

Killer Wave Deaths Surge To 11500 In Sri Lanka

Colombo: The toll from massive tidal waves that struck Sri Lanka's coastline leapt to more than 11,500 on Monday as thousands of soldiers and families searched for bodies a day after the disaster. Military spokesman, Brig Daya Ratnayake said Monday that 10,029 bodies had been recovered from areas of the island nation under government control, raising the official tally by more than 5,000 from the previous day.

An additional 1,500 bodies have been recovered in Tamil rebel-controlled territory, bringing Sri Lanka's overall toll to 11,529. "The toll is increasing," Ratnayake said. "We are finding more bodies." Among the dead were at least 72 foreign tourists, said Udaya Nanayakkara, chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board.

The Japanese embassy in Sri Lanka told Japan's foreign Ministry that 15 of the bodies found appeared to be Japanese, that country's news agency Kyodo reported from Tokyo. One million people in Sri Lanka were displaced in massive flooding unleashed by Sunday's magnitude 9.0 earthquake under the Indian Ocean off the coast of Indonesia. It was the world's largest quake in 40 years. Nearly 20,000 people have been reported killed throughout Asia.

Ten helicopters and 25,000 soldiers rushed on Monday to Sri Lanka's coastal areas to deliver aid and crack down on looting. Helicopters dropped rescue teams and medicine to areas not accessible by land, while soldiers worked to maintain order and help with the rescue efforts. AP



A German tourist holds her child outside a hotel destroyed by the tsunamis in Galle, Sri Lanka

Lanka declares state disaster

Agencies

300 prisoners escape

COLOMBO, Dec. 26. — Massive tsunami waves triggered by a devastating earthquake swept Sri Lankan villages, affecting a wide stretch of the coast today, killing at least 4,500 people and displacing a million others, Sri Lankan officials and a pro-Tamil Tiger website said.

The government declared a state of disaster in the wake of the calamity as the casualty figures mounted and the displaced sought shelter in makeshift refugee camps.

"It is a huge tragedy and it is still unfolding," Mr Lalith Weerathunga, secretary to the prime minister, said. "The death-toll is going up all the time." But the good thing is that we are now reaching the people and telling them we are there to help," he said.

He said India and Norway have already responded to Sri Lanka's call for help.

Police Chief Mr Chandra Fernando said at least 3,000 people were dead in areas under government control.

Mr Weerathunga said he didn't believe the final toll would reach 5,000, but added that the government had no information on what has happened in coastal areas in the northeast where 300 prisoners from the southern Matara prison escaped after flood waters entered the prison.

COLOMBO, Dec. 26. — Some 300 prisoners escaped after the tidal waves destroyed a high-security jail in southern Sri Lanka's coastal town of Matara today, police said. The prisoners were being held in a separate section in the Matara prison compound, 160 km from here, police said. — PTI

The army, navy and air force were called out to help local officials and police in rescuing the marooned and providing food and medicine for the refugees, while police also declared local curfews in many areas to prevent looting of damaged hotels, homes and shops.

Mr Matthew O'Connell from New York City managed to escape from his guesthouse in Amblangoda, 60 miles (37 miles) south of Colombo, when the first waves hit.

"I saw water gushing through the door and I came out," Mr O'Connell said. Blood was dripping from his head.

Sri Lankan President Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga sought international help to provide relief to those affected. Norway has provided \$ 1.52 million (euro 1.12 million) in emergency relief, the country's embassy said in a statement.

Police in the southern town of Matara, said water levels were receding, but residents were bracing themselves for possible tsunami strikes during the night.

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THE STATESMAN

Over 4,500 feared killed in Sri Lanka

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 26. More than 4,500 persons are feared killed and at least 22,000 people were displaced as the Indian Ocean's tsunami wreaked death and devastation across nine coastal districts in Sri Lanka.

A Sea Tiger base of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is also said to be affected as it lay in the range of the tsunami attack. The situation inside rebel-held Sri Lanka is not known, but defence sources said civilians in those areas were "seriously affected."

The tsunami saw no distinction between Government and insurgent and caused extensive damage in parts of northern and eastern Sri Lanka, where Colombo and the LTTE are observing the longest ceasefire in decades of separatist conflict.

With large parts of the affected areas inaccessible, a large number of people still missing and scores of others not reporting the deaths, the final tally could far exceed the 5,000-figure mark, sources said. According to defence sources, at least 2,500 persons were killed in Government-held areas in nine districts. In addition, at least 500 persons are feared killed in the areas held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The coastal belt affected by the tsunami spread from the northern Jaffna district to the western Colombo district, with almost the entire coastal population caught unawares as the tidal wave struck.

Mild tremors were felt in several parts of the island-nation, including the central hill districts around 6.30 a.m.

'National tragedy'

The President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, declared a state of national disaster, and the Cabinet, at an emergency meeting, headed by the Prime Minis-



Tidal waves sweep through houses at Maddampegama, about 60 km south of Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Sunday. — AP

ter, Mahinda Rajapakse, sought Indian and international assistance as the embattled island-nation braved to meet its worst calamity. "Sri Lanka is the country with the highest number of deaths," senior Government official said.

"It is a national tragedy, the devastation is total. We cannot assess the total damage at the moment," the Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapakse told *The Hindu* this evening after visiting the affected districts in the south. According to the President's office, Ms. Kumaratunga, who is in London on a private visit, will return to the island "sooner the expected."

Responding to request from the President's office, the Indian Government immediately rushed emergency relief. An aircraft carrying medical relief is scheduled to land here tonight, while medical and emergency relief ships are set to

arrive here tomorrow. "We are thankful to the Indian Government for the immediate assistance," Mr. Rajapakse said. Commiserating with the affected families outside Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister said: "I extend my sympathies to the affected families in India and other countries."

Sea Tiger base hit

The tsunami, according to reports from northern and eastern Sri Lanka, lashed a key Sea Tiger base in the northern rebel-held Mullaitivu district. The LTTE's underground bunkers and other military installations were also reportedly hit. There is no confirmed information on the damage caused in LTTE-controlled areas and the condition of the top LTTE leadership is not known. "It will have a serious affect on the LTTE. They do not appear to have been prepared for such a

calamity," a defence analyst said. The LTTE could not be contacted as telecommunication links broke down in several parts of the country.

Reports from the east said people and cattle were washed away. "I can see bodies hanging on the trees," a distressed resident told a radio station, which ran half-hourly first person accounts of the national disaster.

Round-the-clock operations

The Sri Lankan armed forces have already been pressed into service.

"We are carrying out round-the-clock operations. We are thankful to India for extending help," the Defence Spokesman, Daya Ratnayake, told *The Hindu* tonight.

"More than 30,000 food packets are being prepared and will be moved to the affected areas, he said.

LTTE rejects agenda for talks

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 24. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today formally rejected the Sri Lankan Government's latest agenda to resume talks and said it was "displeased" with its "structure and contents." The agenda was conveyed to the rebels last week by the Norwegian Special Adviser to the peace process, Erik Solheim.

The LTTE has demanded a specific mention that its proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) would be the basis for the resumption of the stalled peace talks.

In an official response, conveyed by the LTTE's chief negotiator, Anton S. Balasingham, to Mr. Solheim in London today, the rebels blamed the left-nationalist ruling ally, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), for the continued deadlock.

Coherent version sought

"As the JVP continues to declare its vehement opposition to peace talks with the LTTE based on the Interim Self-Governing Authority as proposed by our organisation," the rebel leadership insisted on "a clear, coherent, well-defined version of the agenda, without ambiguity and abstruseness," Mr. Balasingham said.

A report in the TamilNet website quoted Mr. Balasingham as

saying that the Tigers had "carefully scrutinised the current version of the agenda" and unhappy with it.

The details of the agenda have not been made public, but according to reports, the revised plan for talks mentions the need to discuss an "interim arrangement" in contrast to the LTTE's demand for discussions to be based on its proposals for an ISGA submitted by the Tigers last October.

'Vague position'

Terming the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's position as "vague and inconsistent" and describing the JVP's stance as "violent opposition expressed by her major ally," Mr. Balasingham said: "The Tamil Tiger leaders insist on a clear, comprehensive agenda, instead of revising earlier formulations, definitely specifying that the Interim Self-Governing Authority, as proposed by the LTTE, shall be the basis for peace negotiations."

Third anniversary

The LTTE's formal rejection coincided with the third anniversary today of the LTTE's unilateral ceasefire declaration in 2001, more than a year after they overran a strategic military complex, Elephant Pass, in April 2000. Subsequently, a formal ceasefire agreement was signed separately by the then Sri Lank-

an Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, on February 22, 2002. The prevailing ceasefire is the longest one.

Revised cost estimate for Kaveri engine cleared

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) today gave its approval to revise the cost estimate for the Kaveri engine project for the country's Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) to Rs. 2,800 crores.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting of the CCS chaired by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, said that Rs. 1,300 crores had already been spent on the project. It is being implemented by the Defence Research and Development Organisation since 1989.

Two prototypes of the LCA, being developed by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, Bangalore, have so far been test-flown, including at supersonic speeds, with American engines.

A versatile, lightweight and multi-role aircraft, the LCA is expected to be ready for induction into the Air Force in another three years.

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THE HINDU

LTTE sends mixed signals

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 23. In a sign of increasing belligerence, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has started sending mixed signals of war and peace from northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The "political campaign" for the resumption of the stalled talks is matched in equal measure by the threat of a slide to hostilities, if the LTTE's demand to restart negotiations based on its proposals for an interim self-governing authority is not met.

Since the November 27 Heroes' Day speech by the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, in which he said there would be no option but to "advance the freedom struggle," the Tigers are beating the war drums, particularly in the northern districts. According to Tamil sources, familiar notes from the past have resurfaced in both Government-held and rebel-controlled areas in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, giving the impression that the situation is gradually sliding to a possible resumption of hostilities.

'Fighting is imminent'

"The talks have fizzled out like a [Deepavali] flower-pot," an LTTE pamphlet being distributed in the north says, according to sources. "One member from each family" is another familiar strain from the

past, calling for recruits to join the LTTE's fighting forces. The underlying theme in the campaigns, sources say, is that "fighting is imminent." The political agitations since November 27 have now taken a new turn with "human chains" being organised in Jaffna demanding "permanent peace."

As the peace deadlock continues, the Sri Lankan conflict resolution process is entering a period of a protracted stalemate, which needs to be managed prudently, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Head of Political Science, University of Colombo, told *The Hindu*. "Stalemate management is the top-most priority of the peace process."

Lack of mutual trust

The mixed signals "being sent by both sides indicates the total lack of mutual trust," he said. "A unilateral return to war is not the best BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement)." The facilitators and the international community should now examine the BATNAs available to both sides and design their strategies to take forward the peace process accordingly, Dr. Uyangoda said.

By sending mixed signals, the LTTE has, to a large extent, succeeded in lulling a politically divided southern Sri Lankan into a sense of hesitant complacency as its current signals are

seen as either "mere psychological operations" or "a real threat" but both aimed at resuming talks. A "limited military strike" is also not being ruled out.

"After a military strike and the LTTE making its point, it could hope on its western backers to bring pressure on the Government to resume talks," a political observer said.

Recruitment call

"It is clear that they are getting militarily prepared," a Defence source said. Senior Tamil residents in the north see a distant parallel to the current political and military recruitment drive to the late 1980s, when the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) was in Sri Lanka.

The present situation in the north, the sources say, "is not as severe as it was during the full-scale war in the 1990s, but more like the pre-IPKF hostilities." Pointing out that before the LTTE took on the IPKF, it had launched a "people's agitation," Tamil sources said: "In any militant group, the ordinary people have no say, they will finally have to follow what the group says."

The present politico-military belligerence, involving civilians and parliamentarians, combined with shrill recruitment calls, is likely to go on for some time, "until the conditions for hostilities are set."

24 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Prabakaran's warning — text and context

By V. Suryanarayan

Sri Lanka

Anything the LTTE leader says has to be viewed against his uncompromising commitment to the establishment of a separate, independent state.

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IN HIS annual Heroes Day speech on November 27, 2004, synchronising with his 50th birthday, Velupillai Prabakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), warned the Sri Lankan Government that the Tigers would be compelled to launch the "freedom struggle" if peace talks were further delayed and the sufferings of the Tamils continued. Prabakaran called upon the Sri Lankan Government to resume peace talks without conditions, on the basis of the proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) proposed by the LTTE last year. Prabakaran added: "If the Government rejects our urgent appeal, adopts delaying tactics, perpetuating the sufferings of our people, we have no alternative other than to advance the freedom struggle of our nation."

The highlights of Prabakaran's speech can be summed up as follows: the present political stalemate has led to a situation of political void — without war, without a stable peace, without the conditions of normality, without an interim or permanent solution to the ethnic conflict. If this political vacuum continued "indefinitely," the Tamil liberation struggle "would be seriously undermined."

Three years have passed since the conclusion of the ceasefire agreements. The Tigers have been attempting to seek a negotiated settlement with Norway as facilitators, but six rounds of talks, in the LTTE supremo's assessment, turned out to be "futile and meaningless." What is more, Colombo undermined the status of the Tigers as "equal partners in the peace process" by excluding them from the International Donors Conference held in Washington. It compelled the Tigers to temporarily suspend the peace process.

The draft proposals submitted by the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government for an interim set-up were unacceptable to the Tigers because they did not provide "adequate administrative authority." The Tigers went ahead and submitted their own proposals for an ISGA on November 1, 2003. These proposals, Mr. Prabakaran claims, provide for a framework and embody "structures and mechanisms" that could address the "urgent existential problems" of the Tamils.

Then came, in Prabakaran's analysis, a political crisis in the South — the destabilisation of the Ranil Wickremesinghe Government, the dissolution of Parliament, followed by parliamentary elections. The elections paved the way for the formation of a new Government — "an unholy

alliance of incompatible parties articulating antagonistic and mutually contradictory views and policies" on the Tamil national question. On the other hand, in the northeastern Tamil homeland, the Tamil National Alliance won an unprecedented victory, thereby becoming the "political voice and the democratic force" representing "our liberation organisation."

In the last part of his Heroes Day speech, Prabakaran has underlined the multi-dimensional crisis facing the Sri Lankan Government. The internal contradictions and the policy differences among the members of the ruling Alliance have become a "stumbling block to the resumption of peace negotiations." The "authentic political reality" of southern Sri Lanka, he claims, is that President Chandrika Kumaratunga has aligned herself with political parties "drenched in anti-Tamil racism, militarism and Sinhala-Buddhist hegemonism."

In the concluding part of his address, Prabakaran reminded his followers of the historical experience of earlier negotiations, of pacts and agreements that were "torn apart" and "abrogated." The LTTE leader added that the Tigers were not prepared to "walk the path of treachery and deception once again." He demanded that political parties in the South should explain their policies on the core demands of the Tamils concerning a homeland, nationality, and self-determination. He then fired his parting shot: there are borderlines to patience and expectations. The LTTE has now reached this borderline. If the Government of Sri Lanka continues to adopt "delaying tactics," the Tigers would have no option "other than to advance the freedom struggle for our nation."

For Sri Lanka-watchers in India, a striking aspect of Prabakaran's speech was that he completely glossed over the serious contradictions that have developed within the LTTE during the last few months. The monolithic military apparatus of the LTTE was torn asunder when 'Colonel' Karuna raised the banner of revolt. What is more, Karuna articulated the deeply felt frustrations and grievances of the Tamils in the east against the discriminatory policies of the Wannu leadership. The

concept of the traditional homeland, consisting of the north and the east — an article of faith for the Tigers — has suffered a death blow. The foundations of Tamil nationalist ideology have been shaken.

It is the tragedy of Sri Lanka that when Prabakaran launched a ruthless military drive to crush the revolt led by Karuna, the international community, including India, remained mute witness. Hardly anyone of consequence dared to ask the question: what is the meaning of the peace process when the LTTE launches a war on another section of the Tamils? The revolt led by Karuna has been defeated but the east will never be the same again. The tall claim of Prabakaran that the LTTE is the "sole representative of the Tamils" has now to be taken with a bag of salt. In the same way, V. Anandasangaree's open rebellion against pro-LTTE forces within the Tamil United Liberation Front is a harbinger of democratic stirrings in the north. The proxy of the Tigers — the Tamil National Alliance — won all the relevant seats except one in the parliamentary elections. It has to be kept in mind that this phenomenon takes place in all parts of the world where fascist forces are dominant. But what is clear is that the worm has started to turn, dissent against the tyranny of the LTTE has burst out, new openings and new resistance movements are bound to emerge within the Tamil community. According to Sri Lankan media reports, serious differences have cropped up between Prabakaran and Soosai, the leader of the Sea Tigers.

While the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tigers agree that an interim administration should be put in place soon, the Government rightly maintains that the Interim Self Government should be in conformity with a final political solution. The Government also wants negotiations to be held simultaneously on the core issues relating to the final settlement. Prabakaran does not subscribe to this point of view. In his Heroes Day speech, he made it clear that negotiations on a final solution could take place only after an interim administrative authority "is institutionalised and becomes functional." Equally important, Prabakaran has demanded that the ISGA be negotiated out-

side the existing Sri Lankan Constitution. I have pointed out, in previous articles published in *The Hindu* and *Frontline*, how the ISGA proposals go far beyond the federal model. In the LTTE proposals there is hardly any mention of the relations that should exist between the federal unit and the central government. The acceptance of the LTTE proposals would be tantamount to the establishment of a *de facto* Tamil Eelam.

Insistence on the formation of an ISGA in the northeast before entering into negotiations for a final settlement is part of a clever and dangerous policy of the Tigers. The establishment of the ISGA will confer on the Tigers much-needed international legitimacy as the sole representative of Sri Lankan Tamils. The borders of the Tamil homeland will be clearly defined and they will receive legal sanction. Their international prestige will receive a boost, as the ISGA will have powers to negotiate and receive foreign aid. The immediate objective of the LTTE can be summed up as "one state, two nations." What is more, the ideologues of the LTTE are convinced that federations and even confederation as solutions to ethnic crises have not worked satisfactorily. The Vance-Quen Pact in Yugoslavia, which never got off the ground, is cited as a case in point. The next logical step, therefore, will be the establishment of a separate state.

The Hindu, in a lucid recent editorial, has correctly pointed out that the Tigers have treated the peace process as a means to gain control of the northeast, an objective they failed to win militarily. Contrary to his expectations, participation in the peace process has not given Prabakaran the international stature and acclaim he craves for. It must be kept in mind that while the LTTE supremo has occasionally made noises about his readiness to explore a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka based on the principle of internal self-determination, he has simultaneously asked his followers to treat him as a "traitor" if he were to give up the liberation struggle. Prabakaran's warning in his Heroes Day speech has to be viewed in the backdrop of his passionate, uncompromising commitment to the establishment of a separate independent state of Tamil Eelam. A winter of discontent is ahead of Sri Lanka.

(Dr. V. Suryanarayan is Professor for Maritime Studies and Research University of Calicut.)

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2004

LTTE'S BRINKMANSHIP

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RAC

VELUPILLAI PRABAKARAN, THE leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has finally confirmed what was all along suspected: the LTTE is not interested in negotiating a federal solution to Sri Lanka's Tamil question. This is the unambiguous message of Mr. Prabhakaran's November 27 "Heroes' Day" speech in which he has threatened to "advance the freedom struggle" if the Government does not begin talks with the LTTE on setting up the "Interim Self-Governing Authority" in North-East Sri Lanka, for which the group submitted proposals last year. From the beginning, the LTTE has treated the peace process as a means to gain control over the North-East, which it failed to do militarily. The February 2002 ceasefire helped the LTTE achieve this to an extent. But total administrative control, with powers such as the LTTE wants, emphasising the separateness of the North-East from Sri Lanka, would have completed the picture. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who saw through the LTTE's game plan, first insisted that talks on the ISGA must be linked to negotiations for a permanent settlement. When the LTTE rejected this condition, Ms. Kumaratunga signalled her willingness to begin talks on the ISGA alone, adding only the phrase "within a unified Sri Lanka." Were Mr. Prabhakaran serious about ending the impasse, he would have accepted this condition. After all, he came into the peace process fully aware that its final destination was a settlement that would not violate the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, the message conveyed to him by the Norwegian peace envoy, Erik Solheim, at their first meeting in November 2000. But it is amply clear the LTTE was only playing a charade all along, even when it signed a commitment at Oslo in December 2002 to "explore a federal solution."

Does this mean the LTTE is about to begin

another war? Mr. Prabhakaran's ultimatum to the Sri Lankan Government certainly makes it sound that way but it is extremely unlikely considering that the ground situation in the North-East turned unfavourable to the LTTE after its former eastern military commander, Karuna, split the organisation. Weakened militarily by this, the LTTE no longer controls the East as it once did. Crucially, it can no longer depend on the region as a cadre recruitment ground for future military campaigns. Mr. Prabhakaran's significant silence in his speech on the most serious division to have surfaced within the LTTE might have been intended to give the impression that the Karuna factor poses no problem to the organisation. It is quite obvious from the violent drama playing itself out in eastern Sri Lanka, with cadres on both sides of the divide killing each other every day, that the opposite is true. As if to drive home this point, Karuna made his own "Heroes' Day" speech on November 27 attacking his former leader.

Politically too, the LTTE is finding itself progressively on weaker ground. The Karuna-led split has questioned one of its main demands that of the North-East as a unified homeland of the Tamils. Its political confusion is apparent in the manner Mr. Prabhakaran asks President Kumaratunga to begin talks immediately on the ISGA even while dismissing her as a leader who cannot "offer either an interim administrative or a permanent solution." The truth staring the LTTE in the face is this: there is no escape from returning to the table for a negotiated settlement. Of course, Mr. Prabhakaran holds another option, that of striking terror anywhere in Sri Lanka through his suicide bombers. But should he fall back on this tactic, he, and the LTTE would get completely discredited and lose every friend they have made in the last four years.

30 NOV 2004 THE HINDU

Tigers threaten to resume war

Sri Lanka F3

Colombo, Nov. 27 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's feared Tamil Tiger rebels threatened today to resume a two-decade war for self-rule that killed more than 64,000 people if the government does not agree to discuss their demands soon.

In a strongly worded annual address to mark the rebels' war dead, shadowy leader Velupillai Prabhakaran said the Tigers had reached the limit of their patience and said the government's Marxist coalition ally was blocking chances of peace.

"We urge the government to resume the peace negotiations without conditions, based on our proposal for an interim self-governing authority," Prabhakaran said in the policy statement, broadcast on radio from an undisclosed location in the rebels' northern stronghold.

"If the government of Sri Lanka rejects our urgent appeal and adopts delaying tactics, perpetuating the suffering of our people, we have no alternative other than to advance the freedom struggle of our nation," he added.

The government and the LTTE agreed to a ceasefire brokered by Norway in 2002.



Velupillai Prabhakaran

The truce is holding, but the Tigers pulled out of peace talks last year, leaving hopes of sealing permanent peace in limbo. The Tigers already have de facto rule over large areas of the Indian Ocean island's north and east, which they consider their homeland of Tamil Eelam.

But they want their homeland to encompass the northern town of Jaffna as well as key towns in the east and want their right to self-government to be enshrined in the constitution.

The two sides have been locked in a Catch-22 for months. President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government insists the rebels must agree

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to discuss lasting peace before any self-rule. The rebel group, which the US has placed on a list of banned terrorist organizations, demands self-rule before it will even start to discuss permanent peace.

Compounding matters, the government's Marxist coalition partner, the Sinhalese nationalist JVP, has voiced rabid opposition to giving the Tigers autonomy. "The extremist, hardline attitude of the JVP towards peace and ethnic reconciliation has become a major challenge to Chandrika Kumaratunga," Prabhakaran said.

Presidential spokesman Harim Peiris said Kumaratunga would issue a formal reply to Prabhakaran's address on Monday.

"The government regards this as the official policy statement of the LTTE, and it does not warrant an off-the-cuff response," Peiris said.

The faltering peace bid has been strained in recent months by a spate of killings in the restive east and the capital, Colombo, which the military blames on infighting among the rebels after a top Tiger commander defected in April.

28 NOV 2004 THE TELEGRAPH

Project won't affect Lanka: UNP leader

Statesmen News Service

15/10 2 10 16
CHENNAI, Oct. 14. ✓
Former Sri Lankan Prime Minister and leader of the Opposition United National Party, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, today said the proposed Sethusamudram project, envisaging deepening of the Gulf of Mannar to enable ships to reach India's eastern ports without circumnavigating Sri Lanka, would not affect the economic interests of his country.

Talking to mediapersons after a meeting with DMK president Mr M Karunanidhi, at his residence this morning, he said Sri Lanka was for implementation of both the project and the proposed land bridge between Talaimannar in Sri Lanka and Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu. The UNP leader arrived in the city on Wednesday night after meeting the Prime Minister in New Delhi and discussing bilateral issues with him. During his hour-long meeting with Mr Karunanidhi, Mr Wickremesinghe said the DMK leader discussed peace process between Sri Lankan government and LTTE.

Speaking to reporters at Chennai airport last night, Mr Wickremesinghe called for early resumption of peace talks between Chandrika Kumaratunga administration and LTTE.

THE

15 OCT 2004

S. Karuna

Karuna dubs Prabakaran a 'cruel dictator'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, OCT. 12. The former military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V. Muralitharan ('Col.' Karuna) today tendered his "apologies to the Tamil people" for past killings and asserted that he would "never leave the liberation struggle."

Allotting a major part of a detailed statement after announcing the launch of the Tamileela Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), to personal attacks on his former leader, V. Prabakaran, 'Col.' Karuna said, "We never saw good leadership qualities in Prabakaran." He said he would "continue to fight for our people" to "liberate the people from the cruel dictator."

Rajiv assassination

Charging Mr. Prabakaran with being "solely responsible" for the Tamils not reaching the LTTE's goal of Tamil Eelam, he said, "In fact, Tamil Eelam should have been achieved 15 years ago," but as "he was a terrorist, other countries placed roadblocks and denied our reasonable aspiration for liberation." India's support was lost due to the "atrocious act" of assassinating the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, which he said "took place without consulting the important leaders of the outfit."

Mr. Muralitharan was named president of the new party, and G.R. Gnanaraja, who is closely linked to the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF), general secretary.

Sources close to 'Col.' Karuna said an application had been made to the island-nation's election authority today. As Sri Lankan laws prohibit recognition for new parties when elections are pending, the TMVP is likely to face an uphill task in getting itself legally accepted against the backdrop of the postponed local body polls in the North-East.

Earlier this year, the ruling

United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) circumvented the same problem by changing the office-bearers and the name of a party that was already recognised. According to sources, the new formation could take a similar path through the ENDLF route.

Character assassination

"The new party is unlikely to

change the ground situation immediately. Depending on his survival and holding capacities, there will be a change in the long run, especially in the eastern province," a Tamil political analyst said. On the personal nature of the attacks by 'Col.' Karuna on Mr. Prabakaran, he said that it was "retaliatory character assassination." Pointing out that "character assassi-

nation" was launched immediately after 'Col.' Karuna's rebellion, he said that "Karuna was targeting the heroic image of Prabakaran" as part of his political activity.

In his statement, 'Col.' Karuna blamed the policy of killing members of other Tamil groups and expressed regret over "blindly following orders" in the past. His intention, he said was to "relieve the liberation struggle of the Tamils from the cruel clutches of Prabakaran." Condemning the past, he said, "What has happened all these years cannot be termed as the struggle for liberation."

His former leader, he said, "never had a firm political or military strategy to attain the Tamil Eelam goal" and that "he concentrated on war and in assassinating those who opposed him." On the internecine killings and the assassination of Tamil political leaders, he said, "We have lost great many political leaders, leaders of fraternal outfits, militants" and civilians. The people, he said, "had lost good leaders, who could have led the Tamils, because of the political killings carried out by Prabakaran with the selfish intention of prevailing over anyone coming forward to challenge his leadership."

'Short-sighted policies'

On his past, he said, "I have fulfilled even the senseless orders made by Prabakaran," despite arguments by his "colleagues" that the policies were "short-sighted." However, "now I realise the truth in what my colleagues said earlier."

For instance, when "our brotherly outfits were *in toto* branded as traitors and called agents of India," and that they stood in the way of Tamil Eelam, "I too blindly accepted. Today I regret very much for it. By these vengeful acts, the struggle for Eelam got diverted and ruined."

The whereabouts of 'Col.' Karuna are unknown.

XD-13
18/10

Fissure in LTTE's top leadership?

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, OCT. 12. Six months after the most serious split in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), rumours of yet another fissure at the top leadership level are spreading in sections of the Sri Lankan media. According to reports, differences of opinion have crept between the LTTE's leadership and the head of the Sea Tigers, Soosai.

The rumours, which started over the weekend, were denied by the LTTE as "psy-ops tactics," but the issue became more complicated after 'Col.' Soosai's absence at a function organised by the LTTE to mark its Women's Resurgence Day in Kilinochchi on Sunday.

According to sources close to the LTTE, 'Col.' Soosai's absence was explained as "due to security risks," as the function was held in the Kilinochchi public playground and "none entering the premises was subject to checks." Military and police sources say there is no confirmation of any serious clash as reported in sections of the media.

There are also varying reasons cited for the "difference of opinion." While one version says that the recent replacement of the LTTE's former special commander for Batticaloa

and Amparai, Ramesh — who succeeded V. Muralitharan ('Col.' Karuna) — by Bhanu, who hails from the north, another reason cited is that sections of Sea Tigers had expressed support to Mr. Muralitharan. Sources close to 'Col.' Karuna were also unable to confirm if the rumoured "difference of views" were true.

"There could be something, but we don't know its magnitude," a former Tamil militant said. The repeated reports of fissure within the LTTE are against the backdrop of a spell of extended non-fighting since the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government in 2002. The reports of instability within the LTTE also raise the possibility of a return to violence.

Meanwhile, commenting on the current Sri Lankan situation, the visiting Foreign Minister of Switzerland, Micheline Calmy-Rey, today expressed caution that the "lack of confidence" between the Government and the LTTE could "endanger the ceasefire agreement."

Ms. Calmy-Rey met the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapakse, the Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar and the Leader of the Opposition, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

THE HINDU

13 OCT 2004

S. Lanka
HD-12

LTTE raising new conditions, says Sri Lankan Minister

309

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, SEPT. 29. The Sri Lankan Minister for Trade, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, said today that the Government would not start a war "all over again" with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) despite the current problems in the peace process.

"The LTTE is putting forward new conditions," he said in an interaction at *The Hindu* here. The Minister categorically stated that the Sri Lankan Government did not have anything to do with the breakaway faction of the LTTE or with Col. Karuna. "Why would we do it [provide support for Karuna] knowing fully well that it will be an obstacle to the peace process?" he said. The peace process was very important to the Sri Lankan Government and its people since they had "no idea of fighting again."



Jeyaraj Fernandopulle

"We are interested in peace. But their [LTTE's] idea is something else," he said and added that the LTTE wanted the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) to come into existence at an early date.

They were prepared to negotiate only on this and not on the

final solution.

LTTE's grand plan

But everyone knew the LTTE's game plan on this account. Once the ISGA came into being the LTTE would have control over more areas in the north and the east and the LTTE wanted this. The Sri Lankan Government was of the view that ISGA could not be treated as a separate or only issue for the negotiations.

Mr. Fernandopulle criticised the meeting that the LTTE convened in Geneva to discuss the peace process with non-resident Sri Lankan Tamils. In his view, the Tamils abroad were more of a hindrance to the peace process since they would be affected once real peace dawned in Sri Lanka. "Then they will have to come back. They will lose their refugee status," he said and added that the LTTE should rather talk to the people in the north and the east

of the country and find out from them what they wanted.

Political dissent

Asked for his comment on the recent political killings in Sri Lanka, Mr. Fernandopulle said this was a clear indication that the LTTE would not allow any space for political dissent or for another party.

The Government was helpless in putting an end to the militant elements carrying arms since it had signed a Memorandum of Understanding which limited the powers of the executive.

On the proposed Sethusamudram canal project, he said both countries should talk first before deciding on deepening the canal.

Though there was no formal communication from the Indian Government, it had come up for a discussion in the Sri Lankan Cabinet.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2004

STOP THE KILLINGS

✓
Sri Lanka
110-10
30/9

THE OBSESSION OF Velupillai Prabhakaran's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with being the "sole representative" of the Tamils of Sri Lanka has rendered the ceasefire virtually meaningless for Tamils. Taking advantage of the concessions granted to it in the February 2002 ceasefire agreement, the LTTE immediately set out to liquidate all Tamils it perceived as its opponents. Within a few months of the ceasefire coming into force, it took out several Tamils it accused of helping the Sri Lankan armed forces during the years of war. Since March 2004, when the organisation broke into two — the Vanni faction, and the Eastern faction led by the former military commander Karuna — the killing spree has assumed war-like proportions. The recent killing in eastern Sri Lanka of Reggie, the brother of the breakaway group's leader, the subsequent retaliatory murders by Karuna loyalists, and the death of a civilian in the crossfire make a complete mockery of the ceasefire.

In all this, the LTTE is encouraged and emboldened by the silence of Norway, the facilitator of the peace process, and of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), the Nordic committee tasked with monitoring the ceasefire. The Government too has offered little protest. This is understandable considering that all its energies are taken up with keeping alive the engagement with the LTTE, keeping the Sri Lankan military in check, and ensuring that on its side there are no ceasefire violations. Less understandable is the reticence of Oslo and the SLMM in confronting the LTTE over the relentless killings. Instead of bringing moral pressure on the Pol Potist outfit to stop the killings, democratise its functioning, accept dissidence as a natural by-product of pluralism and democratic politics, they have, in effect, given it a licence to kill. This they have done by taking the view that the settling of scores by the Vanni faction with the Karuna group is an "in-

ternal matter." Under the circumstances, it is not at all surprising that Mr. Prabhakaran made bold to dispatch a suicide bomber to take out his other arch enemy, Douglas Devananda, the leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). Only chance ensured Mr. Devananda's escape but other members of his party have not been that fortunate. The Tamil human rights group, the University Teachers' Human Rights (Jaffna), reported recently that the LTTE has killed 140 members of the EPDP in the last two years. Members of other Tamil political parties that do not subscribe to the LTTE's views have always been on its hitlist. But the impunity with which the group now ticks off names from that list owes much to the softly-softly approach that Norway and the ceasefire monitors have taken towards it.

It is time for all concerned to acknowledge that the LTTE has done nothing less than unleash a terrorist campaign amounting to a sub-guerrilla war against the very people it claims to represent. From the recruitment of children, which continues unabated despite international outrage, to the harassment of Muslims, the discrimination against eastern Tamils, and the killings of opponents, the LTTE demonstrates on a daily basis that its rule is by fear and terror. The present efforts at reviving the peace process — stalled since April 2003 when the Tigers refused to participate in further talks until their demand for an interim administration in the North-East was met — are focussed on getting them back to the negotiating table. This is perceived to be the most effective way of averting a war that nobody other than the LTTE arguably seems to have the stomach for. But for the peace process to hold meaning, the limits of tolerance have to be benchmarked by the Sri Lankan Government with the backing of the international community, including India that is increasingly regarded in the island as a bulwark of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

THE HINDU

30 SEP 2004

TRUTH COMMISSION

S. Lanka

Call For New Era Of Reconciliation In Sri Lanka

Sr 6
28/9

By SAM RAJAPPA

Truth Commissions have become a new instrument ushering transitional justice in the recent past. More than 20 truth commissions have been constituted around the world in the last three decades, the most famous among them being the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While some of the commissions were sponsored by international or non-governmental organisations, a majority of them were the efforts of the national governments of the concerned countries.

A tool adopted by nascent democracies to reckon with the past and move on to establish peace and stability in the new regime, truth commissions have evoked mixed reaction. While critics hold truth commissions responsible for undermining the rule of law, its proponents focus on their healing nature. The primary task of a truth commission is to uncover just what happened to whom and why without prescribing prosecution.

Shameful crimes

President Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka three years ago established the Presidential Truth Commission On Ethnic Violence (1981-1984) with S Sharvananda, retired chief justice, as chairman. Its mandate was to inquire into the nature, cause and extent of the gross violation of human rights, the destruction and damage to property committed as part of the ethnic violence which occurred from the beginning of 1981 to the end of 1984 with special reference to Black July 1983, including the circumstances which led to such violence. The commission was required to investigate those responsible for the atrocities, the nature and extent of damage caused, compensation to be paid to the victims and other measures that could be taken to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

Unlike other truth commissions set up after a peace settlement was reached, including the South African one established after the apartheid regime was overthrown through democratic means, the Sri Lankan commission held its inquiry and completed its report when the ethnic strife was still on with no permanent solution in sight. Submitted when Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party was still in power, action on it was taken only after a change in government in Colombo earlier this year.

Observing the 21st anniversary of Sri Lanka's worst-ever anti-

Tamil riots that rocked the country from 25 July to 3 August 1983, President Kumaratunga extended a state apology to the nation and sanctioned Rs 72.3 million as compensation to the victims or their heirs. Thirty of the 937 identified victims were paid their compensation last week.

Kumaratunga described the incidents of July 1983 as the most shameful crimes ever perpetrated in Sri Lanka, in which



more than 1,000 people were killed and about 18,000 properties belonging to Tamils destroyed.

Only very few nations seem to have had the courage or the right leadership to accept the blame for their moments of shame, she said on the occasion. Admitting it was late but not too late and accepting collective guilt for the wrongs, she said the Sri Lankan state should come of age, look the truth in the face and make a national apology first to all the victims of that day in Black July and then to the entire nation.

Gross negligence

The ambush and the killing of 13 soldiers in Jaffna on 23 July 1983 by the LTTE which triggered the anti-Tamil pogrom was large in scale but qualitatively not different from numerous other ambushes in Jaffna and elsewhere. What might have changed was the attitude of President JR Jayewardene to the Tamil leadership following the resignation of P Nadarajah as chairman of the Jaffna District Development Council.

Amongst the more prominent of the events of July 1983 were the reprisal killings of 51 Tamils in the North by Army personnel on 24 July, the destruction of 175 Tamil houses with one death and injuries to a dozen in Trinco-

malee by Navy personnel on 25 July, the killing of 35 Tamil prisoners by fellow prisoners at the Wellicade jail in Colombo on 25 July followed by the killing of another 18 Tamil prisoners at the same jail on 27 July.

Finding fault with the government for both acts of commissions and omissions in the run-up to the events that resulted in the communal conflagration, the Truth Commission report found the government guilty of gross

Jayewardene's speech was reported by *Dawasa*, a leading Sinhala daily, the following morning. There was no message to the victims and no apologies. On 30 July, Minister of State Anandatissa de Alwis blamed the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Communist Party and the National Sama Samaja Party for the violence. There was, however, no evidence of any Left complicity in the events of July 1983.

The surprise visit of Narasimha Rao to Colombo did not soften Jayewardene's tough stand on the issue of Tamil terrorism. Going by the text of Jayewardene's address to the nation, it only encouraged trouble-makers as the attack on Tamils continued for five more days.

No remorse

To give prominence to Sinhala aspirations at a delicate time when innocent sections of a minority were trying to escape the attacks, fleeing as they did with their women and children would have doubtless given the message that the media too was united in the political leadership and the hoodlums in teaching lessons. We need add only that the nation was at its lowest ebb with a total breakdown of its moral responsibilities, the report said.

When the need of the hour was to assuage the Tamil people and their leaders, Jayewardene moved swiftly in Parliament on 4 August 1983 the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution. It was passed after a single day's debate. The amendment was to disavow separatism but the net result was to compel all the 16 TULF MPs to vacate their seats in Parliament and to throw the political leadership of the Tamils into the lap of the LTTE. The amendment further reinforced the belief that there was no remorse nor regret for the Black July events.

The most important recommendation of the Truth Commission is that the President and the Prime Minister must give leadership to a new era of ethnic reconciliation and national unity. President Kumaratunga, throughout her 10-year tenure, has shown a firm commitment to devolution of power to Tamils along federal lines without compromising the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. The LTTE, on the other hand, has put forward its Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) proposals for the North-East, which are nothing but a stepping stone for a separate Tamil Eelam. With the LTTE showing no flexibility, the peace process continues to remain deadlocked with no foreseeable sign of a breakthrough.

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

Karuna deputy killed by LTTE

P.K. Balachandran

Colombo, September 23

2/19 8/11
A strike force of the LTTE on Wednesday ambushed and killed Reggie, the number two in the dissident Tiger faction led by the former Batticaloa commander, 'Colonel' Karuna. K.G. 13

Sri Lankan military spokesman Colonel Sumedha Perera said that Reggie, who was also Karuna's brother, and two of his aides, Elilan and Thumilan, were killed at Eluppadichenai, north west of Batticaloa, on the route to Pollanaruwa.

Perera said that Reggie was killed in a gun battle which started at about 7.30 in the evening and lasted a long time. The incident took place in a LTTE-controlled area. The pro-LTTE website Tamilnet said that Reggie was leading an outfit which was working in close collaboration with the Sri Lankan Army. Reggie's death is indeed a major loss for Karuna, who is said to be conducting anti-Prabhakaran operations in Batticaloa district from somewhere outside Sri Lanka.

Karuna had lost his other key commanders after his 41-day revolt was crushed by a swift military action by Prabhakaran in April this year.

THE HINDU

24 SEP 2004

Sri Lanka: draft Constitution 'can be a starting point'

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, SEPT 13. Sri Lanka's draft constitution proposals submitted in 1997 and 2000 "can be a good starting point to find an amicable solution" to the island-nation's ethnic conflict and a federal variant could be found to suit a small nation such as Sri Lanka, Prakash Karat, Polit Bureau member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said here today.

Delivering a public lecture on federalism and the political system in India, organised by the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS), Mr. Karat said in the "long history" of the island's debate between the unitary structure and federalism, "progress was made in the late 1990s in working out a federal form of state structure, which safeguards Sri Lankan unity and sovereignty."

Responding to a question from the audience on whether

federalism would suit a small country, a common apprehension among the island's majority Sinhalese, Mr. Karat said: "I don't buy the argument... There is no proof to suggest that small states cannot have a federal system. There is sufficient space within federalism to innovate."

Emphasising that there were "no readymade models," he said a federal model for the island-nation was "something which you have to work out in Sri Lanka."

Decentralisation

Replying to another question, Mr. Karat said there was a "common misconception that the Left is against decentralisation." Setting out examples from Left-ruled states in India, he said: "We can legitimately claim that we have made a serious contribution to decentralisation from a Marxist standpoint." Decentralisation, he said, "does not mean rolling back the state,"

but "making the state at all levels more accountable to the people."

Federalism in India, Mr. Karat said, was currently facing "a new threat" from "two countervailing forces": the outlook of the two major parties — the Congress and the BJP — and the process of liberalisation.

Jayadeva Uyangoda, Professor of Political Science, Colombo University, said there was a need for a "historic compromise" between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE to solve the decades-long separatist conflict. Such a compromise, he said, should span three areas: self-rule and shared rule, shared sovereignty and political guarantees of a peace accord for both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE.

Lakshman Kadirgamar, Foreign Affairs Minister and chairman of the BCIS, presided.

Chandrika offers to meet Prabakaran

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 17. Signalling Colombo's eagerness to resume negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), coupled with a message of firmness in approach, the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has offered to meet the elusive LTTE leader, V. Prabakaran, if progress were to be made in the stalled peace talks. The President also asserted that she "will not hesitate" to order troops to march into rebel-held Sri Lanka if the LTTE's internecine war endangered the island-nation's stability, a Western news agency

reported today. ^{110-15 18/8} In a recent interview given in Colombo to the Washington-based United Press International (UPI) news agency, Ms. Kumaratunga was quoted as saying that she was willing to meet Mr. Prabakaran, "not for the sake of just shaking hands, but if negotiations begin and we are progressing, quite definitely at some point we have to meet."

Political keenness

Ms. Kumaratunga — who made a similar offer to meet Mr. Prabakaran a decade ago when she proposed a move away from Sri Lanka's unitary state to

a union of regions with devolved political power to solve the decades-long separatist conflict — laced political keenness to resume talks with military firmness in approach on the troubled eastern front, saying "the only way to control the situation in eastern Sri Lanka would be to send in troops," the news agency reported.

"I have never baulked at doing what is required of me as head of state in the national interest," the President was quoted as saying. "We will not hesitate if it appears to us after long reflection that it is required in the national interest," Ms. Kumaratunga, who is also

^{Sri Lanka} head of the armed forces, told the news agency.

'Rebels refused offer'

Ms. Kumaratunga also added that Colombo had offered to step in and restore law and order in rebel-held eastern Sri Lanka after the March 2 revolt by the LTTE's former military commander, V. Muralitharan, "but the rebels had refused," the news agency said. On the deadlock in efforts to restart peace talks, Ms. Kumaratunga opined that the "main concern" of the LTTE leadership was to "stabilise the eastern situation before they come to talks."

Not under pressure: LTTE

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, AUG. 17. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has said that it was not under pressure by the international community and blamed Sri Lanka's "political contradictions" and "power struggles" for having resulted in "the Tamil people losing faith in the peace process."

Addressing journalists on Monday after a meeting with the European Union's Sri Lanka troika, during which the EU raised issues relating to killings, child recruitment and abductions, the LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, said the group "is not pressurised in

any way by the visits by international delegations."

According to a report in the TamilNet website, Mr. Tamilchelvan "explained to the EU envoys the LTTE leadership's stand that we are ready to restart negotiation with the Sri Lankan Government on the basis of the Interim Self Government Authority (ISGA) proposal, which was endorsed by the Tamil people at the general election."

Mr. Tamilchelvan also told the team, which had conveyed its concern over the deteriorating situation on the human rights front, that "it is the moral responsibility of everybody, including the LTTE, that the Ta-

mil people's wish expressed as an overwhelming electoral mandate should be respected and talks should recommence without any further delay."

The LTTE's political wing leader also "explained the situation in the east, where paramilitary forces are being nurtured and promoted by Colombo," and that the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the accomplices of the LTTE's former military commander, V. Muralitharan, "are engaged in activities aimed at disrupting the peace process," the report said. Just hours before the EU delegation met the LTTE in rebel-held Kilinochchi on Monday, the

EPDP's propaganda secretary, Balanadarajah Iyer (EROS Bala) was shot dead in Colombo.

Trawler spotted

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry today said the Navy had "spotted a trawler moving under suspicious circumstances," off Chalai close to the eastern Mullaitivu coast in the early hours of Monday.

"The Navy craft, which detected this trawler, mounted surveillance on the suspected trawler" and "several boxes suspected to be containing military hardware" were seen "being unloaded" from the trawler to a fibreglass dinghy, the Defence Ministry said.

18 AUG 2004

Anura willing to take over

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, Aug. 5. — Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's brother, Mr Anura Bandaranaike, today said he was willing to take over the leadership of the ruling party following his sister's sudden resignation.

Mr Bandaranaike, 55, expressed willingness to be the new leader of the Marxist-backed Freedom Alliance after President Kumaratunga resigned her top position in the party yesterday.

"I am willing to take that position if the party wants me to," Mr Bandaranaike told reporters here.

Mr Bandaranaike is also the minister of tourism and investment promotion and had

been a Speaker of Parliament. Mrs Kumaratunga resigned as differences emerged within the Freedom Alliance coalition on reviving peace negotiations with Tamil Tiger rebels, but Mr Bandaranaike said most of the problems had been sorted out.

"Yes, we had differences of opinion, but it was sorted out," Mr Bandaranaike said.

Media reports here have said that Mrs Kumaratunga slammed JVP leaders over some of their public statements criticising the Norwegian-backed peace process and several other issues. However, government spokesman Mr Mangala Samaraweera said they had no problems in the alliance and that Mrs Kumaratunga quit "merely to spend time dealing with the country's problems."

Lanka offers veils to Muslim schoolgirls

COLOMBO, Aug. 5. — The Sri Lankan government today said minority Muslim schoolgirls had a choice whether to cover their faces after the state decided to give them free veils as part of their uniforms.

Government spokesman Mangala Samaraweera said the decision last month was aimed at giving Muslims in state-owned schools veils in line with religious practices, but the left-leaning government was not insisting they wear them. "What we have decided is to give them material for the veils," Samaraweera said. "But, it is not compulsory for them to wear it unless they want to." Muslims are considered a distinct ethnic community in Sri Lanka and make up about 7.5 per cent of the 19 million population, making them the second largest minority after Tamils. — AFP

Mrs Kumaratunga's resignation does not affect the running of the government, but the JVP will no longer be able to demand talks with her as leader of the coalition.

JVP softens stand

Softening its stand on the peace talks with LTTE, JVP, a key ally in the Freedom

Alliance government today said they were ready to accept negotiations on self-rule for the Tamil Tigers. The JVP, which had earlier threatened to pull out of the government if talks were revived based on the rebel proposal for self-rule, said they were being "flexible" in helping President Kumaratunga carry forward the peace process.

THE STATESMAN

Aug 5 1990

Chandrika quits as alliance leader

Colombo, Aug. 4 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's President quit as leader of the ruling alliance today as confusion grew over the government's stand on long-stalled peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels.

The resignation by Chandrika Kumaratunga, which does not affect her role as President, comes after state media said she backtracked on her offer to hold peace talks on the rebels' terms. She said the media reports were wrong.

Kumaratunga told Norwegian envoy Vidar Helgesen last week she would hold talks on the LTTE proposal for interim self-rule, meeting their longstanding demand to restart the peace process.

Today, she said in a statement that "the government's stance on the resumption of peace talks with the LTTE remains unchanged".

The media reports, her denial and now her decision to quit as head of the alliance have led to further doubts

about the ability of the United People's Freedom Alliance to form a coherent position on the peace process.

There is speculation her resignation is a result of her frustration over the alliance's inability to formulate a strategy about restarting talks to end the island's 21-year civil war. Her office, however, said the resignation was due to overwork and had nothing to do with politics.

Direct negotiations between the government and the rebels stalled in April last year, and a change in government, factional fighting within the LTTE and increasing violations of the island's February 2002 ceasefire have complicated efforts to get back to the negotiating table.

Today's confusion is likely to deepen the Tigers' distrust of Kumaratunga, who they tried to kill in a 1999 suicide bomb attack and who they have repeatedly accused of being insincere about the

peace bid. There was no immediate comment from the Tigers on the issue, but the rebel-backed Tamil National Alliance has said it wants a written commitment from Kumaratunga on her position before it will believe she is sincere.

"The position that stands is the one taken after the Helgesen visit," presidential spokesman Harim Peiris said.

But he said the statement issued at that time said Kumaratunga was "willing and keen to commence negotiations on an interim authority," adding that did not necessarily mean the Tigers' interim authority proposals, but the principle of an interim authority more generally.

To add to the confusion, a second statement posted on a government website said the President would hold talks on the LTTE proposal "alongside the talks to reach a final solution" to the war that killed more than 64,000.



Chandrika Kumaratunga

LTTE seeks talks on devolution package

By Jal Taraporevala
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

dominated areas and an easing of restrictions on the freedom of movement.

Mumbai: The LTTE leadership has ideological and tactical reasons for stating that a breakthrough in the stalled peace process in Sri Lanka will hinge on progress in working towards an agreement with the Chandrika Kumaratunga administration on an interim devolution package.

This has crucial significance since the LTTE sees the proposals on power sharing unveiled last year as the basis for substantive discussions with the leadership in Colombo.

It is, however, unlikely that full-scale substantive talks on a provisional devolution arrangement will commence in the near future. After all, certain additional confidence-building measures remain to be addressed before a formal substantive dialogue can get under way.

For instance, the government is seeking stricter verification of the ceasefire. For its part, the LTTE is pressing for a faster resettlement of internal refugees, a larger allocation of aid to the Tamil-

Even if a substantive dialogue on devolution begins in the coming months (something which cannot be taken for granted), achieving progress is likely to prove difficult in view of the contentious nature of the issues involved in the negotiations.

Even if a substantive dialogue on devolution begins in the coming months, achieving progress is likely to prove difficult in view of the contentious nature of the issues involved in the negotiations

These include the precise nature of the powers to be devolved, the delineation of provincial boundaries, the status of the land settlements in eastern Sri Lanka and the modalities of effecting the requisite amendments in the country's constitution.

The situation has been made harder by the demographic shift that has taken place in the eastern districts in the past 15 years. Except Batticaloa, the eastern districts of Amparai and Trincomalee have witnessed a decline in Tamil population during this period. This, in turn, will complicate the LTTE's effort to secure a long-term merger of the northern and eastern regions of the country.

Deadlock over agenda for Sri Lanka peace talks continues

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JULY 27. The visiting Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, today met the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, as part of the ongoing efforts by Oslo to restart the stalled peace negotiations.

However, the deadlock over the agenda for the peace talks continued, with no agreement between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on the basis on which to recommence the talks, which remain stalled since the unilateral pullout by the Tigers last April.

Mr. Helgesen, who met the LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, in rebel-held Kili-

nochchi on Monday, briefed Ms. Kumaratunga "indicating that there was no agreement on the proposed agenda for recommencement of talks."

Commitment

According to the Presidential Secretariat, Ms. Kumaratunga, "indicated that her Government is willing to commence negotiations on an interim authority within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and to reach a durable solution to the conflict." The common outcome of Mr. Helgesen's meetings with the LTTE on Monday and the Sri Lankan President on Tuesday were commitments made by the Government and the Tigers to adhere to the ceasefire agreement

that has been in force since February 2002. Colombo said today that it "hopes that the LTTE will agree to resume talks," on the basis of an interim rule within a united Sri Lanka."

While the Tigers want the Government to accept its proposals for an interim administration as the basis for negotiations, Colombo's offer has not been made public. Speaking to journalists in Kilinochchi on Monday after meeting Mr. Helgesen, the LTTE's political wing leader said the Tigers had not received an agenda from the Government and that there was no change in its position as outlined to the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Petersen, during his visit this May.

THE HINDU

28 JUL 2004

Tigers kill 8 from Karuna faction in dawn raid

Colombo, July 25 (Reuters): Eight people were shot dead at a Tamil Tiger safe house near the Sri Lankan capital today in an attack blamed on the months-old split in the senior ranks of the rebel leadership.

The Tamilnet website (www.tamilnet.com) said those killed were supporters of renegade Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commander Vinyagamoorthy Muraditharan, known as "Karuna", and included



V. Prabhakaran: Old scores

ment in the above incident and the Sri Lanka army further assures that no intelligence operative is among the dead," the police said in a brief statement.

The police official said the killings took place at a residence believed to be a Tamil rebel safe house in Kottawa, an outer suburb of Colombo.

Residents said they heard bangs a few hours before dawn today, but thought it was fireworks set to stop monkeys from

raiding orchards.

They said the house — a plush double-storey building set in a rubber plantation and surrounded by a two metre brick wall — had been rented about two weeks ago by a man believed to be a key Karuna associate.

Police and army investigators today swarmed the house looking for clues. In the driveway, police experts dusted a Japanese saloon car for fingerprints as a bomb squad team

checked the premises for booby traps.

Karuna, one of the most senior Tamil commanders, split from the LTTE earlier this year, prompting a crisis in the group, which has been fighting for decades in a war that has claimed over 64,000 lives.

The LTTE is run with an iron fist by its senior commanders, under chief V. Prabhakaran, and analysts say scores will be settled for months to come as a re-

sult of Karuna's split.

Although the LTTE has regained control of the eastern areas formerly commanded by Karuna, the group accuses the government of supporting him in order to drive a wedge through their ranks.

A team of Norwegian negotiators, led by deputy foreign minister Vida Helgesen, arrived in the Sri Lankan capital today afternoon in the latest attempt to re-start the stalled peace process.



Karuna: Fresh blow

A LAUDABLE STEP

S. Lanka
110-12
29/12 ✓

THE DECISION BY the Sri Lankan Government to pay compensation to victims of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots deserves to be praised. It is long overdue. Money can never pose as compensation for victims of an atrocity. The riots, which lasted nearly 10 days in July 1983, resulted in enormous loss of life and property, and even more than that, a trauma that will affect generations of Sri Lankan Tamils to come. That much was evident in the testimonies of many of those who gave evidence before the Truth Commission on Ethnic Violence (1981-1984) that President Chandrika Kumaratunga appointed in 2001. Such suffering does not carry a price tag. Yet financial reparation may be the best available method by which wrongs of the past can be acknowledged and responded to. The Commission, which submitted its findings to President Kumaratunga in September 2002, held the J.R. Jayewardene government responsible for "both acts of omission and commission in the run up" to the riots. It also blamed the government for "gross negligence in failing to appeal to the people for restraint, peace and calm" during the riots aside from "failing to perform its fundamental obligations to protect the life and property of its citizens, even by recourse to force." One of its recommendations was that "victims, their dependants or heirs [be] compensated as a matter of right and not as a matter of charity." In announcing that it has set aside 72.3 million rupees for payouts to the 937 people who gave evidence to the Commission, Sri Lanka has acknowledged and accepted the state's responsibility in the genocidal pogrom.

"Black July", as it is known, was a watershed in the history of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. It contributed to the rise of Tamil militancy (of which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is a

product) and ruptured relations between Sri Lankan Tamils and the state to an extent that no Government since then has been able to build a bridge to them. Compensation will certainly go some distance in healing the wounds of those who were directly affected by the targeted killing and looting, even if it has taken more than two decades in the coming. Only the cynical will see it as a political game by the Kumaratunga-led Freedom Alliance Government to "fix" the opposition United National Party. Rather, it must be seen as a reiteration by President Kumaratunga of her promise to rectify historical wrongs through a political resolution of a conflict that predates 1983.

Through 10 years in office, Ms. Kumaratunga has shown unwavering commitment to devolution along federal lines as the cornerstone of a permanent solution that will fulfil the aspirations of all Sri Lankans. If the two-year-old peace process between the Government and the LTTE shows little signs of progress, it is due to the inflexibility of the latter, with its constant threat of returning to war unless all its demands are met and its policy of assassination and suppression of all democratic expression. The recent suicide bombing in Colombo has demonstrated that the LTTE is quite prepared to fall back on its old strategy of terrorism to put pressure on the Government. The bombing has naturally raised questions about how long the ceasefire will last. Sri Lanka, which now understands more than at any other time in the past two decades that there is no military solution to this problem, must guard against being provoked into a military response. Instead, it must look to winning the hearts and minds of the Tamils. The decision to make financial reparations to the 1983 riot victims is a significant step in the right direction.

THE HINDU

✓ THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2004

S. Lanka
10-10
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LTTE BACK IN ACTION

THE LIBERATION TIGERS of Tamil Eelam is back at its old game of assassination and terrorist strikes. In fact, the re-emergence of the dreaded woman suicide bomber, the execution of 'death sentences', and the triumph of the ruling alliance in the Provincial Council elections have all a message of their own. The suicide bomber who blew herself up at a Colombo police station last week was a hallmarked Black Tiger, reportedly No. 263 on the organisation's honour roll. She tried but failed to 'meet' Douglas Devananda, a Sri Lankan Minister, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, and a longstanding target of the LTTE. The target escaped but the episode ended tragically with the death of four policemen and injury to more. On such matters, a formal denial by the LTTE does not carry any conviction. However, the organisation had no problem in admitting that it 'executed' two young men in the east for being 'traitors'. There has also been an attack on a Buddhist temple in Polonnaruwa district in the North-Central Province, supposedly in retaliation for providing shelter to rebel Tiger V. Muralitharan alias Karuna's cadres. The violence, significantly, has not been one-sided: an LTTE town leader was shot on Black Tigers' day, presumably by a rebel cadre.

This *recidivism* has an ominous message. Aside from seeking to take out a key political target, the suicide mission in Colombo may have been intended to demonstrate that the LTTE can strike in the heart of Colombo if it chooses to. Its denial of authorship of the suicide bombing can be linked to the active involvement of the international community in Sri Lanka's peace process. The incident is one more violation of the ceasefire agreement, even though the Government for constructive reasons does not say this openly. The United States and the European Union have promptly condemned the violence and called

upon the Government as well as the LTTE to ensure that the ceasefire holds and peace talks resume. President Chandrika Kumaratunga has shown courage as well as sagacity in making it clear that these outrages will not be allowed to derail the peace process.

There is opportunity in the new turn brought about by the sweeping victories of the Kumaratunga-led alliance in the Provincial Council elections. President Kumaratunga is a gifted and brave political leader with a non-chauvinistic and progressive vision. With a majority in Parliament now within grasp, with Arumugan Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress expected to join the ruling alliance, she has a new opportunity to take forward her commitment to a negotiated federal solution to Sri Lanka's principal national problem — the Tamil question. She knows more than anyone else that the peace process can succeed not through a policy of appeasement of the Tigers but only through establishing sound fundamentals for a political package along federal lines that will be acceptable to all constituents of Sri Lankan society. One factor working in her favour might be the desperation that seems to underlie the Tigers' renewed extremism. Militarily as well as politically, the LTTE is a tremendously weakened presence in the east. With Mr. Karuna moving resourcefully to mainstream himself and his followers in national democratic politics, Velupillai Prabhakaran's organisation finds itself in crisis. With political stability beginning to return to the South, this is an excellent time for President Kumaratunga to accelerate her big-ticket plans to achieve a negotiated political solution, which will demand a constitutional change. Whether the LTTE will be part of this process or is in the process of driving itself beyond the pale yet again cannot be predicted with any confidence at this juncture.

THE HINDU

19 JUL 2004

Tigers ready for battle, blame government

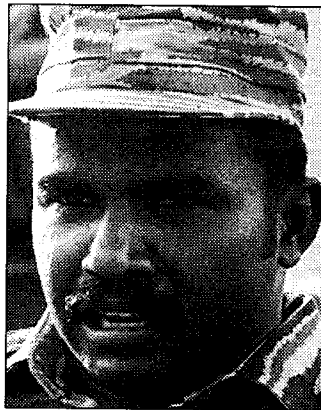
Colombo, July 12 (Reuters): Tamil Tigers accused the government today of thrusting a war on them by using a rival rebel faction to weaken their forces and said they were ready to return to the battlefield.

The warning came less than a week after a suicide bomb blast blamed on the LTTE killed five people at a police station in the capital, the first such attack since the government and rebels agreed to a truce in 2002.

Both the rebels and the government have said they do not want to break the Norwegian-brokered truce that has given the island its best chance to end the war that killed 64,000 over more than two decades.

The LTTE says the military is aiding a rebel faction led by a breakaway eastern fighter known as Karuna, and is complicit in ongoing violence in his home base of Batticaloa.

"This would make it plain to the Tamil people that the Sri Lankan state is not interested at all in taking forward the peace



Karuna

process but is only bent on using the talks and the ceasefire to wage a terrorist war on us," E. Kausalyan, head of the Tigers' political wing in Batticaloa said on the *Tamilnet* website.

"We are ready to face the war that the Sri Lankan state has decided to thrust on us thus," he said on the pro-rebel site.

Defence secretary Cyril Herath said security forces were

under strict instructions to stick to the ceasefire and denied they were involved with Karuna.

"Karuna's people can act on their own — they don't need help," he said. "The instructions we have given to security forces is that they should in no way in word or deed do anything to perpetrate violence," he said.

Nordic monitors overseeing the truce said they met the Tigers' political wing in the rebel-held north yesterday, but it was a routine meeting not prompted by the suicide bomb.

"They want to respect the ceasefire," spokeswoman Disa Finnboga said.

The Tigers have denied a role in the suicide blast, but police said the target was Tamil government minister Douglas Devananda, one of their most outspoken critics and a challenge to their claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the island's minority Tamils.

Devananda said he has had contact with Karuna.

HD-1
12/7

Chandrika-led alliance sweeps provincial polls

✓
Sambandan

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JULY 11. Sri Lanka's ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) has swept the provincial council elections held in six provinces on Saturday. According to current indications, the UPFA led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga has a clear majority in five provinces and a two-seat lead in the Central province. The results are to be officially released tomorrow.

Except the Central province, a traditional stronghold of the Opposition United National Party, the People's Alliance was in power in the other five provinces where elections were held. In the Central province, the role of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) now becomes crucial. The CWC had contested the polls with the UNP but had maintained it would inde-

pendently decide its political course.

The Western, Central, Southern, North-Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces went to the polls to elect a total of 316 provincial councillors, who would form the third tier of elected representatives in the island after the directly-elected President and the 225 Members of Parliament.

The UPFA, a combine of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Left-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), has already won the North-Western province and is thus poised for a complete consolidation.

Fewer than half of those eligible voted in Saturday's elections, days after a suicide attack in the capital strained the truce between the Government and the Tamil Tigers.

**LTTE hardens stance:
Page 12**

THE HINDU

12 JUL 2004

THE KARUNA FACTOR

S. Lanka
12.9.10
20/10

MUCH AS THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would have wished physically to liquidate Karuna, its former military commander in eastern Sri Lanka who led an internal rebellion in March, it failed to lay hands on him. But it did seem as if it had overcome one of its most serious crises when Karuna fled his base following a military operation against him by the Tigers. For a while, this enabled the LTTE to claim that it remained the "sole representative" of the Tamil people and would brook no challengers. But it is increasingly clear that Velupillai Prabhakaran's organisation cannot simply wish Karuna and his supporters away. The continuing incidents in the East show that the region remains a battlefield for the two factions of one movement. Cadres loyal to Karuna have taken out LTTE cadres and supporters in the region. Significant sections of the Tamils in the area are in political sympathy with the rebel commander who brought out into the open the resentment of eastern Tamils against the discrimination practised by what Karuna terms the "Wanni leadership." Recent reports indicate that the rebel commander may even have carried out a military operation against the LTTE. Its petulant denials of the fighting have only reinforced the impression that both politically and militarily, it is on extremely shaky ground in eastern Sri Lanka.

Predictably, the "Wanni leadership" has reacted by accusing the Sri Lankan Government of using Karuna to try and weaken it and has warned that this could have "grave consequences" for the peace process. The Government has denied it is assisting the rebel, but has said a few "individuals" in the army may have helped him. But even if the Government is instrumental in the resurrection of Karuna, it is doubtful that the LTTE can do much, with its

emaciated eastern flank, by way of retaliation. Getting into a full-scale war with the Government may not be a real option for it any more. Resorting to terrorist attacks will not get it any mileage either. Internationally, the LTTE will face further isolation if it returns to fighting. Instead of sabre-rattling, it would be on the whole better for the "Wanni leadership" to look into the mirror that Karuna has held up to it and consider its future in a context that may be congenial to the evolution of a democratic and pluralistic leadership for Sri Lankan Tamils. Karuna represents a section of the Tamil people who are clearly fed up with the Pol Potist ways of the organisation. If it continues to suppress dissent within its ranks and in the Tamil community in general — witness its conduct with Karuna and during the parliamentary election in Jaffna — sooner than later the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, will find himself besieged by Karuna clones.

However, in order to provide a meaningful alternative to the "Wanni leadership," there is no doubt that first, Karuna himself needs to change. Very much a product of Tigerism, he has in these early days of his rebellion fallen back on the methods he knows best. He was evidently behind the killing of two intellectuals who spoke against him — a university professor and a journalist. By having them eliminated, Karuna's group has done disservice to its own cause and provided an excuse for the use of violence against dissent. Those who have the interests of Sri Lanka's Tamil people at heart must encourage Karuna to enter the country's democratic mainstream. In this may well lie one of the keys to finding an inclusive solution to Sri Lanka's longstanding conflict — one acceptable to all Sri Lankans, Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim and Burgher.

THE HINDU

30 JUN 2010

WAR CLOUDS OVER LANKA

S. Karuna
5/18
23/6

Peace Process In Dangerous Impasse

By SAM RAJAPPA

The much awaited breakthrough in Sri Lanka's peace process remains elusive. President Kumaratunga's meeting with representatives of Tamil National Alliance parliamentary group, political proxy for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, only widened the gulf between the two sides. The TNA told Kumaratunga that the Interim Self Government Authority (ISGA), mooted by the LTTE as early as 31 October, 2003, should be established in the North-East immediately and talks on core issues to resolve the ethnic conflict could follow. Kumaratunga wanted to link ISGA with a permanent political solution which, according to the LTTE, was "manipulative strategy" to take the peace process forward for a while before aborting it. Her condition that discussions on core issues should be parallel to discussions on ISGA has brought the situation back to square one. If ISGA was not conceded, the LTTE warned, "the foundation for peace laid with international assistance during the last three years would be shattered and bloodbath could resume in Sri Lanka."

Virulent campaign

The Janatha Vumukthi Perumana, junior partner in the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance, has launched a virulent campaign against ISGA even as Kumaratunga was seriously considering it. Before it was voted out in April, the United National Party, which had signed the existing ceasefire with LTTE and held six rounds of talks with them, had agreed to negotiate on the basis of ISGA proposals. The UNP is now accusing the UPFA of endangering the peace process by allowing internal contradictions within the ruling alliance. The two leading parties differ sharply in their views on negotiations with the LTTE.

Kumaratunga dissolved Parliament in February last because she feared the UNP would concede ISGA, which is a stepping stone to a separate state. In her meeting with representatives of the TNA in the second week of June, she said she was prepared to discuss ISGA without linking it to a permanent solution. Two days later, in her televised address, she said interim administration for the North-East would be a part of a final solution only.

Sri Lanka's Media Minister and the UPFA government's new cabinet spokesman Mangala Samaraweera clarified that Kumaratunga had no intention of establishing ISGA. However, he said the UPFA government was committed to take forward

the peace process. Peace talks would be conducted in a transparent manner, he said. A political solution would be found to the satisfaction of Tamils who voted for the UPFA and the UNP. Both government and the LTTE should adopt flexibility in taking forward the peace process towards finding a permanent political solution, he said. LTTE has expressed disappointment over the government's latest position.

The official position of the SLFP on ISGA had been made clear by Lakshman Kadirgamar, Minister for Foreign Affairs who

protect the territorial integrity of the state. The coastline of seas adjacent to the North-East go all the way from Mannar in the west to Hambantota in the east, covering two-thirds of the coast of Sri Lanka. Tension has already mounted between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan security forces over the passage of three sea Tiger boats from Mullaitheevu to Illankanthai in the East. The Sri Lankan Navy has strengthened security to prevent illegal sea movements by the LTTE. The LTTE's influence over the Eastern Province comprising Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara



was her special adviser when the proposals were submitted last year. While the LTTE agreed in Oslo in December 2002 to explore a federal solution based on the principle of internal self-determination in the areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking people within a united Sri Lanka, the ISGA proposals go far beyond the parameters of any known federal model. The proposals, which call for plenary powers for the governance of the North-East, affect the sovereignty of Sri Lanka and violates its Constitution. ISGA will have no organic link with the Sri Lankan government in Colombo. Parliament has no role to play in the ISGA scheme of things.

Territorial integrity

According to Clause 18 of the proposals, ISGA would control marine and offshore resources of adjacent seas and have power to regulate access. If control over the marine and offshore resources of adjacent seas passes to ISGA, Kadirgamar explained, the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka will be compromised. There will be a grave threat to international shipping lanes that pass the east coast of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Navy will no longer be able to regulate access to adjacent seas and will not be able to pro-

tect the territorial integrity of the state. The coastline of seas adjacent to the North-East go all the way from Mannar in the west to Hambantota in the east, covering two-thirds of the coast of Sri Lanka. Tension has already mounted between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan security forces over the passage of three sea Tiger boats from Mullaitheevu to Illankanthai in the East. The Sri Lankan Navy has strengthened security to prevent illegal sea movements by the LTTE. The LTTE's influence over the Eastern Province comprising Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara

districts has diminished considerably since the 3 March rebellion by V Muralitharan, alias Karuna, its former military commander. Also, there has been a spate of killings. Dissident cadres of the LTTE loyal to Karuna roam the region. They have yet to be disarmed. In ISGA proposals, there is no reference to the Supreme Court or to existing judicial structures of Sri Lanka. Instead, Clause 10 of ISGA says that separate institutions for the administration of justice shall be established for the North-East and judicial power shall be vested in such institutions. ISGA will have total control of financial matters, including power to borrow internally and externally, provide guarantees and indemnities, receive aid directly and engage in and regulate internal and external trade. ISGA will appoint a separate Auditor-General. It is a clear indication that Parliament will be excluded from the affairs of ISGA. Provisions relating to elections relegate them to a delay of five years of the agreement coming into force. This clause conceals the right to secede. As long as the LTTE remains heavily armed, no free and fair election is possible in areas under its control, as the recent parliament election has revealed.

Observers from the European Union have denounced the LTTE for violence and preventing candidates not aligned to it from campaigning before the 2 April election in the North-East. John Cushnahan, head of the European Union's team of election observers, told a press conference in Colombo: "The LTTE did not want any party other than the TNA to be in the election. This affected others' campaign." The EU report said that apart from the rebel related violence, there were 2,000 other cases of election-related violence. Cushnahan, who led EU team to monitor three parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka since 2000, warned the EU was unlikely to send another observer team in the future if its recommendations were not acted upon.

EU observers

The LTTE backed TNA, which used the name of Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi, swept the polls in the North and Tamil speaking areas in the East, winning 20 seats and earned two more under the proportional representation system. Cushnahan said the EU observers had noted instances of impersonation and said that pre-election murders, particularly that of a candidate of the TNA considered close to renegade LTTE commander Karuna, had an adverse impact on the election. Tamil United Liberation Front leader V Anandasangaree, who contested as an independent from Jaffna, said LTTE prevented candidates of other parties from campaigning from the day of nomination until the day of polling. He described how they were harassed by LTTE's 78-member motorcycle gang, most of the vehicles without number-plate. The entry of TNA members into Parliament meant legalising terrorism by the country, he added.

The University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna, in its latest report, has warned of LTTE supremo Velupillai Pirabhakaran's proclivity to provoke a war whenever he feels cornered. The prospect is nearer now. The report, says Pirabhakaran, was almost exclusively dependent on his intelligence chief Pottu Amman and a handful of other northern "cronies", backed by about 500 northern cadres to restore his control over Batticaloa. What stands in the way of the LTTE resuming armed conflict is the pledge of \$4.5 billion by more than 70 countries, including the European Union, India, Japan and the USA, to rebuild the war-torn nation after the rebels and government sign a ceasefire agreement and launch peace talks which have since broken down. The donors have tied the funds to the resumption of peace talks.

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

Karuna plays a hand

By V.S. Sambandan

S. Karuna
10-10
26/10

Whichever way 'Col.' Karuna's rebellion unfolds, the situation in eastern Sri Lanka and consequently the conflict resolution process will have undergone a radical change.

AFTER LEADING the crack fighting units of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for 17 years, V. Muralitharan — whose battlefield successes under the *nom de guerre* 'Col.' Karuna had made him an icon within the group — is now both hunter and hunted. Since the March 3 rebellion, those who had dreaded 'Col.' Karuna cherish him and those who had adored him revile him. However, the impact of his revolt on the LTTE, which he joined as a schoolboy and left as the longest-serving regional commander, is perceptible with each passing day.

Three months after 'Col.' Karuna broke ranks and lived to tell his tale, Sri Lanka's East, and along with it the national politics of peace making, has changed completely. The impact of 'Col.' Karuna's rebellion cuts across political, social and military spheres.

The success of the LTTE as a challenger to the Sri Lankan state was a result of its out-manoeuvring its rivals, primarily through the bullet, pushing the Sri Lankan armed forces into a corner, and ensuring control over civilians in the North and the East. The LTTE has always wanted to be the 'sole representative' of the Tamils in the island. The political reasoning was that otherwise Colombo would play one Tamil group against another. Consequently, the rise of militant politics also saw the gradual demise of multi-party representation of the Tamils.

'Col.' Karuna's revolt and the reasons he chose to expound for breaking away questioned the fundamentals of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism, which pre-date militancy. By asserting the 'regional aspirations' of the East, 'Col.' Karuna has challenged a key concept of the island's Tamil ethno-politics — traditional homelands. The LTTE faces the most serious challenge to its decades-long existence at the ideological level.

Politically, the timing of the 'Col.' Karuna's move dented the LTTE's claim to the status of 'sole represen-

tatives' of the Tamils at the negotiations with the Government. Indications that the rebel commander is keen on starting a new political party add another dimension to the emerging scenario. This is particularly so as the new Sri Lankan Government is keen on inclusiveness in negotiations within a two-tier system framework.

While Colombo has made it clear that the LTTE will be the principal negotiator at the main talks, it has also conceived of a second tier to include all interested groups and parties. As the Government views 'Col.' Karuna as a breakaway group of the LTTE, the question is whether he and his supporters will be involved separately.

Immediately after he broke away from the LTTE, 'Col.' Karuna declared: "I want to do my duty by the people of southern Tamil Eelam. It is my final goal that I should fight for these people and die at their feet. I do not want anyone to interfere in this."

With eastern assertion becoming an issue, the question is whether regionalism could emerge within Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism.

As he is more than anything else a product of the LTTE, 'Col.' Karuna's tactics are likely to be broadly politico-military in approach. Formation of a political party depends on several imponderables, primarily his ability to continue to hold out against a powerful antagonist. His effectiveness will also be dependent on his ability to strike an independent line, with or without new allies, and on the eagerness with which the Sri Lankan polity involves him in national affairs.

That 'Col.' Karuna had not just subscribed to the LTTE's views, but was at the helm of its fighting forces makes him different from other Ta-

mil militants who aspired to make a break with their past. Bringing 'Col.' Karuna into the mainstream will, therefore, be a challenge for the Sri Lankan polity.

His bid to join the political mainstream is likely to see him shift his approach from that of an eastern leader to one espousing the case of pan-Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. To that extent, recalibrating his earlier bitterness over "discrimination against the eastern Tamils by the Vanni leadership," could mark the starting point. 'Col.' Karuna's plans are officially to float a political party to take the battle to the LTTE camp. This raises the possibility of a revival of internecine clashes the island witnessed during the early days of Tamil militancy.

While the formalisation of a political party will add to his legitimacy as a political player, the military element is bound to continue in the form of guerrilla attacks on the LTTE.

As in the case of the LTTE, 'Col.' Karuna's party in formation will aspire to be a politico-military organisation. While a political party will make him a legal entity, the armed dimension of 'Col.' Karuna's resistance is bound to continue. With his knowledge of the eastern terrain and his direct involvement with the people of Batticaloa-Amparai, 'Col.' Karuna can add a new dimension to the conflict resolution process.

The core of his new support comprises two broad groupings, the common strand being an endorsement of his publicly stated opposition to the LTTE. Sections of Sinhalese who had once termed him the 'Butcher of Batticaloa' now back him, seeing in him a way to get over issues crucial to the conflict resolution process — the de-merger of the north-east, for instance. For his

small core of Tamil supporters, 'Col.' Karuna remains on a pedestal as one who can stand up for the discriminated within the LTTE monolith.

To a significant extent 'Col.' Karuna's joining the mainstream will depend on the acumen displayed by him during this difficult as well as tricky stage of transition. The change from being the undisputed LTTE leader of Batticaloa-Amparai to a rebel on the run and challenging the LTTE has made him more vulnerable than ever.

Recent allegations that sections of the Sri Lankan military sheltered 'Col.' Karuna from the LTTE are bound to create further discord between the Sri Lankan polity and the Tigers. Even more disturbing is the continuing bitterness between the two main parties — the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Party — who continue to trade charges, oblivious to the need to think along national rather than party lines.

After 'Col.' Karuna's rebellion, fear has gripped Batticaloa. The change is so complete that the eastern town, once the stronghold of the LTTE, can never be the same again. Decades of militarisation had made even commoners identify and rapidly shift public allegiances between the Government forces and the LTTE — depending on which side had more strike capability. However, now with the LTTE and 'Col.' Karuna's fighters making clear their intention to sort matters out with the bullet the civilian is wary.

Trust, a rare commodity in any conflict-torn region, has plummeted to an extent that prompted a Sri Lankan political commentator to observe: "Even family members are now split. Friends don't trust friends. Political and personal links are suspect. No one knows from where the next firing will come, for what reason and when." Whichever way 'Col.' Karuna's rebellion unfolds, the situation in eastern Sri Lanka and consequently the conflict resolution process will have undergone a radical change.

Tigers reject Chandrika offer

Colombo, June 13 (Reuters): Tamil Tiger rebels accused Sri Lanka's President today of being "duplicitous" and rejected her terms for reviving a stalled peace bid, saying her government is too unstable to discuss a permanent end to the war.

The two sides are deadlocked over the agenda for renewed talks, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insisting negotiations be based on their interim self-rule proposal and the President wanting simultaneous discussions on a final settlement.

"Linking the ISGA with permanent political resolution is a manipulative strategy to take forward the peace process for a short while and then to abort it," the Tigers said on their *ltp-peacesecretariat.com* web site, re-

ferring to their proposal for an interim self-governing authority.

A meeting last week between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and rebel-backed parliamentarians raised hopes for an agreement on restarting talks to end the 20-year civil war, on hold since the Tigers suspended direct negotiations more than a year ago.

But today's strongly worded statement reflects the rebels' deep distrust of Kumaratunga, who they tried to kill in a 1999 suicide bomb attack and whose United People's Freedom Alliance won a minority mandate in an April election.

"This new condition (for talks on a final settlement) has within it a political duplicity, a trickery," said the LTTE.

LTTE warnings aimed at forcing govt to be flexible

By Jal Taraporevala
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

S. Kumar *11-11* *17/6*
Mumbai: The leadership of the LTTE has a dual purpose for again warning the Chandrika Kumaratunga regime of the possibility of a collapse in the ceasefire agreement unless a decisive breakthrough is achieved in the search for peace in Sri Lanka in the near future.



C Kumaratunga

For one, given the determination of the high command of the Tamil Tigers to try and prevent another internal revolt like the one led by Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan in April, the statement is an attempt to reassert a firm policy line at this juncture.

For another, it is a tactical means of stepping up the pressure on the government to demonstrate greater flexibility on certain confidence-building measures and substantive issues involved in the peace process. In particular, the LTTE is seeking the implementation of such confidence-building measures as the provision of more aid to the Tamil-dominated areas, greater freedom of movement and a faster resettlement of internal refugees. As far as substantive issues are concerned, the Tamil Tigers can be expected to continue to insist that any discussions should take place on the basis of the proposals separately outlined by the LTTE and the then government of Ranil Wickremesinghe last year. However, a significant breakthrough is unlikely to be achieved in the peace process in the near-term on account of the ideological predilections of the government and the wide gap that exists between the two sides on crucial issues.

The statement of the leadership of the Tamil Tigers notwithstanding, the organization has little option for the present but to continue to observe the ceasefire. After all, there is a sense of war weariness among a substantial section of the population which the Tamil Tigers cannot ignore and the LTTE lacks the capability to score decisive gains on the military front. The changed global equation in the post-September 11 period has also made the armed struggle an unattractive option from the LTTE's point of view.

Amnesty fears for Bhutanese

Statesman News Service

KATHMANDU, June 8. — Human rights watchdog Amnesty International fears that five Bhutanese refugees living in camps administered by the UN High Commission for Refugees, could be under risk of torture by Nepal's security forces who arrested them this month.

The five, four men and a woman, were arrested on 2 and 3 June from the Beldangi 1 refugee camp, in the Jhapa district of eastern Nepal. They were reportedly arrested on suspicion of links with the Maoists.

The five are being held in incommunicado detention, and may be without access to their relatives, lawyers or medical attention, Amnesty said.

A sixteen-year-old girl, Januka Tiwari, who was arrested at the same time, was released on 2 June on condition that she reported to the Beldangi 1 army barracks every afternoon. Amnesty today expressed

and expelled from their homes in southern Bhutan in the early 1990's, are living in eight refugee camps in Jhapa and Morang districts in eastern Nepal, administered by the UNHCR. During eight years of conflict between armed members of the Communist Party of Nepal — Maoist and Nepalese security forces, there have not been any reports to date that the Maoists or their supporters have been active in the camps where the Bhutanese are living.

Tension among the refugees about their uncertain future has increased, after talks between Kathmandu and Thimpu on the continuation of verification of the refugees and their planned repatriation broke down in December 2003.

'Five Bhutanese — detained for suspected Maoist links — are being probably held without access to their relatives, lawyers or medical attention'

concern to Nepalese Prime Minister Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba as well as the head of the army's human rights cell and police chief.

At least 100,000 Bhutanese, who were arbitrarily stripped of their nationality

Monks mauled in Lanka parliament



Buddhist monk legislator Kolonnawe Sri Sumangala recuperates in a Colombo hospital on Tuesday. — AFP

"I have never seen such disgraceful behaviour," a parliament official told reporters. "This is a disgrace to parliament." The monks' party condemned the attack saying they were not surprised after the behaviour of government MPs during the three previous sittings of the House when the Freedom Alliance MP's threw files and paper balls at monks.

"People in this country have tremendous respect for a Buddhist monk, and to see MPs hitting monks is not something that they will accept," NHP spokesman Udaya Gamamanpila said.

The NHP won nine seats at the elections, but two of their members ended up supporting the government. One of the dissidents later resigned.

Officials said a mace, a symbol of parliamentary authority, was stolen during the brawl, holding up proceedings, and that it was later found in a lobby used by government MPs. Parliament sittings were disrupted by the brawl. Ms Kumaratunga's Freedom Alliance won the 2 April elections but has so far mustered only 108 seats, five short of a simple majority in the 225-member Assembly.

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, June 8. — Two Buddhist monk legislators were admitted to a hospital today after they were beaten up by government MPs in an unprecedented brawl in Sri Lanka's parliament, officials said.

New MP Akmeemana Dayaratne and fellow monk MP Kolonnawe Sri Sumangala, both from the Opposition National Heritage Party, were admitted to the Jaywardenepura hospital, officials said. The ruling Freedom Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga was furious with Dayaratne, who was selected to replace a fellow monk legislator who had broken ranks to support the shaky minority government.

Jaffna's flawed election

S. Lanka
By Nirupama Subramanian

Behind the apparent triumph of ITAK, a proxy of the LTTE, in the Sri Lankan elections is a tale of massive subversion of the democratic process.

SRI LANKA's recent elections gave the Tamil National Alliance (ITAK) 22 seats in Parliament. ITAK, an alliance of five Tamil parties, is a proxy of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Eight of its parliamentarians were elected from Jaffna and the rest from other parts of the North-East. The LTTE projected ITAK's performance in the election as its triumph.

But behind the apparent triumph is a tale of subversion of the democratic process on a scale so massive, especially in Jaffna, that in a similar situation in an Indian constituency, the Election Commission would have countermanded the election. At the very least, the evidence would have warranted re-polling in scores of polling booths. For the LTTE to claim a mandate from the Tamil people on the basis of this flawed election is an exercise in deception.

From the start of the election process, it was clear that the LTTE — which wanted ITAK to win the maximum number of seats — would not permit a free and fair election in the North-East. In the East, it killed three non-ITAK candidates, two of them early in the campaign. In Jaffna, it did not permit any party other than ITAK to canvass for votes.

The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) led by Douglas Devananda, and a breakaway group of ITAK, led by V. Anandasangaree, who quit the alliance refusing to kowtow to the LTTE, formed the main opposition to ITAK. But they and their candidates found themselves under virtual house arrest. They had no access to voters and the voters had no access to them.

Mr. Devananda wrote 16 letters to the Elections Commissioner from the day the nominations were accepted to the date of the elections, bringing to his attention the serious threat the LTTE posed to the holding of a free and fair election, to no avail. His supporters could not hire vehicles or loudspeakers to run their campaign. When they did venture out to canvass votes, bands of youth on motorcycles rode up menacingly, telling people to disperse and not accept any EPDP campaign material.

In a fundamental rights petition now before the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, Thambithurai Sivakumaran, an EPDP candidate, has said the atmosphere was marred by "numerous acts of political intimidation and violence" making it impossible for his party and the Anandasangaree group to campaign freely. Their supporters were "threatened and physically assaulted, prevented from using loudspeakers and holding rallies, were being harassed when circulating leaflets and canvassing door to door," the petition says.

The situation had deteriorated to

such an extent that Mr. Anandasangaree did not step out of his office even for a single day's campaigning. "No meetings were held by me. No canvassing was allowed. Paper advertisements were either censored or prevented from being published," he said in a recent statement.

The Colombo-based Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) said in its interim report that "the election campaign in the North and East has turned out to be fraught with violence and flagrant disregard for the democratic rights of the citizens of these areas."

The group said there was not adequate focus on the rights of voters to receive information regarding the different political parties and groups contesting the elections in order to enable them to make an informed choice.

"Given a situation where no group other than the [ITAK] has been able to enter and canvass for votes in these areas, once again the issue of whether an election held under such circumstances could be considered to be free and fair remains an issue," the CMEV report said.

In spite of the adverse reports, the Election Commission decided to go ahead and hold the election in Jaffna as scheduled. If the campaign flouted every democratic norm, the election was farcical. Independently of one another, four groups, two Sri Lankan — PAFFREL and CMEV — and two international — the Commonwealth Observer Group and the European Union Election Observation Mission — witnessed the polls in Jaffna.

All four came up with near-identical findings: large-scale voter impersonation; multiple voting; ITAK supporters intimidating EPDP polling agents; ITAK supporters ejecting agents of other parties from polling stations; ITAK transporting voters to polling stations; polling officials aiding and abetting ITAK; polling officials not fastidious about checking for identification ink to ensure that people who had voted once did not vote again; people washing off the identification ink from their fingers; and ballot boxes bearing the ITAK symbol.

This is what the Commonwealth Observer Group report had to say:

"In the North, there was also considerable evidence of multiple voting, impersonation, underage voting and intimidation of party workers and voters. A voter in the North claimed she had voted five times and boasted 'my work is done for the day.' Another voter, also in the

North, boasted that he had voted 25 times. In the North groups of young men were seen outside polling stations and political party offices with many poll cards in their hands. Observers saw one man soliciting polling cards and heard him claim 'they're not checking.' Many ballot boxes in the North were seen by our Team to bear the symbol and name of the [ITAK]. Officials 'nodded through' voters even though their names were not on the list. Attempts to remove the indelible ink were organised on a large scale... At many polling stations agents were present from only one party..."

The CMEV had a detailed report of the polling centres where the malpractices took place. In Manipai, for instance, only ITAK polling agents were present in 33 polling centres. In Point Pedro, the CMEV monitors noted "large-scale impersonation" by the TNA. In Kopai, they saw "a large group" of young and old people removing ink from their fingers and handing out polling cards. And so on.

In spite of the rigging, the EPDP managed to win one of the nine seats in the peninsula, a tiny hint of the disaffection among people with the LTTE over its conduct — in particular its extortionary ways — in the months since the ceasefire.

The CMEV urged the Election Commissioner to annul the election in the entire Jaffna district and order a re-poll. In the Indian election, the Election Commission took the extreme step of countermanding the election in Chapra, Bihar, after considering the overwhelming evidence of rigging and intimidation of voters in that constituency.

In Sri Lanka, the Election Commissioner is admittedly not as powerful as his Indian counterpart but he has the power to order re-polling where he deems it necessary. Inexplicably, he chose not to exercise this power in respect of Jaffna. This even after the powers of his office have been augmented by the 17th Amendment to the Constitution under which he is vested with the duty and responsibility of acting independently to ensure a free and fair election.

As in India, Sri Lankan courts are barred by the Constitution (17th Amendment) from interfering with the electoral process once the election has been notified and this is to ensure that the democratic process is not disrupted by frivolous legislation. Therefore, it rests entirely on the Election Commissioner to act as the umpire, provide a level-playing field, and blow the whistle where warrant-

ed. Otherwise, those with legitimate complaints must necessarily wait until after the election to approach the courts. Again, as in India, courts can take years to settle election petitions. The Sri Lankan Election Commissioner clearly abdicated his role as the umpire insofar as the elections in Jaffna were concerned.

There are other issues that the fiasco has raised that Sri Lanka needs to address in order to prevent it from happening again.

Of these, a key issue is that of the outdated electoral rolls in the Jaffna peninsula, which carry the names of 650,000 people. Unlike in the rest of Sri Lanka, the Jaffna voters' list has not been updated since 1981. Over half the voters on the list are dead, have gone abroad or have been displaced internally by the two decade-long conflict. This flawed list has been misused in successive elections.

Sri Lankan election law does not require voters to carry any identity document to the polling booth except their polling cards. The polling card is not a photo I-D. With the outdated voters' list and the evidently easy access to the polling cards of the missing voters on that list, elections in Jaffna are tailor-made for impersonation.

A parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms set up in 2003 considered the Election Commissioner's representation that it should be made mandatory for voters to produce the National Identity Card (NIC), a photo I-D, to prove their identity. But until all Sri Lankans, especially the Indian Tamils in the tea estates of central Sri Lanka, have access to the NIC, introducing such a rule may cut many eligible voters out of exercising their franchise altogether.

The select committee also witnessed a demonstration of two Indian brands of electronic voting machines that India has used successfully. The EVM would certainly help to eliminate multiple voting and the mass impersonation that Jaffna witnessed in this election but it would have to be greatly modified for Sri Lanka's complex mix of proportional representation and preferential voting.

In any case, these measures must go hand-in-hand with the updating of the voters' list in Jaffna. So far, all Tamil political parties, including the EPDP, have resisted attempts to revise the rolls. The reason: a reduction in the number of registered voters implies a parallel reduction in the number of parliamentary seats allotted to the Jaffna electoral division. But ultimately there can be no escape from such revision. A clean electoral list is a fundamental requirement for a free and fair election.

SRI LANKA VERDICT-II

Threat From Tamil Tigers Still A Worrying Factor

By PARMANAND

Mahinda Rajapakse, who entered politics in 1968, and who had the privilege of handling ministerial portfolios of Labour, Fishing, Ports and Shipping in Ms Kumaratunga's government between 1994 and 2001, has shown his confidence that a solution could be found to the decades-long separatist centrifugal crisis by the present government. Mahinda describes President Kumaratunga as "the best person" to handle the differences between the UPFA constituents with her experience.

He asserts that Ms Kumaratunga will "personally handle the peace process and the cabinet will support her". He has confidence in her handling of the peace process and feels "it will bring results". How President Kumaratunga is able to do things, when she does not have to face an adversarial Prime Minister or a non-cooperative cabinet remains to be seen.

'Major victory'

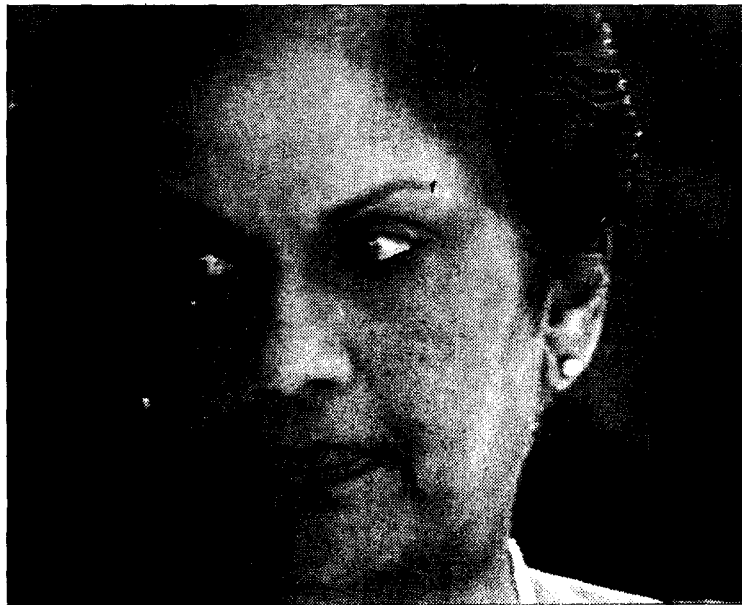
But the Tamil Tigers do not wish to lie low or to be taken for granted. In their first reaction to the recently concluded polls won by President Kumaratunga's political alliance, the Tamil rebels, on 5 April, warned that they would renew their fight to win their demands, if the new government denied them autonomy. The rebel LTTE said that their overwhelming sweep of the island's north and east in the 2 April general election was a "major victory" and an endorsement of their nationalist struggle. The rebels said in a statement that a clear message "has been effectively delivered by the Tamil people, in that the concept of the Tamil homeland, Tamil nationalism and the right of Tamil self rule should be accepted as the basic aspirations of the Tamil people". They stressed that the Tamil national problem should be politically resolved on that basis, failing which the "Tamil people will fight to establish the Tamil sovereignty in their homeland on the principle of self-determination".

Of course, the LTTE is no longer the same monolithic organisation after March, and it remains to be seen how it resolves its intra-organisational discipline after the sustained rebellion of Colonel Karuna, who seems to be the

unquestioned leader of the eastern Tigers. More to the point, differences of various kinds, including the urge for ascendancy, between the northern and eastern Sri Lankan Tamils, have resurfaced at the worst possible time. Nothing can be more to the liking of the Sinhalese. Many

the changed circumstances and what response is made by the Kumaratunga-Rajapakse team.

Paradoxically, the economy of the island, despite the huge expenditure on defence for two decades and the damage done to the infrastructure by the Tigers, never reached a point of panic.



straws in the wind indicate that the Sri Lankan state would have first to intervene in the well-nigh unavoidable violent confrontation between the Tigers led by V Pirabhakaran and Karuna.

It will be difficult for Ms Kumaratunga, even if she shows guts and determination (which are difficult under the existing political milieu) to restart the process of peaceful negotiations, which stopped on 21 March 2003. Indeed, the LTTE had announced suspension of peace talks with the Sri Lankan government on 21 April 2003. It is altogether a different matter that the Tigers had presented to the Sri Lankan government a document called the "Interim Self-Government Authority" on the front of power devolution in November last year. The scheme cannot be called reasonable.

Stable economy

Immediately after the conflict between Pirabhakaran and Karuna had become public in March, the latter had asked the Sri Lankan government to enter into another cease-fire agreement with him, which Prime Minister Wickremesinghe had refused. It remains to be seen what stand Karuna takes under

Indeed, after the cease-fire agreement between the Tigers and the government, it had begun to look more robust. After the start of the peace talks between the two sides, foreign donors had begun to come out rather enthusiastically to help Sri Lankans in developmental projects, particularly in the North-Eastern province.

Foreign direct investment was around \$310 million by the end of the last year. While this figure was not big by Asian standards, it was significant in the sense that \$240 million was the previous best, and \$120 million the highest in the preceding decade. Tourism is a major beneficiary of the cease-fire and the industry looked forward to visitor arrivals, hitting the long-sought 500,000 mark in 2003. The Colombo Stock Exchange had been on a roll since March. It plummeted, though, after a new power struggle between the President and the Prime Minister in November 2003. The GDP growth was 5.5 per cent for 2003 from four per cent in 2002. If the stock market was to be an indicator of the direction in which an economy was heading, Sri Lanka had never had it so good.

Privatisation had continued

vigorously under the premiership of Ranil Wickremesinghe and gas, oil, plantations, telecommunications, steel, cement and the national airline, were just a few to be named that were privatised. The withdrawal of the Tigers from the peace talks and the tussle between Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe began to affect the economy rather adversely. One can hope things may improve once again.

On 20 October 2003, the spokesperson of the ministry of external affairs in New Delhi said that India was the third largest investor in Sri Lanka with approved investment totalling \$392 million. India was the largest investor in the island in 2000. The Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement signed in December 1998 has boosted bilateral trade between the two countries.

Indian role

According to an UNCTAD report, Sri Lanka's exports to India increased from \$71 million to 2001 to \$168 million in 2002, while India's exports to that country were up from \$604 million in 2001 to \$831 million in 2002. The agreement provides for duty-free market access to India and Sri Lanka on a preferential basis and covers 4,000 products.

After its bitter experience in the aftermath of the signing of the India-Sri Lanka Peace Accord on 29 July 1987, the induction of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in the island and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, India has behaved with a great deal of care and caution. But it has always kept itself informed of all developments. On their part, Sri Lankan politicians of all hues have kept India informed of their perceptions on various issues. The Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, Nirupam Sen, was the first foreign diplomat to meet the new Prime Minister and the President after the former's swearing-in.

The new Prime Minister has underlined the importance of Indian involvement in the peace process and described it as "our biggest neighbour". On its part, India wishes that a durable and fruitful peace is established in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan politics needs to be watched with all seriousness.

(Continued)

SRI LANKA VERDICT-I

SI-6 3815 Change Of Government Produces Positive Scenario

By PARMANAND

The Sri Lankan electorate did prove pollsters and psephologists right by producing a hung parliament on 2 April. In any case the system of proportional representation — which Sri Lanka has been practising under the existing 1978 executive presidency constitutional framework, in contradistinction to other South Asian states — is well-reputed for producing hung legislatures and unstable governments.

The 2 April nationwide one-day parliamentary polls in Sri Lanka was a very significant event for a number of reasons. The elections resulted in the change of government in Colombo. Sri Lankan elections have generally been very famous for rejecting the incumbent government.

Peaceful elections

Between 1956 and 1977, no government in the island state had got a fresh mandate. Though the trends had shown some change in the 1980s and 1990s, Sri Lankan voters have always proved their remarkable political consciousness and dynamism. Besides, the 2 April polls had been one of the most peaceful in recent times.

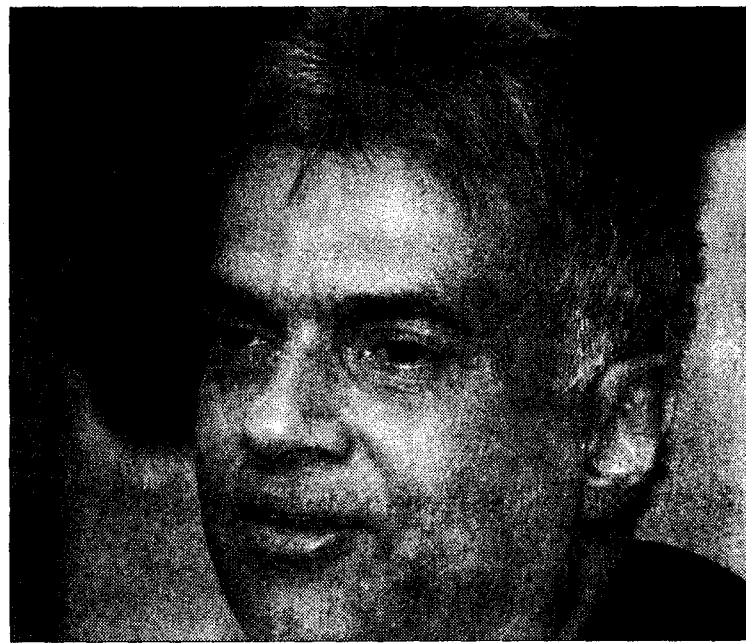
In addition, the rate of voters' participation was quite high: some 75 per cent islanders participated in the polls. Of course, the rate could not be said to be remarkably high by Sri Lankan standards, for it had been more than 80 per cent on several occasions in the past. But the rate was certainly higher in comparison to other South Asian states, and even many western states. Besides, the election was one of the most peaceful in recent times. It was remarkable, especially in the overall growth of polarisation in Sri Lankan society, and the growing split in the most ruthless militant (or terrorist) organisation, the Libe-

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ration on Tigers of Tamil Eelam, particularly on the eve of the hustings.

Moreover, the growing impact of politics on the Buddhists, who constitute 75 per cent of the South Asian state's population, was very significantly reflected in these elections. The Jatikha

ted People's Freedom Alliance comprising the traditional Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the radical Janatha Vimukti Peramuna, under the leadership of President Kumaratunga. The UPFA secured an all-time high 45.6 per cent of votes and 105 seats in the 225-member house.



Hela Urumaya, a party exclusively of the Buddhist monks, secured nine seats in Parliament. The JHU is likely to play the role of a kingmaker and an effective interest and pressure group in view of the emergence of a hung parliament.

Economy priority

Ethnically the party of the Sinhalese, it had largely succeeded in convincing a vast chunk of voters that the mainstream Sinhalese political parties — the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and the United National Party of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe — were not bothered about their welfare.

Also, the voters of the south gave a clear verdict to the Uni-

defeated in the 14 out of 22 electoral districts. It secured only 37.83 per cent of votes whereas it had secured 45.6 per cent of votes in 2001.

How peace was not taken very seriously by many and how the feeling that Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was too liberal with the Tigers had gained ground is also clear from the fact that the new parliament will have at least 46 identified anti-concession members — 37 of the JVP and nine of the JHU. Obviously, the politics of Sri Lanka will tend to be more tense and unaccommodative creating uncertainty and confusion.

Unsavoury scramble

The SLFP leader and leader of the opposition in the 12th Parliament, 58-year-old Mahinda Rajapakse, was sworn in as the island republic's 18th Prime Minister on 6 April by President Kumaratunga. Notably, Rajapakse acted in the Sinhalese film *Nomiyena Minissu* (Immortals). Rajapakse is a lawyer by training, and has been a parliamentarian since 1970. He enjoys wide support among the rank and file of the SLFP, of which he is the vice-president.

A positive scenario, indeed, has emerged for the time being in as much as the President and the Prime Minister belong to the same political spectrum, and the era of uneasy and tense political cohabitation — in which the President and the Prime Minister belonged to two political groups — is over. The unsavoury scramble for premiership, though, has left much to be desired — particularly for a minority government.

On the other hand, the absence of the JVP, the only other component of the UPFA, during the swearing-in ceremony signals how secure the UPFA is and how secure the minority government could be.

(To be concluded)

THE STATESMAN 31 MAY 2004

Lanka talks breakthrough

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, May 13. — Norway today clinched a surprise agreement with Tamil Tiger rebels on resuming peace talks with the Sri Lankan government, the guerrillas said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam announced ending the deadlock on resuming peace talks after Norway's deputy foreign minister Vidar Helgesen made an unscheduled visit to the rebel-held town of Kilinochchi.

"The Norwegian government will make an official announcement regarding the basic agreements we have reached regarding the resumption of the talks in a day or two," said LTTE's chief

insisted that peace negotiations should focus on their self-rule plan.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has already rejected the Tiger blueprint which would set up an "Interim Self Governing Authority" that would give the rebels political and financial autonomy.

The Norwegian shuttle diplomacy is to be followed by a visit of US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca, who is scheduled to hold talks with Sri Lankan leaders.

Following Rocca will be Japan's special peace envoy to Sri Lanka Yasushi Akashi, who will arrive here on Saturday on a four-day visit, the Japanese embassy said.

Refuge to Aristide: South Africa

DURBAN, May 13. — South Africa today decided to provide political refuge to deposed President of Haiti, Jean Bertrand Aristide, amid strong reservations from opposition parties.

"The Cabinet has taken a decision to host Aristide until his fate was secured," Essop Pahad, a senior minister in the Thabo Mbeki ministry said today. The decision came in the backdrop of serious apprehensions raised by opposition parties which argued that "South Africa was setting a bad example by giving refuge to fallen dictators." On the other hand, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Portfolio Committee in Parliament Professor Kader Asmal said the "government had used its discretion given the fact that South Africa had a refugees convention." — PTI

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Sri Lanka peace process: next phase

By V.S. Sambandan

10-10 775

A PAINFUL decade after Sri Lanka took its first steps to chalk out a homegrown solution to its separatist crisis, it is poised for another phase of talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On the face of it, preliminary indications point to an eagerness on the part of Colombo and the rebels to resume the talks that were stalled a year ago. The Tigers unilaterally snapped negotiations citing "tardy progress" by the Government on implementing the decisions taken at six rounds of talks between September 2002 and March 2003 as the reason.

Much of how the next phase proceeds, however, will depend on what the two main parties see as the endgame to what was allowed to grow into one of South Asia's most intractable conflicts. Crucial in this assessment would be the extent to which the entrenched positions adopted by the two broad flanks, the Sinhala and the Tamil polities, have changed over the past 10 years when the state proposed devolution of power as the cornerstone to conflict resolution.

With a working consensus still elusive between Sri Lanka's two main political parties — the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) — despite their agreement on the need for devolution, the rise of hardliners in the island-nation's polity has changed the dynamics. As the Sinhala and Tamil nationalists together account for 70 members in the 225-member House, a new political scenario has emerged. If the two political alliances — the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Front (UNF) — are disaggregated, the new dynamics will become evident. A mere coming together of the UNP with 67 MPs and the SLFP with 57 MPs cannot, for the first time since the imperative of constitutional reform was recognised, give the two-thirds majority to effect a statute-change. The decades-long conflict, hence, is now set in the *realpolitik* stage where building cross-party coalitions and meaningfully engaging the minority ethnic groups will be vital.

Despite the current positive indications, the lay of the land is marked by at least three major points of departure. The internal contradictions between the two main UPFA allies,

If handled properly, the current disquiet in Sri Lanka can pave the way for a coming together of non-hardline forces and the emergence of a truly inclusive nation-building process.

the SLFP and the hardline-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, are an inbuilt resistance to moves away from the *status quo*. The LTTE, which, in effect, pursued negotiations as yet another military operation, is unlikely to yield to talks without going for the jugular, be it in the name of confidence-building measures or "assessing the situation."

The UNP, yet to grasp the shock of tumbling from the Treasury to the Opposition benches, is likely to link issues external to conflict-resolution, but crucial to its political survival, such as the retention of the Executive Presidency, to its support to a solution. As political disarray stares on the island-nation, a move away from bipartisan political bitterness, punctuated by the uninhibited and relentless pursuit of thwarting outcomes, is more vital than ever before.

The LTTE, which grew on a divided Sri Lankan polity, is unlikely to re-enter talks without further strengthening itself. Public indications that the Tigers are ready for resumption of talks, indeed, come with clauses that require amplification. Critical to this will be the point from where the negotiators pick up the threads — from the LTTE's unilateral pullout in April 2003, or the rebel proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority for the North East (ISGA) in October 2003.

When the LTTE pulled out of the peace talks, it effectively outmanoeuvred itself from participating in a crucial Sub-committee on Political Issues. The Tigers' evasion of this Sub-committee effectively means that the two sides have not discussed the core issues. It is also a clear pointer to the rebel disinclination to commit itself to a consensual political endgame.

Thus, true to past form, the rebels left the table when they had nothing more to gain, as the earlier demands for de-militarising Jaffna's High Security Zones and the main *raison d'être* for talks — an interim administration — were far from being delivered. The LTTE's call for "continuity" is, simply

put, a call for the pursuit of its unfinished agenda. Colombo sees addressing day-to-day issues as a starting point, making the path to resumption easier for itself and the Tigers, but only if it is able to keep its allies satisfied.

A key difference between the past attempts and the evolving situation is the externalisation of the conflict resolution process, with the involvement of Norwegian facilitation and other international players. Though it is likely to be fine-tuned, the current primacy accorded to Oslo is evident from the positions taken by Colombo and the Tigers. A redefinition of the role of the external players, however, is tied to the dependence of the island-nation's economy on foreign aid for structural reform and reconstruction of the war-torn economy.

While there are calls from Colombo for a larger Indian role, New Delhi's stand will have to be decided upon without ignoring the fact that the LTTE is a banned terrorist organisation and that its leader, V. Prabhakaran, the prime accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, is a proclaimed offender. A request for his extradition is pending and an Interpol notice has been issued against him.

The true test for Indian diplomacy would be its ability to influence the course of events from just outside direct involvement, without compromising its strategic, territorial and legal interests. Against this domestic and international setting, a phase of talks about talks is the most immediate outcome. The most crucial difference for the LTTE between its previous phase of talks and the upcoming one is the impact of the rebellion by its erstwhile eastern military commander, V. Muralitharan (Col. Karuna). While the LTTE has regained ground level control, the changed circumstances, reflected by its suspicion that forces loyal to Karuna could be behind the killing of its cadres in rebel-held Batticaloa, lay bare the actual situation in the eastern tinderbox.

In addition to pressing on with the unfinished agenda of the previous talks, the negotiability of the ISGA proposals is a key factor. In a way, the ISGA reflects both a maximalist and a minimalist position, depending on what the LTTE considers its endgame to the conflict resolution process. If it adheres to the Oslo agreement "to explore" federal options, it could be construed as a maximalist position. To the extent to which it keeps the separatist option vigorously alive and open, the ISGA proposals constitute what the LTTE considers its endgame to the conflict resolution process. If it adheres to the Oslo agreement "to explore" federal options, it could be construed as a maximalist position.

With several threads to be picked up to put the peace process back on the track, the few delicate strands of convergence of positions among the three main parties — the Government, the Opposition and the rebels — could come in handy. Topping the list is the near common acceptance that the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga's 1997 draft constitutional proposals mark a difference from the past in terms of devolution of powers. The solution to the conflict evidently lies somewhere between the 1997 draft constitution and the ISGA proposals.

There is a clatter of opinion on three crucial issues that will direct the next phase of talks. While the main parties indicate the willingness to take on board the ISGA proposals, with varying degrees of attachment, resistance can be expected from the other players, particularly the JVP and the debutant Buddhist monk MPs of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). On the abolition of the Executive Presidency, which tops the priority of the UPFA government, the unqualified support of the Opposition: UNP cannot be expected. If electoral reforms to replace the present proportional representation system with a hybrid of PR and First Past the Post system are to be pursued, they cannot be piecemeal and will have to factor in a bicameral legislature to effectively cater to the multi-ethnic, plural Sri Lankan society.

If handled properly and with political statesmanship, the current disquiet can also pave the way for a coming together of non-hardline forces and the emergence of a truly inclusive Sri Lankan nation-building process — the singular concept that has remained fatally elusive in the past decades.

Sri Lanka asks Oslo to restart talks

10-16 By V.S. Sambandan 2/1/1

COLOMBO, APRIL 23. The Sri Lankan Government on Thursday initiated moves to restart the stalled peace talks with the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, speaking to the Norwegian Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, over telephone.

According to the Presidential Secretariat, the Norwegian Government "has expressed willingness to resume its role as facilitator" in the stalled negotiations between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Ms. Kumaratunga's conversation with Mr. Bondevik was confirmed by the Foreign Affairs Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, who said that "no timetable has been set as yet." The President had earlier held formal discussions with the Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka immediately after the conclusion of the elections. The Norwegian Prime Minister was quoted as saying that consultations would be held with the parties about how the process could be taken forward.

The LTTE has not yet reacted, but its leader, V. Prabhakaran, told MPs-elect from the Tamil National Alliance earlier this week that the rebels were awaiting resumption of talks. A key issue to be addressed before the next phase of peace talks start would be the composition of the new Government negotiating team, which was earlier headed by the former Constitutional Affairs Minister, G.L. Peiris.

The telephone conversation between Ms. Kumaratunga and Mr. Bondevik marks the start of another phase in the island's externally facilitated conflict resolution process, initiated by the Sri Lankan President in the late 1990s, when her People's Alliance (PA) Government was in power.

Despite a change in Government, the United National Party (UNP) Government — between December 2001 and April 2004

— continued the Norwegian facilitation, which saw cessation of hostilities following a ceasefire agreement, the domestic de-proscription of the Tigers and the start of direct talks in September 2002. The six rounds of talks saw the two sides reach an agreement in Oslo in late 2002 to "explore federal models" to find a solution to the separatist conflict "within a united Sri Lanka."

However, amid deep differences with the Government over a key demand — demilitarisation of the northern Jaffna Peninsula

Norway ready to resume mediation

OSLO, APRIL 23. Norway said today that it had conditionally agreed to resume its role as mediator between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, at the request of the Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga.

In a statement, the office of the Norwegian Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, said that it would only resume its work if the LTTE also requested its help.

Norway suspended its mediation in November due to a dispute between Ms. Kumaratunga and the then Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Ms. Kumaratunga, who appointed a new premier, Mahinda Rajapakse, after winning re-election last month, called Mr. Bondevik yesterday to seek his assistance in peace talks she has restarted.

"I said Norway was ready to play the role of mediator as long as the LTTE also wants us to play such a role," Mr. Bondevik replied, according to the statement. — AFP

— the LTTE unilaterally pulled out of the talks on April 21, 2003, citing "excessive internationalisation" of the peace process. Subsequently, the LTTE made its first ever proposal for an interim self-governing authority for the northeast (ISGA), which would have plenary powers and a major stake for the rebels.

Days after the ISGA proposal was submitted, Ms. Kumaratunga constitutionally took over the Defence Ministry from the then UNP administration. The Norwegian facilitators then put the peace process "on hold" and said they would wait for "political clarity" before resuming their role.

Sri Lanka's political leadership has since changed, with the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), headed by Ms. Kumaratunga emerging as the single largest party in the 225-member Parliament and regaining power at the April 2 snap Parliamentary poll, with the Left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) as a key ally.

UPFA to go ahead with statute reform

The Power and Energy Minister, Susil Premajayanth, told a press conference today that the Government would go ahead with its proposals to abolish the Executive Presidency and change the electoral system, despite losing the key post of the Speaker by a single vote in the 225-member House on Thursday. The Government also planned other legislative moves, which would be introduced when Parliament reconvenes on May 18.

On the issue of the JVP joining the Government, its Parliamentary group leader, Wimal Weerawansa, said that a decision would be taken on Sunday.

The JVP, a major ally in the UPFA, has stayed away from joining the Government, demanding the sensitive River Basin Development portfolio.

Editorial on Page 10

We will prevent division of Sri Lanka, say monks

By V. S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 23. They are Parliamentary debutants who have come a long way from the temples of Sri Lanka. After a day marked by internal dissension and heckling by ruling party MPs, the Buddhist monks from the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) today said they would "prevent a division of the country" and wanted the two main parties — the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Party (UNP) — to work together for the "betterment" of the nation.

"Our main purpose is to show us as good examples," Omalpe Sobitha Thero, one of the nine JHU MPs, told a press conference today. Emphatic that the two votes each to the Government and Opposition in yesterday's Speaker's election was not a show of unqualified support to either party, the Ven. Sobitha

said: "If the UNP together with parties backed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) tries to divide the country, we will even sacrifice our lives to prevent it. The same applies to the UPFA as well. We want these two parties to work together for the betterment of the country."

The monks, the Ven. Sobitha said, were "at risk" and had received "death threats" over telephone, but had not complained to the police. "We may have to be born again, but we are prepared," he said. On the decision by two monks to vote for the Government's candidate for the Speaker's post — D.E.W. Gunasekara, leader of the Communist Party — the Ven. Sobitha said: "The two monks went against the policies of the JHU for mere political reasons. They tried to show to the outside world that even the monks are divided politically."

The decision by two other monks to vote for the Opposition candidate — W.J.M. Lokubandara, who was elected by a single-vote margin — was to "neutralise" the votes in favour of the Government, he said.

The monks who were at the receiving end of irate MPs from Sri Lanka's ruling UPFA yesterday say they "have to continue" their role "to set good examples" and would deal with politics with "compassion, sympathy and equanimity."

On the heckling by ruling party MPs yesterday against R. Sampanthan, Parliamentary group leader of the LTTE-backed Tamil National Alliance, Dr. Sobitha said: "The Government appears to believe that they can defeat the LTTE by hooting in Parliament."

The monks were also particularly critical of the behaviour of MPs, which they saw as considerably degrading Parliament

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 2004

A MAJOR SETBACK

24/4
THE FIRST CHALLENGE for a minority government in any democracy is to build bridges with other political parties in the interests of good governance and its own survival. The United People's Freedom Alliance that formed a minority government in Sri Lanka after the recent parliamentary elections has conspicuously failed to do this. The defeat of the UPFA candidate in the Speaker's election — its very first parliamentary test — was the result of a series of steps taken by the new government that showed little appreciation of its lack of a majority in Parliament, and had the net effect of putting off potential allies instead of winning them over. Foremost among these seems to have been the inability of the main constituents of the UPFA — the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna — to agree on the distribution of portfolios. Their unseemly public bickering so early in what should have been a honeymoon period in government sent out the wrong signals. Promised a key Ministry before the election, the JVP, which played a big role in the UPFA win, expected President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the leader of the coalition, to keep her part of the bargain. The party was understandably disappointed with being let down. The ensuing cold war within the UPFA has given the impression of a coalition that cannot negotiate the demands of its own constituents, let alone outside allies.

Moreover, President Kumaratunga's decision to give priority to the task of changing the country's Constitution was not a well-judged gambit for winning friends. The 1978 Constitution is undeniably the root cause of many of Sri Lanka's political woes today, including the difficulties it places, through the proportional representation election system, for any party to win an outright majority in Parliament. But minority parties representing Tamils and Muslims view proportional representation as the only way to gain empowerment in a non-federal political system. The ap-

S Lanka 110-12
pointment of a committee by President Kumaratunga to work out a framework for a new Constitution that would bring in the first-past-the-post system and her promise to implement this change bypassing Parliament naturally caused disquiet among minority parties that could have helped the Government shore up a working majority. The UPFA also managed to antagonise the Jathika Hela Urumaya, a new party of Buddhist monks that has nine members in Parliament, by attempting to split it on the eve of the Speaker's election. In the event, it was not surprising that a candidate of the Opposition United National Party won the election by one vote. All in all, the new Government mismanaged an event of crucial importance for its future and that of the country, starting off its term in office on a note of uncertainty and bitter acrimony.

The divisive inauguration of the new Parliament will have its impact on the peace process with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The LTTE has demanded that the Government open talks with it on the proposals it submitted last year for an "interim self-governing authority" in the North-East. In order to present a meaningful response that can thwart the LTTE's designs — evident in the proposals — of setting up a virtually separate state in the North-East without restarting the war, the UPFA Government will need the widest possible backing in Parliament and outside. At the moment such support seems a faraway dream, especially given the contradictions within the main constituents of the Government itself. The Opposition, and especially the United National Party, has no reason to gloat over its victory in the Speaker's election. It has dealt an unexpected blow to the Government's plans but this does not give it any worthwhile advantage in pursuing a peace agenda. No solution to the Tamil question is possible unless the two major Sinhala parties in Parliament work earnestly to find common ground against the odds.

LTTE struck deal with rebels: report

S. Karuna Apr 15 1994

Colombo: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels had entered into a "secret" pact with a renegade faction to end their internecine war recently.

The deal had also been inspired to ensure the safety of a top Tiger intelligence operative Neelan, who had been detained by renegade leader V. Muralitharan, better known as Karuna, at the start of the rebellion early last month, the privately-run Sunday Leader newspaper reported.

Neelan was linked to the May 1991 assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Karuna made a "discreet deal" with his former boss Tiger supremo Vellupillai Prabhakaran to demobilise the 5,000-6,000 fighters under him and quit the revolt in exchange for safe passage out of the country, the report said.

Prabhakaran had expected the release of Neelan, one of the few Tiger operatives to escape Indian authorities after Gandhi's assassination.

Karuna had gunned down Neelan just before disbanding his fighters and fleeing on Monday.

The LTTE had on Wednesday posthumously conferred on Neelan the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, the highest rank given to fallen Tigers, the Tamilnet said, adding that he had been responsible for several "battlefield successes."

The paper commented that Neelan's killing could lead to the collapse of the deal.

"If Karuna had really killed

Neelan, then it is clearly a breach of understanding arrived at," the Sunday Leader said, adding "the guarantee of safety given to Karuna is certainly invalid if he is responsible for the killing."

"In that case, the Tigers can launch an intensive manhunt for Karuna and kill him."

There was no immediate reaction from the LTTE to the newspaper report.

The paper said that Karuna was expected to free Prabhakaran loyalists he had kept prisoner, but the killing of Neelan could lead to the deal collapsing.

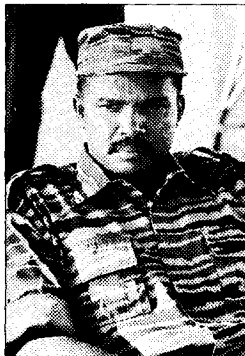
Sri Lankan authorities have said they were willing to consider safe haven for Karuna

who abruptly called off a factional war and disbanded his fighters who held sway in the island's eastern province.

Meanwhile, Tigers have released 40 child soldiers, bringing to 299 the number of underaged fighters freed since a factional war among the rebels ended last week, news reports said on Sunday.

The 31 girls and nine boys were released after a special committee appointed by the Tigers found the children had joined the rebels "using false documentation saying that they were 18 or older," the Tamilnet website, which reports on Tamil affairs, reported.

The release on Saturday came a day after the UN children's agency Unicef said two underage combatants died in fighting between warring rebel factions. AP



V. Muralitharan

FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 2004

THE FALL OF KARUNA

19-12 16/4

THE SHORT KARUNA chapter in the Sri Lanka story has reconfirmed that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam cannot deal with dissent in any way other than crushing it. The LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has never brooked challengers, internal or external. The group has gone through rival groups and dissenters within its ranks like a knife through butter. Therefore, it was only a matter of time before the LTTE went after Karuna, its one-time military commander in eastern Sri Lanka, who rebelled against the top leadership. Karuna's flight in the face of a military onslaught by the LTTE against his forces in the East has enabled Mr. Prabhakaran to lay unchallenged claim once again to the status of sole representative of the Tamils. But the manner in which the LTTE set upon the rebel leader shows that force and intimidation are the essential ingredients of this claim, which has never been put through a democratic test. The recent electoral success of the Tamil National Alliance, a proxy of the LTTE, in the North-East does not qualify because it was won (as both Sri Lankan and international election monitors have noted) through similar force and intimidation of rival candidates.

It is clear that the LTTE could not have got away with its military assault against Karuna but for the extremely narrow interpretation given to the February 2002 ceasefire by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, the Norway-led multilateral body that supervises the truce. Despite the evidence that the Tigers began building up for the assault immediately following Karuna's March 3 rebellion, the SLMM seems to have taken the view that the ceasefire agreement was only between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. With no one prepared to prevent the fighting, with only limited means at his disposal to arm and maintain the cadres under his command, and with no apparent support from

either the Sri Lankan armed forces or a "third power" (as was alleged from the Wannu), Karuna could not have held out for long. The LTTE has credited its near-bloodless victory over the rebel forces to its superior military tactics. But more is owed to Karuna's realisation of his limitations and his decision to let go. By ordering his cadres to disperse without putting up a fight, the former military strategist of the LTTE can take the credit for preventing a bloodbath. There were some casualties immediately after the LTTE struck but fighting back would have resulted in a much higher death toll — among the combatants on both sides and among civilians caught in the crossfire. After Karuna's confident declarations that the LTTE was a much weakened military force since his departure from it, retreat may not have been an easy decision for him but it was definitely the right choice.

Where does all this leave the peace process? At this stage, it is most convenient for all concerned — the Sri Lankan Government, Norway, and the LTTE — to pretend that Karuna was just a bump on the log that has now been axed out. At the most obvious level, he raised valid questions about the future of multi-ethnic eastern Sri Lanka, with its near equal populations of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. At another level, his rebellion made it clear that this peace process is one between the Government and the LTTE to the exclusion of all other stake-holders. Sri Lanka's recent general election has produced a Parliament that represents every shade of opinion in the island. Even though President Chandrika Kumaratunga is still struggling with the task of government formation after her Freedom Alliance fell short of a majority, a bold vision, imagination and political will on all sides could yet turn this divided verdict into an opportunity for building a more inclusive and broad-based resolution to the country's Tamil question.

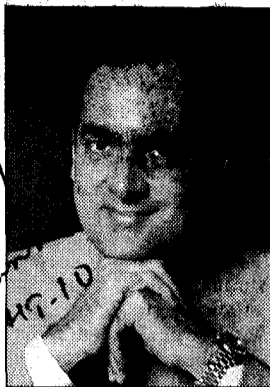
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THE HINDU

16 APR 2004

Karuna kills man involved in Rajiv's assassination

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, April 14



Rajiv Gandhi

REBEL LTTE commander Col. Karuna has killed Neelan, one of the LTTE intelligence operatives who plotted the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991.

Sources in Batticaloa told *Hindustan Times* on Wednesday that Karuna shot Neelan dead at the high-security Beirut Base on Monday, just before fleeing. Neelan was a close associate of Pottu Amman, the mainstream LTTE's intelligence chief and a confidante of outfit supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.

As a member of Pottu Amman's pistol gang of assassins, Neelan was involved in all major assassination projects of the LTTE, including those targeting moderate leaders like Sam Thambimuthu and Dr Neelan Thiruchelvan. The LTTE expected Karuna to hand Neelan over to India to curry favour with that country and exploit its animosity towards the Prabhakaran's LTTE.

Had he done that, it would have thrown up the

possibility of an Indian involvement in his revolt. So, the LTTE now believes that India is not involved in the revolt, says a source close to the LTTE.

According to the Tamil net website, Karuna himself fled Batticaloa-Amparai district with his associates in two vehicles.

The exact whereabouts of Karuna and his associates are not known. But according to Kausalyan, appointed regional political leader by Prabhakaran, Karuna is definitely not in the Batticaloa-Amparai area.

Every single base of Karuna's is now in the hands of the forces of the mainstream LTTE led by the new district commander, T. Ramesh, Kausalyan said.

According to unofficial sources, 4,500 troops under the command of Karuna have been released. The whereabouts of the remaining 6,000-strong army are not known.

Tigers free more than 100 child soldiers

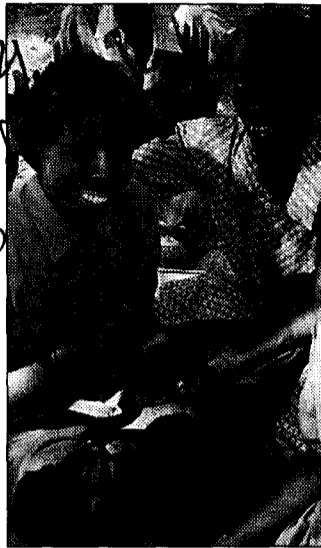
Colombo, April 13 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers freed more than 100 child soldiers today after vanquishing a break-away rebel faction in weekend clashes that threatened the island's fragile peace bid.

The Unicef said that it was the Tigers' single largest release of children, and that there were possibly hundreds more who had given up arms and returned to their villages since the rebels' factional infighting eased.

"We hope that this large release of children is the beginning of a new trend by the LTTE towards the large-scale demobilisation of child soldiers and meeting their commitments under the peace process," Unicef resident head Ted Chaiban said in a statement.

The whereabouts of break-away rebel commander Karuna were unknown and most of his forces had dispersed as the Tigers emerged triumphant from the split that shattered their iron discipline and complicated efforts to end 20 years of civil war.

Most of the released children were thought to belong to Karuna's faction, although the Tigers have long used fighters as young as 10 in their struggle for a separate Tamil state in the north and east of the island.



LTTE fighter, 18-year-old Velayutham Chuti (left), with her family at Kathirawel, Sri Lanka. (AFP)

Thousands of civilians in the east were also returning home after fleeing when the Tigers launched the offensive to retake areas held by Karuna — the movement's name for V. Muralitharan — who split from the group in early March with about 6,000 of its 15,000 troops.

"We visited the area and found the situation returning to normal and that there is no conflict at all. People were found gradually returning to their homes," said Sukumar Rockwood, spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross. Monitors who oversee the island's two-year truce said the Tigers had installed Karuna's replacement, Ramesh, in the area, adding that they had met him late yesterday.

Supporters of rebel Tiger leader defect

Colombo, April 12 (Reuters): Thousands of fighters loyal to a Sri Lankan breakaway rebel commander defected today, military officials said, after Tamil Tiger offensives that cast a cloud over efforts to end the island's 20-year civil war.

Cadres loyal to Tamil Tiger eastern commander Karuna have been locked in a standoff with the northern-based Tigers since early March, when Karuna split from the group with about 6,000 of its 15,000 fighters, shattering the group's internal discipline.

"These people are all leaving the eastern command of Karuna. There is a mass exodus. People are leaving their arms to their homes. They say they are leaving the LTTE," one military official in the east said.

The LTTE launched an offensive on Friday to retake control of territory held by Karuna — the nom de guerre for V. Muralitharan — and have reported major inroads, although they have been mostly bloodless since clashes overnight on Friday.

The military official estimated that more than 2,000 of Karuna's fighters had given up and were returning to their villages rather than rejoining the main Tiger group.

The pro-rebel *Tamilnet* website said the Tigers had encountered no resistance when they



Two LTTE fighters loyal to Karuna flee from the rebel camp near Batticaloa. (AFP)

moved into new areas of Karuna's territory today and added that they had taken over the main newspaper he controlled.

"Several military units of the LTTE, which moved from different directions, took control... around Monday noon," the *Tamilnet* report said. Karuna's faction could not be reached for comment. A second *Tamilnet* report said he had retreated to a jungle hideout and his main base camp was deserted.

Military officials and truce monitors said there were unconfirmed reports that Karuna had given up the fight.

But it seemed unlikely the

Tigers would end their offensive without launching an attack on their main target after they vowed to "get rid of Karuna from our soil" and in the past have killed anyone who challenged their authority.

Sri Lanka after elections

By Jayadeva Uyangoda

No shade of opinion can now complain of being excluded from Parliament.

410-10
12/9

SRI LANKA'S parliamentary election, held on April 2, has left no party or alliance with a clear majority in the 225-member legislature. While the United National Party (UNP) has lost the election to the newly formed United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), the latter's tally, 105 seats, is still eight short of a simple majority. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who heads the UPFA, appointed Mahinda Rajapakse as the Prime Minister amidst much controversy within the Alliance. His immediate challenge is to prove his majority on April 22, when the new Parliament meets. It does not appear an easy task. So far only the lone Eelam People's Democratic Party MP, Douglas Devananda, is sure to join the government. Indications are that President Kumaratunga is likely to run a minority government, until some re-alignment of forces can be engineered.

Sri Lanka's is essentially a fractured polity. The composition of Parliament, worked out on the basis of proportional representation, dramatically reflects all the major fragmentations. While the UNP has 82 seats. The third largest party in the new House is the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) with 22 seats. The TNA was openly backed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and its 22 seats represent a clear majority in the Northern and Eastern provinces. In a surprising development, the newly launched entity of Buddhist monks, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), bagged nine seats. The plantation-based Ceylon Workers Congress contested with the UNP and claims eight seats. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has five MPs from the Eastern Province. The Upcountry People's Front, which also has close political links with the LTTE, has one MP. Thus, the Opposition tally is 119 seats as opposed to the UPFA's possible 106.

The most dramatic feature of this election is the emergence of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, the LTTE and the JHU as three powerful centres of power in the new Parliament.

The JVP as a member of the UPFA coalition has 40 seats under its direct control. More than a dozen Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) members in the UPFA are closely allied to the JVP. This is the real political coming of age for the JVP, which had in 1971 and 1987-88 launched two insurgencies to gain control of state power through revolutionary means. Now the JVP with its Left-nationalist policy agenda is in the real mainstream.

The LTTE's presence in the new parliament is through the TNA. The strategic goal that the LTTE sought to achieve in this election is to re-establish the claim that it is the 'sole representative' of the Sri Lankan Tamil people. The recent split between the movement's Vanni leadership and the Eastern command also provided the context for the LTTE to aggressively prove that point at the election. Immediately after the election, there was speculation in Colombo that the TNA's four Eastern province MPs might break ranks and join the UPFA coalition. It appears that the LTTE's Vanni leadership has ensured that the TNA will stay as 'one unit.'

The proportional representation system ensured the election of the nine JHU monks. The JHU fielded 260 candidates all monks. Campaigning with the promise of establishing a *dhammadarajya* in Sri Lanka, the JHU drew support mainly from the urban, middle-class voters, disenchanted with the mainstream Sinhalese political parties. The voting pattern indicates that the many middle class UNP voters, who were opposed to the peace negotiations with the LTTE, shifted loyalties to the JHU, which presented to the electorate a militant version of Sinhalese nationalism along with a message of moral regeneration.

Against this backdrop, stability of the new government will depend on immediate changes in the permutations of the numbers in Parliament.

President Kumaratunga will have to expand the ruling coalition. Her options are both limited and full of pitfalls. How she broadens the coalition will also re-shape the policies of the new government. The JHU monks have already offered outside support to the UPFA on a set of tough conditions. Among them are the de-merger of the North and the East, abandoning of regional autonomy to preserve the unitary state of Sri Lanka and introducing legislation to ban the so-called unethical Christian conversion. If the President is keen to resume negotiations with the LTTE, accepting the JHU's conditional support will be politically hazardous.

It is still possible that President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Rajapakse will try to persuade the CWC and SLMC to join the UPFA Government. Their best option is to expand the ethnic base of the coalition. Such a move will also give a multi-ethnic character to the UPFA that was forged late last year as an essentially Sinhalese-nationalist coalition of forces wary of the UNP-LTTE peace bid. However, Sinhalese nationalist groups, who have a strong presence in the UPFA ranks, will object to the inclusion of both the CWC and the SLMC.

Other than ensuring survival and stability, the new UPFA regime faces two other crucial and immediate challenges. The first is the resumption of negotiations with the LTTE. The other is working towards economic recovery. The UPFA leaders have already indicated that they want early resumption of talks with the LTTE. However, there are also indications that in place of Ranil Wickremesinghe's strategy of involving the United States and the Western donor countries in the process, Mrs. Kumaratunga will seek a direct and greater role for India. This could lead to delays.

When the UNP-LTTE talks reached

a stalemate last year, the main item on the agenda was the proposal for an interim administrative arrangement to the North and the East. The LTTE's Interim Self-Governing Authority proposals were submitted on October 1, last year. It is not clear whether the UPFA will treat the LTTE proposals as the central issue around which the new phase of talks should be organised. There is a school of opinion in Colombo that the political conditions that existed when the LTTE presented to the UNP Government the ISGA proposals no longer exist, primarily due to the breaking away from the LTTE of its Eastern military commander. The outcome of the bloody Tiger versus Tiger battle will also impact on the peace process.

In the economic recovery agenda, addressing Sri Lanka's acute agrarian crisis will pose a formidable challenge. The UPFA's economic development strategy is basically shaped by the JVP's ideology. The fact that in the elections Mr. Wickremesinghe's UNP was routed in most of the rural districts demonstrated the gravity of the agrarian crisis as well as the expectations of the farmers of the new regime. This calls for a decisive shift away from the way the UNP handled the economy. The UPFA is at least ideologically committed to such a change. But the question is how plausible such a policy shift is in the context of a fast-globalising Sri Lankan economy.

In any case, Sri Lanka needs a fresh beginning to address all its major challenges. The verdict of the electorate is for a consensus among all the political forces, and not for unilateral strategies. The silver lining of the election outcome is that Sri Lanka now has a Parliament that has assured representation to all major political entities in Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim societies. No shade of opinion could now complain of being excluded from Parliament. However, inclusivity in governance is hard to come by as yet.

(The writer is Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, University of Colombo.)

Tigers vow to tame Karuna

T-3 174 S. Lanka ✓

Colombo, April 11 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers vowed today to reclaim territory held by a breakaway rebel commander after launching an offensive that shattered the calm brought by the island's two-year ceasefire.

There has been no serious fighting since Friday when at least 10 — and possibly many more — died in clashes between the rival rebel factions, and some 3,000 civilians fled their homes.

But the northern-based Tigers said they would see through the operation to expel Karuna, the eastern commander whose split was a blow to the movement's previously iron internal discipline and complicates peace efforts to end 20 years of civil war.

"We have begun a co-ordinated operation to expel Karuna from Tamil homeland," the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said in a statement published on the pro-rebel Tamilnet website.

"We are taking all efforts to bring a closure to Karuna's actions and the resulting disturbances and anxiety caused in the east," the statement said.

The Tigers have in the past eliminated anyone who challenged their leadership and vowed last month to "get rid of Karuna from our soil", but the task is complicated by the fact that he controls about

6,000 of the group's 15,000 fighters.

Those include child soldiers, and the LTTE's statement urged parents of fighters under the control of Karuna — the movement's name for V. Muralitharan — to take back their children.

Karuna's spokesperson Varathan confirmed yesterday it was the main LTTE that launched the attack, and said his group had retreated to "re-organise" its forces.

Tamilnet said the Tigers were encircling Karuna's forces, having made inroads from the north in Friday's fighting, and adding that last night they moved into the southern part of his territory where his cadres left without resistance. But defence secretary Cyril Herath said there had been no reports of fresh fighting or problems in that area.

New equations in Sri Lanka

SRI LANKA'S already difficult peace process has been further complicated. The third general election in four years has put more hardliners, Sinhala and Tamil, in Parliament and a minority government in office. Besides, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has split and the two factions are fighting.

All this has challenged some key premises that have formed the basis of the two-year-long peace process. So, the peace dynamics could change considerably in the coming months, both within Parliament and outside it.

The new Parliament, which is to meet on April 22, reflects every possible opinion in the nation. Leading the numbers in Parliament is the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), an electoral combine of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which won 105 seats but fell eight seats short of a majority in the 225-member House. The United National Party (UNP), which was in power when the elections were called four years ahead of schedule, ended second with 82 seats, losing all but four of the 22 electoral districts in the island.

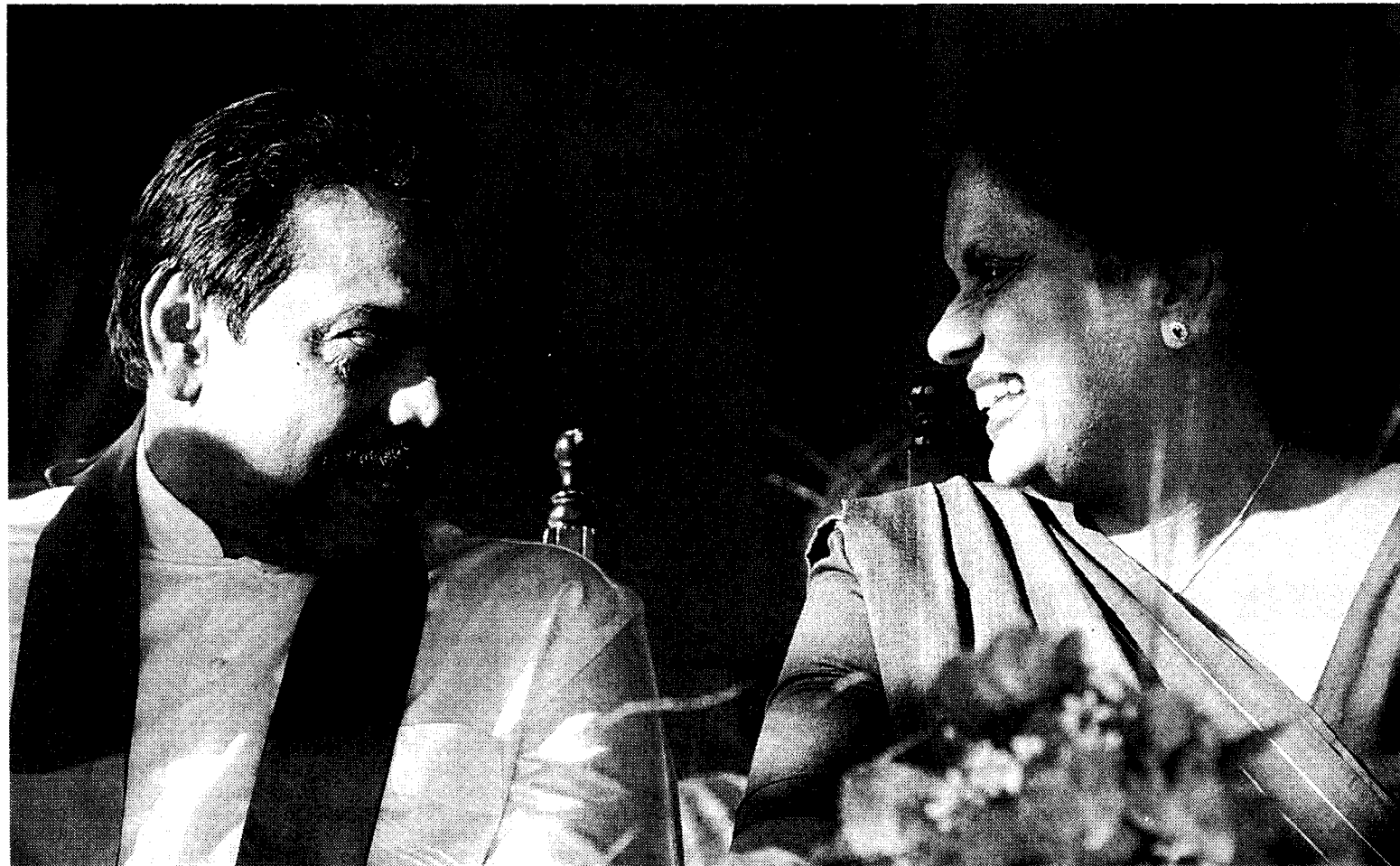
Though the UPFA and the UNP as the two largest entities in Parliament, the House has a larger presence of hardline Sinhala and Tamil representatives than last time, making it imperative more than ever before for the two main parties in the country to forge a consensus, at least on the peace process.

Parties representing ethnic minorities such as the Ceylon Workers Congress (eight seats), the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (five seats), and the Eelam People's Democratic Party and the Upcountry People's Front (one seat each) will have a say in government formation. But the JVP does not seem too keen on the support of these parties, particularly the CWC and the SLMC, thus making the UPFA lean more on the nine MPs of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a grouping of the Buddhist clergy.

The most formidable challenge for the new Government will lie in translating its electoral victory into effective governance. The verdict has seen the emergence of all shades of political opinion — pro-peace, anti-peace and devolution groups, those that support the LTTE and those who oppose it and those who want greater economic reform and those who want to restore Sinhala-Buddhist glory.

Survival of the Government will depend on the JHU's support from outside. However, given the vast contradictions that dominate Sri Lankan politics, the swiftness with which the constitutionally powerful President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, moves to forge a broad and inclusive consensus holds the key to any progress on the peace process.

The drastic change in voter mood from the 2001 polls, when the UNP-led United National Front won, is the result of a combination of political and economic factors.



Sri Lanka's President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, with her new Prime Minister, Mahinda Rajapaksa ... a bumpy road ahead.

— Photos: Sriyantha Walpola

The electoral arithmetic for the UPFA, based on the 2001 poll results — the PA won 37.2 per cent of the popular mandate and the JVP secured 9.1 per cent, adding up to a total of 46.3 per cent — was its biggest advantage in the elections held under the proportional representation system.

Its two main poll planks, the spiralling cost of living and the charge that the UNP was not handling the peace process properly, thereby leading to a possible division of the island, struck the right chord among the voters.

alliance was formed early this year, the two parties have held on to their respective positions on a solution to the ethnic conflict.

While the SLFP is for devolution of powers and a move away from Sri Lanka's unitary system, the JVP opposes devolution and is an ardent advocate of the unitary structure, which it says is synonymous with the island-nation's unity. Added to this fundamental difference is the fact that 39 of the 105 UPFA MPs in the new Parliament are from the JVP, which could emerge as an in-built resistance to change, despite the

administration for the North-East, as proposed by the Tigers.

The way out would be for the two main parties, the SLFP and the UNP, which together can muster the required majority in the House, to bring in the constitutional changes. However, given the intense rivalry between the two

parties, there is not much scope for optimism. A dangerous consequence would be the further strengthening of the hardliners.

The clearest indicator of the rise of the hardliners in the election is in the relative performance of the SLFP and the JVP in the same electoral districts they contested. In

the Gampaha district, considered an SLFP stronghold, the party's main candidate, Anura Bandaranaike, who is also the brother of Ms. Kumaratunga, came second to a relatively unknown JVP candidate, Vijitha Herath.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the emergence of the Tamil hardliners is evident from the defeat of those who opposed the LTTE. With the exception of the EPDP's sole MP, Douglas Devananda, the others, including the veteran political leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front, V. Anandasangaree, lost the election.

While the UPFA's victory signals the end of a cohabitation government, it marks the beginning of a frictional phase in Sri Lankan politics. The external support given by the JHU places restrictions on the SLFP's ability to offer its desired peace package on issues such as devolution, even if it were to silence critics in the JVP.

To make peace work, the UPFA would have to assure its constituents and supporters in Parliament that their sensitivities would not be affected. The second stage involves issues that have been placed on the board by the LTTE, and largely accepted by the UNP in the past two years — that the Tigers are the "sole representatives of the Tamils" and that they would have a free run on issues relating to the North and the East. The SLFP is unlikely to maintain continuity, especially on giving the Tigers a free run in their areas.

The two sticking points in resuming the negotiations with the Tigers are the latter's demand for a "sole representative" status, and their insistence that their proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority for the North-East (ISGA) be the basis for restarting talks. On

the first issue, the UPFA has kept the option open by saying that separate discussions would be held with other groups. On the second, it has said that it is willing to discuss "everything and anything" except a separate state.

Rather than as an outright rejection of the peace process, the UNP's defeat is to be interpreted as popular disagreement over the manner in which the process was handled. Importantly, despite the UPFA's criticism of the peace process, it has emphasised that the ceasefire agreement will continue and that there will be no return to war.

The ground level changes since April 2 are most important as far as the peace prospects are concerned. With the LTTE launching an all-out offensive against the rebellious former eastern military commander, V. Muralitharan ('Col.' Karuna), the conflict has entered an entirely new phase. After an initial thrust by the northern LTTE forces on April 9, a standoff appears on the cards on the eastern front. At stake in this battle between the Tigers is the claim of being the "sole representative of the Tamils" made by the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran. By directly challenging Mr. Prabhakaran on issues such as traditional homelands, 'Col.' Karuna has changed the course of the decades-long separatist conflict.

On the international front, the new Government's call for a "greater Indian involvement" is yet to crystallise in formal terms. The manner in which the role of the international community, led by Norway, is going to be handled is another area that will indicate the pace, progress, and more important, the direction in which the next phase of Sri Lanka's peace process evolves.

The election verdict and the LTTE infighting have drastically changed the ground situation in Sri Lanka. V.S. Sambandan reports.

Stability was another factor that swung the polls. A war-weary nation had voted for the UNP, which promised peace, in 2001. By 2004, Sri Lanka had become a poll-weary nation, a factor that played a major role in the success of the UPFA. Unlike the 2001 situation, when President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe were from opposing parties, the victory of the UPFA, led by Ms. Kumaratunga, has ended the governance of cohabitation.

However, the UPFA has its own frictions. Its two main constituents, the SLFP and the JVP, have differences on the two main issues that dominated the polls. While some middle ground was reached on the economic issues when the

pre-poll promise that the JVP would go with the majority decision on how the conflict should be resolved.

Besides, the position adopted by the nine Buddhist monks of the JHU — to save the island from domination by the minorities — is a natural inhibitor to the path charted since 1994, when Ms. Kumaratunga first proposed devolution as a solution to the ethnic conflict. The JVP and the JHU together have 48 MPs, representing the southern hardline view on the conflict.

On the opposite side is the 22-member Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which contested as an LTTE proxy, and wants the rebels to be accepted as the only negotiators of the Tamils. It is all for an interim

Kumaratunga inducts 31-member Cabinet, JVP boycotts ceremony

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, April 10. — Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today retained the crucial defence portfolio as she appointed a 31-member Cabinet at a ceremony marred by a boycott by her party's main coalition partner, the JVP.

Her close aide, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar has been made foreign minister, a charge he had held in her previous government, while Prime Minister Mr Mahinda Rajapakse was given the low profile highways ministry. The President's brother Mr Anura Bandaranaike was given the home affairs ministry, along with public administration.

The swearing in ceremony, originally scheduled at 2 p.m. was put off several times as the Marxist Janata Vimukti Peramuna did not show up at the event. The planned live broadcast was also cancelled. Eventually, Mrs Kumaratunga went ahead with the ceremony without the four JVP ministers who were also expected to take their oath of office today. The delay embarrassed the new government that has to go before parliament for its first session on 22 April.

The JVP had wanted additional subjects given over to them, but the President resisted. JVP also announced they were getting the ministries of lands, agriculture, rural industries and culture, even before Mrs Kumaratunga appointed her new Prime Minister last week. The JVP also opposed the appointment of Mr Rajapakse as the new premier, but they were overruled.



Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga swears in her new foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, in Colombo on Saturday. — AFP

ARMY TO RESTORE LAW AND ORDER

COLOMBO, April 10. — Sri Lankan security forces have been ordered to restore law and order in the island's east amid a fighting between Tamil Tiger factions even as the new government said it will take up the issue of the internecine war with peace broker Norway because it was in "violation" of an Oslo-arranged truce. The fighting, which erupted between the main Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and their renegade faction in the east of the country yesterday had caused civilian casualties, the defence ministry said in a statement. It was not immediately clear how security forces would move to

restore law and order as the rebel fighting was concentrated in an area where government forces have no control. However, the defence ministry said Norway will be informed that the outbreak of hostilities was a violation of the truce that is in force since February 2002. "It is intended to inform the Norwegian facilitators to convey to the LTTE that this is a violation of the ceasefire agreement and the government expects to take up this issue with the LTTE leadership," the statement said. The renegade rebel fighters are led by regional commander V. Muralitharan, better known as Karuna. — PTI

LTTE factional fight kills 22

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, April 9. — In the first factional fighting since the LTTE split in March, 22 people were killed as the two sides traded heavy gunfire in Sri Lanka's northeast.

Cadrés belonging to the main LTTE group were fighting members of the breakaway eastern faction led by renegade commander Karuna with mortars and small arms fire at the Verugal river, military officers said.

Military officers said fighters belonging to Karuna, the defector, were retreating as the fighting grew worse and some 4,000 civilians began fleeing the east.

Karuna's faction had withdrawn south from the position they held earlier on the bank of a river that demarcates the border of the eastern Batticaloa district and were now south of a major highway.

Military sources said government troops were now caught between the main LTTE and the breakaway faction and were vulnerable to attack from both sides.

Troops have so far not been involved in the fighting which broke out early today.

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross said people were leaving their homes and either moving out of the area or into public buildings seeking refuge amid the worsening situation. "Four thousand civilians are moving northwards and southwards from the affected area," ICRC spokesman Mr Sukumar



Rebel LTTE leader Karuna

Rockwood said. "They are moving into schools and other public buildings." He said food and cooking utensils were being rushed to the refugee centres.

"We are watching the situation very closely and monitoring every minute," Mr Rockwood said. "If it gets worse, we are ready to move in quickly and help."

Today's heavy fighting left at least 20 rebels and two civilians killed and many more wounded, but the pro-rebel Tamil net website confirmed only eight rebel deaths in the first wave of fighting.

There was no immediate word from Karuna on the fighting or the casualties. However, earlier in the day, Karuna's spokesman said the LTTE's main leadership had initiated the battle and was facing resistance.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2004

LTTE launches offensive against eastern cadre

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 9. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today launched an armed offensive against its eastern forces led by the defiant eastern commander, V. Muralitharan ('Col.' Karuna).

The fighting, which commenced in the early hours of Good Friday, takes Sri Lanka's decades-long separatist conflict into an intra-Tiger military offensive.

At least eight LTTE cadres from both factions and a Tamil civilian ambulance driver were reported killed. Eight eastern cadres were reported injured. Police sources are of the view that the number of cadres reported killed could increase. While the cadres died in battles, the civilian was killed when his ambulance hit a claymore mine, the sources said.

The armed aggression ends just over 23 months of non-fighting in Sri Lanka after the Tigers unilaterally declared a ceasefire against the Sri Lanka Army on the Christmas eve of 2001. Sri Lankan security forces, however, kept their distance from the two fighting factions, but are on alert.

Today's fighting was in the making since 'Col.' Karuna rebelled against the LTTE's leader, V. Prabakaran, on March 3, citing "discrimination." On March 6, the LTTE expelled Mr. Muralitharan. It later declared that it had decided to "get rid of" him and warned his cadres to leave him.

The first-ever armed clashes between the Tigers started in the early hours of today after the northern LTTE cadres crossed the Verugal River in eastern Sri Lanka — which separates the areas un-

der the control of Mr. Prabakaran and 'Col.' Karuna — and "infiltrated" areas under the latter's control, military and police sources said.

"Fighting started after midnight followed by two hours of intense mortar and small arms fire," the spokesperson for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, Agnes Bragadottir, said. The pre-dawn attack, which ended at 3.30 a.m., was followed by "consolidation and advances" by the northern rebel cadres till noon, after which no fighting was reported.

According to reports from the east, the northern cadres advanced nearly 12 km from the Verugal River and set up positions at a hamlet, Paalchenai, about 65 km north of Batticaloa town. Both the LTTE factions have been building up their cadres along the banks of the

Verugal River after last month's split in the LTTE.

The areas taken by the northern LTTE forces today include a Sea Tiger base, Kadiravelli, under the control of Mr. Muralitharan.

Figures vary on the number of eastern cadres who had "surrendered" in today's offensive, but defence sources do not rule out the possibility of an 'encirclement' strategy by the eastern fighters.

The LTTE's political wing leader, S. P. Tamilchelvan, told the SLMC that the Tigers had started fighting to "regain control" over the areas "being controlled" by 'Col.' Karuna. Ms. Bragadottir said. Security and defence sources see the possibility of Prabakaran's forces launching the next offensive "soon."

40-1104

Chandrika to open talks with LTTE

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, April 7. — Sri Lanka's new government was preparing to open peace talks with the LTTE, President Chandrika Kumaratunga said over national television today.

Ms Kumaratunga said her government had set out as a priority the need to revive peace negotiations with the rebels but did not say how or when the discussions could start. "The new government takes office at a difficult moment in our history," she said. "We have a truce for over two years without even starting to talk with the LTTE on the possible final solutions. This is not a happy situation for the country."

The new government is working on resuming peace talks with the LTTE," she said in her Sinhalese-language speech.

In the first address to the nation after her leftist Freedom Alliance narrowly won parliamentary elections, Ms Kumaratunga said she wanted to establish peace.

Ms Kumaratunga's statement came two days after the LTTE warned they would return to fighting unless the government granted them self-rule.

Her address also came after she had talks with the former Premier, Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, who had spearheaded negotiations with the LTTE and entered into a truce agreement in February 2002. "They discussed in general terms the

peace process under the previous government," a source close to both sides said. "There were no specifics taken up." Mr Wickremesinghe and Ms Kumaratunga last met in December in a futile attempt to end the power struggle.

The LTTE withdrew from talks in April last year, but agreed to reopen negotiations in November after unveiling their first ever blueprint for a peace settlement. The President had rejected the LTTE peace plan and eventually sacked the parliament and called snap election.

Mr Wickremesinghe warned on Monday that the political instability following a hung parliament was a danger for the Norwegian-backed peace process aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed.

New PM puts peace talks ball in Chandrika court

Colombo, April 6 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister was sworn into office today and said headline President Chandrika Kumaratunga was now in charge of reviving peace talks with Tamil rebels.

"They (talks) should start as soon as possible," new Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse told reporters as he left his house for the swearing-in ceremony. "We need peace."

He said Kumaratunga would be in charge of the peace process once the new government takes over after proving its majority in parliament, which is due to convene on April 22.

Direct talks with the Tamil Tigers, fighting for two decades

for a separate Tamil state in the north and east of the island, broke down last April, although a two-year-old truce has held.

"The President will handle the peace process," Rajapakse said after 10 Buddhist monks blessed him in an early-morning ceremony.

But uncertainty surrounding the new government hit the markets, with the key Colombo all-share index plunging 9.5 per cent.

Rajapakse also said India, which intervened in Sri Lanka's rebellion in the 1980s before withdrawing after heavy troop losses, should take a larger role in trying to bring a permanent end to the war that has killed

64,000 people. "India must come in as soon as possible," he said, adding that did not mean the role of Norway, which brokered the ceasefire, would be reduced.

Rajapakse was greeted by warm applause from party leaders when he entered the colonial-era Presidential Secretariat building to be sworn in as the country's 13th Prime Minister.

There was a light moment when Rajapakse's eyeglasses caught in the end of his trademark red scarf and it took him a minute to untangle them.

He said his first job would be to secure a majority in parliament.

"The first priority is that. We are very confident of getting a

majority. I do not want to give names right now," he said of possible coalition partners.

Rajapakse, 58, will lead a government that is eight seats short of a majority in parliament, after his United People's Freedom Alliance won 105 seats in the 225-seat parliament in last Friday's general election.

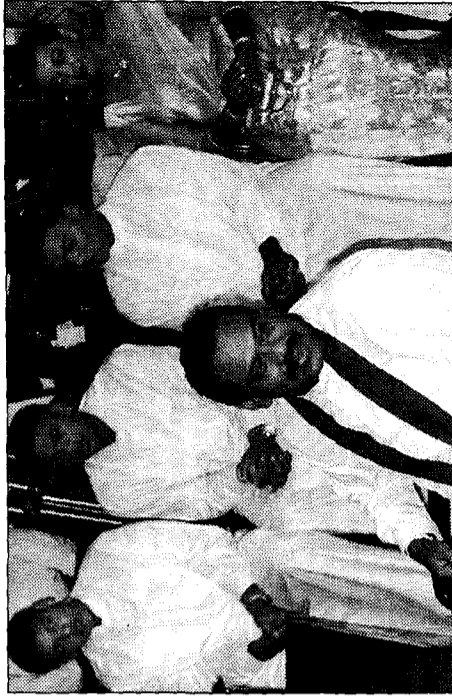
The Ceylon Workers Congress, which represents Indian-origin Tamils in the island's tea plantations, has the eight seats the Freedom Alliance needs and is widely expected to do a deal, but the party said on Tuesday it was for now remaining neutral.

"We have not knocked on anybody's door, nor have we been approached officially,"

party leader Arumugan Thondaman told a news conference. But he added: "All options are open".

Under Sri Lanka's executive presidency system, Rajapakse is likely to play second fiddle to Kumaratunga, who is expected to name herself defence minister and possibly finance minister when the cabinet is announced in the next three or four days.

Kumaratunga called the snap election nearly four years early after a political fight escalated with outgoing Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, her arch-rival. Kumaratunga, who is elected separately, accused him of giving away too much to try to win peace with the rebels.



Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse with his wife and three sons at the swearing-in ceremony in Colombo on Tuesday. (Reuters)

7 APR 2004

7 APR 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Lanka PM sworn in, calls for ties with India

Press Trust of India
Colombo, April 6

REGARDED AS a political moderate, Mahinda Rajapakse, handpicked by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, was on Tuesday sworn in as Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister, who sought India's help to revive the faltering peace process with Tamil Tigers.

Soon after he was sworn in, 58-year-old Rajapakse went in for a meeting with India's High Commissioner here, Nirupam Sen. Identifying the peace with the rebels as his main priority, Rajapakse told reporters, "India must come in as soon as possible and get involved in the peace process".

"I've always wanted India to

play a role in Sri Lanka. They're our biggest neighbour", Rajapakse, Leader of the Opposition in the outgoing Parliament, said. "We must keep the peace process moving", he said making it clear that he did not want to stop the Norwegian involvement to resolve the two-decades-old ethnic conflict.

He was sworn in after heated debates among constituent parties of the Freedom Alliance on who should get the top post in Parliament. Kumaratunga's main Leftist ally, the JVP or People's Liberation Front, was backing former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar to be the Prime Minister and opposed Rajapakse, who had earlier clashed openly with the JVP. "At one

point, there were very serious splits that threatened to come out into the open", an aide of Rajapakse said. "Now, the compromise is that he gets the Prime Minister job plus one ministry". The key JVP members boycotted the hurriedly summoned swearing-in ceremony, but a JVP legislator showed up after the ceremony was almost over, witnesses said.

Sri Lanka's post of Prime Minister is largely ceremonial. It is an additional portfolio that gives the Prime Minister a subject to handle.

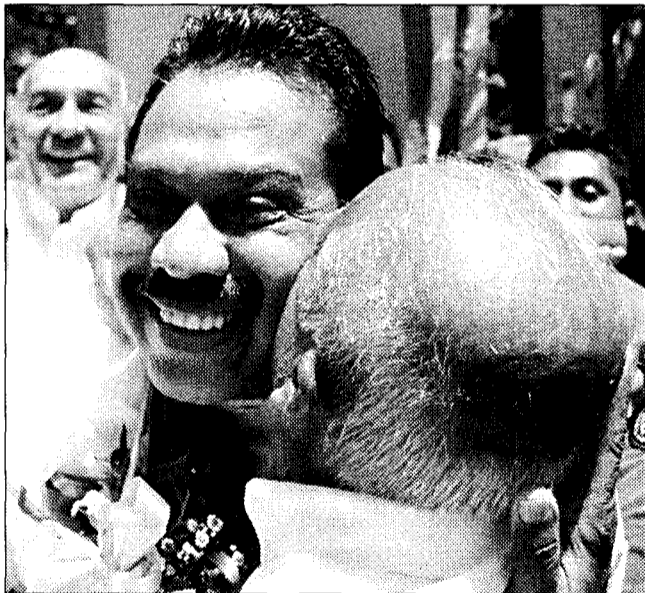
In this case, Rajapakse has been promised the relatively minor Highways Ministry.

The ceremony, itself, was held by a small meeting room of the sprawling presidential Secretariat, whereas Kumaratunga had sworn in the previous government at her imposing President's House.

A lawyer by profession, Rajapakse was a former minister of Labour and Fisheries. A part-time actor, Rajapakse has been honoured by the Shanthi Nikethan University for his contributions to art.

Meanwhile, a party representing Tamils of recent Indian origin said they were undecided about whom they should support. The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) of Arumugam Thondaman said they had eight seats that could make or break Rajapakse's government, but he was undecided. "There's no need to rush", Thondaman said.

Traditionally, the CWC has supported whoever was in power and pulled out when the government it supported became unpopular.



AP

A supporter hugs Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse (centre) in Colombo on Tuesday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 APR 2004

TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2004

10-10
6/9

SRI LANKA VOTES FOR CHANGE

AS EXPECTED, THE parliamentary election in Sri Lanka did not give either of the main political groupings an outright majority. But even though the Freedom Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga did not win the election decisively, and with 47 per cent of the vote needs the help of other parties to form the government, the Ranil Wickremesinghe-led United National Party has clearly been voted out. The race to the election began with the premise that the F.A. — a new alliance of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna — had only an arithmetic edge over the UNP. But the people's dissatisfaction with the UNP has played a bigger role, slashing its vote to about 38 per cent from the high-water mark of 45.6 per cent that propelled it into power in 2001. The ceasefire between the UNP's United National Front Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was doubtless a major achievement that brought relief to a war-weary people. However, support for Mr. Wickremesinghe shrank on two counts: one, his failure to translate the truce swiftly into economic benefits for rural Sri Lanka; and two, the perception that his Government was soft on the LTTE, clearly the reason for a significant number of the UNP's Sinhala-Buddhist supporters favouring the Jathika Hela Urumaya, a new party of Buddhist monks.

While economic issues and the disenchantment of the majority Sinhalese trumped the UNP at this election, the immediate question facing the new Government relates to the peace process. The F.A. has pledged not to disturb the ceasefire. But the real challenge for it, and for President Kumaratunga, who will now have her own party in government, is to transform the ceasefire into permanent peace by carrying forward the negotiations on the core political issues

of the Tamil question. For this, the F.A. needs first to resolve the differences within itself on an eventual political solution to the conflict. While the SLFP with Ms. Kumaratunga at the helm stands firm that only devolution can meet Tamil political aspirations, the JVP — which has played a vital role in the F.A. success — will commit itself only to administrative decentralisation. So far, the two parties have managed to deal with this potentially crippling difference by not talking about it. It remains to be seen if the JVP's hardline position will be tempered by its new responsibility of governance. But there is now little escape from formulating a clear joint position. The task is urgent as the new Government will need to provide a coherent and firm response to the Interim Self-Governing Authority proposals — a virtual charter for a separate state — that the LTTE articulated last October.

An SLFP-JVP agreement on these issues is only the first step. The F.A. Government needs to take the entire nation into confidence on the peace process, something the previous Government failed to do. While it is up to Mr. Wickremesinghe to demonstrate he is the leader of a responsible Opposition, the F.A. Government must leave no room for doubt that it considers the UNP a crucial partner in the peace efforts. The process has to become more inclusive among the Tamils as well. With the Karuna-led split, the LTTE can no longer claim to be the "sole representative" of the Tamils. The Muslims, a significant minority in the North-East, who have increasingly felt left out of the proceedings between the Government and the LTTE, must also be taken on board. Ultimately, Sri Lanka's 20-year-old conflict can be resolved only through the widest possible consensus. It falls on the new Government to craft one.

THE HINDU

6 APR 2004

Rajapakse named Lanka PM

Chandrika has second thoughts on Kadirgamar

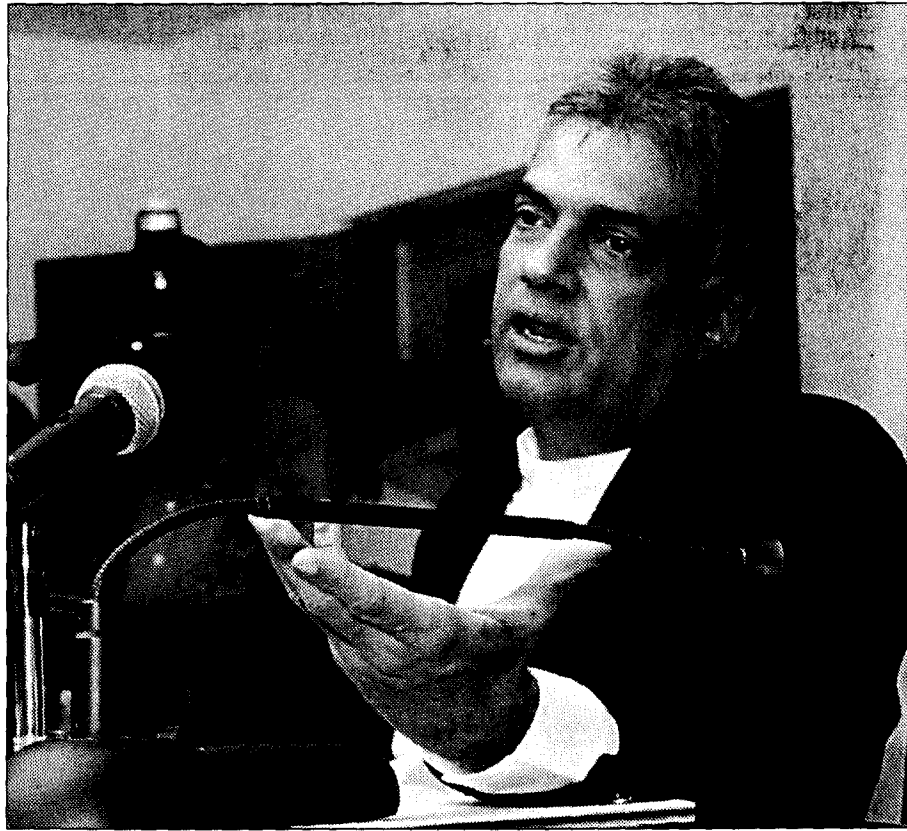
Press Trust of India
Colombo, April 5

DUMPING HER first choice as Prime Minister in the face of opposition from within her party, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Monday named party stalwart Mahinda Rajapakse for the key post. Sources close to 58-year-old Rajapakse said he would be sworn in as the island nation's 13th Prime Minister on Tuesday morning.

Kumaratunga, whose Freedom Alliance fell eight seats short of majority in Parliament, had earlier held back naming her first preference for prime minister-ship 71-year-old former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar following strong resistance from Rajapakse. Rajapakse has been asked to come to the President's official residence on Tuesday morning for the swearing-in ceremony, sources in his office said.

Kadirgamar is credited with getting the Tamil Tigers banned overseas, but is not a grassroots politician. He entered Parliament in 1994 as a nominated legislator. Rajapakse - on the other hand - had been a legislator since 1970 and enjoys wide support among the rank and file of the party.

Some youngsters in the party had, on Monday, suggested a secret ballot to resolve the issue of the next Prime Minister, but sources said Kumaratunga now appeared to be leaning more towards Rajapakse although it was still not a done deal. Kumaratunga's



Sri Lanka's outgoing Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe speaks at a Press conference in Colombo on Monday.

party won 105 seats in the 225-member Assembly and is set to form a minority government.

Meanwhile, in their first reaction to parliamentary polls won by Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga's political alliance, Tamil Tiger rebels on Monday warned they would renew their fight to win their demands if the new government denied them autonomy.

The rebel Liberation Ti-

gers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said their overwhelming sweep of the island's north and east in Friday's general election was a "major victory" and an endorsement of their nationalist struggle. The warning posted on the LTTE's peace secretariat website came hours after results of the poll were officially released.

Tamils in the once war-torn north and east voted for the first time in 27 years, although the result was

marred by allegations of widespread impersonation by the LTTE from other Tamil candidates.

There was no indication of the rebels' intention to resume peace talks with the new government that must prove its majority at the first session of the next Parliament on April 22 but the LTTE said it must accept their proposals for an "interim self-governing authority" seeking greater regional autonomy.

France picks up 15 in terror raids

Agence France Press
Paris, April 5

FRENCH COUNTER-ESPIONAGE services on Monday arrested 15 people in early-morning raids aimed at the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), the organisation blamed for the Casablanca bombings in May 2003 as well as last month's attacks in Madrid.

Of the nine men and six women detained in the raids, "between six and eight are suspected of having links with the GICM", a police official said. The dawn arrests took place in the north eastern Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois and at Mantes-la-Jolie, a dormitory town 65 kms west of the capital.

At Mantes-la-Jolie witnesses saw police taking away a young woman in a veil and two men, and removing documents and other objects in a bag.

The operation was ordered by the anti-terrorist investigating magistrates Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard who are looking into the Casablanca bombings. Of the 45 who were killed on May 16 last year in those attacks three were French - which explains France's judicial interest. The Europe-1 radio station said the raids were aimed at the network and sleeper cells uncovered during the judges' investigation.

Designated a terrorist organisation by the US, the GICM is believed to have emerged in the late 1990s, recruiting Moroccans who had trained in armed camps in Afghanistan.

6 APR 2004

Chandrika tilts towards party's choice for PM



Prime Minister-designate Mahinda Rajapakse

Colombo, April 5 (Agencies): Dumping her first choice as Prime Minister in the face of opposition from within her party, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today appeared to be ready to name party stalwart Mahinda Rajapakse to the key post.

Sources close to 58-year old Rajapakse said he would be sworn in the island nation's 13th Prime Minister tomorrow morning. "Yes, it is true," Rajapakse said, declining to comment further.

Kumaratunga, whose Freedom Alliance fell eight seats short of a majority in parliament, had earlier held back naming her first preference for Prime Ministership, 71-year-old former foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, following strong resistance from Rajapakse.

Rajapakse has been asked to

reach the President's official residence tomorrow morning for the swearing-in ceremony, sources in his office said.

No date has been announced for the naming of the cabinet. Kadirgamar is credited with getting the Tamil Tigers banned overseas but is not a grassroots politician. He entered parliament in 1994 as a nominated legislator.

Rajapakse, on the other hand, had been a legislator since 1970 and enjoys wide support among the rank and file of the party.

Some youngsters in the party today suggested a secret ballot to resolve the issue of the next Premier, but sources said Kumaratunga now appeared to be leaning more towards Rajapakse although it was still not a done deal.

Kumaratunga's party won

105 seats in the 225-member assembly and is set to form a minority government.

Rajapakse will lead a government whose main task will be to put a stalled peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels back on track.

But under Sri Lanka's executive presidency system, it is expected that he will take a back seat to Kumaratunga.

Kumaratunga has vast powers under the constitution and is expected to name herself defence minister and possibly finance minister when the cabinet is selected.

"He's a very good man but it is likely he will be a figurehead under the President," said one diplomat. An official involved in the peace process to end the 20-year civil war that has killed 64,000 people described Ra-

japakse as "a good choice".

Rajapakse, who is married to a former beauty queen and has two sons, was first elected as the youngest member of parliament in 1970.

From 1994 to later 2001, he served as minister of labour, then minister of fisheries and also ports minister.

He was named Opposition leader after his party lost the December 2001 election to Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP).

In this election, Rajapakse won the most votes in the working-class Hambantota district in the southern part of the island. Rajapakse will be involved in trying to forge a coalition to avoid what Wickremesinghe called a stalemated parliament.

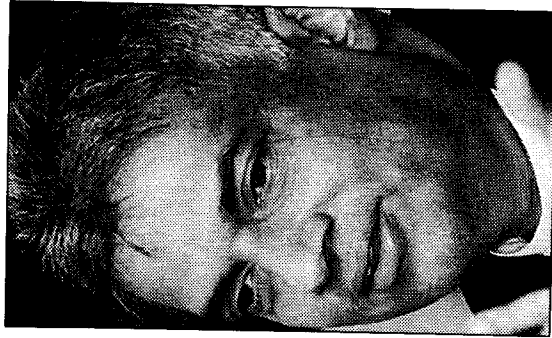
Wickremesinghe said earlier today that the peace bid may be

sidelined because the new government lacks a majority to push the process ahead.

"Everything is in trouble if you don't have a government with a majority," said Wickremesinghe, who signed a ceasefire with the rebels during his two years as Prime Minister.

Political analysts also said the Freedom Alliance will have a tough time resuming talks with the Tamil Tigers after voters elected an ethnically divided parliament. "The President still wants to take the peace process forward but she'll have less room to manoeuvre," one Western diplomat said.

Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) won 82 seats, down from 114 in the last election, a two-seat majority which was achieved through a coalition.



Outgoing Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (AFP)

6 APR 2004

Chandrika's UPFA falls short of majority

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, APRIL 4. A change of Government is in the offing in Sri Lanka with the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), led by the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, winning the 13th Parliamentary elections, held on April 2.

The UPFA, which won 105 MPs in the 225-member Parliament, however, fell short of a majority to form a government on its own, and would have to depend on smaller minority parties to reach the midway 113-mark.

With neither party winning more than 50 per cent of the popular mandate, the election held under the proportional representation system has resulted in a hung Parliament.

The Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) was voted out of power and its 82 seats fell far short of the UPFA.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), backed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), emerged as the third largest party with 22 MPs. Debutant,

Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), which fielded Buddhist monks in all constituencies, won nine seats.

The other parties voted to Parliament were the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (five), the Eelam People's Democratic Party (one) and the Upcountry People's Front (one). The UPFA, a combination of Ms. Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), swept the polls at the electoral division level, winning an all-time high of 45.60 per cent of the popular mandate.

The 4.2 million votes polled in its favour secured the party 92 directly-elected MPs and 13 National List MPs taking its tally to 105.

The UNP was defeated in 14 of the 22 electoral districts. The LTTE-backed TNA, which contested under the symbol of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi, swept the Tamil-majority north and two eastern districts.

But at least four of its 22 MPs are from the eastern Batticaloa district and are known supporters of the rebellious eastern mil-

itary commander, V. Muralitharan.

First-time contestants, JHU, made inroads in all Sinhala-majority southern districts.

The emergence of the JHU is seen as the popular endorsement of its stand that it would "prevent the domination of the minorities" and as a protest vote against the two main parties — the UPFA and the UNP.

Despite the sweep by the President's UPFA, Sri Lanka's proportional representation system has not given it a working majority.

With the JHU ruling itself out from any coalition, the party would have to negotiate with smaller parties such as the EPDP, the SLMC and the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), which contested under the UNP.

The exact tally of the CWC has not yet been announced, but it is likely to secure three seats. A combination of these Tamil and Muslim parties could take the UPFA past the required 113 mark, giving it a slender majority as in 1994.

Another report on Page 14

Chandrika group needs a crutch

Colombo, April 4 (Reuters): Sri Lanka was left with a hung parliament today that may delay resumption of peace talks with Tamil rebels after President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party won an election but fell short of an absolute majority.

Voters also sent a mixed message by returning two strong and diametrically opposed ethnic parties — one backed by the Tamil Tiger rebels and the other a party of Buddhist monks.

The result amounted to a rejection of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), which signed a ceasefire two years ago.

It left unresolved how to resume talks with the rebels who are fighting for a Tamil state in the north. Final results gave Kumaratunga's Freedom Alliance 105 seats out of 225, eight short of a majority. The UNP won 82 seats.

Kumaratunga's spokesperson Harim Peiris was buoyant: "It is quite a drubbing and very clear who got the mandate." The head of state is likely to name a new Prime Minister tomorrow, ending two and a half years of uncomfortable cohabitation with the UNP.

The Freedom Alliance took 45.8 per cent of the vote, compared with 37.9 per cent for Wickremesinghe's party.

"It was, if not 100 per cent, it was near 100 per cent, a free and fair election," elections commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake said of the island's least violent ballot in decades.

The rebel-backed Tamil National Alliance took 22 seats in the north and east. The National Heritage Party of Buddhist monks won nine seats, all in or near Colombo or central Kandy.



Commonwealth election observers (from left) Adaora Ikenze of Nigeria, Iona Tip of South Africa, Margaret Reid of Australia and Joyceln Lucas of Trinidad & Tobago in Colombo on Sunday. (AFP)

Kumaratunga's supporters in parliament are likely to work for support from minor parties.

They must also deal with the People's Liberation Front (JVP), a nationalist party from the Sinhalese majority which joined the Freedom Alliance this year.

Although now in the political mainstream, the JVP led two rebellions in which more than 80,000 people died and has been extremely critical of Wickremesinghe's peace process.

It has also said negotiations are the only way to end the war, however.

The JVP could be a concern for investors because of its stance against economic reforms and privatisation.

Kumaratunga had been forced into an awkward cohabitation with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe after a 2001 parliamentary election.

But the President, who has wide powers, called the weekend snap election after accusing the

Premier of endangering national security by making too many concessions to the rebels.

The truce has held even though direct talks to end the war that has killed 64,000 broke down a year ago. Efforts to restart them have been snarled up the political disputes in Colombo.

Sri Lanka's economy grew about 5.5 per cent last year and the stock market has surged nearly 80 per cent since the ceasefire was signed in Febru-

ary 2002 as prospects of a peace dividend have lured investors back and aid donors pledged \$4.5 billion.

The Tigers say they will resume negotiations with anyone who has a mandate and the power, but a recent split in the group may also complicate that for the rebels.

The Tigers hold a swathe of territory in the north and east but have dropped a long-standing demand for a separate Tamil state in favour of autonomy.

EIGHT SHORT OF ABSOLUTE MAJORITY ■ 'TOP PRIORITY TO PEACE TALKS'

Chandrika alliance wins polls

AP & PTI

512 ✓ 94 S Karuna

COLOMBO, April 4. — President Chandrika Kumaratunga, whose political alliance emerged as the single largest winner in Sri Lankan parliamentary elections, will make resuming peace talks with the LTTE her "top priority," her chief aide said today.

Ms Kumaratunga's United Peoples Freedom Alliance secured 105 seats in the 225-member parliament — just eight short of an absolute majority — and was in discussions with minor parties to join them to form a government.

"The top priority of the Freedom Alliance is to take steps to resume negotiations (with the Tamil rebels)," her aide Mr Harim Peiris said after the final results were announced.

While Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe could — in theory — forge a coalition to form a new government, his party's poor showing of just 82 seats made that highly unlikely.

A spokesman for the breakaway LTTE leader, Karuna, said his wing had no objections to the President's apparent victory. "Her alliance has given promises in their manifesto that they will take forward



ALL EYES ON POLLS: Members of the Commonwealth Election Observer Group compare notes at a Colombo hotel on Sunday. — AFP

the peace process, and this is good," said Varathan, a spokesman for Karuna.

The Tamil National Alliance, the LTTE's proxy party, won 22 seats. Five of those seats are loyal to the Karuna faction, Varathan said, adding that showed many Tamils "no more want to be dominated" by the main rebels wing. Representatives of the main branch

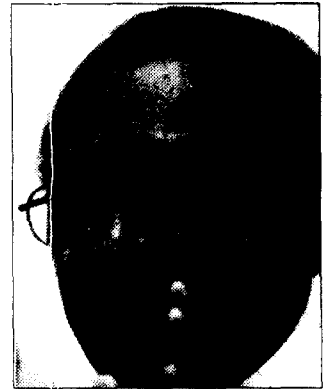
of the LTTE could not be reached for comment.

Rounding out the final results, a party led by Buddhist monks took nine seats in parliament, and the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress won five. Two small parties took one seat each.

The results were announced after election officials decided not to conduct re-poll two districts where

irregularities were alleged.

After initial speculation that the results could be delayed by a week, Sri Lanka's Election Commissioner Mr Dayananda Dissanayake today said at a meeting of representatives of political parties that voting would not be held again in two areas where rigging was reported. "We had a lengthy discussion and my



The Election Commissioner, Mr Dayananda Dissanayake

Party position

- Total number of seats: 225
- Freedom Alliance: 105
- United National Party: 82
- Tamil National Alliance: 22
- National Heritage Party: Nine
- Sri Lankan Muslim Congress: Five
- Others: Two

decision is that there is no need for re-polling," he said.

Neither of the main parties had asked that polling be held again in the two areas — in the central highlands, and the east.

The polls largely revolved around the question of who was best suited to negotiate an end to decades of civil war with the rebels: the President or the Prime Minister.

Chandrika party set for win

Colombo, April 3 (Reuters): Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party inched closer to a general election win today, but looked short of a parliamentary majority, complicating efforts to restart peace talks with Tamil rebels.

It was a mixed message from voters, ousting Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), but giving large minorities to smaller parties on opposing ends of the island's ethnic divide.

At the end of vote counting today, the Elections Commission said that with more than two-thirds of the votes counted, Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance had 47.2 per cent of the vote, compared with 37.9 per cent for the UNP.

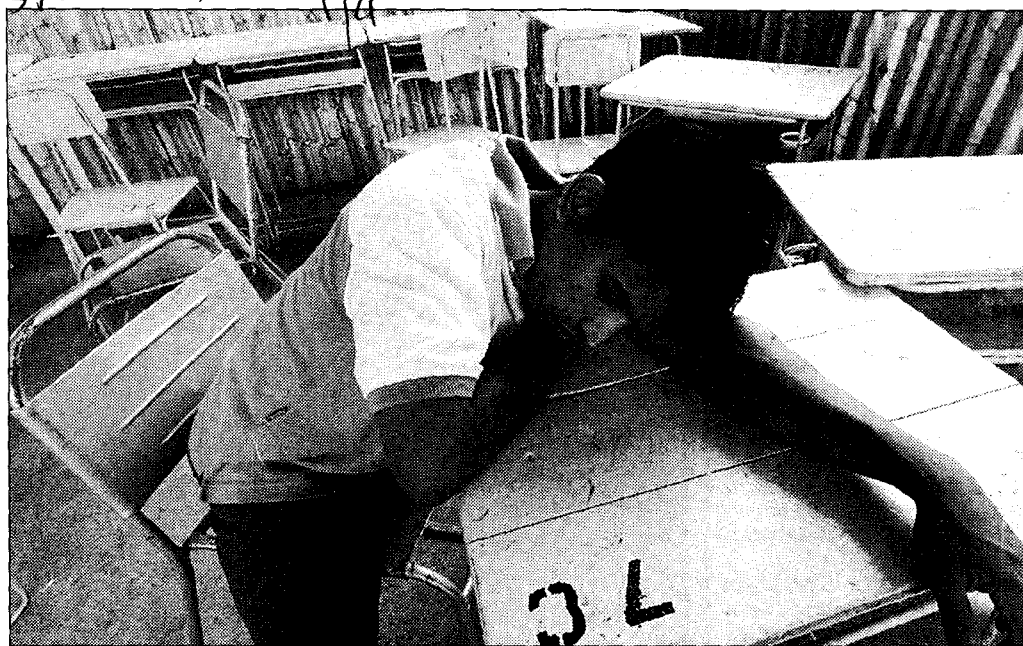
That was enough for the alliance to declare victory and issue a statement saying Kumaratunga would "invite the Freedom Alliance to form the new government no sooner the elections commissioner has finalised all the results".

The figures are still in flux, but projections give the Alliance up to 109 seats in the 225-member parliament — four short of a majority — while the UNP is forecast to take 80.

"This is not a good thing. The country did not need another minority government," Rohan Edrisinha, a legal expert at the University of Colombo, said after the vote, Sri Lanka's third in four years.

An all-clergy party of Buddhist monks had 6.3 per cent, while a rebel Tamil Tiger-backed party had about six per cent.

"This is a complete repudia-



An election worker sleeps after working overnight at a counting centre in Colombo. (AFP)

tion of the UNP," said presidential spokesman Harim Peiris. "The projections show a big difference in the number of seats."

The US issued a statement urging the new government and the Tigers to return to talks to "quickly forge a lasting peace".

The vote in Sri Lanka's most peaceful election in decades was fought mostly over how to permanently end the 20-year civil war that has killed 64,000 people and tarnished the country's image internationally.

Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga have shared an awkward government since he won the last election in 2001. As Prime Minister, he controlled

parliament while she, as President, had vast constitutional powers.

Kumaratunga used those powers to call the snap election after accusing Wickremesinghe of endangering the security of the country by giving away too much to gain peace with the rebels.

"I think it will be a real blow to the peace process as well, there will be no clear direction," Edrisinha said.

Kumaratunga has said she wanted to start talks with the Tigers as soon as possible, but the People's Liberation Front, a Sinhalese nationalist party that is part of the alliance, has in the

past taken a hard line in dealing with the rebels.

The party could also be a concern for investors because of its stance against economic reforms and privatisation.

The economy grew an estimated 5.5 per cent last year and the stock market has surged nearly 80 per cent since the ceasefire was signed in February 2002 as prospects of a peace dividend lured investors back and aid donors pledged \$4.5 billion.

A ceasefire that Wickremesinghe signed more than two years ago has held despite stalled peace talks, the feud between the President and Prime

Minister and a recent split in the Tigers. The LTTE has said it would resume negotiations with anyone who has a mandate and the power, but the rebel split, with a strong eastern commander breaking away last month, may complicate that.

The LTTE-backed party, the Tamil National Alliance, could win about 20 seats, giving the rebels a voice in parliament.

Yesterday's election was the first in which the Tigers had openly endorsed a party and was a crucial test of their claim to be the sole legitimate voice of the Tamil community.

The Tigers began fighting more than two decades ago for a separate homeland in the north and east for Tamils, who say they are discriminated against by the Sinhalese majority.

The Tigers control a swathe of territory in the north and east, but have dropped a demand for a separate Tamil state in favour of autonomy.

Lanka polls calm, political suspense hangs heavy

Colombo, April 2 (Reuters): Sri Lankans voted in large numbers today, but there was no indication so far they had broken a political logjam that has frozen efforts to revive a peace bid with the island's separatist Tamil Tigers.

The parliamentary election — the third in four years — was also one of the calmest in years, with fears of violence and fraud largely unfounded, poll monitors said after voting ended.

"This is the most peaceful election for the last decade. There is such enthusiasm from voters," said Sunanda Deshapriya from the independent Centre for Monitoring Election Violence.

Election officials around the island said there was heavy turnout, including for Tamils living in rebel-controlled areas, and about three-quarters of the more than 12 million eligible voters are believed to have cast ballots. That comes after pre-election opinion polls showed neither the ruling United National Party (UNP) nor the United People's Freedom Alliance winning a majority.

Final results for the 6,000 candidates battling for 225 parliament seats were not expected until tomorrow.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga called the election nearly four years early after her political feud with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe escalated. "I appeal to all our countrymen to use their vote freely and not indulge in any provocative acts or undue influence today," Kumaratunga said.



A voter gets his finger marked at a polling station in Colombo. (Reuters)

Wickremesinghe signed a ceasefire with the Tigers two years ago, and the President — who is elected separately — accuses him and the UNP of being too soft on the Tigers.

Voters said they were anxious for the ceasefire to continue. The island has enjoyed its longest period of peace since the Tigers began fighting for an independent state in the north and east in 1983.

More than 64,000 people died in the conflict.

During the two years of calm, the economy rebounded and tourist arrivals increased.

Today, the stock market rose 1.64 per cent on what brokers said were hopes for a win by Wickremesinghe's pro-business party. "It is an important election because we have to take a firm decision about peace.

That's the most important thing," said Christine Fernando after voting in Colombo.

Wickremesinghe voted in central Colombo, looking relaxed and dressed in his traditional white, collarless shirt.

"I'm very confident. The peace is the most important

issue, the economy itself is linked to the peace," he said.

Peace talks to bring a permanent end to the war broke down a year ago, but the truce has held.

For many ethnic minority Tamils living in rebel-held areas it was the first chance to vote since the civil war began, and tens of thousands of them waited overnight along the road once known as the Highway of Death for the battles fought over it.

They then crossed into government areas in the morning, where they likely voted for a rebel-backed party that could hold the key to forming the next government if forecasts of a deadlocked parliament come true.

This is the first time that the LTTE have endorsed a party, throwing the movement's intimidating weight behind the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

"For the first time since its inception, the LTTE is giving Sri Lanka's dubious democratic mechanisms a try," said the London-based *Tamil Guardian* newspaper said.

Key Tamil party to play kingmaker

Colombo, April 1 (Reuters): A Tamil rebel-backed party could hold the key to forming Sri Lanka's next government if, as predicted, tomorrow's general election produces a deadlocked parliament.

The vote is the first since the outbreak of the island's civil war in 1983 in which the LTTE have endorsed a party, throwing their intimidating weight behind the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

But that could also complicate matters if a government had to rely on the TNA for its power while at the same time was negotiating with the Tigers to permanently end a conflict in which more than 64,000 people have died.

"Whoever has to form the government will have to rely on the support of the smaller parties. What is the basis for that support? What price might they extract?" said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, head of the independent Centre for Policy Alternatives.

With the TNA projected to get 16 to 20 seats in the 225-seat parliament, and neither of the two big parties seen winning an out-

right majority, its backing could supply the winning margin. The TNA would only ever be expected to give support to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party.

But the other significant minority party in the House could be a Sinhala Buddhist party running an all-monk slate of candidates. Projected to win between four and nine seats, they would be more likely to back President Chandrika Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance.

Kumaratunga, who is not up for re-election, sacked Wickremesinghe's government in February, accusing her arch-rival of being too soft on the rebels.

"If you had a UNP government which had to rely on the support of the TNA in order to govern, it will be probably open to the charge of being held hostage by proxy to the LTTE," Saravanamuttu said.

Wickremesinghe said before formal campaigning ended yesterday that the problem would not arise. "We're going to have a majority. The TNA will in the early parliament support us on

many issues, but they will sit in the opposition." Officials said prospects for a free vote had already been marred by violence and intimidation in the north and east, with three shootings in the past week — all of ethnic minority Tamils — shattering the relative calm of the campaign.

"Certainly in the east we are extremely worried because of the context — there have been murders and a lot of tension between the different political parties," said Sunila Abeyssekera of the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence.

A TNA kingmaker role has also been complicated in recent weeks by a split in the Tigers, with a strong eastern commander challenging the movement's leaders in the north.

That could result in a rift within the TNA, with most supporting the north and several backing breakaway commander Karuna, the *nom de guerre* for V. Muralitharan.

"It has muddled the waters a bit," said a Tamil official close to the rebels in London where the LTTE has its international headquarters.



A worker carries a ballot box during a distribution exercise in Colombo. (Reuters)

Canadian aid to monitor Sri Lankan poll

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, APRIL 1. The Canadian International Development Agency will provide (Canadian) \$100,000 to the Commonwealth Secretariat that will monitor Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections of April 2.

"We hope that the presence of Canadian and other international election monitors at polling stations in Sri Lanka will help facilitate free and fair elections and deter acts of violence against those casting their ballots," the Foreign Minister, Bill Graham, has said.

"Once the people of Sri Lanka have expressed their collective will in a free and fair election, it will be important for the parties to resume the peace process as quickly as possible so that Sri Lankans can live in peace and security," he said.

The 15-member international group that includes India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa has already reached Sri Lanka. It will draw a report after the polls close.

Ottawa has said that it has also provided (Canadian) \$100,000 to two Sri Lankan non-governmental organisations to enable them to monitor the polls.

"Sri Lanka has been caught in the throes of a civil war for a generation with fighting focussed in the north-eastern part of the country. Canada has been active in supporting a negotiated solution to the conflict through the provision of both financial assistance and expert advice on issues surrounding political power sharing in a post conflict Sri Lanka," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said in a press release.

THE HINDU

2 APR 2004

Tiger split claims poll victim

Colombo, March 30 (Reuters): A Tamil candidate standing in Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections this week was shot and killed today, apparently the victim of a split among the country's Tiger rebels.

The rift in the LTTE has overshadowed much of the run-up to Friday's parliamentary vote, raising questions on whether the winner will be able to quickly get stalled peace talks with them back on track.

The killing of Rajan Sathiyamoorthy of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) by unidentified gunmen in Batticaloa town on the east coast was the third political shooting in three days. Police said Sathiyamoorthy was gunned down in his home along with a relative. Two others were wounded.

"We have intensified patrols and roadblocks and strengthened security," said Batticaloa senior superintendent of police Lasantha de Silva.

Election monitors condemned the killing, saying it was an attack on the island's democratic system.

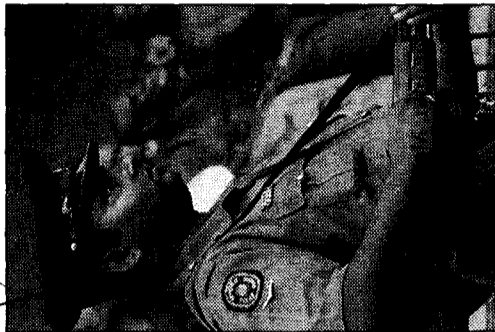
"It would seem that forces outside this election are intent on influencing the outcome and subverting the democratic process. They must not be allowed to do so," said John Cushnahan, chief EU election observer. No one has claimed responsibility, but diplomats and a rebel website (www.tamilnet.com) identified Sathiyamoorthy as close to Karuna, the eastern commander who broke with the rebel leadership earlier this month.

Sathiyamoorthy has organ-

ised protests in the area for Karuna, who controls large areas of the east while the north is controlled by the main faction of the Tigers, who in the past have murdered opposing Tamil politicians.

Although Sri Lankan army officials say there is no sign the two sides are getting ready to fight, if that happened it could drag in the military. The Tigers have been fighting the government dominated by the Sinhalese majority since 1983 for a separate state for Tamils in the north and east, but signed a ceasefire more than two years ago.

Talks broke down last April, fuelling a feud between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe over how to handle peace efforts.



A policeman keeps watch as Buddhist monks attend their final election campaign rally in Colombo. (AFP)

LTTE vows to get rid of renegade Karuna

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND AGENCIES

Colombo: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on Friday issued their strongest warning to a renegade commander who caused an unprecedented split within the movement, vowing to get rid of him and said his followers should take advantage of a pardon and abandon him. said V Muralitharan, better known by his nom de guerre Karuna, had caused immense damage to their cause with his unprecedented breaking away three weeks ago.

"To safeguard our nation and our people, it has been decided to get rid of Karuna from our soil," the LTTE said in a statement sent here. It said LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, 49, was ready to grant a discharge from the organisation for cadres to abandon Karuna, 37.

"In spite of the advice, if any of the cadres decide to arm in favour of Karuna, he or she would be deemed responsible for the consequences," the LTTE said.

The vertical split in the LTTE had taken the world by surprise. It was practically thought of as a tightly bound militant unit, which had eliminated any form of dissent. But, today it's no more so. Prabhakaran's leadership has been challenged by Karuna. This paves the way for further challenges to Prabhakaran's power or the weakening of militancy in Sri Lanka.

Though the rivalry has threatened the peace process and the snap elections in the island on April 2, especially with the LTTE deciding to eliminate Karuna, diplomatic

sources in the Indian High Commission feel that the events of the last one and a half years have belied such fears.

"There are two portions to sort out their rivalry. One is the suicidal attacks, as their ultimate safety is in eliminating each other. The second is through political will. Having relished peace, both Prabhakaran and Karuna know that the first option would alienate them from the people. So the second option is more likely," said a source. "For the first time in 22 years there has been no violence and neither do we expect any significant disturbances during the elections," said one of the sources.

Having the election in close quarters, both factions of the LTTE are in the electoral process. The two factors benefiting Karuna is the pluralisation of the organisation's politics, which has become an operational necessity and the second factor is that he has established a rapport with the Muslims of the region. However, the Indian embassy sources feel that it would be better if Karuna also makes peace with the Muslim leaders too, instead of by-passing them to the grassroots level.

On the other hand Prabhakaran is "quite serious about the peace talks". Karuna's statement that the LTTE demand for Eelam (separate state for Tamils) is only a dream today, is also a reality that Prabhakaran faces. The priority has now switched to power sharing with the front-line political parties and vis-à-vis power share in the north and the east of the island.



Prabhakaran

TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2004

S. Lanka

LTTE AND ELECTIONS

49-10 20/3

WITHOUT EVER DIRECTLY participating in Sri Lanka's democratic process, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has over the past two decades sought to influence the outcome of every presidential or parliamentary election in the country. It has killed candidates and intimidated voters in the North-East, and once even enforced a boycott. When the LTTE set up the Tamil National Alliance — a coalition of five Tamil parties — as its proxy for the 2001 elections, many applauded it as a sign of its "democratisation." But allowing other political parties to function is more essential to democracy than participating in elections through a proxy. The LTTE has shown no sign of this. Candidates of the TNA swear fealty to the LTTE as the "sole representative" of the Tamil people and seek votes only for the endorsement of this dubious status. In the last election, the LTTE was not as well entrenched in the North-East as it has become since the February 2002 ceasefire. Other political parties were able to participate in that election, even though fear of the LTTE blunted their campaigning. But for the parliamentary election on April 2, the LTTE, which now virtually controls Jaffna, has through acts of violence and intimidation made it impossible for non-TNA candidates even to step out of their offices for campaigning, thus turning the electoral process in that district into a farce.

The LTTE is obviously determined that the TNA must win the maximum number of seats in the North-East in the parliamentary election. It sees in this an opportunity to play the role of king-maker in Colombo after the contest as neither of the main political groupings — the Ranil Wickremesinghe-led United National Front and the Freedom Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga — is likely to win a clear majority and will need assistance from

other parties to form a government. At the very least, the LTTE will flaunt a massive victory for the TNA as an endorsement by the Tamils of its Interim Self-Governing Authority proposals, through which it is seeking to legitimise the control it has gained over the North-East in the two years since the ceasefire. However, in this period, resentment has been building up against the LTTE in the region pretty much as it does against any ruling party. Some of its policies, such as its system of extorting money from people through "taxes," have led to widespread discontent but fear of retribution stops people from expressing themselves freely. Unsure of a clean sweep for the TNA, the LTTE has taken the only path it knows — stifling the opposition, led by V. Anandasangaree, a rebel TNA candidate, who is contesting as an independent, and Douglas Devananda, who leads the Eelam People's Democratic Party. The same lack of confidence seems to have been behind its killing of a Government official in Batticaloa, where an internal challenge to the LTTE leadership from a break-away group led by Karuna, a former military leader of the group, could upset the TNA's electoral calculations.

While the LTTE has virtually hijacked the run-up to the election, the main concern now is the outdated voters' list in Jaffna — where out of approximately 600,000 registered voters, nearly half are dead, displaced, or abroad. This is a situation tailor-made for rigging through impersonation on polling day. Strangely, for the election observers and monitors pouring into Sri Lanka, the situation in the North seems to be of marginal concern even though the conditions there are clearly neither free nor fair. Their silence can only embolden the LTTE and push the objective of arriving at a just peace in Sri Lanka farther than it is at the moment.

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Election observer Shannon Turner-Covell marks the region allotted to her in Colombo. (AFP)

Lanka poll body takes over state media

Colombo, March 29 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's election commission shocked the island today by taking over state-run media four days before the vote and after weeks of charges that newspapers and television favoured President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party.

Election commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake said he was using his powers under the constitution to appoint a new authority — the first time a commissioner has used such power.

"It's something good, in the run-up to elections, to avoid reportage which might lead to any problems," the newly appointed Competent Authority for state media, Lakshman Perera, said.

Dissanayake's statement mentioned only state radio and television, but Perera said his authority would also extend to print.

Kumaratunga took over state media last November in a feud with her rival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, replacing officials with those loyal to her — and appointing her spokesman to head state television.

State media have been dogged by allegations of bias throughout the election campaign, which pits Kumaratunga's United People's Freedom Alliance in a close race with Wickremesinghe's United National Party.

A court challenge was expected, although presidential spokesman Harim Peiris said he would not speculate on that.

"I'm extremely surprised. At no point has the elections commissioner pointed out any violations of his guidelines (or fair reporting)," he said.

He also questioned why the commissioner had not acted against private newspaper and television stations — some of which are owned by relatives of Wickremesinghe — which the President's backers say are biased against the Freedom Alliance.

Dissanayake, who is independent and has strong powers under the constitution, has been under pressure for weeks to move on the state media.

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THE TELEGRAPH

Peace and the peace dividend

By Nirupama Subramanian

KURUNEGALA (SRI LANKA), MARCH 24. Every morning, Mayura Attapattu pedals through the small, crowded town of Mel-siripura, near here, hawking lottery tickets on her bicycle.

Many flock to her out of curiosity because a woman selling lottery tickets is an unusual sight. But Mayura also gets a lot of buyers for whom winning a lottery remains the main hope for getting on in life.

"People would rather buy a lottery with their last 10 rupees than something else," she said.

These days Mayura sells between 300 and 350 tickets daily. Affected by a severe drought for the last seven months, the people of this paddy farming district are praying for either rain or a big stroke of luck to bail them out of their current misery.

The drought here, just 80 km from the capital Colombo, and in some other parts of the country, has tightened a tough situation for the Ramil Wickremesinghe-led ruling United National Front, which is fighting for re-election in Sri Lanka's parliamentary election on April 2.

The election, the country's third in under four years, came after a four-month deadlock in the co-habitation government between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the UNF, to end which Ms. Kumaratunga dissolved Parliament ahead of time.

Essentially a battle for the Sinhala heartland, the election centres around two main themes — the ceasefire with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the peace it has brought, and the peace dividend.

The UNF, which signed the ceasefire with the LTTE in February 2002, is de-

fending itself from the allegation that the truce has helped the rich grow richer but brought no benefit to Sri Lanka's poor during its two-year rule.

Leading the charge is the new coalition of Ms. Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) known as the Freedom Alliance (FA) and some smaller parties.

Economy, the burning issue

"The economy has surfaced as the most burning issue in this election because most people are worse off than they were two years ago," said Mangala Samaraweera, a spokesman of the FA and one of its key candidates.

Drought-hit villagers complained of the high cost of living, which has rapidly

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outstripped their earning capacity.

"I sell a kilogram of paddy for 12 or 13 rupees. It used to be just enough to make ends meet two or three years ago. But now, I need to make at least 20 rupees a bag to break even with just my production cost," said Premadasa, a 50-year-old farmer in Ussawa, a village near here.

A common complaint is that the UNF government removed subsidies on fertilizers. Premadasa said a bag of urea fertilizer that cost him 350 rupees earlier was now selling at between 850 to 930 rupees, making it difficult for him to cultivate his two-and-a-half acres sharecropping land even before the drought set in.

'Ceasefire, the main achievement'

In its defence, the UNF projects the ceasefire as its main achievement, argu-

ing that with its six-year-term abruptly reduced to just two, it did not have the time to take the benefits of peace to the Sri Lankan hinterland.

"We laid the foundation for peace, we were building a strong economy on it but President Chandrika decided to play her hand just then by dissolving Parliament," said Milinda Moragoda, Minister for Economic Reforms in the UNF Government and one of its key candidates for the coming elections.

"In many places, young people ask me, 'What has your government done for the youth?'," Mr. Moragoda said.

"My reply to them is that we have stopped them from dying on the battlefield. That is the main thing. The next stage is to think about their future," he said.

The UNF gets full marks for the ceasefire but the FA — specifically its JVP constituent — is aggressively projecting it as a threat to national security.

Not permanent peace: JVP

Bimal Ratnayake, one of the JVP candidates in Kurunegala district, said that while peace was vitally important to people, they were fearful the LTTE would strike back with renewed force despite the recent split in its ranks.

"People know a ceasefire is not the same thing as permanent peace," said Mr. Rathnayake.

Last year, 68 residents of Ussawa visited Jaffna, Batticaloa and other areas in the North-East as part of a "peace education" programme sponsored by an NGO. Their visit was returned by 38 people from the North-East. But the exchange appears to have made little dent in the villagers' perception of the LTTE.

"We have nothing against the Tamil people but we fear and distrust their leadership," said Kamalani, who took

part in the programme. More immediately, many houses in the village including Kamalani's, do not have electricity. Of 25 recent graduates in Ussawa, 10 are unemployed and the rest are daily-wagers.

The ceasefire helped push growth from below the red line in 2001 to an estimated 5.5 per cent in 2003. Sri Lanka has spent around Rs. 50 billion annually on defence since 2002, and while the number has increased nominally, it has decreased as a percentage of GDP from before the ceasefire.

But according to Dushini Weerakoon, an economist at the Institute of Policy Studies in Colombo, the benefits are apparent only in the big cities and on the south-western coast where tourists have begun returning in large numbers.

In the capital, developers are building plush apartment blocks where a three-bedroom flat overlooking the Indian Ocean could cost as much as Rs. 140 lakhs (about 70 lakh Indian rupees). International coffee chains and snack-bars have set up shop in Colombo in the last two years. Moneyed youngsters lounge at new night-spots. A spurt in car sales in 2001 has shrunk the city's roads.

The resentment this lop-sided development has created outside Colombo is palpable.

"Our challenge is to make the people believe that the economic benefits of the ceasefire would have reached them had we been given time to build on our foundation," said Mr. Moragoda.

The challenge for the FA is to convince people it has a better plan for the resolution of the Tamil question that will not take people down the path of war once again and that will make for more equitable economic development.

At the moment, neither side seems to have convinced voters entirely.

Tiger vs tiger in eastern Sri Lanka

By D.B.S. Jeyaraj

Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan whose *nom de guerre* is Karuna has been expelled from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and publicly proclaimed a traitor for spearheading a revolt.

The warlord was the LTTE's supreme commander for the eastern region consisting of Batticaloa and Amparai. Trincomalee is administered separately.

Karuna, also called Karuna Amman, continues to retain effective control over tiger cadres and structures in Batticaloa district as well as pre-dominantly Tamil areas in Amparai district.

Though some senior Eastern tiger leaders such as Karikalan, Ramesh, Kausalyan, and Ram have deserted Karuna and fled to the North, the rank and file remains loyal. He has around 7,500 fighters in the East and by all accounts is ready to battle his erstwhile comrades if necessary.

Karuna's men are vigilantly patrolling the Vaaharai-Verugal areas on the borders of Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts.

An LTTE contingent led by senior commander Sornam is camped on the north of Verugal Gangai the river that divides both districts. Karuna's brother and Vaaharai area chief Reggie is in charge of defences to the south of Verugal. He is prepared to resist any southward advance by the Tigers under Sornam.

The coast along Vaaharai-Kaluvan-kerny is also monitored to prevent a possible LTTE invasion by sea. The land borders in Kadiravelly and Punaanai are also sealed. Access routes such as the Polonnaruwa road and Trincomalee road are also watched. For, Karuna's camp fears LTTE infiltration in sizeable numbers through clandestine routes or unobtrusively in singles and twos.

The Tamil areas to the West of the Batticaloa lagoon known as "Paduvaankarai" or Shore of the Setting Sun is Karuna's stronghold. The region is now on a war footing.

Karuna and his men getting ready

for war is nothing new for the East but the irony is that this time the enemy is not the "Sinhala state" but fellow Tamil guerrillas from the LTTE. The man who once led his Eastern soldiers to the Northern battlefield and rescued his leader is now preparing to resist a Northern military invasion to capture or kill him.

LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was in deep trouble six years ago because of two military offensives codenamed "Jayasikurui" (Certain Victory) and "Rana Ghosa" (Battle Cry) launched by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Extensive areas of LTTE-controlled territory in the Northern mainland of Wannai had been seized and it seemed only a matter of time before the net closed in on the tiger chief's headquarters in Puthukudiiruppu in the Mullaitheevu district.

Toast of the Tigers

The tide turned decisively for the LTTE when Karuna, then its senior regional commander, led a band of 3,600 fighters to the Northern front to bail out his leader and comrades. Karuna fought a series of defensive battles in "alien" terrain and proved his mettle.

He was then made overall field commander for the LTTE's "Unceasing Waves" (third phase) counter-offensive that succeeded in wresting back control of areas extending from Oddusuddan to Omanthai. Contrary to some media reports Karuna did not participate in the Elephant Pass battle or other related battles in the Peninsula except for providing logistical support. He was kept in the rear to serve for the final assault on Palaly-Kankesanthurai base that never materialised.

Karuna returned home in triumph. He was the toast of the Tigers then. A grateful Prabhakaran elevated him as special military commander of Batticaloa and Amparai districts.

Karuna was given a great deal of autonomy and allowed to develop a parallel administrative structure for the East (minus Trincomalee).

this was not possible due to the war. In times of conflict, the regional chiefs had practically a free hand in running their affairs. This was particularly so in the case of Karuna whose seniority and military ability was great.

The Central divisions were not answerable to the regional command and reported back to their heads alone, who in turn reported to Prabhakaran. Thus several acts were being done in the East in the name of the LTTE that Karuna had no control over and, in many instances, no knowledge of. The LTTE courts, police stations, income tax offices and more importantly the dreaded intelligence wing TOSIS (Tiger Organisation Security Intelligence Service) all functioned in the East without being subject to any regional control.

NEWS ANALYSIS

This was particularly galling to a man of Karuna's calibre who felt that he deserved special treatment because of his seniority and services rendered by the Eastern cadres. Complicating matters further was the regional factor. There is a strong sense of underlying Eastern Tamil sub-nationalism that often surfaces over contentious issues. The Batticaloa Tamils in general nurse a feeling of being discriminated against or being dominated by the Jaffna Tamils. This mindset has to be handled with extra care and a particular sensitivity that seemed absent within the LTTE.

Campaign of resistance

To make matters worse these centralised authority structures were all led and to a great extent manned by Northern Tamils. Thus friction was exacerbated. Karuna and his loyalists began resenting this northern hegemony as they perceived it and commenced a campaign of non-cooperation and even resistance. This cold war has been on for quite some time now and has been largely unknown outside the Tiger realm.

Karuna alleges that of the 30 LTTE

departments none is headed by an Eastern Tamil. The 15-man Central Committee has only two Easterners who are there by virtue of being Trincomalee and Batticaloa-Amparai commanders.

Karuna compares this to the military situation where the Eastern tigers have made proportionately higher sacrifices. A total of 4,543 Eastern Tigers have lost their lives so far. Of these, 2,302 died in Northern battles. Operations on Eastern soil took a lesser number, 2,241. Despite these sacrifices for the North, the Eastern tigers have not received a fair deal after peace, says Karuna.

Duel between 'Ammans'

Complicating matters further is the long duel between the two "Ammans" (Uncle). There has been rivalry between Pottu Amman and Karuna Amman since 1987 when both served together in Batticaloa. In recent times both have competed to be in Prabhakaran's good books and possibly the *de facto* No. 2 position.

Resenting the activities of Pottu Amman's outfit on his native soil Karuna started a separate wing known as "Intelligence BA." This agency began monitoring the activities of Pottu Amman's operatives.

Pottu like Beria in Stalin's time is the most feared man within the LTTE. He has brought down many people including former deputy leader Mahathaya. The clash of the Ammans in the East saw the TOSIS launch an intensive probe against Karuna himself.

Aided by operatives of Thamilendhi's and Nadesan's divisions, Pottu Amman's men compiled a damning dossier against Karuna. Among the charges were misappropriation of funds, building a separate house for himself, encouraging anti-Muslim activities, and masterminding conscription of minors. There was also an accusation about a relationship with a senior leader of the Tiger women's brigade. Karuna is married with two children.

Thereafter, Prabhakaran "asked"

Karuna to come to the Wannai and answer these charges. Mahathaya too was given a chargesheet to be answered before being taken into custody. Karuna sensed a trap and refused to comply despite several directives. This led to a straining of relations between him and the Tiger supremo. This also led to Karuna being excluded from the recent trip to Europe led by Thamilselvan.

The next twist was when more than 100 TOSIS operatives were brought to Batticaloa by Pottu Amman. It was suspected that Pottu was planning to abduct Karuna clandestinely to the Wannai or assassinate him. Given Karuna's popularity in Batticaloa open confrontation seemed impossible. Karuna feared that Pottu would commence a campaign to discredit him and then strike.

When elections were announced Karuna reportedly gave the green light to parties such as the UNP and the EPDP to contesting in Batticaloa along with the LTTE-sponsored Tamil National Alliance. But suddenly a UNP candidate was killed and an EPDP activist gunned down. This, according to sources close to Karuna, made him panic. He thought that Pottu was getting ready to strike and in typical Tiger fashion hit first.

Action against TOSIS

What has not come to light in Batticaloa is that 12 senior TOSIS operatives in the region were rounded up and killed by Karuna's loyalists. They were allegedly plotting to kill Karuna. A further 25 to 30 intelligence wing cadres were detained but managed to escape through help given by people like Ramesh and Ram. Another 60 to 75 TOSIS operatives led by Keerthi are under house arrest in Kammankudah on the western shore of the lagoon.

It was after this swift strike that Karuna brought the issue out into the open. He is raising regional concerns with remarkable success to strengthen his position vis-à-vis the Eastern people. Whatever his motives the concerns raised are quite

valid and have struck a responsive chord.

LTTE circles say Karuna has revolted only to prevent being punished under strict Tiger disciplinary codes for his misconduct. He is now whipping up regionalism to justify his rebellion.

It is also pointed out that the demand to sack Pottu, Nadesan and Thamilendhi is because their departments were instrumental in expelling Karuna.

Against this backdrop it seems clear that genuine rapprochement or peaceful reconciliation is not possible. Well-meaning efforts by people like the Batticaloa Catholic Bishop Rev. Kingsley Swamipillai are not likely to succeed in the long run.

The LTTE is restraining itself because of the ceasefire, the coming elections, the fear of alienating Eastern sentiment further, and the ground reality that Karuna controls the bulk of cadres and territory in the East. Karuna, on the other hand, will not trust the leadership on account of the Mahathaya affair and also because he knows he has gone too far in defiance.

The Colombo Government is unable to comply with Karuna's request to sign a separate ceasefire agreement with him because the LTTE will then abrogate its own agreement. But if the LTTE commences war on its own then Colombo is sure to make a deal with Karuna to keep the East quiet.

Karuna's revolt seems essentially home-grown but with the passage of time extraneous forces could begin backing him. The LTTE knows this and will be planning to physically assassinate him and also characterise him through the Tamil media.

Karuna will not be forgiven nor will he go down without a fight. Given the LTTE's track record the commencement of a protracted Eastern bloodbath seems inevitable at some point of time. Whatever the outcome there is no doubt that the LTTE will be considerably weakened as a result.

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2004

KARUNA'S CONFESSIONS

THE LIBERATION TIGERS of Tamil Eelam have always publicly denied responsibility for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. In his April 2002 press conference in a jungle clearance, the LTTE Supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, came up with the mother of all evasions: he described the killing as an "unfortunate event that happened many years ago" and advised India not to live in the past. The man in effective military command of thousands of Tiger troops in eastern Sri Lanka, Vinayagamorthy Muralitharan, better known as Karuna, was a top Tiger until he seceded from Prabhakaran's set-up recently. In characterising the Rajiv assassination as the "gravest mistake of the intelligence wing" of the LTTE, he has ripped off the pall of evasion the organisation has placed over the horrendous crime. Karuna's confession, in an interview to *The Hindu*, is the first public acknowledgement by a leading Tiger of the LTTE's authorship of the assassination and its consequences. For India, the hand behind the assassination has been established investigatively and judicially: Accused No. 1, Prabhakaran, and No. 2, Pottu Amman, the organisation's intelligence chief (whom Karuna characterises as "a terrorist" pure and simple), are nothing but criminal fugitives from justice. Karuna's statement should reinforce India's resolve not to grant the LTTE any legitimacy.

The rebel LTTE military leader has made another explosive admission: Eelam is a pipe-dream; even Prabhakaran has forsaken this, preferring instead to negotiate for "a federal system and internal self-determination"; given the international circumstances and India's stand, the armed struggle for a separate Tamil Eelam is unwinnable and its prolongation will only bring "destruction on both sides." Karuna has also done a service to the cause of keeping Sri Lanka one by speaking up on an issue that has sim-

mered among generations of Sri Lankan Tamils but until now has not been acknowledged by the partisans of Eelam — the resentment that Tamils in the East feel at being hegemonised by a Northern leadership that claims to speak for all Sri Lankan Tamils. It may well be that Karuna's slogan of autonomy for the East from the North is a product of expediency. After all, as one of the top commanders of the LTTE, he was in the forefront of the group's battlefield manoeuvres for control of a unified North-East. Even so, his stand should open debate on one of the toughest issues that must be resolved in forging a political solution to Sri Lanka's Tamil question. The issue does not, of course, concern Tamils alone. The East is also home to Muslims and Sinhalese, who together constitute today an overwhelming majority of the region's population and are wary of the demand for a unified North-East because Tigerism has meant ethnic cleansing, terrorism and instability.

In throwing the gauntlet before the LTTE, Karuna challenges the political leadership of Sri Lankan Tamils to think boldly and break away from the military tyranny of the island's Pol Pot. For sure, this rebel is no saint. He was, after all, the mastermind behind many of the LTTE's horrific actions against civilians in the East — Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese. A question that cannot be answered at this juncture is whether by fixing the responsibility for his rebellion on second-runners who "influence" the LTTE leader, Karuna is keeping his door open for an unlikely but remotely possible reconciliation. Still, his revolt, the questions it raises and the possibilities it offers, should provoke all Sri Lankans to think differently, to reflect on the calamitous course the twenty-year civil war has taken, and to ensure success for the process of crafting an enduring political settlement along federal lines within a united Sri Lanka.

THE HINDU

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Rajiv assassination the gravest mistake: Karuna

After leading the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in several battles, 'Col.' Karuna, its longest-serving regional military commander, left the group on March 3 citing "discrimination." Three days later, the Tigers expelled him for "traitorous acts" — a crime that means death in the LTTE.

In an exclusive interview to V.S. Sambandan, deep inside LTTE-controlled Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka, the rebel military commander, who joined the LTTE as V. Muralitharan, a school student, and went on to become the much-feared 'Col.' Karuna, says he considers the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi the "gravest mistake" and "winning a separate nation an impossibility."

Excerpts:
Question: On March 3, you left the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Why?

Muralitharan: It is discrimination against us within our organisation. I don't feel our leader [V. Prabakaran] has given regard to the lives of our [eastern] fighters. From the time of the Indian Army, our fighters have been martyred in the Vanni battlefields.

Even now, there are 600 fighters there. Parents don't like their children to be deployed during peace. What we wanted was that the eastern fighters should be sent back. When the leader asked for 1,000 more people, it was unacceptable. Then, of the more than 30 administrative positions in the LTTE not even one is held by someone from Batticaloa-Amparai.

There have been problems within the LTTE in the past, before you went public. Did you weigh the impact of this on the LTTE?

There will certainly be an impact. They cannot function without me. Even if they do, they cannot be strong. May be they can become a real guerrilla movement, but they cannot continue any longer as a conventional army. We gave 75 per cent of the strength. We gave fighters and introduced technology and tactics into the military. For instance, the organisation does not know defence battles. As I had read books on history of warfare — Stalingrad, Hitler, Rommel — I knew the importance of defence in warfare.

Do you think your action would affect concepts such as traditional homelands?

I am not even concerned that they will be affected because the northern, Vanni leaders think arrogantly that they are the educated lot, that they can do everything and that they can suppress other communities. That is not acceptable. So when a country or a solution comes, what are they going to do? Even then, our people will be suppressed.

From the beginning, there have been severe problems between the Jaffna man and the Batticaloa man. There was discrimination. We thought war would change things. Within the organisation all was well; they took care of us well till their work was done. But with passage of time, we find discrimination within the organisation. How can we continue to accept that?

Before the war there was a good relationship between the Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims here. In the 1983 riots those who were affected were Jaffna Tamils, not eastern people. Apart from one problem — colonisation — I don't think there was a big problem here. I was studying in school when I joined the LTTE. There were no Sri Lankan forces here then. When we started attacking there, destruction started here.

What happened on March 3 when you informed Norway that you are leaving the LTTE?

I had written a letter to the leader, very humbly: "We regard you as God. Please accept our demands. You appointed 30 administrative heads. None of them is from Batticaloa-Amparai. I will run [the east] di-



V. Muralitharan

rectly under your control as we have the capacity to do so."

He said, he can't permit it. I said: "I don't approve [of] sending fighters. I want to function from here." Then he said: "No, you cannot do that. Come here if you want or quit [the LTTE]." That was the internal communication. Then I decided: "This will not work," and I told Norway immediately: "We have parted ways with the LTTE from today."

Political killings are also cited as a background for the current problem.

That is true. The problem is the atrocity of the intelligence gang, directly under [the intelligence wing leader] Pottu [Amman]. Pottu is a terrorist. That is what I can tell you. None of the work done by him is acceptable to the international community. He wields personal influence on the leader.

INTERVIEW

They do not accept our views. We are consistently for conventional war — ground battles, raids, attacks — I really did not like these games of exploding bombs, killing civilians.

The atrocities of the intelligence increased. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) coordinates with us; we give them assurances. Then the next day there will be an incident. We ask [our intelligence] "is there any link with you in this?" They would say "we don't know." Then the SLMM tells us: "You guys are hopeless." When we realised that [the LTTE intelligence] was involved, I said: "If intelligence is to operate here they must function under my control, or they must be removed from here immediately." They did not accept it, so I ordered the intelligence out as [we] are getting a bad name. My inference is that they were portraying us as villains.

Do you still believe in Tamil nationalism?

Yes. I believe that when the northern Tamil Eelam people discard the Vanni leadership, then Tamil nationalism will be rescued. Even there, nearly 80 per cent oppose it. If they had people's support, they could have recruited people there.

You were a member of the LTTE's negotiating team. Were you surprised that you were named? What were your experiences?

It was a surprise. Questions would have been raised if someone from the East was not there. I feel that was the reason I was sent. However, the travels were truly a good experience. I learnt a lot. I could see other societies and study various developments.

Even our leader has given up the demand for Tamil Eelam. His demands now are for a federal system and internal self-determination. That is why we went for talks. Now we cannot be accused of giving it up. We cannot be blamed for it. You would have noticed his position in last year's Heroes Day speech. I think he has given it up.

The relationship between India, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan conflict is a much-discussed subject. What are your views?

That was our biggest setback. We should have stopped with fighting against the Indian Army. Going back and assassinating Rajiv Gandhi — killing him in Tamil Nadu — is not acceptable. I consider it the gravest mistake of our intelligence wing. That was the reason why our liberation struggle deteriorated so badly. I was trained there and I remember that we were considered as freedom fighters then.

As far as I am concerned, we attacked their army on the basis of retaliation. Their army left. What is the need for rage after that? It is because of the assassination that we have such a bad reputation. We have been trying to explain this on and off, but none accepts our version.

Col.' Karuna is known as one who evoked fear, now with the emergence of Muralitharan, what is the difference?

(Chuckles) I have had long experience in war. I really did not like it during the war. Destruction on both sides affected me. I started feeling "is it necessary?" They used to say "if you bring 1,000 soldiers, we will win." We take them; nothing comes of it. Then they would say "bring 2,000 here, we will win." We take them; there is no solution. I am convinced that we cannot solve this through war.

If we have to form a separate Tamil Eelam, we cannot do so antagonising India. That is out of the question. Or we should create a relationship with that country. They have not attempted that, except superficially saying so once in a way.

If we still want to get a separate country, we will only face more destruction. There will be destruction on both sides — no problem with that — but there will be no solution. We will not get a separate country.

Now there is a different situation in the global order. Without any support, I consider winning a separate nation an impossibility.

So you held negotiations (with the Sri Lankan Government) on the premise that a separate country was not possible?

Certainly. There are no doubts about that. Even I was there. We negotiated only the possibility of considering a federal system. We were not negotiating Tamil Eelam.

Throughout this interview you have referred to "Leader Prabakaran." What are your views about him?

As far as the leader is concerned we were reverential of him. In the beginning he was a good person. We accept that, but those surrounding him started exerting pressure on him and when he started acting according to their influence, he moved away from the leadership qualities and started behaving differently. He has become a person controlled by [those] around him.

He could have shared powers. He failed to do that. In the early days it was ok, when there were 500 or 1,000 people, when there was little territory, a single person can control things then. Now, with such a large Tamil Eelam, he must have shared administrative powers. That is his monumental mistake. It is impossible to achieve things now as a single man.

Another weakness of his is that he will not like anyone growing up as an equal to him. I know that.

FD-1
12/3

Separate state impossible: Karuna

By V.S. Sambandan

BATTICALOA, MARCH 12. The rebel military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (a.k.a. 'col.' Karuna), says it is "impossible" to create a separate state — the battle cry of the Tigers in the decades of a bitterly fought separatist battle against the Sri Lankan Government — as there is no international support.

In a wide-ranging interview to *The Hindu*, deep inside rebel-controlled eastern Sri Lanka, Mr. Muralitharan termed the

'Rajiv's assassination was the gravest mistake': Page 12

assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, the "gravest mistake" committed by the LTTE's intelligence wing. With his departure from the organisation, which he joined as a 17-year-old final year school student, Mr. Muralitharan said the LTTE "cannot continue any longer as a conventional army."

'Col.' Karuna alleges discrimination against the "eastern fighter" by the "northern leadership." He said he "was not even concerned" about the impact of his departure on the concept of north and east as the "traditional homeland" of the Sri Lankan Tamils — one of the three principles held by Sri Lankan Tamil parties for several decades and a basis for the demand for a separate Tamil Eelam. In his 45-minute

interview in Tamil, Mr. Muralitharan said the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, had made the "monumental mistake" of not sharing powers. Referring to Mr. Prabhakaran throughout the interview as "the leader," he said: "Another weakness of his is that he will not like anyone growing up as an equal to him." Mr. Muralitharan was particularly critical of the LTTE's intelligence wing leader, Pottu Amman, and two other administrative heads. The LTTE leader was "being influenced" by them and had "moved away from leadership qualities."

The 37-year-old Mr. Muralitharan, who was the LTTE head for two eastern districts — Batticaloa and Amparai — before his expulsion on March 6, met this correspondent in a training camp, 'Meenagam' yesterday, where, he says, about 6,000 armed fighters are based. At ease with his new situation, 'col.' Karuna was in a casual and relaxed mood, with his serious, tough look making way for several smiles and a few chuckles.

Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, Mr. Muralitharan said, would "be rescued" when the people of "northern Tamil Eelam discard the Vanni leadership." The LTTE's negotiating team, of which he was a member, was only discussing the possibility of a federal structure, and "certainly" not a separate Tamil Eelam, he said. Even Mr. Prabhakaran, Mr. Muralitharan said, had "given up the demand for Tamil Eelam."

Karuna rejects amnesty offer; LTTE calls for calm

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MARCH 9. The renegade regional military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), V. Muralitharan (a.k.a. 'Col.' Karuna), has declined the amnesty offer granted to him by the rebel leadership, and insisted on top-level changes in the rebel-group's organisation to rejoin it.

As Mr. Muralitharan's defiance of the LTTE leadership continued, the rebel political wing leader, S. P. Tamilchelvan, assured the residents in the troubled eastern districts of Batticaloa and Amparai that normalcy would be restored "without affecting the civilians or the cadres".

The LTTE has said that 'Col.' Karuna was "trying to bring up dissension of the Tamil nation on the basis of an imaginary regionalism" to "cover up his wrongful actions in contravention of the organisation's structure".

The LTTE, which considers the crisis an "individual's problem" had also said that the unseated regional leader could seek amnesty to "lead the life as an individual". Mr. Muralitharan's aide, however, told *The Hindu* this morning that

the question of an "amnesty did not arise" and that the expelled leader wanted the three conditions met before he could consider rejoining the organisation.

"We insist on three preconditions set by 'Col.' Karuna", his aide said. Mr. Muralitharan's demands are that the rebel group's head of intelligence, Pottu Amman, head of police, B. Nadesan, and the head of finance, Tamilenth, should be replaced.

Mr. Muralitharan's aide also said that the possibility of the LTTE taking a new name in the east was being considered, but was not decided as yet. All LTTE offices in the eastern Batticaloa town continued to carry the old name boards of the organisation, but the number of persons manning these offices was considerably lower.

In another development, the Bishop of Batticaloa, Kingsley Swampillai who led a peace team to the LTTE headquarters yesterday, met a military deputy of 'Col.' Karuna in the rebel-held Batticaloa this afternoon. Significantly, the renegade leader was not present at the meeting. No reasons were given for the absence of Mr. Muralitharan, but earlier this morning, his aide said he was "busy in finalising organisational restructuring".

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2001

Challenge to Prabhakaran reign

Smiling face of Tiger atrocities

S. Lanka 9P

Colombo, March 8 (Reuters): The renegade rebel whose split from the Tamil Tigers threatens Sri Lanka's peace process was a close aide to the rebels' top leader who has been accused of carrying out some of the worst atrocities in the civil war.

Karuna, who said last week he had split from the LTTE, has transformed himself since the island's ceasefire from a jungle warrior into a peace negotiator who put on a suit to represent the rebels in world capitals. "Karuna is highly disciplined, a very good military leader," said one official in Colombo who dealt with him often.

"I always found him very polite and he was always smiling. He's broken the sound barrier; he speaks English more when he is on those trips," he said. There is still confusion surrounding why V. Muralitharan — who is more widely known by his military name, Karuna — broke with Velupillai

Prabhakaran.

The smiling Karuna, who took part in several rounds of peace talks with the government and even joined in a friendly snowball fight at one session in Oslo, was the public face of one of the LTTE's top military strategists. Karuna was one of a number of Tiger cadres trained in secret camps in India. He led seven counter-attacks to take control of the island's main north-south artery, dubbed the "Highway of Death" after 3,500 soldiers died fighting over it.



Karuna

Colombo, March 8 (Reuters): A renegade faction of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers said today it would consider a "friendly partnership" with the rebels' northern leaders in a standoff that has complicated efforts to end 20 years of war on the island.

But Varathan, an aide to Karuna, the powerful eastern commander who broke ranks with the Tigers last week, said Karuna would never be subordinate to rebel chief Velupillai Prabhakaran.

"I don't think in the future there will be any possibility of going under his command. But we can consider a friendly partnership for the purpose of the development of the people," Varathan said by telephone from the jungles of eastern Sri Lanka.

The Tigers, who have been fighting for a separate Tamil state in the north and east, expelled Karuna on Saturday for "acting traitorously to the Tamil people" but he is thought to command about 6,000 troops whose allegiance is unknown.

Varathan would not reveal the number of cadres under Karuna, but said his forces were committed to the truce the government and Tigers have ob-

Rebel sets term for deal

served since February 2002. "He's going to focus all of his attention on development for the people in the east, so there is no need for war," Varathan said.

But the split in the rebel movement previously known for its fierce discipline complicates efforts to restart stalled peace talks already in turmoil because of a dispute between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Their wrangling over how to handle the peace process led the President to call a snap general election for April 2.

A strike in support of Karuna closed parts of the east today, but the area was calm and police said the strike was only partially in force, with some areas seeing business as usual.

"We have extra police in the

street, but there is no tension," said Lasantha de Silva, the senior superintendent of police in Batticaloa, Karuna's stronghold.

The LTTE insist they remain in control, but their newly appointed eastern commander has yet to try to take back the rebel headquarters there.

Residents said the only rebel authority visible in Batticaloa was Karuna's.

"Karuna has not left his office. At present the only leadership in Batticaloa is Karuna," said one resident who asked not to be named. Varathan said it would not be possible for Ramesh, whom the Tigers named as Karuna's replacement, to return to the east.

"It would be totally impossible for him to come with a command from Wanni. We are already functioning under a separate command," he said. Wanni is the LTTE's power centre in the north. Yesterday, towns in the area burned effigies of Prabhakaran.

Residents said the law courts and police in rebel-held areas had been shut. Schools in Batticaloa were open although many fearful parents had kept their children at home.

'Karuna still holds the upper hand'

By V.S. Sambandan

Sri Lanka
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BATTICALOA, MARCH 8. Despite being sacked from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and stripped of his post of regional commander, V. Muralitharan (a.k.a. 'Col.' Karuna) continues as the renegade head of the district unit of the rebels. The control wielded by 'Karuna', as the expelled leader is popularly known, apparently continues.

Inside the rebel-held Batticaloa, thinly-guarded checkpoints, few and far apart from each other, dot the road along which are the military camps and political offices of the LTTE. Smiling photographs of the LTTE supremo, V. Prabakaran, continue to occupy prime space on the walls, but the office, which was a hive of activity a few months ago, wore a deserted look.

Across the Batticaloa lagoon, in the Government-controlled town, the show of support is evident. Independent observers of the situation, requesting anonymity, say Karuna clearly holds the upper hand, for now. "We don't know how it would be after some time," they concede. With the new regional leaders — appointed by the LTTE central committee — yet to take charge in the district, there is visible support for Karuna in the town.

"This is a problem that should not have blown up. Both sides should solve it together," a resident said.

At a thinly-attended public rally this evening, however, the district LTTE reaffirmed its support for "Karuna Amman," as the longest-serving regional commander is referred to in the organisation. "Do not neglect the eastern province," screamed a banner at the rally called to mark "national women's resurgence day." A pamphlet, issued by the district LTTE, called upon the public to join hands for the "emancipation of the east."

While on Sunday the effigies of the LTTE leader, V. Prabakaran, were burnt in a nearby town, at today's public rally hope was expressed that "the national leader will find us a solution."

'Threat to accord'

By V.S. Sambandan

BATTICALOA, MARCH 8. The two-year-old ceasefire agreement (CFA) between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is "more threatened" with the latest crisis in the LTTE, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said here today. The SLMM, however, reiterated that it was "absolutely confident" that the CFA would continue to hold.

Pointing out that "it is not within our mandate" to sort out intra-LTTE problems, the district head of the SLMM, Per Rosendhal, told *The Hindu* that "any major changes" in the situation were threats to the ceasefire agreement.

As the ceasefire agreement was signed by the LTTE leader, V. Prabakaran, on behalf of the Tigers, the SLMM could record complaints by the expelled LTTE regional military commander, V. Muralitharan, (a.k.a. 'Col.' Karuna).

"There have been no big problems in the past. We have been successful."

Despite a continuation of the violations recorded in the district SLMM, the incidence, he said, was much lower than before.

The LTTE, when it ordered the expulsion of Karuna, had said that the sacking would affect neither the peace process, nor the military strength of the rebels.

The exact number of cadres under Karuna's command is not known, but estimates are that they range between 5,000 and 8,500 fighters.

MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2004

REVOLT IN THE LTTE

Feb-10
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A BANNER OF open disaffection and revolt has been unfurled within the Pol Potist kingdom of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Its special commander for Amparai and Batticaloa in the East, V. Muralitharan, better known by the *nom de guerre* of 'Karuna', has been "discharged" from the LTTE for his "traitorous" behaviour "instigated by malicious elements." This leadership crisis could signal a new ball game for the monolithic organisation that answers to a Supreme Leader. From the start, the Tamil Tigers have come up with only one kind of response to anyone, within or outside the organisation, who disagrees with the extremist vision and ways of Velupillai Prabhakaran — physical liquidation. Mahathiya, an experienced military commander who was anointed Deputy Leader, was, for reasons that are yet unclear, branded a "traitor," an "agent" of India, and eliminated with the LTTE's signature brutality. The long rope given to Karuna and his lieutenants to function autonomously in the East has now snapped.

Although the LTTE has always demanded a permanent merger of the North and the East of Sri Lanka, claiming it as the "traditional homeland" of the Tamils, differences have persisted within the organisation on strategies and tactics for the two significantly different regions. Over the years, Karuna has led the build-up of a powerful military apparatus in the East. In recent times, he and his spokespersons have publicly voiced their differences over the administration of the North and the East and demanded a separate unit for the East. He has, tactically or otherwise, attempted to distance himself from the killing of the LTTE's political opponents. In effect, he has challenged the vision and methods of the top Tiger leadership and asked for a separate administration in the East while paying lip service to the Supremo and the movement. In a way, this can be seen as

normal democratic political behaviour in a political party, but in an organisation that has thrived on the power of the gun and the bomb, this is "traitorous" behaviour.

The Karuna revolt could lead to some kind of breakaway warlordism, 'reformed' or otherwise, in a region where he has wielded overwhelming military power. It remains to be seen whether the LTTE and the new dispensation it is trying frenetically to establish in the East can go after him and crush his revolt, if that indeed is the Supreme Leader's *diktat*. Karuna has alleged that the "northern leadership" has despatched killer squads to attack him and his troops. Hearteningly, large numbers of civilians in eastern areas have demonstrated against the LTTE leadership. However, it is ominous that some of Karuna's former lieutenants have gone over to the North in a move that could presage major military action. A clash in the East between two armed LTTE groups bodes ill for the hapless civilians of the region. It will, indisputably, mean a grave violation of the ceasefire agreement that came into force on February 23, 2002. That agreement binds the LTTE as well as the Sri Lankan state not to engage in "any offensive military operation" and requires "the total cessation of all military action," including the firing of weapons, armed raids, ambushes, assassinations, suicide missions, and so forth. In a political sense it will be a positive development if Karuna's organisational strength holds. At a time when the electoral battle is heating up in Sri Lanka and the LTTE is trying to strengthen its hold in parliament through the agency of the Tamil National Alliance, this breaking of Pol Potist ranks will provide a ray of hope for the future. The next few days should provide a clearer idea of whether a warlord's 'conscientious' revolt in the East can assume a life of its own or whether Karuna will meet Mahathiya's fate.

8 MAR 2004

THE HINDU

8 MAR 2004

Behind Karuna's revolt

By Nirupama Subramanian

Karuna's ire seems to stem from the perception that he was being sidelined following the ceasefire and the subsequent emphasis within the LTTE shifting from the military to its political unit.

*S. Karuna
#10-10
9/17*

TWO YEARS ago, when Velupillai Prabhakaran addressed his first press conference in a decade, sharing the details with him in that makeshift hall in Killinochchi were those he considered his closest confidantes. On his right, Anton Balasingham, who described himself as the "theoretician" of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, S. P. Thamilselvan, the leader of the political wing of the LTTE, and Balasingham's wife Adele. On his left, V. Muralitharan, better known by his *nom de guerre* Karuna, his military commander in Batticaloa and Amparai, and Paduman, the military commander in Trincomalee. Conspicuous by his absence was Karikalan, the political head of the LTTE in Batticaloa and Amparai.

The presence of the two military leaders at that event was perhaps the earliest sign of the recent developments within the LTTE in which Karuna, a "colonel" in the LTTE's military hierarchy, the topmost rank it offers, broke away from the group with an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 armed cadres. At the time of the April 2002 press conference, the ceasefire between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE was barely two months old. In eastern Sri Lanka where the Tigers controlled large swathes of territory without a formal boundary, and where Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese each form one-third of the population, the truce had unleashed a new dynamic, particularly in Batticaloa. Using the no-war situation to advantage, the LTTE went on a recruitment spree, vacuuming Batticaloa's young, and intensified its "tax" collection, especially among Muslims, who control trade and business in the region.

Faced with an international outcry against the LTTE's unabashed recruitment of children and harassment of a religious minority, and under pressure from the ceasefire monitors, Prabhakaran issued directives to the eastern leadership of the LTTE to stop but nothing changed. At the press conference, neither Karuna nor Paduman uttered a word, but their presence on the stage with Prabhakaran seemed to be aimed at allaying suspicion that the LTTE's eastern military leadership was out of control. Prabhakaran was also sending out the message that he considered them important enough to share the stage with him. Later Karuna was in the LTTE delegation for peace talks with

the Sri Lankan Government. The exclusion of Karikalan from the event, on the other hand, triggered speculation that the eastern political leadership had taken the rap for embarrassing the firm, even though both he and Karuna must have worked in tandem.

Seen against this background, Karuna's recent "secession" from the LTTE seems to have been brewing for at least two years. While the tipping point for this unprecedented schism in the LTTE is still unclear, it is a safe assumption, at least for the moment, that Karuna's revolt does not represent an ideological break with the LTTE, as evident in his call for a "southern Tamil Eelam." Karuna's ire against the top leadership of the LTTE seems to be more about a bruised ego, the perception that he was being sidelined and not given the importance due to him as one of the LTTE's most successful military strategists in recent years.

Since 1995 until the ceasefire of February 2002, the Government and the LTTE were constantly at war, triggered first by the Tigers when they broke off from a ceasefire and a peace process with the then newly elected President, Chandrika Kumaratunga. President Kumaratunga hit back with an all-out war, promising to defeat the LTTE. By then Karuna was already an established military leader of the LTTE in the East. In the mid-1990s, his importance to Prabhakaran grew in direct proportion to the escalation of the war. After the Sri Lankan armed forces wrested the Jaffna peninsula from the LTTE in 1996, Prabhakaran no longer had a ready-made territorial base from which to draw his manpower. He looked to eastern Sri Lanka, where his cadres controlled entire villages. Karuna was his pointman for this. When the Government launched a military operation to take control of a highway in northern Sri Lanka, Karuna moved thousands of cadres from the East for the counter-offensive, successfully thwarting the advance, inflicting hundreds of casualties on the Sri Lankan armed forces on what came to be known as the Highway of Blood. Karuna also led

the LTTE's Unceasing Waves offensives through which the group regained all the territory it had lost to the Government in the northern Vanni mainland.

The LTTE too suffered huge casualties. Tamils in eastern Sri Lanka have always chafed against what they perceive as domination over them by northern Tamils. Even before the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka turned militant, the top hierarchies of the Tamil United Liberation Front, the main political party of the Tamils, and its forerunner, the Federal Party, were packed with Jaffna Tamils. The LTTE was no different, and Tamils in Batticaloa resented that the group looked east only for cannon fodder without taking into consideration the political aspirations of the region. While engaged in battle, Karuna seems to have been untouched by this sentiment, employing ruthless tactics to recruit children as young as 10 or 11 years into the LTTE's fighting force. With the ceasefire, and the subsequent emphasis within the LTTE shifting from the military to its political unit, Karuna was no longer as important as other LTTE second-rungers such as Balasingham and Thamilselvan, and the eastern Tamil's resentment against the northern Tamil seems to have finally surfaced in him.

While the split has for the first time shattered the LTTE's monolithic image, how this drama plays out depends on Karuna's staying power. In the past, Prabhakaran has physically eliminated anyone perceived as posing a challenge to his leadership. Mahattiya, his second-in-command through the war with the Indian Peace Keeping Forces, met with such a fate. But there are some aspects to the present challenge that are different from the Mahattiya episode and perhaps to the advantage of Karuna. For one, with Karuna deciding to take the feud to the press, it is all out in the open. In such circumstances, killing Karuna will not be as easy as killing Mahattiya. It is certain to burn a hole in the image Prabhakaran has been trying so hard to build for himself as a safari suit-wearing, peace-loving, tolerant and democratic leader. The

ceasefire too makes such elimination complicated, though by no means impossible.

Evidently, Karuna would not have taken such a bold step as to break away unless he was sure of his support. He is said to have the sworn loyalty of at least 1,000 cadres that he commands. Whether these cadres stay with him will depend on what resources are available to him to maintain them. That might mean an all-out fund-raising drive by Karuna's outfit. Among the people of the East, the response to Karuna's challenge to Prabhakaran has been mixed, with widespread fear of a war between the two sides.

First reactions to the feuding within the LTTE have cast it as an unfavourable development for the peace process in Sri Lanka. But should Karuna survive, he may serve the purpose of making the peace process more inclusive on the Tamil side than it is at present. More importantly, Prabhakaran will not be able to easily plunge into a war against the Government once more without the help of Karuna and his cadres. In that sense, there is perhaps no danger to the ceasefire between the LTTE and the Government. However, it is important to recognise that Karuna, no longer a member of the LTTE, may not consider himself bound by the 2002 ceasefire anymore. Although the Sri Lankan Government's first reaction was to dismiss Karuna's demand for a separate ceasefire agreement, it may have to acknowledge the need for such an agreement soon.

The infighting in the LTTE is bound to have repercussions for the April 2 parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka. Although not directly in the electoral contest, the LTTE is a participant in it through its proxy, the five-party coalition — the Tamil United Liberation Front is its main component — known as the Tamil National Alliance. Members of the Alliance have pledged allegiance to the LTTE and have bowed to its demand that they acknowledge it as the "sole representative" of the Tamil people. With the LTTE's help, the TNA hoped to make a clean sweep of all the seats in North-East Sri Lanka. It is early yet to predict the exact impact of the split in the LTTE for the TNA's chances. But it certainly poses a dilemma for candidates of the TNA contesting the election in the East where the situation on the ground is one of hostility to the LTTE.

Famed Tiger loyalty under strain

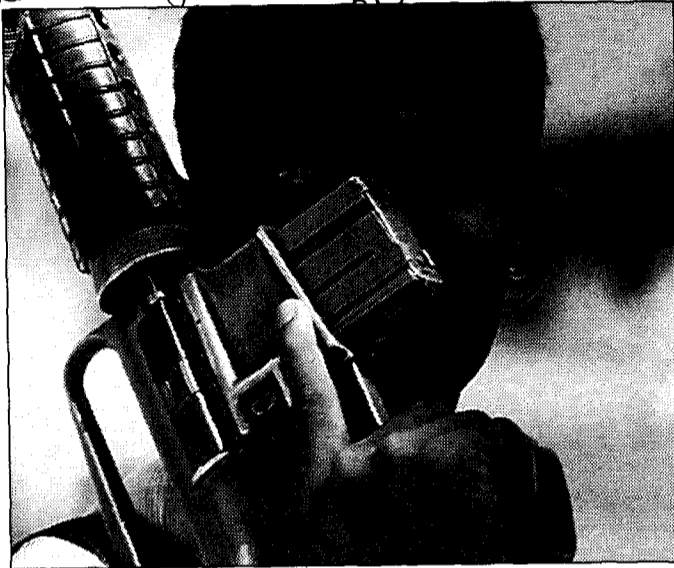
Colombo, March 7 (Reuters): A black string with a cyanide capsule on the end is the symbol of the fanaticism and discipline of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers in their separatist war.

Those qualities that kept at bay the Indian army and held off the Sri Lankan military for two decades could be unravelling, and with them the island's best hope of ending the war that has killed 64,000. The Tigers expelled a renegade leader yesterday, but said their command structure was in place and the internal crisis would not threaten the island's two-year-old peace process.

But in the background, historical grievances among Tamils have bubbled to the surface in the unprecedented rift among fighters known for their loyalty to Velupillai Prabhakaran, the reclusive leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Prabhakaran has demanded total loyalty from his followers, and today met his top aides to discuss the next step following a challenge from veteran LTTE fighter Karuna, who was expelled for "acting traitorously to the Tamil people". But he is still thought to command 6,000 cadres in the east.

When the war started in 1983, the Tigers were a small band of barefoot fighters, but have grown into a sophisticated and disciplined guerrilla force, known for perfecting the art of suicide bombing. That tight control meant that when the government



An LTTE member stands watch over a news conference by the group's political wing in rebel-controlled Kilinochchi. (Reuters)

and Tigers signed a ceasefire in February 2002, hopes were high it would last as long as Prabhakaran remained committed.

But two years later, the peace may also have brought changes to an organisation whose followers blew themselves up or swal-

lowed cyanide rather than surrender in battle.

"The LTTE is in the process of transforming. When there was war, most of these contradictions were suppressed — there was no space for them to emerge," said Jayadeva Uyangoda, head of political science at Colombo University. "The events in the east indicate the LTTE is not a monolithic entity. The challenge will be to see if the leadership can accommodate that diversity without resorting to violence."

There is still no sign as to how the split will be resolved, but a battle for the hearts and minds of the people in Batticaloa-Ampara — Karuna's district — was already under way today, with accusations flying between factions. "Everyone in the LTTE in the Batticaloa-Ampara district except Karuna is with our leader," said Ramesh, who was named yesterday as the new eastern commander.

But forces backed by Karuna — who was a member of the Tigers' delegation at peace talks — staged a general strike in part of the district. They say too many of the Tigers' leaders come from the north, and complain areas in the north have received more rebuilding aid since the truce was signed.

The Tigers today likened Karuna to Pol Pot, accusing him of being like the Cambodian leader who caused the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million people in his country's "Killing Fields".

Protests hit Prabhakaran

Colombo, March 7 (PTI): Unprecedented anti-Prabhakaran protests were today held in eastern Sri Lanka to express solidarity with sacked regional commander V. Muralitharan, better known as Karuna, residents said.

About 3,000 people took part in a protest rally from Kiran to Chenkaladi in Batticaloa and burnt effigies of LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran and his intelligence chief Pottu Amman. The Batticaloa University, meanwhile, postponed all examinations indefinitely as all hostel students left fearing reprisal attacks.

LTTE removes rebel commander

By V.S. Sambandan

KILINOCHCHI (SRI LANKA), MARCH 6. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam today "discharged" the defiant eastern military commander, V. Muralitharan (a.k.a. 'Col.' Karuna), accusing him of "acting traitorously" against the "Tamil people" at the "instigation of some malicious elements."

Denying all charges made by Mr. Muralitharan, former special commander, Batticaloa-Amparai, against the leadership, the LTTE central committee said he had "planned to secede himself from the liberation organisation." The Tigers downplayed what is considered the biggest challenge to its leadership after an internal rift was made public by Mr. Muralitharan three days ago. "It is a problem concerning a single individual," the LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan, said after reading out the decision of the central committee.

Asked who would replace 'Col.' Karuna, in the negotiating team in the currently-stalled

talks, Mr. Tamilchelvan said the decision would be taken by the leadership. He said he was "satisfied" with the expulsion of 'Col.' Karuna, the only regional leader to remain unchanged in his position for 17 years, "as soon as the leadership was convinced of his betrayal." The expulsion would affect neither the peace process nor the military strength of the rebels.

Ramesh, new commander

The "discharged" leader was replaced by his unranked former deputy, Ramesh, who was named as the new special commander. Two other eastern second-rung leaders, Ram and Kousalyan, were appointed deputy commander and political head respectively of the Batticaloa-Amparai district.

'Col.' Karuna was among the most trusted lieutenants of Mr. Prabhakaran. Among the successful military strategies the two are said to have devised together, the most telling was the victory over the Sri Lankan Army at the Elephant Pass military

garrison, which was preceded by months of battlefield deceptions that lulled the Army into a sense of complacency. Mr. Muralitharan was also one of the seven 'Colonels' — the highest military rank in the 18,000-strong fighting force.

The number of fighters under 'Col.' Karuna's command is not known, but estimates place them between 6,000 and 8,000 well-trained troops, including the most-feared 'Jayanthan Brigade,' which overran the Elephant Pass. In a display of support for the LTTE's "national leadership" and the 'isolation' of Mr. Muralitharan, all his former military, political and intelligence deputies — including the head of the 'Jayanthan Brigade' — were present at the hurriedly-convened press conference by Mr. Tamilchelvan to announce the central committee's decision.

Photographs on Page 10

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A HAPPY HOLI

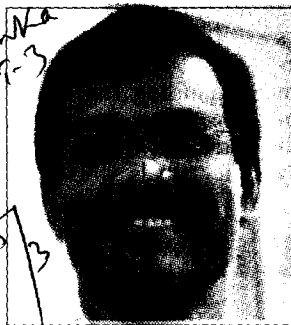
Lanka rebels admit to crisis, Norway monitors move in

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO, March 4. — The LTTE rebels today said they were facing a crisis within their leadership after a reported "split" in the party ranks as peace broker Norway moved to salvage the ceasefire.

The peace secretariat of the rebel LTTE said their supreme Pirabhakaran was discussing the crisis with his seniors from the eastern Batticaloa district where the regional commander showed dissent.

The LTTE's political wing leader SP Thamilselvan went in for emergency talks with the Norwegian truce monitoring chief Mr Trond Furuhojde at the northern rebel-held town of Kilino-



LTTE political leader Sinniah
Paramu Thamilselvan

chchi. "Thamilselvan said that the current crisis is only a temporary one and a resolution will be reached very soon," the secretariat said in a statement after talks with Mr Furuhojde.

Despite the crisis, the island's rebel-controlled regions remain calm, government officials said.

President Ms Chndrika

Kumaratunga's party reacted cautiously to the power struggle within the LTTE saying they believed it was not serious. "As far as we are concerned these are rumblings," a spokesman for Ms Kumaratunga's party said. "We sincerely hope the peace process will continue." Yesterday saw the first major public airing of differences in the usually highly disciplined Tigers, involving the outfit's eastern commander Karuna.

The Ranil Wickremesinghe government declined to comment on the crisis amid reports that Karuna was moving to act independently. "There is a problem, but we have no reason to believe that the ceasefire is in doubt," government spokesman Mr GL Peiris said.

Sri Lanka admits internal rift

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MARCH 4. For the first time in its decades of existence as a guerrilla organisation where dissent is fatal, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) today admitted to an internal rift, but termed it a "temporary crisis" that would be "resolved soon".

No details of the crisis was revealed, and all that the LTTE officially said was that the crisis was being discussed at a central committee meeting, headed by the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran, at an undisclosed location in northern rebel-held Sri Lanka.

The internal rift surfaced yesterday with differences of views between the LTTE's eastern military commander, V. Muralitharan (a.k.a. 'Col' Karuna) and the northern military and political command on issues relating to deployment of eastern fighters in the north as well as calls for "disciplinary action" against cadres suspected to be involved in the killings of non-LTTE political activists in Batticaloa earlier this week.

In another move late tonight, AP reported that 'Col' Karuna wanted a fresh ceasefire agreement for the east. According to other reports reaching Colombo, a deputy of Karuna had distributed unsigned notes in the eastern Batticaloa town, critical of the northern leadership this evening, but did not name Prabhakaran.

bakaran. The LTTE headquarters in Kilinochchi could not be contacted for comment.

Eastern Sri Lanka, with a near-equal mix of the island's main ethnicities — Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims — has always been a volatile zone.

It is not yet clear if the current rift in the LTTE would be patched up or the organisation will undergo a drastic change.

Hectic activity has been on since last night when the Norwegian Ambassador, Hans Brattskar, and the Head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, Trond Furuhojvde, meeting the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, at 11 p.m. Mr. Muralitharan has reportedly requested the Norwegian facilitators to treat the east separately on issues relating to the ceasefire agreement.

The details of the meeting between the Mr. Wickremesinghe and the facilitators have not been made public. Neither the Sri Lankan Government nor the facilitators are able to confirm the ground situation, which was described by Defence sources as "unclear".

This morning, action hifted from Colombo to rebel-held Kilinochchi when Maj. Gen. (Retd) Furuhojvde air-dashed to the rebel headquarters for an emergency meeting with the LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Tamilchelvan.

The SLMM described the

meeting as 'constructive', while the LTTE said "cordial and free discussions took place about the general elections and the current political situation in Batticaloa. The latest rift is also reflective of long-festering differences between eastern and northern Tamils, which were submerged during decades of fighting.

An eastern LTTE functionary also initially denied the latest episode, but this morning the Tigers admitted to "some problems" and said it would be resolved.

On a day when contradictory and speculative reports were aplenty in Colombo, fire-fighting operations commenced in the rebel-held north.

In the east, the centrepiece of the latest internal spat — 'Col' Karuna — played truant and kept away from making any public comment.

The LTTE's special commander for the two eastern districts, Batticaloa and Amparar, Ramesh, and the rebels' Batticaloa district political head, Kousalyan, were also in Vanni to discuss the issue with Prabhakaran and the LTTE's central committee. Late last night, a spokesman for Mr. Muralitharan was quoted by the TamilNet website as saying that there was "no regional split" and that the eastern rebels "will be functioning directly under the command of our leader", Prabhakaran.

Sri Lankan Government, Norway mum

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MARCH 4. Sri Lanka's peace facilitators, Norway, the Government, and the Opposition were today guarded in the reactions to the most serious internal rift in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Political reactions here emphasised the importance of the continuation of the ceasefire agreement, which is in place for two years — the longest run since bloody armed conflict started between armed Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan Government in the early 1980s.

The facilitators, Norway, on the scene since the late 1990s, said they would apply the same yardstick to the Tigers as they did to Colombo last year when a cohabitation crisis put the peace process formally on hold. "We will keep out of the LTTE's internal crisis in the same way as we had kept away from Sri Lanka's southern political crisis", a senior Norwegian official told *The Hindu*. Maintaining complete silence on the issues involved, the facilitator was neither willing to confirm or deny reports, which swarmed Colombo since last night. "No comment is our only comment", the Norwegian embassy said.

The Sri Lankan Government and the Opposition United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), for their part, were restrained in their comments on the LTTE's internal rift and expressed hope that the ceasefire agreement was not under threat. The Government spokesman and Colombo's Chief Negotiator, G.L. Peiris, said there were "no indications" that the ceasefire was under threat. "As far as we are concerned, these are rumblings," the Opposition spokesman, Mangala Samaraweera, said, expressing hope that the peace process would continue. Tamil political leaders reacted along predictable lines, with those backing the LTTE saying that the crisis

would blow over. The LTTE's internal spat comes just ahead of next month's Parliamentary elections in which the rebels are backing the four-party Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

The TNA is seeking a mandate on the twin planks of the LTTE being the "sole representative of the Tamil-speaking people" and "resumption of peace talks" with the LTTE's recent proposals for an 'Interim Self-Governing Authority for the North-East' as the basis for negotiations.

Along predictable lines, TNA political sources say the LTTE's rift would not change voter behaviour, while opponents of the TNA say the public Alliance's electoral prospects.

Solheim to visit Sri Lanka

The Norwegian Special Envoy, Erik Solheim, is scheduled to arrive here next week for a ground-level appraisal of the situation.

On Wednesday, when the LTTE's internal rift became public, Mr. Solheim, a key facilitator since the commencement of the Norwegian role, told the BBC that there is a "new situation in the east."

EPDP candidate hurt

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, MARCH 4. In continued election violence in eastern Sri Lanka, a candidate of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) was injured in a grenade attack today.

The candidate, Thuraija Lal, was attacked when he was distributing pamphlets in Kalmunai.

The EPDP, the most vocal critic of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, has blamed the Tigers for the attack.

We will provide continuity with change: Chandrika

AS SRI Lanka heads towards its third parliamentary elections in four years, the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, says her party has "learnt lessons from our own experience" and that it has a "clear strategy" for talks.

In an exclusive interview with V.S. Sambandan, the Sri Lankan President accepted that the latest peace process by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had "some good things," spelt out the areas of continuity and change in possible talks with the Tigers if her alliance returned to power and said her party "all along" had channels with the LTTE, but declined to elaborate.

Excerpts from the interview held at her official residence on Friday:

Question: Could you elaborate on your oft-reiterated statement on resuming talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) if your alliance were to return to power? How will it differ from your 1994 attempt?

Chandrika Kumaratunga: Beginning from the last part of your question. We have also learnt lessons from our own experience — the 1994 and 2000-01 attempts — and we know what we could use from those experiences and what we shouldn't. Essentially the difference between Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's approach and our next one — the third one — would be that quite definitely we would have a clear strategy for talks.

It appears that Mr. Wickremesinghe did not have one, that he has given all kinds of promises to the LTTE. That has been borne out to be true because the LTTE has now three or four times called upon the Prime Minister to keep to his promises he gave them before the elections.

"Essentially the difference between Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's approach and our next one — the third one — would be that quite definitely we would have a clear strategy for talks [with the LTTE]."

We don't know what these are, obviously some secret ones. We won't do that kind of thing.

We will tell the LTTE quite openly and frankly what we can offer them — at least a framework. The rest have to be left for discussions. We can't expect the LTTE to accept everything we say. As we did the two times before, we would at least keep a flexible time frame. We cannot say we are going to stop this day and get up and go. But we certainly try to agree on a generally broad time frame — targeted dates. We would definitely have a more transparent and inclusive process and we will quite definitely insist on respecting human rights. Obviously we will and we will insist that the LTTE also does that.

Well, democracy, we will not talk about too much at this moment because they are not a democratic organisation. But our hope is that at the end of the discussions if we come to a negotiated settlement hopefully, that they will come into the democratic stream.

How do you see the LTTE's transition to the democratic path?

Some of the good things that have happened in this last peace process are that the LTTE has stuck to a ceasefire for the last two years and they seem to be feeling slightly more at ease with democratic institutions and social life within a free market framework, which are good things.

You mentioned inclusiveness in

the talks. Would you consider taking along other parties on both sides as well?

Well quite definitely, the Muslims. The other parties — we will try to persuade the LTTE to have at least one representative from some of the major parties concerned. Parties meaning not political parties, parties in the wider sense. If they don't agree, we will separately have a group where, while we are discussing with the LTTE, we would discuss with these people, tell them what is going on and take them to the discussions.

On the whole, you had said that there was something in the Wickremesinghe peace process, which is now stalled. Would you see continuity?

Of those good things?

Yes.

Yes. Definitely.

So there would be continuity; there would be change. Where would we see change, where would we see continuity?

Continuity would be the continuation of the ceasefire. Quite definitely, continuation of the stalled talks, continuation of the foreign facilitation and monitors, we will also continue — well that was not initiated by Mr. Wickremesinghe, but by us, but he continued it — the process of constant consultation with the Indian Government or other foreign governments that we consider our friends. India very specially because India is very deeply concerned and relevant to our problem for obvious reasons.

The change would be in the manner in which the peace process is conducted. We will not conduct it in the exclusive, jealously guarded unprofessional manner in which it was done. It would include the major players if not directly in the talks, in the manner that I said a little while ago. We will consult with large sections of the population also.

In fact I had suggested to Mr. Wickremesinghe lastly three-four months ago nearly, when I discussed with him in great detail whether we could form a government of national consensus, he refused it and kicked it out of sight.

Then they said 'would you help us in the peace process' — two years late, in fact. But even then, because he did not want my support earlier or that of my party, I said yes only because of my total commitment to peace. ... Finally after two years, when Mr. Wickremesinghe got stuck with the peace process and said 'okay we don't want to work with you in the national government but help us with the peace process,' I said ok.

The main idea was having a high-level committee consisting of the President and the Prime Minister and one or two people from both sides to consult. The Prime Minister carries on the peace process as before with whomever he wants — we did not want to get involved in that at this late stage — and the Prime Minister consults with the President and that small committee regularly.



And we were going to have another committee with all the major players who would be consulted by this main committee. It is the main committee that would brief the negotiators. But even that was not possible because the Prime Minister said even to work together like that he must have the whole Defence Ministry back.

So do you think that was an issue that came as a stumbling block, the Defence Ministry?

I don't think that was the issue. The Prime Minister did not want to work with us. It was the excuse.

Given the acknowledged differences between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna how do you see the Alliance working together in government?

Well, I was also very anxious, but what has happened up to now gives me hope that we could work with them. We have agreed on almost all the major issues. They are very committed to a negotiated settlement of the ethnic problem. They are committed to not going back to war — the JVP.

The only sticking point is that they are more for decentralisation of power and we are for devolution of power. We will not give up our total commitment to devolution. But we have persuaded the JVP to agree that during this negotiations process with the LTTE and the rest of the country separately, they would agree to the majority consensus view. I think that's going a long way. We have gone much further with the JVP than Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe did with the LTTE.

What are your comments on the possibility of holding elections in uncleared areas?

No. We can't hold elections in the uncleared areas. No elections commissioner has permitted that. That wouldn't be free and fair at all.

The east, with a mix of the three main ethnicities, has always been a volatile point. How do you see present eastern politics?

Our assessment is that the Muslims and the Sinhalese of the east, who constitute 70 per cent of the total eastern population, have

"We would definitely have a more transparent and inclusive process and we will quite definitely insist on respecting human rights."

confidence in the People's Alliance and its leadership and they are quite openly saying they were safest under us.

This election also sees the entry of the clergy in a big way. Do you see it changing Sri Lankan politics?

No, it is not in a big way. It is a handful of extremist-minded priests who are coming in, with a vast majority of the Buddhist priests against it. I think it is horrible. I have always believed

that the clergy of whichever religion should have nothing to do directly with politics. I have always told them this: they should keep their independence and their neutrality and keep the respect of the people, so that in a time of national crisis, they can come up as leaders to guide us.

This business of [the clergy]

"I have always believed that the clergy of whichever religion should have nothing to do directly with politics."

going into Parliament, I am completely against. In fact, the one Buddhist priest who contested and won from the PA list two years ago I had given a definite ruling that no Buddhist priest should be given nominations and against my ruling, at the last minute, in that district our leader had quietly introduced this name against our decision. It was too late.

The UNF has a prime ministerial candidate. Would the UPFA put up a prime ministerial candidate before the elections or wait for later. Who would be your prime ministerial candidate?

We may announce it towards the end of elections.

You had assured that the ceasefire would continue. The JVP has indicated that it should be re-negotiated.

No apparently they never said that. They have given a correction of that.

Would you say that once you...?

But we will talk to the LTTE. Even the LTTE is wanting, I understand, to re-discuss some of the conditions so we will want to look at some of the weaker points in the MoU.

Have you opened channels — formal or informal — in recent months with the LTTE to resume talks after the UPFA comes to power?

We have had channels with the LTTE all along.

Could you elaborate?

(Smiles) No I can't. Not for the moment.

Finally on a personal note, 10 years ago you came to power with a promise of an entirely new Sri Lanka. Personally and as head of state, what has been the big change from 1994 to 2004 in Sri Lanka and what more would you like to change?

The biggest change is that we have brought in democracy, respect for human rights into Sri Lankan politics. We are still trying hard to consolidate that. At the end of my term I would like to see decency back again in Sri Lankan politics and educated enlightened people leading the government and in Parliament.

Are you optimistic?

Well, if political leaders have the backbone to do so, we can, but with most of the present leaders I don't know whether they would do it. I have begun in my party, as you may have noticed. (Smiles).

Lanka talks threat

Colombo, Feb. 15 (Reuters): A Marxist party that is a key partner of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has rejected a two-year old ceasefire between the government and Tiger rebels, a newspaper today quoted a top party official as saying.

Wimal Weerawansa, media secretary for the People's Liberation Front (JVP), refused to deny or confirm the report in *Lanka*, a pro-Kumaratunga Sunday paper. "Next week we will send a correction letter to this newspaper," he said, refusing further comment. Other JVP members were not available for comment.

A JVP rejection of the ceasefire would be a major upset for the Left-leaning Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which signed an alliance with the JVP before she called elections for April 2.

The JVP has 16 seats in the 225-member parliament, and Kumaratunga's People's Alliance, formed by the SLFP and small parties, holds 79 seats. Replying to a reader's question about whether the alliance between Kumaratunga's party and the JVP would respect the two-year old ceasefire if it came to power, Weerawansa was quoted as saying the JVP was against it and would try to negotiate a new ceasefire with the rebels.

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Dissolution of parliament comes at the wrong time

President Chandrika Kumaratunga couldn't have chosen a worse possible time to upset the apple cart by dissolving Sri Lanka's parliament. Her fear is that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNP government is giving away too much in negotiations with the LTTE, but she's had her chance to do things her own way during the seven years her party was in power upto 2001. Wickremesinghe now deserves a free hand at brokering peace, particularly as that was one of the key planks on which he was elected. Kumaratunga ought to have considered the alternatives before taking her precipitate step. One would be to resume negotiations with Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) along with its hardline nationalist coalition ally Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in a position of strength in parliament, which she obviously hopes will be the outcome of the election she has called. Keeping aside for the moment that this will be the third election in the last four years, Kumaratunga's ploy would mean negotiations would have to start again from scratch, in which case the LTTE would be free to take back the concessions it has made. There is also the question of how far the hardline JVP, who Kumaratunga will need to keep on board as a coalition ally, will allow her to negotiate.

The other option would be to call off negotiations which would plunge Sri Lanka back into civil war. The Sri Lankan armed forces have been unable to enforce a solution by military means for the last two decades. It is unlikely that this is going to change soon, and the conflict has cost 64,000 lives already. Hanging in the balance is \$4.5 billion in international aid, which Sri Lanka will forfeit if it cannot resolve the Tamil issue. Given the synergy that the LTTE has with terrorist groups in India, it is in Delhi's interest too that the political crisis brought about by Kumaratunga's brinkmanship be resolved. Delhi enjoys some influence on both Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga, and ought to mediate and see whether the President and Prime Minister of Sri Lanka can be brought to some sort of understanding.

THE STATESMAN

12 FEB 2004

Chandrika dismisses 39 ministers



COLOMBO, Feb. 11. — The political crisis in Sri Lanka worsened today with President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunga sacking 39 ministers in a move aimed at eroding the authority of her arch rival Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The President, who dissolved parliament on Saturday and ordered fresh polls on 2 April, three years ahead of schedule "has sacked 27 non-cabinet ministers and 12 deputy ministers", a Presidential spokesman said. "In view of the dissolution of parliament I have decided to remove all non-cabinet and deputy ministers by virtue of powers vested in me," the spokesman quoted the President as saying in a statement.

Letters were being sent to junior ministers informing them of their removal, he said.

It is customary that when a government is dissolved, all non-cabinet rank ministers lose their authority. The removal is a formal move. The political crisis erupted when the President took over three of Mr Wickremesinghe's ministries last November.

In a related development, the World Bank today warned that the sacking of Sri Lanka's parliament could hold up at least \$176 million in aid to the country, whose economy is headed for a serious slow down.

Poverty reduction support credits amounting to \$125 million were due to be taken up for approval by the World Bank board but this would now be delayed, said the bank's country director here, Mr Peter Harrold. "Our macro program will have to wait until the elections are over."



President Kumaratunga consolidating her grip on power.

Mr Harrold said another \$51 million to support rural communities in the impoverished southern districts of Moneragala and Hambantota may also be delayed unless the president and prime minister reach agreement on the issue.

The project, he said, was expected to be extended to the highly backward plantations sector in the central region of the country at an eventual cost of \$180 million dollars.

Aside from the World Bank money, another \$80 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could also be held up in the short term, officials said.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's influential trade union comprising plantation workers of Indian origin today pledged support to Prime Minister Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe's party in the April 2 snap elections.

The Ceylon Worker's Congress led by Mr Arumugam Thondaman said they believed that Mr Wickremesinghe had worked towards restoring ethnic peace in the island and they wanted his work to continue.

Poll cloud on Lanka peace

Colombo, Feb. 8 (Reuters): Sri Lanka's President called snap elections to try to unseat her bitter rival the Prime Minister, but whoever triumphs, it appeared unlikely to revive stalled peace talks with the Tamil rebels.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who takes a harder line against the rebels than Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, dissolved parliament yesterday and set a vote for April 2 — three years early and the third general election in four years.

A two-year-old ceasefire is expected to hold, but the poll will delay efforts to end a two-decade civil war that has killed 64,000 people.

The President called the election in a bid to break an angry stalemate with Wickremesinghe over how to handle the peace process with the ethnic minority Tamil Tiger rebels, who walked out of talks 10 months ago.

"The elections will not provide an answer, no matter who wins," Jehan Perera, media director at the non-partisan National Peace Council, said.

He said that if the Left-leaning Kumaratunga's People's Alliance wins, talks will be complicated by her recent pact with the People's Liberation Front (JVP), ultra-nationalists who oppose any concessions made to the rebels.

If the Prime Minister's United National Party (UNP) wins, the status quo continues — and he faces a powerful President, whose job is not up for election and who suspects he would com-

Delhi ignored

Colombo, Feb. 8 (PTI): President Chandrika Kumaratunga dissolved parliament and called snap elections despite apprehensions by aid donors and India, a newspaper said today.

India and donors like the US, Japan and the EU were against mid-term elections that could undermine the troubled peace process, Lanka's *Sunday Times* quoted diplomats as saying. Delhi's apprehensions about possible political and economic instability in the island nation were conveyed to the President during a meeting with Indian high commissioner Nirupam Sen on Thursday, the report said.

In another twist, the Indian chief of naval staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh, has put off his visit to Sri Lanka. Singh was due here on a four-day visit starting tomorrow. No official reason was given for the cancellation.

promise security to make peace.

Many business leaders had opposed the widely expected poll, saying the President's alliance was less market-friendly.

Analysts and newspapers predicted a close vote but said that the President's alliance had momentum going into the race.

"The President has called an election so that whichever party wins gets a clear mandate to continue the peace process," her office said.

Chandrika dissolves Parliament

Reuters
Colombo, February 7

SRI LANKA'S Parliament is to be dissolved from midnight on Saturday, clearing the way for elections on April 2, an aide to President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced late on Saturday night.

"Dissolved. Election 2 April," Manoj Tittawella, director-general of the President's office, said in a message.

Elections had been widely anticipated since a political feud erupted in November when Kumaratunga sacked three ministers in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's government, saying he had compromised security in his Norwegian-backed peace bid with the Tamil Tigers.

Kumaratunga used her executive powers to dissolve the 225-member legislature led by Wickremesinghe four years

ahead of its tenure, brushing aside international pressure to avoid snap polls.

The general election will be the island's third in four years, and will further delay efforts to end the 20-year civil war that has killed 64,000. Peace talks have been on hold since April 2003.

Kumaratunga accused Wickremesinghe of being too soft on the LTTE, fighting a relentless guerrilla war with the government from their stronghold Jaffna and the northern areas since 1972.

Wickremesinghe refuses to handle the peace process while the President controls security, and several attempts at compromise have failed to end the deadlock. The three decades of ethnic bloodshed has claimed over 65,000 lives, most of them since the conflict spiralled during the tenure of former President J. Jayewardene in 1983.

The Tigers had warned that the tug-of-war between the two Sinhalese leaders was undermining peace efforts and also suggested that the country could slip back to war.

Kumaratunga, who holds the executive Presidency in Sri Lanka's French-style system, cannot herself run in the election, which had not been due until 2007.

But her party, which signed an alliance in January with the hardline People's Liberation Front — a vocal opponent of the peace bid — will be up against Wickremesinghe's United National Party in an election that will be fought over his record on peace and the economy. No polls have been published, but analysts say the vote could be close.

Elections in Sri Lanka are frequently marred by violence. An inconclusive result could produce another weak govern-

ment and delay the peace process further. Wickremesinghe's party and Muslim allies have 114 seats in the 225-seat Parliament and the support of 15 Tamil legislators, while Kumaratunga's People's Alliance and the JVP together have 93.

There was no immediate reaction from Wickremesinghe's government to the dissolution. With the sacking of the Legislature, the Prime Minister and his cabinet must assume a care-taker position with no powers to take key decisions on running the country. Analysts say such a situation suits Chandrika in the run-up to the elections.

There had been intense pressure on Kumaratunga to avoid a snap election with India and the US urging the two squabbling leaders to end their bitter rivalry and resume peace talks with the Tigers.



Chandrika Kumaratunga
Combat mode

Chandrika-Ranil standoff dangerous, says LTTE

HD-15
29/1

By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, JAN. 28. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has termed Sri Lanka's political standoff "a dangerous situation" for the peace process, and has called upon the international community to "come to the rescue of the Tamil people."

In an interview to the "BBC World Service" on Tuesday before leaving for a European destination, the LTTE's political wing leader, S. P. Tamilchelvan, described as "very much undesirable" the current situation where the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, were "trying to pass the buck on to each

other."

Moreover, the left-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was "acting in a very hostile manner" and seemed to be "very cynical towards the entire peace process and the facilitation," Mr. Tamilchelvan said.

Asked if this view meant the LTTE would not negotiate with the alliance between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the JVP, if it came to power, Mr. Tamilchelvan said "it was not appropriate to comment finally on it now."

The statements made by the partners of the alliance "seem to indicate that they are not very clear on the stance and solution on the ethnic problem."

The LTTE's position would depend on several factors such as the alliance coming out "very clearly with the mandate of the electorate of Sri Lanka, with the necessary power to implement whatever they have in their mind and if the statements that they will give out regarding meeting the aspirations of the Tamil people, accommodate the aspirations of the Tamil people."

The LTTE, he said in reply to another question, was "a responsible organisation with a political mandate."

As "the people are deeply disappointed" the LTTE did not want the "peace momentum built over time, with much euphoria, to be lost."

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MORE UNCERTAINTY IN SRI LANKA

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THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) of Chandrika Kumaratunga and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) signals a clear parting of ways between President Kumaratunga and the Ranil Wickremesinghe-led United National Front Government. It is an indication that Ms. Kumaratunga is considering an early parliamentary election to break the cohabitation deadlock between her and the UNF Government. In reaching an understanding with the JVP, President Kumaratunga has linked the political fortunes of the People's Alliance (P.A.) of which the SLFP is the main constituent, with a party that combines socialism with heavy doses of Sinhala nationalism. But the long time she took to finalise this alliance suggests it was not her preferred political route. Before making up her mind to go with the JVP, she was willing to explore ways by which she could make cohabitation with the Wickremesinghe Government work. But Mr. Wickremesinghe's insistence that the President must return the defence portfolio, one of three she took over from his Government last November in an assertion of her Constitutional supremacy, left little room for compromise. With no alternative to an election, Ms. Kumaratunga's first instinct was naturally to strengthen the P.A. For this a tie-up with the JVP is sound arithmetic, for its significant vote share in southern Sri Lanka may help tilt the electoral balance in the P.A.'s favour.

The new alliance, however, places a question mark on the current efforts to resolve Sri Lanka's Tamil question. The JVP is against devolution and believes the ethnic conflict can be resolved by administrative decentralisation. Ms. Kumaratunga, on the other hand, is the only Sinhala leader to have unilaterally put on the table a far-reaching devolution package to

resolve the conflict as early as 1995. Even Mr. Wickremesinghe, who as the Leader of the Opposition forced her to abandon the proposed reforms, now concedes those reforms could form the basis for political negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The JVP's condition for the short-lived alliance it had with the P.A. in 2001 was a freeze on plans for devolution. While there is no such condition this time, the JVP-SLFP "memorandum of understanding" clearly states their differences on the devolution issue. The Norway-assisted peace process now requires the Government to provide a credible alternative to the LTTE's separatist proposals for an "interim administration" in the North-East. It is doubtful such a response can come from the deadlocked cohabitation government. The SLFP-JVP combine says it believes in a "negotiated settlement" to the ethnic conflict, but it is difficult to see how the two partners can reconcile their conflicting positions on a peace formula in case they form the government after an election.

The SLFP-JVP alliance has rightly pointed out that the February 2002 ceasefire agreement gave away too much to the LTTE. But the ceasefire has also brought a measure of peace to the island, even though this peace is only an absence of war. An indefinite drift in the peace process can only benefit the LTTE further by giving it time to entrench itself, under the cover of the ceasefire, as the *de facto* ruler of the North-East. It is up to the Sinhala political establishment to ensure this does not happen. The new alliance has not altered the essential challenge for Sri Lanka's political class, which is to forge a consensus among the Sinhalese for a just and permanent political settlement that adequately addresses Tamil aspirations. Ultimately, only this can thwart the LTTE's separatist designs.

জাতিবৈর প্রত্যাবর্তন?

শ্রী লক্ষা কি আবার অন্তর্বর্তী
নির্বাচনের জন্য প্রস্তুত
হইতেছে? যে-নির্বাচনের
লক্ষ্য হইবে রনিল বিক্রমসিংঘের
সংযুক্ত জাতীয় মোর্চাকে গদিচ্যুত
করিয়া প্রেসিডেন্ট চন্দ্রিকা কুমারতুঙ্গার
হাতেই যাবতীয় ক্ষমতা কেন্দ্রীভূত
করা? লক্ষণ দেখিয়া সে রকমই মনে
হয়। অন্যথায় সহসা কুমারতুঙ্গার
ফ্রিডম পার্টি টট্‌স্কিপহী জনতা বিমুক্তি
পেরুমনার (জে ভি পি) সহিত মিলিয়া
একটি অখণ্ড দল গড়িবে কেন? এমন
নয় যে এই দুই দলের মতাদর্শ ও
কার্যধারা অনুরূপ। ফ্রিডম পার্টি
বরাবরই আন্দোলনের নিয়মতান্ত্রিক
পন্থা-পদ্ধতি অনুসরণ করিয়াছে। আর
জে ভি পি একদা গোটা দ্বীপরাষ্ট্রেই
সশস্ত্র অভ্যুত্থানের মাধ্যমে রাষ্ট্রক্ষমতা
দখল করিতে উদ্যত হইয়াছিল। অবশ্য
একটি বিষয়ে দুই দলের মধ্যে অভিন্নতা
রহিয়াছে। উভয়েই উগ্র সিংহলি
জাতীয়তাবাদ দ্বারা আচ্ছন্ন। এই উগ্র
জাতীয়তাবাদ দেশের তামিল
জাতিসত্তাকে স্বায়ত্তশাসন মঞ্জুর
করিতে দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত। শুধু তাহাই নহে,
নরওয়ার মধ্যস্থতায় এল টি টি ই-র
সহিত বিক্রমসিংঘের সরকার যে শান্তি-
প্রক্রিয়া চালাইতেছে, তাহারও
বিরোধী। তাহাদের মতে, এই প্রক্রিয়া
তামিল শার্দুলদের কাছে
আত্মসমর্পণের, শ্রীলঙ্কার সার্বভৌমত্ব
বিকাইয়া দিবার নামান্তর।
বিক্রমসিংঘের দলকে পরাস্ত করিতে না
পারিলে এই প্রক্রিয়া রোধ করা যাইবে
না। তাই ফ্রিডম পার্টি এবং জে ভি পির
এই মিলনোদ্যোগ।

এই উদ্যোগের মধ্যে দ্বীপরাষ্ট্রে
জাতিদাঙ্গার আশু প্রত্যাবর্তনের অশনি-
সংকেত রহিয়াছে। দীর্ঘ দুই দশক
ধরিয়া চলিতে থাকা গৃহযুদ্ধ (যাহাতে
অন্তত ৬৫ হাজার মানুষ নিহত
হইয়াছেন) গত দুই বছর ধরিয়া থামিয়া
আছে বিক্রমসিংঘের সরকারের সহিত
এল টি টি ই সম্পাদিত যুদ্ধবিরতি
চুক্তির জন্য। স্বায়ত্তশাসনের প্রস্তাব
পেশ করিয়া এল টি টি ই বুঝাইয়া
দিয়াছে, সরকারকে তাহাদের সঙ্গে
কঠোর দর কষাকষিতে নামিতে হইবে।
কিন্তু শান্তি প্রক্রিয়া হইতে সরিয়া
আসার কোনও ইঙ্গিত শার্দুলরা দেয়
নাই। অথচ প্রেসিডেন্ট কুমারতুঙ্গা
গোটা শান্তি প্রক্রিয়াটিই বানচাল
করিতে উদ্যত। মুখে তিনি ও জে ভি
পি নেতৃত্ব এল টি টি ইর কাছে শ্রীলঙ্কার
সার্বভৌমত্ব বিকাইয়া দিবার অভিযোগ
তুলিতেছেন। কার্যত তাহারা উগ্র
সিংহলি জাত্যভিমান উন্মত্ত হইতেছেন।
এবং ইহার নেপথ্যে রহিয়াছে

বিক্রমসিংঘের সহিত চন্দ্রিকার
ব্যক্তিত্বের লড়াই। দুর্ভাগ্যবশত
শ্রীলঙ্কার সংবিধান এমনই যে তাহাতে
পার্লামেন্টে সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ দলের নেতা
তথা নির্বাচিত প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অধিকার
সমান্তরাল একটি নির্বাচনে নির্বাচিত
প্রেসিডেন্টের দ্বারা পদে-পদে নিয়ন্ত্রিত,
খর্বিত। এই সাংবিধানিক এস্তিমারের
সুযোগেই প্রধানমন্ত্রীর আমেরিকা
সফরের সময় প্রেসিডেন্ট কুমারতুঙ্গা
তাহার সরকারের তিন মন্ত্রীকে বরখাস্ত
করিয়া মন্ত্রকগুলির ভার নিজহাতে
তুলিয়া লন। ইহা এক ধরনের
রক্তপাতহীন অভ্যুত্থানেরই নামান্তর।
অতঃপর বিক্রমসিংঘের পক্ষে এল টি
টি ই-র সঙ্গে আলোচনা চালানোই
অসম্ভব হইয়া ওঠে। এখন জে ভি পির
সহিত একজোট হইয়া চন্দ্রিকা
কুমারতুঙ্গা বলিতেছেন, তামিলদের
স্বায়ত্তশাসন দিবার আলোচনা একা এল
টি টি ইর সহিত করা অনুচিত, অন্য
তামিল সংগঠনগুলিকেও ইহাতে শরিক
করা উচিত।

একটা সময় ছিল, যখন দ্বীপভূমির
তামিলরা একাধিক সংগঠনে বিভক্ত
ছিলেন। বহু কালই সে পরিস্থিতি গত
হইয়াছে। অন্য সব তামিল সংগঠনকে
অপ্রাসঙ্গিক করিয়া দিয়াছে এল টি টি
ই। হয় সে সব সংগঠনের নেতৃত্ব ও
ক্যাডারদের হত্যা করা হইয়াছে, নতুবা
ভয় দেখাইয়া স্বেচ্ছানির্বাচনে যাইতে
বাধ্য করা হইয়াছে। কুমারতুঙ্গা নিজেও
জানেন, এল টি টি ই-ই এখন দ্বীপের
তামিলদের একমাত্র প্রতিনিধি। তিনি
নিজেও এই সংগঠনের সঙ্গেই ইতিপূর্বে
স্বশাসনের প্রস্তাব লইয়া আলোচনা
চালাইয়াছিলেন। তবে আজ অন্য
তামিল সংগঠনের বায়বীয় ও কাল্পনিক
অস্তিত্বের গল্প ফাঁদিতেন কেন?
আন্তর্জাতিকভাবে এল টি টি ইকে
কোণঠাসা ও বিড়ম্বিত করিতে? এল টি
টি ই কিন্তু যুদ্ধ-বিরতি ভাঙিয়া দিয়া
সশস্ত্র সংগ্রামে ফিরিয়া যাওয়ার ছমকি
দিয়াছে। কুমারতুঙ্গা দায়িত্বশীল
রাজনীতিকের পরিচয় দিতেছেন না।
বিক্রমসিংঘের সহিত অহমিকার লড়াই
তাহার কাছে দেশের জাতিগত সৌহার্দ্য
অপেক্ষা বড় হইয়া উঠিতেছে।
ইতিপূর্বে ভারত এবং মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র,
উভয়েই শ্রীলঙ্কার দুই সাংবিধানিক
কর্তৃত্বকে নিজেদের দ্বন্দ্ব মিটাইবার
আবেদন জানাইয়াছে। এই দ্বন্দ্ব যে
দ্বীপরাষ্ট্রের ভঙ্গুর শান্তি বিনষ্ট করিয়া
হানাহানি ঘিরাইয়া আনিবে, তাহা কি
রাজনীতিকরা বুঝিতেছেন না?
কুমারতুঙ্গা নিজের সংকীর্ণ রাজনৈতিক
স্বার্থ ছাড়ুন। তাহার অহমিকার চেয়ে
দেশ বড়।

23 JAN 2004

5/10/04
3/1-2/22/1

LTTE warns of war

COLOMBO, Jan. 21. — Slamming President Chandrika Kumaratunga's agreement with left for failing to address the ethnic conflict, the Tamil Tigers today warned the pact might create "conditions for resumption of war".

LTTE's London-based chief negotiator, Mr Anton Balasingham, said the President's pact yesterday with the JVP or People's Liberation Front was a "means to topple" the government of premier Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe but not to address the country's main issue — the ethnic conflict.

"This anti-peace political pact articulating an incoherent, confused and

mutually contradictory position on a serious national issue might create objective conditions for the resumption of ethnic war," Mr Balasingham said.

The LTTE's reaction came as the new alliance held its first press conference here and vowed to maintain the Norwegian truce if returned to power.

The alliance, however said they will review the future role of Norway arguing that the people were opposed to Oslo's work here. Mr Balasingham said they will not talk to any future government of Sri Lanka unless they accepted the Tigers as the "sole representatives of Tamils." — PTI

Alliance angers Tigers

Colombo, Jan. 21 (Reuters): A political alliance between President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party and a hardline Marxist party could lead Sri Lanka back into war, the Tamil Tiger rebels warned today.

Although the new party — the United People's Freedom Alliance — said it would continue a peace bid with the Tigers if it came to power in elections that are expected soon, its rhetoric has upset the LTTE.

"This anti-peace political pact articulating an incoherent, confused and mutually contradictory position on a serious national issue might create objective conditions for the resumption of war," the rebels' chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, told the pro-rebel *Tamilnet* website.

He said the new party signaled the re-emergence of "Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinistic forces", adding it was "opposed to peace and peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict".

The party was formed to take on the government of

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, raising the possibility of early elections.

It alters the political landscape and comes as a peace process to end a 20-year separatist war by the LTTE in the north and east of the island has been frozen by a power struggle between Kumaratunga and Wickremesinghe.

The two are elected separately, but have huge differences over the peace process and Kumaratunga seized control of three ministries in November, saying Wickremesinghe was endangering Sri Lanka's security by giving away too much to the LTTE.

Wickremesinghe signed a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire that has stopped the bloodshed for the last two years.

Balasingham also rejected a pact signed by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Marxist Peoples' Liberation (JVP) that outlined the new party's position, including a reference to negotiating with groups other than the Tigers.

"We wish to state emphatically that our liberation organisation will not enter into negotiations with anyone who does not recognise the LTTE as the sole and authentic representative of the Tamil people," Balasingham said.

Earlier today, alliance member and former foreign minister Lakshman Kadiragamar said the party wanted a negotiated settlement to the island's 20-year civil war. "We are not on a path back to war. We are prepared to talk," he said.

Other party members said the role of Norway would be reviewed, saying the peace mediator was biased even though the truce has been the longest since the war started in 1983.

Norway was asked to help by Kumaratunga, who is also the only person who can call parliamentary elections.

Kadiragamar said the alliance would negotiate with the rebels despite disagreeing with many of their proposals for an interim administration in the north and east.

THE TELEGRAPH

?? JAN 2004

'Peace process not my lookout alone'

Colombo\Islamabad: Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga on Thursday refused to take over Sri Lanka's fragile peace negotiations after her political rival, prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, said he was unable to continue talks with Tamil rebels after losing control over the defence ministry.



Chandrika

Mr Wickremesinghe on Wednesday had urged Ms Kumaratunga to renegotiate a ceasefire agreement with the Tamil Tiger rebels and take charge of the peace process if she wanted to hold on to three vital ministries, including defence. Ms Kumaratunga rejected the statement. Said presidential spokesman Harim Peiris: "The president stresses that the peace process should be an inclusive one, particularly with the participation of both the president and the prime minister."

Earlier at the Saarc summit in Islamabad, Ms Kumaratunga said talks between her and the PM over sharing power have not broken down and a new round of dialogue would

commence later this month even as she alleged that the LTTE consolidated its military strength during the current peace process.

"Discussions between us have not broken down. Discussions are ongoing. Talks will start after New Year holidays. I hope that we can come to a truly negotiated settlement," Ms Kumaratunga said before she left for home.

Ms Kumaratunga, whose decision to take over the powerful defence portfolio triggered a major political crisis with Mr Wickremesinghe a few months ago, said the military consolidation of the LTTE went on unabated as Norwegian facilitators appeared helpless in stopping rebels from beefing up their military strength.

"There is another problem, whether I have to take the defence portfolio. The prime minister has decided that he does not want to do the peace process, unless he gets defence portfolio. This is not possible." Agencies