

In his sharpest criticism yet of a representative of the Sri Lankan state during the current talks, Mr. Balasingham on Tuesday described the Jaffna commander, Sarath Fonseka, as "intransigent" and "paranoid" and saw no point in continuing in the SDN as long as Maj. Gen. Fonseka was in it.

Emphatic that the Government would not abandon the SDN route, Prof. Peiris said: "we do not agree to the disbanding or suspension of the SDN".

However, Prof. Peiris was quick to emphasise that this difference "will not affect" the peace process. The two sides "will continue to work" despite differences "which will manifest from time to time, naturally and inevitably", he said, downplaying the deadlock.

"That is to be expected. In the course of a negotiation like this, obviously there is going to be difference of opinion. If you agree on everything, then there is no need for a negotiating process. This is not the first, it won't be the last", he said. On Tuesday, Prof. Peiris saw the issue of resettling refugees inside the island's northern High Security Zones as a problem, "daunting in its proportions". Today he did not view the differences over the SDN as one that would disrupt the peace process.

Peace talks skip sensitive issues

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND) JAN. 7. A continued soft approach at the Sri Lanka peace talks today averted the fledging process from a total breakdown.

When talks started, Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) agreed to further defer volatile military matters and to address less contentious humanitarian issues instead.

It was, however, a day of mixed results with the Tigers saying that they have suspended participation in a sub-committee to discuss de-militarisation, but asserting that the peace process was on course.

The heads of the delegations, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, and Anton S. Balasingham, were one in saying that the peace process was going in a "cordial" manner. The two sides agreed to address issues relating to resettlement of internally displaced people (IDPs), people outside the heavily militarised High Security Zones (HSZs) of the northern Jaffna Peninsula and work towards evolving a common approach towards issues relating to human rights.

With an estimated 2.5 lakh people displaced from places outside the HSZs, the negotiators agreed that this issue be taken up first and wait for the report of "international experts" to discuss de-militarising the HSZs.

"Those who expected the

talks to break down will be greatly disappointed. The talks were very constructive and in a friendly atmosphere. We did not encounter any of the problems that were expected in certain quarters," Colombo's Chief Negotiator, Prof. Peiris, told journalists.

However, mutual reconciliation by both sides prevented the negotiations from collapse. In the run-up to the talks, resettlement of IDPs in the HSZs had become controversial with an Army proposal linking it to disarming by the Tigers. The LTTE came to the talks in an aggressive mode, stating that disarming was non-negotiable and when talks started on Monday

the matter was deferred to today. The two sides side-stepped the issue and decided to "pragmatically" address resettlement of the IDPs outside the HSZs. Prof. Peiris said that the HSZ issue was a "daunting problem in its proportions."

During the next two days, the two sides will discuss matters relating to human rights in preparation for next month's talks when the former head of Amnesty International, Ian Martin, is expected to be present.

In addition, the two sides would also gear up for the proposed visit of the U.N. special envoy on child soldiers, Olara Otunnu.

Differences of opinion, however, surfaced on the sub-committee on de-escalation and normalisation, formed at the second round of talks here in November. "That committee is now suspended", the LTTE's chief negotiator, Mr. Balasingham, told journalists. "We are not going to operate within that."

Slamming the disarming proposal made by the Jaffna Commander, Sarath Fonseka, Mr. Balasingham said: "As long as Maj.Gen. Fonseka is operating in Jaffna there is no purpose in calling these committees, because he has adopted a rigid, intransigent and paranoid position, as if the LTTE is going to penetrate inside."

Refuting the Army's view that de-escalating northern Jaffna would make the Palaly airbase and the Kankesanthurai port vulnerable, Mr. Balasingham said it was "impossible" for the Tigers "to launch an attack on Palaly and Kankesanthurai."

"We don't have artillery to such a range to launch an attack. It is impossible for the LTTE to move artillery under a massive Army occupation. These are simply provocative suggestions that we have to disband just to allow people to go back to their homes."

While Prof. Peiris saw no major problems ahead for the SDNs, he said: "We will operate the other committees" such as the one on immediate humanitarian needs, to deal with the resettlement of the refugees.

De-escalation issue put off

By V.S. Sambandan

NAKORN PATHOM (THAILAND), JAN. 7. Sri Lanka's peace negotiators will await the expert report of Satish Nambiar, former Indian Deputy Chief of Army Staff, before taking up the issue of de-escalation of high security zones to resettle the internally-displaced people in the Jaffna peninsula, sources told *The Hindu* today.

When talks started this morning between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, there was an air of uncertainty over the explosive issue. However, a suggestion by the Government delegation that the subject be deferred until Lt. Gen. Nambiar proposed a re-arrangement was acceptable to the LTTE.

Asked about the progress on the issue, Colombo's chief negotiator, Gamini Lakshman Peiris, said "we are awaiting some reports of international experts whom we have appointed for this purpose and who will be able to give us valuable advice. That was acceptable to both sides for the time being." He did not elaborate.

Mr. Nambiar's involvement, in his personal capacity, could narrow down the differences between the LTTE and the Government.

Lanka, LTTE teams agree on human rights

Trust of India

NAKHON PATHOM (Thailand), Jan. 7. — Side stepping contentious military issues to avoid a deadlock, Sri Lankan Government and Tamil rebels today struck a deal on human rights agreeing to set up a committee to look into the problems of women and children affected by the ethnic conflict.

The two sides, on the second day of their deliberations here, focussed on resettlement of thousands of refugees displaced by the nearly two-decades of conflict in the country. The government negotiator, Mr GL Peiris, said under the deal both sides have agreed to receive the expertise of former London-based

Amnesty International chief, Mr Ian Martin, on improving the rights condition of the people. The two sides emphasised that there was a very definite role for human rights while the negotiating process was moving forward, he said.

The LTTE leader, Mr Anton Basingham, is leading the rebels side at the talks which will conclude on Thursday.

Mr Peiris said the two sides decided to set up a committee on women to look all issues relating to them and children, including child soldiers. It will have two women from each side.

During more than three hours of intense talks the two sides discussed an action plan for reset-

ting the people displaced due to the ethnic conflict.

The issue of resettling of displaced persons was a complicated one. "It is daunting in its proportions ... the sensible thing is to deal with the problems outside the high security zone."

There were concerns that the talks which opened yesterday could have derailed by a rebel demand that the military reduce its high security zones near army camps in north of the country to allow civilians to return to their property.

The army insists that the rebels disarm before resettlement was allowed by closing down military camps.

Lanka, LTTE kick off 4-day talks in Thailand

Nakorn Pathom (Thailand): The Sri Lanka government and Tamil Tiger rebels kicked off what was expected to be a tense round of peace talks on Monday, with the process clouded by an army call to the rebels to surrender weapons.



R. Wickremesinghe



A. Balasingham

The run-up to the four days of meetings in Thailand has been dominated by the dispute over the army calls for the rebels to begin disarming in response to Tiger demands that the military allow displaced Tamils to return to their homes in security zones in the north.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe issued an appeal on the eve of the talks, the fourth round of negotiations between the two sides, that the dispute should not be allowed to derail the peace process he revived when he was elected one year ago.

However, these differences will not be discussed at least until Tuesday. Officials said that under an agenda set after a two-and-a-half-hour meeting between head government negotiator G.L. Peiris and top Tiger official Anton Balasingham, humanitarian issues would be discussed first.

"I'm glad we are starting with rehabilitation, that is the most prudent," Balasingham said just before the start of the talks at a resort on the edge of Bangkok. Balasingham is the head negotiator for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and heads a four-person team faced off with four government negotiators led by Peiris.

"This session will be more difficult, that can be expected," said Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim, one of three Norwegian peace envoys also at the table. "There is no way in the world anyone can expect a breakthrough at every

session."

Norway has worked for several years to bring the two sides to the negotiating table to end two decades of ethnic war that has killed 64,000 people, and brokered a truce signed in February.

The latest talks come after dramatic progress was made in earlier rounds over the last four months, boosting hopes that the island of 19 million people had its best chance yet of permanently ending the separatist conflict. The LTTE has been fighting since 1983 for a separate state in the north and east for Tamils, who they say are discriminated against by the island's majority Sinhalese. The rebels have now dropped that demand and agreed to discuss setting up a federal system that would give them regional autonomy.

Officials said the two sides would still discuss that, and a Canadian team of constitutional experts is in Thailand to offer assistance; but would open the talks with a look at humanitarian concerns in the war-hit north and east. Mr Wickremesinghe, the driving force behind the peace process since taking power, said on national television that it was important that the peace process continue. Reuters

L 7 JAN 2003

Lanka talks enter decisive phase

SCOTT McDONALD

(W) S-Lanka
Nakorn Pathom (Thailand), Jan. 5 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's bid to end two decades of war has entered a key stage and arguments over sensitive security issues should not be allowed to derail the momentum, the island's Prime Minister said today.

"We are now at a decisive moment in the peace process," Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said on national television in Sri Lanka on the eve of a fourth round of talks with the Tamil Tigers in Thailand. "It is time now to embark on the road to a permanent peace," he said.

The talks, which made quick progress since beginning in September, could drag over the next four days as the two sides discuss a dispute over army demands that the rebels give up their arms in return for the military letting refugees return to their homes in high-security areas in the island's war-ravaged north.

But Wickremesinghe, in one of his strongest statements on peace since winning an election just over one year ago, said it was vital that the talks not be stopped.

"Whatever situation may

arise, we must not leave the negotiating table," he said.

The chief negotiator for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton Balasingham, has said the resettlement issue had to be dealt with before dealing in depth with so-called core issues.

He also warned that the idea of the Tigers giving up their arms was "non-negotiable... provocative and will not contribute to the creation of a congenial atmosphere for discussions".

The government's chief negotiator, G.L. Peiris, today said he did not expect the dispute to disrupt the talks.

"We really don't think that it will overshadow the discussions," he said. "There are ways of resolving it in a practical manner."

Until the dispute arose in the last several weeks, the talks at a picturesque resort on the edge of Bangkok had been expected to look at ways of power-sharing as a solution to ending an ethnic war that has killed 64,000 over the last two decades.

Huge strides had been made in the first three rounds of talks, raising hopes that the island of 19 million people had its best chance yet of permanently

ending the separatist conflict.

The LTTE had been fighting for a separate state in the north and east for Tamils, who they say are discriminated against by the island's majority Sinhalese, but dropped that demand and agreed to discuss setting up a federal system that would give them regional autonomy.

Peiris also tried to downplay hopes that the rapid progress would continue at each round of talks.

"We have to recognise the reality that at the end of every session there is not going to be a dramatic breakthrough."

The latest meeting comes as life is changing in Sri Lanka, with residents now able to drive from one end of the tropical Indian Ocean island to the other for the first time in years after re-opening of roads into rebel-controlled areas.

Road blocks that littered the capital Colombo — there were at least a dozen on the way to the airport — are gone, as are the dreaded suicide bombers, the signature act of the Tigers to back their separatist demands.

A truce signed in February has largely held, with just a handful of deaths last year instead of the usual thousands.

6 JAN 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Lanka talks critical: PM

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Jan. 5. — Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe said today his government's attempts to make peace with the Tigers had entered a critical phase but it was imperative to pursue negotiations.

"The journey to peace is not yet over. We have to go a long way. But whatever situation arises, we must not leave the negotiating table,"

Mr Wickremesinghe said in a televised address today.

Mr Wickremesinghe's remarks came a day before government negotiators were due to open a fourth round of direct negotiations with the LTTE on neutral ground in Thailand.

The latest session is expected to see both sides engage in tough bargaining over the continued presence of military troops in the island's northern Tamil-dominated Jaffna peninsula.

"We are at a decisive moment of the peace process. It is time to embark on the road to permanent peace as the guns are now silent," the Prime Minister said.

Despite rapid gains in the Norwegian-brokered peace bid since opening talks in September, the current round is expected to be clouded over by the LTTE demanding the pruning of military "high security zones" in the embattled peninsula.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan military optimistic about peace talks

HD-12
2/1/03

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JAN. 1. Sri Lanka's military leaders today struck a confident note that difficulties over de-escalation of the high security zones (HSZs) in the north will not affect the peace process and saw the possibility of the impasse being resolved through discussions with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) later this month.

"We hope that the peace effort succeeds", the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, Lionel Balagalle, told a press conference this morning. Holding the same view, the island's Defence Secretary, Austin Fernando, said he was "optimistic" that the two sides "can discuss these matters and come to a compromise".

The two sides will be meeting twice this month - first at the fourth session of peace talks in Thailand between January 6 and 11 and then at a meeting on January 14 between the military commanders of the two forces in the northern Jaffna peninsula called by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission.

All through December, the SLA and the LTTE differed on the sensitive issue, with the former linking a rebel demand for relocation of high security zones to disarming by the Tigers.

Moreover, some headway

is also on the cards after a high-profile visit by the three service commanders, the Defence Minister, the Defence Secretary and a key Cabinet Minister, Milinda Moragoda, to Jaffna on Tuesday.

According to indications, a compromise is likely to be worked out in at least two positions, where the army would "re-adjust" its lines in two locations. Conceding that there were difficulties, Lt. Gen. Balagalle expressed confidence that "these can be ironed out."

At the centre of the controversy is the rebel demand for de-escalation, particularly in the Valikamam sector, which has important strategic installations such as the Palaly airbase and the Kankesanthurai port.

Mr. Fernando, who heads the Sri Lankan Government's delegation at the sub-committee on de-escalation and normalisation (SDN), saw scope for negotiations based on the Government proposals. "I am a firm believer that every problem has a solution", he said.

The SDN, formed in the second session of talks, was dismissed as "irrelevant" by the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, a few days ago. Declining comment, Mr. Fernando said, "I am cool as ever. I have been optimistic all along and I am even now".

Varying estimates

Differences on principles apart, estimates vary on the magnitude of the problem. Three different figures have been put forward to Mr. Fernando for the areas sur-

rounding the Palaly HSZ alone: the Army's estimate of 7,200 to 8,000 houses, the figure given by the Government Agent (the equivalent to a District Collector) of 15,000 - 16,000 houses and the LTTE's version that there are 29,000 houses. Apart from the emotive issue of the number of persons displaced, the varying estimates have financial implications. The Defence Secretary also refuted a charge that the Government had given in to the rebel demands without gaining anything.

On issues such as the continued presence of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a former militant party opposed to the Tigers, permitting LTTE-registered vehicles into Government-held regions, the HSZs, among others "we have not given in" he said.

Despite the confident positions held today, much of the progress of the peace process will depend on how the two sides reconcile to the sensitive issue of de-escalation in the discussions to be held during the month.

Political and military observers see a possible stalemate in the coming months, if not a collapse of the fragile peace, which has held for a year. The year 2002 also had just two military deaths - the least during the past 20 years: one from the Army, one from the Navy and none from the Air Force.

THE HINDU

2 JAN 2003

Lanka plans military review

CHAMATHARIYADASA

Colombo, Jan. 1 (Reuters): Sri Lanka said today it planned to restructure its military if a peace process with Tamil Tiger guerrillas that has led to an end to nearly two decades of ethnic war takes hold.

Defence minister Tilak Marapane said in a statement that a committee had begun a review of the 150,000-strong military and was looking at ways of reducing defence spending while maintaining security.

"We do not know how long the peace process will take but we can begin now to plan to reconstruct the security sectors," he said. "As changes occur to the national security landscape, some areas of the security sector will have to be increased, others 'right sized', but all within what the country can afford," he said.

At a news conference, defence secretary Austin Fernando said the government did not have any estimates of how much could be saved on defence if it the military was restructured.

Defence spending is seen at about 50 billion rupees (\$520 million) this year compared to 49 billion last year.

"The need to import ships, aircraft, other weapons, equipment and ammunition has placed undue pressure upon our foreign exchange reserves," Marapane said.

Defence spending accounted for more than five per cent of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product during the height of the war and the military built up an arsenal that included Czech-built multi-



Sri Lankan defence secretary Austin Fernando in Colombo. (AFP)

barrel rocket launchers, Israeli Kfir jet fighters and Russian MI-24 helicopter gun ships.

In the first major dispute to befall peace talks that began in September, rebels this week rejected a government proposal that they disarm in the war-torn northern Jaffna peninsula in return for allowing refugees into sprawling military camps.

The issue is expected to be taken up at a fourth round of peace talks in Thailand next week.

The rebels are also upset that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, comprising observers from Nordic countries overseeing a truce signed in February, cautioned last week that demands by either side had to be balanced by security concerns.

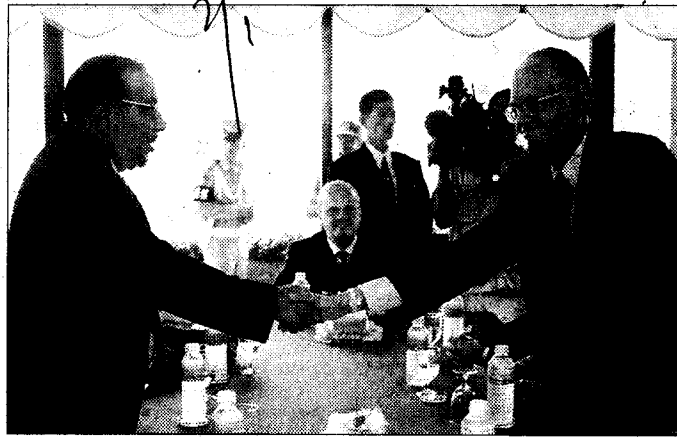
Lanka-LTTE deadlock to end

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
COLOMBO, JANUARY 1

SRI Lanka will seek a compromise with Tamil Tiger rebels over their demand for shrinking military bases in the name of resettling refugees, a top defence official said.

Defence Secretary Austin Fernando said the Scandinavian team monitoring a truce between government forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had called for a fresh meeting between the two sides within two weeks to discuss the issue. "I am optimistic that we can discuss these matters and come to a compromise," Fernando told reporters here. "We are all for resettling the internally displaced people, but it must be done in a systematic way," he added.

The LTTE had insisted that the Army give up the private property



it is currently occupying in Jaffna and allow thousands of civilians to go back to their homes. However, Fernando said there was a disparity in the numbers of homes affected as well as the number of people to be resettled.

A military estimate for the number of homes inside the "high security zone" of the Palaly Mili-

tary Complex was 7,200 while the District Collector placed the figure at 15,000. The Tigers had said 29,000 homes were affected, he said. "What we are saying is that we should have a task force to look into the matter, do a survey and have a systematic plan to bring back the IDP's (Internally Displaced Persons)," Fernando said.

The question of the military shrinking its bases has emerged as the most contentious issue since both sides entered into a Norwegian-arranged truce in February last year. Officials said the issue was expected to dominate the fourth round of peace talks to be held in Thailand from January 6 to 9.

The Scandinavian team monitoring the ceasefire had sided with government forces last week saying that any one-sided de-escalation by the military alone could affect the balance of power and undermine the entire peace process. The tigers took exception to the Scandinavian statement and slammed the truce monitors.

Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando played down fears of the peace process breaking up over the high security zone issue and said he expected the government and the Tigers to resolve differences at the peace talks.

Jittery Lanka gears up for snap polls

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Jan. 29. — Sri Lanka's government today announced it was ready to face snap parliamentary polls even as President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga appears set to enter into a formal pact with a Marxist party to regain control over parliament.

Government spokesman Mr GL Peiris said Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe's administration, which came to power in December 2001 with a two-seat majority, was prepared to face an election immediately. "The government is prepared to face the people at any time. We are not afraid," Mr Peiris said today. "We welcome an election any time. We are happy to renew our mandate." He said the Norwegian-backed ceasefire between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had changed the lives of all Sri Lankans and the people overwhelmingly supported the peace drive.

President Kumaratunga whose People's Alliance (PA), the main Opposition party, has opened talks



Chandrika Kumaratunga & Ranil Wickremesinghe: No love lost



with the main Marxist group, the JVP or People's Liberation Front in a bid to form a coalition and topple the administration.

Mrs Kumaratunga, who is at loggerheads with Prime Minister Mr Wickremesinghe, warned last week she may dismiss the government and expressed her dissatisfaction with Mr Wickremesinghe's handling of the peace process.

A legislator from Mrs Kumaratunga's PA, Rohitha Abeygunawardena, said the President had asked them to inform the rank and file about the new alliance with the JVP which is vehemently opposed to the

power, it fought off a threat by Wickremesinghe's United National Party with a prop from the JVP. However, that government collapsed in the face of mass defections.

The shift prompted her to call a snap election despite pledges not to go for an early vote the country could ill afford.

The PA lost the parliamentary elections in December 2001 and Mr Wickremesinghe came to power.

Mr Wickremesinghe's government can in theory remain in office until December 2007, but Mrs Kumaratunga, whose six-year term ends in December 2005, can cut short the life of parliament without offering any explanation.

The Sri Lankan President, who is elected directly in a vote separate from parliamentary polls, has unlimited powers which cannot be challenged. The President can be impeached only with a two-thirds majority which the government lacks.

Mrs Kumaratunga issued a virtual chargesheet against the Prime Minister last week blaming him for agreeing to every demand made by the LTTE and alleging that he was moving towards breaking up the country.